

IRON TIMES AND GOLDEN AGES:
NOSTALGIA AND THE MID-
VICTORIAN HISTORICAL NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines nostalgia as a central literary trope of burgeoning modernisation in the mid-Victorian historical novel. Nostalgia began as a pathological form of homesickness and rapidly engaged with the perceived distancing from the past brought about by accelerated modernisation. This thesis suggests that literary representations of social, cultural and technological change echo nostalgic reactions of loss and longing. Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot are the primary focus of this study. Selected works by these authors are situated within the wider context of Victorian historical fiction which – following Walter Scott’s phenomenal success at the beginning of the century – became, as Franco Moretti put it, a ‘key genre’ in the Victorian era.

Nostalgia’s first victims were soldiers and students displaced from home by new opportunities for mobility and new reasons to travel long distances and live away from home; it was a disease that responded to modernisation or, as Kevis Goodman has put it, ‘historical growing pains’. Nostalgia’s combination of historical and psychological dimensions, I argue, made it an aesthetic peculiarly suited to the historical novel. This thesis suggests that nostalgia was an important novelistic trope during the nineteenth century and argues that it quickly became enmeshed with the historical novel in a way that has seldom been acknowledged. Because of its medical origins, alongside its continued development as a poetic trope, nostalgia provided a language with which to intertwine emotional and psychological reactions to change with the fictional representation of real historical events.

The thesis begins with a detailed account of nostalgia’s etymological history, scientific entanglements and early literary manifestations; the introduction establishes the theoretical and historical framework for the thematically organised chapters that follow. Chapter 1 explores the interlacing of personal and historical subject matter in Thackeray’s historical fiction. This chapter suggests that these interactions took place in Thackeray’s historical fiction through the mingling of nostalgic tropes in the person of his central protagonists. These figures frequently follow Scott’s Edward Waverley in being insipid spectator-participants who have been displaced from their homes and (directly or indirectly) mediate events from a perspective of nostalgic exile. Chapter 2 considers the transformation of landscape as a node of nostalgic representation. It explores the confusion of time and place in the original case studies collected by doctors studying nostalgia as a disease in relation to nineteenth-century representations of past landscapes. It suggests that part of the historicising potential of geographical places comes from this instinctive association of time with place. This overlap is exploited in the historical novel to represent changing times via changing places. Chapter 3 takes George Eliot’s *Romola*, frequently criticised both by contemporary commentators and subsequent critics for being too full of minutely researched objects, as an illustrative example of how things can become ‘memorative signs’ around which to build a narrative. This ‘clutter’ is reinterpreted as a system of souvenirs, artefacts and mementoes through which public history is reconstructed from excavated fragments of private life. Chapter 4 explores how mid-Victorian historical fiction tested the limits of its own nostalgic tropes. It uses *Sylvia’s Lovers* to probe the point at which forgetfulness overtakes the most carefully memorialised people and events. It discusses the ways in which these novels use nostalgia to represent a perilous closeness between memorialisation and erasure. It considers whether a trope premised on loss might require the threat of encroaching historical oblivion to complete its own metaphors. The thesis concludes with a coda looking forward to later nineteenth-century uses of nostalgia in historical fiction through a reading of Thomas Hardy’s *The Trumpet Major* (1880) and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886).

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A NOTE ON EDITIONS

Where available I have used Clarendon editions of the works of Charles Dickens and George Eliot. Where these were not available, I have used other Oxford University Press editions. References from the novels of Gaskell and Thackeray are taken from Oxford University Press or Penguin editions, chosen for their ready availability and reliability. I have consulted scholarly editions where available. References to Walter Scott's novels are taken from the Edinburgh University Press edition except in cases where the material I required was not included in these editions.

INTRODUCTION

I have found myself between two centuries as at the junction between two rivers; I have plunged into their troubled waters, regretfully leaving behind the ancient strand where I was born and swimming hopefully towards the unknown shores where the new generations will land.¹

I. An Age of Change

This thesis is about the ways in which nostalgia – a form of memory premised on dislocation from a familiar time or place – was used to describe the experience of time passing, and time passed, in the mid-Victorian historical novel. It takes the historical novel, a neglected but prominent sub-genre of the nineteenth-century realist novel, and considers how nostalgia, a frequently misrepresented form of emotional memory, forged literary tropes through which to engage with the pathos of perceived historical estrangement. John Stuart Mill insisted that the time in which he lived was ‘an age of transition’ while Matthew Arnold famously described his generation ‘wandering between two worlds, one dead/ The other powerless to be born’ (‘Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse’, 1855).² I will suggest that nostalgia engages with this recurrent rhetoric of traumatic discontinuity from the past. As Franco Moretti has remarked, ‘one can practically speak about time only in metaphors’.³ Nostalgia, I will argue, is one such metaphor and an apt way to describe an experience of time which – as this introduction will begin to outline – was premised on, and characterised by, rift.

¹ François-René de Chateaubriand, *The Memoirs of Chateaubriand* (1836-41), trans. by Robert Baldick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p. 24.

² John Stuart Mill, ‘The Spirit of the Age’ (1834), in *Mill: Texts and Commentaries*, ed. by Alan Ryan, (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), pp. 3-40, (p. 5).

³ Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders* (London: Verso, 1983), p. 6.

A rhetoric of ‘transition’ pervades nineteenth-century discussions of their own historical moment. As Tennyson put it ‘All ages are ages of transition, but this is an awful moment of transition’, while to Edward Bulwer Lytton, ‘Every age may be called an age of transition – the passing on, as it were, from one state to another never ceases; but in our age the transition is visible’.⁴ The mid-Victorian period saw a network of small changes and large, ‘visible’ transitions, which created a sense that the ground was shifting and the relationship to the past had been irrevocably transformed. The proliferation of historical novels in this period was, perhaps in part, a reaction to this wider intellectual climate.⁵ Almost every major novelist of the period, including Wilkie Collins, Anthony Trollope, Arthur Conan Doyle and Walter Pater, attempted one unambiguously historical novel. Many other (subsequently) minor authors – Edward Bulwer-Lytton, William Harrison Ainsworth and G. P. R. James among them – produced a deluge of historical fiction which has (often justly) been forgotten. The historical novel was, as Franco Moretti puts it, a ‘key genre’ in the nineteenth century but this is seldom reflected in recent scholarship.⁶

My title is borrowed from two prominent nineteenth-century authors, each of whom engaged with the central literary or cultural problems addressed in this thesis. In *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805) by Walter Scott, the eponymous minstrel is persecuted by ‘The bigots of the iron time’ who ‘Had call'd his harmless art a crime’, while in Matthew Arnold’s ‘Memorial Verses’ (April 1850), the poet writes:

Wordsworth has gone from us; and ye,
Ah, may ye feel his voice as wel
He too upon a wintry clime
Had fallen, - on this iron time
Of doubts, disputes, distractions, fears.⁷

⁴ Edward Bulwer Lytton, *England and the English*, 2 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1833), II, p. 165. Charles Tennyson, *Alfred Tennyson* (London: Macmillan, 1950), p. 49.

⁵ Jonathan Nield’s *Guide to the Best Historical Novels and Tales* (London: Elkin Matthews, 1902), gives a sense of the extent of this trend through the course of the nineteenth century.

⁶ Franco Moretti, *An Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 38.

⁷ Walter Scott, ‘The Lay of the Last Minstrel’, *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott* (London: James Misbet and Co., 1857), p. 2. Matthew Arnold, ‘Memorial Verses’ in *The Routledge Anthology of Poets on Poets: Poetic Responses to English Poetry from Chaucer to Yeats*, ed. by David Hopkins (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 225.

Among other things, my title points to a broader context of temporal reorientation in nineteenth-century literature and metonymically hints at the industrialising context which contributed to this shift. This broad tendency to eulogise the past at the expense of an apparently more banal present has been extensively discussed, perhaps most sensitively in John D. Rosenberg's recent *Elegy for an Age: The Presence of the Past in Victorian Literature* (2005).⁸ Rosenberg calls the Victorian period 'The Age of Elegy' and suggests that this feeling was generated by an 'unsettled cultural climate'.⁹ He points to the Gothic Revival as an embodiment of this spirit 'in stone' and the Oxford Movement as a manifestation in religious life. As many studies have described, these disturbances were felt in the formation of national identity¹⁰, industrialisation¹¹ and urbanisation¹². Robin Gilmour's *The Novel in the Victorian Age: A Modern Introduction* (1986) begins with the insistence that 'the only key to this period of unprecedented change is the fact of change and the Victorians' consciousness of it'. Gilmour goes on to enumerate the types of 'change' he means and draws on census figures – showing, for instance, a marked rise in the proportion of people living in towns – to make his case.¹³ Philip Davis and Walter E. Houghton are among the many other critics who establish various constellations of these social and cultural changes.¹⁴ The Victorian era was shot through with a social, cultural and literary tendency to look to the past in reaction to real or imagined crises. Historical fiction, which proliferated in the mid-Victorian period, is one manifestation of this

⁸ John D. Rosenberg, *Elegy for an Age: The Presence of the Past in Victorian Literature* (London: Anthem Press, 2005).

⁹ Rosenberg, *Elegy for an Age*, p. 1.

¹⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991); Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

¹¹ Maxine Berg, *The Age of Manufactures: Industry, Innovation, and Work in Britain, 1700-1820* (London: Fontana, 1985).

¹² H.J. Dyos and Michael Wolff, *The Victorian City: Images and Realities* (Routledge: London, 1973).

¹³ Robin Gilmour, *The Novel in the Victorian Age: A Modern Introduction* (London: Edward Arnold, 1986) p. 2.

¹⁴ Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (New Haven: Published for Wellesley College by Yale University Press, 1957); Philip Davis, *The Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

mentality. This was an important cultural habit, even if it is slippery, diffuse and difficult to pin down or summarise.

As John Stuart Mill put it, the nineteenth century was a period of transition which continually attempted to define its own 'spirit'. Mill opens his 1831 essay 'The Spirit of the Age' with the lines:

The "spirit of the age" is in some measure a novel expression. I do not believe that it is to be met with in any work exceeding fifty years in antiquity. The idea of comparing one's own age with former ages, or with our notion of those which are yet to come, had occurred to philosophers; but it never before was itself the dominant idea of any age.¹⁵

It is, Mill suggests, 'an idea essentially belonging to an age of change'. It requires a conception of time which distinguishes the present times 'in a very remarkable manner from the times which preceded them'. This widespread tendency to compare 'one's own age with former ages', Mill argues, was a consequence of a 'conscious' awareness of recent changes. 'The times' he says 'are pregnant with change':

The nineteenth century will be known to posterity as the era of one of the greatest revolutions of which history has preserved the remembrance, in the human mind, and in the whole constitution of human society. Even the religious world teems with new interpretations of the Prophecies, foreboding mighty changes near at hand. It is felt that men are henceforth to be held together by new ties, and separated by new barriers; for the ancient bonds will now no longer unite, nor the ancient boundaries confine.¹⁶

That this 'spirit' endured through the nineteenth century can be seen in Matthew Arnold's 'The Study of Poetry' (1880): 'There is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve'.¹⁷

Fredric Jameson has defined the 'modern feeling' as 'the conviction that we ourselves are somehow new, that a new age is beginning, that everything is possible and nothing can ever be the same again'.¹⁸ It is this 'modern feeling', rather than any one particular cause of it, which will provide the contexture for my subsequent argument. Many mid-Victorian authors had just such a 'modern

¹⁵ Mill, 'The Spirit of the Age', p. 3.

¹⁶ Mill, 'The Spirit of the Age', p. 3.

¹⁷ Matthew Arnold, 'The Study of Poetry', *Complete Prose Works: English Literature and Irish Politics*, ed. by R.H. Super (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1973), pp. 161-188, (p. 161).

¹⁸ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 310.

feeling'; sometimes this was expressed as optimism, sometimes as a rhetoric of social decline, and elsewhere as unease and disorientation which found one means of articulation, as this thesis will argue, in nostalgia.

One consequence of this new spirit of transformation is, as Mill put it, a division between 'those who are still what they were, and those who have changed: into the men of the present age, and the men of the past. To the former, the spirit of the age is a subject of exultation; to the latter, of terror; to both, of eager and anxious interest'.¹⁹ This sentiment is echoed in William Makepeace Thackeray's 'De Juventute' in which those 'who lived before railways, and survive out of the ancient world, are like Father Noah and his family out of the Ark'; an epochal shift creates a sense of before and after; of belonging and no longer belonging.²⁰ Strikingly similar language has been used to describe changes in communication brought by the internet and the proclamation of an 'information age'.²¹ Rhetoric of loss for generations that straddle periods of technological transition is, it seems, perennial. Mill refers to 'men who carry their eyes in the back of their heads and can see no other portion of the destined track of humanity than that which it has already travelled'. He is interested in the many 'points of view from which the spirit of the age may be contemplated'.²² There was a prevailing sense that the mid-Victorian experience of history was profoundly liminal and that they found themselves in an uneasy transitional period between a lost past and uncertain future.



The complex economic, social and cultural conditions brought about by successive waves of industrialisation and urbanisation throughout this period are difficult, if not impossible, to untangle. Beyond simple statements about burgeoning modernisation and the observation that

¹⁹ Mill, 'The Spirit of the Age', p. 3.

²⁰ William Makepeace Thackeray, 'De Juventute', in *Roundabout Papers* (1863) (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1863), pp. 103-131, (p. 112).

²¹ For example: Simon Garfield, *To the Letter: A Journey through a Vanishing World*, (London: Canongate, 2013) and Rebecca Solnit, 'In the Day of the Postman', *London Review of Books*, 35: 16, (2013), 32-33.

²² Mill, 'The Spirit of the Age', p. 3, 4.

there were recurrent references to an often troubling feeling of ‘transition’, the exact factors are too vaguely expressed or too numerous to attribute to one cause or another, certainly within the scope of this thesis. The important thing remains the underlying anxiety which was referred to, imprecisely, as a sense of disorientating change. Rosenberg’s approach is to present a conglomeration of pressures in a bulging list. He writes:

Waking daily to newness in all its forms – new sciences and intellectual disciplines, new and vastly more rapid modes of transportation, new political and social institutions, vast new acquisitions to the Empire, new relations between the classes and the sexes, sprawling new cities in which machines were housed with far more care than the ‘hands’ that worked them – the Victorians felt, in Matthew Arnold’s phrase, like wanderers [...]²³

Any greater specificity would be a distortion. The desire for precision defeats my point that the authors I will discuss felt that they faced a multitude of changes.²⁴ Raymond Williams’s *The Country and the City*, for instance, explores similar tropes through a closer focus on the cultural conditions surrounding urbanisation. This thesis is heavily indebted to Williams’s study but takes a broader approach to closely related material. I focus on the evident sense of anxiety and unease rather than its cause.

This confusion created a feeling that these transformations were too overwhelming to digest. I would like to echo Laura Brown’s methodological statement that the treatment of these themes ‘depends upon a widely accepted social, cultural, and economic understanding of modernity, which [she does] not challenge’ and is ‘engaged in a close reading of the experience of modernity, but not in an extended negotiation with the concept’.²⁵ As my title suggests, I take the aftershocks of the industrial revolution as among the most ‘visible’ of these changes but see this as one element in a broader ‘cultural fable’ of disorientating transformation, to borrow Brown’s useful coinage. The category of ‘cultural fable’ appeals to me as a methodological and conceptual approach to my own critical reading and, because of this, I quote Brown’s definition at length:

²³ Rosenberg, *Elegy for an Age*, p. 1.

²⁴ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (St Albans: Paladin, 1975).

²⁵ Laura Brown, *Fables of Modernity: Literature and Culture in the English Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 5, 4.

Like a Marxist notion of ideology, [...] a cultural fable transcends particular writers and texts: it is generated collectively in many texts over a period of time. But unlike ideology, a cultural fable has a specific formal structure that can be defined and read as closely as a novel or poem, and an aesthetic distinctiveness that enables it to develop a temporary life of its own, to attain the relative autonomy of a literary tradition, to be connected generically with other parallel cultural fables, or even to gain canonical status. But although it has a coherent form, a cultural fable is not necessarily coterminous with a single text. It may make up a small portion or a specific dimension of a text, and a particular text may contain more than one cultural fable. My treatment of texts focuses on specific images, sustained tropes, and recurrent rhetorical structures, and it highlights the contradictions, disjunctions, or tensions generated by those structures.²⁶

Apart from the many obvious parallels with the themes of this thesis, the ‘cultural fable’ also creates an interaction between historical environment and generic or formal approaches which is, I will argue, crucial to the development of a nostalgic literary response to the perception of progress. The ‘cultural fable’ I will trace through the nineteenth-century historical novel is a perception of historical acceleration which, as Thackeray (‘De Juventute’) and Mill (‘The Spirit of the Age’) expressed it, created a sense of recent discontinuity from the past; the trope through which this was represented was, as I will outline in the next segment of this introduction, a complex and self-reflexive form of nostalgia.

It is only common sense to observe that an idea does not need to be sociologically or historically ‘correct’ in order to become a cultural preoccupation. The subject of this thesis is the manifestations of the often vague or confused notion that times were changing too fast; it is not my intention to present a historical account of these anxieties beyond the barest contextualisation or to justify them as a sociological reality. A nostalgic reaction to social and cultural transition, I contend, became a background hum in the nineteenth-century novel and, almost because of this ubiquity, has been consistently overlooked.



Thomas Babington Macaulay’s *The History of England* is prefaced with a dismissive nod to a misguided belief in past ‘golden ages’. That he felt compelled to address this misconception suggests that it was a prevalent reaction to the ‘progress’ which he implicitly endorses. Macaulay was, after all, a prototype of Butterfield’s ‘Whig’ historian and had criticised Robert Southey’s

²⁶ Brown, *Fables of Modernity*, p. 2.

creation of lost 'golden days' in his *Sir Thomas More; or, Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society*, asking: 'On what principle is it that, where we see nothing but improvement behind us, we are to expect nothing but deterioration before us?'²⁷ The Whig historian, as Butterfield describes him, sought to 'produce a story which is the ratification if not the glorification of the present' and was an archetypal 'nineteenth-century gentleman' who 'very quickly busies himself with dividing the world into friends and enemies of progress'.²⁸ For Southey to indulge such backward looking sentimentality, Macaulay insists, is blinkered and ignorant:

Those who compare the age on which their lot has fallen with a golden age which exists only in their imagination may talk of degeneracy and decay: but no man who is correctly informed as to the past will be disposed to take a morose or desponding view of the present.²⁹

Macaulay spends the opening paragraph of his history establishing a narrative sequence in which we can see steady progress towards a present day of comparative ease and enlightenment. We are given an abstract of his broader argument and told 'how our country, from a state of ignominious vassalage, rapidly rose to the place of umpire among European powers' and 'a gigantic commerce gave birth to a maritime power, compared with which every other maritime power, ancient or modern, sinks into insignificance'.³⁰ Both Macaulay and Mill point to Southey's *Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society* as a (or the) prime example of romanticising retrospection.

There is a compelling argument that many of the tropes used to express these attitudes were inherited from the climate of revolution which had overshadowed the previous generation. Peter Fritzsche's *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (2004) persuasively relates the shock of sudden epochal change in an age overshadowed by the French Revolution with the

²⁷ Robert Southey, *Sir Thomas More; or, Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society* (London, 1829) reviewed: Thomas Babington Macaulay, Review of Southey's *Sir Thomas More* in *Edinburgh Review*, January 1830, reproduced in Macaulay, *Critical and Historical Essays Contributed to the Edinburgh Review* (London: Longman, 1843), pp. 217-269.

²⁸ Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), pp. 9, 13.

²⁹ Thomas Babington Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James II* (1848), 3 vols, (London: J.M. Dent, 1906) I, p. 10.

³⁰ Macaulay, *The History of England*, p. 9.

development of literary nostalgia alongside a ‘new historical mindedness’.³¹ He describes ‘how people thought about the irretrievability of the past or the eruption of the new’ during this period of uncertainty.³² Fritzsche’s notion that the French Revolution spawned a new way of thinking about history, which was newly sensitive to the idea of disjuncture between past and present, is particularly instructive:

The world appeared to them more restless than it had in the past, which was as much due to thinking about events in terms of revolution as it was due to the revolutionary nature of events themselves. This rather drastic dimension to social description is perhaps the most fundamental outcome of the French Revolution. Thus the Industrial Revolution of the early nineteenth century was as much a category of analysis distinctive to the period as it was an unmistakable material process shaping the period.³³

The French Revolution, Fritzsche convincingly argues, created a state of mind which was more alert to similar patterns of upheaval. George Steiner makes a similar point when he suggests that, while ‘those who lived through the 1790s [...] felt that time itself and the whole enterprise of consciousness had formidably accelerated’, the ‘generation of 1830 was damned by memories of events, of hopes, in which it had taken no personal part’.³⁴ Romantic-era traumas continued to reverberate in the later nineteenth century.

‘Revolution’ and ‘transition’ were master narratives as much as single events and influenced the ways in which subsequent events were experienced and interpreted. As Fritzsche puts it at the outset of this same study ‘[i]t is not the march of time that has [...] stranded people in the present, but the specific course of recent history, and more specifically its apprehension as non-repeatable, irretrievable time.’³⁵ This is a conception of historical time which is peculiarly sensitive to the idea of loss. Modernity, as Laura Brown puts it, ‘is distinguished by an act of historical differentiation, an attention to the novelty of the present and its distance from the past, which makes possible

³¹ Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 202.

³² Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present*, pp. 8-9.

³³ Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present*, p. 202.

³⁴ George Steiner, *In Bluebeard's Castle* (Faber and Faber: London, 1971) pp. 18, 22.

³⁵ Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present*, p. 3.

ideas of progress, improvement and change.³⁶ As this thesis will show, a sense of ‘distance from the past’ also produced a nostalgic mode of representation which paid attention to losses and indulged in longing retrospection, not only as an end in itself, but as a way of articulating deeper anxieties. Susan Stewart has described the incorporation of this new idea of history into a realist aesthetic, suggesting that the ‘confidence in the circularity of history and the complete vision of closure is broken with the advent of the industrial revolution, the advent of a new kind of realism and a novel kind of “psychological” literature’.³⁷ This thesis will argue that historical fiction was generated by this sensation of rupture and used nostalgia as a superficial suture which draws attention to a disjuncture it might otherwise be supposed to patch.³⁸

Fritzsche argues that this is a progressive or ‘Whiggish’ view of time, in opposition to a cyclical model, and suggests that:

even this Whiggish conception of history did not ignore the vast scenes of destruction which history had now formed, so that notions such as the end of community, the spoliation of the landscape, the innocence of childhood, or the “last Indian”, or even a concept like “tradition” could become part of a common cultural lexicon that distinguished the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from the seventeenth or eighteenth.³⁹

Fritzsche identifies these tropes of loss as integral to Whig historiography but, as I have already suggested, I consider them a reaction against – or at least deliberate complication of – this burgeoning cultural narrative of progress. They supplement and soften an attitude to the past which, as Butterfield argued, was often insensitive to historical cul-de-sacs like ‘Marie Antoinette’s ear-rings or the adventures of the Jacobites’.⁴⁰ This is, I will argue, one way in which a Whiggish progressivism generates its own counter narrative. This nostalgia was, I argue, a counter-current –

³⁶ Brown, *Fables of Modernity*, p. 7.

³⁷ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 4.

³⁸ For further discussion of this changing conceptualisation of historical time, see Jerome Buckley, *The Triumph of Time: A Study of the Victorian Concepts of Time, History, Progress, and Decadence* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967).

³⁹ Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present*, p. 203.

⁴⁰ Butterfield, *Whig Interpretation of History*, p. 20.

even a counter-argument – and reaction which, in combination with other (overt or implicit) refutations wove an answering strain of pathos and doubt within an established narrative of progress and improvement. Critical discussion of these themes frequently poses the ideas of progress versus decline and has not, therefore, been well placed to explore the more subtle interaction of these positions suggested by nostalgic literary tropes. ‘Opposed attitudes to the past’, as Raymond Chapman has put it ‘were a part of the diverse and often mixed feelings with which the Victorians regarded their own time’.⁴¹ Fritzsche’s work is unusual in its concession that a narrative of progress might be intertwined with a reaction of yearning memory and this thesis takes his more nuanced account as a starting point.



These ideas of progress and transition induced a permanent state of doublethink in which, like Walter Scott’s ‘Aunt Margaret’ in *My Aunt Margaret’s Mirror*, it was possible to dream about the past but be fully reconciled to the benefits (and the inevitability) of progress or at least perpetual change:

Do not come at such a moment, when my head is full of plaids, pibrochs, and claymores, and ask my reason to admit what, I am afraid, it cannot deny—I mean, that the public advantage peremptorily demanded that these things should cease to exist. I cannot, indeed, refuse to allow the justice of your reasoning; but yet, being convinced against my will, you will gain little by your motion. You might as well read to an infatuated lover the catalogue of his mistress's imperfections; for when he has been compelled to listen to the summary, you will only get for answer that 'he lo'es her a' the better.⁴²

Eliot, too, self-diagnosed a political inconsistency or hybridity in her response to the past. She observes a tendency to ‘revel in regret’:

Immense improvement! says the well-regulated mind, which unintermittingly rejoices in the New Police, the Tithe Commutation Act, the penny-post, and all guarantees of human advancement, and has no moments when conservative-reforming intellect takes a nap, while imagination does a little Toryism by the sly, revelling in regret that dear, old, brown, crumbling, picturesque inefficiency is everywhere giving place to spick-and-span new-painted, new-varnished efficiency, which will yield endless diagrams, plans, elevations, and

⁴¹ Raymond Chapman, *The Sense of the Past in Victorian Literature* (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 1.

⁴² Walter Scott, ‘My Aunt Margaret’s Mirror’ in *Selected Short Stories of Sir Walter Scott* (Glasgow: Kennedy and Boyd, 2011), p. 130.

sections, but alas! no picture. Mine, I fear, is not a well-regulated mind: it has an occasional tenderness for old abuses [...].⁴³

The most discursively complete and appropriately complex reaction to change – the most ‘sympathetic’ to use one of George Eliot’s touchstone words – contains currents and counter-currents. A rational understanding that certain changes have had generally beneficial consequences does not preclude nostalgic regret for the things they rendered obsolete. Though apparently contradictory, the above passage suggests, this reconciliation of opposing points of view is simply consonant with psychological experience. People and novels are complicated and inconsistent; they can hold multiple clashing opinions at once. Nostalgia – backward looking but premised on ‘progress’ – holds two such conflicting notions in balance. It suggests or describes a sort of cognitive dissonance and, while it is premised on rift produced by irreversible forward momentum, is always itself a backward-looking mentality. In a notebook (kept from 1868), Eliot places what she identifies as a Christian, future-orientated approach in opposition to the concept of the Golden Age that abounds in classical literature:

The tendency to look not to the past but to the future for types of perfection was brought into the world by Xtianity. Ancient literature gives few or no hints of a belief that the purposes of society is necessarily from the worse to the better.⁴⁴

This is a direct quotation from chapter four (‘The Modern History of the Law of Nature’) of Sir Henry Sumner Maine’s *Ancient Law: Its Connection to the History of Early Society*.⁴⁵ In drawing out this phrase, Eliot implicitly acknowledges that either position can be treated as an ideological bias. Her fiction, as we will see, cuts across this binary divide.

This thesis argues that the historical novel which, as Ina Ferris puts it, has ‘its task of representation [...] divided between two imperatives: the evoking of absence and the exhibiting of presence’,

⁴³ George Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857), ed. by Thomas A. Noble (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 7.

⁴⁴ George Eliot, ‘Notebook with label “Miscellanies” on spine and ‘Quotations, Latin, English & Greek – and Hebrew matters’ on front cover. Holograph. Probably used for Daniel Deronda. 20cm. 1868 notebooks (305p.), The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library., New York Public Library, p. 51. This section of the notebook is transcribed in George Eliot, *Middlemarch Notebooks*, ed. by John Clark Pratt and Victor A. Neufeldt (Berkeley, LA and London: University of California Press, 1979).

⁴⁵ Sir Henry Sumner Maine, *Ancient Law: Its Connection to the History of Early Society, and its Relation to Modern Ideas* (1861), 4th edn (London: John Murray, 1870), p. 74.

found a solution to this problem in a system of tropes informed by nostalgic memory. Nostalgia, in this formulation, is simultaneously a mode of historicising the events described – by placing them in a perspective which supposes their pastness – and a trope of modernisation which includes a strong sense of forward temporal momentum. The historical novel accentuates a more general representational paradox and, to borrow Paul Ricoeur’s phrase, conjures ‘a present image of an absent thing’; little wonder, then, that nostalgic memory, a form of recollection which is unable to forget the irretrievability of its object, became a prominent trope in a genre that attempts to make present something that will always remain distant.⁴⁶ As Rosemarie Bodenheimer has put it ‘Retrospective narrative is built on an oscillating arrow of time. It selects its past and suffuses it with the language and consciousness of the present. All the while it declares the pastness of the past, through a *rhetorical assumption of difference* [my emphasis]’.⁴⁷ The historical novel, arguably more than any other genre, presupposes that its object has already ceased to exist.

II. Nostos Algos

Hypochondria of the Heart: Medical Origins

The first use of the word nostalgia was in a Swiss medical dissertation written in 1688 by Johannes Hofer. He combined Greek roots *nostos*, return home, and *algos*, pain or longing to form a medical synonym for *das Heimweh* or *mal du pays*. He made no claim that ‘nostalgia’ was a new discovery; it was intended as a medical term for a disorder which had, as he puts it, been ‘introduced not long since into [the] vernacular language’ of the French and Germans. It was a porous and inclusive category which shifted back and forth between organic medicine and psychology as well as literary and cultural discourses. It wasn’t until 1900 that the OED records the first incidence of nostalgia used as a straightforwardly sentimental attitude to the past. Fred Davis wonders how it is that ‘following its habitation of two centuries in the realm of psychiatry’ its psychological connotations

⁴⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004), p. 280.

⁴⁷ Rosemarie Bodenheimer, ‘Knowing and Telling in Dickens’s Retrospects’ in *Knowing the Past: Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. by Suzy Anger, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 215-233, (p. 215).

‘are rapidly being dissipated through positively tinged popular and commercial usage’.⁴⁸ In Hofer’s dissertation, nostalgia is a potentially life-threatening disease with an organic as well as a psychological component.

Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), which precedes Hofer’s dissertation by nearly seventy years, lists a form of melancholy under the title ‘banishment’ which has striking similarities to nostalgia. Burton, however, has little sympathy with this ‘illness’ and makes no connection with any physiological condition:

’Tis a childish humour to hone after home, to be discontent at that which others seek; to prefer, as base islanders and Norwegians do, their own ragged island before Italy or Greece, the gardens of the world. There is a base nation in the north, saith Pliny, called Chauci, that live amongst rocks and sands by the seaside, feed on fish, drink water: and yet these base people account themselves slaves in respect, when they come to Rome. *Ita est profecto* (as he concludes) *multis fortuna parcit in poenam*, so it is, fortune favours some to live at home, to their further punishment: ’tis want of judgment. All places are distant from heaven alike, the sun shines happily as warm in one city as in another, and to a wise man there is no difference of climes; friends are everywhere to him that behaves himself well, and a prophet is not esteemed in his own country.⁴⁹

The idea that nostalgia was a life-threatening disease seems, then, to have begun with Hofer, though a more general sense of unease caused by displacement had already been noted and discussed.

Around the time Hofer was writing, then, something changed and nostalgia began to be taken much more seriously. As Jean Starobinski has noted, from the start nostalgia was influenced by changes in the way space was used – it was a ‘modern’ malady created in part by a changing relationship between the local and the global. The world was becoming a wider and more mobile place in which there were abundant opportunities for displacement. Describing the cultural context of Hofer’s dissertation, Starobinski writes:

the medical cases cited told of recent observations. The malady, the author affirmed, most often affects students and soldiers, illustrative examples of those who are separated from their birthplace by constraint. These were “modern” examples, which took over from the

⁴⁸ Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: Free Press, 1979), p. 5.

⁴⁹ Robert Burton, ‘Against Servitude, Loss of Liberty, Imprisonment, Banishment’, *Anatomy of Melancholy* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1847), pp. 368-369.

older examples of the exile and the prisoner. [...]In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with their long-distance journeys sometimes imposed by force, a sharper awareness of the diversity of social conditions involving uprootedness and the loss of freedom allowed the motif to be brought up to date—to be laicized.⁵⁰

Nostalgia's first victims were uprooted from the places they had been familiar with from birth and forced into a disorientating new world which was itself changing and expanding. Kevis Goodman has listed the international conflicts which coincided with the discussion of nostalgia as a disease of uprootedness and demonstrated that it was a period which saw the movement of vast numbers of soldiers. 'The diagnosis' she says, 'seems to have answered a practical need during a century marked by persistent international and global warfare: the wars of the Spanish Succession (1701-14), the Polish wars of the 1730s, the Franco-Austrian wars of the 1740s, the Seven Years War carried out globally in the 1750s, the struggle for American independence, and then, from 1793 to 1815, the almost uninterrupted conflict with France'.⁵¹ It was a new manifestation of an old anxiety. As a literary trope it updated a long-established idea in relation to burgeoning modernity which had transformed relationships to space and time. As Richard Sennett has put it, 'it is easy to forget how bold and how recent is the very assertion that human beings are creatures of particular cultures'. This new sense of difference, Sennett suggests, gave rise to a new idea of 'place and displace'.⁵² You have to feel at home before you can be made homesick. Nostalgia was, in some sense, a product of this shift.



The symptoms of the original disorder are various and vague: as Hofer says, 'the next thing is for me to prove the existence of the thing thus described; but what manner better than by cases and

⁵⁰ Jean Starobinski, 'Rivers, Bells, Nostalgia', trans. by Richard Pevear, *The Hudson Review*, 61, Translation Issue (2009) 603-617, (p. 603).

⁵¹ Kevis Goodman, 'Romantic Poetry and the Science of Nostalgia', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romantic Poetry*, ed. by James Chandler and Maureen N McLane, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 195-216, (p. 196).

⁵² Richard Sennett, *The Foreigner* (London: Notting Hill Editions, 2011), pp. 64, 65.

histories?⁵³ The common feature in these often disparate case studies was an obsessive ‘meditation only of the Fatherland’.⁵⁴ This illness, he writes, ‘admits no remedy other than a return to the homeland.’⁵⁵ It afflicted those who had been geographically displaced from their homes or homelands. Young people from rural regions were seen as particularly susceptible. It drew on a broader cultural context, both in the identification of the disorder – which had only recently been given a vernacular name – and in the selection of a neologism formed from Greek root *nostos*, a word with unavoidable literary resonances. Hofer writes:

The very name presents itself for consideration before all things, which indeed the gifted Helvetians have introduced not long since into their vernacular language, chosen from the grief for the lost charm of the Native Land, which they called *das Heimweh*; just as those stricken with this disease grieve, either because they are abandoned by the pleasant breeze of their Native Land or because at some time they picture themselves enjoying this more. And hence, since the Helvetians in Gaul (France) were taken often by this mood, among that same nation it merited the name *la Maladie du Pays*.

‘However’, he continues, ‘it lacks a particular name in medicine, because from no doctor thus far had I learned that it was observed properly or explained properly’.⁵⁶ Nostalgia wasn’t a new discovery but a medicalization of a recently observable cultural phenomenon; it articulated a set of pressures which had already found a vocabulary in broader cultural discourses. The name chosen was far from culturally neutral; it alludes to a rich literary tradition of exile and thwarted homecoming. It is not surprising, then, that this medical neologism swiftly – and enduringly – found its way back into literary discourse.

Hofer proposed a number of alternative names before settling on nostalgia. ‘Nosomanias’ and ‘philopatridomania’ would, he suggests, be equally suitable, though he still prefers nostalgia:

Nor in truth, deliberating on a name, did a more suitable one occur to me, defining the thing to be explained, more concisely than the word *Nostalgias*, Greek in origin and indeed composed of two sounds, the one of which is *Nostos*, return to the native land; the other,

⁵³ Johannes Hofer, ‘Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia by Johannes Hofer, 1688’, trans. by Caroline Kiser Anspach, *Institute of the History of Medicine, Bulletin*, 2 (1934), 376-391, (p. 382).

⁵⁴ Hofer, ‘Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia’, p. 386.

⁵⁵ Hofer, ‘Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia’, p. 382.

⁵⁶ Hofer, ‘Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia’, p. 380.

Algos, signifies suffering or grief; so that thus far it is possible from the force of the sound Nostalgia to define the sad mood originating from the desire for a return to one's native land. If nosomanias or the name philopatridomania is more pleasing to anyone, in truth denoting a spirit perturbed against holding fast to their native land from any cause whatsoever (denoting) return, it will be entirely approved by me.⁵⁷

The central principle is a desire to return to a native place. Hofer's suggested alternatives (which he didn't endorse all that strongly) stand in contrast to nostalgia in their inclusion of the word 'mania' and a consequent emphasis on insanity. As Tamara Wagner has suggested, 'Algia' suggests pain and bodily illness more than the psychological unease or insanity suggested by 'mania'.⁵⁸ Philpatridomania insists on the patriotic aspect of the disease which is implied, but not necessary, in nostalgia. Later commentators would variously emphasise or deny this implicit patriotism depending on their own national perspective and agenda. Early sufferers were predominantly Swiss – nostalgia became known as *Schweizerkrankheit* because of its close identification with Swiss troops – and as such an alternative explanation was found by some interested parties in the change of altitude when Swiss soldiers left their mountainous homeland.⁵⁹ As both Dennis Walder and Austin have suggested, other groups (especially those from remote areas) were quickly identified as particularly susceptible, among them Scottish highlanders. Walder notes that Scottish Gaelic has its own term for nostalgia, *cianalas*.⁶⁰ Johann Georg Zimmerman tells us that English press-ganged sailors were also frequent victims to this disorder.⁶¹ As Arnold noted, 'In England whatever may be the partiality to our native land [...] we know nothing of this passionate attachment that leads to a sort of insanity' but the press gang was an exception to this rule.⁶² In what is probably only a highly

⁵⁷ Hofer, 'Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia', pp. 380-81.

⁵⁸ Tamara Wagner, *Longing: Narratives of Nostalgia in the British Novel, 1740-1890*, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2004), p. 14.

⁵⁹ S.W. Jackson, 'Nostalgia' in *Melancholia and Depression: From Hippocratic Times to Modern Times*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 373-280.

⁶⁰ Dennis Walder, *Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Representation and Memory*, (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 8. The 1828 edition of *Dictionary of the Gaelic Language*, however, defines this word more generally as a 'melancholy' or 'dulness' and does not specify a particular cause. Subsequent dictionaries specify homesickness and nostalgia as significant synonyms.

⁶¹ Johann Georg Zimmerman, *Von Der Erfahrung in der Arzneikunst* (1763-4), (Zurich, 1787).

⁶² Thomas Arnold, *Observations on the Nature, Kinds, Causes, and Prevention of Insanity, Lunacy or Madness*, 2 vols, (Leicester, 1782), I, p. 268.

suggestive coincidence, Gaskell's *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863) centres on the plight of press-ganged sailors and the communities they left behind. This overlap is discussed in more detail in my fourth chapter. The synonyms Hofer provides for this newly defined condition are, as numerous commentators have noted, revealing in their insistence on patriotism and virtuous attachment to place.



Nostalgia was, as Michael S. Roth has put it, 'an affective disorder that destroyed the body'.⁶³ A key feature of Hofer's dissertation is its assertion that nostalgia is a psychosomatic condition through which the imagination could create bodily illness:

Nostalgia, moreover, indeed as far as I am able to assume in the uncertainty of the thing, is sympathetic of an afflicted imagination. Hence, from the living spirits entirely by its own momentum along uncommon routes through the untouched courses of the channels of the brain to the body, and by revisiting the oval tubes of the center brain, it is originated by arousing especially the uncommon and ever-present idea of the recalled native land in the mind. At the same time it is accompanied by various other symptoms of an afflicted imagination, for I do not think it is possible to ascribe it accurately or better to anything else.⁶⁴

One way in which a pathological version of homesickness survived into the nineteenth century was through the intricate relationship it supposed between mind and matter. The following, for instance, was published in *The Lancet* in 1837:

If *hypochondriasis* may be confounded with melancholia, that disease which has been termed nostalgia [sic] is much more likely to be so; and when this occurs, and confinement in a lunatic asylum takes place, death is the inevitable result. *In no disease is the influence of mind over body so strikingly displayed as in nostalgia* [...] In this disease the power of intellect over organized matter is most striking; and it is fully demonstrated in the condition of the lungs and liver, when the fatal termination of the disease affords an opportunity for the examination of those organs. The small influence of materia medica, and pharmacy, in affording remedial agents, is thus displayed; and a proof, if any were required, is presented of the inseparable connexion between moral science and the healing art. This combination is essential for the knowledge of mental alienation; and particularly so for the discrimination of nostalgia, as it is frequently, although not always, in the highest and most cultivated persons that it displays itself, "the mind, in proportion as it is expanded, exposing a larger surface to impression." This, however, is not always the case. I once saw

⁶³ Michael S. Roth, 'Dying of the Past: Medical Studies of Nostalgia in Nineteenth-Century France', *History and Memory*, 3, (1991) 5-29, (p. 10).

⁶⁴ Hofer, 'Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia', p. 381.

the disease in a Scotch artisan; and Mr Dunlop, in a note published by Dr Beck, states, that the only cases of the disease which he ever met with, were two: - one in a recruit, a country lad, from the fens of Lincolnshire, “who died” says he, “under my charge on his passage to Canada, in the year 1813; and the other, in a London pickpocket, who I saw this year 1824, in the hulks at Sheerness.⁶⁵

Hofer’s nostalgia has come to seem like an obscure context but this was not yet the case in the nineteenth century when theories of mind still referred to similar models of interaction between brain, mind and body. Indeed, nostalgia was still current, if no longer ground-breaking, in scientific discussion well into the twentieth century.⁶⁶

In the early nineteenth century nostalgia was often prominently linked to associationism as an extreme – indeed, a pathological – example of strong association in action.⁶⁷ The story that was most frequently used was of the influence of traditional music on Swiss troops serving abroad (a phenomenon discussed in more depth later in this introduction). Dugald Stewart drew this connection, suggesting that:

The well-known effect of a particular tune on Swiss regiments when at a distance from home, furnishes a very striking illustration of the peculiar power of perception, or of an impression on the senses, to awaken associated thoughts and feelings: and numberless facts of a similar nature must have occurred to every person of moderate sensibility, in the course of his own experience.⁶⁸

John Abercrombie, meanwhile, observed that:

The effect of a particular tune, on the Swiss regiments in foreign service, is familiar to every one; and a similar effect has been remarked, from a similar cause, among the Highland regiments of our own country.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ A.T. Thomson, ‘Lectures on Medical Jurisprudence, now in course of delivery at the University of London: Lecture 24, *The Lancet* (Saturday, 18th March, 1837), I, (1836-7), 881-889, (p. 883).

⁶⁶ Susan J. Matt, *Homesickness: An American History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁶⁷ Linda M. Austin, *Nostalgia in Transition, 1780-1917*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007) and Catherine Jones, *Literary Memory: Scott’s Waverley Novels and the Psychology of Narrative*, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2003), both explore this aspect of memory, Austin as it relates to nostalgia and Jones as it was manifested in Scott’s novels.

⁶⁸ Dugald Stewart, *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (1792), 2nd edn, (London: T. Cadell Jun. and W. Davies, 1802), p. 276.

⁶⁹ John Abercrombie, *Inquiries Concerning the Intellectual Powers and the Investigation of Truth* (1830), (Boston: Otis, Broaders, and Company, 1843), pp. 91-2.

Nostalgia merges mind and matter in a way that would make it a prime example in discussions of associationist psychology. It resonated with an influential nineteenth-century theory of psychology and, as such, remained more prominent – and relevant – than might otherwise have been the case.⁷⁰ As Linda M Austin has put it, ‘Victorians in particular who challenged mind-centered psychologies advanced a pre-Freudian idea of the unconscious by expanding the concept of memory to include actions of the sensory and motor mechanisms centered on the spinal chord.’⁷¹ Nicholas Dames has noted that Dickens owned a copy of Dugald Stewart’s 1792 ‘associationist masterwork’ *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* though he does not mention the fact that this book contains explicit references to the ‘Swiss disease’, perhaps because this observation is made within a chapter that places association in mutually exclusive opposition to Dames’s definition of nostalgia.⁷² This connection between nostalgia and associationism through their shared interest in the interrelation of mind and matter, underpins my argument in chapter 2 and, to a lesser extent, chapter 3.⁷³



One hundred years after Hofer, Immanuel Kant observed the confusion between time and space which was inherent in the attitudes of both early nostalgics and the doctors who diagnosed them. Kant noted the misidentification of a geographical cause for the disorder and suggested instead that it was brought about by the passage of time: ‘they think that this is because everything [...] has changed a great deal, but in fact it is because they cannot bring back their youth’.⁷⁴ Dislocation

⁷⁰ Recent studies which touch on nineteenth-century continuations of the eighteenth-century theory of association, include: Catherine Jones, *Literary Memory*; Nicholas Dames, *Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810-1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Gregory Tate, *The Poet’s Mind*; Linda M Austin, *Nostalgia in Transition*. Rick Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture, 1850-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) also gives a useful account of the theory and unpicks its relationship to the nineteenth-century novel with particular attention paid to Eliot.

⁷¹ Austin, *Nostalgia in Transition*, p. 2.

⁷² Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, p. 129.

⁷³ Linda M. Austin also makes this connection between nostalgia and associationism and these segments of my thesis will implicitly build on her work.

⁷⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798) trans. by Robert B. Loudon and Manfred Kuehn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 71.

from a particular place – especially a close community in rural surroundings – was central to nostalgia from its first diagnosis but, Kant suggests, it wasn't the place that was missed but the stage of life with which it was associated. This thesis will argue that that the nineteenth-century historical novel exploits this intermingling in the representation of historical landscapes (chapter 2) which are bound up with the personal pasts of individual characters as well as with broader social and cultural histories. As Fred Davis has put it, nostalgia is a 'deeply social emotion' with an 'intensely felt personal character'; it uses individual reaction as a barometer of broader changes.⁷⁵ Nostalgia was a product of displacement, in geographical space and through the passage of time, which became a sensibility through which to represent the affective experience of those changes. At first it was seen as a literal homesickness based on geographical displacement but it swiftly accumulated additional associations of temporal dislocation. Many early sufferers with nostalgia who thought they longed for a place, Kant influentially thought, actually missed a time in their own lives, usually their childhood or youth. This misidentification of time with place and vice versa, as I will argue in the body of my thesis, informs the metaphors with which this condition was understood and used to describe the personal and communal experiences of historical displacement. Once nostalgia starts being about time rather than place, there is no longer any possibility of going back home.

Writing about the medicinal treatment of nostalgia, Roth has observed that in nineteenth-century France:

Although the physicians were aware that the patient can never actually return to the past, the literature is full of examples that demonstrate the possibility of going home again. Thus, nostalgia is often conceptualized in spatial, rather than temporal, terms: the patient desires to return to the *scene* of his or her memory, and sometimes [...] the doctor can oblige. Even if the scene has changed, the strategy usually works. Reestablishing the connection with the lost object of desire is the surest cure of the dreaded disease.⁷⁶

Place, then, was substituted for time in the treatment of this disorder. This confusion is endlessly suggestive in a genre, like the nineteenth-century historical novel, which so often uses rural settings

⁷⁵ Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, p. vii.

⁷⁶ Roth, 'Dying of the Past', p. 13.

and pastoral tropes to create, not only a sense of historical period, but also a tangible relationship between past and present.

Etymological Origins and Afterlife: Problems of Terminology

The word nostalgia was seldom used in the nineteenth century, though medically inflected synonyms like ‘*Heimweh*’, ‘homesick’ and ‘calenture’ often were. Interestingly, the *OED* gives an example from a letter written by George Eliot on 9th February 1850 with its definition of *Heimweh*. As Linda M Austin has put it, the nineteenth century was ‘a time of significant dormancy’ in the history of the word but, she suggests, the older form of nostalgia ‘was residual in the nineteenth century and had not yet reified into its modern form’.⁷⁷ There are (as I outline in the following chapters) numerous explicit references to medical case-studies alongside many more oblique, but recognisable, allusions to the disorder. It is particularly tricky to trace nostalgia’s transformation during this period because most of the semantic signposts are missing. The most that can be claimed, then, is that the idea of pathological homesickness indisputably endured long into the nineteenth century – as the following chapters will show – but that there had also emerged a more nebulous sense of mournful retrospection with which this older idea merged and mingled. Most of the critics who have written about nostalgia in recent years are keen to point to (different) watershed moments at which, they variously claim, pathological nostalgia died out once and for all. Nicholas Dames thinks Jane Austen brought about this transformation, Tamara Wagner identifies it with the literary history of the early-eighteenth-century sensation fiction suggesting that these novels idealised nostalgia as a symptom of ‘virtue and refinement’, and Linda M Austin nods to Dames’s suggestion but prefers Friedrich von Schiller because, as I go on to discuss, he had careers in medicine and philosophy.⁷⁸ I do not, however, see the purpose of specifying one author or genre that marks a straightforward move from pathology to poetics; the accumulation of contradictory critical voices, indeed, suggests that there is no single moment to pinpoint. In critical discourse, nostalgia has become a term that can mean almost anything a critic needs it to. By pinning

⁷⁷ Austin, *Nostalgia in Transition*, pp. 1, 3.

⁷⁸ Austin, *Nostalgia in Transition*, p. 5; Wagner, *Longing*, p. 12; Dames, ‘Austen’s Nostalgics’, *Amnesiac Selves*, pp. 20-75.

nostalgia to concrete definitions and extrapolating through close reading, I attempt to avoid this pitfall.

Getting to grips with this fluctuating etymological history of this idea has caused problems in many recent studies. The idea of a sudden disjuncture between a supposed first and second phase is, as I have suggested, too schematic. One danger has been that these studies, faced with an inconsistent gradient of semantic and cultural change, have been able to define these terms in any way they choose. When the medical meaning eventually – and by increments – fell away, there is no logic in the idea that it took with it all of nostalgia’s more serious connotations. This is an especially dubious argument given that nostalgia quickly accumulated a literary sub-genre as documented by Jean Starobinski, Laurence Lerner, Aaron Santesso and others.⁷⁹ The change in definition, which is frequently figured as the shift from scientific to aesthetic categories, began with the observation of an emotional response to dislocation *outside* medical discourse which was then adopted as a category of disease and from there re-entered the cultural lexicon with a new name and a persistent tincture of pathology.

Starobinski’s brief but illuminating essays on nostalgia draw attention to these etymological tangles. He noted that, ‘[i]n tracing the history of emotions and of mentalities, one is immediately confronted with a question of method resulting from the interplay of emotions and language.’⁸⁰ This interaction has been neglected or only cursorily alluded to in most recent studies of nineteenth-century nostalgia and the result has been arguments with shaky foundations. Starobinski sets out this tricky relationship, writing:

The emotions whose history we wish to retrace are accessible to us only from the time when they find expression, verbally or by other means. For the critic, for the historian, an emotion exists only beyond the point at which it attains a linguistic status.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Aaron Santesso, *A Careful Longing* (Newark, New Jersey: University of Delaware Press, 2006); Laurence Lerner, *The Uses of Nostalgia*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1972), Starobinski, ‘Rivers, Bells, Nostalgia’ and ‘The Idea of Nostalgia’, trans. by William S. Kemp, *Diogenes*, 14 (1966), 81-103.

⁸⁰ Starobinski ‘The Idea of Nostalgia’, p. 81.

⁸¹ Starobinski, ‘The Idea of Nostalgia’, p. 81.

This thesis attempts to re-historicise nostalgia, rather than reading past understandings of psychology in the light of developments and prejudices which were yet to come. The over-emphasis on childhood in discussions of nineteenth-century nostalgia, for instance, justified by some as an extension of the Victorian ‘child-cult’, seems to me to have more to do with Freud than *das Heimweh*.⁸² For this reason it has only a subservient role in my argument. Starobinski articulated these problems of semantic shift in psychological history, suggesting that:

In this outline of a history of nostalgia, I shall endeavour to let these antiquated languages speak for themselves, and I shall refrain from interrogating these documents from the perspective of contemporary psychology. At most, I shall proceed in this manner only occasionally and as a last resort. I should like to let the obsolete (but original) voice of a psychology which is no longer our own be heard.⁸³

This manifesto-like statement articulates a useful touchstone idea and this thesis will try to abide by Starobinski’s rubric. The alternative, analogous to reading the last page first, is practiced too readily by critics who would, presumably, be more careful of chronology with other subject matter. Nostalgia seems to have become a critical blind spot in this regard. Starobinski has thoughtfully discussed the semantics of nostalgia and wondered how it is that while a word like ‘sadism’ (his example) would be considered anachronistic, though still permissible, in critical discussions of periods before the Marquis de Sade, there are other words – nostalgia among them – that critics are content to use anachronistically. While ‘[w]e have the right to speak of the *sadism* of Nero, just as we have the right to measure the radio-active carbon in prehistoric chipped stones. Only we must not forget that the word sadism, to the same extent as the Geiger-counter, forms part of our modern intellectual equipment.’⁸⁴ Hysteria is, as a rule, referred to in light of its origins rather than only its subsequent colloquial meanings. Nostalgia is not generally treated with a fraction of this sensitivity, even in works of criticism that ostensibly deal directly with the phenomenon.

⁸² Ann C. Colley and Linda M Austin each devote substantial sections of their studies of nostalgia to Victorian childhood. Tamara Wagner notes that ‘In Victorian literature, nostalgia was redirected to the interior spaces of bourgeois domesticity and appropriated as an essential part of the age’s child cult. This sentimentalized version of personal longing was far removed from the controversial, even radical, uses of nostalgia at the end of the eighteenth century’ (*Longing*, pp. 12-13).

⁸³ Starobinski, ‘The Idea of Nostalgia’, p. 82.

⁸⁴ Starobinski, ‘The Idea of Nostalgia’, pp. 82-83.

In literary critical discourse, nostalgia has come to be understood as an unambiguously pejorative term which connotes a stupid and conservative outlook on the past. As Kevis Goodman has put it, ‘the disturbing disease – both illness and more general unease – of historical existence appears in modern scholarship, if it appears at all, as a colourful backdrop for what it became, the false consciousness that our own contemporaries distrust or disown’.⁸⁵ The result has been a series of denials of ‘nostalgia’ in the work of beloved authors, even when recourse to nostalgic tropes is essentially incontrovertible. This has been especially the case in relation to Dickens’s work; his critics seem determined to defend ‘Mr Popular Sentiment’ from the accusations of historical unsophistication they perceive in any hint of nostalgia. This defensiveness, I suggest, has created a critical blind-spot which this thesis seeks to address. If these tropes are used – which they definitely are – it seems more productive to tease out their full (far from simple) implications than to deny them entirely or treat them as irrelevant aberrations. Jonathan H. Grossman, for instance, has been praised in reviews for his insistence that there is nothing nostalgic about Dickens’s representations of changing transport networks while Ruth Livesey has argued that ‘something much thornier than nostalgia’ is needed to ‘write through (and of)’ obsolete technology in Charlotte Brontë’s treatment of the coach road.⁸⁶ Obviously, as I argue in the second segment of my second chapter, I disagree. Nostalgia isn’t a trivial or sociologically insignificant idea, though literary criticism seems especially prone to treat it as such. Studies which take a broader view are not usually primarily literary critical; it is a topic which has benefited from interdisciplinary discussion. Svetlana Boym’s *The Future of Nostalgia* and Susan Stewart’s *On Longing* are discipline-straddling examples of this more open-minded approach.⁸⁷ While Stewart especially does not treat nostalgia as a positive emotion, she also

⁸⁵ Goodman, ‘Romantic Poetry and the Science of Nostalgia’, p. 197.

⁸⁶ Ruth Livesey, ‘Communicating with Jane Eyre: Stagecoach, Mail, and the Tory Nation’, *Victorian Studies*, 53, (2011), 615-638, (p. 615). Jonathan Grossman, *Dickens’s Networks: Public Transport and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Iain Crawford, ‘Review of Charles Dicken’s Networks: Public Transport and the Novel’ *Dickens Quarterly*, 29, (2012) pp. 367-12.

⁸⁷ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

does not deny its potential complexity and the self-evident ‘thorniness’ of a disease you could still die from, as the above extract from *The Lancet* demonstrates, as late as 1837.⁸⁸

There are inevitable problems of terminology where the transformation of a system of tropes is closely related to the semantic shift of one particular word. In this thesis ‘nostalgia’ needs to represent numerous permutations of meaning. For the sake of clarity I will use the word nostalgia to mean an emotion with at least strong resonances of the original pathological memory of home. In cases where the term is intended to denote any additional or adapted meanings, for instance a greater degree of sentimentality or a shift between geographical and temporal causes, I will specify the change. As far as possible, I try to avoid generalisation about the exact ratio of this or that meaning of nostalgia to ‘the mid-Victorian novelist’ and instead use close reading to disentangle uses of particular nostalgic tropes in particular novels. Critics who have attempted to extrapolate general principles from particular instances have produced dubious arguments. During this period, nostalgia was, accurately, neither one thing nor the other; mid-Victorian nostalgia has the privilege of occupying an in-between phase in which many shades of meanings are possible and, more importantly, actively in use.

Nostalgia as literary aesthetic

The early adoption of this medicalized terminology in eighteenth-century poetry was remarkably swift. As Starobinski has noted ‘[t]he didactic poetry of the end of the eighteenth century often put the ideas of doctors and philosophers into verse’. More interesting for this study:

The truths of science being universal, commonplaces were established at a time when scientific knowledge itself remained indebted to poetry.⁸⁹

Whether Hofer was aware of it or not, it is not without significance that ‘*nostos*’ – and indeed the pain of deferred homecoming – were established literary tropes with a pedigree dating back (at

⁸⁸ Linda M Austin’s work on the Brontës and nostalgia suggests the extent to which the sisters were aware of its more serious implications. See: Austin, *Nostalgia in Transition* and ‘Emily Brontë’s Homesickness’, *Victorian Studies*, 44, (2002), pp. 573-596. See also my discussion of Gaskell’s hints of nostalgia in her *Life of Charlotte Brontë* in chapter 4.

⁸⁹ Starobinski, ‘Rivers, Bells, Nostalgia’, p. 603.

least) to Homer's *Odyssey*. This transformation, then, had already happened in reverse and the 'aestheticisation' of this supposedly straightforwardly medical term evidently needs further unpacking. Most recent studies have been premised on the idea that nostalgia began as a psychosomatic disorder and later, in a diluted and sentimentalised form, found its way into literary discourse. Once this narrative of nostalgia's deterioration into a 'desultory' emotion suitable for literary amalgamation has been dismantled, significant segments of recent discourse on the subject begin to lose their bearings. The relationship was more mutual than this linear narrative implies. Obviously, the process through which nostalgia became an aesthetic, as much as a psychological, category is crucial to this thesis. But rather than insist on one simple transition (as Nicholas Dames does in his reading of Jane Austen or Tamara Wagner in her discussion of eighteenth-century 'novels of sentiment'), or a straightforward movement from one position to the other (as Linda M. Austin does in her *Nostalgia in Transition, 1780-1917*), my argument will suggest a subtle interaction which can almost be said to predate Hofer's work. The early and sustained literary engagement with this 'Swiss disease' suggests that this relationship was always more intricate than has yet been acknowledged. There has been a tendency to trace nostalgia's movement from medicine to psychology to psychiatry and finally depathologization. This retrospectively imposed narrative neglects the complicated relationship between mind and body which is implicit in Hofer's dissertation and had particular resonances in an intellectual climate in which associationism, for instance, was an on-going concern and when a sense of disorientating temporal or geographical rift was increasingly commonplace.

From the beginning, nostalgia nodded to its literary lineage. The eighteenth century, as has been extensively discussed, didn't imagine science and art as irreconcilably at odds as subsequent centuries have done. Nor, as Meegan Kennedy has established, was the dichotomy complete in the nineteenth century, though this is one accepted critical and historical framework.⁹⁰ Nostalgia is a theme likely to fall foul of any such 'two cultures' dichotomy. The intermingling of these supposedly separate spheres informed Hofer's choice of name and the ways in which – as

⁹⁰ See, Meegan Kennedy, *Revising the Clinic: Vision and Representation in Victorian Medical Narrative and the Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010).

Starobinski has convincingly documented – it was swiftly integrated into literary discourse through the cooption of key tropes and motifs, particularly into poetry of the period.⁹¹ Thomas Arnold's entry on nostalgia in his *Observations on the Nature, Kinds, Causes, and Preventions of Insanity, Lunacy or Madness* (1782) demonstrates this interaction by prefacing the discussion of the disorder with an extended extract from Goldsmith's *Traveller*:⁹²

Thus every good his native wilds impart,
Imprints the patriot passion on his heart,
And ev'n those ills, that round his mansion rise,
Enhance the bliss his scanty fund supplies.
Dear is that shed to which his soul conforms,
And dear that hill which lifts him to the storms;
And as a child, when scaring sounds molest,
Clings close and closer to the mother's breast,
So the loud torrent, and the whirlwind's roar,
But bind him to his native mountains more.

This same poem is quoted in Erasmus Darwin's definition of nostalgia in his *Zoonomia*, the particular complications of which are discussed in chapter 2. This wavering between two (apparent) poles of discourse enriched the concept of nostalgia in ways which are, perhaps, difficult to appreciate in a century which views nostalgia as only a woefully superficial outlook on the past. 'Nostalgia', I suggest, takes something from each of these discourses and is the richer for its diverse, though short, history.

Santesso has persuasively argued that eighteenth-century poetry enthusiastically adopted nostalgia as a literary trope which both reflected and induced a feeling of loss and longing in its readers.⁹³ Samuel Rogers's *The Pleasures of Memory* (1792) – which Dickens references in his dedication of *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840) – includes an explicit meditation on nostalgia as the 'Swiss disease':

The intrepid Swiss, who guards a foreign shore,
Condemn'd to climb his mountain-cliffs no more,
If chance he hears the song so sweetly wild
Which on those cliffs his infant hours beguiled,

⁹¹ Jean Starobinski, 'Bells, Rivers, Nostalgia'. This essay not only provides an illuminating analysis of the social and cultural conditions in which nostalgia arose, but also outlines an extensive survey of early literary manifestations. He presents us with an essay organised as an anthology.

⁹² Thomas Arnold, *Observations on the Nature, Kinds, Causes, and Preventions of Insanity, Lunacy or Madness*, (London, 1782) pp. 267-268.

⁹³ Santesso, *A Careful Longing*, pp. 11-12.

Melts at the long-lost scenes that round him rise,
 And falls a martyr to repentant sighs. [...]
 When the blithe son of Savoy, journeying round
 With humble wares and pipe of merry sound,
 From his green vale and sheltered cabin hies,
 And scales the Alps to visit foreign skies;
 Though far below the forked lightnings play,
 And at his feet the thunder dies away,
 Oft, in a saddle rudely rocked to sleep,
 While his mule browses on the dizzy steep,
 With memory's aid, he sits at home, and sees
 His children sport beneath their native trees,
 And bends to hear their cherub-voices call,
 O'er the loud fury of the torrent's fall.⁹⁴

This poem is interesting because it describes nostalgia in its original context as a life-threatening illness but frames it to emphasise the ‘pleasure’ of memory. It hints at the idealization we would associate with nostalgia today while retaining its older implications. The list of other authors who adopted these tropes is long and international. Starobinski notes allusions to pathological homesickness in authors including Jacques Delille whose *L’Imagination* (1794) describes a homesick and pining ‘dweller of Helvetic crags’. Antoine de Bertin and Jean-Antoine Roucher each develop nostalgic tropes of auditory triggers to memory, particularly, as Starobinski’s title suggests, the relationship of rivers and bells to nostalgia.⁹⁵ Thackeray’s unpublished and undated poem in this vein – ‘To Strasburg [and] To Switzerland’ – also features a soldier pining for home while meditating on a river, as I discuss towards the end of my first chapter (see fig. 3).⁹⁶ Starobinski also points to William Cowper’s *The Task* (1795) as an example of nostalgia triggered by music or musical sounds:

How soft the music of those village bells,
 Falling at intervals upon the ear
 In cadence sweet, now dying all away,
 Now pealing loud again, and louder still,
 Clear and sonorous, as the gale comes on!
 With easy force it opens all the cells
 Where Memory slept. Wherever I have heard

⁹⁴ Samuel Rogers, *The Pleasures of Memory and Other Poems* (1792) (New York: R. & W. A. Bartow, 1820), p. 30.

⁹⁵ Starobinski, ‘Rivers, Bells, Nostalgia’.

⁹⁶ Thackeray, ‘To Strasburg [and] To Switzerland’, 1p. MS. Holograph. Unsigned and undated. Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, New York Public Library. For facsimile see fig. 3 in appendix 1.

A kindred melody, the scene recurs,
And with it all its pleasures and its pains.⁹⁷

Starobinski's examples, then, shade from the integration of unmistakable images culled from the *Heimwebliteratur* to more watered-down or adapted versions of these tropes of longing memory. Nostalgic literary tropes, as we see with Rogers's poem, were flexible enough to do both things at once.



The idea that sounds could act as 'memorative signs' – exploited by Starobinski in 'Rivers, Bells, Nostalgia' – was influentially proposed by Jean Jacques Rousseau in his *Dictionary of Music*. The sheet music for the Ranz des Vaches was also included in a 1710 reprint of Hofer's dissertation (fig. 1).⁹⁸ Rousseau glosses the piece with the following commentary:

The above celebrated Air, called Ranz des Vaches, was so generally beloved among the Swiss, that it was forbidden to be play'd in their troops under pain of death, because it made them burst into tears, desert, or die, whoever heard it; so great a desire did it excite in them of returning to their country. We shall seek in vain to find in the air any energetic [sic] accents capable of producing such astonishing effects. These effects, which are void in regard to strangers, come alone from customs, reflections, and a thousand circumstances, which, retrac'd by those who hear them, and recalling the idea of their country, their former pleasures, their youth, and all their joys of life, excite in them a bitter sorrow for the loss of them. *The music does not in this case act precisely as music, but as a memorative sign.* This air, tho' it continues the same, does not produce, at present, the same effects which it produc'd before amongst the Swiss; because, having lost the taste for their ancient simplicity, they no longer regret it, but when reminded.⁹⁹ [my emphasis]

The end of this lengthy passage, which laments that nostalgia has died out with the 'ancient simplicity' that created it, hints at a nesting of this specific nostalgia within a broader sense of loss or deterioration. The disease becomes a sign of cultural decline, in part, because Rousseau regrets the passing of a time when it was still possible to die of homesickness. Roth has commented on

⁹⁷ William Cowper, 'The Task' (1785), *The Poetical Works of William Cowper*, ed. by H. W. Cary (London: William Smith, 1839), p. 87.

⁹⁸ For a comprehensive account of this tune, see: Helmut Illbruck, 'Chapter 4: The Ranz-des-Vaches' in *Nostalgia: Origins and Ends of an Unenlightened Disease* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2012), pp. 79-100.

⁹⁹ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *A Complete Dictionary Of Music. Consisting Of A Copious Explanation Of All Words Necessary To A True Knowledge And Understanding Of Music* (London, 1779), pp. 266-67.

this correlation between social change and personal attachment to home in the diagnosis and treatment of nostalgia, suggesting that:

Many of the medical writings consider the links between nostalgia and progress. In his article on music in the *Encyclopédie*, Rousseau had already noted that primitive people are more vulnerable to the disease than civilised people. There was a strong consensus that as a country became more civilized, and as people became more cosmopolitan, the incidence of nostalgia diminished.¹⁰⁰

By the nineteenth century then, the idea that this disease properly belonged to a simpler time was well established. After Rousseau, nostalgia became something to be nostalgic for; it was not only a psychological affliction but a social and historical phenomenon.

The connection between nostalgia and technological development was also a subject of discussion among doctors who treated the condition. For instance, in his 1846 medical dissertation, Louis-Alexandre-Hippolyte Leroy-Dupré argued that ‘Cerebral nostalgia becomes more rare each day thanks to rapid communications which modern industry is beginning to establish among peoples who will soon be nothing more than one big family’.¹⁰¹ As Roth notes, a less positive interpretation of this decline in the phenomenon can be found in Delmais-Eugène Pilet’s account:

One has to say it, nostalgia is a disease that is tending to disappear and that is observed less frequently each day: the establishment of rapid communications, the inundation of a ceaselessly invasive civilization, erases one by one the moral colors that so often created the disease in other times. General cosmopolitanism results in one becoming attached to anything [...] everywhere materialist egoism is substituted for the noble instincts of the heart, everywhere the positive kills the imagination and its divine creations [...] the further we move away from a state of simplicity, the less we cling to the tombs of our ancestors and to the soil on which we were born.¹⁰²

Nostalgia is premised on a recognition of difference; the uniformity brought by certain later, globalising innovations, Roth argues, destroyed the variety of cultural experience and sanctity of ‘home’ on which nostalgia was premised. Rousseau incorporates this idea of belatedness in his engagement with nostalgia. They might not agree on what the connection is, or on the direction of

¹⁰⁰ Michael S. Roth, ‘Dying of the Past: Medical Studies of Nostalgia in Nineteenth-Century France’, *History and Memory*, 3, (1991) 5-29, (p. 15).

¹⁰¹ Louis-Alexandre-Hippolyte Leroy-Dupré, ‘De la nostalgie,’ (Thèse de médecine, parisi, 1848), 28n. Quoted in (and translated by) Roth, ‘Dying of the Past’, p. 15.

¹⁰² Delmais-Eugène Pilet, ‘De la nostalgie: considérée chez l’homme de guerre’, (Thèse de médecine, Paris, 1844) p. 19. Quoted in (and translated by) Roth, ‘Dying of the Past’, p. 16.

the correlation, but each of these commentators see nostalgia as intricately bound up with modernisation.

An instinctual sense of attachment to a place of origin is a prerequisite for a feeling of nostalgic dislocation. There develops a degree of nostalgia for a time when community and place were so fundamental to psychological well-being that nostalgia could still be fatal. The type of nostalgia that could be caused by geographical movement, then, belonged to a particular moment, between a time when the idea of mobility was new and a time when it was so common that return was as easy as displacement. Following this transformation, as we have seen, there grew up a new discourse which used nostalgia as a touchstone in a wider discussion of cultural transition. This was a temporal model with a collective as well as a personal range. For this reason, nostalgia was able to become an aesthetic with historical and psychological dimensions.

Friedrich von Schiller is – as Linda M. Austin has noted – an important figure in the history of nostalgia because he treated the disorder as a doctor and later integrated it within his literary work.¹⁰³ Austin, as I have said, points to Schiller as a writer who completes the transition from pathology to sentimental trope but it seems more accurate to say that he was well placed to combine the two cultures. The Ranz des Vaches feature prominently in *Wilhelm Tell* (1804), a play which concerns Swiss nationalism and resistance against Habsburg control. Rossini's overture to *Guillaume Tell* (1829), therefore, also incorporates this melody. This music is intricately connected to a close identification with home and homeland through the recollection of personal pasts:¹⁰⁴

Deluded boy, seduced by empty show!
Despise the land that gave thee birth! Ashamed
Of the good ancient customs of thy sires!
The day will come, when thou, with burning tears,
Wilt long for home, and for thy native hills,
And that dear melody of tuneful herds,
Which now, in proud disgust, thou dost despise!
A day when thou wilt drink its tones in sadness,
Hearing their music in a foreign land.

¹⁰³ Schiller's considerable significance in nineteenth-century literary culture in England is laid out in Frederic Ewen, *The Prestige of Schiller in England, 1788-1859* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932).

¹⁰⁴ Linda M. Austin has explored Friedrich von Schiller's connection to *das Heimweh* in her introduction to *Nostalgia in Transition*.

Oh! potent is the spell that binds to home!
No, no, the cold, false world is not for thee.
At the proud court, with thy true heart thou wilt
Forever feel a stranger among strangers.¹⁰⁵

Schiller's nod to nostalgia in his 'Essay on the Connection between the Animal and the Spiritual Nature of Man', where he discusses the cure brought about by taking 'someone back to his homeland who has been reduced to a skeleton by the most frightful nostalgia', suggests that his use of this tune in his subsequent play was carefully considered and well informed.¹⁰⁶ Dewhurst and Reeves note that Schiller was assigned the care of Grammont, a homesick young man at the Academy where Schiller was also based.¹⁰⁷ Helmut Illbruck does not seem to realise the extent of Schiller's knowledge of the subject when he suggests that he coalesced to Goethe's opinion about the influence of the Ranz des Vaches in correspondence about *Wilhelm Tell*.¹⁰⁸



Rousseau's account, with its interest in how and to whom these ideas are accessible, bears a striking resemblance to Wordsworth's poem in *Memorials of a Tour on the Continent* (1820) titled 'On Hearing the "Ranz des Vaches" on the Top of the Pass of St Gothard'. This poem, like Rousseau's prose account, begins with a sense of belatedness and incomprehensibility. He writes:

I listen – but no faculty of mine
Avails those modulations to detect,
Which, heard in foreign lands, the Swiss affect.

But proceeds to insist, 'Yet may we not reject/ The tale as fabulous' and describes how:

Mindful how others by this simple Strain
Are moved, for me – upon this Mountain named
Of God himself from dread pre-eminence –
Aspiring thoughts, by memory reclaimed,
Yield to the Music's touching influence;
And joys of distant home my heart enchain.

¹⁰⁵ Friedrich von Schiller, *Wilhelm Tell*, (Act II, Scene I), *Schiller's Complete Works*, trans. by Charles J. Hempel (Philadelphia: I. Kohler, 1861), p. 608.

¹⁰⁶ Friedrich von Schiller, 'Essay on the Connection between the Animal and the Spiritual Nature of Man' in Kenneth Dewhurst and Nigel Reeves, *Friedrich Schiller: Medicine, Psychology and Literature* (Oxford: Sandford Publications, 1978), pp. 253-287, (p. 271).

¹⁰⁷ Dewhurst and Reeves, *Friedrich Schiller*, p. 135.

¹⁰⁸ Illbruck, *Nostalgia*, p. 81.

Wordsworth empathetically appropriates Rousseau's inaccessible 'memorative signs' as a trigger for his own memories.

In Wordsworth's poem, nostalgia remains distinct and recognisable as a serious affliction. It might blend with a softer-focussed version of nostalgic recollection but it retains its own discernible differences as a disease which, as Rousseau notes, early on acquired a reputation as the response of 'ancient simplicity' to the prospect of change. Having noted another specific reference to pathological nostalgia in Wordsworth's poetry, this time in his *Descriptive Sketches* (written 1791-2, published 1798) in which 'Alpine measures swell' and turns 'past pleasures into mortal pains'.

Starobinski remarks:

And it must be added that nostalgic pining away is only a passing figure in Wordsworth's repertory of images. Even when he turns towards his own past, Wordsworth, in his poetry, is a man in motion, before whom the depth of the world reveals itself. He is too eager, too impatient to be stopped by separation.¹⁰⁹

It is, I think, important to establish the role Wordsworth will play in this thesis, not least because so much work has been done on the poet's relationship to many themes closely related to the ideas and tropes I unfold over the following chapters.¹¹⁰ As I hope the above summary hints, and to borrow Starobinski's phrase concerning Samuel Rogers, Wordsworth is 'one witness among many others' and, while I don't deny his importance to the mid-Victorian novelists I discuss (perhaps George Eliot especially), I don't think it would be productive or accurate to suggest that he was the sole, or even the most important, source of these themes or the tropes with which they were expressed.¹¹¹ As Laurence Goldstein has put it '[t]he expression of such sentiment is an eighteenth-century commonplace, an almost reflexive nostalgia shared by the poets Wordsworth admired'.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Jean Starobinski, 'Rivers, Bells, Nostalgia', p. 610.

¹¹⁰ Christopher Salvesen, *The Landscape of Memory: A Study of Wordsworth's Poetry* (Edward Arnold: London, 1965). Philip Davis, *Memory and Writing: from Wordsworth to Lawrence* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1983).

¹¹¹ The influence of Wordsworth on the mid-Victorian generation of writers has been extensively and perceptively documented in Stephen Gill's *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹¹² Laurence Goldstein, 'The Auburn Syndrome: Change and Loss in "The Deserted Village" and Wordsworth's Grasmere', *ELH*, 40, (1973), 352-371, (p. 354).

As my thesis is about historical fiction, the Romantic antecedent I prioritise is (if anyone) Walter Scott. Scott's influence has been less carefully traced but was, I think, just as important a forebear for novelists later in the century as Wordsworth. The discrepancy in the recent literary reputation and consequent discussions of influence between these two writers has been enormous.¹¹³ Because of his subsequent importance in British literary history it is easy to point to Wordsworth as the originator of these ideas and techniques. An accurate disentanglement of the routes this system of tropes took into nineteenth-century literature is too lengthy and complex to tackle within the scope of this thesis. I try instead to emphasise the nuance created by a diversity of influences, accumulated over an extended period of time, as such Wordsworth's 'influence' is not discussed in much detail or given the prominence it has had in previous studies.¹¹⁴ As Kevis Goodman has put it, 'for better or worse, Romanticism and nostalgia are so frequently associated as to be nearly synonymous' but this is usually 'the nostalgia familiar in common parlance today' rather than the older illness which responded to 'the growing pains of historical existence'.¹¹⁵



The literary associations of nostalgia are many and varied. As L. A. Bisson has suggested, these mid-Victorian novels also contain a foretaste, if not quite a seed, of Proustian memory.¹¹⁶ He points to *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) as one of Proust's favourite novels and suggests that Eliot's book contains passages which resonate with *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-27). These, he suggests, simultaneously mimic and describe affective memory.¹¹⁷ Bisson suggests Eliot as a more

¹¹³ Murray Pittock ed., *The Reception of Sir Walter Scott in Europe* (London: Continuum, 2006). Julian Wolfrey's is unusual in acknowledging Scott's enduring importance by beginning his study on later nineteenth-century novelistic historicity with the suggestive line 'Walter Scott was dead to begin with', *Dickens to Hardy, 1837-1884: The Novel, the Past and Cultural Memory in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

¹¹⁴ For a detailed discussion of Wordsworth and pathological nostalgia – especially in *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), see: Goodman, 'Romantic Poetry and the Science of Nostalgia'. There are many studies which discuss a more modern strain of nostalgia in Wordsworth's poetry. Because of this skew, where I do allude to Romantic poets, it is to their specific use of, or reference to, the older form of nostalgic memory.

¹¹⁵ Goodman, 'Romantic Poetry and the Science of Nostalgia', p. 195.

¹¹⁶ This is a connection which Sally Shuttleworth also takes up in *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science: The Make-Believe of a Beginning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 51-2.

¹¹⁷ L. A. Bisson, 'Proust, Bergson, and George Eliot', *Modern Language Review*, 40, (1945), 104-114.

influential source for Proust than Henri Bergson, though the latter is the more frequently invoked parallel. There are, indeed, explicit references to Eliot or her work in the course of *À la recherche du temps perdu*. In *Within a Budding Grove* Andrée spends her ‘happiest hours’ translating ‘one of George Eliot’s novels’ while more general allusions are made in *The Captive* to ‘the limpid state of unreason that precedes these heavy slumbers, if fragments of wisdom float there luminously, if the names of Taine and George Eliot are not unknown, the waking life does still retain the superiority’.¹¹⁸ As Sally Shuttleworth has noted, ‘In both cases, memory gives the *matière première* of the novel and its technique’.¹¹⁹

The themes discussed in this thesis, then, resonate forwards as well as backwards in literary history; they aren’t dead ends or fleeting aberrations. The ways in which these tropes filtered forward create a form of interpretation which selects and develops the points that (one particular) posterity considered salient. If it can be argued, then, that there is a through-line from the mid-Victorian historical novel to Proust, it seems likely that these rudiments of a style are at least worth consideration. Obviously, Proust falls very far outside the remit of this thesis – in period, language, nationality and genre – but, as Franco Moretti has argued, ‘The *future* of a text – the conventions and the world views it will help to form and consolidate – is just as much a part of its history and its contribution to history.’¹²⁰ I only gesture towards the afterlife of the tropes which I will trace in the mid-nineteenth-century historical novel to give a small sense of their place in a much larger picture. Walder has concisely mapped this sweep through the centuries:

Nostalgia was first named in the mid seventeenth century, and first emerged widely during the rise of industrialisation in modern Europe, when the writings of the European Romantics challenged what was happening in the world by exploring – as Rousseau and Goethe and Wordsworth explored – the restorative, nurturing potential of memory for the threatened individual. During the nineteenth century it was of central importance in writers and thinkers as far apart as Dickens and Turgenev or Ruskin and Nietzsche, an importance heightened in the early twentieth century by the works of Bergman, Freud, and Proust. Nearer our own time, the rise in migration and exile accompanying the ends of empire and

¹¹⁸ Marcel Proust, *Within a Budding Grove*, trans. by C. K. Moncrieff (London: Vintage, 2005), p. 605 and *The Captive*, trans. by C. K. Moncrieff and Stephen Hudson (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2006), p. 547.

¹¹⁹ Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science*, p. 51.

¹²⁰ Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders*, p. 7.

the disasters of war explored by writers as varied as Doris Lessing and W.G. Sebald, Chinua Achebe and J.G. Ballard, has led to a representation of the present as a place marked by a trail of survivors searching for their roots, for a home, in the ruins of history.¹²¹

The uses of nostalgic memory in the eighteenth- and twentieth-century literature, then, have been sensitively discussed. The bridging years, however, have been strangely neglected.



In the course of this thesis I will argue that historical fiction takes part in this wider tendency to reflect on the present in relation to the past and that nostalgia is the means by which this was attempted and frequently achieved. As Susan Stewart has argued, because nostalgia ‘is enamored [sic] of distance, not the referent itself’ it is not necessarily – or even probably – retrogressive. An actual return would ‘cancel out the desire that is nostalgia’s reason for existence’. Nostalgia relies on this ‘gap’ between reality and memory.¹²² It longs for the past but can never go back there. Svetlana Boym’s idea of ‘reflective’ and ‘restorative’ nostalgia has been articulately glossed by Dennis Walder who suggests that¹²³:

Another way of putting this is to say that restorative nostalgia focuses on *nostos*, and tries in spite of history to reconstruct the lost home, or homeland; whereas reflective nostalgia thrives on *algia*, the longing itself.¹²⁴

‘Reflective’ nostalgia is, therefore, able to incorporate apparently opposing ‘points of view’ on the question of epochal change; it dwells on the past but does not expect a return. As Bruno Latour has put it, ‘[t]he modern time of progress and the anti-modern time of ‘tradition’ are twins who failed to recognise one another: The idea of an identical repetition of the past and that of a radical rupture with any past are two symmetrical results of a single conception of time’.¹²⁵ Nostalgic representation, as I will show, is able to contain this dynamic of intertwined opposites. The desire

¹²¹ Walder, *Postcolonial Nostalgias*, pp. 1-2.

¹²² Susan Stewart, *On Longing*, p. 145.

¹²³ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. xviii.

¹²⁴ Walder, *Postcolonial Nostalgias*, p. 11.

¹²⁵ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. by Catherine Porter (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 76.

to disentangle these ideas and establish the Victorian age as either a period of hope and progress or retrospection and decline occludes the complexity of this relationship. As John Stuart Mill observed, it was both at once. Nostalgia can contain these apparent contradictions.

III. The Historical Novel

Two unavoidable figures preside over the study of historical fiction: Walter Scott and Georg Lukács. In this final segment of my introduction, I will briefly explore each of their considerable contributions to the genre or the critical field which has grown up (sparsely) around it and tease out the hints and leads which represent the starting points for my own work. Through this discussion I will begin to outline the interconnection between historiographical narratives of progress and decline, a cultural and literary heritage of nostalgic tropes, and the development of the historical novel through the course of the nineteenth century. As nostalgia is an emotional response to change over time and through geographical space, its peculiar significance to historical fiction is, I think, quite clear. As Franco Moretti has observed, the historical novel was full of borderlines which can be ‘mapped’ on to a ‘topography of progress’ which resonates with Bakhtin’s chronotope.¹²⁶ Because nostalgia is an affective reaction to change over time, its recurrent use in the historical novel during the mid-Victorian period suggests a greater degree of sophistication than critics have, so far, been willing to allow. Throughout the following chapters, I will argue that nostalgia and the historical novel are mutually illuminating subjects, each of which engaged with the disorientation caused by a perception of rapid, dislocating change, the ‘modern feeling’ described by Jameson. One of the tangential questions which this thesis sets out to answer is why the historical novel became such a popular and characteristic genre in mid-Victorian Britain and why the realist novel became defined by a longing backward glance during such a crucial period in its development. I will suggest that the ‘new’ sense of rupture and disconnectedness from the past described by nostalgic tropes could offer at least a partial answer to this question.

¹²⁶ Franco Moretti, *An Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* (London: Verso, 1999).

Critical discussion of the Victorian historical novel has, with a few notable exceptions (Franco Moretti among them), been largely dismissive if not actively scornful or hostile.¹²⁷ Jim Reilly and Nicholas Dames have each summed the genre up with acerbic concision. Dames suggests that it was characterised by ‘waste’, saying: ‘we are largely presented with a spectacle of waste: the waste of pain and effort, of years of research and composition, devoted to now underread texts’¹²⁸. In a more even-handed echo of this position, John Bowen has conceded that ‘much historical fiction of the period can only be judged to fail.’¹²⁹ Reilly suggests that ‘[f]ew would want to contradict the view that these works are variously strained, turgid, slight or overblown and rarely redolent of their authors’ characteristic brilliancies’.¹³⁰ He sees these novels as the progenitors of the historical novel which has, in his view, become the ‘most enfeebled and quietist form’, ‘the costumed sub-genre of romantic light fiction’.¹³¹ This might have been an uncontested view in 1993 but in more recent years the historical novel has again become a byword for seriousness in literary fiction. The genre has seen its stock swell, for instance, by the recent success of Hilary Mantel. Regardless of this slight (and most likely temporary) shift in critical opinion, judging a genre by its weakest examples seems like a misguided approach to literary scholarship; one reason why this thesis sticks broadly to canonical novels is so that my discussion can move beyond basic survey or defensive self-justification. I am selective because many other critics have been broad.¹³² Many nineteenth-century

¹²⁷ Romantic historical fiction, presided over by Scott, is, of course, another matter. Recent studies have included Ian Duncan’s *Scott’s Shadow: the Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), Ann Rigney’s *Imperfect Histories: The Elusive Past and the Legacy of Romantic Historicism* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2001) and *The Afterlives of Walter Scott: Memory on the Move* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹²⁸ Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, p. 207.

¹²⁹ John Bowen, ‘The Historical Novel’, *A Companion to The Victorian Novel*, ed. by Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 318-335.

¹³⁰ Jim Reilly, *Shadowtime: History and Representation in Hardy, Conrad and George Eliot* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 2-3.

¹³¹ Reilly, *Shadowtime*, p. 3.

¹³² Andrew Sanders, *The Victorian Historical Novel, 1840-1880* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1978); Harold Orel, *The Historical Novel from Scott to Sabatini: Changing Attitudes toward a Literary Genre, 1814-1920* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995); Avrom Fleishman, *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971).

historical novels were pretty feeble specimens but it does not necessarily follow that the genre is at fault.

George Eliot's essay 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists' (1856) touches on a particular sub-set of these failed efforts, saying:

perhaps the least readable of silly women's novels are the *modern-antique* species, which unfold to us the domestic life of Jannes and Jambres, the private love affairs of Sennacherib, or the mental struggles and ultimate conversion of Demetrius the silversmith. From most silly novels we can at least extract a laugh; but those of the modern-antique school have a ponderous, a leaden kind of fatuity, under which we groan. What can be more demonstrative of the inability of literary women to measure their own powers than their frequent assumption of a task which can only be justified by the rarest concurrence of acquirement with genius?¹³³

It is because she esteems the historical novel as a genre which requires the 'rarest concurrence of acquirement with genius' from its authors that she find this 'modern-antique' debasement so difficult to stomach. As she says, the 'finest effort to reanimate the past is of course only approximative—is always more or less an infusion of the modern spirit into the ancient form'. Even the designation 'modern-antique' insists that these novels fail because they are not genuinely historical; they are not failed historical novels because they are not really historical novels at all. This differentiation is echoed in Lukács's insistence that Scott was the first historical novelist because no author who preceded him had engaged properly with their theme: '[w]hat is lacking in the so-called historical novel before Sir Walter Scott is precisely the specifically historical, that is, derivation of the individuality of characters from the historical peculiarity of their age.'¹³⁴ Lukács insists that, for a novel to be considered a 'Historical Novel' there must be 'historical truth in the artistic reflection of reality' and that this was an innovation of the early nineteenth century. A novel then, isn't judged historical, by either Eliot or Lukács, purely on the basis of its stated period setting but on the basis of a historical consciousness which is far more difficult to define.

In a period when almost every major novelist attempted at least one historical novel, this is not a genre which should be so blithely dismissed. As Franco Moretti has recently remarked, the

¹³³ George Eliot, 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists' (1856), *Silly Novels by Lady Novelists* (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 28.

¹³⁴ Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. by Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell (London: Merlin Press, 1989), p. 19.

historical novel was ‘the most successful form of the century’ and its ‘key genre’.¹³⁵ That some – or even many – attempts were unsuccessful is obviously no reason to dismiss the genre wholesale. In light of this broadly hostile critical consensus, my principle of selection has privileged quality over quantity. Useful critical surveys of the genre include Andrew Sanders’s *The Victorian Historical Novel*, Harold Orel’s *The Historical Novel from Scott to Sabatini: changing attitudes to a literary genre, 1814-1920*, Harry E. Shaw’s *The Forms of Historical Fiction: Sir Walter Scott and his Successors* and James C. Simmons’s *The Novelist as Historian: Essays on the Victorian Historical Novel*. John Bowen’s essay ‘The Historical Novel’ gives a more concise summary of the genre in the Victorian period¹³⁶ Perhaps the most developed study since Lukács has been Avrom Fleishman’s *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf*, but this too takes a defensive tone and a range so broad that it precludes the development of a detailed thesis beyond a general assertion that the historical novel merits serious study.

Recent studies dealing with historical consciousness, including Reilly’s *Shadowtime* and Jason B. Jones’s *Lost Causes*, make a point of labelling the lack of sophistication evinced by explicitly historical novels. Like Lukács, they imply that, after Scott, the literature which engaged with meaty historical themes took a contemporary setting. The idea that all historical fiction written in the Victorian period was turgid and unreadable is obviously a highly selective and unsustainable position but it has nevertheless become a widely held critical commonplace. After Reilly’s opening section, for example, distancing his study from the historical novel as an ‘enfeebled form’, he immediately invokes Stendhal’s *The Charterhouse of Parma* (1839) as a nineteenth-century novel that maintains a meaningful engagement with ‘history’ in more than just its plot, costume or superficial stage set. This is a disjuncture which Reilly draws attention to only a few pages later, saying: ‘Despite this study’s stated relegation of the genre my starting-point is a historical novel’.¹³⁷ Remarkably on it, however, does not justify or explain the contradiction. This critical U-turn

¹³⁵ Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel*, pp. 33, 38.

¹³⁶ Bowen, ‘The Historical Novel’, pp. 318-335.

¹³⁷ Reilly, *Shadowtime*, p. 6.

exemplifies a tendency to dismiss a generalised version of historical fiction while lauding specific instances. For this reason, I avoid generalisation and foreground a small number of exemplary novels through close reading within the cultural framework already outlined. Reilly's book also includes an extended discussion of *Romola* (in a chapter which has been especially useful to the third chapter of this thesis) despite his earlier assessment that Eliot's book is 'a paradigm of the problematic structuring of the historical literary text in this latter half of the nineteenth century'.¹³⁸

John Maynard's 'Broad Canvas, Narrow Perspective' launches a more prolonged and developed attack, suggesting that the historical novel was 'a popular minor subgenre which quickly degenerated from Scott's romantic realism into mere pot-boiling romance'. Maynard seeks to establish 'the relative weakness of fictional works on the subject of history in an otherwise strong tradition of the novel'. It is an 'escap[ist]' genre which, in its Victorian manifestation 'elaborat[es] Scott's tendency to romance and distance'. Maynard's most fundamental criticism, however, is in 'the relation between individual experience and historical overview'. 'Specifically, he says 'the problem amounts to a tendency to avoid or evade a direct confrontation of the two, a desire to talk about history on the one hand and about the individual on the other without fully realizing the consequence of seeing historical life in a historical perspective'.¹³⁹ This mingling of subjective with objective, fact with fiction, is tackled in relation to Thackeray's merging of historical novel, *Bildungsroman* and memoir in chapter 1. Nostalgia, I suggest, is one way in which this apparent disjuncture can be explained; it was an aesthetic based on an illness with historical and psychological dimensions.

Maynard was not the first to remark on the sometimes problematic, almost oxymoronic, hybridity of the historical novel. In 1846 G.H. Lewes remarked that 'Idleness – a wish to get at knowledge by the royal route; and a pleasant self-sophistication, that reading such novels is not a "waste of time" – these are the great encouragers of historical novels. What is the consequence? The consequence

¹³⁸ Reilly, *Shadowtime*, p. 3.

¹³⁹ John Maynard, 'Broad Canvas, Narrow Perspective', in *The Worlds of Victorian Fiction*, ed. by Jerome H. Buckley, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975) pp. 237-66, (pp. 238, 247, 261).

is that we have false history, and a bad story, palmed upon us for a novel'.¹⁴⁰ Given that Lewes's partner was to write a novel set in Renaissance Italy with his encouragement, this position can probably be taken as rhetorical hyperbole. As Alessandro Manzoni puts it, ventriloquizing an imagined critic of the historical novel, 'Don't you see that joining together bits of copper and bits of tin does not make a bronze statue?'¹⁴¹ He comes to the conclusion that 'it is the historical novel itself that is completely at fault'.¹⁴² Nostalgia in the historical novel, I suggest, is one way in which this integration is at least attempted even if it isn't always fully achieved. It places the affective response of individuals living through personal and historical upheavals at the heart of its thematic and stylistic representation of the historical past and shows how vicissitudes of cultural change were felt as a lived experience. Nostalgia, this thesis will demonstrate, is a psychological reaction to external disruption which can relate individual experience to much broader changes and timescales. It reconciles a 'broad canvas' with a 'narrow perspective'.



Georg Lukács, however, remains the presiding figure in the study of historical fiction. He begins his field-defining study of the historical novel with the observation that '[t]he historical novel arose at the beginning of the nineteenth century at about the time of Napoleon's collapse'.¹⁴³ From the beginning, this genre was – if only for reasons of plot – drawn to moments of particular rift and upheaval. In his 'Introduction' to *The Fortunes of Nigel*, Scott links the idea of geographical borders to the representation of historical transition. He writes:

Lady Mary Wortley Montague has said, with equal truth and taste, that the most romantic region of every country is that where the mountains unite themselves with the plains or lowlands. For similar reasons, it may be in like manner said, that the most picturesque period of history is that when the ancient rough and wild manners of a barbarous age are just becoming innovated upon [...]. The strong contrast produced by the opposition of

¹⁴⁰ G.H. Lewes, 'Historical Romance' *Westminster Review*, XLV (March 1846), 34-55, (p. 35).

¹⁴¹ Alessandro Manzoni, *On the Historical Novel*, trans. by Sandra Bermann (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), pp. 66-67.

¹⁴² Manzoni, *On the Historical Novel*, p. 72.

¹⁴³ Lukács, *Historical Novel*, p. 19.

ancient manners to those which are gradually subduing them, affords the light and shadows necessary to give life to a fictitious romance¹⁴⁴

This is a touchstone quotation which I will return to again in the course of this thesis for, among other things, the light it sheds on the relationship between topography and temporality (chapter 2). Here though, it establishes the extent to which Scott, the originator of historical fiction in what Lukács refers to as its ‘classical form’, saw historical uprooting and transition as the ideal subject for this new (or arguably new) form. This does not indicate a particular set of changes however – and Scott’s work described various periods of various national histories – but points to a general principle of historical consciousness in the recognition of difference and rift. Importantly, Scott attributes an aesthetic as well as a thematic importance to transition. In Scott’s own account, the historical novel was a genre which could aptly depict the processes and experiences of transition. The Whig emphasis on ‘reason’ versus ‘barbarism’ seems a disingenuous add-on rather than a necessary corollary. This is only the position he states, and not, I argue, the one his novels enact.

It is, indeed, commonplace to consider Scott’s treatment of history a trite simplification. Mark Twain – perhaps the most extreme of Scott’s many critics, though the competition is fierce – argued that the elder novelist was responsible for propagating the attitudes that caused the American Civil War.¹⁴⁵ It is argued that, having given these ‘barbarous’ and troublesomely abortive histories a hearing, Scott packages them up and aestheticizes them in such a way that they are essentially neutralised. The struggles of the Highlanders might be the subject of *Waverley*’s plot but, at its close, Fergus Mac-Ivor is neatly framed in a portrait which shows him in ‘traditional’ dress and in a mode which already feels almost twee. It is an image for a chocolate box – or a shortbread tin. The process of this portrait’s production is, furthermore, steadily distanced from the Highland life it depicts; it was painted in London, we are told, from a ‘spirited sketch’ drawn in Edinburgh rather than in situ:

¹⁴⁴ Walter Scott, ‘Introduction’ (1831), *The Fortunes of Nigel* (New York: D Appleton & Co., 1851), p. 6. Not included in the Edinburgh University Press edition used elsewhere in this thesis.

¹⁴⁵ Mark Twain, from chapter 46 of *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), reproduced in *Walter Scott: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by John O. Hayden (London: Routledge, 1970), pp. 537-9, (p. 537).

It was a large and spirited painting, representing Fergus Mac-Ivor and Waverley in their Highland dress, the scene a wild, rocky, and mountainous pass, down which the clan were descending in the background. It was taken from a spirited sketch, drawn while they were in Edinburgh by a young man of high genius, and had been painted on a full-length scale by an eminent London artist. Raeburn himself (whose 'Highland Chiefs' do all but walk out of the canvas) could not have done more justice to the subject; and the ardent, fiery, and impetuous character of the unfortunate Chief of Glennaquoich was finely contrasted with the contemplative, fanciful, and enthusiastic expression of his happier friend. Beside this painting hung the arms which Waverley had borne in the unfortunate civil war. The whole piece was beheld with admiration and deeper feelings.¹⁴⁶

Only the most cursory and superficial reading, however, could interpret this as a position which Scott unambiguously endorses. This paragraph points to the unreflective aestheticisation of history – which Scott himself has been regularly accused of – as a deeply problematic phenomenon. The passage is left ambiguously hanging on the suggestion of unnamed ‘deeper feelings’ just as the novel as a whole is closed with a toast in which an unexplained ‘tear mingled with the wine which the Baron filled’.¹⁴⁷ Nor is this sense of competing narratives isolated to this emblematic scene. Likewise, returning to a landscape which, earlier in the novel, had been ‘destroyed and split up’, ‘broken and thrown down’, and ‘cruelly wasted’, the narrator notes that:

In truth, not only had the felled trees been removed, but, their stumps being grubbed up and the earth round them levelled and sown with grass, every mark of devastation, unless to an eye intimately acquainted with the spot, were already totally obliterated.¹⁴⁸

‘Unless’ you know the place and its history, we are told, the damage seems to have been ‘obliterated’. The reader is, by this time, among the initiated and has been taught to interpret concealed histories. Nostalgia fits into this equation as an affective response to change which held a retrospective point of view in tension with an awareness of inevitable progress.



It is not, perhaps, all that surprising that a Marxist critic like Lukács would identify a strain of progressive development as the driving principle behind historical fiction. Lukács summarises Hegel’s perspective on history (one which he evidently integrates into his discussion of the

¹⁴⁶ Walter Scott, *Waverley; or, Tis Sixty Years Since*, ed. by Peter Garside (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 361.

¹⁴⁷ Scott, *Waverley*, p. 362.

¹⁴⁸ Scott, *Waverley*, p. 356.

historical novel), saying: ‘He sees the total life of humanity as a great historical process’. He continues:

Thus there arose, in both a concrete historical as well as philosophic manner, a new humanism, a new concept of progress. A humanism which wished to preserve the achievements of the French Revolution as the imperishable basis of future human development, which regarded the French Revolution (and revolutions in history altogether) as an indispensable component of human progress.¹⁴⁹

This argument goes on, however, to hint at the counter-reaction to this narrative:

This conception of the last great intellectual and artistic period of bourgeois humanism has nothing to do with the barren and shallow apologia of capitalism which sets in later (and to some extent simultaneously). It is founded upon a ruthlessly truthful investigation and disclosure of all the contradictions of progress. There is no criticism of the present from which it will shrink. And even if it cannot consciously transcend the spiritual horizon of its time, yet the constantly oppressive sense of the contradictions of its own historical situation casts a profound shadow over the whole historical conception. This feeling that – contrary to the consciously philosophic and historical conception which proclaims unceasing and peaceful progress – one is experiencing a last brief, irretrievable intellectual prime of humanity manifests itself in the greatest representatives of this period in very different ways, in keeping with the unconscious character of this feeling.¹⁵⁰

Lukács proceeds to describe the ways in which this sadness manifested itself in the work of selected authors. ‘Think of the old Goethe’s theory of “abnegation”’ he says, or ‘of Hegel’s “Owl of Minerva” which takes flight only at dusk, of Balzac’s sense of universal doom, etc.’ The most evocative description is reserved for Heine who, Lukács believes, experienced ‘a tragic cleavage of spirit’ at the 1848 Revolution.¹⁵¹ As Lukács puts it, whatever the particular mode of expression, ‘the emotional accent is very similar’.¹⁵²

As Lukács argues, ‘Such was the historical basis upon which Sir Walter Scott’s historical novel arose’. The historical novel as we know it, then, had its origin in a nineteenth-century tug-of-war between a narrative of on-going, beneficial progress, and a reluctance which manifested itself as either pessimism or regret. The nostalgic tropes which this thesis will discuss, are, I argue, one mid-

¹⁴⁹ Lukács, *Historical Novel*, p. 29.

¹⁵⁰ Lukács, *Historical Novel*, pp. 29-30.

¹⁵¹ Lukács, *Historical Novel*, p. 30.

¹⁵² Lukács, *Historical Novel*, p. 30.

century English manifestation of these broader historical pressures. Lukács considers the historical novel to be a flowering of a ‘post-revolutionary ideology’ and, I argue, nostalgia – as an illness and as an aesthetic – is part of this intellectual atmosphere. In the work of the authors I consider, this mournful counterbalancing is achieved, or at least communicated, through the literary use of nostalgic memory. As the above extended quotations show, this idea is implicit in Lukács’s classic study of the historical novel.

Classifying the Historical Novel

One problem with studying the nineteenth-century historical novel is that there is little consensus on the boundaries of the genre. There is a large degree of flexibility in Scott’s theory and practice of historical fiction, which seems to advise against too narrow or prescriptive critical categorisation. Scott set his fiction in various periods and places and (sometimes) involved ‘real’ historical characters in marginal and major roles. The desire to generalise and rigidly classify novels as either historical or not historical has produced some strange results. Some critics insist on particular timeframes, which very frequently exclude *Waverley*, the supposed ‘first’ historical novel, others want real historical figures but are unclear or inconsistent about the extent to which they should feature.¹⁵³ The creation of a ‘real’ sense of historical milieu and the visible edges of ‘real’ history are widespread in novels in this period whether they have been classified as ‘historical’ or not. This thesis selects novels as historical on the basis that – for one reason or another and manifested in a variety of ways – they are set in the past and take a developed sense of historical-consciousness as a central theme or aesthetic approach.

Many of these critical debates revolve around the integration of fictional and factual history in these novels, an inevitable problem in the almost oxymoronic genre of the historical novel. Even Manzoni, author of *The Betrothed* (1825), struggled with this problem until he eventually announced it insoluble and historical fiction fatally flawed.¹⁵⁴ The attempt to discover an optimum ratio of fact

¹⁵³ Avrom Fleishman (*The English Historical Novel*) and Harry E. Shaw (*The Forms of Historical Fiction*) both begin with descriptions of the historical novel in terms of the number of years that needs to have elapsed, neither of which is very successful or compelling.

¹⁵⁴ Manzoni, *On the Historical Novel*.

to fiction, however, seems pointlessly pedantic. The approach taken in this thesis is to consider each novel on its own terms. I argue that each 'historical novel' might deserve the designation for a different reason or different combination of reasons in different proportions or degrees of prominence.

These discussions, then, are as old as the genre and are unlikely to be resolved in any single critical intervention. As Anne Green has put it in her critical rehabilitation of Flaubert's *Salammô* 'there was considerable disagreement as to how these historically important passions should be treated: to what extent should they be portrayed through real, historical characters?'¹⁵⁵ Even Scott was perplexed by this problem. He wrote in his journal that it was a problem he had considered at length and was still not entirely satisfied with his solution: 'in my better efforts, while I conducted my story through the agency of historical personages and by connecting it with historical incidents, I have endeavoured to weave them pretty closely together, and in future I will study this more. Must not let the background eclipse the principal figures – the frame overpower the picture.'¹⁵⁶ As Green notes, however, Scott never does allow a real historical figure to dominate his narrative and the middling, wavering 'Waverley' character became the most characteristic of his historical novels.¹⁵⁷ Other nineteenth-century novelists grappling with the same problems came to different conclusions in different circumstances. 'Balzac was hesitant about the place of the historical figure' Green tells us: in '*Sur Catherine de Médicis* they abound; in *Les Chouans* he eliminates them entirely; and in *Une Ténébreuse Affaire* there is one brief appearance of a historical figure'.¹⁵⁸ A similar range of solutions to this problem are found in English historical fiction in the mid-nineteenth century. In *Romola* there are many such figures, including Savonarola and Machiavelli, while in other novels they only merit a significant mention, as with Nelson in *Adam Bede* or a walk-on part like Napoleon

¹⁵⁵ Anne Green, *Flaubert and the Historical Novel: Salammô Reassessed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) p. 9.

¹⁵⁶ Walter Scott, *Journal, 1825-32: From the Original Manuscript at Abbotsford* (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1891), p. 275.

¹⁵⁷ Alexander Welsh, *The Hero of the Waverley Novels* (New York: Atheneum, 1968).

¹⁵⁸ Green, *Flaubert and the Historical Novel*, p. 9.

in *Sylvia's Lovers* who is glimpsed in the background at the Siege of Acre (1799). This dynamic is discussed in relation to auto/biographical timescales and 'heroic' historical figures in chapter 1.

For the purposes of this study, perhaps the most challenging problem in classifying the historical novel in the mid-Victorian period is the issue of timescale posed by the numerous novels set, as Kathleen Tillotson observed, in the recent rather than the historical past. Tillotson suggests that these novels are 'neither historical nor contemporary' and argues that the 'story of the rise and popularity of this kind of setting is a long one. A complete survey would need to start at least with *Waverley* (or, *'Tis Sixty Years Since*'); bafflingly, she acknowledges no conflict in designating Scott's novel a 'novel of the recent past' and emphatically not historical. As her argument progresses, Tillotson also insists that both *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, though they 'encroach' on the category of historical fiction, are more properly members of her sub-category.¹⁵⁹ As John Bowen has put it 'These works, set a generation or so earlier than the time of their writing, are not usually treated as historical novels, even though they are saturated in historical understanding and sense of period. It may be that the barrier between them and historical fiction "proper" is an unnecessarily restricting one'.¹⁶⁰ This suggestion seems more sensible than a proliferation of opposing entomologies. Thackeray's 'De Juventute' and Eliot's *Theophrastus Such* both suggest that the idea of 'historical' subject matter altered with the notion of accelerated 'progress'. As Thackeray puts it 'it was only yesterday, but what a gulf between now and then' ('De Juventute') while *Theophrastus Such* ruminates on the importance of 'paternal time'.¹⁶¹ As Scott puts it in *The Heart of Midlothian* 'we are apt to take an interest, warm, yea partial, in the deeds and sentiments of our forefathers'; this is especially the case where these familiar – familial – subjects have become uncannily remote.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Kathleen Tillotson, *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 92, 93.

¹⁶⁰ Bowen, 'The Historical Novel', p. 247.

¹⁶¹ George Eliot, 'Looking Backward', *Theophrastus Such* (1879) (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1879).

¹⁶² Walter Scott, *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), ed. by Clare Lamont (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 10.

The Antiquary (1816) which Scott imagined as the closing section of a loose trilogy of novels (with *Waverley* (1814) and *Guy Mannering* (1815)) would surely qualify – in Tillotson’s terms – as a ‘novel of the recent past’ because it is set in July and August 1794, only twenty-two years before the book was published. In his ‘Advertisement’ to *The Antiquary*, Scott describes his broader plan for these three novels as: ‘a series of fictitious narratives, intended to illustrate the manners of Scotland at three different periods. WAVERLEY embraced the age of our fathers, GUY MANNERING that of our own youth, and the ANTIQUARY refers to the last ten years of the eighteenth century’.¹⁶³ However, in its connection with the rest of Scott’s oeuvre (and not least as a part of this ‘trilogy’), and on its own terms, *The Antiquary* is also a historical novel. The antiquarian themes of this novel are, indeed, interestingly offset within its shorter retrospect. Scott’s historical fiction played on the slippage between unambiguously historical timescales and periods accessible through personal recollection. Critics who insist on stable definitions miss the nuance implied by this messy blurring of categories. Most of all, for my purposes at least, this smudging suggests one reason why nostalgic memory became such an apt trope for the merging of timescales as this ‘new’ genre developed over the course of the nineteenth century. The novelists I consider in this thesis – Dickens, Eliot, Thackeray, Gaskell – all follow Scott’s lead in switching and blurring between novels which look to the distant past and those which refer to a period contained within or only shortly preceding their own lifetimes. Taking Scott as a model – rather than the imitators who caricatured and concretized his style – the historical novel becomes a far more fluid genre which is distorted by too rigid a definition. The historical novel is more a continuum than a straightforward category. This slippage, I will suggest, is an opportunity rather than a problem.

Eric Hobsbawm argues that there is a ‘twilight zone’ of time where memory and history mingle:

For all of us there is a twilight zone between history and memory; between the past and a generalized record which is open to relatively dispassionate inspection and the past as a remembered part of, or background to, one’s own life. For individual human beings this zone stretches from the point where living family traditions and memories begin – say, from the earliest family photo which the oldest living family member can identify or explicate – to the end of infancy, when public and private destinies are recognized as

¹⁶³ Walter Scott, ‘Advertisement’, *The Antiquary* (1816), ed. by David Hewitt (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p. 4.

inseparable and as mutually defining one another ('I met him shortly before the end of the war'; 'Kennedy must have died in 1963, because it was when I was still in Boston') The length of this zone may vary, and so will the obscurity and fuzziness that characterizes it. But there is always such a no-man's land of time. It is by far the hardest part of history for historians, or for anyone else, to grasp.¹⁶⁴

As Hobsbawm puts it, 'this is true not only of individuals, but of societies'.¹⁶⁵ This 'no man's land of time' was put to particularly interesting use in the Victorian historical novel and, though this thesis isn't limited to texts which inhabit this 'zone', it is an interesting innovation which, I suggest, colours the whole genre and helps to account for the striking predominance of memorative tropes with which variously distant historical periods were represented.

As such, I have selected historical novels or historical novelists who straddle a line between straightforward history writing and the sort of (auto)biographically inflected approach that productively merges personal and historical time-scales. Though only peripherally discussed, it is an interesting and informing background fact that, alongside *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens also wrote novels with a shorter, more personal retrospect like *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations* and (most significantly, perhaps, given its publication alongside *Barnaby Rudge* in *Master Humphrey's Clock*), *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Both Gaskell (*Cranford*) and Thackeray (*Vanity Fair*, *The History of Pendennis*) wrote novels on either side of the apparent divide between novels of the recent past and historical fiction. George Eliot's entire oeuvre (with the exception of *Daniel Deronda*) shades towards historical fiction but her novels are usually treated – if the retrospect is observed at all – as 'novels of the recent past'. This is even true, I argue in the second chapter of this thesis, of the quite explicitly autobiographical *The Mill on the Floss*, which takes a self-consciously historicising approach to the representation of a group of people who, as she remarks in 'The Natural History of German Life', had already vanished by the time she came to write her commemorating novel. These are novels which invite an interplay between public and private histories. While I have not limited myself to these 'novels of the recent past'/historical novel hybrids, I have selected authors who made a career out of treading this dividing line or, arguably, in disregarding it altogether. Just

¹⁶⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987) p. 3.

¹⁶⁵ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire*, p. 3.

as this thesis does not focus on the object of the memory so much as on the motivations and attitudes of the rememberer, it is also flexible as to the period 'remembered' in each historical novel. While the time which is dwelt upon is, in many cases, important and telling, it is not the primary focus of this study. As Fred Davis has put it 'What is important for us [...], is an understanding of the *general* conditions and circumstances that evoke nostalgic feeling, not the largely adventitious occurrences associated with the success of one or another specific nostalgic manifestation'.¹⁶⁶ This study is more concerned with why and how these writers looked back than with what exactly they looked back to.

Overview of chapters

This thesis argues that nostalgia creates an intersection between memory, history and fictional recuperation in the nineteenth-century novel. It suggests that nostalgia was of central importance as a novelistic trope during the nineteenth century and argues that it quickly became enmeshed with the historical novel in a way that has seldom been acknowledged. Because of its medical origins, as well as its continued development as a poetic trope, nostalgia provided an ideal literary language with which to intertwine psychological and emotional reactions to change with a fictional representation of historical events. It blends memory and fiction to create a perspective on history which is both personal and public. While this thesis does have broader resonances, both within the mid-Victorian period and beyond, my interest is with nostalgia as a literary trope which responded to particular social and cultural conditions specific to the nineteenth century as they were manifested in the historical novel. In order to explore this idea, I undertake a series of thematic discussions, each of which hinges on a reading of one or two historical novels, selected in each case for the particular light they shed on the point at issue. These examples are not intended to be exhaustive but to be representative; they are selected as illuminating examples which speak to wider themes.

The first chapter explores the interlacing of personal and historical subject matter in Thackeray's historical fiction. It focuses on *Henry Esmond* and *Barry Lyndon*. As John D. Rosenberg has put it,

¹⁶⁶ Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, p. ix.

‘History, the study of public time, found its complement in the flourishing of autobiography, the research into the origins of the self in private time’: Thackeray took this closeness to its logical extreme and wrote two historical novels in an autobiographical mode.¹⁶⁷ This chapter suggests that these interactions took place in Thackeray’s historical fiction through the mingling of various nostalgic tropes in the person of his central protagonists. These figures frequently follow Scott’s *Waverley* in being insipid spectator-participants who have been displaced from their homes and, directly or indirectly, mediate events from a perspective of nostalgic exile.

Chapter two considers the transformation of landscape as a node of nostalgic representation. It considers the confusion of time and place in the original case studies collected by doctors studying nostalgia as a disease in relation to nineteenth-century representations of landscape. It suggests that part of the historicising potential of geographical places comes from this instinctive association of time with place. This overlap is exploited in the historical novel to represent changing times via changing places. My first chapter is divided into two equal sections the first of which looks at Eliot’s aesthetic of presenting static ‘scenes’, and the second deals more explicitly with the representation of technological movement within the landscape through a consideration of Dickens’s use of the coach road in *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities*.

The third chapter of this thesis takes George Eliot’s *Romola*, frequently criticised both by contemporary and subsequent critics for being too full of minutely researched objects, as an illustrative example of how things can become – as Rousseau described particular strains of music – not only themselves (and therefore pointless detritus) but ‘memorative signs’ around which to build a narrative. This ‘clutter’ is reinterpreted as a system of souvenirs, artefacts and mementoes through which public history is reconstructed from excavated fragments. This chapter takes its cue from Lukács’s criticism of Flaubert’s extensively researched historical novel *Salammbô* as a ‘frozen, lunar landscape’.

¹⁶⁷ Rosenberg, *Elegy for an Age*, p. 2.

The fourth chapter explores the way in which mid-Victorian historical fiction tested the limits of its own nostalgic tropes. It uses *Sylvia's Lovers* to explore the point at which forgetfulness overtakes the most carefully memorialised people and events. This section of my thesis discusses the ways in which these novels represent a perilous closeness between memorialisation and erasure. It considers whether a trope premised on loss might require the threat of encroaching historical oblivion to complete its own metaphors. In *Sylvia's Lovers* this ultimately manifests itself in a crumbling narrative. As such, this thesis begins with the attempts of these novels to forge connections of (invented) tradition and (imagined) community with the historical pasts they describe and ends with the dissolution of these efforts where the limits of memory are tested and begin to fail.

I conclude with a brief coda glancing forward to later nineteenth-century uses of nostalgia in historical fiction through a reading of Thomas Hardy's *The Trumpet Major* (1880) and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886).

Through the course of these chapters, this thesis re-orientates the critical debate around nostalgia by focussing on its simultaneously affective and historicising role in the nineteenth-century historical novel. It contributes to recent discussion of the historical novel by reopening a discussion of nostalgic tropes in the genre which, as I establish in this introduction, are hinted at in a number of previous commentaries but never extensively explored. The historical novel and nostalgia, as I hope I have begun to show, share a common origin in a sense of disorientation and are, in numerous ways, mutually illuminating. The uniting thread of my thesis is the argument that nostalgia, far from being a simply sentimental, reactionary or politically conservative response to change, served as a literary trope through which to describe and discuss the process and experience of modernisation – a 'modern feeling' brought about by a new perception of 'transition'.

1

‘THOUSANDS, AND HUNDREDS, AND UNITS’: MEDIocre HEROES, WORLD HISTORICAL INDIVIDUALS AND NOSTALGIC CHARACTERS.

A large topic; indeed, an illimitable one; wide as Universal History itself. For, as I take it, Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of Great Men who have worked here.¹

I. WAVERING PROTAGONISTS

The role of the ‘hero’ has rich implications for historical fiction but these central figures have only been partially, or rather lopsidedly, discussed within criticism of the genre. During the nineteenth century, when parallel themes occupied historiographical discussion and archetypal ‘world historical’ figures like Napoleon Bonaparte and Lord Horatio Nelson dominated accounts of the recent past, these ideas had particularly striking implications for the historical novelist.² The place of central protagonists, who could arguably be dubbed ‘heroes’, and their relation to real historical figures, who may or may not be interpreted as the prime movers of historical events, has been discussed at length by scholars with diverse critical and ideological agendas. Georg Lukács, for instance, influentially explored the interaction of ‘mediocre heroes’ and ‘world historical individuals’ in Walter Scott’s historical fiction and used this idea as a lynch-pin for his argument that Scott’s novels ultimately endorsed a ‘whiggish’ progressivism, which celebrated the consistent triumph of a bourgeois ‘middle way’ in British history. This chapter will focus on the eponymous protagonists of

¹ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841) (Chapman and Hall: London, n.d), p. 1.

² Most notably, Carlyle’s *On Heroes and Hero Worship* quoted above but also, Hegel, who in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1821-31) proposes the influential concept of ‘world historical individuals’ who direct the course of historical events, an idea which spawned the image of Napoleon as ‘history on horseback’.

The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon, Esq. (1844) and *The History of Henry Esmond, Esq.* (1852), two novels in which the hero is given a large degree of ‘compositional importance’, to use Lukács’s description of the Waverley hero, because they tell their own stories, and those of the historical events they witness, from memory and at a distance.

Dorrit Cohn has explored the ‘borderlines and borderline cases’ between fictional and historical lives, and suggested that ‘historical and novelistic narratives that center on a life plot’ are ‘the generic region where factual and fictional narratives come into closest proximity, the territory that presents the greatest potential for overlap’.³ This ‘overlap’, I will suggest, is achieved in Thackeray’s historical fiction by creating generic ambiguity between autobiography, *Bildungsroman* and historical novel. As Cohn remarks:

History is more often concerned with humanity in the plural than in the singular, with events and changes affecting entire societies, than those affecting the lives of individual beings [...] Within fiction, by contrast, plots that center on the lives of single, more or less singular individuals shape the dominant generic modes known in French by the term *roman d l’individu*, in German by the term *Figureroman*. Not all novels of this type follow what Bakhtin calls the chronotope of biographical time. Indeed one of the distinctions of fictional as compared to historical narrative is that the former is able to make an entire life come to life as a unified whole in a short span of story time, as short as a single day in novels like *Ulysses* and *Mrs Dalloway*.⁴

This interleaving of sometimes apparently irreconcilable timescales and levels of historical magnification is a persistent theme in both *Barry Lyndon* and *Henry Esmond*, each of which describes an individual life within a much broader field of historical action. This effect is accentuated by the autobiographical narrative voice which draws attention to itself, as we will see, in a number of ways, including an authentically eighteenth-century inconsistency between first and third person and a more-or-less self-conscious tendency to bend the truth.

This blurring of first and third person conflicts with Cohn’s schematic approach. She outlines her theoretical position with the following explanation:

³ Dorrit Cohn, *The Distinction of Fiction* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 18.

⁴ Cohn, *Distinction of Fiction*, p. 18.

I have found [...] that a survey of this region can yield theoretical and critical light only if it is carried on separately in the two regimes of person, by which I mean the two principal ways a life can be told: by the self or by the other. The distinction of person seems to me the enabling move for obtaining a clear vision of the interface between historical and fictional life stories. My approach accordingly postulates a two-dimensional schema, crossing the opposition between the historical and the fictional domains with the opposition between third- and the first-person narrative forms.⁵

Literary texts, Cohn posits, exist somewhere on a spectrum with a first-person voice at one extreme and third-person at the other. Thackeray's historical fiction does not conform to this model but muddles the two modes through the mixing of fact with fiction and memoir with history.

Henry Esmond smudges these neat distinctions and confounds Cohn's diagrammatic approach. *Barry Lyndon* blunders through them obliviously. The spirit and natural perspective of these novels is first person but they often adopt the language of a third-person point of view. Henry Esmond refers to himself at different times as 'the boy', 'a lad of twelve years of age', Harry Esmond, Esmond, Mr Esmond, Colonel Esmond, to name a few. The most common personal pronoun is 'he' with an inconsistent smattering of 'I's. As John Loofbourow has observed of *Henry Esmond*:

Throughout the book, the contemporary, recording voice of the old narrator must be distinguished from his dramatic mode. Since Esmond, in the tradition of memoirs of the period, habitually refers to himself in the third person, reserving the 'I' for moments of special intensity, his reflective comment can be marked only by its stylistic quality.⁶

Loofbourow seems to separate style from substance and suggest that the fluctuation between first and third person can be explained as one among many more-or-less superficial period details, alongside, for example, the first edition's eighteenth-century type and binding or the inclusion of a formal dedication (see fig. 2 for a page opening from this first edition along with a manuscript page). This calls to mind Virginia Woolf's reflection on the manuscript of *Henry Esmond* and what it could tell a critic about Thackeray's style:

Moreover, I recollected, as I put this plan into execution, it is in this famous library that the manuscript of Thackeray's *Esmond* is also preserved. The critics often say that *Esmond* is Thackeray's most perfect novel. But the affectation of the style, with its imitation of the eighteenth century, hampers one, so far as I can remember; unless indeed the eighteenth-century style was natural to Thackeray – a fact that one might prove by looking at the manuscript and seeing whether the alterations were for the benefit of the style or of the

⁵ Cohn, *Distinction of Fiction*, p. 19.

⁶ John Loofbourow, *Thackeray and the Forms of Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 119.

sense. But then one would have to decide what is style and what is meaning, a question which – but here I was actually at the door which leads into the library.⁷

Though at first Woolf implies that Thackeray's eighteenth-century embellishments are a barrier to understanding the 'sense' of his novel, in the course of this stream-of-consciousness discussion, she begins to consider the extent to which style can convey meaning and meaning inform style. Style and sense, she seems to conclude, are too intricately woven together to be so easily extricable. The use of first- or third-person, as Cohn argues, is highly significant in a novel which straddles a division between fiction and history. Thackeray's persistent ambiguity suggests a concerted desire to blur these categories. His slippery third- and first-person narrator reflects his merging of fictional and pseudo-factual genres. An apparent stylistic tic, in which the narrator never seems able to settle on a single point-of-view, suggests a surface manifestation of a deeper ambiguity. Telling a historical narrative in an autobiographical voice has far-reaching implications for the already oxymoronic genre of the historical novel; this ambiguity is accentuated by a style which implies a personal perspective within an objective tone.



Lukács influentially suggested that Scott's historical fiction hinges on a 'more or less mediocre, average English gentleman' who:

generally possesses a certain moral fortitude and decency which even rises to a capacity for self-sacrifice, but which never grows into a sweeping human passion, is never the enraptured devotion to a great cause.⁸

Lukács argues that the 'middle-of-the-road' protagonist is of 'compositional importance' to historical fiction because he illustrates and embodies the socio-political landscape of the period in question. 'Scott's greatness' Lukács suggests 'lies in his capacity to give living human embodiment to historical-social types'.⁹ Scott's 'heroes', he argues, are fundamentally entwined, not only with the structure of his novels, but also with the novelist's personal politics:

⁷ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929), ed. by Morag Shiach (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) pp. 8-9.

⁸ Lukács, *Historical Novel*, p. 33.

⁹ Lukács, *Historical Novel*, pp. 32, 36, 35.

Paradoxically, Scott's greatness is closely linked with his often narrow conservatism. He seeks the 'middle way' between the extremes and endeavours to demonstrate artistically the historical reality of this way by means of his portrayal of the great crises in English history. This basic tendency finds immediate expression in the way he constructs his plot and selects his central figure.¹⁰

This central but 'mediocre' protagonist, Lukács argues, reflects Scott's belief in a moderate society. For instance, this character signifies Scott's belief in the benefits of Act of Union and, while he can accommodate regret for the traditional ways of life which face extinction, he could also celebrate the advantages of 'progress' through the triumph of a hero who is eminently suited to the less romantic, but more practical, way of life which was to become the norm. Fergus Mac-Ivor, the romantic but volatile leader, is executed while Waverley prospers.

Lukács's study of the historical novel places character at the heart of the genre's thematic and structural make-up. His focus, however, is squarely on the political implications of these characters, to the extent that some of his readings are almost allegorical. This preoccupation neglects other important facets of the historical novel's use of character. As John Maynard has suggested, Lukács imposes a 'Whiggish (or opto-Marxist) context' on these novels which, while illuminating in its way, is by no means the whole story.¹¹ This chapter will begin to explore an angle on this problem which is more concerned with aesthetic choices than personal politics and it will approach politics as one context among many rather than as a motivating agenda. It will consider the interaction between factual and fictional elements of these novels through the lens created by this relatively disengaged central protagonist reimagined as a memoirist and therefore as a rememberer.

This chapter takes Lukács's notion of the 'mediocre' or 'middle of the road' hero of the Waverley novels as a starting point from which to explore the significance of the 'hero' in relation to tropes of nostalgic memory in the nineteenth-century historical novel. It will explore the importance of the alternate – unexceptional – 'eyewitness' account of the 'mediocre' hero within a more established historical record. David Lodge has noted that in the nineteenth-century novel, 'the main

¹⁰ Lukács, *Historical Novel*, p. 33.

¹¹ Maynard, 'Broad Canvas, Narrow Perspective', p. 241.

characters are alienated and their efforts to participate in history are mocked and frustrated'.¹² This chapter will explore the possibility that, aside from a political motive for this marginalising method of characterisation, which, as Lukács and others have argued, is no doubt compelling in many cases, these side-lined heroes also participate in tropes of nostalgic memory by mediating public events through a more personal, and inevitably more lowly, point-of-view. These unusually ordinary individuals, unencumbered by the problems associated with the representation of real historical figures, are able to contribute a narrative tone and thematic atmosphere of personal recollection to the historical novel. This is sometimes achieved through the deployment of an explicitly autobiographical narrative but elsewhere this mediation is more subtle or implicit within the perspective of a 'wavering' hero. Historical events are compressed into the timescale of an individual life and are remembered rather than merely narrated. This 'middle of the road' protagonist, then, is central to the transformation of factual record into an emotionally compelling historical novel. These characters create a narrative perspective which can infuse historical fiction with a tone of regretful memory.

One way in which this function is accomplished, as I have begun to argue, is through the emulation, and adaptation, of biographical or autobiographical tropes. As Helen Small has remarked concerning long-lived individuals like the Countess of Desmond – who could correct and 'subdue' historical record through the transmission of personal memory, 'individual to individual' – '[t]hey made the distant past immediate, puncturing its remoteness with disarming ease'.¹³ Memory creates a sense of proximity to distant historical events which would otherwise be beyond our reach. As Maynard has remarked, biography can be read as the 'closest cousin to the historical novel' or, as Cohn says, a basic 'historiographical unit'.¹⁴ This is, I argue, true for reasons aside from Carlyle's influential and oft quoted remark that history is, in essence, the gradual accretion of

¹² David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), p. 38.

¹³ Helen Small, 'The unquiet limit: Old age and memory in Victorian narrative', *Memory and Memorials, 1789-1914: Literary and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. by Matthew Campbell, Jacqueline M. Labbe and Sally Shuttleworth (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 60-79, (p. 61).

¹⁴ Maynard, 'Broad Canvas, Narrow Perspective', p. 240.

great men's lives – though that is perhaps the implicit reference within Maynard's remark. As Carlyle suggests in his essay 'On Walter Scott' (1838), the historical novelist reminded his readers that history was populated by real men and women. 'These Historical Novels' Carlyle insists 'have taught all men this truth, which looks like a truism, and yet was as good as unknown to writers of history and others, till so taught':

that the bygone ages of the world were actually filled by living men, not by protocols, state-papers, controversies and abstractions of men. Not abstractions were they, not diagrams and theorems; but men, in buff or other coats and breeches, with colour in their cheeks, with passions in their stomach, and the idioms, features and vitalities of very men. It is a little word this; inclusive of great meaning! History will henceforth have to take thought of it. Her faint hearsays of 'philosophy teaching by experience' will have to exchange themselves everywhere for direct inspection and embodiment: this, and this only, will be counted experience; and till once experience have got in, philosophy will reconcile herself to wait at the door. It is a great service, fertile in consequences, this that Scott has done; a great truth laid open by him¹⁵

Carlyle's account of the historical novel is entirely consonant with his own idea that the history of the world is essentially a collage of 'Great Men's' biographies. As this chapter shows, this is only a small part of a much more complex picture. Thackeray's use of autobiography to make his heroes a more resistant medium than Scott's 'insipid' and largely transparent ciphers significantly complicates Carlyle's idea. The importance of memory to memoir is obvious but seldom discussed in relation to Thackeray's remembering narrators. This triangular interaction – between Great Men, mediocre heroes and remembering memoirist – sheds new light on the approach of these novels in the reconciliation of a 'broad canvas', as John Maynard has put it, with a 'narrow perspective'.

Walter Scott and Intertextuality

Scott discussed the problem of finding suitable protagonists for a new genre in an 1817 anonymous self-review and again in 1822 with *The Fortunes of Nigel* in which the central protagonist soliloquises at length on the theme of his own passivity. Both of these discussions consider the characteristics of a relatively inactive, disengaged and un-heroic hero. In his anonymous review of *Tales of My Landlord* – comprising *The Black Dwarf* and *Old Mortality* – Scott suggests that a leading fault in his own fiction is:

¹⁵ Thomas Carlyle, 'Memoirs of the Life of Scott', *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1864), p. 531.

the total want of interest which the reader attaches to the character of the hero. Waverley, Brown, or Bertram in *Guy Mannering*, and Lovel in *The Antiquary*, are all brethren of a family; very amiable and very insipid sort of young men. We think we can perceive that this error is also in some degree occasioned by the dramatic principle upon which the author frames his plots. *His chief characters are never actors, but always acted upon* [my emphasis] by the spur of circumstances, and have their fates uniformly determined by the agency of the subordinate persons. This arises from the author having usually represented them as foreigners to whom everything in Scotland is strange, - a circumstance which serves as his apology for entering into many minute details which are reflectively, as it were, addressed to the reader through the medium of the hero.¹⁶

The hero he describes is a cipher who mediates historical events for the reader. He is our eyes and ears but never really intervenes in the narrative. Alexander Welsh has summarised Scott's statement by suggesting that the novelist's 'own rationale of the hero' is essentially as 'a vehicle for nonfiction'.¹⁷ 'The passive hero', Welsh adds, 'supplies a medium for introducing historical and topographical detail. He is a kind of representative of the reader at the scene of action'.¹⁸ He is an outsider who justifies exposition and allows us to be tourists within the narrative because he is too. This is no doubt part of his function – indeed, Scott is explicit in calling his hero a 'medium' – but this is not the full extent of the hero's role. It is also significant, indeed, that Scott insists his readers should be able to relate to these apparently bland and uninteresting heroes. This emotionalising role has been underplayed. As Hazlitt suggests in his essay 'Why the Heroes of Romances Are Insipid' there is an aspect of 'everyman' simplicity to this unexceptional protagonist which enables a variety of readers to imagine him according to their own needs or proclivities.¹⁹ A truly exceptional hero, Hazlitt implies, while admirable, might seem comparatively remote from the reader. Similarly, Alexander Welsh suggests that 'an imaginative cipher can accommodate the greatest range of readers'.²⁰

¹⁶ Walter Scott: an unsigned review, *Quarterly Review*, Dated January 1817, issued April 1817, xvi, 430-80, reproduced in *Scott: The Critical Heritage* (London and New York: Routledge, 1970), pp. 106-143, (p. 115).

¹⁷ Alexander Welsh, *The Hero of the Waverley Novels* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 56.

¹⁸ Welsh, *The Hero of the Waverley Novels*, p. 51.

¹⁹ William Hazlitt, *Men and Manners: Sketches and Essays* (London: Illustrated London Library, 1852), pp. 208-226. As Welsh suggests, 'an imaginative cipher can accommodate the greatest range of readers', p. 54

²⁰ Welsh, *The Hero of the Waverley Novels*, p. 54.

Chapter 22 of *The Fortunes of Nigel*, contains similar reflections, this time in the voice of the inadequate hero himself:

She is right and has taught me a lesson I will profit by. I have been, through my whole life, one who leant upon others for that assistance which it is more truly noble to derive from my own exertions. I am ashamed of feeling the paltry inconvenience which long habit has led me to annex to the want of the servant's assistance – I am ashamed of that; but far, far more, am I ashamed to have suffered the same habit of throwing my burden on others, to render me, since I came to this city, a mere victim of those events, which I have never even attempted to influence – a thing never acting but perpetually acted upon – protected by one friend, deceived by another; but in the advantage which I have received from the one, and the evil I have sustained from the other, as passive and helpless as a boat that drifts without oar or rudder at the mercy of the winds and waves.²¹

Nigel feels himself to be 'a mere victim of [...] events' and 'never acting but perpetually acted upon', an idea which directly echoes the wording of Scott's anonymous self-review which, as quoted above, sees these central but eminently malleable characters as 'never actors, but always acted upon'. These self-censoring descriptions of Scott's heroes, places them in striking opposition to Carlyle's influential idea that the history of the world is made up of the biographies of great men. The historical novel coheres through the life-story of a mediocre and unmemorable individual. The play of words between 'hero' as synonymous with a literary protagonist, and 'hero' referring, as the *OED* has it, to 'a person, typically a man, who is admired for their courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities', creates a very clear sense of disjuncture between these ideas. The coincidence of vocabulary is used to highlight a very marked and deliberate difference.

Scott repeatedly discussed these problems and opportunities, both within his novels and elsewhere in his letters and critical writing. The first and perhaps most striking instance of this self-reflexive criticism occurs in the opening to his – arguably *the* – first historical novel, *Waverley; or, tis sixty years since* published in 1814. Scott introduces this novel with a discussion of the choices he made in selecting a suitable protagonist for his first foray into prose fiction. He tells us that he wanted a hero who could be separated from his readers' various preconceptions:

The title of this work has not been chosen without grave and solid deliberation which matters of importance demand from the prudent. Even its first, or general denomination, was the result of no common research or selection, although, according to the example of

²¹ Walter Scott, *The Fortunes of Nigel*, ed. by Frank Jordan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 246.

my predecessors, I had only to seize upon the most sounding and euphonic surname that English history or topography affords, and elect it at once as the title of my work, and the name of my hero. But, alas! what could my readers have expected from the chivalrous epithets of Howard, Mordaunt, Mortimer, or Stanley, or from the softer and more sentimental sounds of Belmour, Belville, Belfield, and Belgrave, but pages of inanity, similar to those which have been so christened for half a century past? I must modestly admit I am too diffident of my own merit to place it in unnecessary opposition to preconceived associations: I have therefore, like a maiden knight with his white shield, assumed for my hero, WAVERLEY, an uncontaminated name, bearing with its sound little good or evil, excepting what the reader shall be hereafter pleased to affix to it.²²

The novel's hero, Scott suggests, inevitably influences the way a book is read and the generic expectations with which it is received. This must be especially true when he lends his name to the book. Within this disavowal of various novelistic traditions or perceived commonplaces, Scott employs a striking allusion to Don Quixote's blank shield, a figure that must be considered to loom large in traditions of heroic or chivalric literature. In the language with which he declares his freedom from literary comparison, Scott problematizes the very idea that any such separation could be possible.

In his 'Essay on Chivalry' (1818), Scott repeats this image in almost exactly the same formulation:

In the like manner, as the general reader may have learned from that irrefragable authority, Don Quixote de la Mancha, a knight who received his order was obliged to wear white armour, and a shield without a device, until, by some daring and distinguished achievement, he had acquired title to an honourable badge of distinction.²³

This passage not only references a very significant literary forbear, but also places the hero in a particular tradition of literary heroes who self-reflexively explore the ideas of 'heroism', 'chivalry' and the literary traditions within which these ideas had been most fruitfully developed. A strongly allusive mode of expression undermines Scott's purported argument. What he essentially announces in this passage is that his hero, rather than straightforwardly jettisoning established traditions in order to remake the protagonist of historical fiction afresh, will, like Don Quixote, traverse a complex landscape strewn with the relics and remains of older literary forms. This is, if

²² Walter Scott, *Waverley*, p. 3.

²³ Walter Scott, 'Essay on Chivalry' in *Essays on Chivalry, Romance, and the Drama* (London: Frederick Warne and Co., n.d.), pp. 1-126, (p. 3).

anything, an announcement of inter-textual intent rather than the statement of complete literary independence which it pretends to be or at least gestures towards. This questioning and explorative approach to the role of the central protagonist – firmly coached in literary tradition, though it denies any direct connection – forms a significant legacy for later nineteenth-century historical novelists. Scott's protagonist is, by the novelist's own account, fundamental to his historical fiction as he envisioned the project from its outset. From the start, historical fiction was a genre which reflected on the conventions it adapted for its own purposes and was especially interested in the representation of real and fictional characters; this self-reflexive tendency was available as a legacy to later nineteenth-century novelists.

Gérard Genette's discussion of *Don Quixote* (1605) is particularly illuminating. He indicates the tradition Scott invokes with his allusion to a 'blank shield' at the beginning of *Waverley*:

Don Quixote is not first and foremost a hidalgo (in fact, he is scarcely more than a picaro) who roams about the countryside and its villages and inns; he is above all a hidalgo who wishes to live like a knight: i.e., like the heroes of chivalric romances. The reference to this model absolutely determines the type of the work.²⁴

Genette insists that *Don Quixote* is 'in no sense a parody of a chivalric novel, but this improper formula at least has the merit of underscoring, however inadequately, its hypertextual character – which remains to be defined'.²⁵ A similar hypertextuality which isn't quite parody, underlies the mediocre hero in historical fiction, beginning with Scott. This individual participates in the ongoing tradition of historical fiction but also builds on what Genette describes as a 'hypotext', formed by a pre-existent, 'received' historical record alongside an established literary tradition. There is an implicit historical record, which would presumably take the form of a purportedly objective, third person account, with which these novels, and especially their heroes, implicitly interact and engage. This is true of Scott and, I argue, of Thackeray among many other historical novelists in this period when the genre must still have seemed comparatively 'new'.

²⁴ Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in The Second Degree*, trans. by Channa Newman & Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 148.

²⁵ Genette, *Palimpsests*, p. 149.

As Genette has argued, the interactions of different literary texts do not need to be explicitly signposted to be significant. Genette is concerned with ‘the actual presence of one text within another’, whether through clear imitation or adaptation, or as indicated by participation in a particular tradition or even genre.²⁶ Among the examples Genette proposes are ‘poem’ and ‘essay’; the self-consciously recent genre of ‘the Historical Novel’ with all its cultural connotations of learnedness and erudition, must be considered a genre which was especially aware of its own conventions. It is interesting, for example, that both Scott and Thackeray both produced a sort of internal literary critical gloss to their historical novels. As Gerald Prince describes it in his ‘Foreword’ to *Palimpsests*, ‘[a]ny text is a hypertext, grafting itself onto a hypotext, an earlier text that it imitates or transforms; any writing is rewriting and literature is always in the second degree’ before suggesting that ‘though all literary texts are hypertextual, some are more hypertextual than others, more massively and explicitly palimpsestuous’.²⁷ In a striking echo of Scott’s own remarks at the beginning of *Waverley*, Genette suggests that ‘generic perception is known to guide and determine to a considerable degree the readers’ expectations, and thus their reception of the work’.²⁸ Even participating in the genre of historical fiction, this suggests, must entail some inter- or hyper- textual allusion to Scott and beyond him through his own interrogation of pre-existent generic boundaries. Because he was the supposed progenitor of the genre, his particular approach is implicated in its future manifestations. With Scott as such a recent and prominent forbear, later nineteenth-century historical novels are almost unavoidably inter-textual.

Thackeray, as many of his critics have remarked, began his career with pastiche and imported this spirit and technique into his later work. *Punch’s Prize Novelists* comprises a series of pastiches including one of the G.P.R. James-school of historical novel writing while elements of *Vanity Fair* were written in a succession of styles. One of the most marked instance of this tendency is to be found in Thackeray’s parodic continuation of *Ivanhoe* (1820), *Rebecca and Rowena* (1846). This short

²⁶ Genette, *Palimpsests*, pp. 1-2.

²⁷ Gerald Prince, ‘Foreword’, to Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests*, p.ix.

²⁸ Genette, *Palimpsests*, p. 5.

novel engages directly and explicitly with the conventions adhered to by Scott's heroes. The premise of this work, which sets out to correct *Ivanhoe's* choice of 'niminy piminy' Rowena over the more striking and exotic Rebecca, brings to mind Maggie Tulliver's protest that the 'dark unhappy' heroines of the *Waverley* novels are consistently sacrificed to the happiness of the 'blond-haired women'.²⁹ Maggie also singles Rebecca out for special mention as an unjustly handled heroine, alongside Flora MacIvor from *Waverley* and Minna from *The Pirate*. Even when not referring directly to Scott, both Eliot and Thackeray reproduced these blonde/dark pairings in their own work. In this context, Thackeray's repeated use of the name Rebecca – most strikingly, of course, in *Vanity Fair* – does not seem accidental. To some extent, therefore, Scott is an implicit intertext, not only within these particular novels but throughout nineteenth-century fiction which experimented with and developed the notion and role of the hero-protagonist in the historical novel. Though I don't want to suggest any straightforward or easily extricable lines of influence between Scott and Thackeray, or any other mid-nineteenth century author for that matter, I would like to draw attention to the various ways in which these two novelists, faced with similar obstacles to the fictionalisation of historical periods, people and events, found parallel solutions in their approach to characterisation.

This awareness of a literary lineage is particularly pertinent to historical fiction. Thackeray's nod to *Ivanhoe's* apparently 'conventional' conclusion indicates the extent to which these themes influenced his ideas about historical fiction. In spite of this clear legacy, critics have neglected the echoes between Scott's insipid heroes and Thackeray's dubious central protagonists. This is despite the vast critical literature that has accumulated around the problem of Scott's 'mediocre heroes' and the almost equally active discussion around Thackeray's anti-heroism. Genette, for instance, is more

²⁹ 'Proposals for a Continuation of *Ivanhoe*, in a letter to Monsieur Alexandre Dumas, by Monsieur Michael Angelo Titmarsh', originally published: *Fraser's Magazine*, August and September, 1846. Reproduced in William Makepeace Thackeray, *Christmas Books, Rebecca and Rowena and Late Minor Papers, 1849-1861*, ed. by George Saintsbury (Oxford: Oxford University Press, n.d.), pp. 463- 494, (p. 463). George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. by Gordon Sherman Haight (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 292. Subsequent references will be given in parentheses.

concerned to explicate the eighteenth-century models for *Henry Esmond* and *Barry Lyndon* rather than exploring the tradition of historical fiction in which they participate. He remarks that:

Thackeray was a great practitioner of hypertextual writing: *Henry Esmond* (1852), a fictitious autobiography, is written in the language of the eighteenth century, and *Rebecca and Rowena: A Romance upon Romance* is, as its superb title indicates, a continuation of *Ivanhoe*. Even *Vanity Fair* is broadly reminiscent of the narrative attitudes that were dear to Fielding.³⁰

Thackeray was a master of parody, pastiche and acerbic imitation and he made ample use of pre-existent texts in the construction of his own work. His historical fiction was no exception. Lukács similarly went to some pains to dissociate Thackeray's efforts from Scott's example. He suggests that the apparent similarities between the two are illusory. Thackeray, Lukács says, 'has no interest in separating the historical from the social-critical novel, that is in turning the historical novel into a genre of its own'; 'he does not base himself on the classical form of the historical novel, that is on Scott; instead, he attempts to apply the traditions of the eighteenth century social novel to a new type of historical novel'.³¹ As I will discuss in the next section of this chapter, Lukács takes the most obvious similarity between *Esmond* and *Waverley* – that they each waver between political and religious factions – as the point at which they most sharply diverge.

Intertextuality can be read as an unavoidable characteristic of historical fiction because it is a genre which always – to some degree – presupposes another version of the same narrative. Whatever the plot, on some level, we already know what will happen. These novels place themselves in an oppositional relationship to a notionally 'objective' account of past events and contribute a more personal point of view on history. Genette has traced the meaning of 'parody' to an original meaning of 'singing alongside', implying a degree of meaningful interaction with conventions of writing rather than only mocking caricature. This intertextual attitude is much further reaching than only these explicit instances and informs, as I argue, Thackeray's approach to characterisation of historical 'heroes'. The following section will outline the autobiographical and nostalgic tropes through which this interplay is achieved.

³⁰ Genette, *Palimpsests*, p. 452.

³¹ Lukács, *Historical Novel*, p. 201.

Exiles and Homesick Soldiers: Thackeray and Nostalgia as a 'Swiss Disease'

There is an undated, unpublished manuscript poem by Thackeray in the Berg Collection of English and American Literature at the New York Public Library which hints at a missed context of nostalgic memory in the novelist's wider body of work (fig. 3). This item is catalogued as two poems – though I read it as a single, unfinished draft – titled together 'To Strasburg [and] to Switzerland'. These verses, I argue, refer directly to the early diagnoses of nostalgia as a disease which particularly afflicted Swiss soldiers serving abroad. Because this poem is short, and its interest lies more in the way its 'plot' and theme unfold than in individual details of language, I transcribe it in its entirety below:

To Strasburg as I went

And passed the Guard house near

<I heard that>

A doleful voice did evoke complaint

Swiss

Alas that <eis [illegible]> our Regiment
Was quartered here.

That <eis [illegible]> twas quartered here!

The Rhine flows close at hand.

Could I but cross the Rhine so clear

To Switzerland.

O darling Switzerland

Our luckless winter moon.

As I upon my guard did pace

I heard upon the marketplace [end of fragment]³²

³² Thackeray, 'To Strasburg [and] To Switzerland', 1p. MS. Holograph. Unsigned and undated. Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, New York Public Library, The New York Public Library. For facsimile see fig. 3 in appendix.

This scrap of verse is not Thackeray's best or most characteristic work, not least because it is clearly unfinished. Nevertheless, it is thematically suggestive and points to an overlap between the novelist's literary uses of memory, discussed at length by a number of recent critics, and older traditions of nostalgic writing.³³ In the New York Public Library library catalogue – the only place besides Peter Shillingburg's list of unresearched Thackeray manuscripts where it is referred to at all – a break is presumed with the recurrence of the formulaic phrase 'To [a place]'.³⁴ This misreading is the result of a common failure to recognise nostalgia as a context at all. Its thematic continuity is the most obvious source of coherence in this poem. The first segment, in which the poet or his narrator listens in to a homesick soldier's lament, segues into a sketchy dramatic monologue which relates the overheard complaint. It takes the form of two monologues but, thematically and narratively, it is a consistent whole. The second section, beginning with the line 'To Switzerland', is the soldier's 'doleful [...] complaint' at his separation from his homeland.

This fragment unambiguously refers to nostalgia to a 'Swiss disease' rather than only to a wistful, softening memory, though arguably – as with Samuel Rogers's *Pleasures of Memory* discussed in my introduction – it is both. What it shows, a lament for an idealised home, does not necessarily correspond with the tradition it alludes to, in which men were believed to die of homesickness. A soldier abroad suffers from overwhelming homesickness and imaginatively revisits his home. The Rhine, which eventually joins Strasburg to Switzerland, links the soldier with his homeland and connects the two segments of this draft poem. Starobinski's detailed account of rivers as a characteristic image in a nostalgic literary aesthetic, discussed in more detail in my introduction,

³³J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982); George Levine, *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981). G.K. Chesterton, for example, described Thackeray as an author of 'everyone's' memory, everyone's childhood, a remark which Nicholas Dames interprets to mean that Thackeray's use of standard modes of expressing memory relied on an incomplete metonymy designed to allow the reader to project his or her own experiences on to the elliptical text. This metonymy is connected to an associationist theory of mind which connects fragments through memory. The reader of Thackeray's novels, Dames implies in *Amnesiac Selves*, mediates this process by supplying experience from their own lives. These readings, though given from entirely different critical backgrounds and perspectives, give memory a central role in Thackeray's work.

³⁴ Peter L. Shillingsburg, *Thackeray* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1974).

suggests another point of contact between Thackeray's poem and a wider poetic tradition.³⁵ That this plaintive voice is explicitly Swiss – and that this is a detail which was retrospectively added to the draft as though to clarify an implicit correspondence – suggests a strikingly direct reference to early diagnoses of nostalgia and the literary tropes it had rapidly generated.³⁶ Because Thackeray is the author of numerous literary pastiches, this slight foray into nostalgia poetry suggests some knowledge of the work discussed by Laurence Lerner, Aaron Santesso and Laurence Goldstein. Thackeray was, after all, an incisive mimic and frequently used his intricate knowledge of literary genres to create parodies which targeted form as much as content. It is surprising, given Thackeray's extensive use of eighteenth-century literary tropes and genres, that this context has not previously been acknowledged.

The reference to a Swiss soldier pining for home, as I argue in my introduction, would be unmistakable to a nineteenth-century reader familiar with, for example, Wordsworth's poetry on the subject, various writers on associationism, the literary or scientific work of Friedrich Schiller, Rossini's operatic adaptation of *Wilhelm Tell* or Rousseau's entry in his *Dictionary of Music* on the Ranz de Vaches – to name only some of the most famous allusions to the phenomenon. Numerous widely-read authors refer to this idea but these hints have seldom been recognised or fully explored. Taking Wordsworth's explicitly nostalgia-inspired poetry as a close parallel to Thackeray's unpublished draft, it is clear that nostalgia was not considered an obscure concept which needed to be glossed for readers but part of a tradition which, though old-fashioned, remained residual and interpretable into the nineteenth-century.

Though I do not want to overstate its importance – in itself, this is obviously a very minor fragment – this poem has a greater significance than its scrappy appearance suggests. It demonstrates that Thackeray was aware of the earliest definition of nostalgia and of its subsequent literary manifestations. In the nineteenth century, nostalgia was arguably beginning to lose its

³⁵ Starobinski, 'Rivers, Bells, Nostalgia'. See introduction for a more detailed account of this argument.

³⁶ As Laurence Lerner, Aaron Santesso, Laurence Goldstein and Jean Starobinski describe. This process is briefly outlined in my introduction.

scientific prominence and precise definition but Thackeray's frame of reference was evidently wider than his contemporary milieu or immediate predecessors. As Eric Hobsbawm wrote about the periodization of history, 'History is not a bus-line on which the vehicle changes all its passengers and crew whenever it gets to the point marking its terminus'.³⁷ Thackeray's fondness for the literature of the eighteenth century is well documented, not least in his own words in his *Humourists of the Eighteenth Century*. This unstudied poem suggests that Thackeray was also aware of the tradition of nostalgia poetry. The idea that there were successive phases of nostalgic representation, each of which simply superseded previous traditions, has dominated and distorted critical discussion. This poem signals an unlikely recurrence.

The strikingly similar tropes in Thackeray's historical fiction should, then, be treated as more than a coincidence. The exiles experienced by Thackeray's narrator-protagonists in *Henry Esmond* and *Barry Lyndon*, for instance, take on additional resonances when considered in light of this forgotten tradition. This missing context provides a key to two recurrent aspects in Thackeray's treatment of historical themes: the frequent focus on soldiers of fortune forced to leave their homes and the integral threads of regretful memory which run throughout these same novels. Nostalgia is quite obviously not a total explanation for Thackeray's tropes of memory but it is one substantial node around which these ideas cluster. The use of imagery and characterisation modelled on the trope of the homesick soldier, I argue, resonates with Scott's 'mediocre hero' by creating central protagonists who look in on events from the outside. Scott's inadequate heroes function as spectator-participants while Thackeray's uprooted narrator-heroes, Henry Esmond and Barry Lyndon, fulfil a similar role, with the additional implication that events are mediated by their memories. The superimposition of *Bildungsroman* or autobiography on to historical fiction creates a sense that the narrative is not only witnessed by the central protagonist but also remembered by him. A nostalgia which implicates this mediating central figure, I will argue, should not be treated as a peripheral trope.

³⁷ Hobsbawm, *Age of Empire*, p. 6.

Thackeray's preoccupation with themes and techniques of personal and cultural recollection has been widely discussed in recent criticism,³⁸ as has his creation of central protagonists who fall short of the expectation that 'great men' are the stuff of history.³⁹ This chapter draws out the close relationship between these themes and techniques in Thackeray's historical novels. It suggests that nostalgia creates a point of contact between narratives of memory and exiled or otherwise homeless and marginalised characters. In this connection, I develop the idea that Thackeray used nostalgia to adapt Scott's famously 'wavering' and rootless hero to his own anti-heroic and profoundly intertextual purposes.

Given the particular circumstances which were understood to cause nostalgia in early diagnoses, and the literary tropes which sprang up in the eighteenth century to describe this experience, nostalgia was fundamentally bound up with the representation of soldiers who were compelled to serve abroad.⁴⁰ This context, I argue, sheds fresh light on the close coexistence of memorative and heroic themes in Thackeray's historical fiction. Soldiers serving away from home, then, had a reputation for a particular type of nostalgic remembering; Thackeray uses two such figures as the narrator-protagonists in his historical fiction. This choice is not without significance in a pair of books that rely on the structure and emotional tenor of autobiographical memory. 'To Strasburg [and] to Switzerland' might be a fragile steppingstone but it makes sense of many references and techniques which recur throughout Thackeray's work. It provides a key for the interpretation of a mass of details which add up to a considerable thematic and structural element in his historical novels. This chapter unravels these themes and tropes as they relate to the central protagonist and his engagement with other fictional or factual characters in these novels. It considers how personal memory can interact with communal histories in Thackeray's autobiographically inflected historical fictions in order to reconcile a broad historical theme with a narrow personal perspective.

³⁸ J. Hillis Miller's *Fiction and Repetition* and George Levine's *The Realistic Imagination* are perhaps the most insightful contributors to this debate.

³⁹ Harry E. Shaw, *The Forms of Historical Fiction* and Andrew Sanders's *The Victorian Historical Novel* each include a chapter about Thackeray's heroes and anti-heroes.

⁴⁰ Aaron Santesso describes the rapid adoption of nostalgia as a literary genre which adapts characteristics of elegy and pastoral in eighteenth-century poetry, pp. 27-55.

Autobiography

Thackeray frames his historical fiction not only from the perspective of a 'mediocre' hero but in his voice and through his memories. Autobiography is, quite obviously, not a neutral idea in either of these novels. The choice to mediate historical fiction through the personal account of an individual has broad implications for this genre, not least of which is the prominence this approach gives to memory. It nests traditionally 'objective' narratives within an often ostentatiously subjective point of view. As Laura Marcus has observed, autobiography has a long tradition as a counter-narrative to an established version of events:

Autobiography was a central case for feminist criticisms in the 1980s, exposing processes of exclusion and marginalisation in the construction of literary canons. Not only were women autobiographers self-evidently outside the 'Great Men' tradition with which many autobiographical critics operated; generic definitions served to exclude forms of 'life-writing' such as diaries, letters and journals, often adopted by women and those outside mainstream literary culture.⁴¹

This use of autobiography accentuates a characteristic latent in much historical fiction in which fact and fiction jostle together. Autobiographically mediated historical fiction highlights the extent to which memory in general, and nostalgic memory in particular, could be used to bridge this gap between historical fact and fictional invention, the lives of ordinary individuals and the heroic biographies of great men.

In *Henry Esmond* and *Barry Lyndon* we are presented with the autobiographies of dead or dying men. This creates a narrative perspective which assumes that the events described are closed off and finished with. *Esmond* especially is given an implausible degree of closure. He is not only, as he repeatedly states, looking back on his youth when he is much older and living on another continent, but often seems to speak as though his life as a whole, and not only this phase of it, is over. This is a perspective which is established in the preface in which his daughter explains that she has edited her deceased father's memoirs. These novels, then, are written at a geographical and temporal distance and rely entirely on their authors' memories of their lost youth and lost homes. *Esmond* suggests an apt description of his own narrative approach when he remarks, "They that

⁴¹ Laura Marcus, *Autobiographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 1.

saw it remembered it, and said so afterward'.⁴² These events were witnessed, then remembered and related. The novel we are reading has been subject to this process of autobiographical mediation, in Esmond's case from America. This, as I have suggested, invests Scott's 'middle of the road' tour-guide hero with greater prominence and takes his mediating role to its logical extreme.

Thackeray's novels play on the possibilities of history written as autobiography. The 'compositional' decision to mediate the narrative through the experiences of one historically unexceptional protagonist, inevitably results in a greater reliance on the language of personal memory. In Scott's work, as I have suggested, the 'mediocre' hero allows the historical novelist to relate broad narratives of historical events through the subjective but unobtrusive lens of a single life. Thackeray's autobiographical angle on the problem muddies the waters considerably and creates a far more opaque and obstructive narrative voice. The concertinaing of public historical narratives within the format of personal recollection enables historical events to be related to the reader as memories, an approach which influences almost every aspect of the novel's composition. As Gabrielle McIntire has noted in relation to modernist writers, fiction can create a sense of 'historicity that has developed a meaningful relation to the subjective'.⁴³ Thackeray's autobiographical hero-narrators bring objective historical narrative into a direct relationship with their own subjective experience. The model provided by Scott's wavering protagonists, I suggest, has striking parallels with Thackeray's approach.

Lukács has argued that Thackeray's historiographical or political engagement with his subject is virtually non-existent because he privileges this autobiographical voice's interest in the details of private life over public history:

Thackeray, however, does not see the people. He reduces his story to the intrigues of the upper classes. Of course, he knows perfectly well that these trivialities are confined to the class he describes and tell us nothing of the real historical process. It is by chance that every so often the Cromwell age, the heroic period of the English people, casts its shadow in discussions. But this period seems to have wholly disappeared, and the life which is

⁴² William Makepeace Thackeray, *The History of Henry Esmond*, ed. by Donald Hawes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 157. Subsequent references will be given in parenthesis.

⁴³ Gabrielle McIntire, *Modernism, Memory, and Desire: T.S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 182.

described is given over entirely to trivial and private goings-on. The people's attitude to what happens is never revealed.⁴⁴

Thackeray's representation of character might be psychologically well drawn, as Lukács puts it '[t]he psychology is not wrong', but the 'accidental nature of the political standpoints of the characters', while accurate and bearing a marked similarity to the *Waverley* character's wavering approach to political engagement, creates too stark a bifurcation between public and private spheres. Scott's *Waverley*, Lukács argues, 'also joins the Stuart Rebellion by accident; but he is simply there as a foil to those for whom the revolt is a social-historical necessity. The perspective in which Thackeray shows Marlborough, however, is purely private'.⁴⁵ In this model, private life is only significant for the light it sheds on public events and an individual is only interesting if he somehow represents 'the people' or a particular socio-economic group. This is not, I suggest, the sole function of fictional characters in the historical novel. These novels do not simply attempt history writing by another means or only reflect on the same material from a different perspective; the fictional aspect of these plots is just as integral to the project as the 'factual' or historical element. The implicit hierarchy which Lukács creates in his study of the genre has distorted discussions of this subject.



As G.H. Lewes remarked in an early review of *Henry Esmond*, this is not only a historical novel, but also the story of an individual life. It is:

An autobiography, written in the autumn light of a calm and noble life, sets before you much of the private and domestic, no less than of the public and historic activity of the reigns of William and Anne.⁴⁶

The perspective created by the narrator, who remembers events from a period much later in his own life, is intrinsically nostalgic or certainly inflected by the experience of memory. As Lewes

⁴⁴ Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p. 203.

⁴⁵ Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p. 204.

⁴⁶ G.H. Lewes, from 'Thackeray's New Novel, the *Leader*, 6 November 1852, iii, 1071-3, reproduced in *Thackeray: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Geoffrey Tillotson and Donald Hawes (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), pp. 136-138, (p. 137).

hints, but does not have space to develop in the course of his short review, these threads of recollection unify the fictional and factual elements of the novel which have a rough correspondence with the public and domestic. Nostalgic memory, generated by Thackeray's version of the 'mediocre hero' elevated to the position of narrator, helps to unify disparate strands of the plot. Henry Esmond's memories are integral to both the structure and tone of the novel. It is, as Lewes argues, 'to show us some reflected image of the time that the book is written', but this is achieved through the memories of one man whose keenest focus is inevitably his own experience.⁴⁷

Henry Esmond frequently returns to the touch-stone idea that the period he describes is narrated through a lens of fond remembrance. This novel is not only an account of eighteenth-century life, but of the protagonist's own boyhood and youth. On a number of occasions, Esmond breaks from the ostensible subject of his narrative to remark on the memories which have shaped and coloured them. For instance, he exclaims '[h]ow those trivial incidents and words, the landscape and sunshine, and the group of people smiling and talking, remain fixed on the memory!' (*HE*, p. 20) and elsewhere punctuates his descriptions with parenthetical remarks such as '(will he ever forget them)?' (*HE*, p.99). Thackeray adopts certain aspects of Scott's 'wavering' heroes who are 'never actors, but always acted upon' and draws out their implicit nostalgic perspective on the events they witness, and sometimes narrate.⁴⁸ By imposing the timescale of a single lifetime on to accounts of turbulent periods of history, Thackeray weaves a sense of loss and longing into his treatment of real historical events. There are implicitly at least two timescales at work in this novel. The most obvious retrospect is historical and premised on the reader's own perspective in relation to the action of the novel but this historical narrative is filtered through an autobiographical retrospect. The tone with which the story of the life is told becomes inextricably tangled with the narrative of larger historical events. Memory, then, becomes an aesthetic principle in these novels and not a

⁴⁷ Lewes, 'Thackeray's New Novel' in *Thackeray: The Critical Heritage*, p. 136.

⁴⁸ Scott, 'An unsigned review', *Quarterly Review*, reproduced in *Scott: The Critical Heritage*, p. 115.

separable narrative strand, as Lukács seems to suggest; memory is the way the history is written and not a superficial ornament to, or division from, a supposedly authoritative historical text.

Not only does Esmond recount his memories, but he also explicitly signposts moments when these recollections shape his narrative. Sometimes this takes the form of extended set-piece description such as the 'birth right' passage (discussed below), and on other occasions it is noted with simple but poignant remarks like '[h]e is old now who recalls you' (*HE*, p. 173). The text is peppered with reminders of longing and regret. These characters are not merely transparent vessels for Thackeray's interpretation of events but shape and colour the stories they mediate; their perspective on historical events, I argue, is inevitably influenced by the nostalgic tone they adopt within what are, ostensibly, autobiographies.

The scaffold provided by memory in *Henry Esmond* is striking and extensive. At regular intervals throughout the novel, we are prompted to consider this historical novel in relation to the autobiographical language in which it is written. Instances of this explicit signposting include: 'He will remember to his life's end the delights of those days.' (*HE*, p.31); 'Tis forty years since Mr Esmond witnessed those scenes, but they remain as fresh in his memory as on the day when he first saw them as a young man' (*HE*, p.199); 'He remembers, and must to his dying day, the thoughts and tears of that long night' (*HE*, p.70); and 'He sees them now (will he ever forget them?) as they used to sit together of the summer evenings – the two golden heads over the page – the child's little hand and the mother's beating the time, with their voices rising and falling in unison' (*HE*, p.99). Elsewhere he pauses to reflect on the narrative potential of memory, even suggesting that the importance of some events can only be established in retrospect. Esmond reflects that:

There is scarce any thoughtful man or woman, I suppose, but can look back upon his course of past life, and remember some point, trifling as it may have seemed at the time of occurrence, which has nevertheless turned and altered his whole career. (*HE*, p.132)

Sometimes these nods to nostalgic recollection might seem little more than superficial attempts to maintain the fictional framework of Esmond's autobiographical writing, but in this instance it is made clear that Thackeray means us to understand memory as a fundamental and structuring

element of his narrative. These narrating characters aren't just insipid ciphers; they interfere, consciously or otherwise, in the stories they narrate. Memory here is imagined to have almost a structural property within the novel. It can even reorder events in the light of subsequent experience. Given the two layers of retrospects which, as we have established, this novel not only uses but repeatedly signposts; the above reflection raises important questions about voice and vantage point in personal and public histories.

The capacity for memory to shape narrative is given especial prominence in the 'birth right' scene in which a tile depicting the story of Jacob and Esau is described as a negligible detail despite its obvious pertinence. After Esmond has been handed proof that his birth was legitimate, information which entitles him to the Castlewood title and estate, he burns the paper in a gesture of loyalty to Frank, the current holder of the title, and the family that had all but adopted him. The recollection of this important event in his autobiography prompts Esmond to reflect again on the nature of his own memory:

There was a fire in the room, where the cloths were drying for the baths, and there lay a heap in a corner, saturated with the blood of my dear lord's body. Esmond went to the fire, and threw the paper into it. 'Twas a great chimney with glazed Dutch tiles. How we remember such trifles in such awful moments! – the scrap of the book that we have read in a great grief – the taste of that last dish that we have eaten before a duel or some such supreme meeting or parting. On the Dutch tiles at the bagnio was a rude picture representing Jacob in hairy gloves, cheating Isaac of Esau's birthright. The burning paper lighted it up (*HE*, p.162)

This passage purports to weave circumstantial detail within the memory of particular events in an almost Wordsworthian chain of memory. Thackeray, or, more appropriately, Esmond, explains this scene as a surprising and inexplicable conjunction of images and emotions brought together by the operations of memory. The way this episode of memory is framed leaves little doubt that this is, on one level at least, intended to be read as a genuine instance of personal recollection. It is perhaps true, however, that the nested perspectives of autobiographical fiction allow for a degree of ambiguity; Esmond's account – however guileless – does not necessarily include everything that Thackeray meant to say. These layers of meaning can coexist within the novel without either dominating or negating the other. Memory operates in two ways here; it is both a narrative structure, as Thackeray writes it, and a personal experience of recollection with no conscious

ulterior motives, as Esmond relates it. It is both an isolated experience which refers only to itself as a poignant moment of recollection *and* a narrative trope which refers outwards to the structure of the novel as a whole. In an important way, this section has two authors: for one memory is his theme (Esmond), for the other it provides his narrative with its form (Thackeray).

Nicholas Dames has remarked that this passage is expressly 'non-nostalgic'. He suggests that because the image concerns the story of Jacob and Esau the 'trifle' recollected here is too pertinent to the scene at hand to be termed involuntary. If it is not involuntary, according to Dames's terms, it cannot be nostalgic. As this thesis has established, this is an anachronistic and arbitrary definition which prioritises recent meanings of the word over the older form with which Thackeray was evidently familiar. Dames also places nostalgia in direct opposition to associationism despite the fact, as I established in my introduction (and will continue to explore in the course of chapter 2), the 'Swiss disease' was frequently used to illustrate an extreme reaction of psychological association. Therefore, the critic insists, it can only be read as a contrived literary device intended to develop the themes of the novel. Of course, that is exactly what it is because, despite its adoption of characteristics of autobiography, *Henry Esmond* is a novel. Dames would only allow this to be an instance of nostalgic memory if the image on the tile bore no relation to the event it coincides with. The critic insists on a level of psychological realism that is inconsistent both with the period and the genre of this book. This argument, moreover, relies on a confusion between Thackeray and Esmond's divergent positions, one as memoirist and the other as novelist. It is both a literary contrivance *and* an instance of nostalgic recollection. This discrepancy might be thought of as the difference between Thackeray's narrative and Esmond's experience; it is simultaneously spontaneous within the fiction and coherent within the whole on the level of narrative structure. For Thackeray the tile bears a weight of symbolism while, for Esmond, the text's other 'author', what he describes is a memory which occurs to him just as he says, as a 'trifle' that merged in his mind with an 'awful moment'.

The layers of significance within this single allusion undermine the argument that it is too narratively useful to be a representation of nostalgic memory. The question of Jacob's birth right

speaks directly to Esmond's refusal of his own. Jacob is also, however, prevented from marrying Laban's daughter Rachel for want of a dowry, an echo which Dames does not mention. This allusion forms one of many narrative echoes – including, for example, Esmond's adoption of the pseudonym 'Oedipus' in his faked *Spectator* article addressed to 'Jocasta' (*HE*, p. 344) – which forecast the conclusion in which Harry marries Rachel. We are prepared for this ending throughout by frequent, more-or-less explicit echoes and repetitions. Despite this, Eliot claimed to be surprised by this outcome and called *Esmond* 'the most uncomfortable book you can imagine' because 'the hero is in love with the daughter all through the book, and marries the mother at the end.'⁴⁹ This supplementary meaning can only be read backwards once the conclusion is already known. The Jacob and Esau tale participates in this scheme of literary echoes and allusions but this is not straightforwardly a contrary strain of memory which precludes nostalgic tropes: it is part of a broader pattern which mirrors the novel's conclusion. One central problem with Dames's argument is that, while association was an important nineteenth-century psychological theory, it is also a basic element in the creation of narrative coherence.

That this scene can be read as simple memory as well as narrative contrivance is reinforced by Thackeray's use of similar explanations elsewhere. The narrator insists on the illogical associations of memory elsewhere in the novel. He reflects, for instance:

'Tis strange how that scene and the sound of the fountain remain fixed on the memory of a man who has beheld a hundred sights of splendour, and danger too, of which he has kept no account (*HE*, p.149)

The play that Esmond attends before his planned confrontation with Mohun, a comedy called *Love in a Wood*, was ever afterwards remembered 'with a kind of terror', as was the actress who played the lead (*HE*, p. 156). It is counterintuitive to assume that Thackeray would make unambiguous statements of his desired effect if that was the reverse of his intention. Whether or not these attempts ring true to a scholar in the twenty first century is beside the point; Thackeray makes his intentions quite clear and, critical nit-picking aside, he achieves a sense of a narrative formed

⁴⁹ George Eliot, 'Letter to Mr. and Mrs. Charles Bray, 13 November 1852', in *Thackeray: The Critical Heritage*, p. 151, (p. 151).

through the associations of nostalgic memory in these scenes. Dames's position suggests that he considers the trope superfluous or extra to the texts he describes and Thackeray's frequent statements that memory is a structuring principle in this novel are simply ignored. Within the context of a novel which is firmly rooted in tropes of memory, this passage deserves closer attention than Dames's reading, intent on proving its irrelevance, troubles to give it.

As Henri-A Talon has noted, the memorative tropes used in a novel reflect, not only the psychological processes of recollection, but also adhere to and interact with particular expectations of the genre. The 'memory' represented in an autobiography, even a fictional one, does not necessarily follow the same logic as any naturalistic process of memory:

A novel that is presented as an autobiography is supposed to have no other plot than the design of the life it aims at telling faithfully. The old man who yields to what Goethe calls the happiness of seeing the connection between the end and the beginning of one's existence does not let himself be carried away by the usual wayward current of memories. His narrative does not follow the dynamic resurgence of events in the mind; it regulates its flow in accordance with chronology and a personal need for clarification [...] Psychological and historical time is the very stuff from which [Thackeray's] book is cut.⁵⁰

This merging of psychological with historical time obviously has far reaching implications within a historical novel. Just as obviously, a fictional autobiography is an artificial construct which creates an approximation of memory while also threading together a coherent narrative.



These novels are also shaped by their narrator's memories through their frequent omissions and distortions. The reliance of these novels on an underlying structure of personal memory is evident in their narrators meandering route through the plot and their occasional lapses of accuracy or recollection which Thackeray, and his various fictional 'editors', are quick to point out. Barry Lyndon, in particular, is a dubiously reliable narrator who repeatedly misremembers events to the exasperation of his disapproving editor. When, for instance, Lyndon describes a house he has visited as 'a miserable old tumble-down place', the editor interjects with the reminder that '[i]n another part of his memoir Mr Barry will be found to describe this mansion as one of the most

⁵⁰ Henri-A. Talon, 'Time and Memory in Thackeray's *Henry Esmond*', *Review of English Studies*, New Series, 13, (1962), 147-156, (p. 147).

splendid palaces in Europe'.⁵¹ These editorial corrections, or in some cases, openly hostile criticisms, establish the idea that Lyndon bends the truth according to his own self-aggrandising agenda. He filters every snippet of information that does or does not appear in this memoir; his consciousness is the lens through which the historical narrative is experienced by the reader and, as the preface suggests, he is by no means scrupulously honest. In some instances this might take the form of deliberate deception but elsewhere these lapses represent something akin to a simple misremembering of events. These unreliable narrators represent only one of many possible ways of recollecting events; they draw attention to the prismic nature of historical record, made-up as it must be, of numerous – slightly different or very different – points of view. These lapses might be brought about by self-justifying distortions or omissions, but once the principle of an unreliable narrator has been established, the reader is made increasingly aware that the entire narrative is filtered by Lyndon's or Esmond's dubious memory of events. It is one way of making a supposedly unobtrusive narrator conspicuous; we are not allowed to forget that these narrators are as much a hindrance to our understanding as they are a help. The editor's commentary highlights the narrator's dual role as both a barrier to understanding and our sole point of access to the novel.

The Duke of Marlborough is the subject of one such bias, as his descendant Winston Churchill was eager to point out and correct in his biography of the Duke.⁵² This contrary interpretation is, however, already built into Thackeray's novel. Esmond reflects that:

A word of kindness or acknowledgement, or a single glance of approbation, might have changed Esmond's opinion of the great man; and instead of a satire, which his pen cannot help writing, who knows but that the humble historian might have taken the other side of panegyric? We have but to change the point of view, and the greatest action looks mean; as we turn the perspective-glass, and a giant appears a pigmy. You may describe, but who can tell whether your sight is clear or not, or your means of information accurate? Had the great man said but a word of kindness to the small one (as he would have stepped out of his gilt chariot to shake hands with Lazarus in rags and sores, if he thought Lazarus could have been of any service to him), no doubt Esmond would have fought for him with pen and sword to the utmost of his might; but my lord the lion did not want master mouse at this moment, and so Muscipulus went off and nibbled in opposition. (*HE*, p. 244)

⁵¹ William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon, Esq.*, ed. by Andrew Sanders (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 8.

⁵² Winston Churchill, *Marlborough: His Life and Times* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), p. 17.

Esmond's descendants, who feature more fully in *The Virginians* (1857-59), 'edit' his autobiography and remark in a footnote that:

Our grandfather's hatred of the Duke of Marlborough appears all through his account of these campaigns. He always persisted that the duke was the greatest traitor and soldier history ever told of: and declared that he took bribes on all hands during the war (*HE*, p. 293)

These prejudices, which are scrupulously flagged, both by the fictitious author and his fictitious editor so that they do not represent a real instance of misinformation, make the narrator especially visible. These moments of reflection on the limitations of a subjective account of historical events seem to serve little purpose other than to remind us that our narrator relies almost exclusively on his own partial, and potentially prejudiced, memory of events.

These footnotes, which occur occasionally but inconsistently throughout the novel, serve to maintain the fictional framework within which the autobiography has been written and act as a commentary on its methods and limitations. This particular interjection reinforces evidence in the body of the text that Henry Esmond does not only mediate this narrative, but shapes and distorts it according to the limitations of memory, personal interpretations and enmities. Personal histories interact with the public one and shape the course of the narrative, subverting the framework of a 'grand narrative' of historical events. Though to an extent, the fictional author's presence can be taken for granted within an autobiographical novel, Thackeray's decision to state and restate this complication suggests a desire to emphasise his narrator's fallibility. In this he echoes and adapts the convention of the *Waverley* hero.



Henry Esmond is a 'wavering hero' who vacillates between religious and political allegiance. He is also a practised and self-conscious equivocator. Even on a linguistic level, Esmond is a slippery character who knows how to speak without committing himself to any one, clear point of view. The first character to introduce an explicit discussion of misleading, though not outright dishonest, narrative practices is the Catholic priest, Father Holt (arguably a caricatured product of Victorian anti-Catholicism) who converts Henry and tutors him in the idea of equivocation. This becomes a

habit within the narrative – even if it is one which he highlights and discusses – and aligns Henry Esmond with the Waverley character. This habit of speech is paralleled in his actions and the allegiances he forges and quickly dissolves. For instance, Esmond remarks that, ‘midway in his University career’:

he fell to reading for the profession to which worldly prudence rather than inclination called him, and was perfectly bewildered in theological controversy. In the course of his reading (which was neither pursued with that seriousness or that devout mind which such a study requires), the youth found himself, at the end of one month, a Papist, and was about to proclaim his faith; the next month a Protestant, with Chillingworth; and the third a sceptic, with Hobbes and Bayle (*HE*, p.111)

This resembles Waverley’s early education, which is perhaps what fits him to flit between camps so easily. Waverley’s early reading is as voracious and undirected as Don Quixote’s:

Edward's power of imagination and love of literature, although the former was vivid and the latter ardent, were so far from affording a remedy to this peculiar evil, that they rather inflamed and increased its violence. The library at Waverley-Honour, a large Gothic room, with double arches and a gallery, contained such a miscellaneous and extensive collection of volumes as had been assembled together, during the course of two hundred years, by a family which had been always wealthy, and inclined, of course, as a mark of splendour, to furnish their shelves with the current literature of the day, without much scrutiny or nicety of discrimination. Throughout this ample realm Edward was permitted to roam at large.⁵³

Like his literary forbear, Esmond lacks any firm educational grounding which might make him more resistant to persuasion later in life. He does not form any lasting convictions of his own. If he is tutored in anything it is in remaining ideologically flexible and economical with the truth. Thackeray, then, takes some characteristics of the ‘Waverley’ hero but exaggerates these to such an extent that the ‘mediocrity’ of his heroes becomes an obstruction rather than a way to render them almost transparent mediators.

Valet-de-chambre

In *Henry Esmond* the narrator remembers that:

The French wit saith that a hero is none to his *valet-de-chambre*, and it required less quick eyes than my lady’s little page was naturally endowed with, to see that she had many qualities by no means heroic, however much Mrs Tusher might flatter and coax her. (*HE*, p.41)

In *The Paris Sketchbook*, Thackeray illustrates a short piece entitled ‘Meditations on Versailles’ with an image of ‘Ludovicus Rex’, grandly, and presumably ironically, subtitled ‘An Historical Study’ (fig.

⁵³ Scott, Waverley, p. 13.

4). This image resembles a diagram of evolutionary progress which separates the king from his robes in order to illustrate the role of superficial cultural circumstances in the creation of so-called historical 'heroes' or, as Hegel had it, 'world historical individuals'.⁵⁴ These formulations, which recur throughout Thackeray's historical fiction, test the boundaries of the 'hero' in fact and in fiction. I want to interrogate the role played by nostalgic memory in the development of this anti-heroic theme in Thackeray's historical fiction as it relates to his adaptation of Scott's model of the mediocre, spectator-hero. These two aspects, I suggest, are intertwined.

Ian Ousby has outlined Thackeray's engagement with Carlyle's arguments about the role of particular individuals in the motion of historical processes. He summarises their interaction around the image of the *valet de chambre*, a figure who arguably has his origins in Montaigne's 'Du Repentir', a provenance which Carlyle nods to in his allusion to a 'witty Frenchman' and Thackeray to 'the French wit':

Speculation about what great men seem like to their servants has a long intricate history in the literature of heroism, including Carlyle and Thackeray's own writings. Its origin, at least for the purposes of nineteenth-century thought, lies in Montaigne's essay 'Du Repentir', where he remarks: 'Peu d'hommes ont esté admirez par leur domestiques'. In the eighteenth century Montaigne's saying was organised into an aphorism by Madame Cornuel, as quoted in the letters of Mademoiselle Aissé: 'Il n'y avoit point de héros pour les valets de chambre.' By the nineteenth century the idea that no man was a hero to his valet had achieved proverbial status, though it was still often attributed to Montaigne, and attracted the disagreement of Hegel and Goethe: 'but not because the former is no hero, but because the latter is a valet'.⁵⁵

This proverbial *valet du chambre* overlaps and supplements Scott's 'mediocre' hero while integrating these novelistic or aesthetic concerns within a recent historiographical controversy. This figure provides a point of contact between the practical and aesthetic purpose of the Waverley hero

⁵⁴ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, ed. and trans. by Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011).

⁵⁵ Ian Ousby, 'Carlyle, Thackeray and Victorian Heroism', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 12, Heroes and the Heroic Special Number (1982), 152-168, (p. 163). Quoting from: Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, edited by Jean Plattard, 3 vols (Paris, 1946), III, 34; *Lettres de Mademoiselle Aissé à Madame Calandrini*, edited by M.J. Ravenel, 5th edn (Paris, 1846), p. 161; Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. by J. Sibree (New York, 1956), p. 32.

begun by Scott but extended by figures like William Hazlitt, and a more theoretical approach to history which found its expression in the work of historians like Carlyle:

We will also take the liberty to deny altogether that of the witty Frenchman, that no man is a Hero to his valet-de-chambre. Or if so, it is not the Hero's blame, but the Valet's: that his soul, namely, is a mean *valet*-soul! He expects his Hero to advance in royal stage-trappings, with measured step, trains borne behind him, trumpets sounding before him. It should stand rather, No man can be a *Grand-Monarque* to his valet-de-chambre. Strip your Louis-Quatorze of his king-gear, and there is nothing but a poor, forked radish with a head fantastically carved; - admirable to no valet. The Valet does not know a Hero when he sees him! Alas, no, it requires a kind of *Hero* to do that; -- and one of the world's wants, in *this* as in other senses, is for the most part want of such.⁵⁶

Thackeray presents this 'valet' character as an eye-witness in the model of the Waverley hero but gives him an additional iconoclastic agenda by drawing on contemporary historiographical discussion about the role of 'great men' in history. The semantic interplay, but imperfect overlap, between 'hero' as protagonist and 'hero' as remarkable individual, opens the way for aesthetic interests to pun on historiographical themes and vice versa; the oxymoronic 'mediocre hero', therefore, opens the way for the historical novel to play on its own fledgling conventions to interact with broader historiographical debates.

II. GREAT MEN

Carlyle's *On Heroes and Hero-Worship* was one of the most important texts on the hero in history written in the nineteenth century. As Juliette Atkinson has noted, Carlyle's book generated a plethora of competing definitions. 'The publication in 1841 of Thomas Carlyle's lectures *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* stimulated attempts by other men and women to share their own definition of heroism'. 'Newspapers and periodicals', she notes, 'frequently reported lectures on the topic'.⁵⁷ The notional 'Great Man' was a recurrent idea in the period and these themes inevitably bled into the historical novel, especially when it undertook to describe real historical individuals who already had a place in public discourse. Scott was acutely aware of this issue as I

⁵⁶ Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero Worship*, pp. 169-70.

⁵⁷ Juliette Atkinson, *Victorian Biography Reconsidered: A Study of Nineteenth-Century 'Hidden' Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

have already noted in my introductory discussion of the classification of historical fiction. He conceived this as primarily a technical problem, and discussed it in some detail:

in my better efforts, while I conducted my story through the agency of historical personages and by connecting it with historical incidents, I have endeavoured to weave them pretty closely together, and in future I will study this more. Must not let the background eclipse the principal figures – the frame overpower the picture.⁵⁸

Scott was concerned with the due proportions of real and imagined characters in historical fiction. That Thackeray's novels had such a wealth of pre-existent associations to draw upon, informs and enriches their engagement with the tricky territory of fictionalising real individuals within, at least partially, fictional situations.

'Hero-worship' was a peculiarly Victorian preoccupation, a fact which is asserted by Walter Houghton's *The Victorian Frame of Mind* which dedicates a lengthy chapter to a discussion of this theme. Here especially, the historical novel was able to play on the clash between the real and the fictional in the oxymoronic genre of historical fiction. Anti-heroism must have a greater impact in a narrative where a relatively simple and direct play on words can deflate the dignity of the 'hero', a character who was becoming a revered 'type' in contemporary historical and historiographical discourse as a real force in history. Thackeray touched on this connection in the manuscript fragment, 'About these young people – leave them alone' (transcribed in appendix 2:2) in which he writes:

We change Bob[?] we change: and I for my part am not going to say that/ my time was a better time than yours is – on the contrary, I believe the/ world improves and grows more natural every day. I believe that there are/ infinitely more gentlemen now than there were in the old days – a better education for all/ a better understanding between high & lows – a great deal of toadyism no/ doubt, and of consequent arrogance <and> upon the part of the persons so/ flattered – but toadyism is <not> no longer a system, nor is it your duty to/ admire his rank or my lord a man who has a handle to his name/ (as the phrase is) at every instant, as your grandfather would probably/ have done.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Walter Scott, *Journal*, p. 275.

⁵⁹ W.M. Thackeray, 'About these young people – leave them alone'. Holograph n.d. m.s. (1. p), Drawings Group 5, The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library., New York Public Library, p. 8. Transcribed in full in appendix 2:2.

The idea of simple or automatic hierarchy was, as we can see, anathema to Thackeray's notion of etiquette and social justice. This incomplete passage suggests that the novelist associated the idea of a venerated few with his contemporaries' apprehension of history and progress.

One of the most developed instances of this clash between public and private men in *Henry Esmond* occurs, as I have mentioned, when the protagonist meets the Duke of Marlborough. This encounter generates an array of stylistic and thematic implications. As Esmond narrates it, this encounter plays out as a clash between expectation and experience:

So it was, however, that a young gentleman, who, in the eyes of his family, and in his own, doubtless, was looked upon as a consummate hero, found that the great hero of the day took no more notice of him than of the smallest drummer in his grace's army. (*HE*, p. 244)

In this telling passage we see a clash of definitions and genres in action. A 'Great Man' comes into contact with the 'mediocre hero' of historical fiction. Far from attempting to smooth over any disjuncture between fictional and factual elements of his novel, Thackeray engineers his plot in such a way that they are brought into direct and illuminating conflict and the Great Man is shown face-to-face with his recording *valet du chambre*.

This interaction is important, not only for the representation of these particular historical individuals, but also for the construction of the novel. Critics frequently describe the interaction of different hierarchies of characters in the historical novel in terms of landscape, in which characters are either placed in the foreground or recede to the background. Frederic Jameson, for example, has succinctly summarised Lukács's argument, with the suggestion that:

[t]he great historical figures, the real leading actors of history, will be central in drama (Macbeth, Wallenstein, Galileo) because the dramatic collision is a far more concentrated and heightened one; whereas the novel, which aims at a total picture of the historical background, can only tolerate such figures in secondary, episodic appearances, for it is only in such a distant, secondary way that they appear in our everyday lives, in our own lived experience.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Frederic Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 194.

This unusually ordinary protagonist provides a relatable foreground presence while ‘great historical figures’ can be glimpsed only fleetingly in the background. This is one way, Jameson suggests, in which these novels emulate the experience of ‘our everyday lives’ in history. The argument that the representation of character reflects actual experience is particularly telling when it is considered that, as I have argued, they are frequently approached from the perspective of a relatively unimportant individual and described in language coloured by memory. The logical extension of Jameson’s argument suggests the role played by nostalgic memory in the representation of character in these novels. The memoir provides a way of taking the ‘mediocre hero’ or *valet de chambre* and infusing the entire narrative with his perspective. Because he is an autobiographer, this ‘hero’ is not simply one character among many others but the voice that inflects the entire story. This approach is implicit in Scott’s creation of passive heroes, but Thackeray extends this method through his use of memoir, a genre which inevitably foregrounds the remembering narrator. It skews the perspective in order to make an ordinary man the centre of the action.

Thackeray, then, engages with Carlyle’s idea of heroes as a motivating force behind history or Hegel’s ‘world historical individuals’ through the absorption and adaptation of the Waverley hero into a nostalgic voice and vantage point. It offers a skewed but revelatory perspective on an old story, thus completing a sense of intricate intertextuality in which the novel we are reading is implicitly engaging with multiple other versions. The conversation between these radically different conceptions of historical narrative has interesting consequences within the historical novel, not least a proliferation of ‘ordinary’ or forgotten figures, as exemplified in Eliot’s invocation of Saint Theresa in *Middlemarch* or the unnamed spectre who features briefly in the prologue to *Romola*. This mournful recollection of people who have been left out of the history books is magnified in Thackeray’s memoiristic historical fiction into a gleeful counter-narrative to an assumed alternative and authoritative point of view. This alternative, I suggest, is created in part by a nostalgic perspective.

Battlefields

In *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray insists that ‘We do not claim to rank among the military novelists. Our place is with the non-combatants. When the decks are cleared for action we go below and wait

meekly'.⁶¹ Henry Esmond tells his grandson, who he imagines taking up the autobiography at some future date, that it is emphatically not a book of military history but only his autobiography, two genres which he seems to suggest are fundamentally incompatible (p. 265). Despite these assertions, Thackeray *does* frequently discuss military action and he merges it in revealing ways with the 'non-combatants' and the private or domestic sphere. Most revealingly for the present discussion, he brings about this merging through the nostalgic tropes of his autobiographer-narrators. The representation of military action becomes the focus for some of Thackeray's most explicit discussion of genre conventions in history writing. For instance, Esmond reflects in a characteristically faux-objective tone:

And now, having seen a great military march through a friendly country; the pomps and festivities of more than one German court; the severe struggle of a hotly-contested battle, and the triumph of victory; Mr Esmond beheld another part of military duty; our troops entering the enemy's territory, and putting all around them to fire and sword; burning farms, wasted fields, shrieking women, slaughtered sons and fathers, and drunken soldiery, cursing and carousing in the midst of tears, terror, and murder. Why does the stately Muse of History, that delights in describing the valour of heroes and the grandeur of conquest, leave out these scenes, so brutal, mean, and degrading, that yet form by far the greater part of the glory of war? (*HE*, p. 235)

This passage insists on accuracy and balance, qualities which it derives, or justifies at least, through reference to Esmond as an eye-witness who actually 'beheld' the scenes he describes. On a number of occasions, Esmond draws attention to his own limitation in narrating military escapades but, in order to do so, he frequently recounts the events alongside protestations of his inadequacy to describe them. In this way he supplements the objective narrative with a subjective account which, it is implied, would be considered inadequate in a traditional history in proportion to its truthfulness.

The following passage, for example, seems to be building to a crescendo, piling clause on clause with mounting excitement and an accumulation of breathless 'ands', but eventually dwindles out into a bathetic near miss with 'famous' events:

It was past midday when the attack began on our left, where Lord Cutts commanded, the bravest and the most beloved officer in the English army. And now, as if to make his experience in the war complete, our young aide decamp having seen two great armies

⁶¹ William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, ed. by John Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 361.

facing each other in line of battle, and had the honour of riding with orders from one end to the other of the line, came in for a not uncommon accompaniment of military glory, and was knocked on the head, along with many hundred [sic] of brave fellows, almost at the very commencement of this famous day of Blenheim. (*HE*, p. 238)

The novel's interaction with an implied official narrative is made explicit with the following statement:

But of this action there is little need to speak, as it hath been related in every *Gazette*, and talked of in every hamlet in the country. To return from it to the writer's private affairs, which here, in his old age, and at a distance, he narrates for his children who come after him. (*HE*, p. 270)

A certain overlap between public and private life is inevitable, and at times Thackeray's and Esmond's agendas or priorities of historical representation clash. The contribution which this novel makes to the already extensive public record is the recollection of private affairs in 'old age, and at a distance'. This is not only a difference of focus or perspective but of emotion and tone. These moments of commentary suggest striking echoes with Fabrizio's experiences at Waterloo in Stendhal's *The Charterhouse of Parma* in which the hero narrowly misses historical events because he is asleep, inattentive, drunk or in the wrong place at the wrong time. A representative line in Stendhal's novel tells us, 'He had remained a child upon one point only: had he seen a real battle? And, if so, was that battle Waterloo?'.⁶² It is a novel in which even the most historically concrete events become uncertain.

In Stendhal's novel, Fabrizio, an inveterate historical hero-worshipper, travels alone and against the advice of his friends to fight alongside Napoleon. Finding himself on the field of Waterloo, Fabrizio is more confused than gratified by his brush with history and its heroic prime-movers: he meets Marshal Ney but is mocked because he does not recognise him, and he is present when Napoleon rides by with a cohort of generals but is too drunk to pick him out from the crowd. The chapter headings 'The Guns of Waterloo' and 'An Army in Retreat' promise more than the glancing contact with events they actually describe: the guns are mostly distant and represented by clouds of white smoke and Fabrizio sleeps through the first stages of the retreat in the back of a

⁶² Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma* (1839), trans. by Margaret R.B. Shaw (London: Penguin, 1958), p. 58.

'little cart' tugged by an unwarlike 'trotting horse'.⁶³ Like Thackeray, Stendhal undercuts his heroes military exploits with bathetic details of everyday life and the chaos of real experience. Sometimes it seems as though Fabrizio is not only in the wrong place but also in the wrong genre of novel to participate fully in the events going on around him. The ordinary details of his experience, in which he gets drunk, falls asleep and is mocked or abandoned by his supposed comrades, is incongruous with his (and the reader's) romantic expectations.

A little later and having briefly re-joined the French army, Stendhal's hero is once again left alone in an empty field:

Our hero stood looking at the road. A short time before, three or four thousand people had been hastening along it, packed together like peasants in the tail of a procession. After the cry of 'Cossacks!' he saw precisely no one. The fugitives had thrown away shakos, muskets, sabres, etc. [...] He scanned the length of the road in both directions, and also the plain, but saw no trace of the Cossacks[...] He was absolutely alone in the middle of this plain which a short time back had been so crowded with people.⁶⁴

As Reilly puts it 'Surely Waterloo is the very stage of history; if history is not encountered here, where is it?' but Fabrizio continually has to ask what he is witnessing and where he is.⁶⁵ Despite his adoration for them, Fabrizio seldom recognises the famous men he encounters. As he puts it at one point, 'this is the first time I have been present at a battle. But is this one a real battle?'⁶⁶ For Fabrizio, history as experience is difficult to tally with history as narrative. In the official record the treatment of people and events is proportionate to their importance; stranded in a chaotic present-tense, Fabrizio is missing such a simple key to interpretation.

'History' repeatedly speeds by and Fabrizio misses it. Stendhal's historical novel plays on the interstices between decisive events and focuses on the people who populate these gaps in the historiographical narrative. Adam Mars-Jones has recently suggested that Stendhal's novel defamiliarises the too-familiar, over-processed story of Waterloo and creates a sense of immediacy

⁶³ Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, p. 66.

⁶⁴ Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, pp. 76-77.

⁶⁵ Reilly, *Shadowtime*, p. 8.

⁶⁶ Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, p. 60.

and unpredictability that is difficult to recapture in the historical novel, a genre which is characterised by hindsight and second-thoughts. ‘Hindsight’, he says, ‘is the way we make sense of the world, and the events and impressions of the morning are reworked any number of times before evening, with the result that any historical novel is bound to be as processed as spray-on cheese.’ In Stendhal’s novel we are returned, Mars-Jones suggests, to a narrative point-of-view ‘where things haven’t happened yet and Waterloo is just a place name’.⁶⁷ There is an assumption here that tense is the most important point at issue. There is, however, a more varied play on narrative perspective at work here. Stendhal, for instance, does adopt a conventional third-person, past-tense and only implies by a sort of free indirect discourse that what we are reading is Fabrizio’s unhampered perception of events. The choice of past or present tense does not, in itself, simply define the narrative perspective in historical fiction. Thackeray, as this chapter shows, achieves a similarly tangential effect through an emphatically retrospective point-of-view. It substitutes the confusions of memory for the ambiguities of present experience.

Stendhal’s account of Waterloo creates a sense that Fabrizio’s vague experience is inevitably swamped by the louder voice of formalised history. Later we are told that ‘For the first time in his life he found some pleasure in reading; he was always hoping to find in the newspapers, or in published accounts of the battle, some description or other which would enable him to identify the ground he had covered with Marshal Ney’s escort, and later with the other general.’⁶⁸ A similar recourse to other accounts to verify personal experience can be found in Esmond’s stories about his wartime escapades. Esmond tells us that ‘this is writ away from books and Europe’ though he does attempt to check the location of a ‘little river, the Cahine, I think ’twas called’ and, he informs us, the ‘only map the writer hath of these scenes of his youth, bears no mark of this little stream’ (*HE*, p. 324). Esmond sets his account apart from ‘books’ but has nevertheless consulted them or tried to. Throughout Stendhal’s novel, Fabrizio’s narration implies the presence of competing

⁶⁷ Adam Mars-Jones, ‘Peroxide and Paracetamol’, *London Review of Books*, 35:17 (2013), 21-22, (p. 21).

⁶⁸ Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, p. 88.

voices. Like Thackeray's novels, this is a narrative point-of-view defined by an almost parodic play on implied intertexts.

The clash between the present experience of any one individual and the collective, concretised narrative that forms in retrospect is a subject that interested Tolstoy. He dwelt on this problem at length in his retrospective notes on *War and Peace*. The novelist reflects that the 'real', confused story in many parts which catches the artist's attention is anathema to the historian's desire for order and precision. Ask a soldier to describe a battle in its immediate aftermath, he suggests, and he will give you a true but partial account; wait only a little longer and he will have internalised a smoothed-over, shared version of events. Interestingly, Tolstoy implies a connection between narrative perspective and the notion that 'Great Men' steer historical events in his close juxtaposition of these two thematic concerns in his numbered notes (5 and 6 respectively). Tolstoy's argument that 'Great Men' do not direct historical events segues into a discussion of the multiplicity of historical experience and potentially, therefore, in historical narrative. Battlefields offer a space in which the metaphorical ranks of historical characters can literally be shown to jostle together in one place. This is true for Stendhal's representation of Waterloo, Tolstoy's Borodino and Thackeray's description of Blenheim (*HE*, pp. 238-9) and Cadiz (*HE*, pp. 200-201).

Tolstoy's remarks on 'the divergence between my descriptions of historical events and the accounts of historians' are particularly illuminating. This separation is, he says, 'not accidental but inevitable' because the historian and the artist have 'two completely different objects'. Tolstoy draws attention to the discrepancy between report and event:

Make the rounds of a whole army right after a battle, even on the second or third day, before the reports have been written, and ask all the soldiers, the senior and junior officers, how it went; they will tell you what all these men experienced and saw, and you will form a majestic, complex, infinitely diverse, oppressive, and vague impression; and from no one, least of all the commander in chief, will you learn how it all went. But after two or three days, the reports begin to be submitted, talkers begin telling how what they did not see happened; finally, a general account is put together, and the general opinion of the army is put together from this account. It is a relief to everyone to exchange his doubts and questions for this false but clear and always flattering picture. After a month or two,

question a man who took part in the battle – you no longer feel in his story that raw material of life which had been there before; his account follows the report.⁶⁹

Real experience, we are shown, is washed out of the record that ends up being adopted as ‘true’. This seems almost a direct gloss on Fabrizio’s experiences at Waterloo and his subsequent attempts to reconcile his confused experience with written reports. It also highlights the extent to which the historical novel could use the idea of characters or narrators as witnesses to explore the intuitive disjuncture between history as narrative and history as experienced event.

In *The Philosophy of History*, delivered as a series of lectures in 1830-31, Hegel noted the dual meaning of the word ‘history’:

In our language the term *History* unites the objective with the subjective side and denotes quite as much the *historia rerum gestarum*, as the *res gestae* themselves: on the other hand it comprehends not less what has *happened*, than the *narration* of what has happened. This union of the two meanings we must regard as a higher order than mere outward accident; we must suppose historical narrations to have appeared contemporaneously with historical deeds and events.⁷⁰

This is self-evidently true in English as well as in German. Two meanings are compressed into one word and one space of time so that the experience and the record are perceived to occur ‘contemporaneously’. By filtering his historical novels through an autobiographical narrative, Thackeray highlights this gap between history-as-event and history-as-report by placing the protagonist and his memories in the otherwise imperceptible space between the two definitions. This split is brought about by the merging of autobiography with fictitious historical narrative and it is widened and accentuated by a persistent return to the written reports against which it is defined by contrast. Lukács criticised Thackeray for failing to properly segment public from private history in his novels. As we have seen, this blurring of genre boundaries might be expected to obscure the disjuncture between record and event by making everything that happens immediate to the experience of the recording protagonist. Thackeray, as this chapter shows, creates characters who are unreliable, self-interested and who remember events at a distance of many years; he uses autobiography to obstruct rather than reveal and, as such, holds events separate from narrative. His

⁶⁹ Leo Tolstoy, ‘A Few Words Apropos of the Book *War and Peace*’, *War and Peace*, trans. by Richard Pevear and Larissa Lolokhonsky (London: Vintage, 2007), pp. 1219, 1220.

⁷⁰ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. by J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), p. 60.

heroes might seem to obstruct our view of historical events but this other, 'authoritative' narrative nevertheless exerts a gravitational pull on his alternative representation. An, arguably impossible, 'objective' historical record is an implied intertext with which the unmitigated subjectivity of Thackeray's protagonists interacts.

This is a richly allusive subject and one of the major themes around which discussions of the 'Muse of History' centres in this novel. Thackeray uses these recollections of battle scenes to draw attention to omissions from the historical record and the literary conventions he had inherited. One of the most persistent tropes within this discussion is the idea of Esmond's first-hand experience:

And now, having seen a great military march through a friendly country; the pomps and festivities of more than one German court; the severe struggle of a hotly-contested battle, and the triumph of victory; Mr Esmond beheld another part of military duty; our troops entering the enemy's territory, and putting all around them to fire and sword; burning farms, wasted fields, shrieking women, slaughtered sons and fathers, and drunken soldiery, cursing and carousing in the midst of tears, terror, and murder. Why does the stately Muse of History, that delights in describing the valour of heroes and the grandeur of conquest, leave out these scenes, so brutal, mean, and degrading, that yet form by far the greater part of the glory of war? (*HE*, p. 235)

Here a narrative of military action is split into two unequal halves, the first of which ends with 'the triumph of victory' and the second of which describes less praiseworthy, and less frequently discussed, aspects of war. This passage insists on accuracy and balance, qualities which it derives, or justifies, at least, by referring to Esmond as an eye-witness who actually 'beheld' the scenes he describes. It could be argued that such passages, and this one in particular, are explicitly anti-nostalgic because they seem designed to expose idealisation. They do, however, reinstate individual memory as a key to retrieving and relating historical events in an approach reminiscent of Tolstoy asking soldiers for their story immediately after battle. References to the 'muse of history', play on the traditions that form the inter-textual backdrop for Thackeray's own historical fiction. His invocation of these traditions draws attention to perceived misrepresentations or gaps in pre-established narratives, historical and literary.

In *Henry Esmond* this revelatory dynamic between ordinary heroes and 'Great Men' is both demonstrated in scenes of military action and explicitly discussed by Thackeray/Esmond through

reported conversations with Addison and Steele. After a description of the profits made by pillaging soldiers at Vigo, for example, Esmond remarks that it ‘was a bad business, though Mr Addison did sing its praises in Latin. That honest gentleman’s muse had an eye to the main chance; and I doubt whether she saw much inspiration in the losing side’ (*HE*, p. 202). This is one example in a recurrent discussion of and with eighteenth-century authors: they memorialise the winners and represent a type of discourse in which only the powerful are represented. This conversation is continued with Esmond’s eye-witness account of Blenheim being overwhelmed by the poet’s glorifying imagination of events. As Esmond puts it, ‘I admire your art: the murder of the campaign is done to military music [...] Oh, sir, had you made the campaign, believe me, you never would have sung it so’ (*HE*, p. 255). Stress is placed on the distance between record and experience through an invocation of the literary forebears with whom Thackeray’s narrative implicitly engages. Esmond’s jumbled memory of the battle he witnessed is placed in opposition to this sanitised and coldly distant version of events. As Richard Terdiman has put it, ‘memory [...] is inherently contestatory’.⁷¹

Lukács interprets this conversation as an opportunity to ‘expose contemporary apologetics’ and to set-out an aesthetic approach to the diminishment of great men through a memoiristic point-of-view:

[Thackeray], therefore, sees the dilemma in the portrayal of historical events as a choice between public pathos and private manners, the glorification of the one or the realistic depiction of the other. Thus when his hero, Henry Esmond, telling his own story – at the turn of the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries – polemically counters the official histories with the novels of Fielding, when in a discussion with Addison he defends the rights of realism in describing war against poetic embellishment, his language – the language of the memoir – captures the tone of the period beautifully, yet at the same time it expresses Thackeray’s own artistic convictions. The basis of this style is the exposure of false heroism, in particular the reputed heroism fostered by historical legend.⁷²

This idea of separation, between ‘public pathos’ on one hand and ‘private manners’ on the other, requires us to think of these two elements of history writing as incommensurable and mutually

⁷¹ Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 20.

⁷² Lukács, *Historical Novel*, p. 202.

exclusive. As I have argued, this central, narrating character does not replace broader historiographical concerns with the trivial details of private life but instead opens an unfamiliar perspective on familiar people and events through the operations of memory. Lukács acknowledges one aspect of this approach, suggesting that the memoir is the most appropriate form to express Thackeray's suspicion of historical 'greatness':

The memoir is an appropriate form for Thackeray's exposure of pseudo-greatness. Everything can be seen from the proximity of everyday private life and, shown in this microscopic way, the false pathos of the artificial, self-imagined hero collapses [...] Proximity destroys the alleged greatness of Marlborough, the Stuart Pretender and many others. And when every great man swindle of history has been exposed, there remains just the honesty of simply, slightly above average men capable of great sacrifice like the hero himself.⁷³

This assessment only takes one facet of a complex approach into account. Lukács argues that 'Thackeray requires this exposure in order to strip history of its periwig' but that is not the extent of Thackeray's hybrid memoiristic/historical novels. The critic's presentation of 'trivial, mean and haphazard qualities' of history as synonymous with 'all that is purely individual and private' reveals a historiographical perspective incompatible with Thackeray's stated opinions.⁷⁴ Lukács is disdainful of 'trivial and private goings-on' and seems to believe them irrelevant and superfluous.⁷⁵ He believes in grand, impersonal forces in history while Thackeray allows his 'mediocre heroes' to muddle along creating a chaos of conflicting reports.

Memory, in this formulation, supplements and corrects an otherwise faulty account. This sense of supplementation is particularly striking in relation to the representation of war, a topic which, Thackeray argues, had been disproportionately and dishonestly glorified. Consequently, Esmond wants to redress the balance by focussing on autobiographical detail instead of the biographies of 'Great Men'. Faced with historiographical 'forgetfulness', a different sort of memory fills the gap. A certain overlap between public and private life is inevitable, and perhaps at times Thackeray's and Esmond's agendas or priorities of historical representation are slightly misaligned. Indeed, these

⁷³ Lukács, *Historical Novel*, p. 202.

⁷⁴ Lukács, *Historical Novel*, p. 203.

⁷⁵ Lukács, *Historical Novel*, p. 203.

sporadic changes of subject seem slightly disingenuous, if only because the resolution not to mix history with autobiography needs to be repeated so often. The unique contribution which this novel makes to the already extensive public record is the recollection of private affairs in 'old age, and at a distance'.

The creation of a gap between recalled narrative and remembering narrator accentuates a latent element of nostalgic recollection in the historical novel where it is used to articulate untold stories. Here especially, it situates the novel within a broader historiographical context or network of competing narratives. Like Stendhal, Thackeray creates a deliberately messy story through the 'narrow perspective' of a relatively peripheral figure; unlike Stendhal, he achieves this through memory in exile – like the Swiss soldier – and explicit retrospect rather than the chaos of present experience which we find in *The Charterhouse of Palma*. As he suggests at the start of his narrative, Thackeray is more concerned with the 'familiar' than the 'heroic'. He conjures a 'broad canvas' through a particular, familiarising 'narrow perspective'; among his methods for achieving this is an emphasis on the memory of individuals who were not only involved in the events described, but remember them at the end of their own lives and at a distance which precludes return.

2

LANDS OF LOST CONTENT: LANDSCAPE AND MEMORY IN THE HISTORICAL NOVEL

There is no stretch of land, no cave, no tree which does not arouse again in my heart that sweet and pathetic desire which always accompanies the unlucky exile far from home.¹

The historical novel's entanglement with the representation of changing landscapes began (at least) with Scott and precedes him through his entanglement with the regional novel. In *Waverley*, Scott established a historicising aesthetic which relied on an assumption that movement through landscape was analogous to movement through time. In his 'Postscript which should have been a Preface' to *Waverley*, Scott writes that:

There is no European nation which, within the course of half a century or little more, has undergone so complete a change as this kingdom of Scotland. The effects of the insurrection of 1745,—the destruction of the patriarchal power of the Highland chiefs,—the abolition of the heritable jurisdictions of the Lowland nobility and barons,—the total eradication of the Jacobite party, which, averse to intermingle with the English, or adopt their customs, long continued to pride themselves upon maintaining ancient Scottish manners and customs,—commenced this innovation. The gradual influx of wealth and extension of commerce have since united to render the present people of Scotland a class of beings as different from their grandfathers as the existing English are from those of Queen Elizabeth's time.²

As such, Edward Waverley's movement between England, the Lowlands and the Highlands takes on implications of time travel. This inference is borne out, as Franco Moretti has observed, in the course of this novel and the other 'Waverley' books, in a recurrent fascination with borderlands and border-crossing.³ Ian Duncan touches on this interaction when he describes 'the historical processes of British modernisation [which] changed the very terms of space and time by which

¹ Ugo Foscolo, *Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis* (1817), trans. by J. G. Nichols (London: Hesperus, 2002), p. 86.

² Walter Scott, 'A Postscript which should have been a Preface', *Waverley*, pp. 362-365, (p. 363).

³ Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel*, pp. 39-40.

locality is constituted'.⁴ This chapter will unpick some ways in which recollection – and, more precisely, nostalgic longing – is used to articulate this dynamic between times and places in historical fiction.

The first segment of this chapter explores Eliot's use of static 'scenes' to create a dynamic between past and present; the second section will discuss Dickens's use of successive technologies of travel through changing landscapes as a way of layering past and present experience. Eliot's aesthetic, I argue, is created by the presentation of apparently unchanging, but implicitly fragile, still images, while Dickens stays closer to Scott's model in the harnessing of physical movement to describe temporal change. Both, I will argue, achieve these effects through the more or less explicit use of nostalgic recollection or homesickness. This chapter, then, starts where nostalgia did, with people displaced in a changing landscape and yearning to return home.

I. 'Scenes to Sicken For': Homesickness and Nostalgic Memory in George Eliot's Antiquated Landscapes

George Eliot's use of more-or-less static 'scenes' to establish the fragility of a given historical moment is amply illustrated in the first paragraph of her first published work of fiction. 'The Sad Fortunes of Amos Barton' begins:

Shepperton Church was a very different-looking building five-and-twenty years ago. To be sure, its substantial stone tower looks at you through its intelligent eye, the clock, with the friendly expression of former days; but in everything else what changes! Now there is a wide span of slated roof flanking the old steeple; the windows are tall and symmetrical; the outer doors are resplendent with oak-graining, the inner doors reverentially noiseless with a garment of red baize; and the walls, you are convinced, no lichen will ever again effect a settlement on—they are smooth and innutrient as the summit of the Rev. Amos Barton's head, after ten years of baldness and supererogatory soap. Pass through the baize doors and you will see the nave filled with well-shaped benches, understood to be free seats; while in certain eligible corners, less directly under the fire of the clergyman's eye, there are pews reserved for the Shepperton gentility. Ample galleries are supported on iron pillars, and in one of them stands the crowning glory, the very clasp or aigrette of Shepperton church-adornment—namely, an organ, not very much out of repair, on which a collector of small rents, differentiated by the force of circumstances into an organist, will

⁴ Ian Duncan, 'The Provincial or Regional Novel' in *A Companion to the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 318-335, (p. 319).

accompany the alacrity of your departure after the blessing, by a sacred minuet or an easy 'Gloria'.⁵

Such descriptive set pieces which recur throughout Eliot's oeuvre – perhaps most notably in the opening of *The Mill on the Floss* – as Steven Marcus noted, 'do more than [...] "set the scene"'.⁶ These frequent scenic interludes are instead an aesthetic approach to the articulation of a particular relationship between past and present in Eliot's novels. This dynamic, as I will argue, relies in large part on nostalgic memory. As Eliot goes on to comment, in contemplating this scene:

imagination does a little Toryism by the sly, revelling in regret that dear, old, brown, crumbling, picturesque inefficiency is everywhere giving place to spick-and-span new-painted, new-varnished efficiency, which will yield endless diagrams, plans, elevations, and sections, but alas! no picture. Mine, I fear, is not a well-regulated mind: it has an occasional tenderness for old abuses; it lingers with a certain fondness over the days of nasal clerks and top-booted parsons, and has a sigh for the departed shades of vulgar errors. (p. 7)

The representation of still, almost painterly, images is, for Eliot, bound up with issues of narrative perspective – as a novelist and 'historian'. While her professed straightforward 'Toryism' seems dubious, Eliot complicates a Whig narrative that understands history as progress. The only movement in the above quoted opening scene is in the shift in narratorial focus between past and present which is figured as recollection; her subsequent admission of "Toryism" – in opposition to the Whig model which saw history as progress culminating in the present – creates a sense of time in motion in and around this scene.

Both Sally Shuttleworth and John Goode have argued that this method, especially as it is used in *Adam Bede*, points to a circular conception of time in which nothing really changes. They point to the cycles of the seasons and harvests and suggest that the linear, broken narratives of history only apply to private life while public history remains essentially unchanged. The only ruptures in this system, they suggest, occur as breaks in personal timelines, the most striking of which is obviously Hetty's abrupt removal from the community and the country. These, they think, have no broader resonances in Eliot's conception or representation of historical time. As Goode puts it, 'Loamshire

⁵ Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, p. 7. Subsequent references in parenthesis.

⁶ Steven Marcus, *Representations: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: Random House, 1975), p. 186.

is protected from time by the hills that surround it'.⁷ The sense of continuity which underlies the novel, Goode argues, is never really disrupted because Eliot 'fixes the world she describes through the creation of representative scenes'.⁸ Sally Shuttleworth similarly argues that 'for the reader of *Adam Bede*, the idea of temporal progression suggested by the experience of narrative continuity is actually at variance with the relatively static picture of life conveyed' and 'George Eliot's realism and confident empiricism are based on a static theory of order that tends to exclude the dimension of change or progress'.⁹ For this reason, she considers it significant that 'George Eliot chooses the static mode of pictorial representation to illustrate the goal of her narrative'.¹⁰ The following will argue that this static, pictorial aesthetic uses nostalgia to create a sense of historical dynamism within apparently unchanging scenes.

Nina Auerbach expresses a similar idea when she suggests that 'Caleb is the only successful patron in *Middlemarch*, no doubt because he represents an older rural England; as in so much British fiction, the land, or what is left of it, saves and preserves'.¹¹ Auerbach's argument presupposes that 'the land [...] saves and preserves' but Eliot's aesthetic admits a more nuanced picture, in which processes of change arise within rural landscapes and not only in dialectical opposition to them. Eliot's static 'scenes', I suggest in the following pages, create a deliberate illusion of unchangeability against which a nostalgic aesthetic of rupture and loss is defined. 'The land' is just as much a location of change and historical dynamism as the towns against which it is usually contrasted.

The impression of stasis created by these scenes is analogous to Susan Sontag's account of the photograph as an innately melancholy form of representation. Sontag writes:

⁷ John Goode, 'Adam Bede' in *Critical Essays on George Eliot*, p. 19.

⁸ Goode, 'Adam Bede', p. 22.

⁹ Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science*, pp. 26, 28.

¹⁰ Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science*, p. 31.

¹¹ Nina Auerbach, 'Dorothea's Lost Dog' in *Middlemarch in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Karen Chase, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 87-106, (p. 96).

It is a nostalgic time right now, and photographs actively promote nostalgia. Photography is an elegiac art, a twilight art. Most subjects photographed are, just by virtue of being photographed, touched with pathos. An ugly or grotesque subject may be moving because it has been dignified by the attention of the photographer. A beautiful subject can be the object of rueful feelings, because it has aged or decayed or no longer exists. All photographs are *memento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt.¹²

She reflects that the development of photography coincided with an acceleration of changes against which photographic images appear all the more vulnerable:

Cameras began duplicating the world at that moment when the human landscape started to undergo a vertiginous rate of change: while an untold number of forms of biological and social life are being destroyed in a brief span of time, a device is available to record what is disappearing.¹³

This representation of artificially arrested moments does not – or does not only – suggest a genuine suspension of time; instead they imply unlikely and fragile survivals against a background assumption of continual flux. It is a given in a historical novel that time has already moved on. The current of apparent continuity running through Eliot's novels should be read in light of this common-sense dramatic irony, which is reinforced by a narrative perspective of nostalgic memory which implies completion. As George Steiner argues:

It is not the literal past that rules us, save, possibly, in a biological sense. It is images of the past. They are often as highly structured and selective as myths. Images and symbolic constructs of the past are imprinted, almost in the manner of genetic information, on our sensibility. Each new historical era mirrors itself in the picture and active mythology of its past or of a past borrowed from other cultures. It tests its sense of identity, of regress or new achievement, against that past.¹⁴

Still images have the potential to condense processes of change rather than, as many critics have suggested, only to resist it. This particular image takes some of its piquancy from the changes which intervene between the reader and the place described in the novel. In these novels, I argue, this is often figured as homesickness.



¹² Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 15.

¹³ Sontag, *On Photography*, pp. 15-16.

¹⁴ George Steiner, *In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes Towards the Re-definition of Culture* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 13.

In 'The Natural History of German Life' (1856), George Eliot relates an anecdote about a young soldier serving abroad who cries for home because he cannot adapt to his changed circumstances.

She writes:

Some years ago, a peasant youth, out of the poorest and remotest region of the Westerwald, was enlisted as a recruit, at Weilburg in Nassau. The lad having never in his life slept in a bed, when he had to get into one for the first time began to cry like a child; and he deserted twice because he could not reconcile himself to sleeping in a bed, and to the "fine" life of the barracks: he was homesick at the thought of his accustomed poverty and his thatched hut. A strong contrast this with the feeling of the poor in towns, who would be far from deserting because their condition was too much improved!¹⁵

This story bears a striking resemblance to the case studies used to illustrate early scientific writing on nostalgia as a potentially fatal psychosomatic disorder which particularly afflicted young people displaced from rural regions. To begin with at least, nostalgia was a strong psychological reaction to geographical dislocation and this is reflected, I argue, in Eliot's representation of landscape. In Eliot's novels which take place in antiquated rural scenes, individuals are displaced within landscapes which, to the reader, were already extinct; the psychological experience of time passing for an individual is superimposed on to the broader movements of historical time. While many other correlations of method and subject matter between 'Natural History of German Life' and Eliot's novels are well-documented, this overlooked nod to *das Heimweh* is a small detail with, I argue, far-reaching consequences.

As we have established, the first use of the word nostalgia was in a Swiss medical dissertation written in 1688 by Hofer by combining Greek roots *nostos*, return home, and *algos*, pain or longing to form a medical synonym for *das Heimweh* or *mal du pays*. This version of nostalgia, as I laid out in my introduction, had begun to give way to additional definitions – hence the tone of anthropological curiosity in the above anecdote – but was not yet entirely defunct or inconsistent with subsequent psychological theory. Eliot's repeated references to a related condition, 'calenture', in combination with a broader aesthetic of 'scenes to sicken for', suggest that this idea of sickening

¹⁵ George Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', *Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*, ed. by A. S. Byatt (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 119.

for home endured in the tropes she inherited and developed. The following discussion unpacks the enduring idea of geographical displacement as a metaphor for temporal transition and transformation and suggests that Eliot condensed these broader dynamics within static scenes. The temporal and geographical implications of nostalgia, which are often treated as successive (pre- and post- Kantian) parts of a discrete two-phase process, merge in the representation of lost landscapes. Eliot's antiquated places simultaneously represent a time and a place by taking the 'home scene' (*TMoTF*, p. 36) as a touchstone idea.

Hofer offers two case studies in his dissertation. The first, like Eliot's, describes a young man from a rural area, this time a student rather than a soldier, who is compelled to live away from home and falls seriously ill as a consequence. Hofer writes:

I learned of a man from Berne, [...] who for the sake of his studies had spent his youth in this state of Basel, who suffering from sadness for a considerable time, finally fell victim to this disease.

Hofer notes: 'Nostalgia [...] admits no remedy other than a return to the homeland' and that this patient 'was scarcely some few miles from our city when all the symptoms already abated to such a great extent, they really relaxed altogether'.¹⁶ Hofer's second example is of 'a certain country girl' who was seriously injured in a fall and, just as she was beginning to recover in hospital, became ill with nostalgia. When she awoke to find herself away from home:

immediately homesickness took hold of her; she spat back the foods and medicaments, of which she stood in need against the great loss of her strength. Especially she wailed frequently, groaning nothing else than "*Ich will heim; Ich will heim.*" Finally, therefore, her parents allowed that she be brought home, terribly weak, where within a few days she got wholly well, entirely without the aid of medicine.¹⁷

Nostalgia mainly affected displaced young people from rural areas who had moved to towns, to other countries, or both, in order to work or study. This illness, then, began as a psychological reaction to a growing fluidity between town and country and between nations but also resonates with the progressive transformation of the landscape associated with the changing times. Nostalgic memory, as I have argued, is an emotional reaction which is produced by, and therefore well placed

¹⁶ Hofer, 'Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia', p. 382.

¹⁷ Hofer, 'Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia', p. 383.

to describe, the experience of change over time alongside the homesickness produced by physical distance from home. Eliot's representation of landscape incorporates this complication of time and place as well as individual and historical transformation.

Nostalgia's first victims, as Starobinski observed (see introduction), were uprooted from the places they had been familiar with from birth and forced into a disorientating new world which was itself changing and expanding. This resonates with Franco Moretti's description of the geographical content of nineteenth-century historical fiction which, he writes, is 'a veritable *phenomenology of the border*' in a period when borders were 'simultaneously hardening, and being challenged'.¹⁸ Nostalgia is an affective reaction to change which is presented – by Hofer and, two centuries later, by Eliot – as particularly characteristic of rural life at a time when this 'rootedness' could no longer be taken for granted. You have to be rooted before you can be uprooted and an attachment to home is a precondition of homesickness. Svetlana Boym has suggested that nostalgia originated as a 'historical emotion' and 'side effect of a teleology of progress'; it was, as I posit in my introduction, an affective complication of Whiggish progressivism and one way in which the 'march of progress' arguably generated its own counter-narrative. Eliot embeds this point of view within the opening passage of 'Amos Barton' when she suggests that, in dwelling on the scene, she is 'revelling in regret' in defiance of the 'well-regulated minds' who unambiguously celebrate the sterile and diagrammatic productions of modern life. Because nostalgia originally related to homesickness for specific places but was premised on broader social changes, it follows that its use in the representation of rural landscapes endangered by social, economic or industrial innovations would be particularly revealing. Eliot, I argue, used nostalgia, and its variant *calenture*, as I will go on to discuss, to articulate this psychological response to social transformation.

A further indication that Eliot is referring to pathological nostalgia in her essay can be found a little later in 'Natural History of German Life' when she describes an uprooted peasant's inability to breathe in his changed environment. Linda M. Austin has suggested that this image refers to the theory that nostalgia particularly afflicted the Swiss owing to the change in air pressure they

¹⁸ Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel*, p. 35.

experienced when forced to leave their mountainous homeland.¹⁹ If so, this allusion would imply an unlikely knowledge of medical debates surrounding nostalgia; unfortunately, this seems a far-fetched interpretation and I am more inclined to read it as a revealing coincidence rather than a direct reference. Shuttleworth, for example, has convincingly argued that this is a reference to the transmutation of species; these two interpretations, I suggest, are not mutually exclusive, because each describes the traumatic impact of too-rapid changes and finds a bodily metaphor for a social experience.²⁰ Alongside Shuttleworth's evolutionary interpretation, I read this image as a continuation and development of the nostalgic theme which Eliot introduced with her first allusion to the homesick peasant.

Significantly, this idea is embedded within a discussion of broader social and economic changes and Eliot no longer limits the effects of nostalgia to literal, geographical disorientation as was the case with her first 'case study'. She writes:

Political vicissitudes have added their influence to that of economical changes in disturbing that dim instinct, that reverence for traditional custom, which is the peasant's principle of action. He is in the midst of novelties for which he knows no reason – changes in political geography, changes of the Government to which he owes his fealty, changes in bureaucratic management and police regulations. He finds himself in a new element before an apparatus for breathing in it is developed in him.²¹

This time, only a few pages after the first nod to *das Heimweh*, nostalgia has been unambiguously transformed into a figurative way to articulate much broader changes than the geographical displacement of individuals. This change hinges on a subtle shift from a geographical to a temporal cause. The divisions between temporal and geographic change are, therefore, made more uncertain. Instead of the peasant moving as in the earlier 'case study', here the landscape changes around him.

As I set out in my introduction, almost one hundred years after Hofer published his dissertation, Kant observed that nostalgia relied on a confusion between time and space. While sufferers believe that they have been made ill by their removal from home, he suggests, this is merely a psychological

¹⁹ Austin, 'Emily Brontë's Homesickness', pp. 573-596.

²⁰ Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science*, p. 34.

²¹ Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', pp. 121-2.

illusion which masks a deep-seated desire to return not only to the places they associate with their youth but also to regain a lost period of their lives and be young again. He wrote that, ‘they think that this is because everything [...] has changed a great deal, but in fact it is because they cannot bring back their youth’.²² Eliot exploits this confusion in her representation of historical landscapes which are bound up with the personal pasts of her characters, as well as with broader social and cultural histories. Nostalgia was a product of displacement, in geographical space and through the passage of time, which became a sensibility and aesthetic through which to represent the affective experience of those changes. This confusion might be a philosophical weakness (rendered purely academic, of course, as soon as it became clear that it was not really possible to die of nostalgia) but it is richly suggestive for the representation of place in the historical novel.



One of the most obvious points of similarity between ‘The Natural History of German Life’ and the setting of Eliot’s early fiction is the overt adoption of a retrospective point of view which echoes the ‘tis sixty years since’ timeframe of Scott’s *Waverley, Or ‘Tis Sixty Years Since*. ‘In order to appreciate what Riehl says of the German peasantry’ she says ‘we must remember what the tenant-farmers and small proprietors were in England half a century ago.’²³ In *Adam Bede*, Eliot insists on the idea that ‘Sixty years[...] is a long time, so no wonder things have changed’(p. 159) while in *Mill on the Floss* she reminds us of the ‘changes that widen the years’ (TMoTF, p. 103). As I established in my introduction, this timeframe which dwells on the ‘twilight zone’ between memory and history is an underexplored but widely used characteristic of the nineteenth-century realist novel. Most critics fall back on Tillotson’s useful, but brief and therefore necessarily limited, discussion of ‘novels of the recent past’. Eliot, as I say, is among the novelists who most frequently exploit this uncertain overlap between historical and personal pasts. This, as I have argued, is not to say that nostalgic representation is limited to this ‘twilight zone’, only that it was an especially apt approach to the merging of history with personal memory and, as such, flourished at a time when the rift between the two forms of retrospection was felt to be growing. That *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the*

²² Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, p. 71.

²³ Eliot, ‘Natural History of German Life’, p. 113.

Floss inhabit this 'no man's land' and echo themes from 'A Natural History of German Life' – both of which combine in their interest in 'the tenant-farmers and small proprietors were in England half a century ago' who, Eliot suggests, are the nearest to the German peasantry described in Riehl's study – suggests a point of contact between these themes from which a broader aesthetic can be extrapolated. The identification of this watershed moment in 'The Natural History of German Life' gives an additional poignancy to her repeated adoption of Scott's 'tis sixty years since' retrospect. In an echo of Rousseau's suggestion that nostalgia has become something to be nostalgic for in more civilised societies, Eliot tells us that this interval of time returns us to a time when, like Riehl's peasants, the English were still attached enough to home that they could be made homesick.

The extent to which this period of living memory informed the novelist's ideas about historical transition is hinted at in her review of Riehl. 'In order to appreciate what Riehl says of the German peasantry', Eliot writes in 'The Natural History of German Life':

we must remember what the tenant-farmers and small proprietors were in England half a century ago,[...] the daughters even of substantial farmers [...]instead of carrying on sentimental correspondence,[...] were spinning their future table-linen, and looking after every saving of butter and eggs that might enable them to add to the little stock of plate and china which they were laying in against their marriage.²⁴

The Tullivers, the Dodsons and the Poysers are included within this idea of the historically precarious 'peasant' and it was these people, she thinks, who had been susceptible to *das Heimweh*, an illness which, as she remarks, was predicated on an attachment to place which had since died out among the English. Mrs Tulliver and her sisters perfectly embody the role of the farmer's daughters who weave their own linen and save up for crockery in anticipation of their marriages. After it becomes clear that the family will be 'sold up', Mrs Tulliver retreats to the cupboard where she stores these precious remnants of her former life and laments:

"To think o' these cloths as I spun myself," she went on, lifting things out and turning them over with an excitement all the more strange and piteous because the stout blond woman was usually so passive,—if she had been ruffled before, it was at the surface merely,—"and Job Haxey wove 'em, and brought the piece home on his back, as I

²⁴ Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', p. 113.

remember standing at the door and seeing him come, before I ever thought o' marrying your father! And the pattern as I chose myself, and bleached so beautiful, and I marked 'em so as nobody ever saw such marking,—they must cut the cloth to get it out, for it's a particular stitch. And they're all to be sold, and go into strange people's houses, and perhaps be cut with the knives, and wore out before I'm dead. You'll never have one of 'em, my boy," she said, looking up at Tom with her eyes full of tears, "and I meant 'em for you. I wanted you to have all o' this pattern. Maggie could have had the large check—it never shows so well when the dishes are on it." (*TMoTF*, p. 178)

This passage is an exact dramatization of the 'type' described in 'The Natural History of German Life'. These objects or 'teraphim', in a parallel to the artefacts discussed in chapter 3, are invested with the sense of connection to the past described by Eliot as a characteristic of these English 'peasants'. Mrs Tulliver's rootedness – her at-home-ness – depends on these trinkets and the customs of which they form a tangible part. In 'The Natural History of German Life', Eliot tells us, these are the last people who could experience homesickness in the same way as the German soldier of her 'case study'. In *The Mill on the Floss* she uses the named emblems of this homely sensibility to rip these rooted individuals from their accustomed place.

Even Mr Tulliver's litigiousness can be explained as a characteristic of this peasant class; Eliot writes 'The farmer's lawsuit is his point of honour; and he will carry it through, though he knows from the very first day that he shall get nothing by it' because 'To the mind of the peasant, law presents itself as the "custom of the country"'.²⁵ While in *The Mill on the Floss*, all of the Tulliver's misfortunes 'were the consequences of going to law.' (*TMoTF*, p. 196). These characters have deep roots in tradition and place, a fact which Eliot goes to some pains to stress; it is for this reason that they are especially susceptible to the traumatic effects of change and displacement. This is expressed in an almost explicitly physiological language of fibrous connection. It would be an overstatement to suggest that Mr Tulliver's illness has a nostalgic aspect but there is a sense in which he dies because he has been uprooted from his home. His decline is caused by a combination of complex psychological pressures but one ingredient is his displacement from home. In this, Tulliver's illness echoes that of the homesick soldier in 'The Natural History of German Life'. More than this, though, the change is superstitiously linked to the novel's final disaster because, 'There's a story as when the mill changes hands, the river's angry' (*TMoF*, p. 230)

²⁵ Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', p. 119.

and ‘the desire to get the mill and land back into the family’ (*TMoTF*, p. 376) becomes an unbending fixation with Tom. The titular mill takes on an importance in the psychological structures of Eliot’s novel. This importance is established from the opening scene in which the entire plot is framed as a memory and the mill is not only the stage-set, but the subject, of the narrator’s longing recollection. It is a remembered and longed for place, with ties to the inner lives of the Tulliver’s, as much as it is a material structure.

Similarly, during Hetty Sorrell’s journey ‘from the familiar to the strange’ she is characterised as representative of ‘country people’ who cannot ‘believe that those who make a figure in their own parish are not known everywhere else’, are ‘entirely ignorant of travelling’ and have ‘never got up in the morning without the certainty of seeing familiar faces’ (*AB*, p. 332). Like Eliot’s homesick soldier, sleeping in an unfamiliar bed causes Hetty to long for home: ‘as she lay down [...] in the strange hard bed, she felt that her home had been a happy one’. This is a reverie in which the narrator enthusiastically participates, listing the charms Hetty has left behind her and describing the ‘yearning regret’ with which she recalls them. In prison, Hetty sums up her ordeal with the repeated plaint: ‘I longed so to go back again [...] I thought I’d go home [...] I longed so for it, Dinah, I longed so to be safe at home’, which (by coincidence) echoes Hofer’s ‘country girl’ who can only repeat ‘Ich will heim’. Home and homesickness are repeated touchstones in this novel and they hold in tension twin dynamics of temporal and geographical displacement.



Nostalgia, as I mention in my introduction, was closely linked to theories of associationism which held that the mind was formed through experience and memory made up of chains of past association. These ‘chain links’ created almost physical bonds between the material world and the formation of the mind. Some critics have argued that nostalgia – understood principally as a diffuse and reassuring memory – was opposed to associationism because the latter involved a more precise form of recollection than they allow nostalgia.²⁶As I have established, philosophical discussions of psychological association, however, often alluded directly to nostalgia. The story that was most

²⁶ See, for example, Dames, ‘Associated Fictions: Dickens and Thackeray’, *Amnesiac Selves*, pp. 125-166.

frequently used was of the influence of their native music on Swiss troops serving abroad (see quotations from Dugald Stewart and John Abercrombie in the introduction).

Eliot reiterates this relationship in ‘The Natural History of German Life’ by blending the vocabulary of nostalgia and association to describe the close attachment of peasants to place and custom through the effects of their displacement. ‘The Natural History of German Life’ opens: ‘It is an interesting branch of psychological observation to note the images that are habitually associated with abstract or collective terms’ and goes on to hint at an – impossible – aesthetic system in which layers of diverse experience are contained within every allusion:

The historical conditions of society may be compared with those of language. It must be admitted that the language of cultivated nations is in anything but a rational state; the great sections of the civilized world are only approximatively intelligible to each other, and even that only at the cost of long study; one word stands for many things, and many words for one thing; the subtle shades of meaning, and still subtler echoes of association, make language an instrument which scarcely anything short of genius can wield with definiteness and certainty.²⁷

The Mill on the Floss, meanwhile, insists that ‘we could never have loved the earth so well if we had had no childhood in it’ because these familiar landscapes formed ‘the mother tongue of our imagination, the language that is laden with all the subtle inextricable associations the fleeting hours of childhood left behind them’(TMoTF, p. 36). This connection between language and memory implies a sense in which memory is not only the subject of Eliot’s novels, but their medium; the ‘fibres’ that thread people together with places also have a narratological function. They are the stuff from which Eliot’s novels are made and, as such, the drama of their breaking has wide-felt consequences.

In ‘The Natural History of German Life’ Eliot links the associative connections forged between body and mind with the evolution of language and, implicitly, the construction of narrative. These ideas extend throughout *The Mill on the Floss* and *Adam Bede* in a recurrent vocabulary of roots, uprootedness and nerve-like connections forged by sense experience. In *The Mill on the Floss*, for instance, ‘All long-known objects, even a mere window-fastening or a particular door-latch, have sounds which are a sort of recognised voice to us – a voice that will thrill and awaken, when it has

²⁷ Eliot, ‘The Natural History of German Life’, p. 128.

been used to touch deep-lying fibres' (TMoTF, pp. 193-4). 'The wood I walk in on this mild May day, with the young yellow-brown foliage of the oaks between me and the blue sky, the white star-flowers and the blue-eyed speedwell and the ground ivy at my feet, what grove of tropic palms, what strange ferns or splendid broad-petalled blossoms, could ever thrill such deep and delicate fibres within me as this home scene?' (TMoTF, p. 36). In *Adam Bede* this imagery of 'fibres' is accompanied by a more pervasive notion of roots, rootedness and up-rootedness:

"I'm none for worreting," said Mr. Poyser, rising from his three-cornered chair and walking slowly towards the door; "but I should be loath to leave th' old place, and the parish where I was bred and born, and Father afore me. We should leave our roots behind us, I doubt, and niver thrive again." (p. 331)

The connection between people and places is a very physical bond which is often expressed in almost physiological language. Because associationism supposed that the mind was formed through bodily experience, a rift from familiar places could be felt as a physical or physiological catastrophe. This echoes Scott's description of Mr Bertram in *Guy Mannering* (1815):

The old man was about to remove from the house of his fathers, to go he knew not whither, when, like an old piece of furniture, which, left alone in its wonted corner, may hold together for a long while, but breaks to pieces on an attempt to move it, he fell down on his own threshold²⁸

Removal from home could be fatal in the nineteenth-century historical novel. People become so rooted in place that dislocation in space or, by extension, through the passage of time, had additional connotations of trauma.

The notes for G.H. Lewes's posthumous fourth volume of *Problems of Life and Mind* illustrate the way these ideas might have become more concrete later in Eliot's writing life. These notes identify the Sensorium – essentially the nervous system excepting the brain – as the node which explains the interconnection of 'Thought and Feeling'. They tell us that 'The Sensorium [is] a plexus of sensibilities dependent on the whole organism'.²⁹ This close integration is at odds with popular

²⁸ Walter Scott, *Guy Mannering*, ed. by W. M. Parker (J. M. Dent and Sons: London, 1974), p. 16.

²⁹ George Eliot, 'Notes for Volume IV of Problems of Life and Mind', Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, New York Public Library, p. 7.

usage which 'has decided on an antithesis of Thought and Feeling'.³⁰ 'The other tradition that Sensation is bodily[?] has been contradicted[?] by showing that both it & Thought are at once both mental and bodily having their seat in the Sensorium, not one in the peripheral organs the other in the Brain'.³¹ This mingling is the 'Difference between the system called a machine & the system of forces called an organism'.³² The merging of sensations and intelligence has wider implications for binding people within places; external stimulus must play a part in producing these sense experiences and, as these notes put it, 'Life [is] something particular in the general web of molecular change'.³³ This theory argues for the integration of internal with external life. These notes summarise Lewes's work but suggest the ideas that Eliot was steeped in. They are full of 'nerve fibres' which link 'matter' to 'Sensibility' and bring out the 'physiological side of emotional response'.³⁴ 'The activities of the Sensorium' this notebook states 'are what is called the Inner Life'.³⁵

These notes contain, for example, the reflection that 'if we explain memory by retention in cerebral cells wh. are central terminations of the keyboard, why dissociate these from rest of vibrating string?' These same pages repeatedly refer to Alexander Bain's work, saying for example that 'Several modern psychologists have maintained that sensation and images occupy precisely the same neural tracts e.g. Prof Bain' and alludes to his example of 'the sensation of scarlet in exp^e. of child'.³⁶ This last is a nod to Bain's idea that while a child can experience scarlet as 'a new impression', for an adult 'All sensations [...] after the first of each kind, involve a flash of recovery from the past, which is what really determines their character.' He argues that, after the first

³⁰ Eliot, 'Notes for Volume IV of Problems of Life and Mind', p. 1, 'Table of Contents': point 5.

³¹ Eliot, 'Notes for Volume IV of Problems of Life and Mind', p. 15.

³² Eliot, 'Notes for Volume IV of Problems of Life and Mind', p. 9.

³³ Eliot, 'Notes for Volume IV of Problems of Life and Mind', p. 4, 'Table of Contents': point 3.

³⁴ Eliot, 'Notes for Volume IV of Problems of Life and Mind', p. 1, 'Table of Contents': point 2, p. 5.

³⁵ Eliot, 'Notes for Volume IV of Problems of Life and Mind', pp. 8-9.

³⁶ George Eliot, 'Notes for Volume IV of Problems of Life and Mind', p. 38, p. 15 (note).

encounter, ‘the new impression of scarlet is in itself almost insignificant, serving only as the medium of resuscitating the cerebral force of all the previous scarlets’.³⁷ Bain’s forging of connections between associationism and physiology has significant implications for George Eliot’s creation of bonds between people and places in her novels.

In her novels these nervous fibres – ‘vibrating strings’ – create intricate connections between people and places. Through them she maps minds on places and places on minds. Nostalgia represents a feeling of intimate connection brought to pathological extremes by distance or disconnection and, as early writers on of association theory observed, the sense of intense attachment to home or homeland which defined nostalgia, can be read as a close cousin of this more famous psychological system which has attracted a great deal of recent critical interest.³⁸ There has, indeed, been a recent surge of interest in the more physiological models of mind developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and their relationship to literary form and technique. As Ina Ferris has noted, however, novel studies has benefited less than poetry from these new avenues of discussion. Recent critical studies, Ferris suggests, have explored ‘models of mind congruent with new physiological concepts taking hold in medical and scientific circles in the early decades of the nineteenth century’ and ‘literary form and technique [...] by rethinking them via a physiological aesthetic. Canonical poets and poetic forms have benefitted the most from this turn, their writings recast and re-energised’.³⁹ Eliot’s discussion of the aesthetic potential of associationism in ‘A Natural History of German Life’, and the use she put these ideas to in her novels through the description of emphatically old-fashioned landscapes threaded through with nerve-like fibres of memory, suggests the extent to which these physiological models of mind influenced the nineteenth-century historical novel.

³⁷ Alexander Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, 2nd edn (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1865), pp. 581-2.

³⁸ See, for instance, Gregory Tate, *The Poet’s Mind: The Psychology of Victorian Poetry, 1830-1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) and Catherine Jones, *Literary Memory: Scott’s Waverley Novels and the Psychology of Narrative* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2003) as well as a plethora of studies that examine the physiology of reading including Nicholas Dames *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

³⁹ Ina Ferris, “‘Before Our Eyes’: Romantic Historical Fiction and the Apparitions of Reading”, *Representations*, 121, (2013), 60-84, (p. 60).



Among the most striking references to pathological homesickness in Eliot's early fiction are her two prominent uses of the term *calenture*, a condition which Samuel Johnson defined as 'a distemper peculiar to sailors, in hot climates; wherein they imagine the sea to be green fields, and will throw themselves into it'. In both *The Mill on the Floss* and *Adam Bede* *calenture* is used to describe a reaction to change or distance or both. In medical texts concerning nostalgia, *calenture* is often presented as a synonym of the disorder, or, in more thorough or prolonged discussion, as a variant with specific qualities or prerequisites of its own. Erasmus Darwin, for example, combines them under a single heading and conflates them in his definition:

An unconquerable desire of returning to one's native country, frequent in long voyages, in which the patients become so insane as to throw themselves into the sea, mistaking it for green fields or meadows. The Swiss are said to be particularly liable to this disease, and when taken into foreign service frequently desert from this cause, and especially after hearing or singing a particular tune, which was used in their village dances, in their native country, on which account the playing or singing this tune was forbid by the punishment of death.⁴⁰

In *calenture*, attachment to place creates a psychological response which in turn generates a hallucinatory landscape of rolling fields. It seems to have been a strangely uniform delusion and crops up in in *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), *Moby Dick* (1851), Cowper's *The Task* (1785) and *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Wordsworth, to cite a more chronologically and culturally proximate example, uses the idea in his 'pastoral poem' 'The Brothers' (1800).⁴¹ *Calenture*, then, was not unknown but it was most frequently used as a straightforward pathology associated with travel by sea (a characteristic of British nostalgia discussed at greater length in chapter 4). Its metaphorical significance in tracing temporal as well as geographical distance, while frequently implicit, was not usually as central as it is to Eliot's fiction. Eliot is unusual, if not unique, in her transplantation of a disease associated with travel in the tropics to the depiction of rural England. In removing this disease from its maritime, tropical context, Eliot gives *calenture* a broader, more figurative meaning through which to articulate a relationship of yearning memory between past and present; she overlays a sense of

⁴⁰ Erasmus Darwin, *Zoonomia; or, The Laws of Organic Life. Part Second* (Philadelphia: Printed by T. Dobson, 1797), p. 461.

⁴¹ Kevis Goodman argues that this poem's explicit references to nostalgia resonate with wider allusions throughout *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). Goodman, 'Romantic Poetry and the Science of Nostalgia', pp. 205-209.

change through time on top of an established literary trope of physical distance and consequent yearning.⁴²

Wordsworth's 'The Brothers' tells the tale of siblings separated when one goes to sea. On his voyages, the sea-going brother, Leonard, yearns for home in language which seems a close representation of *calenture* as Johnson described it in his dictionary:

in his heart
Was half a shepherd on the stormy seas.
Oft in the piping shrouds had Leonard heard
The tones of waterfalls, and inland sounds
Of caves and trees: - and, when the regular wind
Between the tropics filled the steady sail,
And blew with the same breath through days and weeks,
Lengthening invisibly its weary line
Along the cloudless Main, he, in those hours
Of tiresome indolence, would often hang
Over the vessel's side, and gaze and gaze;
And, while the broad blue wave and sparkling foam
Flashed round him images and hues that wrought
In union with the employment of his heart,
He, thus by feverish passion overcome,
Even with the organs of his bodily eye,
Below him, in the bosom of the deep,
Saw mountains; saw the forms of sheep that grazed
On verdant hills – with dwellings among trees,
And shepherds clad in the same country grey
Which he himself had worn.⁴³

An imagined vision, informed by a 'passion[ate]' memory of home, overcomes his 'bodily eye' and shows him the landscape he misses. The ensuing 'plot' of this poem, which sees the sailor hopefully returning home only to discover that his brother has died in his absence, echoes the Kantian notion that homesickness might seem to be about place but really it is about time or, more specifically, youth. Finding that the home he sought has been transformed in his absence, Leonard goes back to

⁴² Critics who have discussed *calenture* as a pathology of travel include Jonathan Lamb who has traced 'scorbutic nostalgia' as both a nautical disease and as a literary phenomenon. For example, see: 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner': a Ballad of the Scurvy?, *Pathologies of Travel* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000) pp. 157-177, (p. 166) in which he claims that *calenture* and nostalgia were psychological symptoms of scurvy. He identifies 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' as an example of this cross over. Tamara Wagner devotes a portion of the introduction to *Longing* to a description of variants of nostalgia as pathologies associated specifically with travel. This discussion will be briefly reprised in relation to the English press-gangs in *Sylvia's Lovers* in chapter 5 of this thesis.

⁴³ Wordsworth, 'The Brothers', *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* (London: 1847), p. 68.

sea. He had returned ‘to his paternal home’, ‘with a determined purpose to resume/ The life he had lived there’ but, though the landscape which he imagined in a calenture on the waves is only minimally changed, the home he had longed for is no longer there. His remembered home is first lost through distance and then through the passage of time. Eliot used the same trope to similar ends but did so by detaching it from its nautical origins. The rich literary associations of this seafaring nostalgia, colours Eliot’s own interpretation of this idea and serves to highlight her innovative use of an older trope. It has frequently been noted that the word ‘nostalgia’ fell out of use during the course of the nineteenth century; Eliot’s explicit use of its synonyms and evident familiarity with medical discourse surrounding *das Heimweh*, suggests that the ideas were still current. In spite of its apparent disappearance from contemporary discourse, then, nostalgia evidently remained a submerged context.



Eliot prominently uses the term calenture twice in her novels though the ideas it momentarily foregrounds are much further reaching in her aesthetic approach to the representation of antiquated landscapes. In *The Mill on the Floss*, when Tom remembers home while away at school, she writes:

And then the mill, and the river, and Yap pricking up his ears, ready to obey the least sign when Tom said “Hoigh!” would all come before him in a sort of calenture, when his fingers played absently in his pocket with his great knife and his coil of whip-cord, and other relics of the past. (*MoTF*, p. 125)

Obviously, this passage is literally about a homesick child but the way it is expressed has broader resonances. This nostalgia is not only given a border-line clinical name but it also creates a sense of material connection to home through physical contact with ‘relics’ which spark connections between past and present. These ‘associations’ between touch, memory and recalled place, merge mind with matter and create a sense of physical connection between past and present. Mr Tulliver’s anxieties about losing the mill are described in a way that recalls Tom’s homesickness:

The Tullivers had lived on this spot for generations [...] where all his memories were centred, and where life seemed like a familiar smooth-handled tool that the fingers clutch with loving ease. (*MoTF*, p. 229)

For Tom and his father, memory is closely connected to the tangibility of objects and sensory associations with particular places, activities and experiences. The rift created by separation is, therefore, felt as an almost physical trauma and brings on a sort of *calenture*.

This memory-laden method is not limited to *The Mill on the Floss*, a novel with considerable and well-documented autobiographical elements.⁴⁴ It also works to personalise more impersonal histories. The dynamics of social change which Eliot describes in ‘The Natural History of German Life’ are dramatized in this novel. *Adam Bede*, as I have already begun to show, also adopts this recollecting narrative perspective – also focused on the representation of rural landscapes – even though it lacks *The Mill on the Floss*’s explicit frame narrative. My second example of ‘*calenture*’ (but, chronologically, Eliot’s first) occurs in *Adam Bede* where Eliot writes:

The dairy was certainly worth looking at: it was a scene to sicken for with a sort of *calenture* in hot and dusty streets – such coolness, such purity, such fresh fragrance of new-pressed cheese, of firm butter, of wooden vessels perpetually bathed in pure water (p. 78)

This passage casts the reader as rememberer and imagines them in a very different, almost oppositional landscape of the future. The reader inhabits ‘hot and dusty streets’ and longs for a time which is also a place and vice versa. An urban context is understood to inform the way this scene is read and an implied reader – who is both geographically and temporally distant – has a walk-on part in the novel. It is as if one landscape is nested inside another, which is alluded to but only shown in elliptical glimpses. Here nostalgia reinforces a reminiscing narrative tone which, among other things, establishes a particular historical perspective through the description of self-consciously outdated landscapes.

Walter Scott’s use of geography to articulate movement between successive periods of history is well-documented: as Moretti has put it, when *Waverley* travels first into Scotland and then into the highlands, ‘his movement in space is also, and in fact above all, [...] movement in *time*’.⁴⁵ In his Introduction to *The Fortunes of Nigel*, Scott also links the idea of geographical borders to the

⁴⁴ The sonnet sequence ‘Brother and Sister’ (1869), for example, include strikingly similar characters and events and are more explicitly based on Eliot’s own life.

⁴⁵ Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel*, p. 41.

representation of historical transition (see introduction). Scott's picturesque metaphors draw out a correspondence between representations of time and place in the historical novel which has echoes in the genres' manifestations later in the century. He intertwines the idea of geographical boundaries with historical transitions and relates both to the aesthetics of historical fiction. This echoes the statement Scott makes in 'A Postscript which should have been a Preface' – quoted at the beginning of this chapter – that sudden and accelerated modernisation had transformed Scotland beyond recognition so that Waverley's travels from England to the Highlands was a journey back in time.

This 'geography of progress' – to borrow David Lipscomb's description of the temporalised topography of the Waverley novels – becomes implicit in Eliot's remembered landscapes. While Scott's heroes travel into Scotland in order to move between phases of history, Eliot achieves a similar effect while keeping her plot more-or-less geographically stationary and her scenes almost static. She reformulates physical distance as reminiscence and uses the idea of homesickness to create a sense of time passing in apparently motionless landscapes. The adoption of a reminiscing tone implies a process of gradual change and creeping obsolescence through which rural communities were slowly superseded and encroached upon. By using nostalgic memory to establish her characters in the context of particular places – characterised by rural landscape and close community – Eliot creates a backdrop which is coloured by the anticipation of imminent transition.

Eliot's nostalgically described 'scenes' create a sense of movement in two directions. As with Dickens's representation of the stagecoach, discussed in the following section of this chapter, Eliot's landscapes are retrospective but premised on a sense of inevitable forward momentum; the countryside of Eliot's novels has its own historical dynamism and is not simply a stereotyped idyll of calm and stability against which the city, more readily identifiable with modernisation, can be contrasted. These novels use antiquated rural settings to create a sense of social and cultural change which is intimately bound up with the psychological and physiological experience of living through dramatic and sudden changes.



Scott also famously used technologies of travel to reflect on the historical past through an appeal to the memories of his readers. The first chapter of *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), a novel which hinges on a long and arduous journey by foot, begins with a discussion of the coming of the stagecoach. Scott starts with the statement that '[t]he times have changed in nothing more [...] than in the rapid conveyance of intelligence and communication betwixt one part of Scotland and another' and proceeds to emphasise the notion that these changes have taken place within living memory:

It is not above twenty or thirty years, according to the evidence of many credible witnesses now alive, since a little miserable horse-cart, performing with difficulty a journey of thirty miles *per diem*, carried our mails from the capital of Scotland to its extremity [...] But in both countries these ancient, slow, and sure modes of conveyance, are now alike unknown; mail-coach races against mail-coach, and high-flyer against high-flyer, through the most remote districts of Britain.⁴⁶

This transformation of familiar technologies is used to measure the degree of difference between past and present. This trope invokes an experience of travel which can be perceived as simultaneously distant and familiar. It seems almost too obvious to remark that this image of superceding and superceded technologies of travel is everywhere in the later nineteenth-century novel. This method of historicising the landscape through an appeal to nostalgic memory is explored in the following segment of this chapter through a discussion of Dickens's use of successive technologies of travel in *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859).

⁴⁶ Scott, *The Heart of Midlothian*, p. 13.

II. Iron Times and Golden Ages: Travel and Technology in the Landscape of Dickens's Historical Fiction

Every age may be called an age of transition – the passing on, as it were, from one state to another never ceases; but in our age the transition is *visible*⁴⁷

In his treatment of changing technologies of travel, Dickens has variously been characterised as a sentimentalist who revelled in the glories of Merrie Olde England and an enthusiastic modernist who can be closely identified with the railway boom which approximately coincided with his rise to fame as a novelist. His engagements with different modes of transportation have frequently been noted as telling symptoms of an apparently confused and conflicting attitude to progress and the historical past. Dickens's representations of personal and public histories have been considered both as evidence of sentimental nostalgia and a 'savage satire' on the inflated dignity granted to periods of the past.⁴⁸ Stagecoaches and the railway have become a neat short hand for these conflicting points of view in readings of Dickens's historical consciousness. John Ruskin, for example, famously described the novelist as 'a pure modernist – a leader of the steam-whistle party *par excellence*' who 'had no understanding of any power of antiquity except a sort of jackdaw sentiment for cathedral towers'.⁴⁹ This damning assessment, from an author who clearly considered an appreciation of the 'power of antiquity' supremely important, has been adopted by numerous critics to bolster their own conclusion that, as George Levine has put it, '[t]he bias of Dickens's world is toward the new'.⁵⁰ This is, however, far from an uncontested interpretation and as Herbert Sussman has noted '[t]he myth of pastoral England, the organic society shattered by industrialism,

⁴⁷ Edward Bulwer Lytton, *England and the English*, 2 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1833), II, p. 165.

⁴⁸ George Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 122.

⁴⁹ John Ruskin, 'Extract from letter to Charles Eliot Norton, 19 June 1870, on Dickens's death', in *Dickens: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Philip Collins (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), pp. 443-445, (p. 443).

⁵⁰ Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists*, p. 122.

remains the standard of value throughout [Dickens's] novels'.⁵¹ Dickens somehow accommodates both perspectives and seems able to oscillate between regret for the past and an enthusiastic celebration of the modern age without any acknowledged contradiction of purpose.

The early nineteenth century witnessed unprecedented changes to the mode and pace of mass transportation. The development of the stagecoach was followed soon after with the development of a passenger railway network which, begun in 1830 with the Liverpool-Manchester line, expanded so dramatically over the next decades that it is referred to as a period of Railway Mania. I want to suggest that this very visible evidence of broader social and cultural transformation influenced the ways in which Dickens viewed and described themes of historical transition in his novels. The stagecoach tripled the speed of travel by road and transformed the way people moved around in what was suddenly a much more mobile and, therefore, an effectively shrunken, nation. Though it was a revolutionary innovation it was nevertheless swiftly superseded by the steam train. Both of Dickens's historical novels, *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, prominently depict antiquated modes of transportation; this discussion will explore the implications of this preoccupation with superseded and superseding travel technologies in the representation of historical periods and events. I will suggest that nostalgic memory – a perspective on the past which is predicated on progress but characterised by retrospection – brings these apparently contrary attitudes together and enables them to intermingle.

Numerous critics have quibbled with the idea that Dickens's frequent use of the stagecoach indicates nostalgic reminiscence, but this objection defensively assumes that nostalgia can only refer to a sentimental and over-simplified response to the past. Jonathan H. Grossman, for instance, has recently dismissed the idea that Dickens's 'gravitat[ion] towards the depiction of coaching' suggests 'a nostalgia on his part for a premodern past' with the blunt (and insufficiently argued) statement that '[n]othing could be further from the truth'.⁵² Elsewhere Grossman identifies nostalgic

⁵¹ Herbert Sussman, *Victorians and the Machine: The Literary Response to Technology* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 43.

⁵² Jonathan H. Grossman, 'Transport', in *Dickens in Context*, ed. by Sally Ledger and Holly Furneaux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 334-342, (p. 334).

representations of travel as limited to ‘slow novel[s] of sleepy days’; as Dickens’s descriptions of stagecoach travel revel in bustle and speed, he argues, they cannot be said to make use of nostalgic tropes.⁵³ The definitions implied by this statement are unhelpfully and unjustifiably limited. A closer examination of nostalgia’s history and etymology reveals a more complex and suggestive picture. As Svetlana Boym has argued, ‘[n]ostalgic manifestations’ can be read as ‘side effects of the teleology of progress’.⁵⁴ They are ultimately the by-product of cultural or technological forward momentum and not merely evidence of a regressive or conservative point of view. This complexity is seldom acknowledged, though the tension between progress and regret for the past has particularly telling implications within the historical novel, especially Dickens’s notoriously conflicted historical novels.

The sudden transformations brought about first by the stagecoach and then by the railway might prompt just such a reaction of loss and longing. Nostalgia is, in part, an emotion of cultural displacement. It informed an affective literary language with which to discuss processes of historical change. As Boym has expressed it, nostalgia is a ‘historical emotion’ which can, therefore, enable a more personal engagement with public transitions and transformations in history.⁵⁵ It is revealing to explore the ways in which Dickens, dubbed ‘Mr Popular Sentiment’ by Trollope among others, used this approach to complicate his representation of the past. The potential usefulness of this trope to the historical novelist is abundantly clear.

The stagecoach is both a personal and public symbol of rapid change and consequent obsolescence. As Thackeray notes in ‘De Juventute’ (1860), the railway can be interpreted both as a symbol of a broad array of social and cultural changes in the period and simultaneously as one of the most visible causes of these transformations. Its counterpoint in this formulation is the stagecoach. Thackeray writes:

⁵³ Jonathan H. Grossman, *Charles Dickens’s Networks: Public Transport and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 12.

⁵⁴ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. 10.

⁵⁵ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, pp. 7,10.

It was only yesterday; but what a gulf between now and then! *Then* was the old world. Stage-coaches, more or less swift, riding horses, pack-horses, highwaymen, knights in armour, Norman invaders, Roman legions, Druids, Ancient Britons painted blue, and so forth – all these belong to the old period. I will concede a halt in the midst of it, and allow that gunpowder and printing tended to modernise the world. But your railroad starts the new era, and we of a certain age belong to the new time and the old one. We are of the age of steam [...]. They have raised these railroad embankments up, and shut off the old world that was behind them. Climb up that bank on which the irons are laid, and look to the other side – it is gone.

Thackeray describes himself and his contemporaries as ‘praerailroadites’, an increasingly endangered species in a culture dominated by the railway. He compares his generation to the hippopotamus as an (apparently) ill-adapted survival from a former age which, he suggests, is hopelessly ‘out of place in these times’.⁵⁶

The stagecoach is an acknowledged emblem of sudden change in the mid-nineteenth century, which participates in what Walter Benjamin has termed ‘the natural symbolic power of technological innovation’.⁵⁷ Dickens invokes various technologies of travel in his historical novels to render the idea of technological change and consequent cultural shifts emotionally intelligible to a contemporary readership. These technological changes act as tangible markers for perceived epochal shifts. The interaction of superseding and superseded technologies in Dickens’s historical novels makes use of similar nostalgic tropes to reveal and discuss processes of rapid transformation.

Barnaby Rudge opens at the Maypole Inn, a roadside tavern in rural Essex which takes a real maypole as its ‘emblem’.⁵⁸ While the Maypole is ostensibly a resting place for travellers, it advocates stasis and is placed in sleepy opposition to the increasingly violent activity of the city. John Willet, the landlord of the Maypole, is even dubious about his friends walking to London to find out about the riots, preferring to remain at home and take it for granted that the status quo will be maintained because ‘King George the Third would no more stand a rioting and rollicking in his streets, than

⁵⁶ William Makepeace Thackeray, ‘De Juventute’, *Roundabout Papers* (1863), pp. 424-425.

⁵⁷ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 156.

⁵⁸ Charles Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), ed. by Clive Hurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 9. Subsequent references in parenthesis.

he'd stand being crowd over by his own Parliament' (p. 430). The idea (or even ideal) of stasis endorsed by John Willet, influences his manner – in his own terms, 'if he was slow he was sure' and in Dickens's description he is 'the reverse of fast' – and the way he behaves towards his son who he refuses to believe is growing older (p. 11). His father's refusal to allow or recognise change eventually drives Joe to enlist in the army and, on discovering that his son is missing, John Willet is unable to give a useful description because he 'obstinately persisted' in referring to his son as 'a "young boy;" and furthermore as being from eighteen inches to a couple of feet shorter than he really was' (p. 266). This predilection for stasis (and blinkeredness to self-evident changes) is strikingly figured in relation to technologies of transport at and around the Maypole Inn.

Given that Dickens decorated his study at Gad's Hill with a series of false book-backs under the collective title 'The Wisdom of Our Ancestors', with volumes on 'I. Ignorance. II. Superstition. III. The Block. IV. Dirt. VII. Disease', it is no great surprise that there is also a strong element of cynicism towards indiscriminate reverence for the past in this novel.⁵⁹ This counter-current of anti-nostalgic feeling in Dickens's representation of the Maypole is insightfully discussed in Sally Ledger's *Dickens and the Popular Radical Imagination* (2007). In this compelling interpretation, Dickens's 'contempt for the Tory politics of nostalgia' is expressed through the novel's preoccupation with oppressive paternalism in public and private life, a tendency which resonates in ever widening circles throughout the novel.⁶⁰ John Willet's desire for everything to remain the same is cited as evidence that 'Dickens undercuts the ostensible presentation of the Maypole as a nostalgic rural idyll by revealing it to be a place of atrophy'.⁶¹ Nostalgic memory, when stripped of the preconception of sentimentality, accommodates the evident contradictions in point of view which abound in Dickens's historical fiction. Dickens's approach is to look back whilst moving forward, while John Willet wants everything around him to stand still. The Maypole is one location in which these rival impulses most obviously overlap.

⁵⁹ As quoted in Humphry House, *The Dickens World* (1941) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 35.

⁶⁰ Sally Ledger, *Dickens and the Popular Radical Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 132.

⁶¹ Ledger, *Dickens and the Popular Radical Imagination*, p. 136.

The relationship between the period setting of the novel and Dickens's present relies on the counter-currents of retrospection and forward momentum which define nostalgia as, not a sentimentalising memory of the past, but a sense of shock and disorientation. The role of the Maypole as a wayside inn where various modes of transport come and go makes it a particularly suitable vantage point from which to observe these transformations. For all John Willet's resistance, the Maypole is perpetually in transition; these contradictions are both created and reconciled by tropes of nostalgic memory.

The evocation of an actual maypole in this context is particularly striking. Dickens had used maypoles to reflect on the idea of nostalgic recollection previously in his work and his choice of this name for the inn – and as a visible 'emblem' for 'such travellers as could neither read nor write' – draws on these assumptions and associations (p. 9).⁶² 'The First of May' which appears in *Sketches by Boz* (1836), describes the associations of remembrance which define May Day celebrations:

What man is there over whose mind a bright spring morning does not exercise a magic influence – carrying him back to the days of his childish sports, and conjuring up before him the old green field with its gently-waving trees, where the birds sang as he has never heard them since – where the butterfly fluttered far more gaily than he ever sees him now, in all his ramblings – where the sky seemed bluer, and the sun shone more brightly – where the air blew more freshly over greener grass, and sweeter-smelling flowers – where everything wore a richer and more brilliant hue than it is ever dressed in now!⁶³

Here Dickens draws on hyperbole and synaesthesia to simultaneously send-up and create an atmosphere of fondly regretful memory around the May Day celebrations it describes. Changing modes of transportation play a striking role in *Barnaby Rudge* and the Maypole, which we are told from the first pages of the novel, is intended as a resting place for travellers on the road to and from London, represents a superseded precursor to the coaching inns which recur throughout Dickens's novels. This cultural atmosphere of fond regret is reflected in the soft and idyllic images created to accompany the novel (fig. 5-7) in contrast to the often cluttered and spiky images which

⁶² Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, p. 9.

⁶³ Charles Dickens, *Sketches by Boz* (1836), ed. by Dennis Walder (London: Penguin, 1995), pp. 200-209, (p. 201-202.)

his other novels inspired. That a novelist famed for his depiction of the coach road and its attendant lifestyles and communities places such emphasis on this inn (which he directly associates with a typically nostalgic ‘emblem’), suggests a deliberate focus on the processes of change it implies and the nostalgic perspective from which it was very often recalled.

Direct reference to the stagecoach in connection with the Maypole highlights this preoccupation with historical transition and draws on nostalgic tropes to invoke a sense of personal and historical disruption. John Willet deliberately sleeps as the stagecoach passes, and reportedly harangues customers who enquire about it with a sanctimonious speech about the moral decline demonstrated by so much freedom of travel. When the stagecoach arrives to take Barnaby and his mother into a sort of voluntary exile, it is noted that:

They could see him from the coach-roof fast asleep in the cosy bar. [...] He made a point of going to sleep at the coach’s time. He despised gadding about; he looked upon coaches as things that ought to be indicted; as disturbers of the peace of mankind; as restless, bustling, busy, horn-blowing contrivances, quite beneath the dignity of men [...] ‘We know nothing about coaches here, sir,’ John would say, if any unlucky stranger made inquiry touching the offensive vehicles; ‘we don’t book for ‘em; we’d rather not; they’re more trouble than they’re worth, with their noise and rattle. If you like to wait for ‘em you can; but we don’t know anything about ‘em; they may call and they may not – there’s a carrier – he was looked upon as quite good enough for us, when *I* was a boy.’ (pp. 209-10)

This description of John Willet’s unashamed, and arguably unjustified, nostalgia for a time before the stagecoach, perhaps references the regret felt by Dickens’s contemporaries for a time before the railway. It is not necessarily a position he endorses unambiguously but it represents a familiar way of thinking about and remembering the past which he uses in his reconstructions of this historical period. It represents a shaping narrative perspective, rather than an unambiguously ideological position. In this formulation nostalgia is presented as a self-reflexive form of memory which is not averse to scrutinising its own pitfalls.

This idea echoes the graduated retrospection which Raymond Williams refers to in *The Country and the City* (1973) as an ‘escalator’ in perpetual motion which always places the regretted period of relative happiness and simplicity ‘[j]ust back, we can see it, over the last hill’. As Williams suggests, in trying to determine ‘the great climacteric change in rural life’, the ‘initial problem is one of

perspective'.⁶⁴ Each generation, as Williams describes it, discovers a new idyll just passing into history. This slipperiness does not, however, suggest that there is nothing to be gained from examining what Williams refers to as the 'resting places' along the way which have been identified as moments of particular crisis. While he concedes that there is a tendency to 'us[e] the past, the "good old days", as a stick to beat the present' in these instances of nostalgic recollection, they can also 'have some actual significance, when they are looked at in their own terms'.⁶⁵ These successive 'Old Englands' plot the changing nature of what was felt to have been lost as times changed. This treatment of the Maypole Inn implies a perspective which acknowledges the coming of the railway as a context, even as it regrets the lifestyles disrupted by the coming of the stagecoach.

George Eliot likewise noticed this perennial complaint in the opening to *Felix Holt* (1866), in which she describes 'elderly gentlemen in pony-chaises, quartering nervously to make way for the rolling swinging swiftness, had not ceased to remark that times were finely changed since they used to see pack-horses and hear the tinkling of their bells on this very highway'.⁶⁶ These sets of nested retrospectives in which the stagecoach is both a superseded technology (for contemporary readers) and a startlingly new one (within the plot of the novel), articulate broader plots of historical change. Along with the Maypole, a prototype of the familiarly Dickensian coaching inn first established in *The Pickwick Papers* (1837), the stagecoach is a recognisable emblem of an older world. Dickens draws on the recent cultural experience of sudden change which, for many authors of the period was encapsulated in the image of the stagecoach, in order to enrich his first historical novel with a tangible experience of transition. The stagecoach is retrievable as a technology on the cusp of obsolescence and can, therefore, come to stand as an especially visible symbol for an array of less obvious extinctions occasioned by rapid social or cultural shift. The stagecoach, which George H.

⁶⁴ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 18.

⁶⁵ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 21.

⁶⁶ George Eliot, *Felix Holt* (1866) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 5.

Ford has compared to 'dodos or passenger pigeons' in its sudden and comprehensive extinction, has particular significance in this context.⁶⁷



The Maypole is a building with 'the melancholy aspect of grandeur in decay' (p. 88). As an 'old mansion' which has 'become an inn' it physically embodies a process of decay and transformation (p. 89). At the end of the novel John Willet is installed at a cottage at Chigwell which becomes for him 'a fictitious Maypole' where he can re-enact his glory days as landlord while his son inherits responsibility for the actual inn which continues to evolve along with the world around it (p.659). Despite John Willet's best efforts, changeability is a defining feature at the Maypole. It represents a process of gradual change and explains the transformation of a familiar roadside landmark into an almost mythic symbol which is aptly represented by a maypole, with all its nebulous connotations of a bygone period of English history and the habits of cultural recollection which attach to it. On entering the town in the short piece 'An Old Stage-Coaching House' (*All the Year Round*, 1 August 1863), the narrator observes that '[i]t had been a great stage-coaching town in the great stage-coaching times, and the ruthless railways had killed and buried it'. Dickens describes a stay at the Dolphin's Head in the town 'which everywhere expressed past coachfulness and present coachlessness'.⁶⁸ Though obviously tinged with irony, 'An Old Stage-Coaching House' draws attention to a prevalent perspective on the past which found an apt focus in defunct modes of transportation. It simultaneously mocks and participates in a perspective of fond retrospection which laments technological progress because it comes at the expense of the ways of life it renders obsolete. Similarly, the Maypole's reluctant fate is to become a coaching inn and then a drab redundancy, in a world increasingly dominated by the railway. The historical novel provides a context for lengthier discussions of this graduated process of change. The timescale over which the Maypole decays is more spacious and allows for a greater variety of tone. Alongside acerbic digs at

⁶⁷ George H. Ford, 'Felicitous Space: The Cottage Controversy' in *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, ed. U.C. Knoepfelmacher and G.B. Tennyson (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 29-48, (p. 31).

⁶⁸ Charles Dickens, 'An Old Stage-Coaching Inn', *The Uncommercial Traveller and Other Papers 1859-70*, ed. by Michael Slater and John Drew (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000), pp. 269-277, (pp. 270, 271).

the anti-progressivism of people who would bring the stagecoach back – or would prefer there was no such means of ‘gadding about’ at all – Dickens indulges in scene-setting at a coaching inn which betrays more than a hint of fond regret.

When read in the context of Dickens’s 1849 preface to *Barnaby Rudge*, which begins ‘[a]s it is Mr Waterton’s opinion that ravens are gradually becoming extinct in England, I offered a few words about my experience of the birds’, it is fair to anticipate that this historical novel will take the idea of extinction as a central theme and the stagecoach, as Thackeray implies in ‘De Juventute’, is an apt metonymy for these broader changes (p. 5). *Barnaby Rudge* explores sudden transition in the context of historical crisis and the Maypole, a traveller’s way station itself undergoing a gradual process of metamorphosis, is presented as a crucial location for the development of these themes. While ‘An Old Coaching Inn’ is framed as a sentimental and contradictory approach to progress, this preface to *Barnaby Rudge* suggests a more reflective and nuanced attitude to the idea of obsolescence as a by-product of historical change.

This is not to suggest, however, that Dickens’s description of defunct modes of transportation is by any means unambiguously positive. When Barnaby’s father embarks for London the narrator notes that ‘[t]he roads even within twelve miles of London were at that time ill paved, seldom repaired, [...] very badly made [and...] infested by footpads or highwaymen’ (p. 26). This description is shadowed by an awareness of imminent improvement, including the advances made by Thomas Telford (1757-1834) and John Loudon McAdam (1756-1836) in the design and maintenance of road networks. As Jonathan H. Grossman has noted, the innovations made by these men made ‘smooth and waterproof roads rapidly virtually ubiquitous in the early nineteenth century’.⁶⁹ Along with these earlier developments, the railway is a counterpoint against which the representation of travel by coach can be understood. The nostalgic idiom in which Dickens reconstructs the past in his two explicitly historical novels relies on a contemporary perspective which could comprehend the dramatic changes which intervene between the novelist and his subject. The railway, I argue, is a shadowy presence even in these historical novels because it provides a necessary context for

⁶⁹ Grossman, ‘Transport’, p. 339.

reading Dickens's tropes of nostalgic memory. Against this backdrop the Maypole presents 'a delicious perspective of warmth and brightness'; even within the novel, this inn is presented as a reassuring remnant of a time which was already slipping into history though, as discussed, this reading is productively complicated by counter-currents of anti-nostalgic feeling (p. 31). It represents a precarious survival from an earlier time and seems to argue that necessary and generally beneficial transitions nonetheless have their own costs and casualties.

Though it is perhaps less fundamental to the texture of the novel, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) also makes prominent use of changing technologies of travel to articulate a nostalgic reaction to historical change. The action of Dickens's second historical novel begins with Jarvis Lorry dozing on an anachronistic Dover Mail as he travels through the night to reunite a released prisoner with his daughter after a long and unjust imprisonment in pre-revolutionary France. As Lorry puts it, first in his coded message to Tellson's bank, and then in his feverish dreams along the remainder of his journey, this section describes 'recall[ing] to life' a man who had effectively been buried alive.⁷⁰ This journey by stagecoach also serves to resurrect a historical period by plunging the reader into the experience of travel by stagecoach. We are immersed in the novel's historical setting through this familiar, but familiarly distant, emblem of bygone coaching days. That Dickens uses the Dover Mail for this purpose, despite its anachronism in a novel which opens before the first Mail Coaches ran (1784), suggests that the choice was a deliberate one which drew as much on present perspectives as on the desire to create a historically veracious scene.⁷¹ It is reasonable to imagine that the connotations which the stagecoach held for Dickens's contemporaries played some part in his decision to include it so prominently in this historical novel, despite the fact that it is chronologically out of place.

A similar journey to France via Dover is described in 'The Calais Night Mail' (*All the Year Round*, 2 May 1863) and here too the experience is shadowed by the remembrance of travel by coach:

⁷⁰ Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), ed. by Andrew Sanders (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 14. Subsequent references in parenthesis.

⁷¹ P.J.G. Ransom, *The Victorian Railway and How it Evolved* (London: Heinemann, 1990), p. 7.

The stokers open the furnace doors below, to feed the fires, and I am again on the box of the old Exeter Telegraph fast coach, and that is the light of the for ever extinguished coach-lamps, and the gleam on the hatches and paddle-boxes is *their* gleam on cottages and haystacks, and the monotonous noise of the engines is the steady jingle of the splendid team.⁷²

This moment of double exposure allows an older experience of travel to haunt another, later form of transport in order to articulate a process of change over time. Crucially, it is nostalgic memory which causes these two experiences of travel to overlap and interact. This passage merges contemporary experience with remembered events so that both can be simultaneously described in the present tense. Neither is given priority. A version of this disorientating narrative perspective is implicit within Dickens's depiction of technologies of travel in his historical fiction in which the remembered past and the remembering present continually interact.

Dickens's method of recalling the past through particular experiences of travel – and the slippage between past and present this produces – creates an illusion of simultaneity which ultimately serves to highlight a gap between memory and experience. It is presented as a psychological, and representational, trick or hallucination. As Thackeray puts it in 'De Juventute', while it might almost be believed that 'the old world that was behind them' remains intact on the other side of the newly raised railway embankments, in reality it has – completely and irretrievably – 'gone'. This use of technologies of travel to create an illusion of closeness to the past through the memory of similar, but notably altered, journeys is also used in Thackeray's unpublished manuscript, 'The two officers...', where he describes a railway journey in which a man recalls his past life like 'passing several centuries there, returning by easy stages over the immeasurable'. This illusion is punctured as the piece draws to an end with the protagonist waking to find that the familiar voices he had heard in his sleep 'alas and alas! are heard no more'. The 'cries of the engine mingle appropriately/ and instantaneously with then dream the occupying the sleeper's brains' and 'you sometimes pass years in a second of time'. He ends 'all these have nothing to do with a man's <travel> journey in a railroad' despite the fact that he has been at pains to weave the experience of travel by railway into his dreams of the past. This final attempt at extrication, therefore, reads as surprisingly

⁷² Charles Dickens, 'The Calais Night Mail', *The Uncommercial Traveller and Other Papers 1859-70*, ed. by Michael Slater and John Drew, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000), pp. 209-218 (p. 214)

disingenuous and seems designed to point to a nebulous connection between memory and travel that might be difficult to articulate but which was intuitively felt.⁷³

While the opening to *A Tale of Two Cities* is obviously not an absolutely positive representation (focusing as it does on muddy roads and the fear of highwaymen), it does supply an evocative description of a mode of transportation which was particular to a bygone period of relatively recent history. In this way the mail-coach supplies a point of access for a contemporary readership. In an age which was increasingly moving off the roads and on to the rails, there is a romantic element even to the menace and discomfort of these scenes. As Wolfgang Schivelbusch famously noted:

As the motion of transportation was freed from its organic fetters by steam power, its relationship to the space it covered changed quite radically. Pre-industrial traffic is mimetic of natural phenomena. Ships drifted with water and wind currents, overland motion followed the natural irregularities of the landscape and was determined by the physical powers of draught animals.⁷⁴

The very physical and sensory description of Jarvis Lorry's journey on the Dover Mail – in which the jolting of the coach intrudes on his dreams – exploits this return to a more basic form of transportation. Dickens describes the smells and sensations associated with such a journey in detail. We are told, for instance, that they 'mashed their way through the thick mud, [...] floundering and stumbling' and that the atmosphere is chilled by a 'steaming mist [...] a clammy and intensely cold mist' which 'made its slow way through the air in ripples that visibly followed and overspread one another, as the waves of an unwholesome sea might do' (p. 10).

Such multi-sensory passages of description parallel Dickens's reminiscences in 'Dullborough Town' (*All the Year Round*, 30 June 1860), in which he describes how he was handled like a package on his journey away from the town by stagecoach and that he had never 'lost the smell of the damp straw in which [he] was packed'. This recollection (which is contrasted with his return journey when he is 'shunted back [...] by train') precipitates a string of associated memories about the town which has

⁷³ Transcribed in Appendix 2: 1. W.M. Thackeray, 'The two officers...' Holograph, 2 p., The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library., New York Public Library.

⁷⁴ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: the Industrialisation of Space and Time in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by Anselm Hollo (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1986), p. 9

been transformed, indeed, partially devoured, by the railway.⁷⁵ In ‘Dullborough Town’, experience is bound to memory through sensory associations and these begin with a journey by stagecoach which is subsequently brought into direct comparison with travel by train. Indeed, when it was first published in *All the Year Round* this piece was titled ‘Childhood Associations’ and it is structured around a process of personal recollection. The striking parallels between the representation of technologies of travel in ‘Dullborough Town’ and the opening of *A Tale of Two Cities*, suggest that Dickens deliberately drew on the idea of nostalgic recollection to set the scene for his second historical novel. He resurrects the past through a recognisable emblem which it was still possible to remember but which was definitely not contemporary.

As Schivelbusch wrote of De Quincey’s essay ‘The English Mail-Coach’ (1849), this representation of an obsolete mode of transport should not be read merely as ‘a reactionary-romantic tirade against the new technology’ but rather as a description of ‘the disorientation experienced by the traveller when the traditional, ‘natural’ technology was superseded by a new travel technology’.⁷⁶ ‘The old technology’ he writes ‘was seen, nostalgically, as having more “soul”’.⁷⁷ This idea can be identified with a particular experience of travel which Dickens draws on in his scene-setting and period-establishing opening to *A Tale of Two Cities*. As the Dover Mail struggles to the top of a hill and its passengers trudge along beside it, Dickens’s first readers, who had in living memory made the transition to a more mechanised mode of transport, were reminded of an only recently superseded technology of travel. In the day-to-day experience of travel the shock of change may have been nullified but in popular memory it could remain a potent symbol of a bygone era, still available to a novelist who sought to create an emotional reaction (and sense of connection) to a narrative of historical transition.

⁷⁵ Dickens, ‘Dullborough Town’, *The Uncommercial Traveller and Other Papers 1859-70*, ed. by Michael Slater and John Drew (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000), pp. 138-148, (p. 140).

⁷⁶ Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, p. 12.

⁷⁷ Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, p. 13.

Herbert Sussman has argued that ‘most early Victorians saw theirs as the railway age’.⁷⁸ This claim is amply illustrated by Carlyle’s insistence in ‘Signs of the Times’ that:

Were we required to characterise this age of ours by any single epithet, we should be tempted to call it, not a Heroical, Devotional, Philosophical, or Moral Age, but above all others, the Mechanical Age. It is the Age of Machinery [...] There is no end to machinery. Even the horse is stripped of his harness, and finds a fleet fire-horse yoked in his stead. Nay, we have an artist that hatches chickens by steam; the very brood-hen is to be superseded!⁷⁹

The prominence of contemporary discourse on increasing mechanisation resonated in Dickens’s work and influenced the way in which he represented the past in his historical fiction. Throughout his writing, particularly in shorter pieces like ‘Dullborough Town’, Dickens repeatedly reminds us that he spent his childhood in a pre-industrial age when stagecoaches still dominated the road. He returns to the town in which he spent a portion of his childhood to find that ‘the Station had swallowed up the playing-field’, ‘while, beyond the Station, an ugly dark monster of a tunnel kept its jaws open’.⁸⁰ In *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities* a consciousness of forward momentum coexists with a sense of loss and longing for the vanished or vanishing past. This approach creates an atmosphere of reflection on the past whilst allowing, and even celebrating, a sense of onward movement. Nostalgia, therefore, represents a productive interaction between old and new in a period of rapid transition, rather than an inconsequential or regrettable quirk of sentimentality. While there is a legitimate, and frequently made, argument that Dickens’s depiction of the coaching age is not nostalgic in the sense of uncomplicated and sentimentalising recollection – his coach-road is too dangerous and dirty to sustain an unambiguously idealising interpretation – it is used to create a sense of a past home and a subsequent state of disorientation which could aptly be described as homesickness.



⁷⁸ Sussman, *Victorians and the Machine*, p. 10.

⁷⁹ Thomas Carlyle, ‘Signs of the Times’ (1829), *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, 5 vol., (London: Chapman and Hall, 1899), II, pp. 56-82, (p. 59).

⁸⁰ Dickens, ‘Dullborough Town’, p. 140.

III. Conclusion

The changing contemporary landscape presented both Eliot and Dickens with considerable representational problems. As Eliot famously put it in the opening of *Felix Holt*, posterity was left with the ‘barren [...] exclamatory O!’ of an imagined pneumatic tube which, she implies, takes the utilitarian functionality of the railroad to its logical conclusion. ‘The happy outside passenger, seated on the box from the dawn to the gloaming’, in contrast, ‘gathered enough stories of English life’ to form a ‘modern Odyssey’.⁸¹ Within a tradition of the novel which often used metaphors of coach travel to talk about narrative, the representational problems presented by these changes must have been almost as disconcerting as the social changes they brought about. In *Tom Jones* (1749) for instance, Henry Fielding uses coach journeys – the language of ‘stages’ and comparison of a novel to ‘a stage coach, which performs constantly the same course, empty as well as full’ – to talk about the progress of the novel.⁸² To adapt the opening to ‘Amos Barton’ quoted above, this can be seen as a competition between the diagrammatic present and the picturesque past. Eliot and Dickens, as I have argued, found a solution in an aesthetic dynamic between past and present made possible by tropes of nostalgic memory. In doing so, they each introduce a psychological aspect into a representational problem which is usually thought of principally in terms of time and geographical space. As this chapter has argued, Eliot condenses narratives of transformation into emblematic ‘scenes’ while Dickens adds a temporal dimension to the well-worn picaresque premise of the coach journey by implicitly presenting any such scene as an irretrievable retrospect. These historical novels use the representation of place to create an overwhelming sense that what they are describing is not only a transformed landscape but a lost home.

⁸¹ Eliot, *Felix Holt*, p. 5.

⁸² Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones* (1749) (Philadelphia: Carey and Lea, 1832), p. 82.

3

‘FROZEN, LUNAR LANDSCAPES’: OBJECTS, SOUVENIRS, AND RELICS IN *ROMOLA*

‘Italy was little more than a vast museum’ (Lord Acton, *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 17 (1885))

‘The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object [...] which we do not suspect’ (Marcel Proust, quoted by Benjamin in *The Arcades Project*)

‘inventory is never a neutral idea; to catalogue is not merely to ascertain, as it appears at first glance, but also to appropriate. The *Encyclopaedia* is a huge ledger of ownership’ (Roland Barthes, ‘The Plates of the *Encyclopaedia*’)

I. INTRODUCTION

Critical Reception

In his defining study *The Historical Novel* (1937), Georg Lukács famously criticised Gustav Flaubert’s novel *Salammbô* (1862) for its excessive detail and what he saw as its consequently superficial and static representation of Carthage. Flaubert might have believed that the ‘resuscitat[ion]’ of the extinct city was a worthy endeavour which had cost him minute and strenuous research but Lukács, and numerous subsequent critics of the historical novel, have considered the genre ‘a spectacle of waste: the waste of pain and effort’.¹ The historical novel has, so the familiar argument goes, primarily served to showcase pedantic research and seldom achieved what it ostensibly sets out to accomplish, the reconstruction and reanimation, of life in a period from the past.² Lukács suggests that Flaubert’s novel privileges ‘dead objects’ and meaningless archaeological precision over the

¹ Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, p. 207.

² Quoted in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. by Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 248 “Peu de gens devineront combien il a fallu être triste ressusciter Carthage” <“Few will be able to guess how sad one had to be in order to resuscitate Carthage”>.

‘inner life’ of his characters, an approach which creates an atmosphere of ‘sterile exoticism’ at the expense of a more sensitive engagement with the cultural idiosyncrasies of the novel’s historical subject.³ He asserts that this ‘archaeologism’ produces ‘a world of historically exact *costumes and decorations*, no more than a pictorial frame within which a purely modern story is unfolded’ [emphasis in the original].⁴ The difficulties encountered in melding unwieldy historical research within the structure of a fictional plot has fuelled repeated suggestions that historical fiction is an ill-conceived genre which unavoidably lacks unity.⁵ The idea that objects and costume are given undue prominence within historical fiction has become a shorthand way to dismiss the genre. Mid-nineteenth-century forays in historical fiction are frequently criticised for having ‘quickly degenerated from Scott’s romantic realism into mere potboiling romance’; critics marvel at ‘the relative weakness of fictional works on the subject of history in an otherwise strong tradition of the novel’.⁶

Transparent Things: Objects and Memory

This chapter will explore the implications of this well-documented, but frequently (and I argue, unfairly) derided fascination with objects in historical fiction and specifically in *Romola*. I will argue that intricately described material backdrops can function as fictional prompts to memory, around which the novelist (and the reader) can reconstruct or, in Flaubert’s famous phrase, ‘resuscitate’, vanished historical subjects by exploiting surviving fragments as souvenirs, artefacts and relics.⁷

³ Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, pp. 186, 189, 186.

⁴ Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p. 189.

⁵ Its factual and fictional aims and methods, its most unsympathetic critics have claimed, cannot help but clash. This apparent contradiction is especially clear in the presence of precisely delineated artefacts within historical fiction. Alessandro Manzoni, author of *The Betrothed*, one of the nineteenth century’s most enduringly popular and admired works of historical fiction, rejected the genre as fundamentally “fractured”; weighing up the flaws he perceives in the historical novel, Manzoni concludes that “it is the historical novel itself that is completely at fault” because in it “the necessary turns out to be impossible”. It is a “jumble of fact and invention” in which fact is diluted with fiction and fiction compromised by fact. This problem is arguably rendered particularly evident by the attempt to represent historically accurate artefacts which, some would say, function primarily as a superficial stage-set.

⁶ Maynard, ‘Broad Canvas, Narrow Perspective’, p. 238.

⁷ The OED defines a souvenir as “a remembrance, a memory”, “a slight trace of something” and “a token of remembrance”; etymologically it is derived from the French for “memory, keepsake”. A relic can be used to

This process of research is deliberately foregrounded within this historical novel in a way which highlights and explores problems of historical representation. Rousseau's notion that the Ranz des Vaches function, not exactly as music, but as 'memorative signs' around which to structure personal recollection, can be applied to the 'archaeological' texture of these overly precise (and overtly researched) historical fictions. In his novel *Transparent Things* (1972), Nabokov commented on the capacity of 'things' to give access to memory, suggesting that '[w]hen *we* concentrate on a material object, whatever its situation, the very act of attention may lead to our involuntarily sinking into the history of that object. Novices must learn to skim over matter if they want matter to stay at the exact level of the moment. Transparent things, through which the past shines!'.⁸ It has become a critical cliché that historical fiction focuses the reader's attention on material objects. It is this idea of objects which contain memorative and historical connotations which enriches Eliot's representation of Renaissance Italy.

Similar critical assumptions have dogged George Eliot's meticulously researched historical novel, *Romola* (1863), which Henry James famously suggested 'smells of the lamp' and 'tastes just perceptibly of pedantry'. What is less frequently recollected, however, is that in the same article James also remarked that *Romola* was, in many ways, one of Eliot's most ambitious and impressive novels. He describes *Romola* as a 'magnificent romance' and suggests that it was, 'on the whole the finest thing she wrote'.⁹ James apparently did not consider this diligence in reconstruction a barrier to the overall success of the novel, though many subsequent critics have appropriated his remarks in order to dismiss *Romola* as a flawed and impenetrable book.¹⁰ As with *Salammbô*, it has become

describe the "physical remains of [...] a deceased holy person" or "a personal possession" of such a person "preserved as an object of veneration" or as "something kept as a remembrance, souvenir, or memorial; a historical object relating to a particular person, place, or thing; a memento". Artefacts, meanwhile, are defined as "excavated objects". This chapter will explore the suggestive interactions of these related concepts.

⁸ Vladimir Nabokov, *Transparent Things* (1972) (London: Penguin, 2011), p. 1.

⁹ Henry James, 'Review of Cross's Life', *Atlantic Monthly*, (May, 1885), lv, 668-78, reprinted in, *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by David Carroll (London; New York: Routledge, 1971), pp. 490-504, (p. 500).

¹⁰ This critical tendency is noted by Felicia Bonaparte in *The Triptych and the Cross* in which she suggests that Eliot is perceived to have written "three and a half" great novels and "three and a half very misguided books" (*Romola* among them) which have "escaped our censure only when it has secured our neglect". Felicia

commonplace to begin any discussion of *Romola* with an account of Eliot's laborious processes of research and to label it a malformed romance which was, as G.H. Lewes put it in a concerned letter to Eliot's publisher, 'the product of an Encyclopaedia'.¹¹ Nicholas Dames has suggested that Eliot's myopic attention to detail caused her historical fiction to fall 'in direct contrast to the workings of nostalgic remembrance and nostalgic amnesias'.¹² In order to reach this conclusion, he applies an arbitrary definition of nostalgia derived from the attitudes and behaviour of Jane Austen's heroines; *Romola* inevitably fails to conform to this prescriptive trope and is dubbed 'nonnostalgic' in consequence.¹³ There is apparently no flexibility to accommodate alternative approaches to parallel themes. I argue that Dames's definition of nostalgia is characterised by an unjustified emphasis on the 'forgetfulness' or 'amnesia' evident in the desultory recollections of those who choose to remember only what was pleasant in the past. He prioritises the idea of desultory sentimentality over the feelings of loss or longing which the term was coined to describe, and sympathises with Eleanor Dashwood's practical-minded dismissal of the past rather than the obsessive recollection of Marianne or the hoarding of mementos indulged in by Fanny Price. This critical choice relies on an unnecessary and unhelpful bifurcation, justified only by a predefined theoretical position which reveals more about Dames's critical priorities than it does about the texts he discusses.

Just as Rousseau imagined particular melodies to function, not only as music, but as 'memorative signs' through which to recall detailed images of home, a more nuanced definition of nostalgia, which incorporates an awareness of its early manifestations as a disorder of memory generated by crises of cultural displacement, might well be seen to fetishize fondly recalled objects.¹⁴ I argue that, in the historical novel, minutely described objects can be seen to serve a nostalgic function which

Bonaparte, *The Triptych and the Cross: The Central Myths of George Eliot's Poetic Imagination* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1979), p. 1.

¹¹ 'G.H. Lewes to John Blackwood, London, [14 December 1861]', *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon Haight, 9 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), III, pp. 473-474, (p. 474).

¹² Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, p. 10.

¹³ Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, p. 213.

¹⁴ Rousseau, *The Dictionary of Music*, p. 267.

provides a structure for emotionalised recollection of the historical past – as opposed to the dry recitation of facts or a more intellectual understanding of events – which draws on nostalgic memory to enliven its representation of historical subjects. This chapter will explore the idea that the ‘pedantic’ research which has attracted so much pejorative critical comment, can be reread as an attempt to reconstruct historical narrative around objects which are contextualised, not merely as superficial stage-dressing, but rather as ‘souvenirs’ or ‘relics’ of the historical past which incorporate a more personal sense of memory within historical reconstruction. These objects can, as I will show, function as ‘things’ (to borrow the vocabulary of ‘thing theory’ which has proved fruitful elsewhere in Victorian studies, but has yet to be brought to bear on the historical novel), which carry with them a freight of nostalgic meaning.¹⁵ These objects not only create a ‘reality effect’, as Roland Barthes has suggested of a parallel device of proliferating ‘things’ in realist fiction, but also imply a particular narrative attitude to the past which registers cultural transformation through the acknowledgement of loss.¹⁶ As such, I argue, they enrich the novel’s engagement with themes of historical transition and dislocation by functioning as souvenirs, relics and artefacts around which tropes of nostalgic recollection are woven. They act as fragments that generate narratives while remaining themselves incomplete.

As Nabokov suggests in ‘The Streetcar’ section of his short story ‘A Guide to Berlin’, obsolete objects can be seen to represent something besides their original function within the context of fictional representations of the past. They are not only props for the creation of a convincing stage-set but can become a means to represent the lived experience of a bygone period and evoke an emotional reaction to its disappearance. Nabokov specifically imagines the use a future historical novelist might make of the streetcar once it had vanished from view:

¹⁵ For example, Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

¹⁶ Roland Barthes, ‘The Reality Effect’, reproduced in *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900-2000*, ed. by Dorothy J. Hale (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 229-234, (p. 229).

The horse-drawn tram has vanished, and so will the trolley, and some eccentric Berlin writer in the twenties of the twenty-first century, wishing to portray our time, will go to a museum of technological history and locate a hundred-year-old streetcar, yellow, uncouth, with old-fashioned curved seats, and in a museum of old costumes dig up a black, shiny-buttoned conductor's uniform. Then he will go home and compile a description of Berlin streets in by-gone days. Everything, every trifle, will be valuable and meaningful: the conductor's purse, the advertisement over the window, that peculiar jolting motion which our great-grandchildren will perhaps imagine – everything will be ennobled and justified by its age.¹⁷

Though this description is obviously undercut with heavy irony, it nonetheless says revealing things about the practice of reading and writing historical fiction. Nabokov's obsolete streetcar is reconstructed with the 'fragrant tenderness' with which the novelist should, he suggests, treat the everyday life of the past as 'exquisite and festive in its own right'. He imagines 'the times when a man who might put on the most ordinary jacket of today will be dressed up for an elegant masquerade'.¹⁸ The detailed description of objects, this short piece suggests, is intimately associated with the realist aesthetic of the historical novel. It produces a particular narrative perspective and affects the reader's engagement with the period described. The presence of these objects, and the extensive research undertaken to create historical milieu, also evoke a strain of emotionalised memory within the texture of the novel's prose. This approach draws on nostalgic tropes for its emotional force and incorporates objects within the novel as souvenirs or relics which function as aids to historical 'memory'. This technique can both propel the course of the narrative and involve the reader with a vivid and emotionally intelligible reconstruction of the historical past.

The place of objects within *Romola* has been discussed as one of the novel's most problematic features since its first publication. Early reactions included the anonymous opinion in the *Athenaeum* that reading Eliot's historical novel was 'like attempting to feast on the bread and wine found in the ruins of Pompeii', along with Hutton's more sympathetic, but essentially similar, verdict that '[s]mall local colours depend for their charm on the familiarity of small local

¹⁷ Vladimir Nabokov, 'A Guide to Berlin', *Details of a Sunset and Other Stories* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London, 1976), pp. 89-98, (pp. 93-94).

¹⁸ Nabokov, 'A Guide to Berlin', p. 94.

knowledge'.¹⁹ Many, if not most, subsequent critics of this novel (regularly taking *Romola* as an epitome of its genre), agree with George Levine's remark that '[t]he initial and inescapable fact about *Romola* is that of its failure.'²⁰ This dismissive reaction to the novel is regularly followed by an account of the detail which Eliot accumulated in her researches and the anxiety and ill-health it caused her. It is frequently noted that the novelist saw this work as a turning point in her life, as much as in her writing career; Eliot later remembered that she had begun the novel 'a young woman' but 'finished it an old woman'.²¹ She also, however, wrote to R.H. Hutton, in response to a review which she considered particularly perceptive, suggesting that:

I believe there is scarcely a phrase, an incident, an allusion, that did not gather its value to me from its supposed subservience to my main artistic objects. But it is likely enough that, my mental constitution would always render the issue of my labour something excessive – wanting due proportion. It is the habit of my imagination to strive after as full a vision of the medium in which a character moves as of the character itself. The psychological causes which prompted me to give such details of Florentine life and history as I have given, are precisely the same as those which determined me in giving the details of English village life in *Silas Marner*, or the 'Dodson' life, out of which were developed the destinies of poor Tom and Maggie.²²

The 'psychological causes' of these 'details' have been underplayed. Eliot's insistence that there is a parallel with her earlier fiction, moreover, suggests a point of contact with the related themes discussed in the previous chapter. She would also reflect that this novel, more than any of her other works, was one which she felt represented her 'best blood'.²³ Flaubert likewise, 'abandoned everything and set off for Carthage to see for himself the few remaining ruins of the civilisation he

¹⁹ Unsigned Review, *Athenaeum*, 11 July 1863, reproduced in *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 196-7; R.H. Hutton, Unsigned Review, *Spectator*, 18 July 1863, xxxvi, reproduced in *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 198-206, (p. 199).

²⁰ George Levine, 'Romola as Fable', in *Critical Essays on George Eliot*, ed. by Barbara Hardy (London; Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 78.

²¹ J. W. Cross, ed., *George Eliot's Life as Related in her Letters and Journals*, 3 vols, (Edinburgh, 1885), II, p. 352.

²² 'George Eliot to R.H. Hutton, (8 August 1863), *George Eliot: Critical Heritage*, p. 206, (p. 206).

²³ She wrote that the novel was 'written with [her] best blood [...] and with the most ardent care for veracity of which my nature is capable'. 'GE to John Blackwood, London, 30 January 1877', *George Eliot Letters*, VI, pp. 335-6.

was struggling to evoke' and to experience the 'sights and sounds of the Orient'.²⁴ The composition of these historical fictions was marked by a, perhaps excessive, commitment to accuracy. The accusation that these novels were too crowded with 'things' is usually simply attributed to a misguided desire to paint a comprehensive and precise picture when, as James notes, a few choice touches might have sufficed to create a sense of atmosphere and milieu.²⁵ As Eliot suggested, she did not undertake research only for its own sake, but considered it subservient to broader thematic and artistic aims consistent with her wider body of work. Though Eliot acknowledges that she may have exaggerated this quality, it should at least be conceded that she intended each detail to serve a purpose beyond the creation of a superficial sense of milieu. This possibility has not been sufficiently examined and, as such, *Romola* has continued to be dismissed out of hand as a misguided stop along the way to the development of Eliot's more successful later work.

II. OBJECTS WITHIN THE NOVEL

'This ring has, doubtless, a history?'

Numerous objects in *Romola* serve as explicit prompts to memory and Tito's ring which 'he had been understood to wear [...] for the sake of peculiar memories and predilections' and eventually comes to represent an unwelcome 'claim from the past', is a prime example.²⁶ The message Dino carries, for instance, is directed to '*Tito Melema, aged twenty-three, with a dark, beautiful face, long dark curls, the brightest smile, and a large onyx ring on his right forefinger*' (p.113); it is the ring which clinches the identification and reconnects Tito with the past he had attempted to cast off. Eliot brings about recognitions, twists in the plot and reversals of fortune through the representation of objects. By evoking 'things', she draws on the particular cargo of memorative associations which they bear with them. Tito's ring is introduced on the first page of the novel and recurs at key moments throughout the plot. Bratti, a street dealer in miscellaneous bric-a-brac and the proprietor of an antique shop

²⁴ Green, *Flaubert and the Historical Novel*, p. 31.

²⁵ James, 'Review of Cross's Life', p. 500.

²⁶ George Eliot, *Romola* (1863), ed. by Andrew Brown (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), pp. 165, 142. Subsequent references will be provided in parenthesis.

(which itself comes to play a significant role in the novel's plot) discovers Tito asleep in the street and playfully reprimands him for his carelessness:

‘Young man,’ he said, pointing to a ring on the finger of the reclining figure, ‘when your chin has got a stiffer crop on it, you’ll know better than to take your nap in street corners with a ring like that on your forefinger’ (p. 10)

That the novel opens in this way, with Bratti, laden with the various wares of his trade, drawing attention to Tito's ring, signals the importance which objects will play in the course of the novel. The fact that the ring had been a gift from Tito's adoptive father, and that he wears it as a memento until it becomes inconvenient to do so, adds an additional layer of significance to this scene. Tito arrives encumbered with the archaeological remains of his former life and Bratti enters the plot decked out like a walking curiosity shop; miscellaneous objects, we might speculate from this opening scene, will play an important role in defining character, developing theme and directing plot within this novel.

Tito's ring comes to signify a physical link with his old life and, as such, a tangible connection with the past. Therefore it also embodies his disconnection from claims on his loyalty and implies his capacity for betrayal – Tito, like Hetty, only has shallow roots. It plays a significant role in the creation of character as well as plot. As Eliot explains it:

It was true that it had been taken from Baldassarre's finger and put on to his as soon as his young hand had grown to the needful size; but there was really no valid good to anybody in those superstitious scruples about inanimate objects. The ring had helped towards the recognition of him. Tito had begun to dislike recognition as a claim from the past (p.142)

This passage, which specifically references ‘superstitious scruples about inanimate objects’, follows the course of Tito's thought's and associations; the ring is part of the recognition which forms an uncomfortable link with the past and the responsibilities associated with the remembrance of unpaid debts. There is symbolic weight in the ring's failure as an emblem of filial love and duty. The instances of recognition which it brings about (first with Dino and then with Baldassarre) precipitate Tito deeper into deception and significantly influence the course of the novel's plot. These two facets – character and plot – interact and overlap in the representation of objects. The first recognition occurs in the flesh, with Dino accosting Tito in Florence but the second occurs at

a distance after the ring has been sold and left the city with its new owner. The ring helps Baldassarre to discover Tito's whereabouts and, such is its symbolic weight (contradicted and reversed by its new context), it is this knowledge which first suggests the possibility of callous abandonment rather than only incapacity or ignorance. The ring is inescapable, like a bad penny, and its influence is far-reaching within the novel; this object does not even need to be present to assert itself as 'a claim from the past'. This object is presented as a link with the past which, within a historical novel, suggests a longer retrospect than only a personal one.

The use of objects to direct plot and bring about similar recognitions is also developed through Tessa's necklace, given to her by Tito, which recurs at decisive moments throughout the novel. For Tessa this necklace is a memento of her relationship with Tito, who she believes to be her husband. The recurrence of this object is also a recognisable thread of continuity in the novel, which enables Romola to find and rescue Tessa who had lived in poverty and seclusion since Tito's death. At one stage it is even referred to with the epithet 'memorable' (p. 585). On returning to Florence, Romola discovers the necklace amongst Bratti's stock:

'Where is she?' said Romola, giving him the money, and unclasping the necklace from the basket in joyful agitation (p. 573)

Similarly, the shared fate of Tessa and Romola finds a physical representation in the locks of hair which each keeps as a token of their relationship with Tito:

A slight shiver passed through Romola as the curl was laid across her fingers. At Tessa's first mention of her husband as having come mysteriously she knew not whence, a possibility had risen before Romola that had made her heart beat faster; for to one who is anxiously in search of a certain object the faintest suggestions have a peculiar significance. And when the curl was held towards her, it seemed for an instant like a mocking phantasm of the lock she herself had cut to wind with one of her own five years ago. (p.470)

The phrase 'five years ago', which concludes this explanation of Romola's emotional reaction to the lock of hair, draws attention to the potential objects have to bring periods of the past into tangible contact with the present. Significantly, Tessa keeps hers amongst her other 'mystic treasures' (p.470), a description which suggests that Eliot wanted to draw attention to the almost magical symbolism – something like the 'superstitious scruples' disapproved of by Tito – of these trinkets. These mementos have an active function within *Romola*; they bind characters' pasts to their futures,

and accrue new associations as their place in the narrative shifts, or in relation to different characters or situations. Within the plot, these objects form a web of memory prompts for the reader as much as for the characters; our memory is jogged by the objects on which the memories of the novel's characters are pinned.

The use of objects to externalise character traits or emotional states is particularly evident in Tito's relationship to the body armour he purchases from Bratti after his first encounter with Baldassare. This armour is immediately and unambiguously introduced as a metonym which encapsulates problematic elements of Tito's relationship to his father and facets of his own character which might otherwise require extended explication. When Tito purchases the armour, he is warned that it is 'like carrying fear about with one' (p. 244) and, shortly after, it is described simply as '[t]his fear – this heavy armour' (p. 255). The movement from simile to metonymy within such a short time not only represents emphasis through repetition but also an intensification of the idea which is first expressed as a similarity and then as a contiguity. Such explicit signposting of the metonymic status of particular material artefacts has implications for the numerous other 'things' which (as has been extensively noted but seldom satisfactorily explained) clutter the novel. This explicit statement of metonymic 'content' can be read as an indication of the novel's broader methods and approaches.

Metaphor and metonymy, indeed, play an important role in the representation of objects within this novel. As Roman Jakobson noted, the metonymic quality of prose is a crucial but understudied feature of the realist novel and is (of course) intimately bound up with the representation of objects. The key examples quoted by Jakobson are taken from Leo Tolstoy. He notes that in the depiction Anna Karenina's suicide, Tolstoy's 'artistic attention is focussed on the heroine's handbag' while in *War and Peace* 'the synecdoches 'hair on the upper lip' and 'bare shoulders' are used by the same writer to stand for the female characters to whom these features belong'.²⁷ In *Romola* the depiction of carefully researched objects participates in this approach to realist prose narrative but, given the 'retrieved' nature of these particular 'things', this rhetorical device is given

²⁷ Roman Jakobson, 'The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles' in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. by David Lodge with Michael Wood (London: Longman, 2000), pp. 30-103, (p. 57).

more significance, and each object a greater prominence within the historical novel. 'Following the path of contiguous relationship', Jakobson argues, 'the realist author metonymically digresses from the plot to the atmosphere and from the characters to the setting in space and time. He [the realist novelist] is fond of synecdochic details'.²⁸ As David Lodge has noted, for Jakobson synecdoche and metonymy are virtually synonymous and both represent 'condensations of contexture' [emphasis in the original].²⁹ This rhetorical approach lends itself to historical reconstruction in fiction and is exploited to particularly striking effect through the inclusion of various memoratively weighted objects in *Romola*. These objects don't only operate spatially, however, by referring to 'setting' and 'atmosphere' as Jakobson suggests, but also have a temporal function through which a period of the past is tangibly recalled to the present experience of the reader.

Such metonymically weighted objects prompt recognitions, realisations and retrievals. Numerous other 'things' are represented in a similar way, sometimes prompting memory which is less directly related to the requirements of the narrative. A telling scene occurs when Baldassarre, who is afflicted with periodically disabling amnesia, contemplates a charm given to him by his mother, which he has worn since childhood in an unopened pouch around his neck. This amulet is explicitly retained as a 'relic' which '[h]e might long ago have thrown [...] away as a relic of his dead mother's superstition; but he thought of it as a relic of her love' (p. 276). Desperate for money with which to further his plans of vengeance against Tito, he resolves to open the pouch and, on doing so, is overwhelmed by a flood of nostalgic memory: '[i]t all rushed through his mind – the long years he had worn it, the far-off sunny balcony at Naples looking towards the blue waters, where he had leaned against his mother's knee; it made no moment of hesitation' (p. 276). Here an object triggers, or perhaps seems to contain, a 'rush' of submerged childhood memory, which even penetrates the understanding of an amnesiac scholar who has lost the ability to read. His frantic

²⁸ Jakobson, 'The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles', p. 57.

²⁹ David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), p. 76.

attempts to interpret the things which should resonate with his personal history suggests the way in which objects can or should be read in this novel.

Baldassare, indeed, has a troubled relationship with objects throughout the novel. When he intrudes on a party in the Rucellai Gardens (Chapter 39) in order to expose Tito's disloyalty, his memory fails him and he is unable to describe the precious stones with which Tito arrived in Florence. As Bernardo Rucellai reasons, '[i]f you are the person you claim to be, you can doubtless give some description of the gems which were your property' (pp. 356-357). Though they fail to do so, these once familiar objects are expected to function as evidence of Baldassare's past and, therefore, of his claimed identity. Despite this failure, these precious stones and other physical remnants of his earlier life as a scholar, nonetheless remain the clues to his elusive past and the fragments around which his incomplete and fleeting memories cling. Elsewhere, Baldassare contemplates his suddenly incomprehensible books, which are reduced to pages of 'unintelligible black marks' (p. 278), in an endeavour to reconnect with his past and restore his faulty memory. This is a model for historical reconstruction which is echoed in the composition of the novel itself. *Romola* uses 'things' as prompts and reminders which are 'excavated', both by Eliot's scholarly approach to her historical subject and, psychologically, in the layers of signification they contain in relation to various characters within the novel. Nevertheless, these are objects that are meant to be read.

The passage in which Eliot describes Baldassare's attempts to reconstitute his own memory around familiar material objects is significant enough to warrant extended quotation here:

he wanted to learn all he could about Florence. But he found, to his acute distress, that of all the new details he learned he could only retain a few, and those only by continual repetition; and he began to be afraid of listening to any new discourse, lest it should obliterate what he was already striving to remember. [...]

As he went home to his heap of straw, and passed by the book-sellers' shops in the Via del Garbo, he paused to look at the volumes spread open. Could he by long gazing at one of those books lay hold of the slippery threads of memory? Could he, by striving, get a firm grasp somewhere, and lift himself above these waters that flowed over him?

He was tempted, and bought the cheapest Greek book he could see. He carried it home and sat on his small heap of straw, looking at the characters by the light of the small

window; but no inward light arose on them. Soon the evening darkness came; but it made little difference to Baldassarre. His strained eyes seemed still to see the white pages with the unintelligible black marks upon them. (p. 278)

This passage posits objects as handholds by which to grasp ‘the slippery threads of memory’, and form a test by which Baldassarre seeks to ascertain how far he has recovered from his amnesia. That the books are rendered opaque by Baldassarre’s memory loss is both specific to these ‘things’ in question, which by their nature require interpretation, and applicable in a more general way to objects which are illuminated and enlivened by their associations within a narrative. To recall Nabokov’s term, these objects have lost their ‘transparency’. The particular involvement of objects and memory is highlighted by Baldassarre’s reliance on the material remains of his previous life as a scholar, of which they are the only remaining external evidence, in order to reconstruct his understanding of past events and reconstitute his sense of self. This reconstructive aspect is crucial to the particular symbolic effect of objects throughout *Romola*. They are metonymic fragments which hint at a larger narrative, an effect which is unlocked by memory. These objects, then, act as more than just a literal representation of themselves; their use in this novel recalls Rousseau’s idea that music could become a ‘memorative sign’.

The triptych and the crucifix

The juxtaposition of the triptych commissioned by Tito from Piero di Cosimo and the crucifix left to Romola by her brother ‘in remembrance of the heavenly warning’ (p. 163) which had been revealed to him in a dream, develops the relationship between tangible artefacts, memory and forgetfulness into an explicit way of generating narrative. Tito intends that the decorated container should obliterate the symbolism of the cross and the unpleasant memories it suggests. He conceals an object in an attempt to suppress its connotations and rewrite memory. These two mementos, each of which is associated with a different set of memories to Romola, compete with each other for dominance. Hilary Fraser has suggested that:

The painted tabernacle is just one of a number of art objects used to great symbolic or structural effect in Eliot’s novel. Not only do such paintings and artefacts play dramatic,

ironic and character-illuminating roles. They also contribute to the general effect of an extraordinarily rich and fertile cultural milieu.³⁰

Though it is useful to note the multivalent significance of these objects, Fraser's assessment does not do justice to the memorative importance of such artefacts which is, I argue, in some important respects, specific to the historical novel. It also fails to note the parallel devices which recur throughout the novel but which refer to more mundane 'things' (locks of hair, personal jewellery, weapons, items of clothing, tools), as well as 'art objects'. Fraser goes on to suggest that '[s]uch references give a kind of authenticity to the fictional characters who inhabit Eliot's historical novel, and they also help conjure up a city whose very life-blood is art and scholarship', but this is little more than a rephrasing (all be it in more positive terms) of the usual critical assessment that these objects serve as stage dressing but otherwise fail to participate in the more substantial aspects of the novel.³¹ If this is all there is to their function, then it can justifiably be claimed that the novel is too cluttered with purposeless information and, as Henry James suggested, fewer such touches might have sufficed.

Tito's gift is first introduced in Romola's private room which she has filled with what she later calls 'relics' of her parents (p. 324). It explicitly joins the ranks of objects around which Romola constructs her own 'inexorable external identity' (p. 324). The way in which this room is described, crystallises the connection between memory and objects which underpins many of the novel's descriptions:

The furniture in it was all old; there were old faded objects for feminine use or ornament, arranged in an old cabinet was the portrait of Romola's mother; and below this, on the top of the cabinet, stood the crucifix which Romola had brought from San Marco. (p. 201)

It is to this collection of mementos that Tito contributes Piero di Cosimo's painted triptych. This room's contents have significant parallels with Fanny Price's accumulation of seemingly valueless but personally meaningful bric-a-brac in the East Room of *Mansfield Park* (1814); it is a sanctuary in

³⁰ Hilary Fraser, *The Victorians and Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 207.

³¹ Fraser, *The Victorians and Renaissance Italy*, p. 207.

which she collects material fragments of her personal past. Fanny Price's room, at one stage referred to as a 'nest', contains numerous precious mementoes and souvenirs including 'a collection of family profiles', 'a faded footstool of Julia's work' and a 'small sketch of a ship sent four years ago from the Mediterranean by William'.³² The memorative significance of the East Room is cemented by the inclusion amongst these miscellaneous objects of a picture of Tintern Abbey. Hetty Sorrel has a similar collection of objects which relate to emotionally significant memories of her recent history or, as narrator puts it, they represent 'the signs of all her short happiness' contact with which brings about 'a rush of remembered sensations'. It also resonates with the much-prized trousseau of the Dodson sisters briefly discussed in the first section of chapter two.³³ Romola's room contains a strikingly similar array of 'things'.

Tito's own commentary on the symbolism of his painted box is made clear with the (imperatively phrased) suggestion that 'My Ariadne must never look backward now – only forward' (p. 201). He hopes that it will serve to negate the crucifix, Dino's token of remembrance and the backward looking mentality which it might encourage. Tito's triptych is presented as a deliberate attempt to reverse the souvenir's usual function, and erase rather than create memory. When Tito gives Romola the 'little shrine', he suggests that it is intended 'to hide away from you for ever that remembrancer of sadness. You have done with sadness now; and we will bury all images of it – bury them in a tomb of joy' (p. 201). He also explains that 'now, while I am away, you will look every day at those pretty symbols of our life together' (p. 202). The symbolic weight of this 'artefact' is, if anything, a little laboured. But the triptych has layers of unacknowledged meaning which are not cancelled by Tito's superficial concealment. The triptych might be a simple, even a cynical, artifice, but that is only the surface meaning of this bundle of metonyms. That Tito fails to acknowledge this complexity does not imply that depth of meaning wasn't important to Eliot's

³² Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (1814), ed. by Jane Stabler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 118-120.

³³ George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (1859), ed. by Carol A. Martin (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2008), pp. 301, 299.

conception of these objects or the scenes they enrich, only that Tito isn't an especially sophisticated reader. Tito's notable failures of interpretation – or over-hasty curtailments of meaning – place a particular emphasis on the need for attentive reading. As John Maynard has noted, for instance, the concoction of Christian and Classical imagery in this device weaves the individual 'securely into the larger fabric of social vision'.³⁴ This object subtly combines personal memory with historical reconstruction and links Romola's fate to that of the city she lives in.

That so much is made of the Burning of the Vanities, undertaken by Savonarola's followers in order to purge Florence of frivolity and sinfulness, provides an interesting focal point in this context. These 'vanities' are described in lists of 'multifarious objects' including, 'tapestries [...], pictures and sculptures [...] playing-cards [...] musical instruments [...] masks [...] handsome copies of Ovid, Boccaccio, Petrarca, Pulci [...] implements of feminine vanity' (p. 423), and their collection by 'troops of young inquisitors' (p. 424) gives Eliot the opportunity to describe period costume and artefacts in more detail than would otherwise seem natural within a fictional narrative. Here, even the novel's plot conspires to foreground 'things'. An expectation that personal memory adheres to objects is extrapolated into a broader method of cultural recuperation.

Elsewhere, Piero's workshop is described through a list of objects which form a 'heterogeneous still life' (p. 189) and Nello's barbershop, a conversational hub within *Romola* where many of Eliot's 'real' historical personages (including Machiavelli and Piero Di Cosimo) congregate and discuss matters of cultural or historical importance, is described in terms of the objects it contains. When we first enter the barbershop with Tito, we are confronted with a still life of miscellaneous objects associated with stereotypically 'Renaissance' pursuits:

a table, with one book in manuscript and one printed in capitals lying open upon it, a lute, a few oil-sketches, and a model or two of hands and ancient masks[...it is a] fitting haunt of the Muses. (p. 33)

As one critic has remarked, this description 'positively buzzes with intellectual life', but it also draws attention to a set of particular cultural assumptions, through which Eliot reconstructed an

³⁴ Maynard, 'Broad Canvas, Narrow Perspective', p. 253.

image of Renaissance Italy.³⁵ This description might be seen to access or, even to reference, a familiar image of the Italian Renaissance, bound up with the instruments associated with particular artistic or intellectual pursuits. This isn't only an image of 'intellectual life', however, but of intellectual life understood through its material artefacts within a novel which is strewn with numerous other things. As I will go on to discuss at greater length, the perspective which Eliot adopts seems inflected by her experience of research. It reminds us that she brought herself into contact with fifteenth-century Florence only through its remains in the contemporary city. This method weaves processes of historical research and recuperation into the texture of the novel.

The intersections between this broader concern with historical reconstruction and a more individual interest in personal recollection can be identified in objects which combine a set of personal associations with subsequent historical significance. 'Museum pieces' are reanimated by replacing them within their original contexts. In these 'things', personal nostalgia and public history overlap and interact. This is markedly the case with the collection of objects which Romola packs away on the first occasion she leaves Florence. In this scene, which is presented as a lingering leave-taking of her life in Florence, Romola handles and stores away, either 'into her wallet [to take with her] or into her chest [to leave behind]', 'every little thing that had a sacred memory clinging to it' (p. 324). These include, 'all the relics of her father and mother', 'portraits' and her wedding clothes. Eliot takes this scene as an opportunity to reflect on 'that force of outward symbols by which our active life is knit together' (p. 324), thereby drawing our attention to the many other objects which litter the text and the function they might have in relation to this idea of 'outward symbols' drawing or 'knit[ting]' together other elements of our historical apprehension or personal pasts. 'Sacred memory' is the catalyst which makes the objects in this novel more than the dull and dusty detritus that most critics have supposed them to be.

III. 'THE COLLECTOR'S MANIA'

³⁵ Fraser, *The Victorians and Renaissance Italy*, p. 207.

As Lytton Strachey remarked with characteristic hyperbole, the Victorian age was, in many different (and often conflicting) ways, obsessed with the hoarding of objects. Even Queen Victoria, Strachey suggests, was caught up in this mania for things:

There, in drawer after drawer, in wardrobe after wardrobe, reposed the dresses of seventy years. But not only the dresses – the furs and the mantles and subsidiary frills and the muffs and the parasols and the bonnets – all were ranged in chronological order, dated and complete. A great cupboard was devoted to the dolls; in the china-room at Windsor a special table held the mugs of her childhood, and her children’s mugs as well. Mementoes of the past surrounded her in serried accumulations. In every room the tables were powdered thick with photographs of relatives; their portraits, revealing them at all ages, covered the walls; their figures, in solid marble, rose up from pedestals, or gleamed from brackets in the form of gold and silver statuettes. The dead, in every shape – in miniatures, in porcelain, in enormous life-size oil-paintings – were perpetually about her.³⁶

She ‘would not lose one memory or one pin’.³⁷ This is a revealing caricature. It specifically relates a sentiment akin to a cloying nostalgia, with the accumulation of mementoes. This reflection on a culture which produced the Great Exhibition undoubtedly has some truth to it; as Barbara Black has suggested, the museum can, in some respects, be taken as ‘a ‘master pattern’ that illuminates the ideological workings of Victorian society and culture’³⁸. Richard Terdiman has suggested that objects ‘Through their associations [...] play a familiar triggering or anchoring role in the mnemonic process. Indeed, the nineteenth century institutionalised and exploited this connection between memories and objects in the form of a brisk trade in ‘keepsakes’ and ‘souvenirs’.³⁹ This is in marked contrast, as Terdiman suggests, to the contemporaneous treatment of objects as commodities which, Adorno noted, left them ‘hollowed out’ of this additional richness. In *Romola*, Eliot engages with this cultural preoccupation and uses objects to mediate historical narrative; she establishes a striking dialogue between the diverse claims that ‘things’ can, on the one hand, function as useful and productive clues for historical reconstruction and, on the other, a dry academic fascination with meaningless detritus. This dichotomy is particularly evident in the novel’s

³⁶ Lytton Strachey, *Queen Victoria* (1921) (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 232-233.

³⁷ Strachey, *Queen Victoria*, p. 232.

³⁸ Barbara Black, *On Exhibit: Victorians and their Museums* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2000), p. 4.

³⁹ Terdiman, *Present Past*, p. 13.

discussion of collections and collectors, in which Eliot seems almost to anticipate the complaints of *Romola's* detractors. She establishes a system of things which signify and things which don't; *Romola* is filled with objects venerated as mementoes which interact and play off objects imagined as commodities.

As Romola observes of her father, he has a 'collector's mania' which she guards him against by anticipating and removing temptation as, for example, when Tito arrives with jewels to sell. Elsewhere this fascination is specifically associated with 'parchment and broken marble' (p. 280). This tension between collecting as both a productive and destructive tendency is well articulated in Theodor Adorno's essay 'Valéry Proust Museum' in which he discusses the opposing responses to museum culture expressed by Paul Valéry and Marcel Proust. Adorno suggests that:

[t]he German word 'museal' ['museumlike'], has unpleasant overtones. It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying [...] Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association. Museums are like the family sepulchres of works of art.⁴⁰

This is also the argument adopted by Valéry who dislikes the school room hush of the museum and the clutter of conflicting impressions created by an imperfectly arranged collection. Conversely, and though the general tone of the essay suggests that his sympathies lie with Valéry, Adorno also reflects that Proust holds museums in high regard '[b]ecause nothing has substance for him but what has already been mediated by memory, his love dwells on the second life, the one which is already over, rather than on the first'.⁴¹ This assessment suggests an innately 'Proustian' quality to artefacts included in museum collections. The contemplation of objects generates memory, even when they concern a historical subject which the viewer could not have experienced. I want to suggest that this tension between the museum (and by extension, the concept of the collection) as either a dead space or a productive one, is played out in *Romola* through her discussion of various

⁴⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, 'Valéry Proust Museum' in *Prisms*, trans. by Samuel Weber (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1981), p. 175.

⁴¹ Adorno, 'Valéry Proust Museum', p. 182.

collections of objects and the ways in which she relates this device to the composition of her historical fiction.

Memorialisation and Objects

The Bardi Library, which Bardo cherishes as ‘a monument to [himself]’ (p. 57) and which he hopes will fulfil his wish for posthumous renown, plays a central role in the development of these themes. Bardo insists, ‘appealing against the injustice of Fame’ (p. 56), that ‘[he] too ha[s] a right to be remembered [...he has] a right to be remembered [...] because [he has] laboured, and because [his] labour will remain’ (pp. 55, 57). He explains that:

‘There will be nothing else to preserve my memory and carry down my name as a member of the great republic of letters – nothing but my library and my collection of antiquities’ (p. 55)

This collection has, to Bardo’s mind, the qualities of a memorial. Other characters, notably Dino who dabbled in scholarship before abandoning it for the more active life of his religious vocation, imagine Bardo’s relationship to his work and his library as a useless fascination with ‘dead toys’ (p. 158) or, as Monna Brigida puts it, the study of ‘mouldy ancients’ which she places in direct opposition to ‘the world’ (p. 125). This attitude imagines Bardo’s brand of scholarship as an arid and futile pursuit. As Dames labels him, Bardo is ‘a scholar in the mode of Miss Havisham’.⁴²

Bardo’s collection, indeed, is characterised by stasis; his books are shelved just as they had been before he went blind and he is ‘perpetually seeking the assurance that the outward fact continued to correspond with the image which lived in the minutest detail in his mind’ (p. 49). This collection is frozen in time by the onset of Bardo’s blindness. As Romola later explains, ‘every book is just where it was when [her] father ceased to see them’ (p. 122). This sterile atmosphere is borne out in Dino’s prophetic vision which he imparts to Romola as a warning, saying:

And at last you came to a stony place where there was no water, and no trees or herbage; but instead of water, I saw written parchment unrolling itself everywhere, and instead of trees and herbage I saw men of bronze and marble springing up and crowding round you (p. 161).

⁴² Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, p. 213.

This debate over the validity and worth of Bardo's scholarship is the most explicit instance in this novel of Eliot entering into a discussion of her own methods. As Walter Benjamin noted in *The Arcades Project*, in some important and illuminating respects, the activity and motivations of a scholar or researcher can parallel those of a collector; collecting, he writes, 'is a primal phenomenon of study: the student collects knowledge'.⁴³ This overlap, I want to suggest, was exploited by Eliot in her accumulation of objects in *Romola*. Benjamin's observation seems to find a perfect illustration in Eliot's 'Quarry' notebooks in which she recorded her research; the Quarries for *Romola* are illuminating in their diversity (names, idioms, objects) and organisation (lists, more extensive notes and quotations).⁴⁴ Her extensive notes for the unwritten historical poem *Timoleon* hints at the sort of research or collecting which she undertook in preparation for such projects.⁴⁵ Her notes for *Timoleon* take in many of the subjects that *Romola* has been criticised for over-emphasising such as costume (fig. 8 and 9), dialect, mundane historical detail – in this case money (fig. 10), detailed chronologies (fig. 11) and a map (fig. 12). Bardo and Baldassarre are engaged in the same sort of scholarship Eliot immersed herself in while preparing to write her novel. Bardo's worst excesses of dry pedantry, then, like Casaubon after him, hint at the pit-falls which Eliot had to negotiate in her own work. This interaction between Eliot's approach to historical representation in fictional form and the accumulation of objects by a scholarly character within the narrative, illuminates the ways in which she negotiates the task of writing a historical novel. It begins to answer the question, much discussed in criticism concerned with historical fiction (particularly following Manzoni's scathing appraisal of the genre), of how (or if) it is possible to integrate historical research within the fictional format of a realist novel. The point at which these objects fail – as when Baldassare's amnesia prevents him from interpreting his own past possessions – highlights their comparative success elsewhere.

⁴³ Benjamin, 'Convolutés: H, The Collector', *The Arcades Project*, p. 210

⁴⁴ See for instance, George Eliot, Notebook, Bodleian MS.Don.g.8

⁴⁵ George Eliot, Notebook with label "Miscellanies" on spine and "Quotations, Latin, English & Greek – and Hebrew matters" on front cover. Holograph. Probably used for *Daniel Deronda*. 20cm. 1868 notebooks (305p.), Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, New York Public Library.

For all that Bardo's, literally and literarily, blind devotion to his studies and his collection of books and manuscripts are not necessarily presented in the most positive of lights, I suggest that Eliot (herself engaged in an all-consuming, and sometimes seemingly impossible, task of scholarship) might have had sympathy with Bardo's thwarted ambitions. His short comings, of which there are undoubtedly many, are particularly telling. It might even be argued that Eliot parodies her own efforts within the novel. The scene in which Romola is interrupted cataloguing her father's collection is a striking image of futile intellectual labour, especially as, at this point in the novel, the library has already been sold though Romola doesn't know it yet (pp. 252-3). If Bardo and Dino represent opposing mentalities to the retention of the past, it seems improbable that Eliot's loyalty would be with the youthful and handsome, but ultimately unprincipled Tito, instead of with the monomaniacal and flawed, but essentially admirable old man who is posthumously betrayed by the sale and dispersal of his library. Romola's relationship with her father is strikingly similar to that described between Dorothea and Mr Casaubon; both involve a young woman with the work of a blinkered older man and burden her with responsibility for the completion of an impossible project. Nina Auerbach has suggested that, in spite of her readers' bias towards Dorothea, Eliot's sympathies might, to some extent, lie with Casaubon who struggles with 'an intractable book and a hectoring wife'; he is, after all, 'alone among the novel's characters in doing something he doesn't have to do'.⁴⁶ 'The Key to all Mythologies' might represent an impossible task, but it is an admirable –if doomed – attempt which could, conceivably, have earned the respect of the author of a novel like *Romola*. As *Middlemarch*'s narrator remarks of Casaubon, 'everything he had said seemed like a specimen from a mine, or an inscription on the door of the museum'.⁴⁷ The interaction between objects which are perceived to be 'living' and those which are presented as 'dead' is key to Eliot's discussion of her own materialist methods of historical research; we are presented with objects which both function within the novel and indicate the means by which the composition of

⁴⁶ Auerbach, 'Dorothea's Lost Dog', p. 87

⁴⁷ George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. by David Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), p. 31. Subsequent references will be provided in parentheses.

the work was undertaken. Bardo's collection takes on the quality of a museum which is already looking to posterity; he historicises these objects in such a way that they lose their vitality.

John Siegel has discussed the memorial potential of the museum collection, suggesting that 'every collection, be its aim novelty or conservation, becomes immediately historic' it functions 'to evoke memories not entirely one's own, to speak at once about the endurance of things and the impermanence of individuals, about the seductions of fame along with its evanescence'.⁴⁸ A collection, Siegel suggests, not only assures the remembrance of the individual who compiles it (though that is one aspect of its function) but contains recollections which are beyond the power even of the collector to determine or limit. It is a treasure trove of interpretations and possible associations. This is a feature of the museum collection which, I want to suggest, puzzles and perplexes Dorothea on her honeymoon to Rome in *Middlemarch*. To Dorothea's experience, the diverse and bewildering objects on display, which cause her to remember Rome as the 'city of visible history', defy interpretation by a young woman of her relatively limited experience. She explains her problem to Ladislaw with the suggestion that his prior knowledge of Italian art and history 'saved [him] from seeing the world's ages as a set of box-like partitions without vital connection' (p. 206). A museum without the connective fibres of interpretation derived from memory, this passage suggests, loses vitality and ultimately defies understanding; it is reduced to meaningless bric-a-brac without a narrative system to give it shape. Ladislaw's own engagement with Rome amply illustrates the alternative point of view on this question. We are told that 'the fragments stimulated his imagination and made him constructive' (p. 206). As it is put in *Middlemarch*, '[s]igns are small measurable things but interpretations are illimitable' (p. 24). Alongside these suggestive statements from *Middlemarch*, Siegel's notion that objects in a collection can contain memory suggests an illuminating alternate reading of the many 'things' in *Romola*. These themes, which Eliot most famously developed in the Italian section of *Middlemarch*, have striking and illuminating parallels in this earlier and explicitly historical fiction. In *Middlemarch*, Rome is a city where history is embodied and made visible; *Romola*, which (along with its titular

⁴⁸ Jonah Siegel, *Haunted Museum: Longing, Travel and the Art-Romance Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 4.

heroine) is arguably named as an Italian version of Romulus the legendary founder of Rome, draws on a similar set of tropes. As Lord Acton remarked, many in the nineteenth century saw ‘Italy [as] little more than a vast museum’; *Romola* ransacks this storehouse for suggestive artefacts.⁴⁹

The idea of bric-a-brac or curios as useless irrelevances has, I suggest, fuelled a dismissive critical attitude to the use of objects in historical fiction and encouraged a tendency to talk about their inclusion as the creation of a sort of stage-set, divorced from the action of the novel or the project of historical reconstruction. Doubtless this is sometimes the case but there is a tendency when discussing characteristics of the historical novel, as I suggest in my introduction, to generalise from the weakest available examples. As Walter Benjamin noted in ‘The Collector’ section of *The Arcades Project* (quoting from Remy de Gourmont, *Le Deuxième Livre des masques* (Paris, 1924), p. 259), “The publication <in 1864> of *L’Histoire de la société française pendant la Révolution et sous le Directoire* opens the era of the curio – and the word ‘curio’ should not be taken as pejorative. In those days, the historical curio was called a ‘relic’.⁵⁰ This notion of otherwise apparently irrelevant objects taking on the role of a ‘relic’ is pertinent to the study of a novel which explicitly contains objects which could quite legitimately be referred to as relics. This is especially the case in a novel concerned with religious controversies, architecture and communities in late-fifteenth-century Italy. Many other objects function in a similar way even if their role as relics isn’t explicitly sign-posted. These multifarious ‘things’ interact to produce a sort of material structure around which a narrative of nostalgic memory is generated. As Benjamin noted ‘[c]ollecting is a form of practical memory’.⁵¹ This is a position he developed with the suggestion that, while the flâneur is ‘optical’, the collector performs a similar role but is ‘tactile’ in his approach.⁵² Eliot’s exploration of Renaissance Florence is made possible by this alternate mode of flânerie, because the more direct method of lounging about the city streets is unavailable to the author of historical fiction. Instead she ransacked

⁴⁹ Lord Acton, *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 17 (1885). Quoted in Monika Mueller, *George Eliot U.S.: Transatlantic Literary and Cultural Perspectives* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Press, 2005), p. 124.

⁵⁰ Benjamin, ‘Convolutés: H, The Collector’, *The Arcades Project*, p. 206.

⁵¹ Benjamin, ‘Convolutés: H, The Collector’, *The Arcades Project*, p. 205.

⁵² Benjamin, ‘Convolutés: H, The Collector’, *The Arcades Project*, p. 207.

libraries, museums and art galleries for information, a method which is evident, as I have said, in the acquisitive style of the ‘Quarry’ notebooks and in her annotations to the books she used in her research.⁵³

Benjamin’s account of ‘The Collector’ suggests a striking and useful point of access to Eliot’s engagement with objects in her historical fiction. He suggests that ‘[t]he displayed collection finds its unity in memory and narrative’, a statement which gets to the heart of Eliot’s approach to the idea of ‘collections’ in *Romola* in which objects, as I have shown, function to propel narrative and bring about recollections and recognitions.⁵⁴ They are presented as ‘prompts to memory’ both for individual characters, thereby functioning as souvenirs, and within the broader historical narrative as artefacts or relics of cultural change. As Benjamin suggests, the collector ‘takes up the struggle against dispersion’ or, perhaps, against a kind of cultural forgetfulness in which the vibrancy of the past is lost.⁵⁵ In this context the process of collection might even be seen to represent a nostalgic attempt at retrieval; an attempt to stave off cultural extinctions by preserving fragments from a bygone era. The collector is alert to detail – ‘this is the way things are for the great collector. They strike him’ – and constructs ‘a whole magic encyclopaedia’ through the arrangement of symbolically significant ‘things’. These objects combine to imply a sense of narrative coherence through which to access the historical past.⁵⁶

Archaeology and Archaeologism

The ways in which this material is retrieved is, on occasion, imagined in very physical terms in mid-nineteenth-century historical fiction. In *My Lady Ludlow* (1858), for instance, Elizabeth Gaskell invokes the idea of retrieved objects with both historical and personal memorative connotations.

⁵³ Eliot, George, Annotated copy of Savonarola’s *Compendio di Rivelazione*, The Queen’s College, University of Oxford (Sel.a.30).

⁵⁴ Susan Stewart, ‘Death and Life, in that Order, in the Works of Charles Willson Peale’ in *The Cultures of Collecting*, (London; Reaktion Books, 1994), pp. 204-223.

⁵⁵ Benjamin, ‘Convolutés: H, The Collector’, *The Arcades Project*, p. 211.

⁵⁶ Benjamin, ‘Convolutés: H, The Collector’, *The Arcades Project*, pp. 207, 205.

The narrator, who is confined to the house having injured her leg, reflects on Lady Ludlow's trove of miscellaneous objects:

Yet I forgot my sad pain in silently wondering over the meaning of many of the things we turned out of those curious old drawers. I was puzzled to know why some were kept at all; a scrap of writing may-be, with only half-a-dozen common-place words written on it, or a bit of broken riding-whip, and here and there a stone, of which I thought I could have picked up twenty just as good in the first walk I took. But it seems that was just my ignorance; for my lady told me they were pieces of valuable marble, used to make the floors of the great Roman emperors' palaces long ago; and that when she had been a girl, and made the grand tour long ago, her cousin, Sir Horace Mann, the Ambassador or Envoy at Florence, had told her to be sure to go into the fields inside the walls of ancient Rome, when the farmers were preparing the ground for the onion-sowing, and had to make the soil fine, and pick up what bits of marble she could find. She had done so, and meant to have them made into a table; but somehow that plan fell through, and there they were with all the dirt out of the onion-field upon them; but once when I thought of cleaning them with soap and water, at any rate, she bade me not to do so, for it was Roman dirt – earth, I think she called it – but it was dirt all the same⁵⁷

Here Gaskell employs an archaeological metaphor which has been used so widely, and usually pejoratively, within literary criticism of historical fiction, in order to invoke both the personal memories (of a youthful visit to Italy) and historical atmosphere (ancient Rome) which can attach to objects from the past. Through the discussion of the semantic difference between 'earth' and 'dirt', Gaskell also explores the idea that objects from the past have a peculiar status which, in Nabokov's words, renders them 'exquisite and festive in [their] own right' and requires them to be spoken about with a 'fragrant tenderness'.⁵⁸

She further complicates personal and historical remembrance by following this passage, which explicitly relates to historical artefacts, with one concerned with more straightforwardly personal objects which Lady Ludlow has jumbled together in the same collection. A similar effect is achieved by the way in which Lady Ludlow venerates the lumps of marble both for their Roman origin and the place they hold within her own life story. This effect is heightened by the jumbling together of archaeologically retrieved fragments and more personal mementos:

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Gaskell, *My Lady Ludlow* ed. by Charlotte Mitchell, *The Works of Elizabeth Gaskell*, 10 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005), III, p. 170.

⁵⁸ Nabokov, 'A Guide to Berlin', p. 94.

in this bureau, were many other things, the value of which I could understand – locks of hair carefully ticketed, which my lady looked at very sadly; and locket and bracelets with miniatures in them, - very small pictures to what they make now-a-days, and call miniatures; some of them had even to be looked at through a microscope before you could see the individual expression of the faces, or how beautifully they were painted [...] My lady rarely spoke out her feelings. (p. 170).

The memorative significance of these souvenirs is, as the narrator notes, more readily understandable to an outside observer than the pieces of Roman marble retrieved from an onion field. They nevertheless participate in a similar trope, indicated by their inclusion in the same bureau and the proximity of their descriptions within the novel. The phrase ‘which I could understand’ acts as a rhetorical device to draw the reader’s attention to these supposedly unintelligible things in relation to the more familiar personal mementos with which they are stored. Through these descriptions, Gaskell interlays and overlaps artefacts relating to ‘historical’ and ‘personal’ remembrance; *Romola* uses similar tropes but makes more extensive, and structurally fundamental, use of them. A technique which in Gaskell represents a telling moment of comment, in Eliot supplies a scaffold for the entire novel.

The subterranean images which are used in relation to Bardo’s collection play into this notion of excavation and suggests the problems associated with revivifying retrieved historical fragments. On first entering Bardo’s study, Tito is confronted with a drab scene:

The colour of these objects was chiefly pale and sombre: the vellum bindings, with their deep-ridged backs, gave little relief to the marble, livid with long burial; the one splendid patch of carpet at the farther end of the room had long been worn to dimness; the dark bronzes wanted sunlight upon them to bring out the tinge of green (pp. 47-48)

These things are ‘livid with long burial’ and, though within the novel they remain ‘pale and sombre’; the final clause of this passage suggests that, were they again exposed to daylight, they might yet regain something of their vitality. It is, perhaps, the conditions of their display rather than a quality innate to archaeologically retrieved objects, which makes them seem so lifeless and broken.

The only source of light is provided by memory. Bardo ‘sat among his books and his marble fragments of the past, and saw them only by the light of those far-off younger days which still shone in his memory’ (p. 47). One means by which to revivify these fragments, this scene in Bardo’s study implies, is to view them through a prism of nostalgic recollection. It could also be

argued that, in her accurate mapping of the city in this novel, she also engages with this idea of physical reconstruction by presenting us with the bare bones of the city, the buildings which ‘stood then, and stand now’ (p. 84) or ‘of which there are many examples still to be seen in the venerable city’ (p. 47). These moments of material description likewise mingle personal recollection with broader cultural reconstruction. What’s more, they encourage an archaeological tendency in the reader who can still seek out the ‘many examples still to be seen in the venerable city’ (p. 47).

Edward Bulwer Lytton was among those historical novelists who made the most explicit and literal-minded use of this idea, basing his novel *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834) to a large extent on the excavations carried out on the site. As Angus Easson has noted, ‘in exploring the site and the art and objects preserved in the Naples museums, Bulwer showed a notable independence from [Sir William] Gell [who first published the Pompeii excavations in English] in selecting the material fabric of *The Last Days of Pompeii*.⁵⁹ This is a historical fiction which is surprisingly reliant on tangible evidence for its composition. At the close of the novel, Bulwer Lytton identifies a number of characters with the human remains excavated at Pompeii. Among these are characters whose activity within the plot explains the discovery of certain objects lying beside these bodies, for instance gold, a key, and an axe. ‘This desire for authentication’ Easson suggests, ‘is part of the novel’s teasing play with the whole business of reality’ but it is also about research and reconstruction imagined through an extended metaphor of archaeological excavation.⁶⁰ The conclusion of this novel explicitly connects the preceding narrative with the observable remains of Pompeii. It details a diverse list of remains and dwells on the idea of retrievable objects:

Nearly Seventeen Centuries had rolled away when the City of Pompeii was disinterred from its silent tomb, all vivid with undimmed hues; its walls fresh as if painted yesterday, - not a hue faded on the rich mosaic of its floors, - in its forum the half-finished columns as left by the workman’s hand, - in its gardens the sacrificial tripod, - in its halls the chest of treasure, - in its baths the strigil, - in its theatres the counter of admission, - in its saloons the furniture and the lamp, - in its triclinia the fragments of the last feast, - in its cubicula

⁵⁹ Angus Easson, “‘At Home’ with the Romans: Domestic Archaeology in *The Last Days of Pompeii*”, in *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer Lytton* ed. by Allan Conrad Christensen, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), pp. 100-115, (p. 100).

⁶⁰ Angus Easson, “‘At Home’ with the Romans: Domestic Archaeology in *The Last Days of Pompeii*”, pp. 103, 104.

the perfumes and the rouge of faded beauty, - and everywhere the bones and skeletons of those who once moved the springs of that minute yet gorgeous machine of luxury and life!⁶¹

This inventory includes objects which might fairly be described as period-specific and reliant on historical knowledge to make sense of them such as the ‘sacrificial tripod’ and perhaps even the ‘strigil’, but others are more mundane and presumably included to create as complete a picture as possible of ordinary life. This archaeological trope has more than one function and feeds into various strands of the novel, participating in creating character, atmosphere, setting and plot.

In *Romola* this trope is less explicit but the idea of retrieval still underpins the novel’s treatment of many different objects. In these examples, Bulwer Lytton and Gaskell interweave imagery of physical archaeology with the sort of historical knowledge which was crucial, on the most basic level, to the success of historical fiction. This imagery uses archaeology both as a physical process on which the veracity of *The Last Days of Pompeii* relied, and a metaphor for the retrieval brought about within the historical novel through the description of diverse objects specific to the period in question. This technique is reflected in Eliot’s tendency to explain the research behind her knowledge of the period and location of her novel. Eliot might not employ this approach in terms of literally *unearthing* objects but there is significant play on the idea of retrieval which is similarly concerned with the processes of research and reconstruction.

IV. VISIBLE RESEARCH

Painting

Eliot’s use of objects as a shorthand index for her research is striking. She repeatedly signposts real objects, particularly works of art, which remained accessible to her readers and which Eliot herself had likely encountered in the course of writing *Romola*.⁶² This method is echoed as a sort of metaphor through which she anticipates and invokes the background cultural knowledge of her

⁶¹ Edward Bulwer Lytton, *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834) (Heron Books, n.d.), p. 408.

⁶² Leonée Ormond has explored this theme in some detail and listed some of the sources for the paintings in *Romola* and identifying fictional works of art amongst those which demonstrate research undertaken by Eliot or by G.H. Lewes on her behalf (in instances when, as a woman, she was unable to enter certain buildings). See: Leonée Ormond ‘Angels and Archangels: *Romola* and the Paintings of Florence’ in *From Author to Text: Re-reading George Eliot’s Romola*, ed. by Caroline Levine and Mark W. Turner (Ashgate: Aldershot, 1998). See also: Hugh Witemeyer, *George Eliot and the Visual Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

readership. Specific references to actual paintings establish a backdrop of images from which Eliot is able to draw in more general terms. For instance she describes the blacksmith, Niccolò, in terms of an assumed familiarity with Renaissance painting. She describes him as:

not much above the middle height, but the impression of enormous force which was conveyed by his capacious chest and brawny arms bared to the shoulder, was deepened by the keen sense and quiet resolution expressed in his glance and in every furrow of his cheek and brow. He had often been an unconscious model to Domenico Ghirlandaio, when that great painter was making the walls of the churches reflect the life of Florence, and translating pale aerial traditions into deep colour and strong lines of the faces he knew. (p. 19)

This passage characterises Niccolò in relation to his milieu and uses a visual rhetoric in which contemporary readers could participate. The descriptions Eliot gives of several other characters also rely to some extent on portraits which she may have come across in the course of her research for *Romola*. For instance, when Tito meets ‘the boy-cardinal Giovanni de’ Medici, youngest of red-hatted fathers’, Eliot describes his physical appearance with the brief explanation that he ‘has since presented his broad dark cheek very conspicuously to posterity as Pope Leo the Tenth’ (p. 135) which quite probably refers to a particular portrait of Leo X (possibly that by the School of Agnolo Bronzino, c.1551-53 which is kept in Galleria degli Uffizi) but it certainly seems to reference the idea of such an image and the way in which it might be experienced by ‘posterity’ (fig. 13). Here an art object functions as a remnant of the past, which serves to connect and communicate with subsequent periods of history. This assumed, but not explicitly ‘referenced’, object is excavated through Eliot’s account of Giovanni de’ Medici’s personality and behaviour; the image and idea of the painting which has survived for ‘posterity’ acts as a link between diverse phases of his career and encapsulates his subsequent history without the need for the sort of extended explanation which might otherwise be necessary. Though he is a relatively minor character within the novel, his story is fleshed out by this subtle touch. This is an object which existed in the past described by the novels and survives into the reader’s present.

The allusion to a later painting allows the reader to glimpse this character from an explicitly retrospective, nineteenth-century point of view. This same method is used more explicitly, and with more easily identifiable detail, in the case of ‘Young Bernardo Dovizi, who now looks at us out of

Raphael's portrait as the keen-eyed Cardinal da Bibbiena' (p. 196) (fig. 14). This readily identifiable portrait almost functions as a visual or material system of footnoting for Eliot's research. Conventions and particular images from Renaissance art inevitably provided a point of access for Eliot as she researched her subject. She replicated this experience for the reader by including similar fragments within her narrative, around which to reconstruct late-fifteenth-century Florence. Elsewhere ceiling paintings are used as a means of 'reflecting' the activity beneath. At one point, describing a crowd, she says '[i]t was a perfect resurrection-swarm of remote mortals and fragments of mortals, reflecting, in their varying degrees of freshness, the sombre dinginess and sprinkled brightness of the crowd below' (p. 148). Something of what Eliot means can be glimpsed in images like Michelangelo's Last Judgement fresco in the Sistine Chapel (fig.15).

This method is replicated, often in less explicit or concrete terms, throughout the novel. Sometimes a convention or style of painting is alluded to without necessarily referencing a particular work of art. Many examples might spring to mind but no specific image is explicitly referred to. In Tessa's memory, for instance, Romola 'remained confusedly associated with the pictures in the churches' (p. 468). Elsewhere, describing the Carnival, and within the context of this painterly system of imagery, Eliot wonders how an artist might represent the crowds thronging the streets. She says:

So that the pleasures of the Carnival were of a chequered kind, and if a painter were called upon to represent them truly, he would have to make a picture in which there would be so much grossness and barbarity that it must have turned its face to the wall, except when it was taken down for the grave historical purpose of justifying a reforming zeal which, in ignorance of the facts, might be unfairly condemned for its narrowness. (p. 196)

The invocation of 'grave historical purpose', albeit in a faintly mocking tone, seems to speak to the use these images are put within the novel; these paintings are treated – even announced – as historical sources. Throughout her oeuvre, Eliot makes use of characteristics of the visual arts (as has been extensively discussed, particularly in relation to the influence of Dutch Realism on *Adam Bede*), but here the art objects she invokes have particular, or at least accentuated, significance

because they are among the few means by which the Renaissance city could be experienced by a the nineteenth-century novelist and her readers.⁶³

The tangible (and sometimes still extant) artwork is brought into relationship with the more transitory life of Renaissance Florence; the physical remains provide a relatively 'familiar' framework through which to recall the historical past. Eliot uses works of art as a device or shorthand for describing action as well as milieu; these artworks are used to express broad strokes of atmosphere and narrative as well as particular detail. This use of identifiable art works, or art works which are recognisable as fictionalised versions of contemporary styles of painting, combines with the use of architecture which, 'stood then, and stand now' (p.84) to give the reader a sense of continuity while presenting inevitable changes by way of contrast. This relationship is made explicit in the 'Proem' in which Florence is surveyed by a 'Shade' who has returned to the city in the nineteenth-century. This ghost parallels the opening to *The Mill on the Floss* (discussed in my second chapter), in which the narrator returns to the site of a personal past. This reversal of historical perspective (in which the protagonist travels forward rather than backwards in time) highlights the problems associated with historical artefacts within fictional narrative. These fragments are simultaneously familiar and strange to this otherworldly visitor and the sequence of description draws attention to the challenges and opportunities presented by an archaeological method in historical fiction.

The Proem describes a city which had:

hardly changed in outline since the days of Columbus, seeming to stand as an almost unviolated symbol, amidst the flux of human things, to remind us that we still resemble the men of the past more than we differ from them, as the great mechanical principles on which these domes and towers were raised must make a likeness in human building that will be broader and deeper than all possible change. (pp. 3-4)

This introductory 'Proem' draws on the relationship between an ostensibly unchanged city and the deeper changes which have taken place within it. Despite the superficial appearance of stasis, the narrator discovers enough differences to discourage the visiting ghost from exploring any further.

⁶³ See, Hugh Witemeyer, *George Eliot and the Visual Arts*, pp. 157-170.

The narrator implores '[g]o not down, good Spirit! For the changes are great and the speech of Florentines would sound as a riddle in your ears' (p. 9). This section of the novel, instead of imagining a nineteenth-century perspective on Renaissance Florence (which is, to some extent, the point of view adopted throughout the novel), depicts a 'Shade' whose 'eyes were closed for the last time while Columbus was still waiting and arguing for the three poor vessels with which he was to set sail from the Port of Palos', viewing the city as it was experienced by Eliot in the nineteenth century. This alternate perspective on the changes which have taken place, nonetheless relies to some extent on the physical appearance of the city, the 'dome and towers' which are, in some regards, presented as 'broader and deeper than all possible change' and therefore provide a point of contact between past and present.

Initially, this ghost interacts with the material structures of the city he remembers and pins his own associations to the familiar streets and structures. As he continues, however, the narrator cautions him from examining the city he thinks he recognises too closely, in case he realises how much has actually changed in the centuries which have intervened since his death. 'The changes have not been so great in those uncounted years' he thinks 'I will go down and hear – I will tread the familiar pavement, and hear once again the speech of Florentines' (p. 9). This approach to the opening of the novel accesses the past through objects which are represented as simultaneously distant and close at hand, familiar and alien. The material continuity of the city supplies a link with history whilst highlighting, by contrast, the ways in which Florence had been transformed. This distancing is presented as a crucial factor in the generation of a sense of nostalgia within *Romola*. The character of this 'Spirit', out of place in nineteenth-century Italy, embodies a desire for reconnection, which, in such close proximity to an ostensibly similar material environment, seems tantalisingly possible. In the very first pages of the novel, Eliot imagines that 'if the spirit of a Florentine citizen [...] could return from the shades and pause where our thought is pausing, he would believe that there must still be fellowship and understanding for him among the inheritors of his birthplace' (p. 4). This sense of proximity is reflected in the subsequent 'Let us suppose that such a Shade has been permitted to revisit the glimpses of the golden morning, and is standing once more on the famous hill of San Miniato, which overlooks Florence from the south' (p. 4). Location, landscape and

physical remains create a point of contact with the historical past in *Romola*. These descriptions in the 'Proem' not only intertwine physical remains with fond personal memories, but use material objects as a way for the individual, and by extension the novel, to connect the historical past to their own present. Through their continued but altered presence, they simultaneously suggest continuity and disjuncture. This introductory segment of the novel establishes a relationship between memory, lived experience and material artefacts which is, as I have shown, developed throughout the novel.



The inclusion of art objects which, to the experience of the historical characters within the novel did not yet exist, interestingly foregrounds Eliot's relationship, as researcher and author, with the artefacts she describes. It suggests a sort of double exposure in which 'Romola' the citizen of Renaissance Florence and *Romola* the nineteenth-century novel coexist within the text. For instance, when Tito meets Tessa by chance in a church:

He lifted her from her knees, and led her out under the cloisters surrounding the atrium, which were then open, and not yet adorned with the frescoes of Andrea del Sarto (p. 149)

Eliot saw these frescoes, not Tessa. It does not refer to Savonarola's Florence, but draws attention to Eliot's experience of the city in the nineteenth century. Another striking example of this trope takes place when Tito sees a letter addressed by Savonarola and the narrator digresses with a discussion about how the style of the late-fifteenth century monk's handwriting could be ascertained:

Savonarola rose and turned to his desk as he spoke. He took from it a letter on which Tito could see, but not read, an address in the Frate's own minute and exquisite handwriting, still to be seen covering the margins of his Bibles. (p. 536)

Eliot's historical perspective is implicit in this description; we are simultaneously presented with images of Tito glimpsing the letter and Eliot examining Savonarola's 'minute and exquisite handwriting' which, she tells us, can 'still be seen' by the careful researcher who troubles to seek out his annotated bibles. A similar reference to Eliot's textual sources occurs in a footnote following a speech by Savonarola. Eliot explains that '[t]he sermon here given is not a translation,

but a free representation of Fra Girolamo's preaching in its more impassioned moments'.⁶⁴ Even where a direct source is not used, Eliot is careful to ensure that her readers are aware that she has consulted historical documents before deciding against their wholesale inclusion within the novel. Sally Shuttleworth has suggested that, with the shift in historical distance between this novel and her previous work, Eliot 'discards comments designed to create a dual perspective between the time of the novel and that of the reader'; these still-surviving objects allow glimpses of this characteristic dual perspective.⁶⁵ Elsewhere, these references might rely on explicit evocations of memory – as in the opening to *The Mill on the Floss* – but here this perspective is condensed within objects which belong to the past but survive in the present.

Eliot insists on referring to her own mid-nineteenth century perspective, just as she reverses the historical transition in her 'Proem' by bringing a Renaissance resident of Florence into the nineteenth-century city. Switching places allows her to covertly discuss the implications of a similar displacement in reverse and interestingly problematizes her methods before she even begins her narrative. This makes explicit Eliot's own perspective as a nineteenth-century visitor to Florence and therefore makes the author – and the author's cultural perspective – visible within the narrative.

Costume

The presentation of historical costume in *Romola* is a particularly telling instance where painstaking research comes to the novel's surface. The care with which Eliot researched clothing is evident throughout her notebooks. Her pages of notes on costume for *Timoleon* (fig. 8 and 9), for example, suggest similar attention to detail. It could be argued that this technique disrupts the flow of the narrative and creates an artificial air of scholarship which is inappropriate in a novel. This has been noted as a representative flaw in the genre by the numerous critics who insist on a distinction between historical fiction and 'costume novels'.⁶⁶ 'Costume' has become a synonym for an over

⁶⁴ Eliot, *Romola*, ed. by Dorothea Barrett (London: Penguin, 2005), footnote from p. 229.

⁶⁵ Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science*, p. 97.

⁶⁶ For instance, see: Charles H. Shattuck, 'Setting Shakespeare Free?', *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 17, (1983), 107-123 in which he suggests that '[w]ith the beginnings or the burgeoning of modern historical and

concern with superficial detail. These definitions seem designed to protect 'serious' literature from the taint of less sophisticated examples of the historical novel where, they imply, 'surface detail' is all that matters. However, this division is very often too rigid and discourages more considered critical reading of an indisputably prominent aspect of many historical novels, including Scott's. Contrary to critical opinion, the representation of costume in *Romola* is potentially very revealing.

When the narrative returns to Romola and Tessa's shared household after a number of years have passed, Tessa is described as still wearing 'her *Contadina* gown: it was only broader than the old one; and there was the silver pin in her rough curly brown hair, and round her neck the memorable necklace' (p. 585). The continuity of dress, in contrast to the few changes which have crept into her appearance, function as prompts to the reader's memory as well as an indication of inevitable change. This relationship between costume and historical reconstruction and memory, is also made explicit in the description of Tessa's '*memorable necklace*' [my emphasis]. These 'things' create a particular historical perspective which draws on ideas of obsolescence and consequent loss. 'Fashion', tethered as it is to a particular historical moment, is an especially effective means of highlighting this process of continuous transformation; an item of clothing becomes a museum piece more quickly than most objects because it is an especially visible and transitory aspect of everyday life. As the narrator sardonically notes in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860):

Maggie, in spite of her own ascetic wish to have no personal adornment, was obliged to give way to her mother about her hair, and submit to have the abundant black locks plaited into a coronet on the summit of her head, after the pitiable fashion of those antiquated times. (TMoTF, p. 257)

Fashions which become 'antiquated' with the passage of only forty years are used as visual cues to conjure periods of the past.⁶⁷ *Romola* is no exception but, owing to the longer retrospect it undertakes, this effect is more pronounced because the changes described are more extreme. As

archaeological research, alongside the flood of costume novels by Sir Walter Scott, Bulwer-Lytton, and other lesser romancers, Shakespeare on the stage became history lessons.'

⁶⁷ *The Mill on the Floss* was published in 1860 and set before the Reform Act of 1832.

Richard Cronin has observed, fashion is ‘vulnerable not just to the passage of years but of months’.⁶⁸

Romola’s wedding clothes undergo a memorative transformation even within the first half of the novel. Their importance to a particular event and relationship accelerates this process of obsolescence. Once her marriage has failed to live up to her expectations and she has decided to leave Florence, Romola contemplates these items of clothing before storing them away for safe keeping:

The white silk and gold lay there, the long white veil and the circlet of pearls. A great sob rose as she looked at them: they seemed the shroud of her dead happiness (p. 323)

This gives a detailed visual picture of these objects. Following this description, ‘Romola was carried, by a sudden wave of memory, back again into the time of perfect trust’ (p. 323). This costume has outlived its original significance and become a marker of something more nebulous which has also failed to survive the passage of time. Significantly, this object, which has been rendered an artefact divorced from its original use, causes Romola to experience ‘a sudden wave of memory’. Costume is not merely a superficial veneer designed to create a sense of milieu (or the historical ‘atmosphere’ Henry James referred to) but can be a means by which to construct a very specific (and fleeting) moment in time. These things belong to a particular, often brief, period and are, therefore, especially vulnerable to the passage of time. As the narrator notes, they very quickly come to be ‘obsolete stuffs and fashions’ (p. 140), the description of which implies a particular historical perspective and focuses on things which have vanished; it is, therefore, in some striking regards, a nostalgic mode of recollection and reconstruction. In her depiction of costume, Eliot is looking for the differences, rather than the similarities which, as she commented in her Proem, is the more difficult and painful element of historical reconstruction. As Eliot puts it, ‘[t]hese are difficult questions: it is easier and pleasanter to recognise the old than to account for the new’ (p. 5).

⁶⁸ Richard Cronin, ‘Bulwer, Carlyle, and the Fashionable Novel’ in *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer Lytton: Bicentenary Reflections*, pp. 38-53, (p. 39).

Because of this quality, costume is also referred to as a metaphor for a wilful sloughing of the past. It is disingenuously represented as something relatively trivial which can easily be dispensed with. This superficial interpretation is belied by the outcome of the plot, as well as the numerous costumes which are intricately embedded in the novel's sense of historical milieu. Tito wonders, 'Could he not strip himself of the past, as of rehearsal clothing, and throw away the old bundle, to robe himself for the real scene?' (p. 484). This imagery draws on the transitory nature of costume to create an impression of time passing. It applies the idea of constant change to physical objects, and to costume in particular. This is a striking image in a novel which contains so many detailed descriptions of 'things'. It relies on the idea that apparently superficial detail is sloughed as time passes. It can, therefore, be read as a system of imagery which allows the retrieval of vanished scenes. These abandoned fragments chart gradual historical change and their retrieval can be seen to represent a reversal of this process, however partial or unsatisfactory.

Monna Brigida is first introduced into the novel with a description of her costume. She is among the characters most defined by her appearance and accoutrements and is subsequently a prime target for the young boys gathering items for the Burning of the Vanities. She surrenders a number of her prized adornments to their collection. She enters Bardo's house, for instance, described as a 'the figure of a short stout black-eyed woman':

about fifty, wearing a black velvet *berretta*, or close cap, embroidered with pearls, under which surprisingly massive black braids surmounted the little bulging forehead, and fell in rich plaited curves over the ears, while an equally surprising carmine tint on the upper region of the fat cheeks contrasted with the surrounding sallowness. (p. 124)

Monna Brigida's appearance is described in great physical and linguistic detail with the use of the correct Italian vocabulary for each item of clothing. This lengthy description continues:

Three rows of pearls and a lower neckline of gold reposed on the horizontal cushion of her neck; the embroidered border of her trailing black-velvet gown and her embroidered long-drooping sleeves of rose-coloured damask, were slightly faded, but they conveyed to the initiated eye the satisfactory assurance that they were the splendid result of six months' labour by a skilled workman; and the rose-coloured petticoat, with its dimmed white fringe and seed-pearl arabesques, was duly exhibited in order to suggest a similar pleasing reflection. A handsome coral rosary hung from one side of an inferential belt, which emerged into certainty with a large clasp of silver wrought in niello; and, on the other side, where the belt again became inferential, hung a *scarsella*, or large purse, of crimson velvet,

stitched with pearls. Her little fat right hand, which looked as if it had risen out of shape under partial baking, held a small book of devotions, also splendid with velvet, pearls, and silver. (p. 124)

This passage unambiguously connects the depiction of material objects with a broader approach to historical research and representation in which the detail is not only physical but informational. We learn, not only the correct vocabulary for some items but also that a 'skilled workman' laboured for six months on certain details of Monna Brigida's wardrobe.

Costume is first introduced in the Proem, with the spectre of a late-fifteenth-century 'citizen' accoutred in period dress which is described in intricate detail and in a vocabulary which is appropriate to the time and place of the novel's setting:

The Spirit is clothed in his habit as he lived: the folds of his well-lined black silk garment or *lucco* hang in grave unbroken lines from neck to ankle; his plain cloth cap, with its *becchetto*, or long hanging strip of drapery, to serve as a scarf in case of need, surmounts a penetrating face, not, perhaps, very handsome, but with a firm, well-cut mouth, kept distinctly human by a close-shaven lip and chin. It is a face charged with memories of a keen and various life passed below there on the banks of the gleaming river; and as he looks at the scene before him, the sense of familiarity is so much stronger than the perception of change, that he thinks it might be possible to descend once more among the streets, and take up that busy life where he left it. (p. 4)

Not only does this description establish the accurate depiction of period objects as a priority in itself, it also extends this method or approach to historical research and representation to the use of language through which Eliot engages with Renaissance Florence. That the interest in objects develops into an accurate rendition of appropriate Italian terminology for each item of clothing, indicates broader implications for the representation of the past in Eliot's historical novel. The attitude with which she approaches objects can, therefore, be read as influencing many different aspects of the novel, including choice of vocabulary, which is evident in the direct translation of dialect phrases, as well as in the use of specific Italian terminology. Costume is granted immediate relevance within this introductory section because it was important to Eliot's conception of her historical fiction, not only in and of itself, but as an indication of her broader approach to historical research and representation.

Examples of this close attention to details of language pepper Eliot's prose. She includes parenthetical clarifications of idiomatic meaning "Monna Trecca" (equivalent to 'Dame Greengrocer')' (p. 16), or direct translation of terms she has chosen to give in Italian 'romor (insurrection)' (p. 168) 'a *tabellario* (letter-carrier)' (p. 394). This concern is also reflected in the care Eliot took with accurate accent and intonation in her research for *Timoleon* in which she takes notes from Edmund Geldart, *The Modern Greek Language in its Relation to Ancient Greek* (Clarendon, 1870), and recounts the anecdote of Hegelochus's mispronunciation of Euripides's *Orestes* in which he was heard to say 'weasel' in place of 'calm sea'. Eliot takes this as 'proof that deficiencies of pronunciation were perceptible in the Greek theatres'.⁶⁹ As Anne Green has suggested of Flaubert's use of idiomatic language in *Salammbô*, 'if the novel were to ring true, it would have to be full of obscure foreign words and annotations; if, on the other hand, he were to write in conventional French, the result would be banal'.⁷⁰ The compromise achieved in the case of appropriate language and vocabulary is mirrored in the treatment of other types of research, including the description of objects within the text. Both concern the level of specificity which is appropriate and how prominent research, or research methods, should be within the historical novel.

This level of accuracy in the engagement with period objects in relation to the language used to describe them is also reflected in Eliot's correspondence with Lord Leighton who illustrated *Romola* for the *Cornhill* magazine. One particular exchange about the correct style of 'gown or *gamurra*', is particularly indicative of her prioritisation of accuracy over straightforward fictionalisation:

Since I saw you I have confirmed by renewed reference my conclusion that *gammura* was the equivalent of our *gown*, i.e. the constant outer garb of femininity, varying in length and cut according to rank and age. The poets and novelists give it alike to the peasant and the 'city woman,' and speak of the *girdle* around it. Perhaps it would have been better to call

⁶⁹ George Eliot, 'Accent and Quality', 'Notebook with label "Miscellanies" on spine and "Quotations, Latin, English & Greek – and Hebrew matters" on front cover. Holograph. Probably used for Daniel Deronda. 20cm. 1868 notebooks (305p.), reverse of p. 12.

⁷⁰ Green, *Flaubert and the Historical Novel*, p. 32.

Tessa's gown a *gammurrina*, the word sometimes used and indicating, I imagine, just that abbreviation of petticoat that active work demands⁷¹

As Hugh Witemeyer notes, Eliot was frequently disappointed by the results of Leighton's illustrations to *Romola*.⁷² She came to terms with the discrepancy between her text and the images which accompanied it by acknowledging that the two serve different purposes and participate in different traditions.⁷³ She concedes that Leighton had 'given her attitude transcendently well, and the attitude is more important than the mere headdress'.⁷⁴ Eliot's engagement with Leighton over the illustration of her text reveals the degree of specificity which she expected; as Witemeyer has noted, among the reasons that Leighton was selected as a suitable illustrator for *Romola* was his previous depictions of Florence and the years he spent studying in the city. These priorities suggest that Eliot was interested in the detail and specific knowledge he could bring to the project. She would, indeed, have been familiar with a more detailed approach from Leighton's earlier forays into historical genre painting, and particularly where these incorporated representations of Renaissance Italy. A particularly suitable image of this earlier approach can be found in Leighton's *Cimabue's Celebrated Madonna*, (1853-5) (fig. 16) at the National Gallery.



Elsewhere in her oeuvre, Eliot uses objects in tellingly similar ways. In *Silas Marner* (1861), a novel which was completed when work had already begun on *Romola*, objects play an important role in the characterisation of Marner. The lonely man, exiled from his religious community, finds companionship in the hoarding of objects which he imagines have 'faces' and cherishes as though

⁷¹ George Eliot, 'GE to Frederic Leighton, London, [?10 June 1862]' in *The George Eliot Letters*, IV, pp. 42-3, (p. 42).

⁷² She wrote to John Blackwood that only 'a mind well accustomed to resignation' could endure seeing their fiction interpreted (and inevitably altered) by another artist. George Eliot, 'GE to John Blackwood, London, 30 January 1877', *Letters*, VI, pp. 335-336, (p. 335).

⁷³ As Hugh Witemeyer has noted, Leighton's illustrations were influenced 'more by established stylistic and iconographic traditions in the visual arts than by an author's words' (*George Eliot and the Visual Arts*, p. 161).

⁷⁴ George Eliot, 'GE to Frederic Leighton, London, [5? June 1862]', *Letters*, IV, p. 41, (p. 41).

they are voluntarily helpful and comforting to him in his isolation. The earthenware pot with which he collects water, for instance, is described as a ‘companion’:

It had been his companion for twelve years, always standing on the same spot, always lending its handle to him in the early morning, so that its form had an expression to him of willing helpfulness, and the impress of its handle on his palm gave a satisfaction mingled with that of having fresh clear water. One day as he was returning from the well, he stumbled against the step of the stile, and his brown pot, falling with force against the stones that overarched the ditch below him, was broken in three pieces. Silas picked up the pieces and carried them home with grief in his heart. The brown pot could never be of use to him any more, but he stuck the bits together and propped the ruin in its old place for a memorial.⁷⁵

Marnier’s emotional investment in objects also feeds into the two theft plots which shape the novel, and relates significantly to his enjoyment of the coins he hoards. He claims to recognise each of these individually and would not choose to replace them with an equivalent sum of money. These examples serve to highlight the particular role which ‘things’ could play in Eliot’s work and the specific uses they have to historical fiction which exploits this emotional investment. This pot is associated with Marnier’s present through its use value until it is broken and relegated to the status of ‘memorial’. This passage traces a process by which things can be transformed from useful ‘conveniences’ into a ‘ruin’ which then functions as a ‘memorial’. As Benjamin noted, ‘[w]hat is decisive in collecting is that the object is detached from all its original functions in order to enter into the closest conceivable relation to things of the same kind. This relation is the diametric opposite of any utility, and falls into the peculiar category of completeness’.⁷⁶ These objects are reorganised into a new system of relationships within the novel, in which they function within their new context as artefacts and souvenirs of a vanished past.

V. CONCLUSION

In *Romola*, and many other historical fictions (a few of which I have discussed but many others besides), the detailed depiction of objects is intimately associated with the idea, not only of reconstruction, though that is an important facet of the trope, but also a sense of remembrance and

⁷⁵ George Eliot, *Silas Marner* (1861), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 27-28.

⁷⁶ Benjamin, ‘Convolutés: H, The Collector’, *The Arcades Project*, p. 204.

emotional reconnection. As this chapter has discussed, Eliot achieves this combination of aims by establishing ‘things’ as personal souvenirs or cultural artefacts which participate in the novel’s grander scheme of historical representation in a way which combines intellectual with emotional recuperation. This method does, however, acknowledge a disjuncture between the attempt and the achievement which creates a sense of incompleteness and yearning. As Gabriel Josipovici has suggested in his discussion of Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*:

Ordinary memory is the memory of habit, of the intellect, which smoothes out the specific in favour of a generalised view of the past. It is always those senses which are the furthest removed from the intellect (smell, taste, touch) which reawaken our past selves. Thus it is only when Marcel *tastes* the madeleine, not when he sees it, that the whole of Combray floods into his mind and senses, Combray not as he consciously remembered it, but Combray as it *felt* when he lived in it.⁷⁷

A slightly less specific version of this trope – and arguably less sophisticated in its relation to subsequent ideas about sense memory – occurs in the proliferation of objects in nineteenth-century historical fiction. As I have shown, *Romola* uses ‘things’ to create ‘rushes’ and ‘waves’ of memory, parallel to Josipovici’s account of Proust’s madeleine for individual characters (Baldassare’s amulet) and by extension for the reader (‘memorable necklace’), through objects which become recurring motifs or poignant reminders within particular scenes. This trope might not be used on a ‘Proustian’ scale – it refers mostly to local incidents within the text and therefore provides more of a scaffold than an impetus for the narrative – but it is a prominent feature of the novel which infuses this historical narrative with the tone and perspective of nostalgic recollection.

⁷⁷ Gabriel Josipovici, *The World and the Book: A Study of Modern Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 9.

4

UNMARKED GRAVES: FORGETFULNESS AND FAILED MEMORIALS

A little insomnia is not without its value in making us appreciate sleep, in throwing a ray of light upon that darkness. An unfailing memory is not a very powerful incentive to the study of the phenomenon of memory.¹

the metropolis has the added attraction that, through what it has become, one can look back with nostalgia on what it was.²

Our terror of the unmarked grave is a terror of the insignificance of a world without writing.³

I. The Art of Forgetfulness

John Ruskin's 1849 essay 'The Lamp of Architecture' describes the role memory can (or should) play in architectural aesthetics. He argues that though '[w]e may live without [architecture], and worship without her, [...] we cannot remember without her'. Poetry and architecture, he suggests, are the only two 'strong conquerors of the forgetfulness of men'. Old buildings, Ruskin explains, can be 'animated by a metaphorical or historical meaning'.⁴ The connection between history and memory is materialised in the fabric of ancient structures which, through their continued survival and the tangible sense of continuity they inspire, add colour and emotional depth to an otherwise 'doubtful record'. Ruskin wrote:

¹ Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time, IV: Sodom and Gomorrah*, trans. by C. K. Scott-Moncrieff (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 60.

² Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (1972), trans. by William Weaver (London: Vintage, 1997), p. 26.

³ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 31.

⁴ John Ruskin, *The Lamp of Memory* (London: Penguin, 2008), pp. 3, 4.

How cold is all history, how lifeless all imagery, compared to that which the living nation writes, and the uncorrupted marble bears! – how many pages of doubtful record might we not often spare, for a few stones left one upon another!⁵

The emphasis here is on living or, as he calls them, ‘warm’ monuments which have a place in contemporary life – ‘in the hearth and house’ – as opposed to the ‘lifeless’ or ‘cold’ relationship to the historical past produced by traditional history writing.⁶

Built structures which survive from one generation to the next, Ruskin suggests, create a sense of continuity between past and present. The survival of objects from the past, as I discussed in my previous chapter, informs the structure of *Romola*. Where buildings are allowed to fall into ruin – or in cases where they were never built to last – the traces of memory which cling to their architecture are rendered ‘unintelligible’ by ‘decay’.⁷ The balance between conservation and deterioration is a central theme in Ruskin’s argument and this idea of intelligibility gives rise to a need for interpretative reading of physical remains. He ponders how far buildings can be maintained, and therefore prevented from becoming ‘unintelligible’, before they lose the allusive – quasi-magical – quality he praises them for. This problem, I will argue, can be reformulated in terms of the tension between remembrance and forgetfulness which, as I began to argue in my introduction, defines nostalgic recollection. Ruins are one location in which tangible forms of memory can be shown to crumble and fail. This materialisation of faulty memory, I will suggest, is especially striking when it occurs in the historical novel, a genre which is premised on the fictional reconstruction of the historical past which, as I showed through my discussion of *Romola*, frequently developed an aesthetic of tangible memory through a proliferation of material artefacts. The relationship between memory and forgetfulness, I will argue, echoes the tensions between loss and longing, memory and desire, recollection and insurmountable distance, which characterise nostalgic memory.

The possibility of continuity and connection is frequently thwarted by fragmentation or, as Ruskin hints, illegibility. A ruin simultaneously describes what is still recuperable and what has already been

⁵ Ruskin, ‘The Lamp of Memory’, p. 5.

⁶ Ruskin, ‘The Lamp of Memory’, p. 5.

⁷ Ruskin, ‘The Lamp of Memory’, p. 11.

irrevocably lost. This paradox is arguably the source of their fascination. Michel Makarius has suggested that ‘the ruin conjures up absence’⁸ while Salvatore Settis argues that ‘[r]uins signal simultaneously an absence and a presence; they show, they *are*, an intersection of the visible and the invisible’; they ‘potently epitomize the perennial tension between what is preserved and what is lost’.⁹ Ruins materialise faulty or imperfect memory. If they stand for recollection and recuperation, they also remind us of forgetfulness, further dilapidation and eventual obliteration. This resonates with the representational problem at the heart of the historical novel, a genre which accentuates the implicit contradiction of any mimetic project and recuperates a subject or period of time which in reality has ceased to exist. To return to Paul Ricoeur’s phrase – already quoted in my introduction – the historical novel conjures ‘a present image of an absent thing’; it seems, therefore, entirely apt that the genre would find an analogy for its own reconstructive project in the image of the ruin.¹⁰



The tradition of figuring memory in architectural terms was by no means new to the nineteenth century, or even in the eighteenth, when the image of the romantic ruin became so prominent in literature and the visual arts. As Raphael Samuel puts it, ‘Romanticism built on time’s ruins. Its idea of memory was premised on a sense of loss’.¹¹ Wordsworth’s legacy, in particular, looms large in the history of the ruin as it relates to individual and cultural memory. Frances Yates’s *The Art of Memory* (1966) traces the relationship between recollection and the material environment to classical mnemotechnics – a term which Yates abandons as clumsy, preferring her own influential coinage, ‘the art of memory’.¹² The ancient methods of rhetoric which Yates describes mould human

⁸ Michel Makarius, *Ruins* (Paris: Flammarion, 2004), p. 147.

⁹ Salvatore Settis, ‘Foreword’ to Michael S Roth with Claire Lyons and Charles Merewether, *Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1997), p. vii, (p. vii).

¹⁰ Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 280.

¹¹ Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1996), p. ix.

¹² Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. xi.

psychology around ‘evidence’ or prompts in the physical, usually built, surroundings. The story which is frequently related as the starting point for this spatial approach to memory relates to the poet Simonides of Ceos who, having escaped a house in which he was performing shortly before it collapsed – apparently owing to divine intervention – was able to identify the mutilated remains of his less fortunate audience by recollecting where each guest had been sitting at the table.¹³ This story is presented as a sort of origin myth for the practice of using places – most frequently imagined buildings – as a template for orderly recollection in classical rhetoric. The ‘art of memory’, then, maps memory on to place. This notion was taken up by Pierre Nora who borrowed Yates’s concept of the ‘memory place’ to ‘study national feeling not in the traditional thematic or chronological manner but instead by analysing the places in which the collective heritage of France was crystallised’.¹⁴ What began in Yates’s discipline-defining book as an account of artificial memory and how it could be put to use by an orator, is adapted in Nora’s study to analyse the relationship between place and collective memory. Monumental structures, whether intact or fragmentary, have been imagined by various scholars, poets and novelists as locations rich in associations of memory. In the ‘Art of Memory, as Yates puts it, ‘[t]he commonest, though not the only, type of mnemonic place system used was the architectural type.’¹⁵

Inspired by Yates’s work, Umberto Eco has half-jokingly argued that a semiotics of forgetfulness – in the sense that *ars memoriae* creates a semiotics of remembrance – is impossible because signs must always signify presence, not absence. He suggests that ‘a mnemotechnics is a connotative semiotics’.¹⁶ Eco explains that:

every expression determined by a semiotic sign function sets into play a mental response as soon it is produced, thus making it impossible to use an expression to make its own content disappear. If the arts of memory are semiotics, it is not possible to construct arts

¹³ This story is related in more detail by Yates in the opening to *The Art of Memory*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁴ Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. ix

¹⁵ Yates, *The Art of Memory*, p. 3.

¹⁶ Umberto Eco, ‘An *Ars Oblivionalis*? Forget it!’, trans. by Marilyn Migiel, *PMLA*, 103, (1988), pp. 254-261, p. 255.

of forgetting on their model, because a semiotics is by definition a mechanism that presents something to the mind and therefore a mechanism for producing *intentional acts*.¹⁷

Language, Eco argues, 'like all semiotic systems – has the ability to render present what is not present (even if only in the possible world circumscribed by our assertions)'.¹⁸ The creation of an *ars oblivionalis* to match the more famous art of memory is, therefore, a logical impossibility. A semiotics, he concludes, 'is by definition a device that stalls natural processes of oblivion'.¹⁹ He aptly illustrates this point by summarising Abelard:

Because of this, says Abelard, the expression 'nulla rosa est' ('there is no rose,' 'such a thing as a rose has never existed') in some manner brings to our mind the rose. and though the Rabelaisian question 'utrum Chimera, in vacuo bombinans possit comedere secundas intentiones' 'whether a chimera humming in the void can consume second intentions' refers to a non-existent thing, it renders present both the chimera and the second intentions, not to mention the impossible humming that the chimera ought to produce in the void.²⁰

It is not possible to refer to a thing, even in the negative, without calling that thing to mind. Any assertion of forgetfulness, therefore, is merely a perverse form of memorialisation. Narrative, though, might present other possibilities. As Eco suggests, '[o]ne forgets not by cancellation but by superimposition, not by producing absence but by multiplying presences'; the layered information of a narrative which accretes over a duration of time might present abundant opportunities to represent forgetfulness.²¹ Indeed, the palimpsestic quality of *Sylvia's Lovers* – the novel I will discuss in this chapter – produces exactly this sort of gradually obscuring effect.

As Paul Ricoeur has suggested, however paradoxically, memory and forgetfulness are always in some sense intertwined. 'As concerns the mnemonic function, it is specified, among all other functions, by the relation of the representation to time and, at the heart of this relation, by the

¹⁷ Eco, 'An *Ars Oblivionalis*? Forget it!' p. 259.

¹⁸ Eco, 'An *Ars Oblivionalis*? Forget it!' p. 258.

¹⁹ Eco, 'An *Ars Oblivionalis*? Forget it!' p. 260.

²⁰ Eco, 'An *Ars Oblivionalis*? Forget it!' pp. 258-59.

²¹ Eco, 'An *Ars Oblivionalis*? Forget it!' p. 260.

dialectic of presence, absence, and distance that is the mark of the mnemonic phenomenon'.²²

Forgetfulness makes the struggle for recollection both necessary and meaningful:

The extraordinary exploits of the *ars memoriae* were designed to ward off the misfortune of forgetting by a kind of exaggerated memorization brought to the assistance of remembering. But artificial memory is the great loser in this unequal battle. In brief, forgetting is lamented in the same way as aging and death: it is one of the figures of the inevitable, the irremediable. And yet forgetting is bound up with memory [...]: its strategies and, under certain conditions, its cultivation worthy of a genuine *ars oblivionis* result in the fact that we cannot simply clarify forgetting through the effacement of traces among the dysfunctions of memory alongside amnesia, nor among the distortions of memory affecting its reliability.²³

This reciprocal relationship makes the representation of forgetfulness integral to the use of nostalgic tropes in these historical novels.



Legibility, as I have discussed, is a recurring metaphor in the discussion of architectural imagery. The graveyard with its variously corroded inscriptions, is a particularly appropriate site for this sort of reading. Untended graves in various states of disrepair have featured in the historical novel at least since Scott's early efforts. *The Tale of Old Mortality* (1816) tells the story of a man who roamed Scotland, maintaining the graves of Covenanter martyrs and effacing the inscriptions on those of their persecutors. This activity is figured as a way of tampering with historical memory. The idea of legibility as a figure for memory must take on a heightened significance in a novel which is reconstructing a historical period in a written narrative. The novel's eponymous protagonist refreshes or obscures material traces which prompt recollection. Old Mortality acts as an agent of historical memory and the novel itself is framed as a memorial of sorts. That Robert Paterson, the original for Old Mortality, was buried in an unmarked grave – 'without a single stone to mark out the resting place of his mortal remains' – lends the novel itself a memorial function in place of the absent marker.²⁴

²² Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 426.

²³ Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 426.

²⁴ Walter Scott, 'Introduction' *Old Mortality* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd, 1940) pp.1-10, (p. 8). Not included in Edinburgh University Press edition used elsewhere in thesis.

Old Mortality's prefatory frame takes place in a graveyard where the narrator, a school teacher who spends his leisure hours walking in this secluded spot, encounters Old Mortality at work. This graveyard, a pseudo-editorial footnote informs us, is the place where this narrator has since been buried:

It has long been the favourite termination of my walks, and, if my kind patron forgets not his promise, will (and probably at no very distant day) be my final resting-place after my mortal pilgrimage*

*Note by Jedidiah Cleishbotham. – That I kept my plight in this melancholy matter with my deceased and lamented friend, appeareth from a handsome head-stone, erected at my proper charges in this spot, bearing the name and calling of Peter Pattieson, with the date of his nativity and sepulture, with a testimony of his merits, attested by myself, as his superior and patron.

This footnote places the narrative in the graveyard where its narrator is buried and, in doing so, creates a nested set of memorialisations which take the graveyard as their central location. The tense of this scene is both past (for the editor and by extension the reader) and present (for the narrator who describes a habitual action). This setting – the graveyard where the narrator is buried – places a present tense activity in the past. The school teacher, aware that his own life will be brief, spends his leisure in a graveyard which is so overgrown with vegetation that it has lost, for him, its more morbid connotations. This 'deserted burial-ground' is not, he insists, simply a memento mori; instead it mimics the structure of the novel by layering memory upon memory and acknowledging the inevitable encroachment of forgetfulness.²⁵ Arguably, it is this inevitability against which the memorative or mnemonic tropes of historical fiction operate.

The narrator describes the graveyard as a peaceful place littered with slowly deteriorating grave stones which are gradually becoming an inconspicuous part of the landscape:

It is a spot which possesses all the solemnity of feeling attached to a burial-ground, without exciting those of a more unpleasing description. Having been very little used for many years, the few hillocks which rise above the level plain are covered with the same short velvet turf that covers it. The monuments, of which there are not above seven or eight, are half sunk in the ground and overgrown with moss. (p. 6)

²⁵ Walter Scott, *Old Mortality*, ed. by Douglas S. Mack (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), p. 6. Subsequent references will be to this edition and provided in parenthesis.

The tombstones are neglected and the graves they mark largely unvisited. The atmosphere of this passage is more meditative than morbid and segues into a discussion of the memories such places can provoke or suppress:

Yet, although the moss has been collected on the most modern of these humble tombs during four generations of mankind, the memory of some of those who sleep beneath them is still held in reverend remembrance. It is true, that, upon the largest, and, to an antiquary, the most interesting monument of the group, which bears the effigies of a doughty knight in his hood of mail, with his shield hanging on his breast, the armorial bearings are defaced by time, and a few worn-out letters may be read at the pleasure of the decipherer, *Dns. Johan de Hamel*, or *Johan de Lamel*. And it is also true, that of another tomb richly sculptured with an ornamental cross, mitre, and pastoral staff, tradition only can aver, that a certain nameless Bishop lies interred there. But upon other two stones which lie beside, may still be read in rude prose, and ruder rhyme, the history of those who lie beneath them. They belong, we are assured by the epitaph, to the class of persecuted Presbyterians who afforded a melancholy subject for history in the times of Charles II and his successor. (p. 7)

Here hints at physical obscurity are contrasted with a more nebulous and intangible form of remembrance. Scott begins his description of the graveyard with a sense of encroaching illegibility but, as the passage progresses and he examines the artefacts more closely, fragments of memory and hints of narrative begin to emerge. The above passage dwells on inscription as a way of figuring historical forgetfulness, creating an unavoidable link between memorialisation and the writing of the novel that follows.

It is within this context that Old Mortality is first introduced:

An old man was seated upon the monument of the slaughtered Presbyterians, and busily employed in deepening, with his chisel, the letters of the inscription, which, announcing, in scriptural language, the promised blessings of futurity to be the lot of the slain, anathematized the murderers with corresponding violence. (p. 8)

This long sentence describes a memorial and takes on elements of the ‘scriptural language’ it tells us best befit a monument and it accumulates a string of short clauses which almost mimic the rhythm of the chisel. This is both a description of a physical memorial and a memorialisation in its own right. Memory is asserted – and memorial monuments perpetually re-inscribed – in reaction to growing obscurity. This novel takes on the tone of *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* which sets out to preserve oral traditions before they have passed out of popular memory. Indeed, these descriptions

recall the language used by Scott in his 1802 'Introduction' to the first edition of *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* in which he strives to preserve the uniquely Scottish 'manners and characters' which he felt were 'daily melting and dissolving into those of her sister and ally' with a 'mixture of feelings, which [he does] not attempt to describe'.²⁶ It uses the description of material remains to articulate the interrelation of memory and forgetfulness in the composition of a fictional historical narrative. In this opening to *Old Mortality* forgetfulness is seen as a creeping inevitability which can be stalled by a sympathetic posterity or accelerated in punishment or revenge.

II. *Sylvia's Lovers*

Sylvia's Lovers takes its epigraph from Tennyson's *In Memoriam* and makes a feature of its reliance on memory and mourning. In Gaskell's own assessment, *Sylvia's Lovers* is 'the saddest story [she] ever wrote'.²⁷ It derives much of its tragedy from personal losses caused by frustrated attempts to return to a permanently displaced past. As Jenny Uglow has put it, '*Sylvia's Lovers* is a novel of longing for the irretrievable, in which energy and zest are slowly undermined and then suddenly destroyed'.²⁸ This novel materialises the passage of time through its careful – and sometimes claustrophobic – description of Monkshaven as an overtly palimpsestuous place. The town and the novel accumulate layers of architecture which each relate to particular historical or memorial expectations. As Andreas Huyssen has argued, 'In the ruin, history appears spatialized and built space temporalized'.²⁹ Gaskell's solidification of time in place calls for an almost archaeological approach to reading. This novel takes a lingering interest in memorials which fall short, break or

²⁶ Walter Scott, *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, (William Blackwood and Sons: Edinburgh and London, 1902), p. 175.

²⁷ Quoted in Kate Flint, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (Plymouth: Northcote House in association with the British Council, 1995) p. 45.

²⁸ Jenny Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1993), p. 505.

²⁹ Andreas Huyssen, 'Authentic Ruins: Products of Modernity', *Ruins of Modernity*, ed. by Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010) pp. 17-28, (p. 21).

otherwise fail. When instances of forgetfulness are materialised and made conspicuous as gaps in the historical record they gesture towards the importance of memory elsewhere in the novel's composition. In this section, I will look at the ways in which Gaskell incrementally dismantles her own narrative in order to expose and examine memory as a way to articulate processes of historical transformation. *Sylvia's Lovers* has been relatively overlooked in Gaskell's oeuvre and, as such, there have been few readings alert to the important structural (perhaps narratological) role memory plays in this novel.

Sylvia's Lovers, like Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' presupposes the presence of a ruined abbey and then hardly mentions it again. It begins:

Monkshaven was a name not unknown in the history of England, and traditions of its having been the landing-place of a throneless queen were current in the town. At that time there had been a fortified castle on the heights above it, the site of which was now occupied by a deserted manor-house; and at an even earlier date than the arrival of the queen, and coëval with the most ancient remains of the castle, a great monastery had stood on those cliffs, overlooking the vast ocean that blended with the distant sky.³⁰

In Gaskell's novel, the abbey – and the monastic past it hints at – is described in the opening section of the novel and remains an implied presence which re-emerges from time to time in fragments scattered throughout the town. This novel's opening scene layers buildings on top of one another to produce a history of the place which is defined by striking ellipses. The repeated use of terms like 'even earlier' and 'coëval' explicitly relates these material remains to measurements of time. From the beginning, then, this novel weaves significant moments in the town's history with the remains of its buildings. Though these fragments are described as jumbled together on the same cliff-top, they also describe a distinct chronology of successive ruins. An abbey, a castle, a manor-house and a church (described, along with its graveyard, at greater length later in the book) overlook Monkshaven and suggest consecutive phases of the town's history. This is a variably legible palimpsest which, as this chapter argues, suggests the possibility of readability in this opening scene only to expose the gaps and erasures which occur as the narrative progresses. This novel, then, opens with the reconstruction of broad swathes of the town's history around physical

³⁰ Elizabeth Gaskell, *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863), ed. by Andrew Sanders (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 2. Subsequent references in parenthesis.

structures which are shown to us in varying stages of disintegration. As the plot develops, this method becomes more precisely focussed on information relating to the plot and the personal histories of its characters but it is underpinned by a never fully explained history of the town. This principle of reconstruction remains constant whether the timescale is long and historical or short and personal. Both erosion and forgetfulness are presented as incremental but unavoidable processes. This opening passage introduces a narrative approach which, I argue, informs the structure of the entire novel.

One of the first facts we learn about Monkshaven (or easily deduce from its detailed physical and historical description) is that the town is a fictionalised version of Whitby. It is interesting to note that Monkshaven is fictionalised within an otherwise factual landscape where Hartlepool, Newcastle and London are used as orientating points of geographical reference (p. 201). By renaming Whitby, Gaskell emphasises a past which has been all but obliterated and draws attention to the ruins which pepper the novel. The monks who aren't there any more are given a prominent, if inexplicit, place in the town and the book. The town's ecclesiastical past – and the dissolution of the monasteries which curtailed this phase in its history – is signalled in the name 'Monkshaven' though these etymological remains are not explicitly discussed. 'Monkshaven' is a historical survival in language; it represents a type of fragment or ruin which is linguistic rather than material. It might be 'Monks-haven' referring to a period when the monastery was active, or 'Monk-shaven' describing the post-reformation removal of the religious order from the town. This ambiguity, which seems like a clue but is really an obfuscation, echoes in microcosm the novel's broader vacillation between reconstruction and disintegration. This choice acts as a commentary on the fragments which are otherwise strewn about the novel without explanation. It offers a linguistic echo of the town's other ruins because it represents a partial but incomplete recuperation of the past. The dissolution of the monasteries is an implied but unexplained cultural context. The town's name, then, has a similar role in the novel to the physical ruins (particularly the abbey and later the Butter Cross) which occur in its landscape. This submerged ecclesiastical history has left behind tangible remains in the novel's language and in its landscape.

John Herschel drew a similar connection between physical and philological excavation in a letter to Charles Lyell in which he wrote:

Words are to the anthropologist what rolled pebbles are to the Geologist – Battered relics of past ages often containing within them indelible records capable of intelligible interpretation.³¹

The capacity for language to retain fragments of historical meaning is also discussed in the non-fictional contribution which William Gaskell made to *Mary Barton* (1848), ‘Two Lectures on the Lancashire Dialect’ included with the 1854 edition of his wife’s novel. These lectures open with the proposition that, if we are interested in ‘an old coin’ or ‘some relic of outward dress’, we should take ‘an equal interest in [...] the circulating medium of their minds, and of the dress in which their inward spirit clothed itself’. Words can contain traces of the past just like objects can. He calls the Lancashire ‘forms of speech and pronunciation’ ‘bits of old granite, which have perhaps been polished into smoother forms, but lost in the process a good deal of their original strength’.³² As Suzy Anger has put it, philology was an ‘increasingly important field’ and ‘crucial to textual and historical interpretation’ in the Victorian period; ‘the study of language was regarded as giving access to the past’.³³ *Sylvia’s Lovers* plays on the parallel Herschel and William Gaskell both draw between physical remains and the traces of linguistic change. The novelist makes this dynamic of loss and retrieval part of her own linguistic and narrative technique.



Gaskell’s representation of ruins begins in a similar spirit to Ruskin’s ‘warm’ monuments in ‘The Lamp of Architecture’ or, as he explained it in ‘The Turnerian Picturesque’, the ideal of ‘agedness in the midst of active life which binds the old and new into harmony’.³⁴ To begin with, at least,

³¹ Adrian Desmond and James Moore, *Darwin* (London, 1992), p. 215

³² William Gaskell, ‘Two Lectures on the Lancashire Dialect’, in *Mary Barton; A Tale* (1848), ed. by Joanne Shattock and Linda K. Hughes (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005), pp. 329, 339.

³³ Suzy Anger, ‘Introduction: Knowing the Victorians’, *Knowing the Past*, pp. 1-22, (p. 5).

³⁴ John Ruskin, ‘Of the Turnerian Picturesque’, *Modern Painters*, 4 (1856), reprinted in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, ed. by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols (London: George Allen, 1903–12), VI, pp. 11–14, (p. 11).

there is a persistent sense that Monkshaven is riddled with ruins that still have a place in contemporary life; these remains create a sense of continuity with the past. The 'Butter Cross' is a particularly telling example. The 'space surrounding the Butter Cross', we are told, was 'much frequented' and 'the favourite centre for shops' (p. 15). This impression of activity, however, is undermined by simultaneous disintegration and erasure:

They had each purchases to make after their sales were effected, as sales of butter and eggs were effected in those days by the market-women sitting on the steps of *the great old mutilated cross* till a certain hour in the afternoon, after which, if all their goods were not disposed of, they took them unwillingly to the shops and sold them at a lower price. But good housewives did not despise coming themselves to the *Butter Cross*, and, smelling and depreciating the articles they wanted, kept up a perpetual struggle of words, trying, often in vain, to beat down prices. (pp. 10-11)[my emphasis]

The term 'Butter Cross' has eclipsed the monument's earlier function as a religious symbol and, though 'great' and 'old', the cross is left 'mutilated'. 'Active life' does not take place alongside this venerable memorial but over the top of it.

In a subsequent description of the town, Gaskell writes that 'the old stone cross was raised by the monks long ago; now worn and mutilated, no one esteemed it as a holy symbol, but only as the Butter Cross, where market women clustered on Wednesday, and whence the town crier made all his proclamations'. The repeated long 'o's in the first half of this sentence ('old stone', 'long ago', 'worn', 'no one', 'holy', 'only') suggest a solemn tone and are absent from the subsequent section describing contemporary life which is immediately more brisk and business-like. This religious monument is transformed through use into a mundane object of everyday practicality which is no longer 'esteemed'. Its old function has been almost completely submerged in its new one.

This impression is deepened by the addition of a caricatured town crier whose trivial announcements clash with the original purpose of the monument and undercut the solemnity of the preceding description. His 'proclamations' are about 'household sales, things lost or found, beginning with 'Oh! yes, oh! yes, oh! yes!' and ending with 'God bless the king and the lord of the manor,' and a very brisk 'Amen''. A remnant of the cross's original purpose lingers in the 'very brisk 'Amen'' which forms an almost parodic afterthought. This caricature, and the description of the cross as physically 'mutilated', implies deterioration in both appearance and function (p. 21).

Most notably, it suggests an erosion of memory in which life moves on oblivious of the past. The physical landscape of Gaskell's novel, while echoing Ruskin's imagery – 'useful still, going through its own daily work' – subtly subverts the thrust of his argument and instead lingers on the pathos of redundancy.³⁵ As Bill Brown has suggested '[r]eleased from the bond of being equipment, sustained outside the irreversibility of technological history, the object becomes something else' and the artistic depiction of obsolete artefacts 'transforms a dead commodity into a living work and thus shows how inanimate objects organise the temporality of the animate world'.³⁶ The historical novel's use of ruins as 'things', centres on the ways in which they both generate and obfuscate recollection. They 'organise' a psychological understanding of 'temporality' which almost seems a description of the historical novel as a genre.

Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard have described the nostalgic aspect of such fragments in a changing landscape in the second volume of *The Practice of Everyday Life*:

These seemingly sleepy, old-fashioned things, defaced houses, closed-down factories, the debris of shipwrecked histories still today raise up the ruins of an unknown, strange city. They burst forth within the modernist, massive, homogenous city like slips of the tongue from an unknown, perhaps unconscious, language [...] They alternately worry a productivist order and seduce the nostalgia attached to a world on its way towards disappearing.³⁷

This jostling together of old and new in a cityscape has elements in common with Ruskin's ideal arrangement of the built environment. This formulation, however, makes room for inevitable disappearances and consequent nostalgia. These architectural fragments are interpretative as well as physical and represent the most obvious manifestations of broader memory losses.

Another everyday survival of the past in the present is described in Monkshaven's (and Whitby's) steep flight of stone steps up to the cliff top where the abbey, manor house and church stand in various stages of dilapidation. These steps are described parenthetically as 'worn by the feet of

³⁵ Ruskin, 'Of the Turnerian Picturesque', p. 11.

³⁶ Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry*, 28 (2001), 1-22, (pp. 15, 15-16).

³⁷ Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard, *The Practice of Everyday Life. Volume 2, Living and Cooking*, trans. by Timothy J. Tomasik (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 133.

many generations'. They feature in the midst of a commonplace, contemporary scene surrounding the parish church which is itself given a long history and continued relevance. The church of St Nicholas is also the site of the graveyard, a place where, as I suggested in my discussion of *Old Mortality*, memorialisation is most explicitly – and literally – legible:

There, too, lay the dead of many generations; for St Nicholas had been the parish church ever since Monkshaven was a town, and the large churchyard was rich in the dead. Masters, mariners, shipowners, seamen: it seemed strange how few other trades were represented in that great plain so full of upright gravestones. Here and there was a memorial stone, placed by some survivor of a large family, most of whom perished at sea: - 'Supposed to have perished in the Greenland seas,' 'Shipwrecked in the Baltic,' 'Drowned off the coast of Iceland.' There was a strange sensation, as if the cold sea-winds must bring with them the dim phantoms of those lost sailors, who had died far from their homes, and from the hallowed ground where their fathers lay. (p. 64)

The collection of thumbnail narratives implied by these tombstones and their inscriptions creates a strikingly elliptical narrative in fragments. We know some details of these people's deaths and from that can speculate about their lives and the history of Monkshaven as a whaling town, but we are given no names, ages or family relationships. These snippets of information are metonymically allusive but present an unavoidably incomplete picture. Passages like this one compress and concentrate a narrative method and system of imagery which infiltrates the structure of the entire novel.

The recurrence of literal unmarked graves in the mid-Victorian novel is striking. Similarly, when the eponymous hero of *Henry Esmond* goes in search of his mother's grave, he discovers that she has become one of many women who took the same name when they entered the convent:

Esmond came to this spot in one sunny evening of spring, and saw, amidst a thousand black crosses, casting their shadows across the grassy mounds, that particular one which marked his mother's resting-place. Many more of those poor creatures that lay there had adopted the same name, with which sorrow had rebaptized her, and which fondly seemed to hint their individual story of love and grief. (HE, p. 277)

Here too a monument suggests the possibility of memories which it then pointedly fails to deliver. The stories which Esmond imagines remain 'fond hints' of 'individual stor[ies]'. They are muddled in together so that their 'individuality' is lost. Because Esmond's mother had been 'rebaptised' before her death, the inscription on her tombstone serves to conceal rather than 'memorialise' the particularities of her life.

A parallel strain of forgetfulness – masquerading as an assertion of continued memory – is described in Esmond’s explicit commentary:

We forget nothing. The memory sleeps, but awakens again; I often think how it shall be when, after the last sleep of death, the reveille shall arouse us for ever, and the past in one flash of self-consciousness rush back, like the soul, revived. (*HE*, p. 394)

Thackeray insists that nothing is forgotten but this assertion is belied by the events of the novel and the apocalyptic timescale he invokes. Memory will be restored but only after death. This passage suggests the uneasy coexistence of memory and forgetfulness which recurs throughout these historical fictions, especially as they relate to structures or traditions designed to guarantee memorialisation. The conflict between design and effect is most clearly and ironically rendered in the predominance of unmarked or untended graves which make the past they supposedly commemorate nearly impossible to read.



Dickens’s treatment of unmarked graves in his historical novels is illuminating in its marked difference from Gaskell’s. Both *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities* begin with men being raised from their unmarked or mis-marked graves. This image seems to have been analogous, in Dickens’s novels, with the effort of historical reconstruction. Doctor Manette is ‘recalled to life’ from his oubliette and Rudge – believed to have been the victim of the murder he in fact committed – returns to the scene of his crime as *Barnaby Rudge* begins. Where characters are allowed to sink into obscurity – as with Lord Gordon’s malevolent advisor, Gashford – it is treated as a just punishment, meted out by Dickens as recompense for bad behaviour. *A Tale of Two Cities*, which famously begins with a figurative exhumation – ‘He was on his way to dig some one out of a grave’ (p. 18) – is a prime example of this narrative method in which nothing that has been forgotten cannot be retrieved. In a novel in which a man who had been buried and erased by the state is ‘Recalled to Life’, almost nothing is beyond narrative retrieval. Dickens’s historical novels are filled with forgotten histories being brought to light and while he might make statements about impermanence and loss, the only people who are really obliterated from the record are those who deserve it.

A Tale of Two Cities, for instance, is filled with the echoes of footsteps and fleeting reflections, images which insist on an impermanence which isn't reflected in the novel's wider methods of historical retrieval. Dickens regularly describes forgetfulness but doesn't dramatise it. The courtroom mirror at Darnay's trial introduces the idea that even reflected images might return as ghosts:

Over the prisoner's head there was a mirror, to throw the light down upon him. Crowds of the wicked and the wretched had been reflected in it, and had passed from its surface and this earth's together. Haunted in a most ghastly manner that abominable place would have been, if the glass could ever have rendered back its reflections, as the ocean is one day to give up its dead.³⁸

Dickens repeats this strange preservation of fleeting moments in the title of this novel's final chapter: 'The Footsteps Die Out Forever'. Because they die out forever they never do. Dickens's historical novels, then, make similar statements as *Sylvia's Lovers* about the unreliability of historical memory, but his novels always seem to be exempt and any unmarked graves are only waiting to be exhumed and 'give up their dead'.



The dynamic between memory and forgetfulness in *Sylvia's Lovers* is much more tangled than this and is articulated is through the memories people have of deteriorating places. Sylvia's return to her childhood home reveals the ways in which physical environments can be invested with personal memory and meaning. It also articulates a misidentification of time with place which characterised the early pathological manifestations of nostalgia. Sylvia experiences a similar disjuncture – a Kantian mismatch between time, place and expectation – in which a return to her childhood home emphasises the impossibility of regaining the time that has lapsed since she was last there. She finds the farm temporarily abandoned by its new tenants and fallen into a dilapidated, if not quite a ruined, state. Sylvia's obvious preoccupation with her own memories contributes an additional layer of complexity to this episode. This is emphasised because she has returned in order to gather medicinal herbs for her mother whose mental collapse has left her 'dateless' and unable to remember the chronology of her own life. As Sylvia describes it, 'Mother is gone dateless wi'

³⁸ Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, p. 61

sorrow' (p. 323). She loses track of events, believes herself to be a younger woman and forgets that her husband has been executed for his role in rioting against the press gangs (p. 374). On an interesting side note, it is revealing that, while *Romola's* Baldassarre (as Dames discusses at length) enters the narrative without his memory and struggles to regain it, Sylvia's mother undergoes a traumatic series of events that leave her 'dateless'. To put it crudely, *Romola* reconstructs while *Sylvia's Lovers* falls apart.

Memory loss, or amnesia as it was just beginning to be termed, was, as Michael S. Roth has argued, a burgeoning field of interest in the nineteenth century:

Amnesia was a disease of the nineteenth century. It was discussed at the end of the eighteenth century by Francisco Boissier de Sauvages in his classification of medical disorders, but it was the next century that first paid attention to it and gave it importance as a phenomenon that shed light on the normal functioning of memory. And it was in the second half of that century that the study of amnesia became a principal vehicle for understanding the dynamics of memory.³⁹

This interest in pathologies of memory, as Dames has noted, manifested itself in variously afflicted characters in the nineteenth century novel. These include Baldassarre in *Romola* and characters from Wilkie Collins's sensation fiction like Franklin Blake in *The Moonstone* (1868) or Laura Fairlie in *The Woman in White* (1859-1860).⁴⁰ He points to 'the necessity of forgetting for the project of suspense and shock' as one reason for the prevalence of amnesiac characters in sensation fiction.⁴¹ Historical fiction inevitably makes its own particular uses of this trope and, I argue, these revolve around the uses it made of nostalgic memory as a reconstructive trope which manifests absence.

Throughout *Amnesiac Selves*, Dames draws nostalgia into a close relationship with this newly recognised form of pathological forgetfulness. He argues that the 'amnesiacs' who populate the historical novel – most notably *Romola's* Baldassarre – allow the narrative to mute the 'vividness' of

³⁹ Michael S. Roth, 'Remembering Forgetting: Maladies de la Mémoire in Nineteenth-Century France' *Representations*, 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory, (1989), 49-68, (p. 51).

⁴⁰ Dames, 'Chapter 4: The Birth of Amnesia: Collins, Sensation, Forgetting' in *Amnesiac Selves*, pp. 167-205.

⁴¹ Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, p. 186.

the past 'into the generality of nostalgic memory'. In his discussion of Baldassarre's amnesia,

Dames remarks:

We see here a pathology and narrative logic that might remind us of Collins, in which amnesia functions as an extreme instance of a more general novelistic forgetting: Baldassarre, through his mental disfunction, is 'reduced' to a single function – revenge – and his consciousness is drastically, and pathologically, streamlined to only the most relevant, concordant, and integral memories, only those that relate to his son's denial, betrayal and ingratitude.⁴²

He notes that, in *Romola*, Baldassarre 'reduces the complexity of memory to only what is meaningful, what can emotively signify': nostalgia, he suggests, is a form of forgetfulness which makes the past more desirable by wearing away at its rougher edges. It offers a selective and simplifying version of history.⁴³ He goes on to argue that:

The phenomenon to note, then, and the phenomenon that must serve as the starting point for an enquiry into the effect of Victorian styles of nostalgia on the period's historical fiction, is the intersection of personal amnesias of various sorts on the period's historical fiction with large historical projects of recovery [...] what is useless of the past disappears through amnesia, loss, or nostalgic revision, and what is still of value in the past loses its 'pastness'.⁴⁴

Forgetfulness, the above passage suggests, serves principally to streamline a messy story to make it more 'useful' in the present. The mourning tone of *Sylvia's Lovers* undermines this argument by making a tragedy of fading or confused memory. Markers of forgetfulness clutter the novel with loose ends and the emphasis is on the things that have been lost rather than on the 'useful' things that are left.

Sylvia's return to her former home is framed within this context of traumatic forgetfulness:

She knew from experience that nothing quieted her mother so well as balm-tea [...] Still she knew where a plant of balm grew in the sheltered corner of Haytersbank Farm garden; she knew that the tenants who had succeeded them in the occupation of the farm had had to leave it in consequence of a death, and that the place was unoccupied [...] she would walk quickly to the old garden, and gather the tender sprigs which she was sure to find there. (p. 374)

The following passage describes the farm and Sylvia's reactions to its deterioration:

⁴² Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, p. 208.

⁴³ Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, p. 208.

⁴⁴ Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, p. 209.

Sylvia went slowly past the house and down the path leading to the wild, deserted bit of garden. She saw that the last tenants had had a pump sunk for them, and resented the innovation, as though the well she was passing could feel the insult [...] The rusty unused chain was wound around the windlass; the bucket was falling to pieces from dryness [...] Primroses grew in the sheltered places, just as they formerly did; and made the uncultivated ground seem less deserted than the garden, where the last year's weeds were rotting away, and cumbering the ground [...] Sylvia forced her way through the berry bushes to the herb-plot, and plucked the tender leaves she had come to seek; sighing a little all the time. Then she retraced her steps; paused softly before the house-door, and entered the porch and kissed the senseless wood. (p. 376)

This excerpt describes a place with personal rather than historical significance but echoes the effect created by the ruin-scape in the opening pages of the novel. It is littered with remains that evoke memories of the past but offer no consolation of return. This description is, of course, powerfully coloured by Sylvia's memories; this is evident in the elegiac tone and subject of the passage as well as in the lengthy sentences which seem to meander around Haytersbank, taking in details of decay as Sylvia notices them. She projects her own responses on to the house and garden, imagining, for instance, that the well is capable of feeling an insult in 'innovation'. This passage performs a before and after comparison with the past overlayed on the present. The scene's pathos relies on her, and our, knowledge of its past associations. The emotional experience of seeing familiar places irrevocably changed by the passage of time is strikingly foregrounded in this scene. It plays on the psychological intertwining of time with place observed by Kant and insists on their inevitable separation.

Adam Piette has described a similar scene, dwelling 'on the subject of [...] the undeniable pathos of elegiac memory', in *David Copperfield* (1850) when the eponymous hero returns 'in thought to the empty family home'.⁴⁵ The points of similarity between Sylvia's and David's returns to their respective homes are striking. Sylvia's home, though, is a mundane ruin in the midst of a town that is crumbling and changing from the first page of the novel and participates in this broader scheme. On a local level it is noticeably close to David Copperfield's autobiographical memory in which he relates that:

It pained me to think of the dear old place as altogether abandoned; of the weeds growing tall in the garden, and the fallen leaves lying thick and wet upon the paths. I imagined how

⁴⁵ Adam Piette, *Remembering and the Sound of Words: Mallarmé, Proust, Joyce, Beckett* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 17.

the winds of winter would howl round it, how the cold rain would beat upon the window-glass, how the moon would make ghosts on the walls of the empty rooms, watching their solitude all night. I thought afresh of the grave in the courtyard, underneath the tree: and it seemed as if the house were dead too, now, and all connected with my father and my mother were faded away.⁴⁶

This passage has many similarities with Sylvia's encounter: the weeds, the inanimate objects with hurt feelings, the long and ponderous sentences, the sentimental yearning for 'the dear old place'. Memory of home takes on an enriched meaning in Gaskell's novel not because her representation of personal memory is more sophisticated or even very different from Dickens's, but because home is given such a privileged and unstable role in *Sylvia's Lovers*. The house that Sylvia lived in as a child is at the emotional centre of the town which, Sylvia believes from her geography lessons with Philip, is at the centre of the novel's map (chapter X, discussed below). This scene, then, takes part in the broader scheme of the novel in which people are dragged away from their remote and contained community against their will and even the most determined memorials fail as the narrative unfurls and unravels. It is part of a network of similar disintegrations in which the loss of real, geographically-situated homes (Kinraid's, Philip's, Sylvia's) is part of a process that becomes more explicitly temporal as the novel progresses and the town is shown not just to change but to crumble.

The farm is littered with traces which evoke the place's former state in various stages of decay; these describe a process of change which points back to a period before it had begun to disintegrate and forward to a time when it will be entirely erased. In the above quotation, primroses grow about the place 'as they formerly did' but this detail serves to highlight the weeds which elsewhere 'cumber[ed] the ground'. It is in the process of becoming unrecognisable but teeters on the edge of familiarity. It has become an unhomely home. Gaskell refers to these changes in relation to shorter, more personal, timescales but in historical fiction these images inevitably have broader resonances. Within the context of a town which has already been presented to us as a palimpsest of past uses, these themes reverberate outwards. The ruinous state of Sylvia's childhood home is recent and takes its pathos from the events of her personal story but they have

⁴⁶ Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (1850), ed. by Nina Burgess (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 212.

implications for the presentation of various other ruins throughout the novel. Both the novel's opening scene and the above return to Haytersbank, materialise the process by which time moves on and, as Gaskell puts it towards the end of the novel, 'the memory of man fades away' (p. 502).

Sylvia's Lovers makes repeated and fundamental use of the idea of other returns home which are equally thwarted or disillusioning. When Philip Hepburne returns to Monkshaven, he contemplates the town as a legible landscape from which he tries – and inevitably fails – to decipher the changes that have taken place since he had been gone:

There he stood, looking down once more at the numerous irregular roofs, the many stacks of chimneys below him, seeking out that which had once been his own dwelling – who dwelt there now? (p. 469)

This effort to understand change through the structure of the town is telling, even if it is fruitless and can only be posed as a rhetorical question. The town is imagined as a system of structures which can tell the viewer something about the lives lived inside them, just as the abbey alludes to an ecclesiastical past and Haytersbank farm gestures towards Sylvia's childhood. This thwarted attempt to understand events through 'things', reasserts the possibility that apparently allusive physical remains can be severely curtailed metonymies which promise more than they reveal. This might be one way in which a narrative can approach Eco's elusive *ars oblivionalis*.



Like Sylvia's mother, numerous characters in *Sylvia's Lovers* have a more or less unhealthy – often almost pathological – relationship to the past. After Philip returns to Monkshaven, he endures his poverty and alienation by reliving a static moment from his past with Sylvia:

He would go back to his lodging, and softly lift the latch of the door; still more softly, but never without an unspoken, grateful prayer, pass by the poor sleeping woman who had given him a shelter and her share of God's blessing – she who, like him, knew not the feeling of satisfied hunger; and then he laid him down on the narrow pallet in the lean-to and again gave Sylvia happy lessons in the kitchen at Haytersbank, and the dead were alive; and Charley Kinraid, the specksioneer, had never come to trouble the hopeful, gentle peace. (p. 482)

When Sylvia visits Widow Dobson:

She found the widow with her house-place tidied up after the midday meal, and busy knitting at the open door – not looking at her rapid clicking needles, but gazing at the rush and recession of the waves before her; yet not seeing them either, - rather seeing days long past. (p. 478)

Even this relatively marginal character, whose personal history is left unexplored, dwells on ‘days long past’. This novel is filled with people who are absorbed by loss and live in the past; their obsession with memory mirrors the novel’s own formal preoccupations.

Kinraid, fighting abroad in chapter XXXVIII thinks ‘of other days, of cool Greenland seas, where ice abounded, of grassy English homes, began to make the past more real than the present’ (p. 430). While he does not go quite as far as to conflate these images into *calenture*, as I discuss in chapter 2, there is an undertone of this disorder and its subsequent literary manifestations in Gaskell’s language. As a sailor, Kinraid has been taken away from his ‘grassy English home’ and his vocation in the ‘cool Greenland seas’; this *calenture*-esque moment, then, longs for both of these familiar places. Here his nostalgia is for a place which is both geographically distant and in the past. This yearning for home bears a striking similarity to the ‘*calenture*’ described by Eliot in *Mill on the Floss* and *Adam Bede* discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis. Geographical and temporal dislocations are closely associated so that each can reinforce the other’s impression of rift and consequent yearning. In this image, the idea of physical movement away from a place accentuates the notion that time has passed or is passing. Movement through space is the more easy to visualise (and arguably to comprehend or explain) than progress through time. The narrative draws on this characteristic of longing memory to describe the passage of time in the space of a yearned for landscape.

One way in which this preoccupation with personal pasts and lost homes is brought to the fore is through the centrality of the press gangs to the novel’s plot. The importance of the press gangs to Gaskell’s novel, as I hinted in my introduction, bears a striking and suggestive resemblance to discussion of British nostalgics in the *Heimwehliteratur*. Besides the Scottish Highlanders, the only group of people from the British Isles named in medical discussion of nostalgia were the victims of the press gang. In his *Von der Erfahrung in der Arzneikunst* (Concerning Experience in Medicine), Johann Georg Zimmerman refers to John Huxham, a doctor who worked in Plymouth, who

believed that nostalgia induced by the press gangs was ‘responsible for many thousands of deaths.’⁴⁷ Zimmermann gives Huxham as his authority when he describes men returning from work at sea, ill (*ungesund*), weak (*schwach*) and wanting to see their friends when they were forced aboard other ships and taken away from their homes just as they were returning. Zimmermann insists that this inhuman (*unmenschlichen*) treatment brought on *das Heimweh*. The particular national susceptibility to this illness, he suggests, was a result of the curtailment of supposedly prized British liberty.⁴⁸ It is perhaps inevitable that a disease which flourished on distance from home and sudden trauma would be triggered by the activities of the press gang.

The British Isles, naturally enough given that they are entirely bordered by water, usually associated the sorts of displacement that caused nostalgia with travel by sea. This is evident in Erasmus Darwin’s definition of calenture alongside nostalgia (quoted and discussed in chapter 2) as well as the work of numerous doctors who were primarily associated with military medicine or practicing near major ports.⁴⁹ Jonathan Lamb has recently suggested that this aspect of nostalgia informed Coleridge’s ‘Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ through the connections it had with the scurvy.⁵⁰ As Thomas Trotter observed, scurvy often began with ‘longings’ or ‘the desire of being on land’ and ‘thoughts on green fields, and streams of pure water’; for this reason he designated scurvy a ‘scorbutic Nostalgia’.⁵¹ Trotter’s description resonates with Kinraid’s feverish memories of home where the memory of ‘grassy English homes, began to make the past more real than the present’. Besides the literal use of the press gangs, the treatment of place in Gaskell’s novel – with a disintegrating home at its centre – creates a geographical space which is especially conducive to

⁴⁷ Dewhurst and Reeves, *Friedrich Schiller: Medicine, Psychology and Literature*, p. 136.

⁴⁸ Johann Georg Zimmermann, *Von der Erfahrung in der Arzneikunst* (Zurich, 1787), pp. 555-556

⁴⁹ These include John Huxham (quoted by Zimmermann and discussed above), William Falconer whose 1788 study ‘A Dissertation on the Influence of the Passions upon the Disorders of the Body’ gives nostalgia pride of place, Thomas Arnold (already discussed), Robert Hamilton, George Seymour and others.

⁵⁰ Jonathan Lamb, “‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,’ a Ballad of the Scurvy”, *Pathologies of Travel*, ed. by Robert Wrigley and George Revill (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000), pp. 157-77 and *Preserving the Self in the South Seas, 1680-1840* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

⁵¹ Thomas Trotter, *Observations on the Scurvy, with a Review of the Opinions Lately Advanced on that Disease*, 2nd edn, (London, 1792), pp. 44-5.

nostalgia. It places the psychological reaction of press-ganged sailors within a historical retrospect which makes the distance from home temporal as well as geographical.

Even if Gaskell had no knowledge of this illness – which given the nostalgic vocabulary of particular passages quoted in this chapter, seems unlikely – or its relationship to the activities of the press gang, the ways in which she uses these real historical events within *Sylvia's Lovers* creates an atmosphere of longing which centres on a lost home. The disruption caused to individuals and communities by the press gangs interact with the historical themes of failing memory which permeate *Sylvia's Lovers*; Gaskell places the loss of home and consequent homesickness suffered by victims of the press gangs in parallel with the loss of historical memory (and consequent nostalgia) which her narrative enacts. If nothing else, these were real events which, by causing substantial disruption and distress, reaffirmed the importance of home by taking it away.

Sylvia's geography lessons with Philip point to the organisation of space that makes the activities of the press gangs particularly traumatic. Distance in this novel is always related back to home, with Monkshaven imagined at the centre of the map. Despite Philip's prompting, Sylvia's interest in geography is only sparked by places she can relate to her experience in Monkshaven. The 'wild northern seas' are an exception only because Kinraid had 'told [...] such wonders' about them (p. 114). In one of her first conversations with Philip on this subject, Sylvia does not understand the term 'globe' and, when it is explained to her, cannot believe that Greenland – famous to her from fishermen's tales – does not make up a substantial portion of its surface: her first guess is half its surface area. To Sylvia, the world outside Monkshaven is out of proportion and vague; the map she imagines is wildly misshapen. To convince her that Greenland is far smaller than she imagines, Philip draws a crude map with charcoal and 'by-and-by even she became a little interested in starting from a great black spot called Monkshaven, and in the shaping of land and sea around that one centre' (p.109). This image suggests a frame of mind that supposes Monkshaven to be the stable and unchanging centre of the world. Sylvia's grasp of geography is reflected in her 'perhaps not pronouncing the word quite correctly' (p. 108). She doesn't have the barest understanding of the world outside her home; even the concept of 'geography' as an area of study is alien to her.

Gaskell's disintegrating town and novel are played against this preconceived notion of stability and stasis. It is this stable and contained conception of geography with home at its centre that the press gangs, and Gaskell's own unstable depiction of Monkshaven, disrupt.

This effect is heightened by Monkshaven's remoteness. By the time Gaskell wrote her novel, Whitby had become much more easily accessible – it was a tourist destination where the novelist herself holidayed. Monkshaven, though, is pointedly remote and self-contained, at a time 'when there were no facilities of railroads to bring sportsmen from a distance to enjoy the shooting season, and make an annual demand for accommodation' (p. 3). This is the seclusion upon which the press gangs intrude but, as the course of the novel also implies, this was also to be disrupted by future innovations, not least the railway. Not surprisingly, there follow reactions of traumatised memory, more or less explicitly nostalgic, for the old home at the centre of a much smaller map.



The use of buildings with explicit memorial purposes solidifies this theme both figuratively and literally. Arriving back in Monkshaven, penniless and unable to return home after his separation from Sylvia, Philip is directed towards an alms-house for soldiers. This building's physical structure and past history are described in some detail. The alms-house is specifically related to an attempted, and partially successful, memorialisation:

Philip came upon a building which dated from the time of Henry the Fifth. Some knight who had fought in the wars of that time, and had survived his battles and come home to his old halls, had been stirred up by his conscience, or by what was equivalent to it in those days, his confessor, to build and endow a hospital for twelve decayed soldiers, and a chapel wherein they were to attend the daily masses he ordained to be said till the end of all time (which eternity lasted rather more than a century, pretty well for an eternity bespoken by a man), for his soul and the souls of those whom he had slain [...] In the process of years the origin and primary purpose of the hospital had been forgotten by all excepting the local antiquaries (p. 459)

Despite these efforts at memorialisation, this history descends into vagueness so that the date is broadly estimated in terms of a monarch's reign and the supposedly memorialised knight is unnamed. This place, where Philip takes refuge while in self-imposed exile, is a monument that has lost its original meaning. It is only interpretable by 'antiquaries' and, in the context of this novel in

which ruins are expected to unfold broader histories, this suggests that it has deteriorated beyond the point of accessible or interpretable memory.



Towards the end of *Sylvia's Lovers*, Gaskell signposts a series of skipping movements forward through time, which culminate in the period in which the novel was written. Chapter XLIV opens with the words 'It was the spring of 1800. Old people yet can tell of the hard famine of that year' (p. 481). Here, the events of the novel are explicitly related to a timescale of living memory and to events, like the famine brought about by the Corn Laws, which were likely to stick in the public imagination:

The harvest of the autumn before had failed; the war and the corn laws had brought the price of corn up to a famine rate; and much of what came into the market was unsound, and consequently unfit for food (p. 481).

As one contemporary reviewer observed, to 'many it would be easier to revive a more distant period, for it is too long ago to be remembered by many, and not long enough to have passed into the domain of history'.⁵² The above passage intertwines public events (the Corn Laws, the Napoleonic wars) with the experience of the time as reflected in living recollection and, consequently, popular tradition. It places factual history on the same plane as the fictional events of the plot. This recalls Hobsbawm's invocation of a 'twilight zone' between memory and history, discussed at length in my introduction. The subsequent reflection that 'the duty on hair-powder was increased' (p. 481) is the sort of frivolous detail that might otherwise be subsumed in the mass of more important information. Like Herbert Butterfield's interest in 'Marie Antoinette's ear-rings or the Adventures of the Jacobites', this nugget of contemporary trivia might otherwise have been ignored but finds a natural home in historical fiction.⁵³

⁵² Unsigned Review, *The Saturday Review*, 4 April 1863, xv, 446-7, reproduced in *Elizabeth Gaskell: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Angus Easson (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 446-449, (p. 447).

⁵³ Butterfield, *Whig Interpretation of History*, p. 20.

After this 'living memory' interlude, the novel lurches forward in time to Gaskell's present day experience of Whitby/Monkshaven. The narrative structure of *Sylvia's Lovers* begins to mimic the form and function of an eroded memorial. It also echoes a parallel technique in gothic literature in which the unspeakable or unexplainable is elided from the page. The final section of this novel – separated from the rest of the text by a line of asterisks so that it reads like a coda – springs forward in time to the period of the novel's composition. We are told:

Monkshaven is altered now into a rising bathing place. Yet, standing near the site of widow Dobson's house on a summer's night, at the ebb of a spring-tide, you may hear the wave's come lapping up the shelving shore with the same ceaseless, ever-recurrent sound as that which Philip listened to in pauses between life and death.

And so it will be until 'there shall be no more sea.'

But the memory of man fades away. A few old people can still tell you the tradition of the man who died in a cottage somewhere about this spot, - died of starvation while his wife lived in hard-hearted plenty not two good stone-throws away. This is the form into which popular feeling and ignorance of the real facts, have moulded the story. Not long since a lady went to the 'Public Baths' a handsome stone building erected on the very site of widow Dobson's cottage, and finding all the rooms engaged she sat down and had some talk with the bathing woman; and, as it chanced, the conversation fell on Philip Hepburn and the legend of his fate. (p. 502)

The sea suggests biblical timescales in the face of which everything else is impermanent. Buildings and monuments, by comparison, have an amazingly short lifespan and can be represented in constant flux despite their apparent permanence. Here, as elsewhere in the novel, the emphasis is on change described through the transformation of material structures. We return to the spot where the plot unfolded but this apparent proximity highlights the more important ruptures which have taken place. The spot we return to after the asterisks interrupted our reading has been substantially altered.

Monkshaven, we are informed, has experienced major changes between the end of the novel's plot and this brief epilogue. The maritime industries which dominated the lives of the novel's characters have been superseded by the baths. It is worth recalling here that, in the graveyard, the consistency of professions among the buried was a striking marker of past continuity which has since been disrupted. This process is dealt with in a single, brisk sentence: 'Monkshaven is altered now into a rising bathing place'. Whether this is read as telegraphic matter-of-factness or solemn pronouncement, this sentence stands apart from the rest of Gaskell's prose as particularly terse and

unadorned. The social implications of this change are left unexamined while Gaskell delves beneath this most recent innovation, to explore the palimpsestic remains of her novel's plot which are still in evidence beneath. Her concern is with what has been effaced rather than with the latest layer of 'text'. The fact that these earlier fragments have been overwritten subtly but importantly alters their significance. These changes have their hinted beginnings much earlier in the novel with the 'freshly-built rows of the new town of Monkshaven' (p. 166). Jenny Uglow has succinctly described the recent innovations that created a sense of rupture in Whitby:

The Whitby on which this town was based had vanished by the time Gaskell wrote. In 1829 when she lived in Newcastle (Charles Kinraid's home town), the whaling fleets still set sail each spring, but the last whaler sailed from Whitby in 1837, and the railway soon made it easier to reach London by land than sea. Gaskell describes Monkshaven as changing even in the 1790s, its mansions on the heights and the Fosters' embryonic bank signalling a move towards the bourgeois.⁵⁴

There is a steady undertow of change in this novel. The most obvious manifestation of this is its perpetual creation of new ruins, personal and historical.

In the course of this discussion, the 'lady' who seems intended to stand in for Gaskell, is informed about a memorial, possibly but not definitely, devoted to the memory of Philip Hepburn by Hester Rose:

'Hester Rose! have yo' niver heard of Hester Rose, she as founded t' alms-houses for poor disabled sailors and soldiers on t' Horncastle road? There's a piece o' stone in front to say that "This building is erected in memory of P.H." – and some folks will have it that P.H. stands for the name o' th' man as was starved to death.' (p. 502)

The distorting simplification of the novel's plot described in the first quotation, is echoed and reinforced by a memorial which suggests more questions than it answers and reduces Philip Hepburn to his initials and 'th' man as was starved to death'. At the end of *Sylvia's Lovers*, the whole novel is reimagined as a faded and diminishing memorial to a story which is already only partially remembered. Its strange and sudden ending reduces the story to a fragment which elides or distorts great swathes of Gaskell's plot. This scene shows the growing illegibility of the past as Gaskell's contemporaries misread the architectural remains that surround them.

⁵⁴ Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell*, p. 509.

The plot we have been privy to leaves behind its own ‘ruins’ in Monkshaven, a town which was already a palimpsest when the novel began. As Uglow remarks:

A decade after *In Memoriam* Darwin’s theories of natural selection had made evolution seem more wasteful still. *Sylvia’s Lovers* is an act of loving retrieval; gleaned the gossip of Sylvia and Philip from the bathing-woman and recreating their world, the narrator asserts the lasting value of lost lives, like a geologist tracing fossils in the quarried stone. And yet, like Tennyson, despite her Unitarian optimism, Gaskell almost despairs in her attempt to fit the bewilderment of grief and the ravages of nature into the meliorist framework of history and a trust in divine providence.⁵⁵

In this novel, Gaskell is ‘like a geologist tracing fossils in the quarried stone’. These – frequently thwarted – attempts to reconstruct ‘lost lives’, as Uglow suggests, create an almost despairing tone in which there is a strong emphasis on what has been lost as well as what can be retrieved. What is especially interesting about the above synopsis, however, is that Uglow reverses Gaskell’s already-reversed chronology. The biographer’s account of the novel as a straight forward reconstruction of lost lives does not do justice to the novel’s structural oddity. Uglow suggests that ‘[t]o establish the pang of loss, [Gaskell] first had to establish the vitality of the lost, but she does this so effectively that she almost unbalances her novel’.⁵⁶ I would agree that the creation of a interrelation between loss and reconstruction has an important impact on the structure of the novel – as I have argued, I read this as a dynamic between memory and forgetfulness – but I would dispute the implication that the result is unsuccessful or ‘unbalanced’. The idea of ‘retrieval’ would be more convincing if the novel *began* with this gossip and built the narrative up around it, but that is not what happens – there’s more a sense of crumbling away at the end than there is of building the narrative back up. *Sylvia’s Lovers* ends with its apparent starting point: an only half-remembered story and an all but unintelligible memorial. This isn’t the seed of the narrative but its remains.

Sylvia’s Lovers ends where it might ostensibly have begun: with a ‘lady’ – a figure who seems a likely stand in for the novelist – being told a garbled and half-remembered account of the novel’s plot and shown a barely decipherable inscription on a memorial stone. Throughout *Sylvia’s Lovers*, Gaskell is insistent that her novel is about the processes by which ‘the memory of man fades away’,

⁵⁵ Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell*, p. 506.

⁵⁶ Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell*, p. 506.

but as her plot comes to a close this theme becomes explicitly structural. This novel both begins and ends with ruins, though of markedly different sorts. The symmetry of this construction draws the two instances into direct comparison. At the close, the fragments left behind by her fictional characters take the place of the larger ruins with which the novel began. The novel begins and ends in Gaskell's present, completing a cycle of composition and subsequent decomposition. Putting the novelist in the novel makes the process of writing part of the plot and draws historical fiction into the broader discussions of memorialisation.

In this novel 'public history' and 'private plots' are mutually dependent. Memory, and specifically nostalgic memory which is premised on rift, distance and the impossibility of return, brings these two facets of the novel into relationship. Arguably, forgetfulness is what grounds memory in the past and reminds us that a recollected period is never perfectly retrievable in the present. As Susan Stewart has argued, nostalgia is a longing for a time or place that cannot be returned to:

The nostalgic is enamoured of distance, not the referent itself. Nostalgia cannot be sustained without loss. For the nostalgic to reach his or her goal of closing the gap between resemblance and identity, *lived* experience would have to take place, an erasure of the gap between signifier and signified, an experience which would cancel out the desire that is nostalgia's reason for existence.⁵⁷

Forgetfulness productively disrupts the illusion that memory can retrieve or even effectively reconstruct the past. It creates a gap between the representation and what is represented. Within a historical novel, this gap is particularly suggestive. It recognises memory as an event in the present rather than as a point of access to the vanished past. This gap, which problematizes the idea of historical reconstruction, is woven throughout *Sylvia's Lovers*. One of the most striking ways in which it does so is to present us with memorials which gradually lose their meaning. It is the failures of memory that remind us that any reconstruction is just that, and not a full recuperation. Recollection, in this scheme, is figured as a losing struggle. After '[Sylvia] had torn up her love for [Kinraid] by the roots, [...] she felt as if she could never forget that it had been' (p. 451) but this assertion of permanence only appears puny and naïve in the face of the glacial changes that underpin the entire novel.

⁵⁷ Susan Stewart, *On Longing*, p. 145.

Gaskell's novel has a determined lack of fixity. Even apparently permanent structures, traditions or expectations are shown to be in a continuous state of flux. In opposition to this, as I have already suggested, the most persistent images of continuity in this novel is the sea. Throughout *Sylvia's Lovers*, its permanence and seeming omnipresence stands in direct contrast to the mutability of manmade objects. The sound of the sea is a 'ceaseless, ever-recurrent sound [...] which Philip listened to in the pauses between life and death' (p. 502) and 'the lady' who is told the story in contemporary Whitby hears the same sounds. In this scene Gaskell quotes from Revelations when she describes a time when 'there shall be no more sea' (p. 502). This continuous presence serves to highlight the ease with which apparently permanent structures can be swept away. Characters react with various, always unsuccessful, attempts to return to former homes only to find them changed or gone. The final structural flourish which fast-forwards the narrative to the mid-nineteenth century implicates the project of writing and reading historical fiction with this failure to reconnect. Unlike Dickens's all-knowing narrators, Gaskell does not attempt to make her recuperation complete and her use of forgetfulness isn't a punishment but an inevitability and a representational limitation.



The novel ends with a report that Sylvia and Philip's daughter has moved to America. The final line, which comes at the end of the garbled retelling of the story, informs us that 'she were married to distant cousin of theirs, and went off to settle in America many and many a year ago' (p. 503). After the accumulation of messy histories throughout the novel, and the way in which these have left their traces on the landscape, this emigration might seem like a way of wiping the slate clean and beginning afresh. This finishing touch emphasises the role location has played in the presentation of accumulating historical information. In 'The Lamp of Memory', Ruskin describes the prospect of architecture stripped of the associations of age in a 'New World':

to imagine it, for a moment, a scene in some aboriginal forest of the New Continent. The flowers in an instant lost their light, the river its music; the hills became oppressively desolate; a heaviness in the boughs of the darkened forest showed how much of their former power had been dependent upon a life which was not theirs, how much of the

glory of the imperishable, or continually renewed, creation is reflected from things more precious in their memories than it, in its renewing.⁵⁸

Ruskin imagines the 'New Continent' as a place which has never accumulated the enriching associations that come with old age. There is no human story to be extrapolated from this landscape. This image of American terrain as a wilderness is echoed by Gaskell in *Lois the Witch* (1859), a short historical tale set in Salem during the witch trials:

in America the way was simply the cleared ground of the forest--the stumps of the felled trees still remaining in the direct line, forming obstacles which it required the most careful driving to avoid; and in the hollows, where the ground was swampy, the pulpy nature of it was obviated by logs of wood laid across the boggy part. The deep green forest, tangled into heavy darkness even thus early in the year, came within a few yards of the road all the way though efforts were regularly made by the inhabitants of the neighbouring settlements to keep a certain space clear on each side⁵⁹

These passages present America as a place where manmade imprints on the landscape are sparse and in continual danger of being overwritten by nature – in Gaskell's description, not even a track can be properly inscribed in this resistant landscape. Ruskin evidently sees this as a barren and gloomy prospect. Coming at the end of *Sylvia's Lovers*, the move to America's unmarked and apparently unmarkable landscapes, curtails the endless inscription of new layers to an increasingly oppressive palimpsest.⁶⁰

Monkshaven – a small, contained and relied-upon home – which had been a touchstone in geographical space as well as in memory throughout *Sylvia's Lovers*, completes its process of disintegration as the novel's memory fails and the only familiar character who hasn't died has emigrated to America. Clare Pettitt has described the way in which *Lois the Witch* – a historical tale set on the other side of the Atlantic ocean in a country Gaskell never visited – 'uses a double distance of time and of space to launch an investigation into the pain of being estranged from the local by a sudden transition into an incomprehensible global world.'⁶¹ This, as I have argued, is a

⁵⁸ Ruskin, 'The Lamp of Memory', p. 3.

⁵⁹ Elizabeth Gaskell, *Lois the Witch* (1861) (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 116.

⁶⁰ For a fuller examination of Gaskell's relationship to America and its implicit representation throughout *Sylvia's Lovers*, see Clare Pettitt, 'Time Lag and Elizabeth Gaskell's Transatlantic Imagination' *Victorian Studies* 54, (2012), 599-622, (pp. 615-620).

⁶¹ Pettitt, 'Time Lag and Elizabeth Gaskell's Transatlantic Imagination', p. 600.

dynamic also exploited in *Sylvia's Lovers* in which the geographical movement brought about by the press gang is complemented by a steady undertow of temporal shift – materialised in the fabric of Monkshaven – building to a strange anti-climax of temporal dislocation and eventual unintelligibility in the narrative. At the end the reader is suddenly distanced, first temporally and then geographically, from the events of the novel. The departure of Sylvia's daughter for America, a land comparatively free of ruins but also of the memories that adhere to them, completes Gaskell's narrative of belated and thwarted returns by decisively leaving home behind and setting out into uncharted territory.

III. Ruins and Graveyards

As Jacques le Goff has written, the nineteenth century was peculiarly susceptible to a growing fascination with ruins and an attendant interest in memorialisation:

On the eve of the French Revolution, a return of the memory of the dead asserts itself in France as it does elsewhere in Europe. The great period of cemeteries begins, with new kinds of monuments, funeral inscriptions, and the rite of the visit to the cemetery. The tomb outside the Church has become once again the center [sic] of remembrance. Romanticism accentuates the attraction of the cemetery linked to memory. The nineteenth century sees, not so much in the order of knowledge, as in the eighteenth century, but rather in the order of feelings and also, it is true, in education, a development of the commemorative spirit.⁶²

The sensation of a growing rift between the past and the present, brought about by tumultuous 'world historical' events, prompted renewed efforts to solidify memory in memorials. Le Goff suggests that the cemetery became a natural epicentre for this anxiety about the reliability of memory in a period of dramatic historical acceleration. The nineteenth-century historical novel, as I have suggested, reveals a related fascination with graves, memorialisation and eventual forgetfulness. In doing so, it suggests that a similar set of anxieties might be at their root.

The representation of ruin was already a venerable tradition in the nineteenth century but the sensation of rapid movement away from the historical past, as Le Goff suggests, provided a new impetus for the exploration of this theme. It is a system of imagery which – because it relies on an

⁶² Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory*, trans. by Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Claman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 85-86

understanding of difference between past, present and future as opposed to a belief in unbroken continuity – has its origins in the Renaissance. Makarius has neatly expressed this idea, suggesting that:

The historical significance of ruins is necessarily based on the conception humankind entertains of temporality; the ruin was an impossible concept before the Renaissance [...which] apportioned human destiny into past, present and future.⁶³

In Huyssen's words, '[p]rogress and historical teleologies were embraced across much of the political spectrum, but this inevitability meant shedding the past. The price paid for progress' he argues 'was the destruction of past ways of living and being in the world. There was no liberation without active destruction. And the destruction of the past brought forgetting'. The pull of modernisation and the resultant sensation of precipitous changes in innumerable aspects of personal, communal and cultural life, can thus be imagined as a process of gaining and losing memories.

'From the beginning' as Huyssen suggests, 'modernity was Janus-faced in its negotiations of cultural memory. The Romantic lament about a world lost under the onslaught of industrialisation, urbanisation and modernity only goes to show how fast and intense the transformations toward the future had already become in 1800'. Following Nietzsche's famous pronouncements about the dead weight of history, Huyssen argues that the nineteenth century's 'hypertrophy of history' can be read as the (necessary) counterpoint to an awareness of creeping forgetfulness.⁶⁴ He refers to forgetfulness as a 'seductive' antidote to Nietzsche's proposition that the nineteenth century was overburdened by its obsessive recollection of the past:

Here it becomes clear how it is to mankind to have, beside the monumental and antiquarian modes of regarding the past, a *third* mode, the *critical*: and this, too, in the service of life. If he is to live, man must possess and from time to time employ the strength to break up and dissolve a part of the past.⁶⁵

⁶³ Makarius, *Ruins*, p. 8.

⁶⁴ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 2.

⁶⁵ Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 75.

This counterbalancing works in both directions and the relationship between memory and forgetfulness becomes almost symbiotic. These ideas are only apparently oppositional and the desire to erect a monument in the first place acknowledges the potential for forgetfulness.

Nostalgia, as Svetlana Boym argues, is in some sense a by-product of a ‘teleology of progress’.⁶⁶ Ruins, then, can be read as a material expression of this paradoxical relationship to the past – which moves forward but looks back – because they encourage their onlookers to linger over something which is in the process of becoming irrecoverably lost. These sites show history in the process of disappearing but create fragments from which narratives can be reconstructed. The ‘threat of loss’, Roth suggests, ‘is key to the attraction of ruins’ and they have been framed as such in various fields of enquiry ‘from antiquarianism to archaeology, from romantic poetry to post-modern photography’. What is fascinating about ruins, he says, is ‘their essential ambiguity’ which allows them to hover between remembrance and forgetfulness.⁶⁷ This threat of imminent disappearance makes ruins and other partial remains an apt image for nostalgic longing. They create a desire for recuperation which they consistently (and necessarily) fail to deliver. Historical fiction accentuates the paradox which applies to the novel more generally and narrates as present something which it simultaneously represents as already past.

The previous chapter touched on the reconstructive or recuperative potential of material remains by exploring the potential for mnemonic curatorship of diverse historical objects in *Romola*. This chapter centres on instances where this expectation fails and an absence of memory is, therefore, highlighted or ‘memorialised’. If the discussion of objects in *Romola* can be figured in terms of ekphrasis, in which the contemplation of objects brings about literary reconstruction through associations of memory, the present discussion has more in common with the representation of ruin, in which similar impulses to recall the past are thwarted. The striking moments of forgetfulness which this chapter examines, highlight the processes of recollection which are at work in these novels. *Sylvia’s Lovers* contemplates the debris created by its plot’s slow but sure forward

⁶⁶ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. 10.

⁶⁷ Michael S Roth, ‘Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed’ in *Irresistible Decay*, pp. 1-23, (p. 2).

momentum. The gaps in these narratives, dominated elsewhere by a thematic and structural reliance on memory, are inevitably figured as forgetfulness. These intended monuments are subverted so that all they memorialise is forgetfulness. They give us material markers for deliberate lacunae in the text. As Paul Ricoeur puts it, 'On the one hand, forgetting makes us afraid. Are we not condemned to forget everything? On the other, we welcome as a small happiness the return of a sliver of the past, wrestled away, as we say, from oblivion'.⁶⁸ Forgetfulness is the anxiety which underlies the desire to remember, recuperate and record. It gives nostalgia both its urgent desire to recall the past and creates the inevitable distance that thwarts any such attempt.

⁶⁸ Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 417

5

CONCLUSIONS

I. Memory and History

Nostalgia was a trope which placed affect and feeling at the centre of novelistic representations of historical change in the mid-nineteenth-century. It was a disease well-known from Rousseau's account (among others), to have both historical – or borderline sociological – aspects alongside its residual psychological and emotional connotations. In addition, it quickly developed into a literary tradition which, as I have suggested in the body of my thesis, transmitted this idea beyond its immediate historical context in seventeenth-century Switzerland and influenced a corresponding novelistic aesthetic in the nineteenth century. On the most basic level evidence of this successful transmission can be seen in the tenaciousness of the word nostalgia which – though transformed almost beyond recognition in its definition – has survived in common usage from an obscure seventeenth-century medical dissertation to the present day. As I have established, nostalgia began as a psychological reaction to cultural changes and made the individual a barometer of broader transformation through their emotional vulnerability to the influence of historical changes. In this it can be said to merge inner and outer life. To recall Kevis Goodman's phrase, this form of nostalgia can be imagined as historical 'growing pains' and, as such, is a peculiarly apt companion to the historical novel.¹

Nostalgia was available as an established literary mode informed by a 'cultural fable' of transition in which the contemporary milieu was imagined to be profoundly liminal. Matthew Arnold's rhetoric of historical 'wandering' between two worlds was a pervasive idea which is entirely compatible with the feeling of homesickness I outline in the body of my argument. In this context, it is not surprising that nostalgia's dual scientific and literary heritage became newly relevant, especially in

¹ Goodman, 'Romantic Poetry and the Science of Nostalgia', p. 195.

the relatively young genre of historical fiction in which the interaction of old and new (and the gap between them) was necessarily important. This representational interest, in which the historical novel seems hardly able to resist the temptation to comment on its own methods, problems and limitations, is profoundly informed by nostalgic tropes which are themselves intricately concerned with the (im)possibility of recuperation. These novels integrate memory with history in such a way that they hover between recollection and forgetfulness, a condition which finds apt expression in nostalgia, a form of memory which attempts an impossible return and dwells on losses. It is neither fully committed to the present nor able to return to the past.

Alongside the more diffuse continued cultural presence of nostalgia and associated psychological phenomena (calenture, *Heimweh*, etc.), this thesis has established that these ideas also lingered on in more definite, tangible ways. The specific references to nostalgia by canonical Victorian authors which this thesis has unearthed – through close reading and archival research – indicate the extent to which these ideas remained a cultural presence in to the nineteenth century.

Pierre Nora has suggested that ‘far from being synonymous’, memory and history are ‘in many respects opposed’.² Taking this remark as his premise, Nicholas Dames has similarly suggested that ‘in the range of cultural objects that may have inaugurated the thoroughgoing separation between personal memory and historical consciousness, the nineteenth-century historical novel must count as one prominent member’ this, he says, is not because of ‘its avowed goal of recreation through detail but through its more deeply embedded narrative values, in which that detail is cancelled by amnesiac or nostalgic characters and replaced by a series of purely personal, highly diluted summarizations – by, to use the crucial term, nostalgia’.³ The idea that Victorian historical fiction presents an un-problematically smoothed-over or ‘diluted’ version of history which prioritises personal over communal concerns – an aesthetic approach considered, incidentally, synonymous with ‘nostalgia’ – can be answered by referring back to the complex interaction of modernisation, migration and medical nostalgia engaged with by famous (and widely-read) figures from Rousseau

² Pierre Nora, ‘General Introduction: Between History and Memory’, *Realms of Memory*, pp. 3-20, (p. 3.)

³ Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, p. 233.

and Kant to Wordsworth and Schiller. Nostalgia, as I have argued, was a psychological reaction to historical change and, as such, its appropriation as a literary trope – which happened very speedily after its first diagnosis – lent itself to the representation of an intricate, if problematic, connection between memory and history. Nostalgia creates a productive overlap between these distinct but enmeshed concepts and provides a productive space in which to explore their interaction.

My project's particular contribution is in this interaction between the historical novel and nostalgia understood as a psychological response to overwhelming historical change. I suggest that nostalgia informed an aesthetic approach to the fictional representation of history which absorbed at least a tincture of pathology from the disorder's original definition. This, I argue, engaged with contemporary anxieties about new and sudden difference from the past. As such, it was able to nest private experience within public history, an important aesthetic quality in the historical novel. This project reintegrates the pathological, literary and historical implications of nostalgia and suggests that critical attempts to disentangle these facets have simplified and flattened a complicated and long-lived connection. Nostalgia, as I have shown through my readings of various novels, combines historical contexture with psychological reaction via an intricate system of literary tropes. One of the misconceptions about nostalgia which this thesis attempts to challenge is the notion that it can only be inauthentic and sentimental in its engagement with, or representation of, history. Apart from Dames's account of *Romola* as a non-nostalgic novel, no other study has traced the connections between this characteristically nineteenth-century genre and the medical and cultural heritage of nostalgic memory. Dames, though, makes nostalgia synonymous with amnesia and suggests that its main function is to produce a reassuringly simplified – 'useful' – narrative. I argue instead that nostalgia retained some of its early connotations of disease and disorientation and formed part of a more problematic, uncomfortable and sophisticated trope than Dames's account allows.

This thesis uses the psychological and cultural context described in the foregoing chapters to suggest that the historical novel should be reappraised as a vibrant strand of the Victorian novel taken as a whole, rather than a segregated sub-category which is habitually spoken about just a little

less seriously than the rest. Studies of the genre in the romantic period have often been extremely nuanced and sensitive but scholarship concerning historical fiction in the later nineteenth century has tended to be comparatively dismissive. Allowing historical fiction to fully participate in the wider scheme of the nineteenth-century novel opens up new conversations and elucidates themes and tropes which have broader resonances in Victorian literary culture. Because many recent studies about Victorian historical consciousness have excluded this highly prominent genre as inferior and irrelevant, the picture of nineteenth-century historical engagement has been significantly skewed.

As the foregoing chapters have argued, nostalgia is not only backward-looking – it is also, unavoidably, forward-moving. The dynamic it creates between past and present is, therefore, more complicated and suggestive than is usually admitted. It allowed these novels to engage with the problems that underlie their representative projects and maintain an ambiguous distance between remembering present and remembered past. In this way historical fiction uses nostalgia to interrogate its own methods, limitations and historiographical priorities. These nostalgically inflected novels make their own difficulties and contradictions part of their recuperative project and use nostalgia – a form of memory premised on an inability to return – to maintain an ultimately un-shrinkable gap between past and present. Nostalgia's particular resonance with the historical novel, I argue, stems from its combination of historical and psychological aspects in which the individual reacts to their displacement by impersonal, historical causes. These mingled strands of individual and communal disorientation – the soldier who misses his home because he has been displaced by events beyond his control – place emotional response at the centre of the mid-Victorian novel's representation of historical periods and events. This is contrary to the widely expressed view that the Victorian historical novel was an arid, pedantic and aesthetically unsophisticated genre which failed to convincingly reconcile the individual with the communal or the fictional with the factual. Nostalgic memory, I argue, offered a novelising mechanism for the fictional representation of factual people and events. It personalises the potentially impersonal and informs the depiction of individual lives against the backdrop of otherwise emotionally inaccessible

historical pasts. Perhaps most importantly, it informs a narrative perspective which gives these novels their sense of historical dynamism through psychological response.

Despite nostalgia's recent resurgence in literary criticism, with sensitive and elucidating studies by Linda M Austin, Tamara Wagner and Svetlana Boym among others, it is still an underappreciated context which seldom crosses out of specialised studies into wider critical discourse. There is a fundamental vocabulary gap between mainstream Victorian studies discourse and specialist studies of nostalgia so that, in studies of the novels I have discussed, the scientific and cultural connotations described in this thesis are seldom even considered. This thesis has attempted to re-historicise a psychological condition which frequently interacted with historical and literary discussion throughout its short but eventful history.

II. Thomas Hardy and Nostalgic Memory

As I have argued, nostalgia was particularly useful to the historical novel during the mid-Victorian period. This segment of my conclusion will turn to Thomas Hardy's 1880 historical novel, *The Trumpet Major* and briefly examine the remnants and afterlife of the trope I explored in the foregoing chapters. Hardy prefaces this novel with an appeal to personal memory and oral report, saying:

The present tale is founded more largely on testimony—oral and written—than any other in this series. The external incidents which direct its course are mostly an unexaggerated reproduction of the recollections of old persons well known to the author in childhood, but now long dead, who were eye-witnesses of those scenes. If wholly transcribed their recollections would have filled a volume thrice the length of 'The Trumpet-Major.'⁴

This novel, then, while explicitly historical, is based on the innately transitory memories and anecdotes of people whom the author has met. In this scheme, Hardy takes the role of recorder and memorialiser. This same preface takes a particular interest in physical remnants:

Down to the middle of this century, and later, there were not wanting, in the neighbourhood of the places more or less clearly indicated herein, casual relics of the circumstances amid which the action moves—our preparations for defence against the threatened invasion of England by Buonaparte. An outhouse door riddled with bullet-holes, which had been extemporized by a solitary man as a target for firelock practice when the landing was hourly expected, a heap of bricks and clods on a beacon-hill, which had

⁴ Thomas Hardy, *The Trumpet Major* (1880) introduction by Barbara Hardy; notes by Laurel Brake and Ernest Hardy, (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 35. Subsequent references in parenthesis.

formed the chimney and walls of the hut occupied by the beacon-keeper, worm-eaten shafts and iron heads of pikes for the use of those who had no better weapons, ridges on the down thrown up during the encampment, fragments of volunteer uniform, and other such lingering remains, brought to my imagination in early childhood the state of affairs at the date of the war more vividly than volumes of history could have done. (p. 35)

This, he goes on to say, leaves the novelist with the difficult duty of ‘construct[ing] a coherent narrative of past times from the fragmentary information furnished by survivors’ (p. 35). The overarching narrative project, then, is figured as one of careful recuperation through personal memory and the imaginative reconstruction of physical remains. While this gambit has a great deal in common with the themes and approaches described in this thesis, I argue that this premise is quickly revealed to be a relatively superficial aspect of Hardy’s novel. This is a starting-point for *The Trumpet Major* but it is, I suggest, barely reflected in its content which makes memory a comparatively minor element in both method and theme.

To take one example when something we might recognise as nostalgic memory does make a prominent (if brief) appearance, near the beginning of this novel, the narrator makes the following reflection:

It was a cheerful, careless, unpremeditated half-hour, which returned like the scent of a flower to the memories of some of those who enjoyed it, even at a distance of many years after, when they lay wounded and weak in foreign lands. (p. 52)

This idea has obvious points of similarity with the other novels discussed in the preceding chapters and figures the novel we are reading as a fond memory rather than a present experience. When Gaskell employed a similar image in *Sylvia’s Lovers*, and imagined Kinraid dreaming of home on the battlefield (see my discussion in chapter 4), it is experienced as a hallucination in which the past confusedly mingles with the present and a feverish illness in its own right. The ingredients of *das Heimweh* are strikingly present in Hardy’s description: suffering soldiers in foreign lands remember the events of the novel at a distance of years. This memory, though, is figured as a consolation rather than an illness; Hardy’s soldiers savour their recollection ‘like the scent of a flower’. A nostalgic influence lingers in Hardy’s description but it has been significantly altered. There is not any of the violent and disruptive language of ‘uprooting’ we found in Eliot, for example, or the developed sense of irreversible personal loss coupled with historical distance that Thackeray gives his soldier narrators. By embedding the remembering moment within a novel that dwells on the

time that will be remembered, Hardy contains this ‘homesickness’ (if such a pleasant recollection can be termed such) in a way that figures the time of his novel as comparatively stable. It is a concern for the future which hardly needs to perturb the course of the novel. This interlude helps construct an idyll in the novel’s present by providing a brief glimpse of a disrupted future. Compared to the historical dynamism of the novels discussed earlier in this thesis, this brief appearance of the homesick soldier motif appears comparatively ornamental.

This nod to homesick soldiers is reinforced a few pages later with the observation that ‘there were other non-commissioned officers, a German, two Hungarians, and a Swede, from the foreign hussars – young men with a look of sadness on their faces, as if they did not much like serving so far from home’ (p. 58). This novel opens with military scenes which provide an ideal situation for the cultivation of nostalgia; Hardy’s evident awareness of the disease breaks through in a number of places but is never established as a significant theme or aesthetic approach. Beyond the above nods to the idea – which, as I have argued was already an established literary trope – Hardy does not capitalise on this opportunity beyond the barest acknowledgment. In different circumstances these allusions might be read as the introduction of a theme but here they are conspicuous for their comparative isolation. Hardy jokes about these soldiers’ preoccupation with the ‘Waterland’ (p. 102) but does not delve much deeper. Where the inclusion of the press gang in *Sylvia’s Lovers*, for example, resonates with wider thematic interests in spatial and temporal dislocation, Hardy’s homesick soldiers appear strangely disconnected in a narrative which is not otherwise overly concerned with the operations of memory. There are remnants of the nostalgia described in this thesis but these have lost their impetus and become significantly less integral to Hardy’s historical fiction than they were earlier in the century.

As Linda M. Austin puts it, Hardy ‘was aware of nostalgia in its original sense and uncomfortable with its public manifestations. The developing realism of his fiction, with its later transformation from a novelist into a full-time poet, seemed to entail a rejection of the aestheticized remembering

that homesickness continued to signify.⁵ Austin's assertion that nostalgia was at odds with literary realism relies on her argument that the phenomenon was softened into a simplifying aesthetic over the course of the nineteenth-century. While I disagree that this was – simply or entirely – the case in the work of Dickens, Gaskell, Eliot or Thackeray, Hardy's engagements with these ideas towards the end of the century do suggest that doubts about the authenticity of nostalgic memory as a way to access history had begun to creep into popular discourse and informed the way this novelist engaged with the relationship between nostalgic memory and history.



In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, published six years after *The Trumpet Major*, Hardy demonstrates a markedly ambivalent attitude to nostalgia, especially as a point of access to the past. Donald Farfrae enters the *Mayor of Casterbridge* as an exile on his way from his home in Scotland to America where he plans to seek his fortune. The song he sings at the King's Arms is a lament for the country he has left behind:

It's hame, and it's hame, hame fain would I be,
O hame, hame, hame to my ain countree!
There's an eye that ever weeps, and a fair face will be fain,
As I pass through Annan Water with my bonnie bands again;
When the flower is in the bud, and the leaf upon the tree,
The lark shall sing me hame to my ain countree!⁶

The audience to this song are keenly affected by its sentiment and Farfrae's heart-felt performance but their reverent silence is broken when 'the ventilator in the window-pane spasmodically started off for a new spin, and the pathos of Donald's song was temporarily effaced' (p. 41). This nostalgia is a delicate sentiment that seems out of place and undermined in such an ordinary setting. This clash provides an inauspicious, but representative, introduction to the workings of nostalgia in this novel.

⁵ Austin, *Nostalgia in Transition*, p. 156.

⁶ Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), ed. by Phillip Mallett (New York: Norton, 2001), p. 41. Subsequent references in parenthesis.

When Christopher Coney responds to this song about Scotland, that ‘if I loved my country half as well as the young feller do, I’d live by claning my neighbours pigsties afore I’d go away! For my part I’ve no more love for my country than I have for Botany Bay!’ (p. 42), Farfrae does not offer an immediate answer. Later on, however, he will assert that ‘It’s better to stay at home, and that’s true; but a man must live where his money is made’ (p. 121). As the novel progresses, other, more pragmatic impulses, override Farfrae’s attachment to home. As one listener remarks, astonished by Farfrae’s heartfelt attachment to the land he has nevertheless left behind: ‘Danged if our country down here is worth singing about like that!’ (p. 41). This nostalgia is a second-hand fantasy fit for other people and other places but emphatically not a feasible part of ordinary people’s lives in a capitalist culture where onward movement is considered a necessary and effective way to get ahead. This nostalgia might be seen as a self-delusion or excuse, designed to mask quite different motives.

Buzzford’s rejoinder to the above remark, moreover, places nostalgia in opposition to a clear and complete knowledge of history. The reason that Casterbridge cannot be longed for like Farfrae’s generalised Scotland is because regrettable things have happened there:

“True,” said Buzzford, the dealer, looking at the grain of the table. "Casterbridge is a old, hoary place o' wickedness, by all account. 'Tis recorded in history that we rebelled against the King one or two hundred years ago, in the time of the Romans, and that lots of us was hanged on Gallows Hill, and quartered, and our different jints sent about the country like butcher's meat; and for my part I can well believe it." (p. 42)

This opposition draws attention to the neglected histories which lie behind the idealisation of Farfrae’s homeland, but also suggests a clash between fond memory and full knowledge. Most importantly, it establishes an assumption that you can only feel attached to an ideal place and that any nostalgic response, therefore, must be premised on a partial and naïve understanding of history or a willingness to overlook unsavoury details. This notion of separation between nostalgia and history, as I have argued throughout this thesis, was not so clear cut earlier in the century.

This mutually exclusive division between nostalgia and the business of modern life is reaffirmed in a later song sung by Farfrae from within the ‘horse drill’, a new machine for planting seeds which he introduced to Casterbridge. As Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane approach, they hear ‘the humming of a song, which sounded as though from the interior of the machine’ (p. 128). As Lucetta exclaims

“The “Lass of Gowrie” from the inside of a seed-drill – what a phenomenon!” (p. 129). This clash is quickly identified with a split in Farfrae’s personality and Lucetta discerns ‘that he was much mixed that day, partly in his mercantile mood and partly in his romantic one’ (p. 129). When Elizabeth-Jane and Lucetta discuss this surprising arrival of the new machine, ‘Donald Farfrae was in the minds of both as the innovator’ (p. 128) but even in this role as an active agent of technological change, Farfrae retains his pseudo-nostalgic fondness for an excessively aestheticised home. This exaggerated fracturing of Farfrae’s character introduces a note of disingenuousness to Hardy’s representation of nostalgia. This nostalgiac is a willing economic migrant and the person, above all others, who brings change to a town which was previously untouched by modernity. His nostalgia is purely aesthetic – indeed, it is usually signalled by song⁷ – and the business of his life lies elsewhere.

Ian Gregor has suggested that ‘in a sure and economical way, [Hardy] is securing the interpenetration of the public and private themes of the novel and bringing them into sharp focus, almost wittily, in Farfrae’s singing his romantic song of exile from inside the new agricultural machine’.⁸ In this scene, Farfrae’s nostalgic affectation is treated with explicit irony. Elizabeth-Jane’s reaction draws this contradiction out:

"Then the romance of the sower is gone for good," observed Elizabeth-Jane, who felt herself at one with Farfrae in Bible-reading at least. "'He that observeth the wind shall not sow,' so the Preacher said; but his words will not be to the point any more. How things change!" (p. 129)

In Casterbridge, a town first described to us as ‘untouched by the faintest sprinkle of modernism’ (p. 23), this innovation ‘created about as much sensation in the corn-market as a flying machine would create at Charing Cross’ (p. 127). It is a startling innovation and it is brought about by Donald Farfrae, Hardy’s very vocal, but perhaps not very sincere, nostalgiac.

Hardy, then, creates a clear separation between the conventions of nostalgia – which he particularly associates with the modernising and mobile Farfrae – and the deeper, slower processes of historical

⁷ Austin, *Nostalgia in Transition* contains an extended discussion of music and nostalgia in Hardy, pp. 156-195. She discusses Farfrae on pp. 165-182.

⁸ Ian Gregor, *The Great Web: The Form of Hardy’s Major Fiction* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), p. 124.

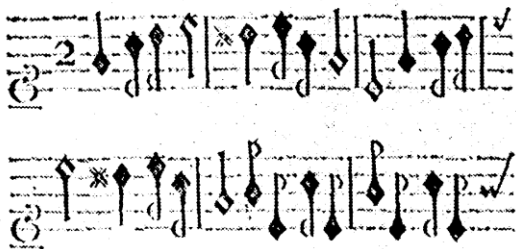
change at work within Casterbridge and the novel. There is an undertow of a far gloomier response to historical change and the nostalgia embodied by Farfrae has little or nothing to do with his presentation of history or ‘the usual touch of melancholy that a past-marked prospect lends’ (p. 64). Ian Duncan has suggested that ‘The Scotsman, at the end of the century, personifies the inauthenticity of a regionalism exported for nostalgic consumption – and acts as a foil to Hardy’s true Wessex version.’⁹ This is certainly part of Farfrae’s influence but he is so closely identified with the nostalgic tropes of homesick exile that he also serves to create a new distance between personal displacement and the apprehension of historical change. Casterbridge, we are told, ‘announced old Rome in every street, alley, and precinct. It looked Roman, bespoke the art of Rome, concealed dead men of Rome.’ (p. 55) but that ‘they had lived so long ago, their time was so unlike the present, their hopes and motives were so widely removed from ours, that between them and the living there seemed to stretch a gulf too wide for even a spirit to pass’. (pp. 55-56). Whatever the ‘melancholy’ created by this historical landscape, Hardy is careful to separate it from the caricatured nostalgia he gives to Farfrae. This novel creates a stark distinction between the melancholy of historical changes and the superficial homesickness embodied by the voluntarily exiled Scot. This departure, I suggest, plays on the wealth of literary and cultural tradition explored in the foregoing chapters and makes Farfrae the embodiment of an aesthetic approach that was, perhaps, beginning to shade into cliché.

⁹ Duncan, ‘The Provincial or Regional Novel’, p. 328.


APPENDIX 1 : IMAGES

102 DISSERTATIO MEDICA III:
audientes, qui recenter à Patriâ advenerunt,
Milites, reliquitâ patriarum deliciarum me-
morâ protinus hoc Moibo corripuntur,
præsertim si jam alteratum aliâs sanguinem
adepti, vel tristitiæ eisdem naturaliter ob-
noxia fuerint. Cumque Tribuni Militum
vidissent, plures hæc ratione ad repetendâ
Patriæ desiderium stimulari, aliquos etiam
impetratâ hinc Febri ardente mortuos esse,
severâ lege prohibere coacti sunt, ne quis
amplius Cantilenam istam, quam vema-
culâ linguâ den Kûbe-Kejen nuncupare
confueverunt, sive Ore sibilando, sive Fi-
stulam instando canere sustineret. Curiosus
verd hæc sistere voluimus Lectoribus Can-
tilenam notis muscis expressam, quod ipsi-
met de effectu ejus in Mentes Helvetiorum
judicare, si velint, queant.

*Cantilena Helvetica der Kûbe-Kejen
ditta.*



DE POTHOPATRIDAEGIA. 103



G 4

Fig.1) Sheet music for *der Kûbe-Kejen* as presented in Hofer's dissertation. He called this tune a 'pathologic air'.

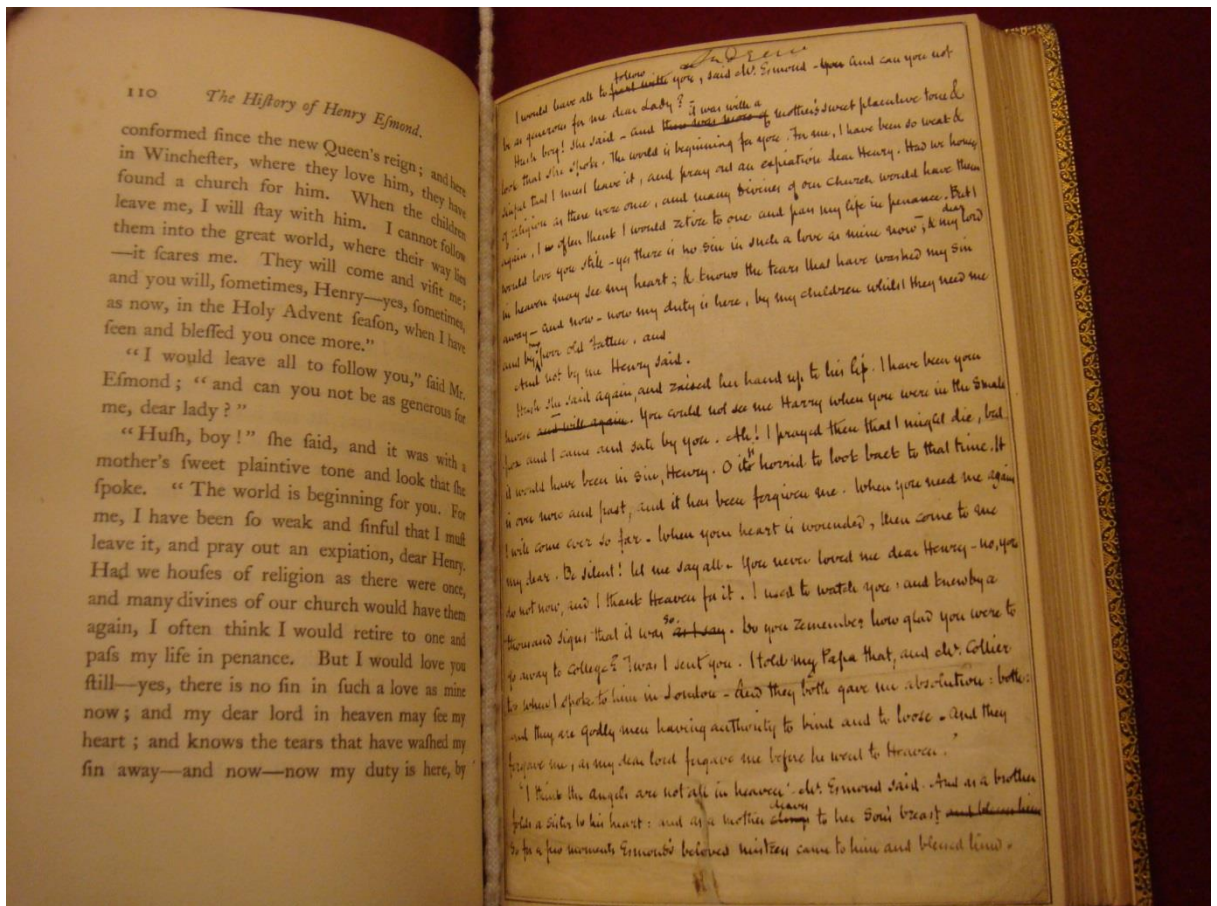


Fig. 2) Page opening from Thackeray. *The history of Henry Esmond*, esq. London, 1852. Copy 6, v. 2, p. 110 including an inserted MS page, *History of Henry Esmond*, esq. (v. 2, p. 110-112). Holograph. Image produced with permission from The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library.

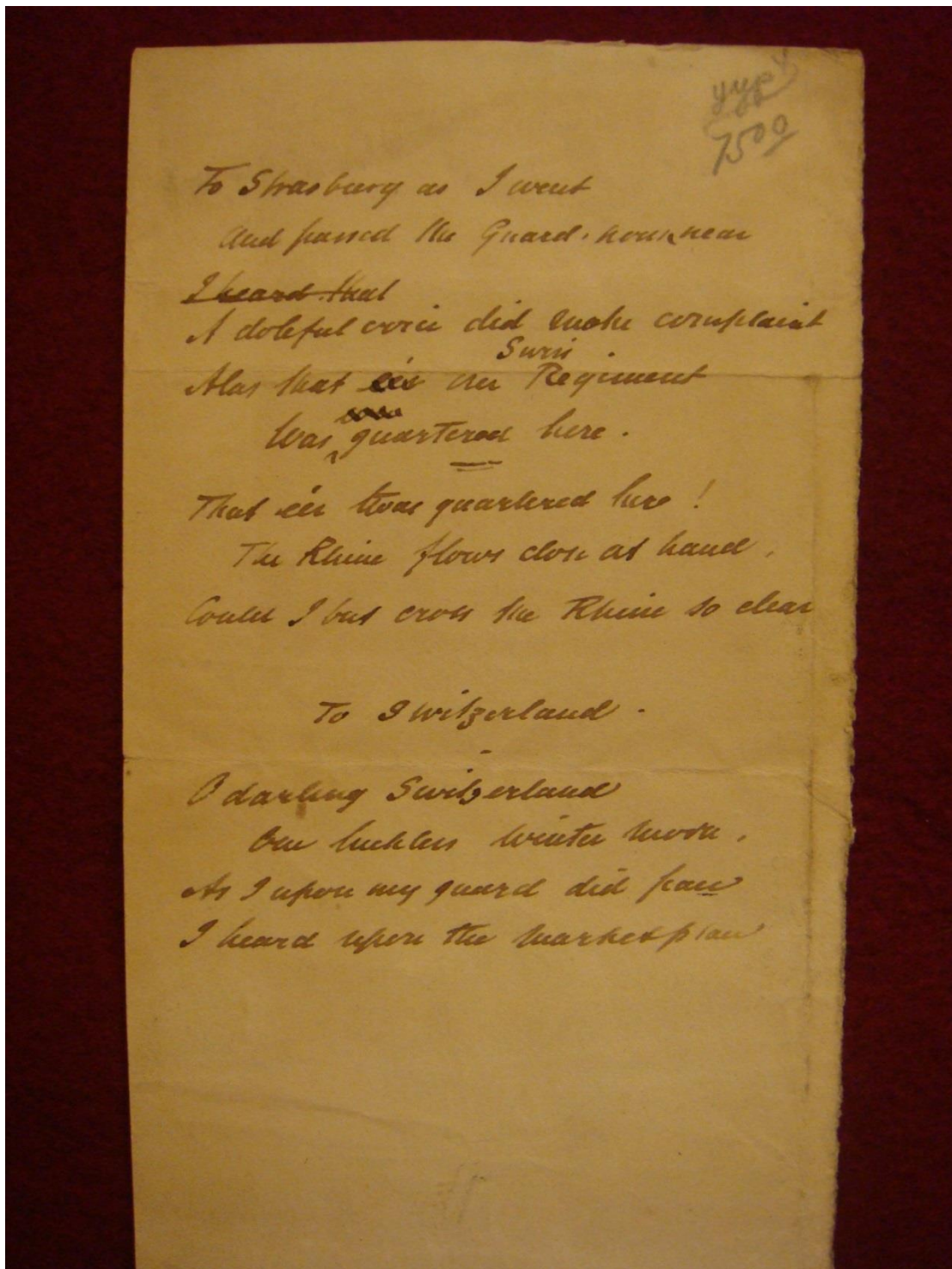


Fig. 3) W.M. Thackeray, 'To Strasburg [and] To Switzerland', 1p. MS. Holograph. Unsigned and undated. The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library.



Fig. 4) Ludovicus Rex, from 'Meditations at Versailles', Thackeray, *The Paris Sketchbook of Mr M.A. Titmarsh and Irish Sketch Book*, (London: Macmillan, 1902).



Fig. 5) Barnaby Rudge. [Browne, H. K.]. 4 original water colors: Emma Haredale reading the love-letter from Edward Chester; Dolly Varden tying the lock-smith's sash; Barnaby Rudge in prison; **Joe Willett embracing Dolly Varden** n.d.



Fig. 6) Barnaby Rudge. Browne, H. K. Unpublished water color drawing of Dolly Varden and Hugh n.d. pictorial works.



Fig.7) H.K Browne, Unpublished water colour drawing to 'Barnaby Rudge' by Charles Dickens. Signed in Pencil. Phiz.

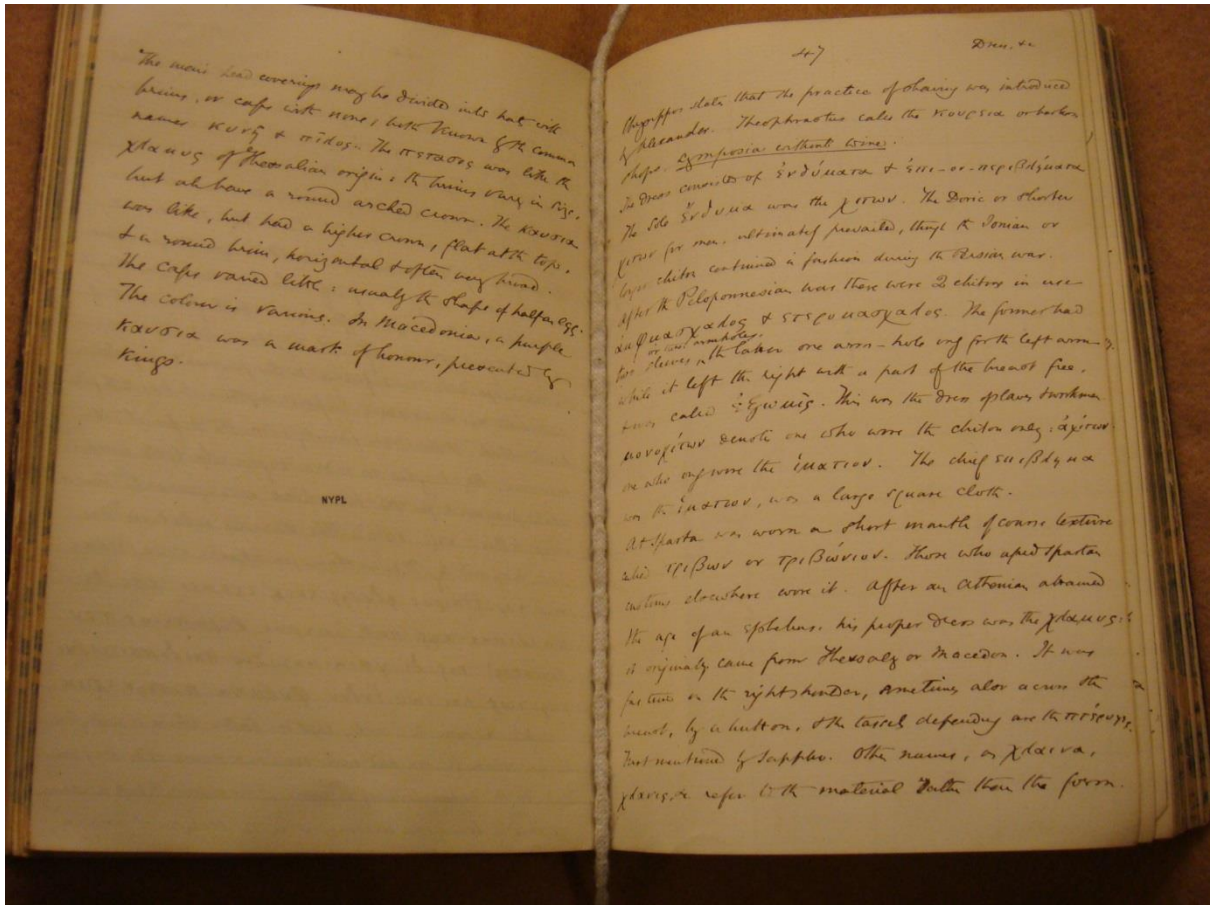


Fig. 8) 'Dress etc', Eliot, George, 'Notebook with label "Miscellanies" on spine and 'Quotations, Latin, English & Greek – and Hebrew matters' on front cover. Holograph. Probably used for Daniel Deronda. 20cm. 1868 notebooks (305p.)

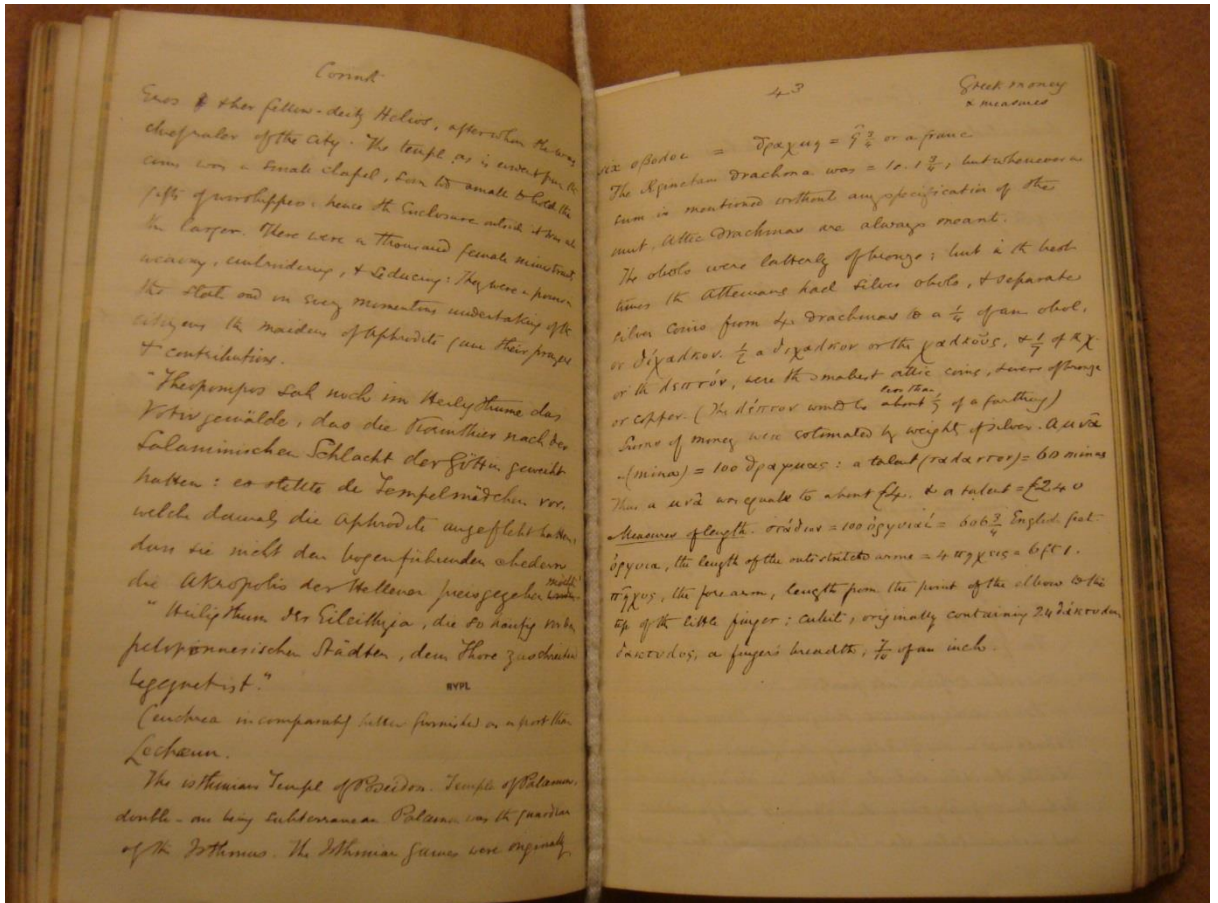


Fig. 10) ‘Greek Money’ Eliot, George, ‘Notebook with label “Miscellanies” on spine and ‘Quotations, Latin, English & Greek – and Hebrew matters’ on front cover. Holograph. Probably used for Daniel Deronda. 20cm. 1868 notebooks (305p.)

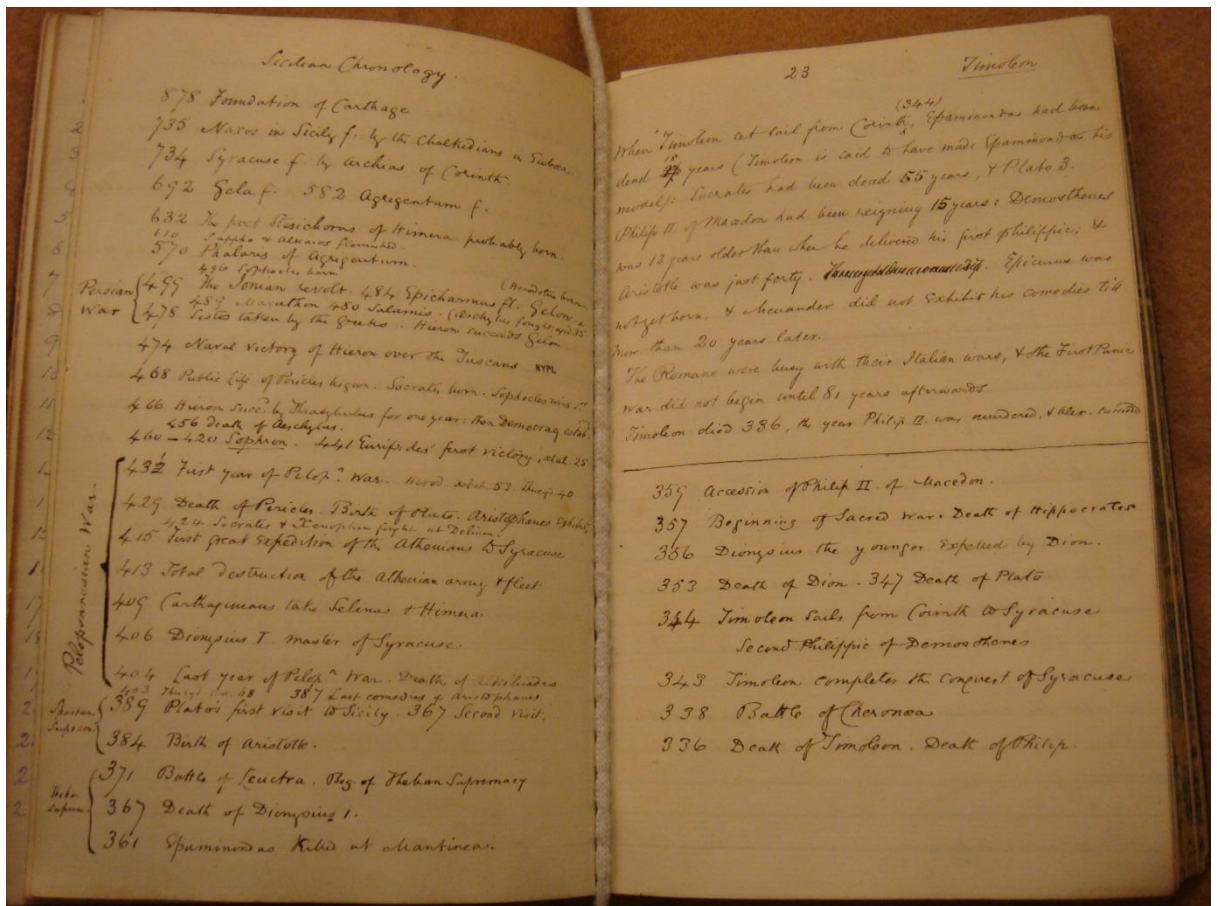


Fig. 11) ‘Sicilian Chronology’, Eliot, George, ‘Notebook with label “Miscellanies” on spine and ‘Quotations, Latin, English & Greek – and Hebrew matters’ on front cover. Holograph. Probably used for Daniel Deronda. 20cm. 1868 notebooks (305p.)

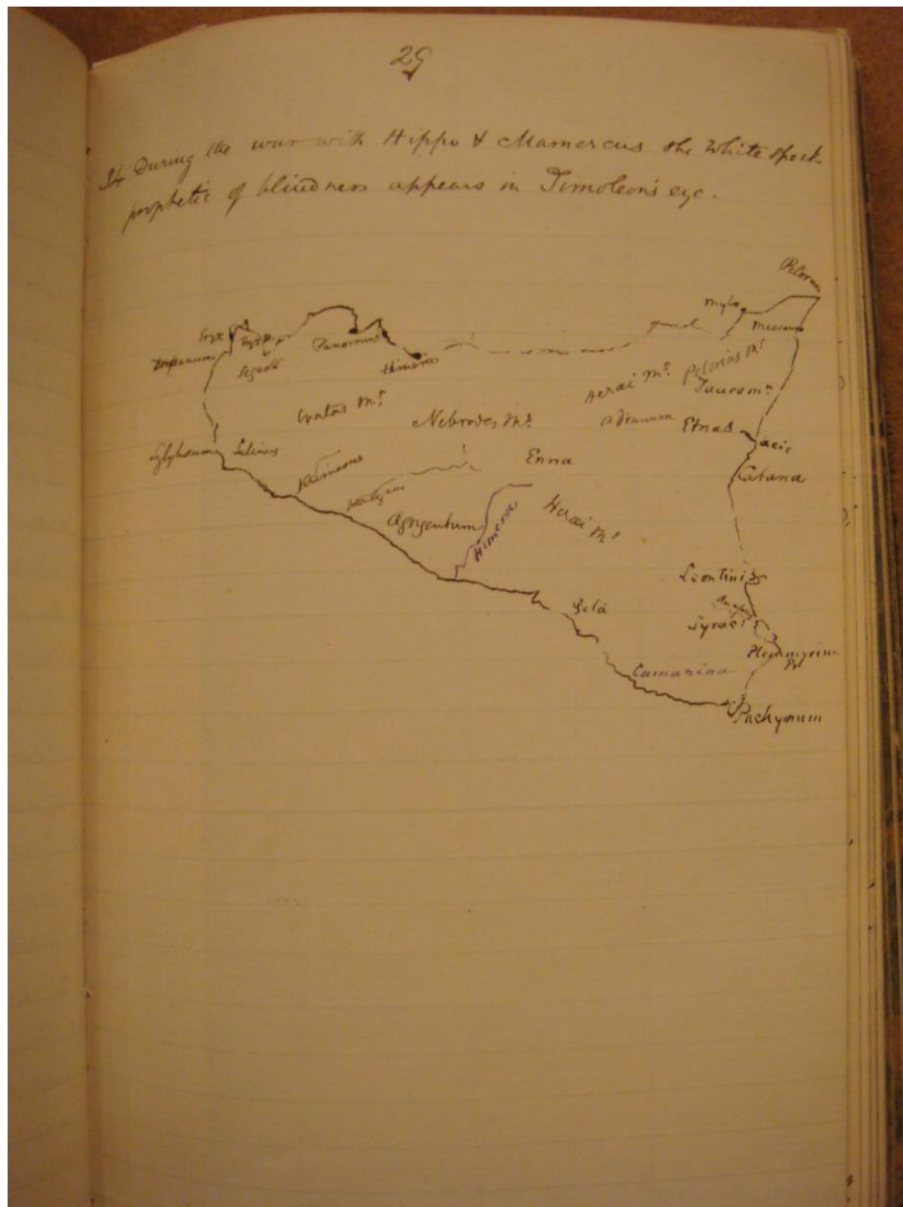


Fig. 12) Eliot, George, 'Notebook with label "Miscellanies" on spine and 'Quotations, Latin, English & Greek – and Hebrew matters" on front cover. Holograph. Probably used for Daniel Deronda. 20cm. 1868 notebooks (305p.)



Fig. 13) School of Agnolo Bronzino, *Portrait of Pope Leo X (Giovanni de' Medici)*, c.1551-53, Galleria degli Uffizi. Image taken from Artstor.org.



Fig. 14) After Raphael, *Portrait of Cardinal Bibbiena*, after 1516 (copy of a lost work by Raphael of 1516), Galleria Palatina. Image taken from Artstor.org.



Fig. 15) Michelangelo Buonarroti, Last Judgement, 1534-41, Sistine Chapel. Image taken from Artstor.org.



Fig.16 Frederic Leighton, Cimabue's Celebrated Madonna, (1853-5). Image taken from the National Gallery (<http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/frederic-lord-leighton-cimabues-celebrated-madonna>).

APPENDIX 2: UNPUBLISHED MSS TRANSCRIPTIONS

1)

The two officers (the one who wasn't in the army, had a smart cap knowingly cocked over one/ eye) began talking of removals, promotions, exchanges: - the young one (with the agate-/headed stick) said he had just got his company in the most miraculous way & without/ purchase; the elder, with the large red-whiskers, had had no such luck, being thus as he/ said (and no doubt since the day he was born, unattached): but on the other hand he/ had a pretty just and extensive idea of the army-list – what a lucky fellow he said/ Major Hobson was who had exchanged from the fifty fifth dragoons to the hundred/ and twentieth Infantry, then from the 120th to some other regiment gaining a step/ each time:- There was Tomkins who had got rank by going to China, poor old <Major[?] illegible> dead of the first[?] India regiment, by whose decease <illegible> got his Majority - &/ so on: - - The two little dumpy Quaker girls, whom a brother broad-brim had/ seen into the carriage with the most proper indifference, took presently out of their/ baskets, two little dumpy tract-books, and fall to reading:- the rest of the company/ (there were but five in the coach) thought the best pastime then available was/ the famous, wholesome and ancient one of going to sleep; w^h. slumbers were occasion/ally interrupted by the sudden stopping of the train at Slough Reading & <[blotted]>/ or diverted by the music w^h. the Engine at intervals thinks fit to play/ Whenever it arrives at a favourite passage (or tunnel) on the journey <deleted punctuation> it shrieks/ out for joy, when a station is in sight it screams a 'how do you do' to the yokels[?]/ the people with portmanteaus, the two policemen & other promiscuous company/ there assembled, - It is strange how these cries of the engine mingle appropriately/ and instantaneously with then dream the occupying the sleeper's brains <deleted word> the/ noises are not in the least unearthly or surprising as they are to the wakeful hearers,/ : in a moment they are accounted for and arranged into a little fable or plot, in/ w^h. you sometimes pass years in a second of time. Let no man wonder at Mohamed[?] (or some other <illegible>)/ going to the most distant and exclusive of all the heavens in the celestial regions,/ passing several centuries there, returning by easy stages over the immeasurable/ [new page] distance w^h. separates the utmost heavens from the earth w^h. we inhabit, and finding/ when he awoke that he had only been an instant of time asleep – the time that he/ dipped his head into a bucket and took it out again. The bucket of sleep is unfath/omable, the ocean of dreams boundless: - there is no need to tell here what I saw/ or felt, or how many old, old days came back again, <how many> what dear voices began/ to whisper in sleep that waking <find[?] illegible> alas and alas! are heard no more; -/ all these have nothing to do with a man's <travel> journey in a railroad, and to/ speak of such things seems like affectation, or a design to be interesting with the/ public, or irreverence towards those who are dearer and more sacred than all/ the fables that ever[?] praised or succeed as books. It was growing dark as I woke/ up – the little Quaker girls had been forced to lay aside their tract-books;- only/ the sham officer with the red whiskers was still upon his favourite theme/

By heavens! – it is <curious to re> wonderful to think <with> what <so> delightful and various/ amusements a bountiful nature supplies each day to those who are but willing to be/ amused.¹⁰

¹⁰ W.M. Thackeray, 'The two officers...' Holograph, 2 p., The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library., New York Public Library

2)

‘About these young people – leave them alone – don’t be always meddling/ with their affairs wh. they can manage for themselves; don’t be always/ fault[?] <illegible> <of> when sailing[?] in their boats, and pulling *your* oar in with/ theirs?/

We change Bob[?] we change: and I for my part am not going to say that/ my time was a better time than yours is – on the contrary, I believe the/ world improves and grows more natural every day. I believe that there are/ infinitely more gentlemen now than there were in the old days – a better education for all/ a better understanding between high & lows – a great deal of toadyism no/ doubt, and of consequent arrogance <and> upon the part of the persons so/ flattered – but toadyism is <not> no longer a system, nor is it your duty to/ admire his rank or my lord a man who has a handle to his name/ (as the phrase is) at every instant, as your grandfather would probably/ have done.¹¹

¹¹ W.M. Thackeray, ‘About these young people – leave them alone’. Holograph n.d. m.s. (1. p), Drawings Group 5, The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library., New York Public Library, p. 8

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