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THE SEARCH FOR A VIEW OF THE WHOLE:  
MODELS OF COMMUNITY IN GOETHE, ELIOT AND MELVILLE

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For my parents, Ann and Keith

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Most people who begin any Ph.D. at the University of Chicago are advised that it will be a long and difficult project. And it is a truism that, to the extent we have distinct expectations going in, few of us achieve an end to a research degree that resembles what we foresaw at the beginning. Beyond these statements I can only speak for myself.

The world has changed a great deal since I began this project. A fellow student once told me that the experience of being a student in Social Thought was like the plotline of Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. To give a bit of background for this reference, the novel, set in an alpine Swiss sanitarium in the foreboding years leading up to World War I, concerns an impressionable young man, Hans Castorp, who journeys up the mountain for what should be a short visit to an ailing relative. But he stays. And he gets an education so deep and

open-ended that he forgets his prior commitments--and (almost) his prior life. When he finally leaves the mountain--at a point in time so different from the present that it was impossible to even imagine until it arrived--he finds that he has achieved *something*, but also been thrust back into a historical moment that (to put it both anachronistically and very optimistically) doesn't know what to make of a person with his skill set!

Much of this hits close to home. The world appears crazier than it has ever been in my lifetime. It is not (and probably never will be) looking for Social Thought graduates. But, if nothing else, I have made my peace with all that. A lot of things need to change about our world in the years ahead, and I am ready to make my contribution.

For my part--unlike poor Hans Castorp--I am lucky in that I can still think back quite clearly to the beginning, before my time in graduate school, and have hope that those who helped launch me into my Ph.D. would still know what to make of me! We'll see about the rest of the world.

Thank you to my two most important mentors in my undergraduate years at Duke University, Thomas Ferraro and Thomas Pfau. In the intellectual presence that I maintain across the rest of my life, I can only hope to carry as much charisma, generate as much excitement, and create as many good memories for students and peers as Professor Ferraro. You taught me to seek out mentors based on all the right qualities. And I have Thomas Pfau to thank for making me aware of the Committee, and for guiding my undergraduate thesis. I don't know what he would think of the intellectual that I have

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Most, David Nirenberg, Ralph Ubl, Laura Slatkin, Nathan Tarcov, Paul Friedrich, and Leon Kass. And of course my dissertation committee chairs David Wellbery and Hans Joas, about whom I will have more to say in a moment. Compared to the later stages of the proposal and dissertation, these were fairly straightforward years. But I would not have gotten through them had I not found peers, both within and outside the department, who became true friends. Many of them have by now left Chicago—a loss that I feel every day. For creating and fostering a real community, thank you to Robert Abbott, Jeremy Bell, Erin Burke, Lauren Butler Bergier, Anton Barba-Kay, Noah Chafets, Jon Baskin, Scott Bear Don't Walk, John Ellison, Tobias Joho, Greg Freeman, Brickey LeQuire, Tamar Mayer, Hannah Mosher, Agnes Malinowska, John Paul Rollert, Dawn Herra Terry, Jason Rosensweig, Michael Subialka, Jonny Thakkar, Luke Parker, Austin Walker, Carly Lane, Drew Dixon, Lin Atnip, Paul Cato, Pablo Gonzalez, David Gutherz, Ben Jeffery, Chenxin Jiang, Jozef Mazernik, Julia Mueller, Andrea Ray, Joseph Simmons, Konrad Weeda, Danielle Charette, and Jamie McCormick. And thank you to my cohort, Alex Orwin and Anastasia Artemyev-Berg, for giving me a sense of continuity and a peer group, like I was part of a more conventional graduate school “class.” And thank you to Anne Gamboa, departmental administrator, for making us feel like someone noticed us on many days when the campus and halls of Foster were quiet, and we had only the solitude of our own work.

If there is a price to be paid for the freedom of an interdisciplinary graduate program like Social Thought, then it is the difficulty of finding one's way back to an intellectual foundation that makes the dissertation possible. This is already a huge task in a conventional graduate program, and I don't believe I am overstating my case when I say

that it is usually more difficult in Social Thought. In this very uncertain endeavor, I have, more than any other group, my peers in the German Department to thank—to the point that I still sometimes wonder if I should have been a joint degree student rather than just a fellow traveller of the department. My participation in seminars, the German dissertation writing group, and departmental events helped me stay grounded enough to feel like I could keep making progress. Many of you are also no longer in Chicago, but I hope we see one another again someday. Thank you to Peter Erickson, Stephen Haswell Todd, Andrea Wald, Joela Jacobs, Mimmi Woisnitza, Martin Baeumel, Hannah Eldridge, Malika Maskarinec, Jake Fraser, Mirjam Berg, Ethan Blass, Daniel Burnfin, Daniel Carranza, Emily Dreyfus, Simon Friedland, Joseph Haydt, Greg Hedin, Matthew Johnson, Tamara Kamatovic, Clemence Kavanaugh, Jessica Resvick, Alex Sorenson, Ella Wilhelm, Noah Zeldin, and of course Amy Stebbins! I am proud to have made my way in Social Thought, but I could not have done it without all the good examples you set for scholarly life. Without this group, I would not have had the support or confidence to do my own work.

And, speaking of work, it is no secret to those who know me that I wandered *far* afield from the traditional itinerary of completion for graduate school--to the point that, while still enrolled as a student, I spent several years working full-time in the very different world of technology, computing, and artificial intelligence. Although, in hindsight, it formed a strange sabbatical of sorts for me within graduate school, I see now that it was a break I badly needed: to be reassured of the value of my own intellectual work, to see some of the same issues I cared about in action within unfamiliar situations of contemporary American life, and to regain the conviction that I could work with others in answering the demands of

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I owe a debt beyond expression to those who have been my most steadfast supporters in graduate school. Thank you to my dissertation committee co-chairs, David Wellbery and Hans Joas, for supporting me and reading my work during those periods when I resembled a traditional graduate student; but thank you even more for your belief in me when I didn't look like a traditional graduate student. Your unwavering support and belief in me was essential to my ability to complete this dissertation. Without your willingness to accept the decisions I made in all things, intellectual and career, I would have long ago decided that it wasn't meant to be. And thank you to my third committee member, Rosanna Warren, for stepping in at a relatively late stage and embracing my work in whatever state it was currently in.

I would also like to give a special acknowledgement to those in graduate school who supported me but were unable, because life and circumstances intervened, to finish themselves. When I started, I did not really believe that life happens. To put it in terms familiar to my dissertation: I believed that I was an individual—that I was in control of my own fate. But I see now, in a very profound and heartfelt sense, that it could have been any of us. I hope that each of you has or will, in your own way, find real closure to your time here.

Thank you to Marcus Lampert and Jeffrey Parker for being my friends in all circumstances, and my roommates during some of the most difficult years. Thank you to those in other departments and at other universities, for your friendship and camaraderie during this time. These include Chris Sukhu, Dustin Gourdin, Daniel Phillips, Phillip Henry, Katie Hendricks and Mollie McFee, though I have the sense that I am forgetting a million and one people right now. Special gratitude goes to Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan and Brandon Levin for being my most unconditional academic friends, and deeply inspiring intellectual partners, from the very beginning of those first years at Duke. I can't wait to see what you do.

Thank you to my parents, Ann and Keith, for supporting me, from my decision to take this crazy unconventional route, all the way to their belief that I could finish—and needed to! Thank you for loving me and my siblings for who we are, and for treating us as people whose lives had to unfold according to their own logic. I dedicate this dissertation to you, because the work that I do here is a product of sacrifice by multiple generations, who have

cumulatively made possible a type of reflective life that is essential to any culture worth preserving. I have been so lucky to live this life, and I will do my best to repay it. In this I owe thanks as well to my brothers and sister, David, Elizabeth and Alex, and to my extended family—especially my grandparents John and Elizabeth, Evelyn and Norman—who always loved and believed in me.

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Philip Sugg

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## Introduction:

### Individual Development and Integration in Nineteenth-Century Narrative

This is a study about a set of problems that became urgent for narrative fiction in the first decades of the nineteenth century, as the terms of what is now called “realism” were beginning to fix themselves around the requirements of middle class existence. At the same moment that the novel, in its many variants, created a set of historical conventions that allowed for a broadly convincing depiction of ordinary time and everyday life *as a whole*, its constitutive figure, the individual, proved unable to live comfortably within the realistic world that narrative had created. I want to concentrate on those characters whose lives unfold under the particularity of the historical record and with powers of effective agency that are definitive of the modern individual, but who do not achieve what I will call a position of “mastery” over their circumstances.

Erich Auerbach writes about one archetypal German novel of middle class reality, Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Lehrjahre* (1795), that it and other novels like it, “insofar as they depict contemporary social conditions,” represent “the destinies of their characters on a solid basis of bourgeois class-consciousness without giving us much of an impression of the underlying political and economic movements of the period,” thereby creating a narrative background where “time and place are often alluded to in the most general way.”<sup>1</sup> Goethe’s

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<sup>1</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature - New and Expanded Edition*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Princeton Classics (Princeton University Press, 2013), 448, <https://books.google.com/books?id=IXEPAAAAQBAJ>.

solution to the realistic basis of the novel would come to represent a stereotypically “inward” German approach to both artistic representation and political thinking; in this reading, reality provides the stability for the workings of the searching mind, the unrealized vision of the private individual.

An example: the reader first encounters the young Wilhelm in his present-day life, enraptured by a secret love affair with an actress, Mariane, whom he met while she traveled with her acting troupe through his hometown. The immediate effect of this love interest is to produce a sense of purposive unity within Wilhelm about his own life, both in its already-lived history and in its un-lived potential. In the past, this means a looking-back to his earliest memories, to the celebrated scene of the puppet show he organizes as a small child; and in the future, his love gives him the resolve to pursue a career in the theater.<sup>2</sup>

The puppet show was a hidden sign. Wilhelm thinks that his “vocation for the theater was now clear to him,” and—in a locution that curiously elides the agency—“he was advancing to it with Mariana’s hand in his; and, in his comfortable prudence, he beheld in himself the embryo of a great actor,—the future founder of that national theater.”<sup>3</sup> Although Wilhelm had not known it until he met her, his purpose—to become an actor—had “slumbered in the innermost corners of his soul,” until it “awoke” and “painted a picture for him,” where in the quoted passage of his private thoughts he imagines his future like an awakening or calling. Goethe’s particular form of realism makes it possible for the novel to present an

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<sup>2</sup> “When the first tumult of joy had passed, and our friend began to look back upon his life and its concerns, everything appeared new to him: his duties seemed holier, his inclinations keener, his knowledge clearer, his talents stronger, his purposes more decided.” Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, ed. and trans. Eric A. Blackall, Princeton Paperbacks (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 4

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 16–17.

individual life-course, where it is sensible to think of bringing together past and future under a single program, a solution to the problem that the historian Jerold Seigel poses: “how the disparate and changing parts of a living individual could all enter into a single whole.”<sup>4</sup>

I understand realism here as the background of what makes Wilhelm’s vision of himself possible. We see the terms of this reality intruding in explicit form, as in the plausibility of institutionalized, national German theater within the late-eighteenth century political fragmentation of the German principalities. And it appears in the more implicit conditions of believable outcomes for Wilhelm as a character: in what we would today call the “socioeconomic” security of Wilhelm’s childhood that would allow him to conceive of his life as a set of future options that could be brought to resolution through a vocational calling.

The version of realism that I have presented here suggests a world that makes itself available to action, one which is populated by characters who have an accurate sense of their own agency, and who make plans and take steps to accomplish them with a reasonable expectation of success. History can be an unruly force of disorder, this story goes, but whatever the upheavals of the past, let us now watch the actions of capable people in the present. In Fredric Jameson’s study of the realist novel, he identifies a tension between “destiny” and what he calls the “eternal present.”<sup>5</sup> Something like an eternal present describes Wilhelm’s self-understanding of his condition at the start of the novel; he

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<sup>4</sup> Jerrold E Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe Since the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 109.

<sup>5</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (New York: Verso, 2013), 26.

is defined by a choice to enter the theater that was always there, waiting to be discovered, and needing only the addition of his intention and will to make it real. Destiny, Jameson argues, is an exogenous force of “chronology,” a “tripartite system of past-present-future,” that slots the aspirations of individuals into the vagaries of unrelenting change.<sup>6</sup> Auerbach gets at this latter view of the real as determinative force in his reading of a post-Revolution France, through Stendahl’s *Le Rouge et le Noir* (*The Red and the Black*) in the aftermath of “the first of the great movements of modern times in which large masses of men consciously took part” that “gave rise to a modern tragic realism.”<sup>7</sup> Here history is not a canvas but an ever-shifting configuration of tectonic plates, an effect on the individual such that “the social basis upon which he lives is not constant for a moment but is perpetually changing through convulsions of the most various kinds.”<sup>8</sup>

According to this conception of the real, the individual plays a role in a fate whose underlying conditions escape him. The development of the individual character represents something like a coming-to-awareness of the baffling nature of history, learning to “account to himself for his real life and his place in human society...upon a far wider practical foundation and in a far larger context than before.”<sup>9</sup> This realism takes a kind of aesthetic delight in the working-out of history in its entirety, a form which Auerbach sees reaching its fullest realization in the realism of a writer like Balzac, who “not only, like Stendahl, places the human beings whose destiny he is seriously relating, in their precisely defined

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>7</sup> Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 458.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 459.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 459.

historical and social setting, but also conceives this connection as a necessary one: to him every milieu becomes a moral and physical atmosphere which impregnates the landscape, the dwelling, furniture, implements, clothing, physique, character, surroundings, ideas activities and the fates of men..."<sup>10</sup> History becomes a leveling force that smooths out differences between individuals under the weight of collective change.

The problem of how the elements of the novel—the individual, the event, the community—stand out within the historical flux is not new to realism, but it would be a problem that, I want to suggest, the realistic novel had to solve, or at least conceal, on its own terms.

In his *Theory of the Novel* (*Teoria del Romanzo*, 2011, English translation 2017) the literary theorist Guido Mazzoni seeks to explain how the ordinary, mortal individual, “born in obscurity,” and subject to “the cyclical movement of nature,” could become the subject of the novel in the first place.<sup>11</sup> Like all representational systems, the realistic novel produces its effect by distinguishing foreground from background. Foreground is the chain of details worthy of being called out in explicit representation, while background is everything else presumed to exist in order to support this representation. In a claim indebted to Auerbach, Mazzoni writes that among the oldest literary divisions is that between the divine and human worlds. To the Greeks the stories of gods were *prima facie* worthy of permanent enshrinement. The poet includes divine action in the epic because it explains the conditions under which untold mortal beings lived their lives. Stories about the gods explain the human world, now and forever.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 473.

<sup>11</sup> Guido Mazzoni, *Theory of the Novel* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017), 22.

But human actors and events do not present the poet with the same obvious principle of selection. Their location in a world-ontology is both meager and fragile. The fate of mortals, making their short journey through a realm of transience, is to “see their existence disappearing into the mass of equivalent lives, unable to impress a sign of their difference in the fabric of the world, and destined to be lost in the infinite cycle of endlessly similar things.”<sup>12</sup>

In the pre-modern situation, the writer’s solution to this problem was to select human material from lives in close proximity to heroism, nobility, or otherwise exceptional social standing. Even if the exceptional life worthy of remembrance could not be tied back to a divine source, it could still participate in an elevated order that was celebrated in memory by the greatness of its deeds (e.g., Achilles in the *Iliad*) or enshrined in institutions with a self-memorializing function (e.g., families with a line of institutionalized nobility). If the poet were asked why he brought together a set of events and characters into a single narrative, he could answer that they were guaranteed by the same exceptional ontological status. The exact meaning of “exceptional” might change by time or place, but the promise that the object of representation was part of a higher order of being would become a precondition for speaking at all. Artistic representation was therefore an act of drawing

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, 22. Auerbach makes a complementary claim about the realistic principles of literature in Roman antiquity, in the work the historian Tacitus and the satirical writer Petronius: “Everything commonly realistic, everything pertaining to everyday life, must not be treated on any level except the comic, which admits no problematic posing. As a result the boundaries of realism are narrow. And if we take the word realism a little more seriously, we are forced to admit that there could be no serious literary treatment of everyday occupations and social classes—merchants, artisans, peasants, slaves—of everyday scenes and places—home, shop, field, store—of everyday customs and institutions—marriage, children, work, earning a living—in short, of the people and its life.” Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 31

lines between earthly phenomena and another superior, coordinating ontological context.<sup>13</sup> The gods, saints, mortal heroes and other exceptional beings subject to pre-modern textual representation were all figures defined by their exceptional knowledge and control over the world. Their claim to representation came from the understanding that their action, while concentrated in their own subjective personality, nonetheless stood for something general. The human world was defined by the actions, however capricious, of beings who had power to define reality by nature of being an exception to the structure of human reality.

The modern text, epitomized in the open-ended adaptability of the novel, appeared to leave behind the question of ontological signaling. If the justification of the pre-modern text was tied to the power that ontologically exceptional beings had over the human reality, then the most “modern assessment” of this problem is that it simply ignored—or even embraced—the chaos of the human subject. About the early modern writer Rabelais and his *Life of Gargantua and of Pantagruel*, Auerbach writes about his incorporation of chaos into the text, that “the breathing life of men and nature calls forth all of [his] love, his thirst for knowledge and his power of verbal representation.” The modern text defies the ancient hesitance about subject matter, believing that it can fix something worth knowing in the image of the human. Change becomes “triumphant earthly life” for Auerbach, which calls

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<sup>13</sup> The early literary work did not need to refer to its celestial connections; this link was presumed in order for the representation to be possible at all. Michel Foucault describes a pre-modern mode of correspondent representation in *The Order of Things*: “The universe was folded in upon itself: the earth echoing the sky, faces seeing themselves reflected in the stars, and plants holding within their stems the secrets that were of use to man.” Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 17

forth Rabelais' "realist and super-realistic mimesis."<sup>14</sup> The text that plays with the endless change of circumstance has negated the centering position formerly held by the gods. As long as everything above and below is subject to change, the problem of representational justification can be ignored. Like Auerbach writes of Rabelais, "as a part of nature, man rejoices in his breathing life, his bodily functions, and his intellectual powers, and, like nature's other creatures, he suffers natural dissolution."<sup>15</sup>

Supposing that we accept the characterization of Rabelais' anti-ontology, that it celebrates the unstable interplay of beings and matter, I want to think about what happens when a certain ontological stability is restored to the text, but the question of ontological *priority* has been forgotten.

The sort of order that I want to consider reflects a middle-class sensibility at the beginning of a European nineteenth century. Realism provides a smooth surface, papering over ontological difference. And at the center of this construction is a promise of *mastery* over earthly circumstances: that the individual can stand apart from the chaos because it has been rendered knowable and controllable.<sup>16</sup> Auerbach writes that "the Christian unity of the cosmos, and the figural preservation of the earthly in the divine judgment, led to a very

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<sup>14</sup> Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 276.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 276.

<sup>16</sup> David Wellbery and Thomas Heller write in the introduction to their edited collection *Reconstructing Individualism* that "an essential aspect of the individualist worldview was the belief that the objective domain was available to scientific or logical representation," connecting "liberal individualism" with "technical accomplishment." In David E. Wellbery and Thomas C. Heller, "Introduction," in *Reconstructing Individualism : Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought*, ed. David E. Wellbery and Thomas C. Heller (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1986), 1–15, 6

strong concept of the indestructible permanence of the individual.”<sup>17</sup> The situation I want to speak of keeps the individual at its center. This is the individual, conceived not as the recipient of a gift at the center of a divinely shaped world, but the master who brings the cosmos to heel through tools, methods and distance. Franco Moretti notes that this type becomes an “abstract hero” by representing the systems of control and power that he extends out into the world. These values include those of “energy,” “self-restraint,” “intellectual clarity” and “a strong sense of goals.”<sup>18</sup> The bourgeois individual possesses the tools to turn the world into a collection of problems subject to solutions. His claim to exceptionalism, mastery, even immortality is not premised on the exceptionalism of his origins, but on the ability to create and live within systems with a “value” that will outlast him.

By the nineteenth century, then, this type of realistic novel rests its credibility on its ordinary representations of a certain type of individual agent, what I want to call an “effective” individual consciousness that underlies the significance of its smooth and reliable reality. If the modern novel upends the human at the center of the cosmos, this is not because of the erasure of the human figure from the picture, but because the validity of the real rests upon its fixture in the image of a principled machine built by human capability, and defined by what is empirical, logical, in principle controllable and morally comprehensible *by* agents. That is, because it is sanctioned by a certain type of consciousness of reality. This is what Husserl will later call “science in the dogmatic

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<sup>17</sup> Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 277.

<sup>18</sup> Franco Moretti, *The Bourgeois : Between History and Literature* (London: Verso, 2014), 16.

attitude,” which resolves “problems regarding the possibility of knowledge” in “an intrinsically universal way in order to then apply the attained solutions and draw the consequences for the assessment of the ultimately valid sense and epistemic value of the results of the dogmatic sciences.”<sup>19</sup> The possibilities of “the real” accord with a picture of a world that can be *mastered* according to technology, organization, and a pragmatism born from a willingness to treat phenomena as systematically impersonal.<sup>20</sup> But it is the figure of the individual—capable, worldly, conscious of his own power—that makes the systematic view possible.

Yet the objectivity of the real under this model also entails a problem. If the only allowable reality is that which can be objectified, which can be understood to operate according to regular principles that are indifferent to any particular observer, then what is the significance of the individual in realistic representation—even one who achieves “mastery” over a “system?” To refer back to my earlier discussion of representation, let me claim explicitly that instrumental forms of mastery do *not* entail a heroic position; indeed the individual may be a bystander to the operation of the system, but mastery is a tool, which can be taught and wielded systematically, without regard to the personality.<sup>21</sup> As Raymond

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<sup>19</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book. General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2014), 47.

<sup>20</sup> On the significance of the term “system,” Thomas Pfau writes that “...the most conspicuous new term to reflect the accumulative, impersonal and abstract mode of knowledge production is that of ‘system,’ which arises to prominence in the later seventeenth century and undergoes further scrutiny and differentiation throughout the eighteenth century.” In Thomas Pfau, *Minding the Modern : Human Agency, Intellectual Traditions, and Responsible Knowledge* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 431

<sup>21</sup> I invoke a situation like what philosopher of technology Andrew Feenberg calls the “technosystem,” which “strives to be all-encompassing” with the result that “technical relations concentrate power in the impersonal, distanced subject of technical action.” In Andrew Feenberg, *Technosystem : The Social Life of Reason* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017), 160

Williams writes in *Keywords*, his lexicographic investigation into the nineteenth-century, the term “machine” conjured up “...an association with the older...sense of routine, unthinking activity—thus action without consciousness.”<sup>22</sup> Or, as Franco Moretti writes in his history of the figure of the nineteenth-century bourgeois, the very systems of objectivity that legitimated the bourgeoisie’s rise as a ruling class (“whose consensus was built on things—not men, let alone principles”) was its “self-effacement as a class.”<sup>23</sup>

What I have called the “mastery” position brings us to consider bourgeois individualism as a general concept. I should briefly note here that I specifically emphasize “individualism” as a committed philosophical position over the more neutral term “individual,” since I want to point to a position that asserts the primacy and importance of the individual over other social forms—especially collectives.<sup>24</sup>

The danger to the bourgeois individual—and the situation I want to examine in the realistic novel—is that he remains powerful only if he holds onto his position as the creator or maintainer of his system of mastery. But mastery, once it is in place, can easily become invisible. One way to take Wilhelm’s understanding of his situation at the beginning of *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* is that he has lost a sense of his own social condition that makes an “aesthetic” posture toward the world like his own possible. Franco Moretti

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<sup>22</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords : A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, New edition. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), entry for “machine,” 150 (emphasis in original)

<sup>23</sup> Moretti, *The Bourgeois*, 21.

<sup>24</sup> A fitting definition of how I understand individualism: “a liberalism that emphasizes the autonomy, importance, and freedom of the individual in relation to society and state.” In George Ritzer, “Definition of ‘Individualism,’” in *Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, ed. George Ritzer (SAGE Publications, Inc, 2005), <http://proxy.uchicago.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=474409&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

argues in *The Bourgeois* that the fate of this class as a whole (he draws primarily from English sources) was to lose its commitment to the clear-sighted rationality that gave it power, substituting “sentimentality” and “fervors” for its former cold realism.<sup>25</sup>

Bourgeois individualism therefore comes to think of itself as “unconditioned” or “free” by sitting at the head of a sociocultural system that masters the caprices of nature, asserts the regularity of social life (through the expansion of, e.g., the economic sciences), and constrains the unruliness of the psyche through a definition of individuals who “will” the “ends” which they set out for themselves. This picture of a stable world that becomes a blank palate for individualism can be thought of as a construction in two senses. First, in that this mindset does not think of itself as offering a ‘model’ of natural or human phenomena, but sets them as the model-free background condition, a state of nature for the individual to tell the story of his or her own self-generation. Second, in that it conceals how the individual position of mastery over nature is a *distinct* form of agency, one of many possible. This is the paradox of mastery and the instrumental stance that forms the background for my consideration of realism: that in a condition where mastery has been naturalized, the responsible agent disappears.

As a result, the mastery perspective produces as an *end* (control, instrumental power) what it first justifies as means. The successful attempt to make the world clearer, more rational, and more purposive *does* make the world more intelligible for the purposes of control, but also reduces the understanding of multiplicity and difference, neglecting a speculative mind that attends to choice and contingency—questions about what could have been otherwise.

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<sup>25</sup> See Moretti, *The Bourgeois*, 184-85

By emphasizing what it *can* do, what is within its power, the narrative of bourgeois individualism obscures the parts of the world that do not contribute to its mastery, what might be “given” to no discernible end. And yet it is just these “superfluous” conditions, this “aesthetic” satisfaction, to which Wilhelm Meister attends at the beginning of the *Apprenticeship*, when he “foolishly” decides to end his training in the family business and join a traveling theater company. The form of realism that I want to consider has forgotten its own basis and—like Wilhelm—begun to let its mind wander. The mastery stance tends to erase the agent’s own sense of himself, to make the human seem inessential, thereby reversing itself. It becomes a search for dependence, for a pattern that constrains.

The disappearance of the individual within the stance of mastery can be seen in the later events of the Goethe’s *Apprenticeship*, where Wilhelm’s childhood friend Werner makes an archetypal statement of this position, to which Wilhelm replies with reasons about *why* he wants to join the theater. The stakes of the discussion above will become clearer in the narrative form of the *Apprenticeship*. I want to consider this scene in some detail because it will eventually provide the outline for the mediating role of the community as a response to the problem of mastery.

The character Werner is Wilhelm’s “practical” counterpart and natural foil to his ambitions: a friend of similar age, class status and upbringing, but with a more conventional outlook that is aligned with their families’ expectations. Yet he is as enthusiastically articulate about the ideals of this way of life and his own identity project as Wilhelm is about the theater. Their exchange is thus a first pass at a larger conflict that will still be left open at the end of

the *Lehrjahre*.<sup>26</sup>

Werner looks with complete faith—indeed with excited anticipation—at the incipient rise of a managerially-minded merchant class, along with a host of modernizing trends that are sweeping the world, opening up new markets, and reorganizing old social hierarchies. Wilhelm, by contrast, resists these conventional markers of success, favoring artistic and aesthetic goals that will remake his entire being. These are goals which he openly regards as more substantive and real than Werner’s own. Werner wants more than wealth or status, which he already possessed at middle-class levels from birth on. What he hopes for is that his entire character will be defined by a mastery of the coming revolution in commerce, technology, politics and aristocratic privilege. Werner displays a fascination with the dynamism, perpetual reinvention and constant search for novelty characteristic of this new way-of-being in the world. His is a style of individualism to rival Wilhelm’s own. On the one side, there is Wilhelm’s lionization of the “inner truth” of his own particular artistic calling. On the other, we are presented with Werner’s appetite to plunge himself into market forces that continually remake the world.

Wilhelm and Werner stage their conflict of values over a poem that Wilhelm re-discovered from his childhood, an apt description of Wilhelm’s present situation entitled “The Youth at the Crossroads.”<sup>27</sup> For Wilhelm, the poem points to a true identity, a meaningful self that is obscured by the distractions of commerce and worldly interests. Though he feels a deep

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<sup>26</sup> Citations to Goethe’s *Lehrjahre* will include both the English edition (Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*) and German (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, ed. Erich Trunz, 15. Auflage, vol. 7, Hamburger Ausgabe, Romane und Novellen: Band 2 (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2002)) edition (“*Hamburger Ausgabe*”)

<sup>27</sup> The “*Jungling am Scheidewege*”, Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, 18 (Blackall), 37 (Trunz)

dissatisfaction and restlessness with his current circumstances, Wilhelm's familial origins (epitomized for him by his grandfather's skillfully-accumulated art collection) confirm the worth of his aspirations. His familial inheritance of artistic potential has, he believes, skipped a generation in his parents, but re-asserted itself in him. Werner is horrified by Wilhelm's re-discovery of his childhood poem and advises his friend to burn it. He expresses his shock that Wilhelm could place so much stock in "the most unreal thing in the world."<sup>28</sup> Werner knows that there is an entire world of engaging, practical business interests just waiting to be taken up by ambitious young people like himself and his friend. Wilhelm prizes the depth of art and intellectual work over the superficial glamor of commerce, finding in Werner's aspirations an equally incomprehensible ideal.<sup>29</sup> Werner's proposed way of life seeks to give him mastery over an increasingly capitalized and commodified world. He wants to make his will into an instrument of the historical changes that he excitedly anticipates. Wilhelm, by contrast, seems less directly interested in the trends of the wider world, and more concerned with attending to the "inner" shape of his personality. Artistic production will be the activity by which he pursues his development, and the measure of his success will be the degree to which art gives unity to his nascent adult personality.

The way in which the two friends frame their debate suggests that two recognizably modern value structures have begun to achieve representation through their personalities. Werner accepts that the entire world is open to those who value the world like he does,

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, 19 (Blackall), 38 (Trunz)

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, 18 (Blackall), 37 (Trunz)

because it is a world held at a rational and calculative distance: standardized by one notion of value–commercial exchange–and the desire of its participants to conform themselves to those demands.

As is made evident by Wilhelm’s accusation against Werner–that he values the “form” of things over their “content”–he prizes the opportunity to achieve procedural mastery through the system of world commerce. He exhorts Wilhelm to consider this nascent way of organizing the world more carefully, and is confident that Wilhelm, too, will be amazed by “how many things come in and go out,” and that he will see “the smallest commodity in relation to trade in general.”<sup>30</sup> His central metaphor is a biological one: circulation. Trade, in his view, is as important to sustain the shape of this new world as the circulation of blood is to the sustainment of the body.

Wilhelm, by contrast, displays a quasi-romantic understanding of the intrinsic value of his highest ideals, epitomized by his faith in himself and the *telos* of his individual self-cultivation. As he will declare later in a letter, his response to Werner will be his own life, lived in and through the theater. His itinerary will be the pursuit of development in the manner of *Bildung*: “I have an irresistible desire to attain the harmonious development of my personality such as was denied me at my birth.”<sup>31</sup> He describes an almost Platonic ascent toward personal perfection, hoping that “I may gradually come to see good in what

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<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, 19 (B), 38 (T), “Wenn du siehst, wie viele Menschen beschäftigt sind; wenn die siehst, wo so manches herkommt, wo es hinget, so wirst du es gewiß auch mit Vergnügen durch deine Hände gehen sehen. Die geringste Ware siehst du im Zusammenhange mit dem ganzen Handel, und eben darum hältst du nichts für gering, weil alles die Zirkulation vermehrt, von welcher dein Leben seine Nahrung zieht.”

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, 175 (B), 291 (T), “Ich habe nun einmal gerade zu jener harmonischen Ausbildung meiner Natur, die mir meine Geburt versagt, eine unwiderstehliche Neigung.”

is good, and beauty only in the truly beautiful.”<sup>32</sup> Wilhelm has no use for what he regards as the typical questions of those in his own bourgeois position. Not, he declares dismissively “What do I have?” where “having” and possession includes all those goods that are included among the so-called intellectual or human forms of capital. As Wilhelm formulates it, he does not want to ask “what insights, what knowledge, what ability” he might acquire.<sup>33</sup> Rather, the question Wilhelm will answer is much simpler, albeit far more radically open-ended: who am I, and how do I “become” that person?

Werner’s statements suggest that he has embraced a range of detached, instrumental values that Charles Taylor classifies under the concept of the “buffered self.”<sup>34</sup> This, Taylor argues, is the predominant way of ordering the modern Western subject, bound up with utilitarian notions of value, and defined above all by the detachment of individuals from their surroundings. In exchange for this detachment, Taylor writes, comes “a sense of power, of capacity, in being able to order our world and ourselves.”<sup>35</sup> The detached subject understands his condition as a form of progress, of being “connected with reason and science, a sense of having made great gains in knowledge and understanding.”<sup>36</sup> Werner’s understanding of phenomena is such that he has great purchase on a range of things outside himself. The world presents itself as an endless array of problems waiting to be

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. “*Dazu kömmt meine Neigung zur Dichtkunst und zu allem, was mit ihr in Verbindung steht, und das Bedürfnis, meinen Geist und Geschmack auszubilden, damit ich nach und nach auch bei dem Genuß, den ich nicht entbehren kann, nur das Gute wirklich für gut, und das Schöne für schön halte.*”

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), Chapter 8, “The Malaises of Modernity.”

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 300.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 548.

solved by skillful masters. His tools—of quantification, accounting, market knowledge, and systematic thinking—are what promise to confer the distinctive stamp of character on him.

What the theater offers Wilhelm is the chance to mature and grow in a setting where artistic creation and personal development are one and the same.

This debate between Wilhelm and Werner seems to cast their disagreement as a matter mere “choice,” of personal preferences among two people who share membership in a newly ascendant middle class. So long as their debate is understood just in terms of their own personal development, their clash of opinions promises to reduce to little more than philosophical and private differences. But even within the terms of an exchange that is predominantly about their nascent sense of self, both men reveal an understanding that any capacity for self-realization will be dependent on the configuration of their surroundings and social milieu.

Werner’s ideal community is not defined by a particular notion of how the “good life” might look, but rather by the erasure of exclusive goods in favor of perpetual process. That is, by the capacity of the markets and exchange to level substantive differences between values. The positive vision he presents of the individual—a man of the world, someone who is at home both everywhere and nowhere through his trade—is accompanied by a negative project of erasing the borders and walls that divide communities into distinct feudal and aristocratic titles. Werner contrasts the old world, maintained by aristocratic elites who receive income from ancestral land holdings, with the new prerogative of men like him, who build empires not from territory but through the anticipation and manipulation of human needs and desires on markets.

“The mighty of this world have seized the earth and live in luxury and splendor. Every small corner of this earth is already taken possession of, every property firmly established. Official positions do not bring in much remuneration. What other regular occupation, what more reasonable means of aggrandizement is there than trade? The princes of this world control the rivers, roads and harbors and make good profits from what goes through them or past them. Why shouldn't we also relish the opportunity of extracting by our labors customs duties on those articles made indispensable by the requirements and caprices of men and women?”<sup>37</sup>

For Werner, true value is measured not by tradition, but by its independence from the old forms of organization. His enemy is permanence, and he will build these values into his everyday life. He will make himself into futurity personified, perfectly malleable to the inconstant winds of commerce and shaped only to the protean needs of his business regimen. To the extent that he imagines a home and community for himself, Werner thinks in terms of the household, a private world defined by basic and practical possessions, things that do not weigh him down over the course of constant activity:

Above all: There shall be nothing superfluous in our house! Not too much furniture, not too many utensils—no coach and no horses. Just money, which we will spend sensibly in doing what we want to do.<sup>38</sup>

Werner contrasts his own values with those of Wilhelm's grandfather, who amassed an art collection of old masterworks through slow and painstaking care over his lifetime.<sup>39</sup> This

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<sup>37</sup> Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, 19 (B), 39 (T), “*Es haben die Großen dieser Welt sich der Erde bemächtigt, sie leben in Herrlichkeit und Überfluß. Der kleinste Raum unsers Weltteils ist schon in Besitz genommen, jeder Besitz befestigt, Ämter und andere bürgerliche Geschäfte tragen wenig ein; wo gibt es nun noch einen rechtmäßigeren Erwerb, eine billigere Eroberung als den Handel? Haben die Fürsten dieser Welt die Flüsse, die Wege, die Häfen in ihrer Gewalt und nehmen von dem, was durch- und vorbeigeht, einen starken Gewinn: sollen wir nicht mit Freuden die Gelegenheit ergreifen und durch unsere Tätigkeit auch Zoll von jenen Artikeln nehmen, die teils das Bedürfnis, teils der Übermut den Menschen unentbehrlich gemacht hat?*”

<sup>38</sup> Goethe:1995a, 172 (B), 287 (T), “*Nur nichts überflüssiges im Hause! nur nicht zu viel Möbeln, Gerätschaften, nur keine Kutsche und Pferde! Nichts als Geld, und dann auf eine vernünftige Weise jeden Tag getan, was dir beliebt.*”

generational heirloom has roots in the past as well. Wilhelm's father, for his part, sold part of it to buy a larger house. Wilhelm remembers the collection from his youth—it is one of his first encounters with art—and it becomes a source of motivation to pursue an artistic life in adulthood. Werner offers the final repudiation of the grandfather's judgment. Possessions should be minimized in favor of the most mobile and fungible asset of all, money. "For what conceivable joy is there in dead capital?" he asks rhetorically. Werner will keep his money in its pure and liquid form, always searching for the new guise of a more favorable investment. Money is a perfect vehicle for the protean existence that Werner wants, since it represents always-transformable value.

Werner is at home in the principle of change itself. What he hopes to achieve in his adult life is a mastery of the codes—written and unwritten—which define a world that is moving toward total interconnection. This is what would be recognizable as "globalization" in our own era: borderless, or at least less bordered than before. Werner makes the terms of this interconnection between different contexts clear: standardization, to serve the needs of commerce, communication and positivistic ends. His optimistic vision of connection evokes what the political philosopher Michael Sandel calls the "procedural republic," a liberalism that "seeks not to promote any particular ends, but enables its citizens to pursue their own ends, consistent with a similar liberty for all" and must as a result not "presuppose any

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<sup>39</sup> This exchange between Werner and Wilhelm occurs later in the novel, prompted by the death of Wilhelm's father. Wilhelm and Werner's financial and household affairs are united because Werner is married to Wilhelm's sister. While he discusses the merging of their affairs, Werner casts aspersions on the habits of Wilhelm's grandfather who amassed a renowned art collection.

particular conception of the good.”<sup>40</sup> Little surprise that this “republic”—marked by an indefinite political and geographic scope—aligns with what excites Werner, with its emphasis on (again quoting Sandel) universal “fair procedures” eroding the entrenched advantages of rent-seeking aristocrats, in favor of talent and ambition like Werner imagines in himself.<sup>41</sup> Werner is excited at the potential of this new kind of “fair” power, which will surely enlarge his life to an unlimited degree.

And yet Werner, who disappears from the middle of the novel, reappears near its end with a surprising outcome. Wilhelm’s apprenticeship ends when he leaves the theater troupe for the Society of the Tower (*Turmgesellschaft*), only to have another chance reunion with Werner, who has been brought in to assist with the appraisal and sale of estates owned by members of this secretive group of quasi-nobility. Upon recognizing Wilhelm, Werner regards him with a guarded happiness, citing rumors of Wilhelm’s activities in the theater from his associates. Wilhelm, for his part, is shocked by Werner’s appearance, which seems to have aged far more than the actual span of time elapsed since their last meeting. He is, Wilhelm notes, “much thinner,” with his face “sharper,” and “bald,” with “pallid cheeks.” Wilhelm rates him a “sickly creature with a mania for work;” this is an assessment with which Werner himself, upon self-inspection, concurs. Yet Werner’s obsessive economism remains undiminished. While he is impressed with Wilhelm’s own polish and vitality, Werner assures him that while Wilhelm may have “squandered his time” with the theater troupe, he will still “become a man of parts who will, in fact is bound to, make his own

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<sup>40</sup> Michael Sandel, “The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self,” in *Communitarianism and Individualism*, ed. Avner De-Shalit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 13.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

fortune." Wilhelm, in turn, is amused by this remark, observing that his old friend can (still) only regard him as a "commodity" and a "source of speculation, from which profit may be gained."<sup>42</sup> Werner admits that "if I had not spent my time earning a mint of money, there wouldn't be anything to say for me." He bears the physical and psychic imprint of someone whose self has been completely dissipated within an objectified mode of activity.

I want to view the result of Werner's aspirations on himself—that is, the abstraction of his own vitality from himself—as a kind of allegory of the stakes in novel's post-heroic representational system. Werner makes his way in the world by adopting a kind of layman's nominalist stance to ultimate questions, through a willingness to revise his referents, and by a resistance to strong distinctions.<sup>43</sup> To recall the philosopher Gilbert Ryle's famous metaphor of "thin" and "thick" description, Werner is a partisan of "thin" descriptive—that is over, ostensibly detached and objective—over "thick" description, which would imply a necessarily subjective component.<sup>44</sup>

Werner has refused the significance of a place to stand—other than to be coterminous with a systematic description of his everyday middle-class world itself. Hence he becomes the personification of the paradox of mastery. Aware of everything around him in only a "thin"

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<sup>42</sup> Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, 306 (B), 498 (T).

<sup>43</sup> Werner's position represents a kind of naive monism whereby the entire world is reduced to economic causes.

<sup>44</sup> Heather Love writes of Ryle's understanding of thin description: "an unadorned, first-order account of behavior, one that could be recorded just as well by a camera as by a human agent." Heather Love, "Close Reading and Thin Description," *Public Culture* 25, no. 3 (71) (September 2013): 401–34, doi:[10.1215/08992363-2144688](https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2144688), 403. Geertz himself aligns thin description with what he calls the "cognitivist fallacy," which he identifies in a quote from the anthropologist Stephen Tyler: that "mental phenomena...can be analyzed by formal methods similar to those of mathematics and logic." In Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures : Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 12

sense of a series of procedural possibilities and strategies leading to a gain or loss (a rubric by which he quickly parses even Wilhelm's unorthodox path), he has obscured the "thick" view of himself beyond the positioning he has gained through his work. This is what he alludes to with his weary comment that he would be invisible ("there wouldn't be anything to say for me") without the evidence of his existence left by his capital accumulation.

Werner is a figure of mastery disappearing within the systemic totality of its own success.

What is meant here is two-fold. First, that in the stable ontology of the realistic novel, the individual loses the uniqueness implied by his subjective qualities, or his status as the bearer of an "expressive" reality which does not already reside in the background. Second, that realism threatens the significance of the individual *per se*. To the extent that the individual is part of a "systemic" reality, he has no regional or local identity. Instead he is radically legible, potentially related to everything else within the logic of a system like Werner's strategic ontology of speculative capital. Under the burden of mastering a systematic reality, the individual retreats into an abstract form of being: a representative of a determined structural "position," in opposition to the "systemic" view of the whole.

One of the more magisterial statements of individual expressive alienation through work is Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic*, in which he traces the secularization of monastic asceticism in its afterlife of the individual's vocational calling. In doing so, he offers us an example of how an expressive imperative which is supposed to glorify a higher reality can disappear within the systemic demands of "economic" participation in social life. By Weber's account, a distinctively Protestant, religious regime of self-discipline directed towards the transcendent becomes the immanent pursuit of rigorous mastery in the workplace.

Vocational success is not simply desired for its rewards, but also as confirmation of a

religious-ethical achievement in the everyday. But this individual imperative to discover one's vocation has, according to Weber, been integrated into the very logic of modern economies, where the search for a vocational calling "now wanders around in our lives as the ghost of past religious beliefs."<sup>45</sup> Werner's fastidious devotion to his profession (or, in Weber's terms, his "renunciation of the Faustian multidimensionality of the human species" that is "the precondition for doing anything of value") occurs in the reduction of his personality and physicality to a representation of his balance sheet.<sup>46</sup> Viewed in this frame, Wilhelm's perception that Werner has a "mania for work" is a telling interpretation of his situation. Werner still conceives of himself as engaged in a vocational pursuit defined by calculative mastery over his circumstances. Yet in Weber's telling, his commitment to his work is misplaced in its self-understanding: Werner will not *become* anything through his work; indeed as his premature agedness already shows, he will disappear within it. The exercise of agency that would distinguish the individual in a heroic context leads to diminishment of the individual within the objective realities of the system by which he achieves mastery.

My claim about the significance of the individual is anchored in what I have called, drawing on Charles Taylor, an *expressive* reality. The notion of "expressive individualism," as it is defined in Taylor's work, views the individual perspective as a source of special knowledge.<sup>47</sup> The expressivist form of individualism looks to an inner source for the truth

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<sup>45</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, ed. Stephen Kalberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 177.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>47</sup> See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), 390.

of things, because the shape of the individual reveals itself through a project of discernment and self-knowledge.<sup>48</sup> The expressivist seeks an elusive truth, what Taylor calls the “the inner élan, the voice or impulse.”<sup>49</sup> From this standpoint, Taylor writes, each human life is necessarily unique, “not just a matter of copying an external model or carrying out an already determinate formulation.”<sup>50</sup> Truth and self-knowledge within the expressivist model are reciprocal, relying on the spiritual boundary concept of nature. If the individual is willing to recognize a different set of truths, he or she will come to understand the common ground of all particulars in nature. Individuals are unique and particular in their directedness *toward* this nature. This makes them not *merely* subjective, in the sense of being ungrounded by a common source.

The common source is how Taylor understands nature, which forms the inspiration and knowledge of a different order accessible through the resources of inwardness.<sup>51</sup> Taylor’s nature offers a kind of liminal spiritual concept, recognizably secular in its avoidance of any particular Christian theology, but also retaining a sense of an extraordinary reality that transcends the mundane. This nature is not intelligible through calculation or observation, but requires powers of discernment that are intrinsically resistant to systematization.<sup>52</sup> The expressivist model puts the individual at its center because it is the uniqueness and

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 368–75.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 374.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 375.

<sup>51</sup> “To have a proper moral stance towards the natural order is to have access to one’s inner voice.” In *ibid.*, 375

<sup>52</sup> “And what can stifle it is precisely the disengaged stance of calculating reason, the view of nature from the outside, as a merely observed order. The filiation with earlier theories of grace is evident. Nature stands as a reservoir of good, of innocent desire or benevolence and love of the good.” *ibid.*, 370

dynamism of the individual person (if he or she is capable of realizing it) that maintains the non-instrumental perspective.

A corollary is that the truth of the real (or what seems true) must appeal to the individual from his particular standpoint. As Taylor writes, this speaks to an outlook that “must speak to me, it must make sense in terms of my spiritual development as I understand this.”<sup>53</sup> In other words it is difficult to treat the individual *qua* expressivist subject as a mere *abstraction* of some already-present principle or tendency. Expressive individualism speaks from a particular standpoint that has to be revealed through the embedded consciousness of the individual in that position. The possibility of expressivism presumes the distinctness and irreducibility of the individual position in an account of the whole. The expression of perspective becomes a distinct mode of reality disclosure.

If the expressivist position speaks from the individual perspective, then this type of individual does so from *a* location. He speaks not only for himself, but out of an identity with recognizable affiliations. Expressivism returns the individual to a place of prominence within systemic dissipation. Walter Benjamin writes about the epistemological situation of the novel relative to the figure of the oral storyteller. Benjamin’s storyteller “does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report.” Instead the story “sinks...into the life of the storyteller,” becoming his own because he bears the markers of the place from where the story emerged.<sup>54</sup> Put differently, the storyteller is unthinkable

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<sup>53</sup> Charles Taylor, *Dilemmas and Connections : Selected Essays* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 241.

<sup>54</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Work of Nikolai Leskov,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, 1st Schocken pbk. ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 91–92.

without being marked by his *community*. By distilling the people and circumstances that created his personality, he puts his own distinctive, individual mark upon the story.<sup>55</sup>

Benjamin's memorializing account of the storyteller points to what is at risk in the form of the novel: the "birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual," he writes, "who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others."<sup>56</sup> In its abstraction from circumstances, the novel is at risk of falling into mere information, incapable of representing a community because its constructive principle is that of speaking to things in general.

The storyteller is a figure who coordinates the elements of his culture, who arrives at his own distinctness through a general culture. He is the *personality type* of his culture, standing distinct from it because he has assembled its elements into his own voice, but also *of* his community because what he says can only be recognized through his origin in a locale. He does not aspire to a *universal* story, as the novel may, but the storyteller incorporates a group of particular stories into himself in way that makes them intelligible to an audience on the outside. The challenge that the storyteller poses to realism is how to make its characters and events achieve distinction amidst the illusion of the stable "informational" background of the realist novel.

Guido Mazzoni writes about the middle-class form of the novel that it concerns "private individuals immersed in the prose of the everyday" who "became a class that earned the

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<sup>55</sup> "The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale." *ibid.*, 87

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

right to serious mimesis and the capacity to impose its values as absolute.”<sup>57</sup> It is an irony that the cardinal bourgeois values of clarity, precision and goal-orientation that we cited in Moretti find themselves at issue in the most flexible, chaotic and open-ended form of fiction available: the novel. As Mazzoni writes, it is mainly defined by its capacity “to tell all sorts of stories in all sorts of ways.”<sup>58</sup> The sort of *mimesis* that I submit for study in this project is the realism of the *Bildungsroman* at the turn of the nineteenth century, a world appropriate to the middle-class sensibilities, which Werner and Wilhelm mull over at the beginning of the *Apprenticeship*. Werner represents the path that was also intended for Wilhelm: the path of *accepting* the apparent solidity and terms of his world in service of comprehensible ends. It is clarity of Werner’s goals that makes him a captive to the spectral realities of middle-class life; hence his unrepresentability across the middle of the narrative which takes place within Wilhelm’s expressive agenda. Wilhelm turns away from the open future represented by Werner, electing to become his own kind of storyteller, coordinating the cultural potentialities hidden within his expressive self. Wilhelm does not accept Werner’s understanding of an ultimate reality composed of measurable and strategically defined entities. What he hopes to create in the theater is an expressive reality that has not (yet) been disclosed.

What Wilhelm’s path offers—and what Werner does not see—is the possibility of keeping *subjectivity* at the center of his vision of the good. Both Werner and Wilhelm represent a form of individualism that presupposes the importance of freedom and autonomy for the

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<sup>57</sup> Mazzoni, *Theory of the Novel*, 226.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

individual. But only Wilhelm's emphasis on the development of his personality puts that individualism in service of a subjective end. He displays a quasi-romantic understanding of his personal development, epitomized by his faith in the intrinsic, self-absorbed value of his own development. He charts out a recognizable itinerary of personal *Bildung*, declaring that "I have an irresistible desire to attain the harmonious development of my personality such as was denied me at my birth."<sup>59</sup> Wilhelm has no use for what he regards as the typical questions of those in his own, bourgeois, position. He dismisses the instrumentalism that captivates Werner: not "what insights, what knowledge, what ability" he might acquire, but an ascent toward an essential understanding of the good.<sup>60</sup> I want to think of the challenge that Wilhelm poses to himself as a formulation of expressive individualism. That is, how he can "become," what he is, potentially.

Wilhelm pursue his goals in the theater because it is where the cultivation of personality is objectified in the human art form, in the actor himself. This is how he argues to Werner that "being" and "appearing" will be united, and the expressive *individual* potential turned into communally recognizable *ideal*.

Wilhelm understands that there is an inherently aristocratic quality to his aspiration, a self-development ethic in pursuit of that most subjective of qualities, *excellence*. As for what this excellence will consist of, he touts the "harmony" of the parts of his personality, along with a general desire for the "cultivation" befitting someone of higher birth. But in several pages

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<sup>59</sup> Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, 175 (B), 291 (T).

<sup>60</sup> Wilhelm hopes that "I may gradually come to see good in what is good, and beauty only in the truly beautiful." Original: "*Dazu kömmt meine Neigung zur Dichtkunst und zu allem, was mit ihr in Verbindung steht, und das Bedürfnis, meinen Geist und Geschmack auszubilden, damit ich nach und nach auch bei dem Genuß, den ich nicht entbehren kann, nur das Gute wirklich für gut, und das Schöne für schön halte.*" *ibid.*, 175 (B), 291 (T)

of musing on the theatrical life that Wilhelm pens to Werner, what is quite apparent is that he has little interest in (or concrete idea about) what the theater actually is and does as a community. And this will become the source of his disillusionment with the theater, the reason for severing of his link with the original *Bildung* project at the end of the *Apprenticeship*. Wilhelm's actual education in the theater—culminating in the role of Hamlet—will dispel any illusion that the theater is a space of ideal development of the personality. Indeed, Wilhelm comes to abhor the creative chaos and generative disorder of the theater. He concludes that he has made a productive mistake.

Wilhelm culminates his mistake in the *Lehrjahre* with a leap into social indeterminacy, by his induction into a mysterious secret society, the so-called "Society of the Tower" (*Gesellschaft der Turm*), a quasi-aristocratic organization whose very requirements for membership and reason for existence are never explained. The ending suggests that some form of belonging is indispensable to the type of selfhood that Wilhelm seeks—even if its final form cannot be understood within the frame of the *Lehrjahre*. Wilhelm's feverish pursuit of self-development will culminate in the epiphany that he has been "playing himself" the whole time in the theater troupe. Acting is, for Wilhelm, just a placeholder for the expressive imperative, and the mysterious Society of the Tower a placeholder for the coordinating role of the community in the expressive project.

The situation that I have sketched out at the end of the *Lehrjahre* suggests that Wilhelm's ambitious individualism was only beginning to understand its social requirements. It is not simply that the *Lehrjahre* ends with an unelaborated representation of its own social background. However much Wilhelm's ideal of "excellence" as a goal was embarrassed within the theater, the Society of the Tower retains the ideal of community as such in the

background of said excellence. The Tower, with its quasi-aristocratic, generically spiritual and religious symbolism (and leadership by the mysterious *Abbé* figure) suggests that it was also formed to seek higher goods. Wilhelm devoted great attention to his own development of a distinctive personality, but his environs in the theater—for all Wilhelm's good intentions—were ill-suited to this purpose. By the end of the *Lehrjahre*, the Society of the Tower marks out the problem that will animate the second novel, the *Wanderjahre*: what is the role of the community in realizing the expressive reality?<sup>61</sup>

Wilhelm represents an understanding of expressivism that regards the individual subject as its coordinating center. *Bildung*, as Wilhelm represents it, allows for the realization of a version of the good which could never be articulated outside of its significance to individual subjects. But I propose a reading of the *Apprenticeship* that takes a forward-looking view, examining aspects of its narrative that will be accelerated and intensified in the sequel, *Journeyman*, novel. One can read the *Apprenticeship* as chronicle of Wilhelm's graduation from a naive to an intentional relationship to his communal setting, and from middle-class acceptance of positivistic values to the *Tower* society's awareness of its own constitution. Wilhelm's self-absorbed imperative to work on himself becomes an agreement to work on a self-conscious collectivity. The *Apprenticeship* inaugurates a situation that will be a central concern of the *Wanderjahre*: how a deinstrumentalized vision of the individual's significance must work through the creation of new communities for its realization.

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<sup>61</sup> The *Wanderjahre* is usually translated into English as the "Journeyman Years." In a traditional trade education, this period refers to the time in which the apprentice travels and works under the tutelage of other masters in multiple workshops.

Classical German *Bildung* seeks to produce a certain ideal human type, one whose highest achievement is not the mastery of any particular domain of knowledge or activity, but rather the coordination between domains of knowledge and specialization in the service of some higher concept of order between them. The ideal of *Bildung* suggests that the most fully realized individualism must bring the individual into a relationship with the orienting logic and values of the culture as a whole, pushing back against cultural division into what Weber referred to as “spheres of value,” each with its own articulated internal logic, ideals, and goals.<sup>62</sup>

More generally, I want to think about the *Bildung* of the individual as that which resists the specialization, institutional compartmentalization, and the concretization of reality into the settled traditions of realism. But *Bildung* is also a collective cultural achievement, itself dependent on the institutionalization of cultural resources made available through a persistent community. It is exactly *through* cultural determination by tradition, the *Bildung* ideal suggests, that an original, individual intervention in culture is possible.<sup>63</sup> *Bildung* is

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<sup>62</sup> Max Weber, “Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. C. Wright Mills and Hans Heinrich Gerth (Oxford University Press, 1958), 328.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Schiller’s canonical formulation of *Bildung*, which articulates this thought through the dependency of his individual determinative faculty (“*Formtrieb*”) on an initially receptive operation (“*Sinnestrieb*”): “His education will therefore consist, firstly, in procuring for the receptive faculty the most manifold contacts with the world, and, within the purview of feeling, intensifying passivity to the utmost; secondly, in securing for the determinative faculty the highest degree of independence from the receptive, and, within the purview of reason, intensifying activity to the utmost. When both these aptitudes are conjoined, man will combine the greatest fullness of existence with the highest autonomy and freedom, and instead of losing himself to the world, will rather draw the latter into himself in all its infinitude of phenomena, and subject it to the unity of his reason.” Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters*, ed. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1983), Thirteenth Letter, 87.

unthinkable without the dynamism of individual expressive creativity, but ephemeral without the possibility of enshrining this creativity in a new tradition.<sup>64</sup>

And so, the expressive reality of the individual within the nineteenth-century novel, locked as it is within the temporal and historical bounds of ordinary human life, and subject to what Mazzoni called “the infinite cycle of endlessly similar things,” cannot rest on heroic standards of significance.<sup>65</sup> Realism will neither commit itself to a level of ontological permanence vested in a theological realm, nor accept a guarantee from modernity of stable, endless progress within secular time. The community is therefore a vital middle term for the representative coherence of the nineteenth-century realistic tradition, because it mediates between expressivism’s encouragement of an historically *active*, constructive individualism (in the Kantian sense of making effective use one’s own powers of agency) and the accidents of historical change. In its claim to a coherent ontology, realism must find a social reality that can be both constructed in the present *and* “discovered” in the past. If the novel gives itself entirely to a constructive model of human progress, then the expressive potential of the individual is subordinated to realism’s systematic objectivity of representation.<sup>66</sup> And the past provides the guarantee of an historical providence of sorts,

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<sup>64</sup> The historian Reinhart Koselleck argues that community’s assimilation of individual *Bildung* can be seen in the evolving demands of work through the division of labor: “[M]odern *Bildung* thus distinguishes itself through the fact that it recasts religious pre-givens into the challenges for the personal conduct of life, that generating the autonomy of individuality, it is open and connectable to all concrete situations in life, and that understood as work, it is the integrating element of the world based on the division of labor.” Reinhart Koselleck, “The Anthropological and Semantic Structure of *Bildung*,” in *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2002), 170–207, 194.

<sup>65</sup> Mazzoni, *Theory of the Novel*, 23.

<sup>66</sup> Weber gives us an example of the individual’s disappearance within the standards of “objectivity” in his infamous “Science as a Vocation,” where the individual accepts complete self-abnegation of the subjective personality to achieve the thorough mastery of disciplinary expertise. Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” in

that individuals can rely on “gifts” from tradition where their resources in the present fail them. This is the version of the community that I want to consider here.

In what follows, I will consider several precursors to the novel that stage the community as a foil for the developing powers of individual agency. I want to suggest that the representation of the individual’s meaningful and generative relationship with the community is a long-standing concern of the novel. Indeed, a brief look at some of the traditions that preceded the genre reveal a long-standing fascination with the inner life and self-understanding of the individual. When we compare the characters within *Wilhelm Meister* to some of its fictional predecessors, what distinguishes it from, for example, characters in the picaresque, epistolary, or *Bildungsroman* tradition is a sense that his own development as an individual depends on his particular historical and social milieu, and that these elements are, to some degree, within the individual’s capacity to choose and control. The figure of the individual emerges on the outside as an outcast or socially marginal figure (the picaresque) before being considered an alternative, private self alongside the public persona (the epistolary) and finally with the tradition of which the *Wilhelm Meister* novels are a part, the *Bildungsroman* and the question of integration.

For the picaresque novel, traditionally dated to the anonymously authored Spanish novella *The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes and of his Fortunes and Adversities* (1554), the individual life emerges at the margins, in a comic character without a well-defined social role or standing. The picaresque hero’s experience reflects the freedom to contemplate an emergent space

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*From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. C. Wright Mills and Hans Heinrich Gerth (Oxford University Press, 1958), 129–56

of the everyday and secular in the social order. According to J.G. Ardila, his understanding of himself reflects a division between knowledge of the world and his experience of it: between a sense that there is a divine providence that he finds no particular reason to question, and his self-reported travails, in which his particular survival seems to depend mostly on his own wit, improvisation, and humor to suffer misfortune.<sup>67</sup> His is a life lived outside of any defined social pattern or tradition and yet he “can make out nothing beyond the scope of the status quo.”<sup>68</sup> The picaresque becomes an individual because the story he has to tell is, narratively speaking, not based on religious pattern or tradition, but on the specific undulations of a life that understands itself to be an agent—albeit an anonymous, socially invisible life. The individual life is a curiosity, an object of amusement, but the genre is ultimately conservative because, as Juan Garrido Ardila writes, it concerns “men’s place in society and how they came to accept their status.”<sup>69</sup> The picaresque’s individuality is an accident that begins and ends with him. It is a literary form that has neither the power nor the inclination to understand itself on any other terms.

If the picaresque novel reflects a compulsively active and worldly life, one whose very material exigencies crowd out sustained habits of reflection, then the epistolary novel is, in some respects, its aesthetic and psychological opposite. It is a novelistic type populated by characters in possession of at least some leisure and distance from their actions. As it is reflected in representative *exemplars* such as the novels of Samuel Richardson, the

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<sup>67</sup> J.G. Ardila, “Origins and Definition of the Picaresque Genre,” in *The Picaresque Novel in Western Literature: From the Sixteenth Century to the Neopicaresque*, ed. J.G. Ardila (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 6–8.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

epistolary novel depicts characters with a substantial and growing awareness of an aspiration (if not power) to shape their own identities and make their own choices.<sup>70</sup> The eponymous heroes in Richardson's novels have a desire to change their social standing, transforming wealth and other, less material virtues into public rank. In some cases these social-climbing aspirations meet with success (e.g., *Pamela*), while in others the ending is tragic (e.g., *Clarissa*), but the formal structures of the genre—bounded by the monological voice of the letter's author—do not allow the characters' achievements and downfalls to be represented in their intersubjective, communal form by a realistic narrator. Everything that the reader (and the writer) learns in the epistolary novel is about the contours of the self. The world of society, events and activity is reported in the letter, but its frame is that of a solitary consciousness, reflecting primarily *on* itself and *to* itself in private. Even the receiver of the letter is merely virtual when the letter is composed.

As the plot of the epistolary novel, such as Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, makes clear, the genre is perfectly capable of depicting its characters' social position and historical circumstances. The epistolary novel depicts the growth of self-awareness and sense of, as Charles Taylor has put it, the "inner depths" of its characters, a self growing up in opposition to public character. The genre is defined by its psychological achievements. From the different formal standpoint, it lacks the freedom conferred by a realistic, distant narrator—who can raise the individual's story to the standpoint of the community and historical reflection.

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<sup>70</sup> See Samuel Richardson, *Pamela : Or, Virtue Rewarded*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) and Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady*, An abridged ed., Broadview Editions (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2011)

Before the *Bildungsroman*, the novel engaged with the individual as a distinctive unit by eliding or reducing the scope of the conditions that allowed for more capacious individualism(s) to emerge. The picaresque character on the margins of society achieves his uniqueness because he is (appears to be) socially invisible and therefore freed from some social strictures. He directs our attention to particular social facts when they come to his attention, but not historical circumstances. And he persists in his improvised way of life without the backing traditions, norms and institutions that would give substance to his identity. Similarly, the epistolary character regards himself (and his implied reader) as the only stable interlocutor. His primary subject is himself, and other selves that are represented with similar depth in his letters. Both genres celebrate a kind freedom and independence from the norms of the community, for the benefit of the character and her immediate peers in a private setting.

Both the picaresque and the epistolary genres depict characters at a remove from their surroundings. This is accompanied by the characters' sense of their own distinctiveness, and by the sense of having developed special powers (of language, of self-observation) to articulate their condition. This consciousness is represented, to a greater or lesser degree, in a new vocabulary of inwardness. Their social surroundings are present and even richly described, but still stand in opposition to an essential individualism that is achieved against the everyday sociality and institutions.

The classical *Bildungsroman* changed the conventions of realistic narrative representation—and ultimately of the modern realistic novel. It inherits the vocabularies of inwardness developed by these earlier literary genres, but also attempts to articulate a social context for its characters' achievements. One immediate and obvious difference between it and

these earlier genres is that, in the *Bildungsroman*'s historical moment of an ascendant middle class, it confronts a competing universe of vocabularies for making sense of the community. These are the coordinating "values" of utilitarian, instrumental-bureaucratic, and scientific (e.g., Darwinian) social processes. By the time of the *Bildungsroman*, each one of these systems promises to organize collective life to an unlimited, totalizing extent. As we have seen in the exchange between Wilhelm and Werner, all possible relationships, from the personal to the configuration of political life, are potentially drawn into its logic.

If, as I have already asserted, one of the most profound questions in the age of the *Bildungsroman* is about how its characters understand the scale and nature of their relationship to any form community, then it must be clear that this problem appears in an oppositional context, simultaneous with historical forces that are rapidly remaking and disembedding the communal forms that already exist. To put it differently, the challenge of these texts is for their characters to organize themselves (or imagine a form of collective organization) that is neither merely personal nor an impersonal totality in its realization.

The legacy of the *Bildungsroman* was a new formal schema for organizing the novel around a narrative of an individual's development. As a genre, the *Bildungsroman* was built on the possibilities and new challenges of giving fictional form to the individual life. This type of life at the beginning of the nineteenth century presents itself as a problem, as a potential identity that is not yet realized but must be planned, experimented with and acted out. The genre's ideal expectation is that the individual arrives at a point of completion and maturity. The idea of maturity, of a stable identity, is a formal feature in the *Bildungsroman*. It is the closure and completion of the narrative.

Across the cultural and national variants of the *Bildungsroman*, a range of thematic

strategies developed that would come to define the meaning of closure and maturity in the fictional individual life. The pattern established in the German setting by the *Lehrjahre* suggests that the emergence of individualism was expressive and counter-cultural, that the fullest individuality came about through a degree of escape from the broad-based expectations of nineteenth-century burgher society. That Wilhelm ends the story by leaving the theater company and joining a secret society only suggests that the resolution was incomplete: artistic productivity was just one among many individual expressive patterns. Jerome Buckley writes about the English *Bildungsroman* that it also dealt with another dilemma of expressive individualism. Its concern was with the individual who had an unarticulated sense of undeveloped inwardness—a kind of latent, undigested expressivist imperative—but who nonetheless has to meet the practical concerns of integration into everyday society.<sup>71</sup>

In just these two cases—German and British—the function of maturity as a device of narrative closure appears to have opposing meanings. If a character like Wilhelm in the *Apprenticeship* manages to achieve a reflective distance from his actions and social milieu by the story's conclusions, the British case starts with a character who begins with this same distance, who feels a certain remove from society that must be dealt with as an individual problem. This will happen through the task of vocational discernment, marriage, family and other integrative social actions. In these and other variants of the nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman*, the closure of the narrative comes about when the individual achieves a level of reconciliation between competing tensions. The specific form of this

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<sup>71</sup> See Jerome Hamilton Buckley, *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974)

resolution is less important than the fact that the narrative expects and demands a resolution for the individual identity as a condition of its “success” as a genre.<sup>72</sup>

Franco Moretti understands the problem of resolution within a psychological and therapeutic model of *integration*. The acceleration, dynamism and pace of change in 19th-century society made it necessary to search for a guarantee of their stability and coherence.<sup>73</sup> Modernity—like the characters of these novels—is not a project that is

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<sup>72</sup> But as the genre’s twentieth-century critics have aptly pointed out, the Bildungsroman narrative rarely fulfills its promise of resolution. While more recent readings of the genre, which owe something to the turn to the “post-human” in literary studies, have frequently taken aim at its humanistic foundations, there is a longer history of questioning the coherence of the Bildungsroman narrative as inherently unresolvable on its own terms. In a 1996 study, the literary theorist Marc Redfield notes the genre’s ability to capture modern critical interest “even when the critic’s agenda and methodology oppose those of humanist aesthetics” (56). He goes on to argue that the genre’s examples, scrutinized closely, all fail in their own lofty humanist ambitions of individual self-realization: “The genre expands to include any text that can be figured as a subject producing itself in history, which is to say any text whatsoever; it simultaneously shrinks to an elite, high-cultural coterie—the five or so novels, for instance, which German studies repeatedly nominates as *Bildungsromane*—and then, when those novels are examined more closely, disappears into the *degré zero de l’écriture* and becomes a mere fiction, discoverable everywhere only because it exists nowhere.” (202) In Marc Redfield, *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996). Jürgen Jacobs’ magisterial 1972 study of the *Bildungsroman*’s legacy in the German setting and across world literature ends with the conclusion that it is an “unfulfilled genre” (*unerfüllte Gattung*). Jürgen Jacobs, *Wilhelm Meister Und Seine Brüder; Untersuchungen Zum Deutschen Bildungsroman* (W. Fink, 1972), 271. A few decades later, the American critic Jeffrey Sammons explored what he called the “Missing *Bildungsroman*,” arguing that the ideal type of the Bildungsroman had massively eclipsed its real textual examples. By his assessment, the genre’s status in the twentieth century (in which novelists participated self-consciously; see the works of Herman Hesse) meant that its existence had equal parts critical and literary reality. See Jeffrey Sammons, “The Mystery of the Missing Bildungsroman, or: What Happened to Wilhelm Meister’s Legacy?” *Genre* 14, no. 2 (1981): 229–46. And Kurt May writes in a 1957 essay that even Goethe’s archetypal *Apprenticeship* novel fails to see Wilhelm live up to the classical definition of *Bildung*, a charge that would seem to be anticipated by Goethe’s complex depiction of the quasi-providential ending in the *Turmgesellschaft*. See Kurt May, “Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, Ein Bildungsroman?,” *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift Für Literaturwissenschaft Und Geistesgeschichte* 31, no. 1 (1957): 1–37. These charges go back to the beginning of the genre’s theorization, carrying a normative disdain for middle-class individualism as an ideal. Indeed, one of the genre’s early theorists, Wilhelm Dilthey, ultimately dismissed the genre because he found realization of an ideal of individualism to be such a facile and solipsistic outcome for any form of literature. For Dilthey, who appropriated the term “*Bildungsroman*” from Karl Morgenstern and popularized it in the late nineteenth century, the *Bildungsroman* typified the tendency of the German political actor of that era to remain encased in political and romantic notions of *Bildung*—to the *exclusion* of concrete political action. See Wilhelm Dilthey, “Das Erlebnis Und Die Dichtung,” in *Zur Geschichte Des Deutschen Bildungsromans*, ed. Rolf Selbmann (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988), 120–22, <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/921162>.

<sup>73</sup> See introduction to Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987).

completed at the collective level, but rather the opening-up of the possibility of continual transformations. History is defined by its inherent unresolvability and open-endedness. But the individual, in contrast to social life, carries with him at least a hypothetical model of closure within the *Bildungsroman*—that of integration. The paradox and central tension of the *Bildungsroman* is that a narrative about the integration of the individual into the community has come about in a modernity defined by unending change. As Moretti argues, the individual internalizes society's contradictions in representative form within the novel, becoming a narrative symbol for the threatened continuity of the social body. "The *Bildungsroman*," Moretti writes, "abstracts from 'real' youth a symbolic one," ultimately aiming at the question of a society's collective unity.<sup>74</sup> The promised achievement of the youthful character's journey to maturity held out the possibility of a symbolic resolution of contradictions within the social order. Individual development, according to Moretti, is not *about* the individual, but about the internalization of the social world *in* the individual. The concept of internalization combines the inner (i.e., psychological) and outer (i.e., public) worlds, incorporating both the influence on the individual from a (social) "outside," and the capacity of the individual to (re-)act creatively back on that same world. The promise that the individual will make a successful integration into society is the possibility that historical change can stabilize itself in the symbol of the individual life.

The paradigm of integration is an important model for this project, but the expressive reality of the individual will instead come from a combination of self-directed agency (i.e., a resistance to integration) and a mode of *discovery*; that is, the appearance of social forms

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 5.

and potentialities that have been lost to the present. The expressive individual is the crosswise product of his ethical powers (of which the mastery perspective is one among many) and new forms of agency that exist outside of him, only to be recovered from the historical or mythic past. The community is the site of both possibilities, where agency can understand its defined scope and ends without the indefinite scaling of the “mastery” perspective. In the realistic texts on which I will concentrate, this is how an expressive individualism comes to be paired with an ontology of permanence.

The importance that I ascribe to community across this project is tied to the necessity of this aspect of discovery. The individual must be opened up to contingency, forms of fate, and agency that is found or inherited rather than self-generated. This is the alternative to the perspective of mastery. Each chapter of this project will be tied to a form of community that envisions a communally-embedded alternative to the mastery perspective.

## **Summary of Chapters**

Wilhelm Meister’s *Wanderjahre: Vocation, the Guild, and the Significance of the Individual Life*: This chapter discusses the intentional, small-scale, planned community, which requires the assent of each individual to a guiding set of orienting values. Its historical antecedents are the small-scale, personal forms of communal life embodied by colonies and the 19th-century utopian communities of Europe and the early American colonial experience. I will read the sequel to Goethe’s *Lehrjahre, Wilhelm Meister’s Wanderjahre, oder die Entsagenden*, as an exploration of the commune as a social refuge from the disorientations of a new economic and social order. The *Wanderjahre* represents the

commune as a place where the individual can grasp the whole idea of the community through the dedication to a common purpose represented by vocational commitment. The *Wanderjahre* offers a simple social form that poses the problem of *membership* and *integration* most directly, since the commune is the group that requires its individual members to “see” the intentionality of their own work in the image of the whole community. As such it forms the basis of the expressive separation–and unity–between the individual and community that will be traced out across the rest of the project.

*George Eliot’s Village Humanism and the Life of the Nation*: The village is the communal form whose members share a sensory reality and have the same sense of idealized historical origin. In contrast to the intentional commune, the scale and extent of the community is not chosen but inherited—at least in ideal terms. The village forms the basis for Eliot’s understanding of England as a nation. The nation’s appeal to the individual’s imagination is not—as in the village—limited to the immediate and transparent expression of intentions between its members, but rather by the demand that it makes on each individual (citizen): his or her identification with the sensorium of the village itself. The village in Eliot’s novels has usually been understood as a nostalgic throwback, as an unreal product of various obscuring nostalgias that afflicted intellectuals. Rather, I will understand it as a revelation of a certain kind of agency in light of abstract virtualizations of the English nation which, I will argue, was *based on* the political and cultural extension of the village ideal. The national community is a distinct “people,” with a particular origin story and a hypothetical shared future. The nation creates a sense of belonging through its ability to create a virtualized participation in its origin story and future destiny—to make its invisible narrative real in the everyday activities of its citizens. This reaches its greatest stakes in

George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, which depicts one individual's discovery of a moral calling to participate in the project of the nation. It suggests that the nation's ability to inspire a sense of community may be limited to the legibility and ultimate recoverability of its past. A nation that is unable to sustain an imaginative and participatory connection between the individual's self-understanding and its collective image will, it suggests, fail to sustain a sense of futurity that inspires belonging, and fall back into the norms and limitations of economic and impersonal forms of social order.

*Melville's Clarel and the Community of Pilgrims*: The connecting principle of this last form of community is the unity of various religious faiths against the value orientation of materialism and the detached scientific stance. The impersonal and utilitarian world order offers a kind of anti-foundation for a group of pilgrims from various faith traditions who are united by the fact that the impersonal order throws their own religious commitments into doubt. My text for this model of community, Herman Melville's modern epic form *Clarel*, has the most explicitly religious set of concerns in the dissertation. Religious systems of value form a crucial common ground across all of my texts, but religious belief and practice is at the foundation of *Clarel* because it helps to clarify what is threatened by the impersonal social order. The orienting point of value within *Clarel* is the fragility of its characters' higher religious good(s), as represented in the Victorian faith-doubt dilemma. The poem, populated by a diverse set of pilgrims to the Holy Lands around Jerusalem, depicts a community that forms around the existential form of doubt that its characters'—as representatives of faith *types*—hold in common. They maintain hope for the promise of a new revelation, which they pray will emerge from amidst its enigmatic holy sites and materially harsh landscapes, binding them together in a new founding moment for belief.

## Chapter One:

### ***Wilhelm Meister's Wanderjahre: Vocation, the Guild, and the Significance of the Individual Life***

The individual character in the *Wanderjahre* emerges according to a latent, as-yet undiscerned pattern. In keeping with the metaphor that lends both Goethe's *Wanderjahre* and its predecessor their titles, the novels are constructed around the pattern of life in a craft education and the craft guild.<sup>1</sup> The *Wanderjahre* will be the "journeyman" phase of a guild apprenticeship that its main character began in the *Lehrjahre*. But the medieval craft guilds, already threatened by capitalistic forms of production and in severe decline by the time of Goethe's novel, are not primarily present to the *Wanderjahre* as a set of living institutions.<sup>2</sup> Rather, the guilds—and their method of building fraternity and social life around the mastery of a material *praxis*—are a metaphor for the organization of individual faculties and developmental pathways into coherent collective units.

In the spirit of small-scale association among independent craftspeople, the *Wanderjahre* is a novel about communities with intimate and direct relationships--what I call the "commune" model. What is modern about the *Wanderjahre* is that it aspires to bring a set of shared, intentional material practices and orientations to a (higher) good into

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<sup>1</sup> In the following discussion of the *Wanderjahre*, I will usually refer to English-language translations in the text while providing the German original in footnotes below. Page numbers listed are, first, to the English translation and second to the German. For both novels, the translation is taken from the Princeton University Press editions of Goethe's Selected Works, translated by Eric A. Blackall (*Lehrjahre*) and Krishna Winston (*Wanderjahre*). German citations are, unless otherwise noted to the 1829 *Hamburger Ausgabe* edition edited by Erich Trunz.

<sup>2</sup>See Werner Abelshauser. *The Dynamics of German Industry: Germany's Path toward the New Economy and the American Challenge*. Berghahn Books, 2005, pp. 33-37 and James R. Farr *Artisans in Europe, 1300-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

a coherent way of life. This is the significance of the commune as an extended metaphor: society becomes a type of guild association. From a historical perspective, it draws on a proliferation of intentional communal projects across the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, realized in their grandest form by the European option to begin life “afresh” in North America.<sup>3</sup> The intentional commune was often built around a shared aspiration to utopia, a transcendent good beyond the life of the everyday. But the commune of the *Wanderjahre* can neither be reduced to its historical antecedents, nor dismissed by an aspiration to escape from the demands of the day in a messianic utopia. Rather, it is an old model for a new way of living together, a transformed tradition for a European modernity that was increasingly oriented around individuals and individualisms.

### **I. The Individual as Primary Social Reality, and the Commune as Compromise Social Form**

The *Wanderjahre* offers what I have termed the commune as an ideal for the organization of the various styles of modern individualism into a coherent and shared way of life. It gives a specific thematic resonance to its individualism through the narrative of an incipient bourgeois ritual: the process of discerning a vocational path. In the German context, the meaning of the vocational path is hierarchically stratified between “higher” and “lower” frameworks: from the most elevated theological notion of the individual “calling”

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<sup>3</sup> On the proliferation of intentional and utopian communities in North America, see, for instance, Mark Holloway's *Heavens on Earth: Utopian Communities in America 1680-1880* (2nd edition. Dover Publications, 1966) and Rosabeth Moss Kanter's *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (First edition, Cambridge: Harvard, 1972). The *Wanderjahre* takes the broadest possible view of what it would mean for a community to be intentional and modern, considering everything from resettlement ventures to isolated mountain villages to the peasant associations formed by large aristocratic landowners. In Goethe's novel, the commune is as likely to be found in social experiments internal to Europe as in the colonial experiments of North America.

(living and working in a monastic or clerical setting) to the mundane, secular and social, classification of all life activity into a socially comprehensible arc of vocational development.<sup>4</sup> The idea of vocation is bound up with the double-sided nature of individual belonging in the *Wanderjahre*. Its characters (Wilhelm and others) must not only discern their particular vocational contribution to their community. They are also called to identify with its guiding *values*, which presume to promote, organize, and assign ultimate worth to the activities of the individual life within the whole. To enter into a vocation in these communities is to identify with the style of individualism that invests the community with its authority. Therefore my approach entails a form of methodological individualism: the meaning of the whole social body in this account is driven by the question of how a society organizes the development of its individual characters.<sup>5</sup>

The concept of vocation lends a narrative pattern to a number of possible individualisms (e.g. expressive, utilitarian), but the particular type of vocational integration

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<sup>4</sup> See Gustaf Wingren's *Luther on Vocation* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957) for an overview of the religious and spiritual historical lineage of the vocation ideal. Outside of his infamously pessimistic psychic interpretation of vocation in his *Protestant Ethic*, Max Weber understood vocation (*Beruf*) in its secular sense to be a recognizable form of productive activity that allowed the individual to maintain his or her place in the society through continual participation in the labor market (see chapter 2, *Economy and Society*). In his study of the sources of vocational ideals in religious mysticism, James R. Horne offers a contrast with the modern secular view of vocation as "discovery of and assent to one's abilities, circumstances and tendencies" (*Mysticism and Vocation*. Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 1996, p. 2) The sense of a joining of part and whole--between emergent, developmentally revealed personal qualities and the everyday, practical demands that society makes on its members to maintain itself--is key to my own operating understanding of secular vocation for this novel.

<sup>5</sup> This statement also functions as an explanation of what I mean by "individualism" within the terms of my study. I simply take it as a starting assumption that for the cultural setting in which the *Bildungsroman* arose, the individual is increasingly the atomic unit of the social, political and economic imagination. An inquiry into what I have called "styles" of individualism goes, therefore, directly to the question of the individual's capacities, limitations, and value(s) that give it this foundational recognition. For a more theistic statement of this position, see, for instance, Charles Taylor's formulation: "The social orders we live in are not grounded cosmically, prior to us, there as it were, waiting for us to take up our allotted place; rather, society is made by individuals, or at least for individuals, and their place in it should reflect the reasons why they joined in the first place, or why God appointed this form of common existence for them." In *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2007, p. 540.

in the *Wanderjahre* will be the ideal of the journeyman's advancement through the craft guild system. When I refer in this chapter to the education of a "craftsperson," the organization of a craft "guild," "apprenticeships" (*Lehrjahre*), "journeyman years" (*Wanderjahre*), and other such terms of art, I am invoking real, historical European economic and social structures in the manner of an ideal type. This is surely the most relevant sense for the haphazard, symbolically rich "apprenticeships" that Goethe's characters undertake across both novels. But while my interest here in the patterns of guild education is more ideal than historically specific, my understanding of the craft guild as a group setting for individual practices has two very specific senses that do have a historical basis.

First, the educational pathways and mature vocational practices of a craftsperson are distinguished by a set of technical skills learned and practiced in common, and specifically by the practice of joint attention to the substantive demands of their material objects. Second, the practice of a craft is defined by an ethic of shared intentions--a personal, cooperative relationship between its practitioners during the phases of education and mastery--and by some notion of excellence and "the good" that provide the guiding context for their work. To be sure, both craftwork requirements are idealizations of their actual practice, even at their high points during the European Middle Ages.<sup>6</sup> For the

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<sup>6</sup> Contemporary historical analysis of craftwork and the guild system in Europe has tended to study its institutional and political realities, particularly the ways in which it has privileged and excluded various skilled economies. These settings often departed from its sometime-romantic depiction as a pre-capitalistic fulfillment of labor's ideal requirements for human flourishing. See Farr's above-mentioned work (*Artisans in Europe*), and *Guilds, Innovation and the European Economy, 1400-1800* (edited S. R., Epstein and Maarten Prak. Cambridge University Press, 2008). As a result, the most detailed recent studies of the satisfactions and unique outcomes of manual work have been undertaken by psychologists (see, for instance, the crucial developmental role of "joint attention" to objects between parent and infant) and in interdisciplinary work of applied philosophy. For an exemplary piece of the latter, see Matthew Crawford's *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work*. (New York: Penguin, 2010).

purposes of this analysis, the most important ideal feature of craftwork is its habit of linking the material activities of human life (here, understood as “work”) to a set of higher goods in the world. The community defines its way of life by maintaining the tension between skilled material labor and the view of “the good” for which this work is undertaken.

The *Wanderjahre* is about skilled work in every material and sensory domain. This is true in senses both high and low: it is a rich pastiche populated, on the one hand, with painters, sculptors, musicians, singers and other aspirants to high aesthetic achievement (what the novel at one point calls the “free” arts), but also with astronomers, geologists, architects, engineers, builders, miners, weavers and other such shapers of the raw materials at civilization’s disposal to meet its everyday needs. The challenge that the novel poses is to effect a transmutation from labor as a sensory process to “work” as a form of insight about values. That is, to move from an orientation to work that grabs the human sensorium to a higher ethical and objective vantage point on these activities. This, in a way, describes the *Wanderjahre’s* starting point, arising as it does out of the *Lehrjahre’s* ambivalent ending: Wilhelm Meister has “failed,” in a narrow sense, to achieve a life defined by physical presence and bodily control on the theatrical stage, but on a wider view of his developmental trajectory, his induction into the Tower Society reflects a new phase of maturity and insight beyond his particular aspirations. This hard-won perspective resonates throughout the intense physical nature the landscape at the *Wanderjahre’s* opening: Wilhelm is “overshadowed by a mighty cliff” and in a “fearsome, significant spot”

that conveys a sense of the plunging depths below the mountain height whose steep pathway he has already climbed.<sup>7</sup>

The idea that skilled manual work put its practitioners in a special position to acknowledge higher—even mystical—goods is hardly without textual and historical grounding. The apprentice’s entrance into a medieval trade—with its attendant promise of mastery—was not just a technical education, but in the most elevated parlance of the guild, an induction into the guild “mysteries” (Latin *mysterium*, meaning “miracle,” “mystery”).<sup>8</sup> In the medieval context, the Latin word *mysterium* arose in conjunction with a closely-related variant, *misterium*, which first designated a “craft, trade, or skill,” and eventually the craft guild itself.<sup>9</sup> By some accounts, *misterium* arose as a variant through the conflation of *mysterium* (“mystery”) with *ministerium* (“occupation,” “work”).<sup>10</sup> By the fourteenth century, both *mysterium* and *ministerium* also referred to ecclesiastical services, where *misterium* took on one more meaning, that of “dramatic performance.” The specific association is with the medieval “mystery plays” that depicted high points in the church liturgy.<sup>11</sup>

The craft guilds were always closely associated with these mystery plays, at first behind the scenes, because they were the ones with the requisite skill to construct the

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<sup>7</sup> “Im Schatten eines mächtigen Felsen saß Wilhelm an grauser, bedeutender Stelle, wo sich der steile Gebirgsweg um eine Ecke herum schnell nach der Tiefe wendete.” p. 7 (Trunz), 97 (Blackall)

<sup>8</sup> On guild training as “initiation” into a “mystery,” see Farr, 34.

<sup>9</sup> Philip Durkin offers a thorough discussion of the possible origins of *misterium* during an unrelated technical discussion in the *The Oxford Guide to Etymology* (OUP Oxford, 2011), pp. 80-81

<sup>10</sup> See Durkin (Ibid.) and Michael Fontaine, *Johannes Burmeister: Aulularia and Other Inversions of Plautus* (Leuven University Press 2015), p. 16

<sup>11</sup> Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*. (Oxford: University Press, 1951), v.2, pp. 409-10

stages and design the sets. Later on, because of the demand for plays in the vernacular and more elaborate staging, the guilds took on the writing, acting and production of the plays themselves. In this manner, the “mysteries” moved outside of the church confines into the primary hands of the craft guilds, growing in scale and coming into tension with church authorities for their excesses.<sup>12</sup>

The guilds’ responsibility for the mystery plays was just one of a larger slate of duties and symbolic rites that they undertook as part their practical labor. These rituals forged them as a social body and laid out a higher context for their work. Farr writes that participation in the guild rituals made them a “body,” and a “confraternity,” which “brought members together in a spiritual brotherhood.”<sup>13</sup> Through the mystery plays, the guilds took a unique form of control over a heretofore exclusive church function: what was once a participatory religious rite for members of the community at large becomes an activity that helps to constitute the guild’s particular way of life.

Yet the joining of individual master craftsmen into a collective brotherhood through the “mysteries” was always an ideal fraught with tensions between the individual masters and their guild communities. It is a tension that the communities of the *Wanderjahre* both symbolically incorporate and accelerate to various imaginative outcomes. The achievement of mastery in the craft guild came with the promise of establishing one’s own independent enterprise. To be a master meant possessing not only a high degree of technical skill, but also the legitimacy to set up a workshop over which the master had earned the right of

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<sup>12</sup> Young, pp. 421-24. Although these changes to the mystery play tradition occurred across Europe, David Muir writes that their shift outside the church was most pronounced in England and Germany. See his *The Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 26-27.

<sup>13</sup> Farr, 424

primary ownership and control. Farr describes the individual owner-operator artisan as the commander of a “self-contained business, financial independence, public honor, a spouse, and political adulthood,” thereby embodying the “ideal of the patriarchal household, a unit of production and reproduction that was assumed to be the microcosm of a well-ordered polity.”<sup>14</sup> This is the tension of the master’s role within the guild. Is the master’s status primarily defined by the obligations of belonging and leadership, by the obligations of care and teaching between junior and senior members, and by a relationship between those who are *developing* and those who have *developed*? Or is the master’s status primarily about the achievement of certain rights: the right to occupy a share of the market for the guild’s services and reap the personal rewards of its collective monopoly? Membership in the guild is thus always inherently conflicted: between the need to contribute to the maintenance of the group and its members, and the desire to pursue the rights of self-assertion and independence.

The *Wanderjahre* imports this same possibility of tension into its communities. The commune—as a general and ideal model for the organization of individuals into meaningful collective units--contains the same basic ethos of cohesion as the guilds. It is a shared model of direct and bodily engagement with the constitutive material forces of communal life, a direct relationship both *between* their members and *toward* the material objects of their daily sustainment. The organization of the commune, which aspires to simplicity and a sense of individual participation in the conditions that maintain the whole, is first and

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<sup>14</sup> Farr, 88. Indeed, to secure this right of independence in a crowded and mature European marketplace, Farr notes that they were frequently willing to uproot themselves from their existing societies and move elsewhere to set up shop (147)-- a historical trend heavily reflected in the various communities of emigrants in the *Wanderjahre*.

foremost a fulfillment of the individual's desire to feel and enact the meaning of his or her belonging through the day's activities. The individual becomes like the independent craftsman: one unit that recapitulates the functions of the whole.

But the commune is not "naturalized" in the *Wanderjahre*. It is a kind of second nature, chosen and maintained by the shared intentions of individuals as a solution to an already disruptive set of historical processes that have dissolved "traditional" or "natural" society. The tension in the communities of the *Wanderjahre* is therefore something like the following: can it successfully organize the full capabilities and desires of the individual in service of a higher and collective understanding of "the good," or will the individual ultimately revert to measuring himself, in a quasi-utilitarian fashion, as his own highest good, asserting his independence and ultimate value within an atomizing and impersonal economic order that ultimately threatens the commune as a particular way of life *tout court*? Like the guild, its individual characters are perched between forms of individualism that entail a sense of belonging to a communal version of "the good," and forms of individual empowerment that lead to independence and separation from the community.

The *Wanderjahre* unfolds under material conditions of what W.H. Bruford calls "early capitalism." Economic production is scattered between craft labor settings reminiscent of the guilds, small-scale piecework (mostly on textile goods) undertaken by rural peasants in domestic settings, subsistence agriculture undertaken by mountain peasants, and highly productive large-scale agriculture owned and overseen by a manorial aristocracy.<sup>15</sup> In the terms of the novel, the most important difference between these

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<sup>15</sup> Walter H. Bruford, *The German Tradition of Self-Cultivation: Bildung from Humboldt to Thomas Mann*. London ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975, pp. 94-95.

arrangements and an incipient later phase of capitalism (which the novel brings into view in a just-visible future) is that, for the immediate time being, economically productive activity can still be integrated into a “way of life.” Economic competitiveness persists in light of the whole community’s higher aims and meaning, such that its members are able to cooperate in the production of useful goods and services. Their way of life has a significance that is consonant with its economic niche. First and foremost, this means that the material conditions of production still unfold at a scale and a speed that accommodates human understanding and the human sensorium. The narrow and focused mindset implied by the division of labor and technical specialization has not yet reached a point where production can easily take place for its own sake rather than within the horizon of view of a communal way of life. But the *Wanderjahre* is situated at a historical inflection point, in which this balance between individual sense and the conditions of labor has begun to shift. At the center of this change is the individual as a dynamic economic unit.

To be an individual in the terms of the *Wanderjahre* is to have the freedom to participate in a cooperative endeavor and a collective vision *in some sense*. But its deep and unresolved dilemma is the uncertainty of “the good” that is the basis for the shared life of the individual. The commune turns the material conditions of labor and everyday life into the basis for the community’s distinctive higher goods. This bears an analogical resemblance to the organization of the craft guild, which treats its distinctive material objects, technical capacities, and labor patterns not simply as “skills” to be learned for remuneration, but as “mysteries” that define the basis for the community. Historically speaking, unskilled or semi-skilled non-guild laborers frequently worked as assistants alongside guild journeymen or master craftsmen. But their work was mere labor, outside of

the mysteries and different in kind than the work of the guild members even if—in practical terms—it was often impossible to keep non-apprentice assistants from learning the technical steps of craft production to a high degree of proficiency.<sup>16</sup> Skilled work undertaken outside of the guild’s social hierarchy and mythology lacked, in principle, the same intentionality toward its material objects. Within the guild, raw materials were a site of collective cultural transmission, shared meaning, and joint attention through the active process of mentorship. Outside of the guild, these materials were a bare substance: suitable to appraisal for their eventual use, valued as a means of remuneration, but carrying no other significance than their eventual commodity function.

As a novel about vocation, the *Wanderjahre* shifts between two contexts for the meaning of the individual’s productive capacities. One possibility is that the vocational development of the individual could unfold under the aegis of a mystery; that is, with the promise that individual activity would be significant beyond its function to provide material and economic sustainment. The alternative is the analogical equivalent of labor undertaken outside of the guild and its mysteries, under conditions of ever-expanding, socially leveling capitalistic production. This, within the imaginary of the novel, is an economistic, proto-utilitarian generic ordering of the world into atomized individuals: a productive, technically differentiated form of labor that has no use for the “mysteries” of its particular social context, re-ordering not only the relationship of individuals *to* their labor, but also severing the connection between individuals and the social context *for* their labor. The novel holds both of these possibilities in tension. The historical European guild was constantly pulled between its members’ desire for singular entrepreneurial independence,

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<sup>16</sup> Farr, 36

and the obligations of guild cooperation that made their way of life socially meaningful.<sup>17</sup> For the commune, in turn, the novel raises the possibility that a form of community that gives legibility to the individual's way of life will be rendered historically superfluous, and that the individual will become the foundational social and historical unit. This point takes us to another level in which the *Wanderjahre* is a book that is, both literally and metaphorically, about the individual as a perpetual *wanderer*. It is through the notion of “wandering”—indicated in the novel's very title—that we can approach the crucial symbolic and mediating role of community in the *Wanderjahre*.

In the timeline of a craft education, the “*Wanderjahre*” are traditionally the phase in which an aspiring master craftsman travelled between different guild social structures and contexts, gaining skill from a wide variety of masters while living an itinerant and unsettled existence.<sup>18</sup> From the standpoint of tradecraft pedagogy, the benefits of technical cross-pollination and exposure to different masters had benefits both for individual journeymen and for the network of ties across the guild system. In the *Wanderjahre*, while the basic outline of the ritual is the same, Wilhelm has (as yet) no chosen vocation, making the purpose of this activity far less clear. He travels under orders from his own “guild” (The Tower Society), living alongside the members of various communities with no definite task

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<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Farr suggests that some masters were so successful at achieving exceptional stature and influence outside of their guilds that they helped contribute to the decline of the entire system. See chapter five of his *Artisans in Europe: 1300-1914*

<sup>18</sup> Typically, a particular guild marked both a specific trade and a regional location (e.g., the “Nuremburg Weavers’ Guild”). Therefore, when a journeyman travelled across a wider area during the itinerant phase of his training, what he had in common with his various destinations was not the full guild association (since this would imply not only a set of skills but a common local affiliation) but rather just the technical prerequisites of his trade. The phase of journeyman training, therefore, anticipates later capitalism's isolation of “technique” and “procedure” from the social rootedness of skilled labor within guilds.

besides observation and reflection, and never remaining in the same place for a period longer than three days. Through it all, he comes to make sense of their norms and understand what organizes their way of life.

Since Wilhelm, in contrast to his trade counterparts, does not travel from one community to another in order to learn a definite trade, the outcome of his “journeyman years” will be more esoteric and inscrutable: in a nod to the *Bildung* imperative, the purpose of the wanderers in the Tower Society is something like an attempt to assemble a better view of the world’s connective tissues from the indefinite fragments of particular experience. To make more of Goethe’s symbolic reinvention of the journeyman ritual, we should briefly direct our attention to the unusual form of *Wanderjahre*, a singular example of what has been called the “*Archivroman*,” or a the “novel of the archives.” The heterogeneity of the novel’s parts has already been noted through its diverse range of characters. Yet even this fact conveys only the faintest suggestion of the strange and incongruous makeup of the novel’s final 1829 edition.<sup>19</sup> It is a collection of aphorisms, translations, novellas, short stories, poetry, correspondences, and technical reports that convey an impression of raw material to the reader even in the final product.<sup>20</sup> This rawness projects its own aesthetic of controlled chaos, as if the reader, too, were subjected

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<sup>19</sup> As previously noted, Goethe released two editions of the *Wanderjahre*, the first in 1821 and the second in 1829. While the 1821 edition establishes the basic narrative of the novel that remained unchanged, the designation *Archivroman* is usually only applied to the second edition, which greatly expands the text (making it more than twice as long), breaks it into three books, and multiplies the range of voices, alternative perspectives, and exogenous sources. For an overview of the differences, see Gerhard Neumann’s and Hans-George Dewitz’s German-language commentary to the *Frankfurter Ausgabe* (Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1989) edition of Goethe’s complete works (v. 10), pp. 1273-1306. This critical version also contains complete editions of both the 1821 and 1829 novels.

<sup>20</sup> Although the term “archive” can be found at points in the *Wanderjahre* itself (perhaps most notably in the title of the aphoristic coda, “*Aus Makariens Archiv*,” Ehrhard Bahr claims that the term did not become an important one for *Wanderjahre* criticism until the 1970s. See his *The Novel as Archive: the Genesis, Reception, and Criticism of Goethe’s Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, Camden House, 1998, p. 12.

to the confusion, open-endedness and multiple pathways that confront Wilhelm at the outset of his journey. Wilhelm Meister becomes the character who “lives in” and “emerges from” from history’s literal manifestation: the archive, out of which he becomes a character. He is the novel’s symbol for the overwhelming array of choices (i.e., the necessity to *select* from history’s contents in order to assemble any narrative) that are the modern basis of retrospective individual particularity. Thus the aspiration at the heart of the traditional *Bildungsroman*--to trace out a latent “pattern” in a life—is held in tension with the untameable, indeterminate, overflowing mass of material that is *this* novel’s inherent form.

Goethe was aware that he wanted to represent something about the modernity of his contemporary moment that strained at the systematic underpinnings of the novel form itself. He believed that the *Wanderjahre*’s unusual structure provided the reader with a wide latitude to select what interested him or her from its mass of details, plots, and literary modes—a condition epitomized by his sometime-description of the novel as an “aggregate.”<sup>21</sup> Its unusual openness, Goethe implies, required a greater-than-ordinary exercise of readerly input and pattern construction.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Goethe used the term “aggregate” to describe the overwhelming number of interpretive layers in the novel (“*das Buch gebe sich nur für ein Aggregat aus*,” letter, February 18, 1830). On the openness of the book to selection of particular elements, he writes that “*Eine Arbeit wie diese, die sich selbst als kollektiv ankündigt, indem sie gewissermaßen nur zum Verband der disparatesten Einzelheiten unternommen zu sein scheint, erlaubt, ja fordert mehr als seine andere daß jeder sich zueigne was ihm gemäß ist, was in seiner Lage zur Beherzigung aufrief und sich harmonisch wohltätig erwiesen möchte* (letter, July 7, 1829). All letters from the Frankfurter Ausgabe, edited by Horst Fleig. Frankfurt am Main: Dt. Klassiker-Verl, 1993.. For a discussion of the concepts of aggregate and archive as oppositional, see Martin Bez, *Goethes Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre: Aggregat, Archiv, Archivroman*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> See Lorraine Daston’s essay, “Third Nature,” for a germane discussion on the construction of scientific archives in the nineteenth century. The archive, she writes, is a “third nature,” or a record of what should endure and be considered part of the scientific past. As such, Daston suggests that it omits the principle of selection that made an object worthy of consideration for membership in the first place. In a similar fashion, the unnamed editor of the *Wanderjahre* walks a tenuous line between *constructing* and *selecting* from an archive. On the one hand, the novel that he or she “writes” will be what is preserved: a kind of *de facto* archive in itself. On the other, the editor sometimes let slip that he or she is selecting from a much larger mass of possible materials: a source whose edges will forever be unknowable and undefinable. See *Science in the*

But a major component of the *Wanderjahre* that Goethe omitted in his recorded commentary on the novel is its unnamed “editor,” who selects from what he has at his disposal in the archive, provides transitional material between these selections, and sometimes comments slyly on his material. The editor is an organizing consciousness that resists the notion that history is just a chaotic and impossible-to-summarize “aggregate.” The logic *within* a given selection from the archive is inherent to that selection, but what gives unity to the archive’s various, disparate pieces is the mind and personality of the editor.

The editor is the vessel through which different layers of the past become simultaneous in the narrative. The significance of the editor is that he holds out the *promise* of unity within the narrative: for Wilhelm as developmental *telos*, for the rest of its characters, for the connections within and between the text(s). The editor thereby reinstates a form of mysterious order across and within the levels of the *Wanderjahre*. He is not a god, but he serves as a stand-in of sorts for one. His intentions are usually uncertain and always hidden, yet his selections contain an implied reasoning and intentionality that provides a version of a higher answer to the inscrutable muteness of history’s archive. But the editor, like Wilhelm and all the others in the *Wanderjahre*, is in the end just another fictional voice of the individual. At times he speaks for himself, at other times he allows his materials to speak through him, as Wilhelm does in a particularly germane remark at the beginning of a letter to his friend Lenardo:

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*Archives: Pasts, Presents, Futures*, ed. Lorraine Daston, Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017, pp. 1-17.

Every person, from the earliest moments of his life, finds, first unconsciously, then half consciously and finally wholly so, that he is continually limited, restricted in his position; but since no one knows the purpose and aim of his existence, but rather the hand of the Almighty conceals this mystery, he merely gropes about, snatches at what he can, lets go again, stands still, moves, hesitates, and rushes ahead; thus in a host of ways arise the errors that perplex us.<sup>23</sup>

Wilhelm describes the inscrutability of historical existence for the individual, but the archival editor is his own kind of historical actor who vexes his readers with his unknown intentions. He assembles a text from the theoretically infinite archive of the past, offering it to them under the implied assumption that, at some level, it will cohere.

As for the individual, as Wilhelm describes it to his friend, he must still attempt to bring together the resources that he has at hand, however imperfect and limited in scope, trusting that they have a higher and more significant pattern. Indeed, he suggests, perhaps the most important wisdom won by the individual is an ever-greater *awareness* of the shroud of mystery that hangs over all his actions (“first unconsciously, then half consciously, and then wholly so”), and which only becomes more complete through his immersion in everyday demands. Any resolution to this mystery must wait for its clarifying moment of retrospective evaluation:

Fortunately all these questions and hundreds of other odd ones are answered by your increasingly active way of life. Continue with direct attention to the task of the day, and always examine the purity of your heart and the firmness of your spirit. When you then catch your breath in an hour of leisure and have room to contemplate higher matters, you will certainly achieve a proper attitude toward the Sublime, to which we must submit with veneration, regarding every occurrence with reverence, recognizing in it guidance from above.”<sup>24</sup>

Here, near the end of the novel, writing to his friend Lenardo, who is about to lead a colony of emigrants to begin anew in North America, Wilhelm offers a picture of *wandering*

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<sup>23</sup> *Wanderjahre*, 393 (Winston), 426 (Trunz)

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 394 (W), 426 (T)

and the *wanderer* as an unsolvable and essential condition. To wander is to move without a sense of one's ultimate destination, to attend to one's local and immediate needs (as Wilhelm does in the *Wanderjahre*) but to defer the wider view. For the journeyman craftsman, wandering meant a period of moderate asceticism, where the pleasures and ordinary aspirations of bourgeois life—accumulated salary, a predictable routine, long-term planning for marriage and other markers in the life-course—were suspended in favor of immersion in the demands of craft training and the pleasures of fraternal association among journeymen.<sup>25</sup>

Of course, Wilhelm's letter does not refer to a defined period of trade education, but rather to an existential condition in which a view of life's wider horizon becomes difficult to achieve from amidst the lowlands of the everyday. The wanderer who seeks a view of "higher matters" is caught in a bind: On the one hand, move forward into history and everyday activity, where this higher perspective is neither achievable nor desirable. On the other, step outside of the everyday—perhaps in the model of the Sabbath or a holiday—where it is possible to achieve the right attitude of assurance to this "guidance from above."

The novel's condition of wandering is organized like two sides of the same coin, where each stance, an alternation between activity and stasis, depends on the other. The day's demands create the structure and the substantive basis for the individual glance back in reflection. And the glance back, in turn, will be imbued with a sense that the structure

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<sup>25</sup> See Euan Cameron's *Early Modern Europe: An Oxford History* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 59-60, which describes how the journeymen comprised a distinctive culture of unmarried itinerants who "could attain neither full social adulthood nor the political rights which accompanied it." It is also important to note the parallels with Wilhelm's own position. His marriage to Natalie, to whom he was betrothed at the end of the *Lehrjahre*, will be, in the fashion of a journeyman, permanently deferred. In the *Wanderjahre*, instead, she serves as an important muse for developmentally crucial moments in the novel: when he sets out the terms of his *Wanderjahre* (i.e., his journeyman's orders), and when he describes his path to a vocation, they are both in letters to Natalie.

that all these “everydays” is mediated by more significant ordering presence, which is to be “submitted” to rather than understood. The process has no implied teleology and no ultimate perspective, achieving significance through its structure of indefinite continuation. Or as Wilhelm’s companion since the *Lehrjahre* (then Jarno, now Montan) offers as an alternative formulation within the *Wanderjahre*: “Thought and action (*Denken und Tun*), action and thought...that is the sum of all wisdom.”<sup>26</sup>

The *Wanderjahre*, then, elevates the intentional construction of everyday life to the highest level of importance. If the condition of individual-as-wanderer implies a disappearance of the larger horizon of meaning and significance in the individual life, then the problem of everyday action’s precise regularity, its organizational stratification, and the assurance of its continuation rises up to take its place. The consistent theme within the *Wanderjahre* is that only the most ardent, thorough and deliberate (re-)structuring of everyday life will substitute for a view of the “higher things.” The community--which imparts a coherent framework to the individual’s actions that lie in the past, and which provides an immediate social basis for future orientation--becomes the wander’s link in the present between past and future. It becomes the living process of duties, obligations, and routines that give daily action its coherent structure. The intensity and variety of communities in the *Wanderjahre* testifies to the urgency with which Goethe’s contemporaries sought to find the proper configuration of the “day’s demands.” In this case, the everyday structure of the commune creates the foundation for a view of Wilhelm’s so-called “higher matters.”

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<sup>26</sup> *Wanderjahre*, 280 (W), 263 (T)

If there is a resolution to the condition of wandering in the *Wanderjahre*, then it is in the commune as a point of symbolic transformation between the material world—or a view of nature as a practical canvas for human needs—and human values. The *Wanderjahre* presents us with a series of historically progressive variations of the commune, in which everyday material activity promises to bring an ethical dimension of life into view.

*The Ethics of Individual Self-Definition:  
Lago Maggiore and Wilhelm Meister's Vocational Resolution*

The novel's most suggestive depiction of the transformation from material presence to ethical life is its symbolic midpoint (Book 2, Chapter 7), where Wilhelm takes a pilgrimage of sorts to the mountain-clad lake of Lago Maggiore, a political and geographic boundary territory that marks a transition between the end of the artistic life that Wilhelm pursued in the *Lehrjahre* and the beginning of his vocational education to become a surgeon. What he undergoes during this interregnum is more than a pause for reflection on one phase of life: it is a metaphorical journey through the process by which a numinous but unshaped "nature" is transformed into an active, productive realization of human values. The visual and sensory encounter with the landscape is what concretizes Wilhelm's resolution to pursue a life of practical service in surgery. Indeed, the *Lago Maggiore* episode introduces a hierarchical symbolics of landscape we can summarize with the following table, to which we will refer throughout the remainder of this chapter:

**Table 1: Topologies of the *Wanderjahre***

<b>Topological Structure</b>	<b>Notable Locales</b>	<b>Symbolic Features</b>	<b>Themes</b>
<b>Mountains</b>	Cliffs Landscape	Topography allows for wider considerations, view of “whole”	Visibility Contemplation Detachment
<b>Midlands</b>	Landed Estates Indoors	Disappearance of topography from narrative detail, human affairs overtake nature	Culture Wealth Education
<b>Lowlands/ Underground/ Underwater</b>	Mines Caverns Lakes	Topography must be “read” for buried truths, esoteric knowledge	Origin stories “Deep” (pre-historic) time Roots and causes

*Lago Maggiore* is the homeland of Mignon, Wilhelm’s former companion from the *Lehrjahre*. She was abruptly taken from her homeland in childhood when she was kidnapped by a band of musicians. Later, she discovered Wilhelm within the theater troupe, accompanied him throughout the novel, and died at the end of the *Lehrjahre*. There, she represented an embodiment of an inward, unworldly, dreamlike romanticism.<sup>27</sup> When Wilhelm returns to her tranquil and picturesque home, he meets a companion who will

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<sup>27</sup> Like the beginning of the novel, when Wilhelm has just ascended one mountain and is preparing to go over into the next valley, travelling to *Lago Maggior* occurs by “passing through several neighboring mountain ranges until the glorious valley opened before him where he meant to resolve so many things before commencing a new way of life.” (*Wanderjahre*, 254 [W], 227 [T]). In the *Lehrjahre*, we learned that Mignon did not leave *Lago Maggiore* according to her own choice, but through being kidnapped by a group of circus performers. Wilhelm’s journey, then, has the character of a symbolic homecoming or gesture of memorialization for Mignon, and a coming-to-terms with a way of life that points all the way back to the first novel for him.

serve as his guide through the region, an unnamed figure called both “a painter” (*Maler*) and “an artist” (*Künstler*). The painter—like most of the characters and features of this singular episode—demonstrates the transformational power of attention to the material object. Nature in *Lago Maggiore* has the power to be both symbolic and real; that is, both a refuge of the imagination (where Mignon can be returned to a temporary life) and a geographical datum to which Goethe’s own readers might refer. The artist’s skill—first at observing the landscape, then translating it to the canvas—becomes a stunning demonstration to Wilhelm of how an entire, distinctive way of life (here art, painting) has the capacity to unfold through total attention to and engagement with the particulars of one’s material world.<sup>28</sup> *Lago Maggiore* becomes a place of boundary crossing, where mundane and magical, everyday and fantasy are constantly in play with one another, a ground for the power of nature as a divider between everyday appearances and a level of numinous reality.

Mignon is the character who walks both sides of this boundary. The Mignon that this painter knows and sought out in *Lago Maggiore* is a figure of poetic affect, an “image, which lives in all feeling hearts” and which the painter seeks to capture in the act of painting: to bring “before the eye.”<sup>29</sup>

Mignon shifts back and forth between representative registers in *Lago Maggiore*: between the features of her particular, “real” self that existed to Wilhelm in the *Lehrjahre*,

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<sup>28</sup> The narrator reports that the *Maler* (painter) straddles both the poetic and the real, with a plausible mix of the realistic and the romantic: “like many such in the wide world and even more who frequent and haunt the pages of novels.”

<sup>29</sup> 255 (T), “auch dem Sinne des Auges hervorzurufen,” 227 (W)

and her romantic ideal.<sup>30</sup> The tendency in much of the commentary has been to treat her as a primarily medial entity, one who may have existed in Wilhelm's past, but is primarily presented in the *Wanderjahre* as artistic object.<sup>31</sup> By contrast, my contention is that Mignon is a more syncretic force within *Lago Maggiore*. That is, she is both *created* by the artist in her ideal form through the artwork and revealed in her individual nature as a particular character: one who is present in Wilhelm's memory and, eventually, to the world of *Lago Maggiore*. The natural beauty of the scene—and the artist's talent for transforming it into landscape—allows for the particularity of the character's identity to emerge from her presence as romantic symbol. As Wilhelm and the artist travel *Lago Maggiore* by boat, observing the natural scenes that she might have inhabited during the earliest years of her life, Wilhelm supplies the artist with the "specific features of her identity" while learning, increasingly, to appreciate the revelatory power of the artistic medium. "One picture," the narrator says, "stood out from all the rest" because "it plumbed Mignon's character:"

"Amidst stark mountain scenery the graceful child, dressed as a boy, stands shining, surrounded by sheer cliffs, sprayed by waterfalls, in the midst of a band difficult to describe. A horrifying, steep, ancient chasm was perhaps never decorated by a more charming or significant crew. The colorful, gypsy-like company, at once crude and fantastical, exotic and ordinary, too casual to inspire fear, too outlandish to awaken trust. Sturdy packhorses plod along, now on corduroy roads, now on steps hewn out of rock, loaded with a jumble of baggage. From it dangle all the musical instruments which are needed for a bewitching concert, and which now and then bewitch the ear with discordant tones. *In the midst of all*

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<sup>30</sup> One vexing challenge within *Lago Maggiore* is to distinguish between the Mignon of the *Lehrjahre* and here. As Wolfgang Ammerland writes about the *Lehrjahre* Mignon, she "*ist weniger und mehr als Person: sie ist vor allem Symbol,*" in "Wilhelm Meisters Mignon - Ein Offenbares Rätsel. Name, Gestalt, Symbol, Wesen Und Werden." *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 42 (1968): 89–116. But it is my contention that the Mignon of the *Wanderjahre* plays on the bifurcation between her status as character (for Wilhelm, who once knew her) and her status as an aesthetic and symbolic object.

<sup>31</sup> Franziska Schößler: "Denn Kunst und Leben befrüchtigen sich hier nicht gegenseitig," (295) in *Goethes Lehr- Und Wanderjahre: Eine Kulturgeschichte Der Moderne*. Tübingen: Francke, 2002, p. 295. Neumann and Dewitz offer a more two-sided understanding of Mignon's role for the *Wanderjahre* in their *Frankfurter Ausgabe* commentary: "Dies mag auch der Grund sein, warum Wilhelm seine "Wallfahrt" zum Lago Maggiore unternimmt, als Versuch nämlich, eine ungelöste Situation seiner Vergangenheit durch die Kunst zu bewältigen," 1126 (DKV, 1989). Mignon is a character who is best approached through aesthetic mediation.

*this the dear child, withdrawn into herself, without defiance, reluctant but unresisting, led but not dragged. Who could have failed to enjoy this remarkable, fully executed picture? The grim defile within the rocky mass was powerfully rendered, the series of black gorges cutting through everything, piled together, threatening to bar any exit, were it not that a boldly suspended bridge suggested the possibility of establishing contact with the outside world. With a clever knack for creating an aura of truth, the artist had also indicated the mouth of a cave, which one might imagine as a workshop where Nature produces giant crystals or the den of a brood of fabulous, frightful dragons.” (emphasis added)<sup>32</sup>*

Mignon's moment of individual trauma (her kidnapping from her homeland) is confirmed and deepened through being situated in the landscape. The picture of Mignon “withdrawn into herself,” incapable of communication, is redeemed and speaks through the spectator's appreciation for the artistic execution. The artist becomes the “interpreter” that “discloses” Mignon, depicting an essence that contains both the particular and the general: Mignon the person emerges and speaks from within her embedded presence in the materiality of the artwork.<sup>33</sup>

The activity of *Lago Maggiore* vibrates between the individual and the general, between the materiality of natural objects and the particularity of Mignon's character at the moment of her greatest trauma. The episode insists, in a quasi-Platonic gesture, on seeing

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<sup>32</sup> 255 (Winston), “Mitten im rauhen Gebirg glänzt der anmutige Scheinknabe, von Sturzfelsen umgeben, von Wasserfällen besprüht, mitten in einer schwer zu beschreibenden Horde. Vielleicht ist eine grauerliche, steile Urgebirg-Schlucht nie anmutiger und bedeutender staffiert worden. Die bunte, zigeunerhafte Gesellschaft, roh zugleich und phantastisch, seltsam und gemein, zu locker, um Furcht einzuflößen, zu wunderlich, um Vertrauen zu erwecken. Kräftige Saumrosse schleppen, bald über Knüppelwege, bald eingehauene Stufen hinab, ein buntverworrenes Gepäck, an welchem herum die sämtlichen Instrumente einer betäubenden Musik, schlotternd aufgehängt, das Ohr mit rauhen Tönen von Zeit zu Zeit belästigen. Zwischen allem dem das liebenswürdige Kind, in sich gekehrt ohne Trutz, unwillig ohne Widerstreben, geführt, aber nicht geschleppt. Wer hätte sich nicht des merkwürdigen, ausgeführten Bildes gefreut? Kräftig charakterisiert war die grimmige Enge dieser Felsmassen; die alles durchschneidenden schwarzen Schluchten, zusammengetürmt, allen Ausgang zu hindern drohend, hätte nicht eine kühne Brücke auf die Möglichkeit, mit der übrigen Welt in Verbindung zu gelangen, hingedeutet. Auch ließ der Künstler mit klugdichtendem Wahrheitssinne eine Höhle merklich werden, die man als Naturwerkstatt mächtiger Kristalle oder als Aufenthalt einer fabelhaftfurchtbaren Drachenbrut ansprechen konnte.” 227-228 (Trunz)

<sup>33</sup> “...und indem die Natur das offenbare Geheimnis ihrer Schönheit entfaltete, mußte man nach Kunst als der würdigsten Auslegerin unbezwingliche Sehnsucht empfinden,” (229, T). “And when Nature disclosed the open secrets of her beauty, it was impossible not to feel an unquenchable longing for art as the most worthy interpreter” (256, W).

what is real in the ideal, or in more specific terms: on finding Mignon as individuated character through her idealization. In this sense its function is that of an idyllic interlude, a mode of representation defined by harmony between the parts, tranquility of the whole, and a cyclical stasis against linear historical progress. The diegetic levels of the narrative interpenetrate on another: characters from an unrelated, intervening novella (*Der Mann von Funfzig Jahren*) appear in the episode at one point, as does the famous *Zitronenlied* song of the *Lehrjahre*, as do the fragments of an unnamed “critical review” of the artist’s work within *Lago Maggiore*.<sup>34</sup> Once the characters are forced to leave *Lago Maggiore*, the sense of time returns, they prepare for their departure, and the landscape is transformed, “as if by a stroke of magic,” into a “desolate waste.”<sup>35</sup> Only at the conclusion of the aesthetic and practical revelations of *Lago Maggiore* can Wilhelm begin, in earnest, his own vocational training. In that scene, Wilhelm comes to see how the essential basis of a world (here, *Mignon’s* world) could reveal itself through attention to nature’s everyday objects. The artist, by remaining faithful to his *particular* methods, means and ends, has entered into the materials of nature and disclosed its higher potential.

*Lago Maggiore* is a maze of symbolic ascents and descents: *ascent* from naïve appreciation of nature to the “naturalized” perfection of the landscape form; *descent* from Mignon as artistic surface to Mignon as character with “depths;” *ascent* from Mignon’s incommunicable romantic inwardness to aesthetic self-disclosure; *descent* from the

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<sup>34</sup> On the review by the critic (260, W; 235, Trunz), see Neumann and Dewitz’s commentary in the *Frankfurter Ausgabe*, which offers several possible works of art depicting *Lago Maggiore* that Goethe might have observed while composing the *Wanderjahre*, including those of Swiss painter and confidant Johann Heinrich Meyer, who also served as a reporting source of primary information for other episodes in the novel (including the sources for the weaver’s colony to be discussed below: notes to *Frankfurter Ausgabe*, 1131.

<sup>35</sup> 264 (W), 240 (Trunz)

landscape as canvas for the imagination to nature as raw materiality. In its descent from the idyllic mode to the identity of a particular character, it serves as a propaedeutic to the symbolic transformations that take place later in the novel. The *Wanderjahre's* orientation will not be the "high" perspective of art in the idyll, but rather the "low" perspective of everyday historical life. Reflecting the change of concern from the *Lehrjahre* to the *Wanderjahre*, this will not be a book about the individual's development toward an artistic ideal, but rather about the discernment of a worldly, engaged, practical calling. Yet the form of individual development that it depicts, for all its practicality, is no less transformative in nature.

The positional significance of *Lago Maggiore* as an interlude within the novel is to prepare the reader for the Wilhelm's transition from a form of aesthetic spiritualism to material engagement. As he will write in a letter that composes immediately afterward to his betrothed, Natalie, the quasi-fantastical experience within *Lago Maggiore* was the final step within his time as a journeyman in the Society of the Tower. The letter begins in a sense where *Lago Maggiore* left off: with a discussion of the "general" (*allgemeine*) and "specific" (*besondere*) influences in the life of the individual that have led him to take the momentous step into his surgical vocation.

## **II. Saints, Emigrants, Workers: The Communities of the *Wanderjahre***

In Wilhelm's case, the memory of personal trauma from a childhood friend's drowning becomes the basis for a redirection of his vocational pathway and reorientation

of his own relationship to the course of individual development. Wilhelm describes a childhood in an “old, solemn town” which, by his brief description, was increasingly given over to the walls, barriers and artificial social and physical divides between citizens of a rapidly modernizing urban locale. Consequently, both young and old in the town are now aware of the ever-growing estrangement between the restorative, pastoral world outside the town’s gates and the disciplined, purposeful regularity of their everyday life. Indeed, when Wilhelm’s family, after much postponement, finally agrees to make the once-customary journey to the countryside to visit several friends, it is only on the condition that they can return with “punctuality” to their home in town the same day, as it “seems impossible” that they would break their routine enough to sleep in any bed besides their own.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the event that will, many years later and in hindsight, become the basis for Wilhelm’s vocational sense of purpose is an accident of sorts, taking place outside of the intentionality of life in the town, and beyond the carefully rationalized bourgeois structures of planning and decision-making into which Wilhelm has already been socialized. The tenor of the entire episode is that of a rediscovery of “natural” human things: the indulgence of the human sensorium, erotic desire, and the appreciation of natural beauty are all at the root of Wilhelm’s recollection. And so, when the tragic drowning of a childhood companion that day tears the community apart, Wilhelm aspires to command the resources of

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<sup>36</sup> “Wir in einer alten, ernsten Stadt erzogenen Kinder hatten die Begriffe von Straßen, Plätzen, von Mauern gefaßt, sodann auch von Wällen, dem Glacis und benachbarten ummauerten Gärten. Uns aber einmal, oder vielmehr sich selbst ins Freie zu führen, hatten unsere Eltern längst mit Freunden auf dem Lande eine immerfort verschobene Partie verabredet. Dringender endlich zum Pfingstfeste ward Einladung und Vorschlag, denen man nur unter der Bedingung sich fügte: alles so einzuleiten, daß man zu Nacht wieder zu Hause sein könnte; denn außer seinem längst gewohnten Bette zu schlafen, schien eine Unmöglichkeit. Die Freuden des Tags so eng zu konzentrieren, war freilich schwer: zwei Freunde sollten besucht und ihre Ansprüche auf seltene Unterhaltung befriedigt werden; indessen hoffte man, mit großer Pünktlichkeit alles zu erfüllen,” 269-70 (T), 285 (W)

civilization to someday make it whole again: its technologies, its management techniques, and its high regard for safe regulation over everyday life. The choice of a vocation is therefore a form of return, on a higher plane of regard and activity, to the natural and everyday basis of the individual's sense of belonging in the world, an affective pre-history of the forces that will be organized into a vocational calling that preserves and maintains the community.

Wilhelm's drowned companion is the son of a fisherman in the country village, older than Wilhelm and a boy "to whom [he] had especially been drawn as soon as he had appeared."<sup>37</sup> The boy teaches Wilhelm a naïve appreciation for the nature that they have at hand: fishing for minnows in a stream, swimming in a brook, admiring insects in the grass, and basking in the sun. Wilhelm's thrill at these activities quickly takes an erotic focus on his companion and, in Platonic solar fashion, rises from an admiration of human beauty to an intimation of the ideal: "I thought my eyes were dazzled by a triple sun," he recounts, "so beautiful was the human form, of which I had never had any notion."<sup>38</sup> After a few hours together, he recounts, they "swore eternal friendship" under "fiery kisses."<sup>39</sup> What precipitates the drowning is an assertion of bourgeois social rank: because it would "not be proper," the companion is not allowed into the house of the magistrate that Wilhelm's family is visiting. Instead, he is instructed to "procure some fine crabs" for Wilhelm's family to take back to the city. Wilhelm is at dinner with his family when the friend, accompanied by a few other boys, goes down to the creek to find the crabs. During this task, one of them

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 286 (W)

<sup>38</sup> "...glaubt' ich meine Augen vor einer dreifachen Sonne geblendet: so schön war die menschliche Gestalt, von der ich nie einen Begriff gehabt," 272 (T), 287 (W)

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., See as well the note below about the transference of erotic desire from masculine to feminine forms.

falls by accident into the deep part of the water, pulling Wilhelm's friend and the rest of the boys into the creek with him, where five of them drown.<sup>40</sup>

This formative moment for Wilhelm can be read as an awareness of a new bodily relationship to the world through sensory awakening, the development of a new subjective capacity that initially presents itself as the unfolding of nature's fullest and deepest dimension.<sup>41</sup> "I should confess that in the course of life that first blossoming of the external world struck me as a revelation of Nature herself, compared to which everything else that later touches our senses seems a mere copy," Wilhelm writes to Natalie.<sup>42</sup> Now, looking back on the process from the standpoint of relative maturity, he understands his revelation that day from the reverse, inward perspective: "How we would despair, seeing the external world so cold, so lifeless, were it not that in our inner self something germinates that transfigures Nature in quite another way, by granting us the creative power to beautify

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 288-89 (W), 275-76 (T), After Wilhelm is parted from his companion for dinner at the magistrate's house and before he learns of his friend's drowning, the sense of attraction that was awakened for the fisherman's son gains a new object in the daughter of the magistrate. He and this "blonde girl" stroll within the magistrate's lavish and carefully cultivated garden (a motif of harmony between nature and civilization, developed in depth in Goethe's novel *Elective Affinities*), where they soon "took each other's hands and wished for nothing more." (287 [W], 273 [T]). This brief detour from his infatuation with the male form anticipates a transference process, whereby an initial, naïve-but-socially-transgressive erotic longing for the same sex is gradually redirected to coupling with the opposite sex in the generative familial structure. Immediately before Wilhelm learns of his friend's death, he describes a seeming tension between the two imperatives, and reveals to Natalie that he had a fervent urge to "free my spirit of the image of that blonde girl" and "unburden my heart of the feelings she had awakened" (288 [W], 274 [T]).

<sup>41</sup> Goethe's first novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, is also an important reference point for the romantic convolution of subject and object in the presentation of natural phenomena.

<sup>42</sup> "Und wenn ich hier noch eine Betrachtung anknüpfe, so darf ich wohl bekennen: daß im Laufe des Lebens mir jenes erste Aufblühen der Außenwelt als die eigentliche Originalnatur vorkam, gegen die alles übrige, was uns nachher zu den Sinnen kommt, nur Kopien zu sein scheinen, die bei aller Annäherung an jenes doch des eigentlich ursprünglichen Geistes und Sinnes ermangeln," (273-74 [T], 288 [W])

ourselves in her.”<sup>43</sup> Although Wilhelm lacked the conceptual tools to articulate this newfound awareness of nature and his own inward enlivenment, in the moment before he learned of his friend’s death, he reports the bodily and affective basis of these phenomena to Natalie in the letter: he was “doubled and redoubled” in “passionate pain” waiting for his friend who would never arrive. Pacing furiously back and forth in the bushes in anticipation, he declares that “my heart was full, my mouth was already murmuring, ready to overflow.”<sup>44</sup> Once he learns that his friend has drowned, he is overcome by weeping and sobbing, having to be restrained by his family before eventually rushing in a fit of instinct into the church where, along with the other dead boys, his friend’s body is laid out. Finally, Wilhelm embraces and touches every part of the boy’s face again before “they tore me away.”<sup>45</sup>

The “tearing away” that Wilhelm describes is an act that removes him not just from his friend and from the country village where his family had sojourned for the day, but from the entire experiential ramification of the event. The family keeps with their originally intended schedule and returns home; the reminder of the tragedy is the basket of crabs they took with them, which the surviving boy held in his hands as he ran back to report the fate of his companions. As the family eyes them in the kitchen with a mute unease, they debate what should be done with them. An aunt who hears of the episode retains a perverse practical-mindedness in the face of the tragedy, suggesting that the crabs could be

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<sup>43</sup> “Wie müßten wir verzweifeln, das Äußere so kalt, so leblos zu erblicken, wenn nicht in unserm Innern sich etwas entwickelte, das auf eine ganz andere Weise die Natur verherrlicht, indem es uns selbst in ihr zu verschönen eine schöpferische Kraft erweist,” (274 [T], 288 [W])

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., “Es war voll, der Mund lispelte schon, um überzufließen”

<sup>45</sup> “Man riß mich weg,” (276 [T], 289 [W])

given to a politically influential member of their town to secure a good will that might later be put to socially beneficial ends. They agree on this step, and the crabs gain a meliorative purpose that, in the family's view, makes up for their unfortunate origin. From this point on their discussion of the affair turns to the possibility of preventing similar incidents in the future, and to the sorts of institutions and social reforms that might prevent such a tragedy in the future.

The family's earnest attention to the necessary reforms after the tragedy is a forerunner to questions of social control that run through all of the communities in the novel. Wilhelm's father, we learn, was "one of the first who was impelled by a general spirit of benevolence to extend his observations and his concern beyond his family and city." He retained an interest in some well-known reform movements in Europe from that period: the conditions of hospital care, the treatment of prisoners, and the minimization of widespread public diseases. The view of "civil society" (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) that he imparts to Wilhelm is that of a "natural" condition (*Naturzustand*) which contains "both good and bad aspects" but which could be managed to beneficial effect, above all to satisfy the imperative to "propagate general goodwill, independent of every other consideration."<sup>46</sup>

The group of phenomena that Wilhelm's father has naturalized is not natural at all, but rather a proto-Habermasian version of the bourgeois public sphere, a space in which

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<sup>46</sup> "Er sah die bürgerliche Gesellschaft, welcher Staatsform sie auch untergeordnet wäre, als einen Naturzustand an, der sein Gutes und sein Böses habe, seine gewöhnlichen Lebensläufe, abwechselnd reiche und kümmerliche Jahre, nicht weniger zufällig und unregelmäßig Hagelschlag, Wasserfluten und Brandschäden; das Gute sei zu ergreifen und zu nutzen, das Böse abzuwenden oder zu ertragen; nichts aber, meinte er, sei wünschenswerter als die Verbreitung des allgemeinen guten Willens, unabhängig von jeder andern Bedingung." (278-79 [T], 291 [W])

reason is mobilized by private individuals in service of public ends. In the gap between acts of God (like this tragedy) and the inevitable facts of life and death, a new possibility of organized rational action emerges, one that permits a great degree of intentional human control over everyday events and the life course. In terms of their immediate relevance to Wilhelm's concerns in the letter, he implies that these nascent structures of public rationality had a definite and deleterious effect on his development; specifically, on his capacity to discern a vocational path. The rationalized organization of Wilhelm's bourgeois world has, he suggests, distanced him from the original basis of his vocational resolution, which is rooted in the direct experience of the tragedy itself.

The young Wilhelm, who was wrested out of the church and away from his friend's body soon after the incident occurred, is being taught to translate the overwhelming immediacy of the event into a plan of generalized collective action. What is lost is the effect of the event itself: how it overwhelms his body's functions of self-control and self-possession in the moment, in the experience of *this* trauma. In the civil reforms that his father proposes, the specific horror of this death will be all but imperceptible in the institutional structures that it inspires. It will be independent of both Wilhelm's experience and the particularities of his friend's drowning--and for that reason it will be all the more *effective* at preventing unknowable others like it. He listens eagerly to his father's criticism of the attempts made to revive his friend and the other boys after they were pulled from the water. As this father judges, the efforts were inadequate and not in keeping with modern medical thinking, going even so far as to claim the poor care amounted to a kind of "murder." This is the intensity of the problem to which Wilhelm traces his interest in what

he calls the “occupation to which I have always secretly been drawn.”<sup>47</sup> In that moment, he vowed “to master everything that might be necessary in such situations, above all bleeding and other things of that sort.”<sup>48</sup>

Reflecting on why he did not, then, continue with his resolution to become a surgeon when he first entered adulthood, Wilhelm casts his past career in the theater as a kind of error in discernment. The inability of rational, bourgeois institutions to speak to the original impetus for his vocation is at least partially to blame. In the moment of writing the letter, he judges the theater to have been a detour from his “true” vocation:

But how soon ordinary life carried me off. The need for friendship and love had been aroused, and I was always looking for ways to satisfy it. Meanwhile my sensuality, imagination and mind were excessively occupied with the theater; how far I was led and misled, I must not repeat.<sup>49</sup>

In light of the now-decisive importance that Wilhelm attributes to his friend’s death, his claim about the later years of his childhood is a startling one: that the conditions of his “ordinary life” were unable to provide the “need for friendship and love” that the encounter with the fisherman’s son opened up to him. That the vital faculties of “sensuality, imagination and mind” first came into their own *outside* of the rigors of his everyday community, and were unable to attach themselves to their intended outlet within that

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<sup>47</sup> “das Geschäft, wozu ich immer eine stille Neigung empfunden, mich gar bald zu fügen, mich darin auszubilden wußte.” (294 [W], 282 [T])

<sup>48</sup> 291 (W), 279 (T). This resolution has a major aspect of foreshadowing in light of the final episode in the novel, when Wilhelm saves his own son, Felix, from drowning by means of the method described here.

<sup>49</sup> Allein wie bald nahm mich der gewöhnliche Tag mit sich fort. Das Bedürfnis nach Freundschaft und Liebe war aufgeregt, überall schaut' ich mich um, es zu befriedigen. Indessen ward Sinnlichkeit, Einbildungskraft und Geist durch das Theater übermäßig beschäftigt; wie weit ich hier geführt und verführt worden, darf ich nicht wiederholen. (279 [T], 291 [W])

community. That he had no way of making sense of the bodily, material, affective, and prosocial basis of his own vocational and developmental self-understanding—in the *experience* of the friend’s drowning and an unreflective resolve to right an unjust wrong—according to the satisfactions and forms of belonging offered by his ordinary life.<sup>50</sup> What one might reconstruct from his brief account is that he chose the artist’s life in the theater because he thought he desired the theater’s apparent mode of relations (“friendship and love”), but he was “misled” from the resolved *ends* of these relations (i.e., to heal the community), substituting instead the theater’s *means* (“sensuality, imagination, and mind [*Geist*]”) that harmonized with his original resolution.

Though not apparent to him, Wilhelm’s revelation has a significance beyond his narrative. One can read his interpretation of the episode as an emergent theory of individual development and vocation itself: that the individual’s ability to walk the vocational path depends on the directness of the connection with the formative moment. From the standpoint of an individual like Wilhelm, vocation was a process of discerning the true subjective pre-history of his own identity, an identity that first (and erroneously) presented itself as a “natural” fact but has finally found its effective form in the reconstructed *personal* narrative. To put it in terms familiar from this discussion: the body, the sensorium and the affective dimension of individual experience are at the basis of the higher forms of identity and community. The community that maintains its contact with

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<sup>50</sup> Relevant to this issue are the historical claims about the *Wanderjahre*, reviewed by Ehrhard Bahr, that Wilhelm’s choice to become a surgeon (*Wundarzt*) would have represented a step down in social standing (see Bahr, *The Novel as Archive*, pp. 92-94). The question is whether the *Wundarzt* carried more association with carpenters and other manual tradesmen than with the other middle-class professions. Surveying the critical disagreement on this point, Bahr concedes that while Wilhelm’s training would have been markedly different and less extensive than that of the modern surgeon (*Chirurg*), surgery was nonetheless in the process of becoming a university subject (he cites Goethe’s own studies of anatomy in the 1780s), and therefore would have carried a mixture of associations for contemporary readers.

these “direct” bases of experience stands a chance of unifying individual development *via* vocational aspiration with a sense of collective belonging *via* the ability to “feel” (i.e., sense and intuit) the substantive foundations of the whole community- a claim in tension with Weber’s formulation of vocation as an estrangement of the self from its bodily and subjective needs.

The significance of this brief flashback, which occurs just before an interlude of unspecified time in which Wilhelm undergoes his surgical training, is that it lays out a pathway to resolve Wilhelm’s “wandering.” To generalize this point: from the perspective of the *individual* in the *Wanderjahre*, wandering ends when its characters discern a connection between past and present. Wandering becomes vocation when the individual makes sense of the relationship between forces, realities and influences outside of his control and a future that he can will. For Wilhelm, the death of a friend in his past becomes the future aspiration to heal. The vocational ideal is what translates the authentic reality of Wilhelm’s past trauma into a focused and effective pattern of action for the future.

### III.

Wilhelm’s discernment of a vocational aspiration midway through the *Wanderjahre* is as an arrival and new beginning, one that was enabled by the unique tension between structure and open-endedness in the Society of the Tower.

I will read the remainder of the novel as a study of commune as a model for the realization of individual ends—vocational or otherwise—and of the forces and tensions which threaten this aspiration. The *Wanderjahre* will unfold in a dialogic tension, between an ideal of vocation like that intimated by Wilhelm, and conditions of rationalization that

threaten to enforce an impoverished view of vocational and individual satisfaction: between the forms of the commune that attempt to maintain the direct basis of relationships—both between individuals and their material concerns—and the historical and economic forces that threaten to separate and atomize individuals. The *Wanderjahre* presents a simultaneous view of several communal forms within a larger process of general historical transformation, a narrative from within “history’s archive” of Western modernization laid out synchronically.

The model of vocation that I have presented here offers an ordering mechanism for both the individual and the collective. Vocation is what aligns the shape of Wilhelm’s past with a resolution about his future, what creates harmony between the heightened reality of his childhood friend’s death in the countryside and the mundane, disciplined character of adult life.

The vocational ideal is simultaneously a “calling” to higher plane of ontological reality *and* a constraining, narrowing force on individual identity. Indeed, Wilhelm’s re-discovery of his medical aspiration contains both these aspects. On the one hand, the decision represents a recall to a level of experience with greater potency than everyday life. This was symbolically indicated by Wilhelm’s final embrace of his dead friend’s body in the church, and his bourgeois family’s immediate flight from the numinous aftermath of the accident scene. But from the longer narrative perspective of the *Lehrjahre*, the re-orientation of his former grandiose aspirations in the theater to a medical career represents a recall back to everyday reality, an abandonment of the higher way of life that Wilhelm laid out to Lenardo in his letters. From one side, medicine is a fulfillment of a

higher perspective glimpsed in tragedy. On the other, it is a disappointment of a higher, “aesthetic,” perspective on reality. Both possibilities are left open, reflected by the relationship of many characters within the novel to the vocational ideal.

The stakes of the commune’s success as an ideal project are not ultimately about the loss of access to higher levels of reality, but rather about whether a relationship to the past, tradition and higher realities will be embodied in collective structures or confined to individual identity projects. This claim can be more fully understood through a discussion of a process that is frequently discussed in relation to modernization: the process of secularization.

The *Wanderjahre* does not glimpse down a historical pathway in which modernization and secularization—understood as a turning away from “higher realities”—is inevitable. Instead, it provides us with a set of historically synchronic “solutions,” in which multiple and hierarchically-related levels of reality can be inherited from the past. The commune is the narrative’s common social form that allows for a historical process—modernization—to appear in a diverse array of collective options and pathways. I want to call these historical possibilities synchronic to one another because the *Wanderjahre* refuses to give in to a historical determinism with respect to the secular that would become a frequent defining feature of twentieth-century modernization theories.<sup>51</sup> Of great importance to many of these more recent theories of modernization is a secularization narrative, or the loss of a sacred and religious option as an organizing basis for collective

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<sup>51</sup> Weber’s own belief in the inevitability of Western secularization is a major point of reference here. See, for instance, Peter Berger’s *The Sacred Canopy; Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967) for a representative example of secularization’s “inevitable” connection to processes of modernization.

reality. The inevitability of the tie between secularization and modernization is a major question for the novel’s historical moment. The commune aspires to be a “middle ground” of sorts between higher and everyday realities. Its relationship to the “high” and “low” realities for the remainder of this chapter can be represented in the following schema:

**Table 2: Spatial Hierarchy in the *Wanderjahre***

<b>Sacred/Higher Reality</b>	<b>Reciprocal Middle Zone</b>	<b>Low, Ordinary, Everyday</b>
Disappearance of temporality	Epiphanic, glimpses of higher reality within a heterogenous flux	Mundane, uninterrupted homogenous duration
Knowledge of ultimate causes and ends	Knowledge of orientation, purpose	Knowledge of means, tools, methods
Ordering principles and structures	Hierarchical context, multiple points of reference	Self-referential, no point outside

In the terms of the commune, modernization represents a threat that both renders mundane and abstracts the individual’s material, bodily, and experiential basis in the community. In Wilhelm’s memory of his friend’s death, this experience had both physical and ethical components: physical because it separated him from his own immediate bodily relationship to the event, ethical because it replaced his particular experiential connections with general and impersonal principles of (practical) action. But in more systematic terms that cut across the entire novel, I want to claim that the novel represents modernity’s

tendency toward abstraction through one very broad but conceptually delineable set of mechanisms: economic rationality.

Within each community, the economy—and economic relationships—become a foundational, quasi-autonomous system of abstract values, material incentives, and social pressures. This is not to claim that the organizing power of the economic within the novel is monolithic. Indeed, it creates new and sometimes contradictory cross-pressures, simultaneously acting as a force of renewal and destabilization, cooperation and atomization.<sup>52</sup> Another way of approaching the re-organizing power of the economic is to claim that it makes no necessary accommodations to the community's *particular* forms of hierarchy and symbolic ordering. Like the new terms of bourgeois society that Wilhelm intimates through the drowning episode, the economic replaces an immediate concern for the particularity and difference of its situation with a principle of generality and uniformity. This is the tension that runs throughout the commune.

Within the commune of the *Wanderjahre*, the independence of economic rationality opens up a new chain of possibilities and conflicts, all oriented around the intentionality, personality, and directness of its material and bodily relationships. If, as I have already claimed, the commune is not a naive precursor to modernity, but rather a potential *solution* to its de-stabilizing power, then the axis of difference between communities in the *Wanderjahre* falls along the solutions by which these communities incorporate the

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<sup>52</sup> By the term “atomization,” I intend something like the subject that philosophers in the so-called “communitarian” tradition identify at the center of the liberal tradition. See, for instance, Charles Taylor’s essay, “Atomism,” in *Communitarianism and Individualism*, ed. Shlomo Avineri and Avner De-Shalit, pp. 29–50 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). As Michael Sandel writes in a contemporary American context that one paradox of liberalism is how it claims to unite all citizens, real and hypothetical, into a single community, but toward no particular end. Rather, citizens are as free as possible to choose their own values ends.” In Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), Introduction, p. i.

abstractions of the economic sphere into their way of life. The commune is an accommodation to the disordering and distorting pressures of economic rationality, all undertaken with a higher view of what makes for human flourishing. To choose the commune as a way of life is to enter into a set of tensions between material and personal immediacy and the impersonality of economic life.

As I have already suggested, the regime of proto-utilitarian, impersonal economic rationality has features that can be generalized across the novel:

- 1) *Erasure of internal and external social boundaries.* Economic rationality pushes against the boundaries and ordering principles of collective life. Its logic fundamentally reshapes the nature of the individual, who can function as an “economic actor” irrespective of his peers and his social context-- and on theoretically unlimited scale. Social barriers to fully realized economic rationality are temporary and practical in nature rather than systematic. “The social” in all its diversity and fundamental difference becomes, in effect, a homogenous body with the same underlying mechanisms. A particularly vivid historical realization of this problem in the *Wanderjahre* that I will discuss is the question of *automation* and *machine labor*, where the practitioners of textile handcrafts face a choice between leaving their communities to embrace automated machine production or remaining in them at the cost of their very economic and existential viability.

- 2) *Material disengagement.* The basis for education in the craft system is a shared orientation to its materials and a mimetic acculturation to the bodily practices that control them. The at-hand presence of the craft as material *praxis* is the basis of its essential mutuality. Economic rationality, by contrast, discourages the actor's involvement with his material objects, effacing the social and experiential limitations that keep its material basis in the foreground. This will become apparent during the novel's episode with the weavers.
- 3) *Loss of personal involvement.* At the level of the individual person, economic rationality disarticulates vocational practice from technical mastery. Instead the technical (i.e., individual mastery of one's tools and materials) becomes the predominant ordering mechanism. The development of the individual is, instead, ordered around "skill" rather than "excellence." The ability to wield and master technological complexity reaches out to define the relationships between individuals both within and outside the community. Relationships become conceivable on an unlimited, mundane, economic plane, where all individuals become identical in principle *qua* economic actors.
- 4) *Erasure of hierarchy and difference between "high" and "low."* In guild parlance, the "mystery" is removed from the site of everyday productive life. In terms of Wilhelm's "forgetfulness" about his authentic call to a surgical vocation, the individual in the economic sphere develops without reference to "higher" or "more authentic" values outside of the everyday.

The overall effect of this form of economic rationality (and of the theoretical totalization of the economic sphere) is to act as a destabilizing force on the commune's distinctive way of life. The commune instantiated in the *Wanderjahre*, with its direct and personal forms of solidarity, is in a sense the negative organizational image of an economic individualism that atomizes all of its participants into foundational units. But even the commune is still, at its core, an individualistic solution to the problem of communal organization in modernity; it is based on the self-sufficiency of the individual, and on a homology between part (person) and whole (society). The significance of "the economic" as a distinct and particular mode of activity is that it gives us the *Wanderjahre's* version of a modernization process. I should underscore that the *Wanderjahre* presents us with a form of modernization that is not a necessary and inexorable teleology of "modern progress," but rather an entire world of values and organizational strategies alternative to the commune. In the imaginary of the novel, a world built around economic rationality and an economically-oriented social imaginary is *not* the inevitable outcome of some kind of historical process. Instead, it is a model whose central characteristic is to *appear* in the form of a conceptual and social inevitability. The commune is an alternative to the future's status as inevitable change that wipes away the forms of the past.

From a sociological perspective, the commune is an institution that denies the certainty of economic modernization. As I have so far suggested, the heart of the economic is to act as a totalizing force that remakes everything around it. Economic logic refuses to allow for the co-existence of alternatives. First, it denies the community's fidelity to past and tradition, and second it exists on the plane of the everyday, refusing "higher"

ontological realities (i.e., sacred) that stand in opposition to its deracinating and ontologically leveling orientation.

If the commune is to be an alternative to the model of modernization as inexorable “progress,” then it must construct a different relationship between past, present, and future. Through the commune, a vision of the future as change that necessarily wipes away the “errors” or “primitive forms” past becomes, instead, a social model for a working-out of the harmonies between past and future. As is introduced in the table below, the commune promises to establish a point of reconciliation between modernity and tradition:

**Table 3: Temporality in the *Wanderjahre***

Past	Present (Commune)	Future
Dominance by caretaker mentality, what is real is “what has always been”	Individual invested in the shape, future of community History has identifiable logic, purpose	Demands unlimited individual flexibility Society a reflection of other processes
No clear separation between higher and lower realities Everyday activity infused by higher purposes, forces, symbols	Individual connects material everyday with ultimate purposes Sense of effective and satisfying action	Impersonal order dominated by everyday demands Vacillate between brute concreteness of utilitarian goals and inscrutable abstraction of final purposes (“use”)
Individual inherits a project beyond memory, understanding	Individual renews the social contract through understanding, assent, participation	Purpose of society is to reproduce itself

The commune refuses a movement across the spectrum of modernity from “past” to “future,” to accede to the standard modernization narration in which the modern is

identified with the secular and the loss of higher dimensions to reality. The synchrony of different ways of life within the novel is a refusal to accede to the inevitability of any one historical pathway, even as it manages to supply several different stories about how these tensions play themselves out. Secularization would imply a movement from left to right along both continuums represented above, a breaking of the middle ground between the temporal realms of past and futurity, and of the “double arrow” that makes them reciprocal to one another within the commune as a way of life. History has the possibility of becoming a progressive movement “forward”—or a nostalgia for and movement “back” into the past.” In the former case, a sacred and higher reality is discredited, replaced by modes of everyday life: by the permanent forgetting of a relations and obligations to tradition and a past in favor of the economic order’s perpetual self-churn and self-remaking. In the latter, the present day becomes a memorialization project of sorts, a state of reactionary resistance and a “war” with the future that plays itself out in the re-establishment of one or another version of what is “past.” The *Wanderjahre* contains both these visions--progressive and reactionary--of social organization.

The commune is the social form that attempts to stabilize fidelity to the past with a progressive relationship of movement into the future. The novel still represents history’s destabilizing effects. They are contained in the pressures that threaten to collapse it as a viable mediating point between individual and collective modes of life. The ideal form of the commune supplies the social context that allows for the individual to be more than a realization of a particular form of individualism. Without the commune as a mediating social form, everyday reality continues to contain the possibility of higher dimensions, and the individual continues to look to the past within an economic order. But the point is that

these activities have become essentially individual and idiosyncratic in nature, a private and individual “choice” or “internal stance” rather than a social possibility with a public, shared reality. In other words, they become bound up in the question of vocational and individual self-constitution. The failure of the commune as a model means a breakdown of the tension between higher and lower orders—between tradition and futurity—into individual forms of integration between high and low.

What I will call the “individual solution” is the other side of the vocational ideal: vocation, not as a form of integration or, in Weberian terms, submission to a set of public and institutional demands, but vocation as a resolution of public contradictions at the level of individual personality and private life. Wilhelm’s vocational choice of surgery in the *Wanderjahre*, spurred as it is by a private—almost therapeutic—assimilation of the past trauma of his childhood friend’s death into his mature adult personality, lays out both elements of this dilemma. By becoming a surgeon, he submits himself to a regime of training, a habit of life once his training is complete, and finally the obligation to regularly practice his surgical skills in the service of the public good. But by the end of the novel, it will be this final step—the discovery of a public in whose service he should act—that Wilhelm discharges in a curious and atypical fashion. Other than the act of saving his son’s life, we have no indication that Wilhelm will ever practice surgery in relation to any particular community. His surgical vocation expresses the symbolic and psychological integration of his higher aspirations and experiences into his everyday habits, but the achievement remains primarily on the individual level, without a public to recognize and receive its benefit.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See the novel’s final chapter: Book 3, Chapter 18.

There will be more to say about the resolution of Wilhelm's own vocational situation later on, but for now I will briefly draw attention to two other characters that represent an individual solution to the problem posed by the commune. The institution of the commune is an attempt to stabilize a set of specific historical phenomena that I have identified (e.g., rationalization under the exclusive banner of economic life) and broadly grouped under the term "modernization." With respect to the possibility that a view of higher realities would be lost in everyday public life, modernization in the *Wanderjahre* is accompanied and defined by its own process of secularization.<sup>54</sup> With respect to the privileging of future over past and progress over stasis, modernization in this novel becomes the term for an overall set of forces that break down the harmony, balance, and proportionality of the commune. But the commune, as I have emphasized, is foremost a collective solution to a problematically atomistic individualism. There remains the possibility—indeed, arguably the probability by the novel's end—that the *solution* to this atomism is found not at the collective level, but at the level of individual characters: that the sense of wholeness created by the commune will prove unsustainable. Under those conditions, the individual character remains his or her own solution to the absence of wider collective unities. The question of "harmony" or "integration" becomes a question of the personality, confined to the extraordinary or exceptional individual. The characters of Montan and Makarie, who represent, respectively, a low and high perspective on the integration of the different levels of reality, are exceptional characters of this type.

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<sup>54</sup> This is not a general theoretical claim about the relationship between modernization and secularization, but rather a set of particular observations about the shrinking scope of religious life within the *Wanderjahre*

From the symbolic “low” side, Montan is an expert in the arts of mining who comes to represent—in almost alchemical fashion—a transformation of the brute materiality of the subterranean world into a higher plane of values.<sup>55</sup> One of a small number of characters the Goethe carried over from the *Lehrjare*, he has taken on a new name (formerly Jarno) and profession: theorist and practitioner of practical geology. When Wilhelm meets him unexpectedly at the beginning of the *Wanderjahre*, roaming in solitary fashion among the crags of the high mountains, Montan has become an advocate for and representative of an esoteric knowledge won from primitive individual isolation.<sup>56</sup> The earth, he claims, gives up its secrets only to those who devote themselves entirely to “reclusive” individual study in the field. On the one hand, Montan appears to embrace an ethos of modern specialist knowledge: “Liberality merely establishes the context within which the specialist works,” he gruffly informs Wilhelm when he expresses hope that his son Felix will receive a wider education. But Montan’s form of specialization is unorthodox—and can be distinguished from the alienations of Weberian vocation—because his form of specialization gives a sense of the whole through the depths of the particular: “To restrict oneself to a craft is the best thing,” he advises Wilhelm. To the most dedicated specialist, “if he does one he does all, or, to be less paradoxical, in the one thing he does properly, he sees the likeness of all

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<sup>55</sup> Indeed, Montan’s character bears worthwhile comparison to Georgius Agricola, the “father” of modern scientific mining techniques. In the beginning of his sixteenth-century treatise on the mining arts, *De re metallica*, Agricola begins with a quasi-utilitarian criticism of the alchemical tradition for engaging in elaborate deceptions of the public that failed to produce anything useful. Agricola, by contrast, claims the contemporary miner as the rightful successor to the alchemical tradition. The miner claims no mystical aspirations: he is a pragmatic technician who masters a slate of arts and sciences in order to possess the materials of the subterranean world. See the Preface and Chapter 1 of *De Re Metallica*, translated from first Latin edition of 1556 by Herbert Hoover and Lou Henry Hoover. New York: Dover, 1950.

<sup>56</sup> Montan: “I wanted to avoid people. There is nothing to be done for them, and they keep us from doing anything for ourselves.” (115 [W]). And later: “each of us knows what he knows only for himself, and he must keep it secret.” (280, [W]).

that is done properly.” By expanding the view from a particular standpoint into a view of the whole, the character Montan represents the possibility of a reconciliation between the single-mindedness of a rationalized, technological culture (“his mind was filled with mining projects and the requisite knowledge and skills”<sup>57</sup>) and a hierarchical order to reality.

If Montan comes to represent an underlying unity to the world that he apprehends through studying the fundamental differences between its parts, then Makarie, the other side of this symbolic character pair, is the figure who achieves an understanding of the particulars of human existence through a wide and encompassing sense of the whole. Spatially and symbolically, Montan is submerged in the earth, while Makarie is a cosmic, superlunary figure who possesses—innately and from birth—an understanding of the movement of celestial bodies:<sup>58</sup>

If we are to assume that beings, insofar as they are corporeal, strive toward the center, while insofar as they are spiritual, they strive toward the periphery, then our friend belongs among the most spiritual. She seems born only to free herself from the terrestrial, in order to penetrate the nearest and farthest realms of existence.<sup>59</sup>

Makarie represents an aristocratic order that is both inherited and earned. The noble origins of her birth are confirmed and enlarged by the purposefulness of her

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<sup>57</sup> 39 (T), 119 (B)

<sup>58</sup> Her condition, described by the narrator: “Makarie stands in a relationship to our solar system that one hardly dares to express. Not only does she harbor it, and see it in her mind, in her soul, in her imagination; she constitutes a part of it, as it were. She sees herself drawn along in those heavenly circles, but in her own particular way; since childhood she has moved around the sun, and, to be specific, as has now become clear, in a spiral course, moving ever-farther from the center and circling toward the outer regions.” (449 [T], 410 [B] ) She retains an astronomer among her associates, a natural scientist who at first doubts her extraordinary claim to intuitive scientific knowledge, but who eventually joins her in pursuing a higher knowledge through knowledge of the stars. He tells Wilhelm: “My purpose is to bring all members of a noble family together again. My way is marked out. I am to investigate what keeps noble souls apart, and to remove barriers of whatever sort they be.” (119-120 [T]. 178 [B])

<sup>59</sup> 449 (T), 410 (B)

activities: to serve as serene manager of human affairs, to catalog human wisdom in her own expansive archive contained within the book, and finally to represent, through her own character, the capacity of the individual to sense and move outward, toward ever-higher planes of awareness.<sup>60</sup> At a minimum, her celestial orientation marks out her as a personality with an awareness of forces and higher concerns outside of everyday human affairs. While her behavior displays no definable religious orientation, her certainty about the existence of a world outside of the mundane human plane—and her belief that she is, silently and internally, journeying outward into this celestial realm, gaining an ever-wider perspective on the human—makes her a placeholder for a unique religiosity in the novel.

**Table 4: Comparison of the Characters Makarie and Montan**

	<b>Notable Symbols</b>	<b>Symbolic Features</b>	<b>Themes</b>
<b>Makarie</b>	Stars Mathematics Astronomy	Socially engaged Advanced age	Height/ascent Wisdom Theoretical knowledge
<b>Montan</b>	Mining Geology Earth science	Socially isolated Indeterminate middle age	Depth/descent Practical/technical knowledge

Together, Montan and Makarie maintain the possibilities contained in the individual outside of the commune. That is, if the commune is no longer capable of organizing itself among a hierarchy of possible realities, then these other realities move inward, to the form and personality of the individual character. This is the individual as atomic building block

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<sup>60</sup> In the second, 1829, edition of the *Wanderjahre*, Goethe had the narrator select from sections of Makarie’s archive to mark an aphoristic interlude after the novel’s second and last books.

from which the commune is imagined, and to which—in the figure and fate Wilhelm as perpetual wanderer—the novel holds out the potential to return. At this point, we should turn to a systematic examination of three communities within the *Wanderjahre*--mountain primitivism, emigrants, and weavers—to view the unfolding of the commune as social and individual form.

#### IV. Saints, Emigrants, Workers: The Communities of the *Wanderjahre*

The first episode in the novel is a parable that reveals the commune in its ideal form: its promise as a way of life--and its challenges and perils. The commune is a second-order *re-creation* of an ideal form of community. The general form of the commune is built around, first, the individual's psychological identification with (and assent to) his or her way of life and, second, a sense of hierarchical patterning to collective life that relates it to the highest and most sacred values of the community.

##### Saint Joseph the Second

For the first figure, "St. Joseph II," the proper work of the commune is to negotiate a relationship to higher things from within the psychological and social materials of the present. Through St. Joseph, this community's most prominent member, the mountain commune aspires to close a gap between the ideal form of its past and traditions and the

historical changes that create distance from them. In this sense, St. Joseph the Second and his mountain community reveal a commune that is essentially restorative and reconstructive. His identity and way of life cannot accept that the commune rebuilds something that is historically inaccessible, if for no other reason than because it is necessarily located *within* history. By seeking to re-create the past and live within it, to access it directly through, in this case, an act of sincere but quasi-parodic imitation, St. Joseph takes the ideal of the commune to an almost parodic extreme. The aspiration to maintain a relationship with past-ness is a central tendency of the commune, but its realization in Joseph becomes a kind of *reductio ad absurdum*. In the mountain commune, the novel inoculates itself against confusion with an idealistic escape from history, revealing its form and purpose to be reconciliation with the forces of historical change.

The introduction finds Wilhelm out walking with his son Felix in the mountains. Standing at the top of a cliff, looking out at the sun hitting the treetops and the path that will lead them downward, Wilhelm sees a sight that stuns him: a man and his family on the approaching path, riding a donkey, and dressed in garb that makes them appear as if they had stepped straight from the biblical tales. Wilhelm, he writes, “found the Flight into Egypt, which he had so often seen painted, here before his very eyes.”<sup>61</sup> This self-styled “St. Joseph II” is, to put it simply, a man in the costume of the past standing in the present. On Wilhelm’s first, dumbfounded appraisal, St. Joseph appears to be the “second coming” of the biblical saint. Along with his wife and children, he rides a donkey, wears rough, simple garb and carries mundane, but symbolically significant items (i.e., “a large bundle of reeds,

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<sup>61</sup> 9 (T), 99 (W)

as if they were palm fronds”) that allow Wilhelm to see not just the character himself, but to see *through* and *in* him to the paintings and historical Christian iconography of Joseph--wife of Mary and earthly father of Jesus. This new “Saint Joseph the Second,” as he styles himself, uses his image and appearance to reach toward a higher reality that—for him—can take an everyday form. His strange character is an icon of direct identification with the past, and literal re-enlivenment of a sacred source.

After recovering from his shock, Wilhelm realizes that he is not speaking to a character in a painting, but to a flesh-and-blood husband and wife and their children, all of whom are embarked on a customary task of carrying charitable goods between mountain communities. This “rare apparition” will, Wilhelm learns, project a sense of serene confidence about the meaning and purpose of his mountain surroundings, a firmness and confidence in his identity.<sup>62</sup> St. Joseph’s first words to Wilhelm—“Why have you stopped? Do not block the way!”—suggest just this sense of unquestionable purpose and total immersion in his way of life. This “way,” as Wilhelm gradually discovers through hearing St. Joseph recount the story of his origin and way of life in the mountains, is a path that submerges him in an immediate identification with the highest sources of sacred significance available to him. St. Joseph represents an immediate, tactile and intuitive relationship to these higher and sacred things. As a character who identifies with what is higher and sacred down to the very details of his appearance, he reflects on processes of secularization by reaching outside of them. The commune aspires to *place* its inhabitants in a relationship to the sacred, but Joseph takes this a step further, aspiring to live within the sacred forms himself.

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<sup>62</sup> 8 (T), 98, (W)

Joseph's intimate bodily and sensory identification with the objects that form his identity is, from one standpoint, a depiction of the commune's ideal process of individual development. His sense of himself is driven by an innate fascination with a cycle of paintings about the life of St. Joseph. In the *Lehrjahre* Wilhelm recounts a naïve and automatic early childhood fascination with the paintings of his grandfather's art. In a similar fashion, Joseph is drawn to aesthetic objects that suggest a kind of numinous higher reality that simultaneously maintain their function as everyday, at-hand objects. Thus, from the very beginning, the episode unfolds in a mode of parallelism between Joseph and Wilhelm.<sup>63</sup>

Joseph, Wilhelm learns, was the son of a family of caretakers for an old monastery in the mountains. Once the site of pilgrimages, by Joseph's time it had long fallen into disrepair and become the property of a "secular prince." In the story he tells Wilhelm, the earliest interest in his life is his fascination with a cycle of old and dusty pictures along a wall in the chapel. "No one could really interpret them for me," he says. For the young Joseph, it was "enough to know that the saint whose life they depicted was my patron saint, and I rejoiced in him as I would an uncle." In his commentary on the episode, Erich Trunz points to the distinctiveness of Joseph's relationship with art.<sup>64</sup> On the one hand, Joseph the Second exhibits an intense relationship to the biblical tradition and the life of a Saint. On

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<sup>63</sup> The reader learns about the details of St. Joseph's life through letters that Wilhelm writes to his betrothed Natalie. The sense of intuitive kinship that Wilhelm reports with St. Joseph is a testament to the similarities between their two situations. At the end of the episode, we learn that Wilhelm was the one who recorded it in a letter to the woman with whom he will be engaged throughout the entire novel, Natalie. The first thing Wilhelm says in his letter to Natalie is that "if the words are not exactly his, if here and there I have expressed my own sentiments as his, that is only natural, given the affinity I feel for him." Without Wilhelm's position as wanderer, looking in from the outside, there would never have been a St. Joseph the Second narrative at all.

<sup>64</sup> In Trunz's view, the central issues raised by St. Joseph is the "formation of the person through art," (*Formung des Menschen durch die Kunst*). In notes to *Wanderjahre*, 559

the other hand, as Jane Brown notes, Joseph's enthusiasm for paintings of the saint is not to be confused with religious devotion.<sup>65</sup> For Joseph, the image of the saint has as much in common with a portrait of a cherished family patriarch as it does with an iconic portrait of a religious figure. The paintings are a visual biography of a kind of "ancestor" to Joseph that are ripe for his imitation: he adopts a donkey for his rides through the mountains, wears antiquated dress, and is apprenticed into the carpentry trade so that he will eventually be able to restore the chapel. It is all too easy to point to the temporarily distant origins of Joseph's role model, when in fact the biblical saint is one of the most prominent and accessible models present to him in the everyday.<sup>66</sup>

In a literal sense, then, Joseph's *Bildung* and mature "vocation" were the product of a *Bild*, the picture of the biblical world of a saint. The story of St. Joseph the Second gives us a general model of how the commune guides the individual into a sense of identification and belonging with surroundings and activities. His way of life is appropriate to a highly individualistic, intentional self-fashioning. What Joseph came to understand during his idiosyncratic childhood and "apprenticeship" was that he needed a world that responded to his immediate senses: what he could see and touch in his youth (the paintings and

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<sup>65</sup> Jane Brown: "It is, in other words, the pictures which Joseph's life resembles; they are his model more than the saint himself," from *Goethe's Cyclical Narratives, Die Unterhaltungen Deutscher Ausgewanderten and Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975, p. 34

<sup>66</sup> The precise nature of Joseph's relationship to the past is one of the most debated aspects of the commentaries on this scene. Jane Brown argues that we should be more concerned with the meaning of St. Joseph's lifestyle for his own time and place than be caught up in the details of how he understands the biblical narrative. St. Joseph "is imitation..." she writes, "not for the purposes of satire or correction, but for the enrichment of the reader's vision of the present...the problem of realizing the past in the present remains the basic concern of the novel." (37) Hans Vaget reads St. Joseph in light of the impending wave(s) of industrialization that are a major part of the *Wanderjahre* narrative, and takes St. Joseph to be the first "warning signal" against the project to enact a "false restoration" of a lost past (159). See "Johann Wolfgang Goethe: Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre," in *Romane und Erzählungen zwischen Romantik und Realismus: neue Interpretationen*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1983.

chapel), and a circle of existence bounded by where only his feet can carry him. Therefore Joseph's discovery of his "identity," which at first appears to be an eccentricity that isolates and sets him apart from the world, reveals itself to be the most consistent and unrelenting contact with his surroundings--and thus with the general principle of the commune.

St. Joseph II's imitation of the biblical Joseph represents the importance of immediacy and individual, intentional assent for the commune form overall. He provides one the most paradigmatic statements to this effect for Wilhelm by way of explanation about his own way of life. What is most favorable about his own community, Joseph says, is its preservation of human sentiment and concern for one's fellow citizen in the commune: "On the whole there is something more humane about life in the mountains than in the flatlands," he tells Wilhelm, "the inhabitants are closer to one another." Closeness preserves the self's sense of integrity, preventing it from self-alienation and bringing it into a productive harmony with others:

"Each person must rely more upon himself, must learn to depend on his own hands, his own feet. Workman, courier, porter—all are combined in one person; everyone is also closer to his neighbor, sees him more often, and is engaged with him in a more common venture."<sup>67</sup>

The "common venture" is the essential form of life in the mountain community. The form of community that Joseph has with his neighbors is an immediate and spontaneous one—drawn from and responding to the human needs that appear in front of them through simple acts of charity and cooperation.

St. Joseph has achieved an intensely self-directed focus that comes at the cost of a retreat from any context outside of the conditions of his own (self-) making. Although he

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<sup>67</sup> "Der Arbeiter, der Bote, der Lastträger, alle vereinigen sich in *einer* Person; auch steht jeder dem andern näher, begegnet ihm öfter und lebt mit ihm in einem gemeinsamen Treiben", 18 (T), 105 (W)

first appears to be a kind of harmless lunatic in costume who misses the point of biblical piety by aping the appearance of a religious icon, he is not simply living in a fantasy world of his own making. By the end of the episode, it has become apparent that Joseph's identity is also a product of the material, everyday influences of childhood and early adult life. What begins as a study of the man and how he stands out from his surroundings becomes an inquiry into features of the community that produced him. If St. Joseph is an extraordinary individual, then by the end of his story it becomes clear that this is not because he set himself excessively apart, but rather because he intensifies the ethos of community that prizes the adequacy of the individual's powers to the self-directed project of an identity crafted out of his immediate surroundings. The paradox of the modern St. Joseph is that the biblical Joseph character, which would otherwise be a sacred and distant *icon*, becomes, through the paintings in the ruined chapel, an intimate component of his childhood. For Joseph, of all people, the paintings participate in both a general order of the sacred and of principle of his own *specific* individuation. In the maturity that Joseph presents to Wilhelm in his adulthood, he presents a seamlessness of identification between individual and surroundings that masks an intense intentionality and idiosyncrasy. His identity presents a seamlessness that would not be possible outside of his intentional way of life within the community.

Joseph's story is a portrait of romantic nostalgia for a bygone age of traditional religiosity, but the influence of the past to the present--from biblical archetype to this "second" St. Joseph—goes in another direction as well. His story is, equally, a story about how the biblical character, Joseph earthly father of Jesus, is re-imagined through the intention and individuality of his eccentric modern counterpart. The St. Joseph the Second

story offers us a portrait of how the biblical Joseph came to be a “solution” for this very modern character, and what form this solution took. In appearance he resembles his holy model, but St. Joseph the Second’s use of the biblical identity has a different and distinct meaning for the mountain community in which he chooses to live.

Ultimately, the limitations of St. Joseph as an *ideal* type for the commune are revealed by his moral and aesthetic self-enclosure. The meaning of St. Joseph’s life in the mountains is that his community will extend only as far as his own sentiments. This circle of his community is bound by *his* family and the works they perform in nearby locales. His eventual wife and their children become part of his own identity in their appearance and way of life. They perform acts of simple charity within their own community, but venture no further afield. Joseph’s life operates on a cyclical model in which the development of an identity brings him into a stable orbit around his origins. Wife and children are a further development of an existing pattern, which was determined by Joseph’s fascination with the life of the saint from his earliest youth. But Joseph achieved his stability of identity *against* a chaotic outside world that he rejects, and which is chiefly represented by the wars and unrest that bring his wife to him. By restricting his way of life to what is within the immediate ken of his head and heart, Joseph’s communal life becomes a permanent protest against the political and historical unrest beyond the borders of his sense and understanding.

Yet there is something misleading about Joseph's description of the jack-of-all-trades in the mountain community--"workman, courier, porter"--in that while he purports to describe what every person does in mountain life, he is most directly describing the appeal of *his own* way of life. Joseph's description of the mountain peoples' communal

unity is also a description of his personal unity with himself. In the ideal form of the commune, the unity of the self is the basis for the unity of the community. This second Joseph has his relationships with others through the relationship he has with himself. Wilhelm notes this fortunate position in a letter to Natalie: "When evening comes, he can accompany his family procession through the old cloister gate; he is inseparable from his beloved, from his dear ones."<sup>68</sup>

The narrative of Joseph's development reveals a tendency to self-enclosure and flight from an uncontrolled outside. He withdraws from destabilizing material and political circumstances on the border of his community. These are the destructive effects of war that bring his wife to him. He presents himself as one isolated eccentric individual, but there is also a link between his imitative identity and his historical position. Joseph met the woman who would become his wife while out delivering wares. The mountain region where he lives is on the edge of a conflict zone: "...war, or rather its consequences, had drawn near our region."<sup>69</sup> His wife came to him through the violent conflicts on the community's borders. Joseph's wife is pregnant by another man (her first husband, who has just died in the conflicts surrounding the commune) when he first meets her, and Joseph will take this child into his family. This child is a remnant of that boisterous world outside the mountain borders, an alien element that, like everything else in St. Joseph's world, must be clothed in the garb of biblical times.

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<sup>68</sup> "Daß er aber glücklich genug ist, neben dem Tiere herzugehen, das die doppelt schöne Bürde trägt, daß er mit seinem Familienzug abends in das alte Klostertor eindringen kann, daß er unzertrennlich von seiner Geliebten, von den Seinigen ist, darüber darf ich ihn wohl im stillen beneiden" 112 (Winston), 28 (Trunz). The "envy" that Wilhelm expresses toward Joseph speaks to a level of similarity to their two characters.

<sup>69</sup>,108 (Winston), 22 (Trunz)

The development of his own inward nature thus leads Joseph to a preternatural concern with surroundings and appearances. “Inward” identity and outward appearance become, in Joseph’s world, a direct reflections of one another. Joseph cannot make sense of the ruptures and unrest from the “outside,” a place where war imposes itself on unwilling participants (like St. Joseph’s wife) and where the only consistent principle is change and growth.<sup>70</sup> It is no accident that Joseph’s wife comes from this outside world--and that she carries a child who is not Joseph’s own. Joseph’s life, with its natural cycles and return to the origins, lacks a generative potential through its disengagement from the *progressive* forces of historical change that have roiled the border of the community and brought his wife to him.

St. Joseph’s final limitation is that he ultimately seeks to *imitate* what is sacred, a significant structural and symbolic difference that he confirms in his final statement to Wilhelm. He and his family, he says, “preserve as a pleasant custom the outward appearance, upon which we happened by chance, and which corresponds so well to our inner inclinations.” The sacred garb—which St. Joseph took on from its “ruined” religious source in an old and abandoned Catholic chapel--thus becomes a kind of secular narrative, in which the attempt to establish a more direct relationship with a higher reality collapses the sense of its ontological and metaphysical distinctiveness, revealing St. Joseph to be a paradigm of secularization for the novel. What he has ultimately reclaimed from the

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<sup>70</sup> Indeed, St. Joseph II frames his marriage to his wife in terms of the essential nature of change for everyday life: “Life belongs to the living, and he who lives must be prepared to change.” His claim about the inevitability of change is complicated and ironized by the cyclicity of his own life, and the cyclical seasonal metaphor he gives for change’s inevitability: “One sees the blossoms fade and the leaves fall, but one also sees fruit ripen and new buds swell” (111 [W], 27 [B]).

sacred source material of the chapel paintings is a way of life and a moral code: “the virtues of that ideal image of fidelity and purity were practiced by us.”<sup>71</sup>

The modern St. Joseph envisions a way of life in which the community’s highest, most sacred traditions—its religious stories, figures and iconography—are directly available to the individual as a way of life. He explains and justifies the choice of Joseph as an inspiration for this way of life not in terms of his sacred character, but rather through a story of personal inclination and natural sympathy: It is crucial that “no one could explain” the cycle of Joseph paintings to him, that he gravitated to them without instruction, based only on their inherent appeal *to him*. He found the discarded paintings, he had an unarticulated (perhaps inarticulable) fascination with them, and he modeled his own character upon them. The point is that he liked them and he found them admirable, and this was justification enough to attach his own life, identity and vocation to them. The role of doctrine and sacred teaching about the meaning of St. Joseph within the Christian tradition is minimized in favor of the effect it has on Joseph himself.

Attention must also be given to the particular aptness of the biblical original-- Joseph, earthly father of Christ—to St. Joseph’s modern project. Joseph is a fitting vessel for these ambitions because he is the one who provides conceptual and material stabilization to the miracle of Christ’s birth. By anchoring the event in the mundane social form of the nuclear family, Joseph becomes a figurehead who gives cover to the miraculous event of the virgin birth and a God-made-flesh. The historical event becomes a miracle that emphasizes the *distance* between an all-powerful, inscrutable God and his human subjects. And the biblical record of Christ’s life is largely a record of the miracles he performs before his final,

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

most miraculous act: that of triumphing over death. But the biblical Joseph—husband to a woman who does not need him to be biologically generative, and “father” to a god who is all-powerful and self-generating—is a figure who stabilizes Christ’s sacred, universal impossibility in the social structures of the family and his particular community.<sup>72</sup> St. Joseph II’s greatest parallel with the biblical St. Joseph is to perform a similar, stabilizing function: although he is an acknowledged eccentric within his own community, the strangeness of his garb and his appearance mask a more fundamental conformity to the form of life in his community. Like its other members, he selects a useful trade (carpentry), which he arrives at independently through examining the paintings in the ruined chapel, and he lives a life of mutuality and informal cooperation, one that hews to what he calls the “closeness” between members that he discerns in the commune way of life and the imperative of earthly charity that is the most prominent lesson he derives from his Christian sources.

St. Joseph the Second’s way of life allows him to be faithful to the higher things that look toward the past, are cyclical in their temporal structure, and promote stability and predictability within an unpredictable, chaotic and social order. The encounter with St. Joseph II, which is recounted in a letter from Wilhelm, is divided between curiosity at the impossible strangeness of Joseph’s traditionalism and envy at his complete sense of unity and identification with his family and surroundings. Joseph shows how the individual can have an intentional, material involvement with a tradition, an abiding past, and a sacred order.

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<sup>72</sup> For example, Jesus is born in the humble circumstances of a stable because of Joseph’s particular communal identity, because he had to be go back to Bethlehem to be counted among other subjects ruled by Herod (see Luke 2:1)

### The Emigrant Colonies

In the character of St. Joseph II, the commune is projected into a naturalized pre-modern past, plucked from the instability of history and held up as the very ideal of stasis within upheaval. The rest of the communities within the *Wanderjahre* will make it clear that the commune is in fact a second nature, a social engineering project, and an answer to the problem of freedom posed by new needs of individuals.

A worthwhile contrast case to Joseph's existence in the mountains is a band of emigrants that, over the course of the novel, refine their practical means and their principles in preparation for a life of self-imposed exile. Like Joseph, they are supremely dedicated to the self-sufficiency and internal coherence of their communal life, but the reason for this self-sufficiency could not be a more stark contrast with Joseph. St. Joseph resists an individual life of wandering through dedication to imitation and a cyclical return to what has already been. The emigrants, by contrast, fashion a way of life out of the endless promise of change and historical transformation. Their horizon will be the (re-) occurrence of what is endlessly novel and unfamiliar, and the imperative to constantly transform themselves—both individual and collective—in response to demands defined by a future made up of unimaginable, endless change.

The leader, architect and individual archetype of the emigrants' way of life is Lenardo, a friend of Wilhelm's who will eventually leave his birth origins behind in the intentional order of the colonial project. If the course of Joseph's entire life and vocational dedication is defined by a stable orbit around his origins and the intentionality of his return

to the source of his life, then Lenardo, by contrast, is the novel's most fully realized wanderer, defined largely by restless, perpetual travel. He is a searching and scheming figure, who embraces the project of identity construction and self-invention to live in synchrony with the perpetual churn of forms and values within historical change. Indeed, his entire persona is connected to the reversal of settled norms. Biographically speaking, he is a character defined by movement and itinerancy, the perpetually dissatisfied son of a landed aristocratic family: often mentioned by others *in absentia*, and present to the narrative mainly through his irregular correspondence with Wilhelm. Lenardo's most important symbolic connection with Wilhelm is through the *Abbé* and his shadow network of associates in the Society of the Tower. Under Lenardo's visionary leadership, this *Turmgesellschaft* becomes the spiritual and philosophical core of the colonial project. What was originally a secret order dedicated to the revival of an aristocratic ideal will become, by the end of the *Wanderjahre*, the foundation for a bourgeois ideal of a colony dedicated to practical adaptation and protean growth. And Lenardo will become its supreme representative.

The ideal that defines Lenardo and, eventually, his colonies is the concept of use and usefulness. Lenardo is the character who thinks, above all, about the "usefulness" of his knowledge and activities, and who will eventually distill the criteria for membership in the band of immigrants into one (apparently) simple imperative: to be "useful" to the group. Given the terms in which I have discussed economic values in this inquiry, it may be tempting to distill what Lenardo means by "the useful" into a question of utility and economic efficiency. But that concept of use-values would be no more descriptive of this community's values than a reduction of St. Joseph's persona to mere copying and mimicry.

Now that we have introduced a second, paradigmatic communal figure to our discussion, we can introduce Lenardo in an initially comparative mode with Joseph. Like Joseph's explanation to Wilhelm about his way of life in the mountains, Lenardo has a self-reported story about his origins that he introduces to Wilhelm in a letter:

Among the earliest of my abilities, which circumstances developed little by little, was especially a certain bent for the technical, which was daily nourished by the impatience people feel in the country during large building projects, and even more with small alterations, installations, whims, when they must do without one trade after another and would sooner push forward incompetently and sloppily on their own than slow down like a master. Fortunately there was a jack-of-all-trades who used to roam around our locality and, because he made out best with me, preferred helping me more than any of the neighbors. He set up a lathe for me, which he used on visits, more for his own purposes than for my instruction. I acquired the carpenter's tools, and my taste for such work was intensified and quickened by the conviction widely expressed at the time that no one could venture into life unless he had some handicraft he might fall back on in an emergency. My enthusiasm received the approval of my tutors, since it accorded with their own principles. I can hardly remember playing, for all my free hours were devoted to building and making things. In truth, I may boast that even as a boy I spurred a smith, by my demands, to learn locksmithing, casting, and clockmaking.<sup>73</sup>

Lenardo's distinctive identity emerges out of the shapeless and unfocused accumulation of commonplace activities. He is also drawn to the "jack-of-all-trades," the figure driven by unrelenting necessity to achieve a certain practical command over the activities and objects presented by day-to-day life. He takes up carpentry, not because it would be an ideal profession (as in Joseph's case), but because it might prove necessary to his survival in an undefined set of future conditions: "no one could venture into life unless he had some handicraft he might fall back on in an emergency." And while he admits to having "tutors," who presumably guided him according to some set of pedagogical

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<sup>73</sup> 331 (W), 336-37 (T)

principles or goals, he denies that any of his activities were meant to *be* educational.

Education would require both teacher and student to set out on a joint path, to at least implicitly agree on a model or paradigm for *why* and *in what mold* the individual pupil is being shaped, an ideal about what it would mean to achieve mastery over a set of subjects and practices leading toward adulthood. Indeed, Lenardo presents his own early activities as a contrast to an educational model that this chapter has elaborated under the guild apprenticeship model.

His model of education will be opposed to what he calls “building” and “making things.” Instead, he seeks to accumulate haphazard trade and skill-based knowledge, a knowledge that is good enough for the moment in which it is applied. Indeed, the knowledge that will define him is a good-enough collection of technical skills learned out of the exigencies and interests of the moment: the handyman who teaches him to use the lathe “more for his own purposes” than for Lenardo’s. The blacksmith whose knowledge of other, ancillary trades--locksmithing, casting and clockmaking—is sufficient for Lenardo’s temporary purposes.

In its totality, Lenardo’s education has two essential qualities: first, that it is “technical,” or dedicated to the production of some material end or purpose, and second, that it is measured by its worth as a basis of action. Lenardo draws on no specific model for this orientation. In this same letter to Wilhelm, Lenardo writes that he “had to create” his “own tools” in order to pursue his education. It must be brought into being from existing, ill-suited purposes. Among already-extant institutions and social models, he complains about craftspeople who “confuse means and ends” and would “rather spend time on preparations and arrangements” than on “seriously applying themselves to execution.” His

great advantage will be that he *does* where others merely think and plan, a bias for active pursuit that culminates in the construction of a new park in a nearby locale. The essential similarity and difference with Joseph's case can be discerned in Lenardo's self-reliant, relentlessly results-focused way of life.

Joseph, we will recall, is also a figure defined by improvisational *bricolage*. He praises life in the mountains: "Each person must rely more upon himself, must learn to depend on his own hands, his own feet," and "Worker, courier, porter—all are combined in one person." The ideal form of the individual life for St. Joseph is the one that expresses itself in the adequacy of the body's manual capacities to its needs. Lenardo, too, writes that "I was less favorably disposed toward machinery than toward simple handiwork, where strength and feeling operate in unison." He continues:

"Hence I was happiest to linger in isolated villages, whose special conditions made them the home of some special type of work. That sort of thing gives each community a special individuality, gives every family or group of families a distinctive character; people live with a clear sense of the living whole."<sup>74</sup>

When Lenardo claims that these villages are set apart by a "distinctive character" and "individuality" that marks it off from its surroundings, he is, in effect, offering a perfect description of Joseph, whose outward eccentricity belies how he has become a member of the community *qua* distinct and exceptional mode of life. The biblical character that Joseph plays is just this special sort of solution to the problem of how to live. Joseph encloses himself in the clean lines of a legendary past, in a biblical story for which the simplicity of the commune provides a modern canvas. The essential similarity between the development of Joseph and Lenardo is that they both seek to practice ways of life that are outside of their

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<sup>74</sup> 337 (T), 332 (W)

immediate ken. Each was struck by strange and unusual forms of life from an early age, and each sought to integrate that strangeness into their practical being. The difference is that the essentially interpretive nature of the practical question for Joseph—“*no one could tell me what it meant*”—becomes instead, for Lenardo, a question of mechanical assembly and engineering skill. Instead of “*what does it mean,*” Lenardo asks: “*how do I do it?*”

But what is “useful” in a given moment is not a stable question that can easily be related to the past—indeed, it seems above all to justify a perpetual *departure* from the past—but a contingent fact that emerges from history and disappears back into it. This is the difference between a world oriented around an exemplary ideal (i.e., Joseph’s world), and one stitched together from an unlimited set of prior models that become future improvisations. Lenardo, in effect, becomes a writer, sketcher, and proto-ethnographer, someone who “records everything,” because he has “a view to future use.” While Joseph writes to Wilhelm, he travels through communities like that which Joseph inhabits, “investigating the condition of the mountain dwellers and taking into our band the useful ones disposed to emigrate.”<sup>75</sup> In the *Wanderjahre*, the mountains are a place where life becomes simpler, where the essential questions are concentrated against a clearer view of the open sky.<sup>76</sup> Like the ethnographer or journalist, however, Lenardo has no intention of becoming a part of these communities. Their value is that he—and they—stand apart, that they are systems whose essential organization is open to rational penetration and

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Recall the role of the “wild hayers” in the landscapes of Lago Maggiore, who climb to the tops of alpine regions in search of the choicest hay, tossing it down to the developed and fertile flatlands below. Wilhelm begins the story high in the mountains with a view of far-away horizons, in the region where Joseph makes his home (See the opening to Book 1).

examination by the careful observer. Lenardo will take what he needs and can use from these systems for his own purposes, and no more.

Lenardo's credo of usefulness, then, is not so much a system in itself as it is a means of organizing other systems. What is important is not what the systems are useful *for*, but rather the act of observing, cataloging and ordering them that allows them to be made use *of*. His colony of emigrants remains deeply concerned with the dynamics of configuration and reconfiguration, a focus on building the solid foundation of an as-yet undetermined future than with reaching a height or pinnacle. Instead of an essential set of values, it substitutes a pragmatics of efficient and effective action. Instead of "why," a question that it cannot approach directly, Lenardo asks "how." As the architect and spokesperson for this organization of the community, he admits that his own way of life is in essence that of a scavenger and a skilled repurposer. In the novel's last book, he turns his individual penchant for re-assembly—an engineer's mindset applied to the social world--to the question of how to build a new society.

For Lenardo, the social world is likened to a kind of physical edifice, a fact that is reflected in the organization of arts and crafts for his European "colony."<sup>77</sup> He compares the requirements for social life in the colony to the roles and skills required to build a sturdy structure: "Let us take these crafts in the order in which they erect a building and prepare it for occupancy," Lenardo declares. In his regard of the fine arts (what would now, in contemporary life, be called "high culture") he dismissively declares that "the best statue still stands on its feet with the worst," and thus should only be judged on this functional

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<sup>77</sup> The plan for the colonies unfolds in two branches: a North American emigration project that will be overseen by Lenardo himself, and an "internal" emigration planned on a plot of land by an associate of Lenardo's and his aristocratic backers in the *Society of the Tower*. (Book 3, Chapters 11 and 12)

basis. Art, poetry, and music are all declared to be a kind of superfluous luxury, technically “free” practices which have their pleasing aspects, but which have no fixed and absolute laws of construction that would allow them to be rationalized into the basis for social life. Instead of sculptors, Lenardo wants “stonecutters,” who, along with the other craft practitioners of the “rigorous” arts (i.e., crafts), “square off the foundations and cornerstones.” Lenardo wants to hold onto the guild structure—“the stages of apprentice, journeyman, and master must be adhered to as strictly as possible”—because of the concreteness of its *objects*, while leaving behind the purpose and context of the guild’s work. Indeed, Lenardo explicitly disavows that the guild system is anything other than a way of producing useful craftsmen. The guild structure, he declares, shall provide no view into the whole: “Each should be enlightened according to his capacities and purposes,” and “no individual can achieve complete clarity.”<sup>78</sup>

Like other communes in the novel, Lenardo’s will be organized according to bodily practice and intentional commitment. But rather than cyclical stability, this organization reflects an essential concern with futurity and expansion. The body of the emigrant is not primarily distinguished by being trained for any specific task, but rather for its readiness to engage in constant, peripatetic movement and resettlement. The common basis for all legitimate vocation and individual identity is that it requires its practitioner to travel: across land and sea, by foot and boat. The definition of the true emigrant in Lenardo’s sense is that he has no place to call home.<sup>79</sup> Lenardo’s argument is explicitly aimed at overturning

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<sup>78</sup> 368 (W), 390 (T)

<sup>79</sup> “Legitimate” means those professions that—in the same spirit as recruitment of the mountain dwellers—Lenardo views as potential contributors to the mission of the emigrants. Among other professions, he mentions artisans, merchants, artists, soldiers, politicians, and teachers. (See Bk. 3, Ch. 9)

the major categories of communal and individual identity. Befitting a group of emigrants, place (“soil,” *Land*) becomes the very thing that—above all else—must be left behind. Lenardo’s reversal: not “where I am well off is my fatherland,” but “where I am useful is my fatherland.”<sup>80</sup> In the colonies, the guiding value of usefulness is tied to the willingness to move into new territories. And while Lenardo applies some historical context for *why* an individual and a people would be given to leave their native land (e.g., overpopulation, adventure, material gain), the ultimate point is to engender a certain frame of mind and principle of action through this movement.

Like craftsmen, Lenardo refers to his band of emigrants as a “guild,” but in stark contrast to the literal guild trades, the bodily and material practices of his emigrants are explicitly disembedded from any objects with particular and immutable features.<sup>81</sup> Rather, the object of attention is the land itself. The point is not to come into a relationship with one’s place but to create distance from it, to separate the individual from a dependence on spatial location—and the social entanglements that come with it.<sup>82</sup> The activity of the true wanderer who becomes an emigrant is to engage in the set of practices that place him at home within a life of permanent disconnection from stable things. The only certainty that the wanderer requires is the expectation of a necessary and endless process of readjustment. What Lenardo calls “neither a doctrine nor a principle,” but a maxim of life itself,” is the dream of building a society on this principle, a society whose individual

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<sup>80</sup> 365 (W), 386 (T): “Wo mir’s wohl gehrt, ist mein Vaterland!” and “Wo ich nütze, ist mein Vaterland”

<sup>81</sup> 368 (W), 390 (T).

<sup>82</sup> “Have we not seen the northeast moving toward the southwest, one people driving another before it, with patterns of authority and land ownership utterly overwhelmed?” 365 (W), 386 (T)

members are the collective embodiment of the dream to be “free from all lasting external relations.”<sup>83</sup> The whole is always dependent on the individual’s participation, always ready to be destroyed so that it can better recreate itself.

The basis of the emigrant’s community is the rejection of association as an inherited and natural property. That is, the community is not something that one *has* as a result of birth, but a status that is earned and continuously re-affirmed. Community emerges in the form of a quasi-spontaneous feature of the individual’s relationship to the world as permanent wanderer. “Let each strive to be useful to himself and to others in all ways,” Lenardo declares. The emigrant must “seek consistency, not in circumstances but within himself...[He] will educate and organize himself to be at home anywhere.”<sup>84</sup> This is the refusal to accept the givenness of the community, the insistence on taking the individual as an atomic unit defined more by his active contribution than his passive receipt of collective values. The community is just an emergent byproduct of individual effort. The individual can (indeed, *must*) be useful to the community because the community is still always being brought into being, a result of the reliance of its members upon one another in their usefulness. Only the community itself is not a product of intentional devotion, but rather a byproduct of the right individual commitments, a band of adaptable people who have adopted the right relationship of usefulness to one another.<sup>85</sup> Again, Lenardo provides a

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<sup>83</sup> The European colony is distinguished by the fact that it discards (to use Clifford Geertz’s term) the “thickness” of long-accumulated trail of settled European customs and social systems. One of Lenardo’s associates who will lead this colony declares that it is Europe’s deep history and tangle of, habits, customs, settled dispositions, and borders that have prevented it from altering itself. The European colony welcomes history as a cleansing force that wipes away these settled foundations (see Book 3, Chapter 12).

<sup>84</sup> 368 (W), 390 (T)

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

physical, constructive metaphor between the community's individual parts: "All useful men should stand in relation to one another, as the builder looks to the architect, and the latter to the mason and the carpenter."

In accordance with a notion of community as a spontaneous, emergent property, the ideals of justice, morality, and virtue in the North American colony are concerned primarily with proto-libertarian coordination and non-interference between its individual members.

<sup>86</sup>A form of Christianity is practiced, in order to "teach our children, from youth on, about the great benefits it has brought us."<sup>87</sup> "Our moral teachings," Lenardo declares, are "entirely separate" from religion and "purely pragmatic, encapsulated in this maxim: "moderation where there is choice, industry where there is necessity. Let everyone put these words to use in his life in his own way..."

The members of society come into a relationship with one another in the sense that they are all parts of the same metaphorical building, each playing a part in holding up the whole. "Society remains the capable man's highest need," Lenardo declares. But he means this in the sense that "the builder looks to the architect, and the latter to the mason and the carpenter." The politics of the colony will be a form of anti-politics; the correct answer to questions of justice and right are decided through a kind of social measurement, by refined techniques of careful construction rather than ongoing processes of deliberation. Indeed, Lenardo's ultimate aspiration is to leave behind the question of the social entirely, marking

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<sup>86</sup> In a society that is concerned above all with *coordinating* about means rather than *deliberating* about ends, the management of time is among the most paramount virtues. The colony contains clocks that regiment the days work, "which all mark the quarter hours with both hands and time," 378-79 (W), 405 (T)

<sup>87</sup> As Lenardo lays out, the "origin and history" of Christianity are considered less important, only taught in adulthood, if at all. This is much like the "Pedagogical Province" that Wilhelm visits, and which serves as another major source of emigrants to the colonial project. (Book 2, Chapter 1)

value problems as settled once and for all in the act of beginning anew: “The abiding principle is that we take the advantages of civilization with us, and leave its evils behind.” This is Lenardo’s view: history reduced to a set of practical best-fit problems between the available tools (historical forms in the past) and an unlimited horizon of future conditions. By reducing and abstracting out the moral, political, and existential dread created by historical upheavals, the disorienting quality of history is reduced to the level of a management problem.

Near the conclusion of Lenardo’s visionary speech about the organization of the emigrants’ guild, he makes a short but radical claim about the preparation of each individual emigrant for the venture on which he or she is about to embark. In principle, he argues, “no individual can achieve complete clarity” about matters of ultimate significance. Rather, in this new type of society they are about to bring into being, he argues that each is already prepared to uproot themselves from their homeland and commit to the new venture because “our society...is based on the principle that each should be enlightened according to his capacities and purposes.”<sup>88</sup> In exchange for abandoning any commitment to knowledge that would transcend immediate, pragmatic social purposes, the individual receives the most flexible possible connection to the whole: *do what is useful, and you will always belong*. To belong fully to the whole and receive its unconditional support, the individual need only answer to what is required of him at any possible moment.

Ironically, the principle that promises the individual will always be a member of the collective is derived from the constitution of the individual life. Lenardo again: “a man, we say, must learn to think of himself free from external relations. He must seek consistency,

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<sup>88</sup> 368 (W), 390 (T)

not in circumstances but within himself.” But in a deeper sense, the individual renounces any dependence on conditions outside of himself because the colony denies that those conditions have any pattern of historical significance, besides the imperative to adapt to new circumstances. “We may view ourselves as involved in a world confederation,” Lenardo declares, because his principle of belonging is equally applicable anywhere. Historical circumstances are reduced to the level of mere accidental properties, which are themselves cancelled out by the overall adaptability of the group: “We have no one among us who cannot usefully practice his profession at any moment.”<sup>89</sup> The principle of the emigrant puts him or her at home anywhere, and for that reason it can form the basis of a universalism within the vicissitudes of any particular historical moment.

Lenardo wants to re-ground social life on the basis of its essential needs. The standard of “use” becomes an opportunity to weigh what is merely pleasing and inessential against the one essential thing: to organize around the needs and survival of the whole. The purpose of the colony is to begin life once more, with *only* these essential things. The unforgiving natural state of the world reveals that political and social decision-making are just one more inessential thing. The colony’s principles are no longer political or theological judgments that must be defended on principled grounds, but rather exceptional acts undertaken against the necessity of merciless “natural” conditions. Instead of a politics, an anti-political economism justified by scarcity and need. Instead of a higher order to the world that grounds the everyday, the precarity of the everyday renders higher things superfluous. And instead of a process of historical change that would threaten the

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<sup>89</sup> 369 (W), 391 (T)

distinctness of a way of life, change becomes a stimulus that sets individual and collective life on its proper useful basis.

The colony treats historical change as a problem of means (*how* do I/we adapt?) rather than ends (*what* is the basis on which we are adapting?). Change will threaten nothing essential for the emigrants. It merely lays the groundwork for a way of life built around material and technical requirements.

The colony of emigrants is the most radical type of commune in the *Wanderjahre*, an answer to the problem that historical change poses to settled values and distinct ways of life. The colony recognizes that the individual is fundamentally independent from the community, with a voluntary relationship to it. The community will therefore be grounded on the contingent relationship between individual part and social whole. Lenardo recognizes that there is no longer anything essential about the individual's connection to any particular way of life. The polarity of dependence is therefore reversed. Society may, as Lenardo says, "remain a capable man's highest *need*," but now the individual has become the unit by which society will be constructed. Communities will be formed and dissolved on the basis of the individual decision to enter into association with one another. In this, the basis of the colony has the same essential structure as the other communities (Joseph, the Weavers) in the novel.

For the emigrants, the acceptable form of life is the one that willingly breaks with any and all intact, inherited traditions. The essence of the emigrant is that he or she voluntarily takes on the type of social disembedding that—in real historical terms--was already underway in the nineteenth century as a result of instability in European collective structures, events that Goethe himself witnessed over the course of his life: changes to the

mode of production, the outbreak of war, and the destruction of settled social patterns.<sup>90</sup> In this respect, the emigrant represents one momentous fork in a choice framework that the *Wanderjahre* lays out: either the individual embraces the effects of historical change, or he seeks a space of social refuge and refuses to accede to its movements. The emigrant will be the former, the one who masters historical change by renouncing his or her dependence on moribund social structures and fixed traditions of the past. The latter possibility—a collective pattern of life that makes both individual and community resilient in the face of historical change—is the topic on which the final section of this chapter will concentrate. This is the alternative represented by the community of weavers.

At this stage, we should momentarily step back from our study of the specific communities and attend to the form of individualism that has structured this chapter. This study is, at its base, an attempt to give a systematic account of the individual as a theoretically separable unit of action and analysis within the novel. In the *Wanderjahre*, the individual is a being who possesses both conceptual and socio-historical independence from the novel's social forms. I offer this proposition first and primarily as a formal analytical principle. This allows us to give a degree of order to a novel that, through its "archival" structure, presents itself in a highly *disordered* fashion. We can enforce a logic on the novel's surface appearance of fragmentation if we frame the *Wanderjahre* as a proto-ethnographic account of the "wanderings" of its many characters: primarily, the itinerant trajectory of its main character, Wilhelm, but also his many other associates (e.g., Lenardo,

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<sup>90</sup> See, for instance, Goethe's *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten* (*Conversations of German Refugees*), which he composed in 1795 while simultaneously at work on the *Lehrjahre*.

Montan, Makarie) along the way. To be in a position to observe and create an ethnographic account, to have the distance from the sources of authority and obligation in any given community to distill its workings and essential features, already presumes a degree of independent functionality between the individual and social life. Whether or not the individual is an observer or a participant in a given form of community, the logic of individual self-constitution has ruled throughout my discussion of the novel. To put this point differently, the *Wanderjahre* would have been impossible to write without a type of character who possesses a degree of self-actualizing possibility *qua* individual, distinct and separated from any fixed group identity that he or she might carry simultaneously. While Wilhelm, Lenardo, and others wander in and out of the many communities in the novel to learn something about a specific way of life, their observations are, on a more fundamental level, about an internal dialogue that they have with themselves. This dialogue concerns their development as individuals, about who they have been and will become as fully realized selves. The systematic development of the individual within the novel provides a logic of unity and structure to its otherwise episodic presentation.

The *Wanderjahre* must present a disorganized, disconnected, stitched-together appearance because its novelistic structure is based upon the proposition that the individual and his or her social context are no longer in historical alignment with one another. By fragmenting into a new kind of novel, it reflects the fact that European social life has become increasingly unstable, and that the sense of a fixed ground upon which the individual stands is no longer available. The novel's fictional "editor" is one confirmation that this new historical condition requires an equally new set of formal innovations. Instead of a "natural" or "realistic" presentation of a seamlessly interconnected social

reality, the editor confirms that what we are about to read is the product of a set of individually chosen criteria, standards internal to his own universe of concerns that are never made transparent to the reader. And so, while my analysis has been primarily focused upon the analytical power that a notion of individualism gives us over the formal interconnections of the novel, I have also relied upon a set of historical claims that lend texture and credibility to my formal claim. The historical claim expresses an essential condition: the experience of the individual is marked by an involuntary historical rupture between part and whole, by the individual's disquieting discovery that he or she has been disembedded from fixed social contexts and obligations, tossed out to find another way of living.

My study begins with a claim about the individual's disconnection from social context, but it is driven by a concern for how this divide might be bridged and, as it were, "healed." To borrow words from Lenardo, "society remains the capable man's highest need." Within the *Wanderjahre*, the loss of the individual's connection to the community presents itself as a problem that is solvable through human insight. It will require the reorganization of communal life around a new version of the individual. Its characters may not be able to "return" to a collective life characterized by individual harmony with the whole, but they will, perhaps, be able to mobilize themselves into collective structures built for the sort of individualism that is now inextricable from their sense of self. This is how we arrived at the concept of vocation and the metaphor of membership in a guild of skilled craftsmen. Vocation links the problems of self-constitution (for Wilhelm: what is the activity that is definitive of my essential self?) and social obligation (what activity brings me into a relationship with others?). In the *Wanderjahre*, a notion of vocation is what

allows highly idiosyncratic, otherwise individualistic characters to enter into a relationship with one another. By answering to both the essential questions of self-definition and social obligation, the vocational search expresses the rift that has arisen between individual and community, and suggests a strategy through which this rift might be mitigated.

The guild—and its apprenticeship system—are the historical model for this vocational ideal. In its ideal form, the craft guild represents a balance between individual self-sufficiency and social obligation. As a metaphor for social life in general, the guild suggests that social life should be marked, first, by bodily engagement with the materially sustaining functions of the community and, second, by a commitment to rituals that reinforce the commitment of the individual conscience to the function of the social whole. This is the specific model that the commune attempts to realize across a broad range of social contexts and situations. In each of the three specific textual examples that I have chosen (St. Joseph's retreat into the archaic stability of mountain primitivism, the colonists' enterprising and future-oriented adventurism, the weavers' search for a harmonious balance between stability and economy), community operationalizes a version of the vocational ideal for its own purposes, to forge a sense of individual identification with the whole. Vocation will be the model that bends the individual back toward collective life, and the commune attempts to forge a "second nature" of social purposes, obligations and duties that, by default, no longer present themselves to the individual in a naturalized form.

A concept of nature—"first" nature," "second" nature, or nature otherwise imagined—is implicit in this argument. Each community defines both the individual and collective structures, either in harmony with or in opposition to a concept of a "natural" good. For Joseph, this natural good is the weight of the past, a giving-in to the mesmerizing

power of a tradition that is as solid and apparent as the simple material requirements of his life in the mountains. The emigrants define themselves in opposition to nature, as the epitome of the anti-natural, a constructivist understanding of the good. Their good is an eminently human creation, an infinitely protean unfolding of self-defined ends that are always more powerful and life-affirming than anything that has already been given to them by past generations. And finally, for the weavers—to whom we now turn—the good of nature is a mediating force, an inheritance from the past, but also a guide to an uncertain historical future. A “natural” good is what can be relied upon to provide the balance between the demands of the historical moment and the permanent features of their community as a way of life.

### *Dynamic Traditions: The Weavers’ Commune*

The weavers are a community of proto-capitalistic textile workers that Lenardo encounters during his travels to discover and recruit “useful” members for his emigrant band. Wilhelm is later given a journal of Lenardo’s observations about the time he spent with them, pieces of which the novel’s editor selects from the archive to include in the primary narrative. Lenardo’s journals recount several days spent in close interchange with the weavers, where he is guided through every step of the production process and given an overview of their principles and the significance of their way of life by his mysterious guide Susanna.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> While Lenardo’s ostensible motive for visiting the colony is observation of their way of life and recruitment of “useful” members, he in fact has a far more personal stake in the visit. Wilhelm had previously given Lenardo word during his own travels that a romantic interest of Lenardo’s, Nachodine, had been located.

What Lenardo finds and records is a Pietist religious community built around one particular historical stage of textile production: a piecework, home-and family-based, intensively handwork-driven, deeply cooperative and prosocial form of labor. The weavers' mode of production receives divine sanction through its grounding in their religious beliefs, as well as the blessing of nature through the family as the unit of production. Lenardo visits the community at a moment in which a more advanced stage of capitalistic production and an unrelenting logic of efficiency and automation are beginning to cast doubt on the community's very viability as a way of life, a problem that will become an overwhelming topic of angst for the weavers by the end of Lenardo's time there.

The essential aspect of the weaving colony is that it has, for the moment, created a way of life that integrates the social and conceptual demands of the religious community with a particular set of market forces. Their role in the production process is to transform cotton that has just been harvested into finished fabrics. The raw materials, received by means of a crude supply chain of porters and donkeys, are worked upon by the weavers in successive stages until they are ready for market, at which point the finished goods are placed on boats and leave the weavers' possession forever, exchanged in a monetary economy for other useful goods and services. Both metaphorically and literally, the weavers do not live as high in the mountains as Joseph, who aspires to provide for himself, end-to-end, in a state of material and ideological independence from historical forces. Nor are they as venturesome and as adaptable as the colony of emigrants in the lowlands,

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Nachodine was a member of a tenant farming family expelled from Lenardo's uncle's estate over an unpaid debt. Originally nick-named the "Nut-Brown Maid" when she lived on his uncle's estates, Lenardo gradually comes to the realization that his guide within the weavers' colony, "Susanna" is in fact the long-lost "Nut-Brown Maiden."

where the arrangement of society and the individual's view of the world are completely subjected to the demands of productive economic activity. Rather, the weavers' colony is a bold wager on a middle ground, a faith that the correct way of living in the world will unlock a deeper, harmonious lockstep with the logic of historical change. If even historical change has some natural constants, ultimately moving according to the workings of a benevolent, divine hand, then the right organization allows the commune to live in synchronization with both the benevolent hand of change and the laws of divine constancy. The weavers have discovered a way of life that affirms not only their higher purposes, but the everyday organization of their material, productive existence. In their historical moment, they seem to have arrived at a form of economic productivity that affirms the organization of the commune and its religious way of life.

In the time that Lenardo spends with the weavers, what strikes him is the sense of purpose within the community, the confidence that their everyday life manifests both a higher (religious) purpose and a code for everyday life. The weavers' colony, according to Lenardo's observations, is a place where "simple handiwork" is practiced, and where "strength and feeling operate in unison."<sup>92</sup> The wider purpose and social significance of their work is apparent at every stage of the weaving process, and in how Lenardo represents them in his journals: all manner of quotidian details about the production of the yarn, from the transport and receipt of raw materials to exhaustive technical process of the spinning to its sale at market, testify to the fact that this form of production is open to

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<sup>92</sup> *Wanderjahre*, 332 (Winston), 337 (Trunz)

immediate human recognition and understanding.<sup>93</sup> Not the effacement of productive activity by a widening scale of economic production, but the connection of the body and sense of human context for the process of labor.

The weaving that Lenardo describes is a family operation conducted at the unit of the household. Parents and children participate in the work together—indeed, it is how the trade is normally instructed. Thus the productive community arises from the bonds of natural community. Lenardo observes families working in cooperative units, each contributing what he or she is able to in the production process according to age and position in the family. Authority comes from the familial roles: patriarchs, matriarchs, oldest siblings, and so forth.<sup>94</sup> The weavers reject an excessive division of labor, choosing instead a form of skilled craftwork learned through the inherited bonds of apprenticeship within the family. There are distinct roles within the weaving processes as the members of the family mature and grow, but not to the point that the relationships between individual workers are shorn from their familial context. It is a way of life organized around a stable set of natural unities: family, the sense of beauty and tranquility provided by the

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<sup>93</sup> Major portions of the description of the weaving process, which was only included in the novel's second edition, were included verbatim from firsthand descriptions of these processes that Goethe requested from his friend Johann Heinrich Meyer while Meyer was travelling through Switzerland. See Trunz's commentary on 649, Bahr 4-5. The passages from Meyer are notable not just for their frequency (see Bk. 3, Ch. 5) but in the depth of their detail. The transparency of specific work processes was essential to understanding their way of life, an important contrast with the inscrutability of the machine production that comes to threaten the weavers.

<sup>94</sup> Certain work in the spinning process, Lenardo notes, is best suited to those with a particular personality type (e.g., "calm, careful individuals"), while other work suits those with a particular frame or bodily inclination. Even the seemingly unrelated rituals of courtship and romance have a part to play. About the process of "sizing and fanning" the spools of yarn, Lenardo writes that it is "usually left to the young people who are being trained for the weavers' trade, or in the leisure of a winter evening a brother or lover performs this service for the pretty weaver, or these last at least prepare the bobbins with a weft thread." (340, [W], 350 [T])

surrounding mountains, and productive commercial interchange with the outside world.

To enter into it is, as Lenardo sees, to be enveloped by a concentric circle of stable unities:

“A household based on piety, enlivened and sustained by industry and order, not too restricted, not too broad, the best possible match of duties and abilities to strengths. She [Nachodine, the Nut-Brown Maid, Susanna] is the center of a group of manual workers in the purest, most original sense; here dwelt restraint and far-reaching effectiveness, caution and moderation, innocence and diligence.”<sup>95</sup>

The individual within the weavers’ colony is not expected to search for the specific vocational activity suited to his or her aspirations or abilities. Vocation is an outcome of choosing the community rather than the term for entering into it. The individual relationship with the divine has the same structure as the individual’s assent to the role assigned to him or her by the community: choose this community, and a natural pathway appears, bounded by the intimate dependencies within the family and the commune. Vocation, therefore, follows from a rediscovery of nature in this setting. The individual who opts in to the community will always have a place within the natural order that the community reveals. What the weavers achieve is an alignment between a condition of general expressive individualism and the individualistic nature of their religiosity. If the individual chooses to enter into a direct relationship with God in the spirit of the Pietists, then he or she will find a place among the weavers. An unsettled individualism is given a place through the basic choice structure of the religion: choose a relationship with God, and a place in the community follows.

Although Lenardo gives no specific doctrinal or theological detail about the particular religious tenets of the community, the essential choice that it poses to the

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<sup>95</sup> 341 (W), 351 (T)

individual is to accept the guidance of a higher power as its organizing force. Indeed, the member of the community who gives voice to the greatest doubt about its founding principles, Lenardo's guide Susanna, is the exception that proves the rule. Her skeptical distance allows her to articulate not only its founding principles, but also to see clearly the existential threat to the community posed by machine automation. Those who are fully immersed in the daily life of the commune are hypnotized by its rhythms, gaining no such clarity. For that reason among others, they are vulnerable to the machine-based production revolution.

As Susanna testifies, the sense of immediate unity that makes the weavers into a community is also what blinds them to the nearly inexorable historical forces at work in machine-based textile production. Though her predictions about the future are dire--even apocalyptic--she also suggests that she and the rest of her community feel paralyzed in the face of technological revolution. There is no principle of internal dynamism that would lead the community to respond and adapt in response to this upheaval.

Nachodine calls the issue of machine production a "business matter" (*Handelssorge*), but it is a business question with an existential urgency. It is an issue "not of concern for the moment; no, for the entire future." She describes the problems in terms that evoke the demonic pace and speed of production in Faust's colony, the revolutionizing effect of the machines is almost demonic, a force of nature--"rolling on like a storm" until it "strikes."<sup>96</sup> Like an attack from an enemy external to the community, technological innovation rises up from the outside and attacks.

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<sup>96</sup> 396 (W), 429 (T)

Lenardo never writes the final outcome for the weavers, leaving behind both their way of life and the possibility of a permanent reunion with Susanna. But what the incipient age of machine production makes clear is that the weavers are not organized according to principles that would allow them to transition to a new form of production. Their way of life requires a specific set of material conditions and labor relationships in order to prosper. In this respect, its essential contrast with the colonies becomes clear. The unity of the colonists is an unlimited-scale, artificial solidarity. Society itself becomes a construction project, a machine that creates a “second” nature by renouncing a dependence on any foundational view of nature. The unity that the colonists prize is deliberately artificial—“use” is whatever the group defines it to be—and thereby its own solidarity regardless of conditions. To draw on Arthur Lovejoy’s concept, for the colonists there is no great chain of being, only successively new constructive relationships within society that they establish for themselves.

The weavers’ are ineffectual in the face of an existential threat to their community, the difference between a condition of natural dependence and a constructivist, artificial notion of community helps to frame. In this moment of deep foreboding for the weavers, nature turns from nurturing force to an isolating wilderness. In the face of the machine age, the community no longer manifests a benevolent and providing nature. It has become a temporary shelter from a larger storm. It, too, will falter and be replaced, in Susanna’s telling, by a “primeval solitude” (*“uralte Einsamkeit”*) that lies beneath the activity of any particular way of life. Nature--*“durch Jahrhunderte belebt und bevölkert”*—will be left to its own ends once again.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> 396 (W), 430 (T)

“I cannot blame anyone for thinking of himself first,” Susanna says about the possibility that any one person could adopt the more advanced methods and “ruin us all.” Labor has become competitive, and the individual chooses between cooperation and an initiative that becomes antagonistic to the whole. But even Susanna, one of the most clear-eyed and resourceful members of the group, “would consider myself despicable if I were to plunder these good people and see them finally wander out into the world, poor and helpless.” The rest of community knows they are in trouble, but “no one decides on any helpful steps.” They can only “think and talk,” exchanging mutual assurances that have no purchase on the action required to mobilize for machine production. For most, the connection to the unity of self and community in the existing model is greater than the force of urgency to uproot the very foundation of their labor.

The hesitation shown by the members of weaving colony in the face of obvious doom suggests the unfitness of their way of life for fully individualistic economic relationships. Without their consent, they are transitioning to an adversarial, proto-capitalistic system, where the difference between individual producers is measured not in terms of a natural and fluid relationship between roles in the process of production, but in a life-and-death struggle against the other. Only those who mobilize quickly and aggressively to acquire production capacity on a mass scale will survive and continue to be masters of their own fate. The alternative to the weaver’s community--to a stable existing within fixed cultural forms--is *wandering*. “And sooner or later they must wander” Nachodine laments<sup>98</sup> Wandering is no longer a temporary experiment or passage into

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<sup>98</sup> “Und wandern müssen sie früh oder spat,” 430 (Trunz)

maturity, as it appeared to Wilhelm before he began his surgical training, but a permanent way of life. Those who will convert to machine production become founders within their own communities, effectively uprooting themselves from its existing forms and inventing a new one that replaces it.<sup>99</sup>

The same economic processes that organized the community around the family as a productive unit now threatens to relegate those productive units to absolute obsolescence. Sooner or later, the community will be dissolved, and wandering—which began for Wilhelm, Lenardo and others as a provisional status *before* entering into the boundaries and expectations of a particular community—becomes history’s background condition, a status quo that that lies behind all other fixed and settled unities.

The final condition for the individual is to be turned toward or away from the community.<sup>100</sup> The settled unities and achievements of each community do not disappear entirely, but they are primarily carried and realized in different ways by exceptional individual characters instead of collective projects.

I bring the three primary forms of the commune together once more in this form to clarify the particular tension I have identified. On the one hand, the commune in the *Wanderjahre* describes a standard form of small-scale communal life. On the other, it

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<sup>99</sup> Before her fiancé died, Nachodine considered emigrating to North America with him, where the more primitive type of weaving practiced by the commune would still be viable. But in her current state, an assistant of hers who proposes marriage wants to stay and transition to machine production. Another ambitious member of a nearby commune threatens to do the same.

<sup>100</sup> Goethe made numerous editorial choices in the second 1829 edition of the novel that affirmed the importance of the wanderer within the novel. Books two and three of the 1829 edition conclude with a series of aphorisms, “Reflections in the Spirit of Wanderers: Art, Science, Nature” and “From Makarie’s Archive.”

expresses a progression of successive forms, ending with the “modernizations” of the colony:

**Table 5: Overview of Communes in the *Wanderjahre***

<b>Commune</b>	<b>Notable Symbols and Characters</b>	<b>Formal Features</b>	<b>Themes</b>
<b>Mountain Rustics</b>	Ruined chapel (caretaker relationship) Lily stalk (“purity”) - Carpentry (“biblical” vocation) Huntsman (craft knowledge) Saint Joseph II (imitation)	Recorded to Wilhelm’s fiancée in letters Community restates prior cultural and religious forms	Adequacy of subsistence Charity between members Informal cooperation Communal self-sufficiency
<b>Colonial Emigrants</b>	Wanderer/Wandering Lenardo Montan	Details selected according to archivist’s discretion Community a collection of the “right” kind of (useful) individuals	World scale ( <i>“Weltfrömmigkeit”</i> ) Use-value Flexibility Functional relationships
<b>Weaving Commune</b>	Handwork Spinning/refinement of “raw” materials Nachodine (“Nut-Brown Maiden”)	Recorded for “research” purposes by Lenardo in journals, ethnographic accounts Community an aggregate of private structures (family)	Whole is graspable by senses, intellect Assent to principles of whole by private conscience “Natural” productivity Balance, harmony

Although Lenardo does not write about the fate of the weavers' commune, in real historical terms, there could be no doubt even for Goethe's own time about the immanent ruin of communes like theirs. The breakup of this community represents a defeat for a few notable characters (e.g., Nachodine, whom Lenardo entrusts as an assistant to Makarie), as well as the destruction of a particular way of life, but within the *Wanderjahre's* symbolic topology, the breakup of the weavers' commune suggests that one entire mode of communal organization is in doubt: the community that mediates between an indefinite past and an unlimited future. Instead (here we look to the colonial project) it winnows down the open-endedness of the future into a fixed structure. The imminent breakdown of the weavers' commune is, first, a retreat from the claim that the past has on the present; second, it is a breakage of the link between the multiple simultaneous realities of the community. That is, the community is neither organized around a higher reality that resides outside of the everyday (e.g., Joseph in the mountains), nor is it structured with reference to a middle zone between the higher and everyday worlds (e.g., the weavers). Instead, the future horizon—the horizon beyond the archive—belongs to communities that are organized primarily with respect to the mundane, everyday “worlds,” like those of the colony that persist in thrall to the everyday. The draw of the colony is that it can state its purposes—for both the individual and the social whole—in simple terms: to *be* useful, and to *seek out* things useful. As we anticipated in an earlier moment of this chapter, by tracing this process, we have identified one possibility of a secularization narrative internal to the symbolic world of the *Wanderjahre* itself.

I should reiterate once again at this moment that my reading of a secularization narrative within the *Wanderjahre* does not ascribe any teleological or ontological determinism within the text itself. Rather, what the *Wanderjahre* seeks to do is to trace out the individual's broader experience of multiple levels of reality, as well as a process by which these levels are circumscribed and eventually written out from collective structures.

In short, while the novel traces the reorganization of collective life around an everyday reality that is perpetually turned toward the future, on another level, it is a novel about the individual as wanderer with respect to this process: about the individual's unsteady and non-linear relationship to a process of secularization that effaces these levels of reality. If the secular represents an increasingly narrow slice of a wider horizon of possibility, then the individual becomes at least a partial outside to the activities of collective life, a remainder containing other possibilities outside of the social. The wanderer contains the orientations that predominant forms of collective life, with all their boundaries and functional specificity, can no longer integrate. The inwardness and freedom of the individual becomes a storehouse of alternative realities with respect to the social order, and one dimension of the *Wanderjahre* will map out these capacities.

The guild builds a vocational structure that allows for the multiple levels of reality (as they have been defined in this chapter) to be unified. First, its work takes place in view of higher forces and powers, the so-called "guild mysteries" that remain out of view except in times of ritual exception. Second, it provides the institutional structure for a substantive past, an immemorial tradition to which the labors of the current generation have the relationship of caretaker and inheritor. The anchoring practice of these features is the materiality of guild labor, the set of bodily and technical practices that forge a collective life

through shared attention on objects of labor. The *Wanderjahre* maps the logic of the guild onto the community itself. The commune aspires to recreate the guild structure at the level of the entire community; a flexible form of collective life that accounts for both higher and mundane worlds; a mix of tradition and forward movement that anchors the individual in an enduring social reality. In the opposition between what is higher and lower, what is in the past and what is in the future, the commune contains an implicit notion of a balanced whole—a balance that is informed by the needs of the individual. But the *Wanderjahre* also raises the possibility that any balance is essentially illusory, that the line of plot development ending with the colony project also reveals a tendentious “modernization” direction (in a pejorative sense) within history. The colony---at the same time both stultifyingly concrete (“society is functional, a *building*”) and meaninglessly abstract (“society is what is ‘useful’”)—offers up a version of history in which the promise of the vocational path to a sense of the whole is essentially lost. Within the colony, vocation becomes functional assimilation; to belong is neither more nor less than to fulfill a particular, circumscribed function.

Accordingly, the individual carries within himself the promise of vocational fulfillment even as the social context for the exercise of vocation becomes ever-more attenuated. If the *Wanderjahre* has a resolution rather than a mere ending, then it is to be found at the level of the fate and personality of its individual characters. We have already been introduced by means of analogy to a triad of characters whose features map onto the levels of reality within the commune. From “low” to “high,” respectively, the characters of Montan, Makarie and Wilhelm remain embodiments of a whole that is no longer representable within any specific form of community itself. This is a strange feature of the

*Wanderjahre* in its final sections: the personality of the individual becomes a microcosm of what the entire community no longer contains. The individual does not reach toward an ideal that exceeds him; rather, he or she *is* an ideal superimposed against an increasingly flattened everyday world. For this reason, a novel that has been, for the bulk of its duration, an ethnographic catalog of communal forms and situations will be, by its conclusion, a catalog of eccentric individual outliers. The novel ends with an incompatibility between individual satisfaction and communal life. Or rather, the inability of the vocational ideal to achieve satisfaction in a communal setting. Indeed, there is a perverse reversal of sorts that the vocational ideal effects in the novel's conclusion: the character who is the fullest embodiment of a rich vocational ideal (Wilhelm) will continue to be separated from the communal forms the novel has cataloged. Vocation, which was supposed to be the condition of integration into the community, becomes the terms by which the individual exceeds and remains outside of it. In the character of Wilhelm, the vocational ideal is fulfilled in a condition of separation from the community.

Wilhelm is the subject of the novel's brief final chapter, an episode that provides a measure of symbolic closure to the vocational question. He is still--for lack of any contrary indications—a wanderer, having chosen not to affiliate with the colonies or any of the other communities through which he travelled. A ferry passenger on a river that cuts its way through a steep gorge, he is startled out of admiration for the view by a man on horseback who, making his way along a treacherous pathway, suddenly falls with his horse into the river when the earth on the steep path collapses. When the drowning and unconscious person is hoisted onto the boat, Wilhelm uses his medical training to revive him, only noticing with shock after he has successfully finished his work that the man is in

fact his own son, Felix. The only example of Wilhelm's medical training in action will be this episode, undertaken in service of a family member. Wilhelm's vocational purpose has come full circle: a resolution that began out of a personal loss (the death of his friend in the countryside) is paid back by the personally significant act of saving his son's life. Thus the work that Wilhelm undertakes with his training will not be an act of general goodwill, exercised without discrimination on a public body in the mundane everyday, but rather an extraordinary heroic act, made significant because of the private relationship between practitioner and beneficiary. In Wilhelm, vocation retains its personal quality, and this final episode confirms an element of separation between Wilhelm and the patterns of life in the community.

## Chapter Two:

### George Eliot's Village Humanism and the Life of the Nation

By the latter half of her career as a novelist, George Eliot had arrived at a dilemma that could only be resolved through a risk to her humanistic principles, a difficulty that went to the foundation of what she understood to be the purpose of fiction itself. This chapter will consider the problems that Eliot represented when, as a writer of nostalgic English country life, she subjected her provincial novel to the demands of a universalizing Christian humanism. This claim should be understood within Eliot's fundamentally ethical approach to the novel, and what she understood as the end of realism: to represent the individual conscience in action. Eliot did not take the individual to be a first principle of social life; instead she understood the individual to be the bearer of *capacities* (e.g., "sympathy") that defined the "web" of relationships (to use *Middlemarch's* famous metaphor) that were constitutive of community in the provincial setting. For Eliot the individual would be the subjective expression of her humanistic ideals, but her humanism would only reach its full expression—and have its significance appreciated by her contemporaries—within the form of community that I have called "the village."

The previous chapter examined Goethe's use of what I called "the commune," where the terms of membership are defined by the structure of the inner calling; the individual is bound to the community by his sense of vocational duty. The village, by contrast, is a collective whose most important feature is its members' shared sensorium—that is, their common material references that make up an everyday reality. "There is no sense of ease

like the ease *we* felt in those scenes where we were born, where objects became dear to us before we had known the labor of choice,” the narrator declares at the beginning of *The Mill on the Floss*.<sup>1</sup> Eliot’s novels will often understand the village form, and the concomitant form of individuality that it cultivates in terms of a theoretical prior, as a hypothetical starting point that is inaccessible to the present. If the commune is a form of utopian community driven by the call to conscience and common action inspired by the vocational ideal, then the village is motivated by a nostalgia for the past, when an imaginary collective life gathers around a single set of material features that are definitive of both group and individual identity.<sup>2</sup> From this description it should be inferred that I do not describe the village as a historical construct, but as a technique for creating a particular type of illusion. In Eliot’s case this is a form of realism about the individual capacity for sympathy. The villages of Hayslope (*Adam Bede*), St. Ogg’s (*Mill on the Floss*) and Middlemarch, to cite just a few examples, describe a world where detail is revealed by the exchange of sympathy, by a reference through common objects. I describe how Eliot uses the village as a controlling figure to understand the forces of social disaggregation. This disaggregation, she would show, led to an abstraction of the sympathetic relationships that were integral to her humanism.

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<sup>1</sup> George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. Gordon S. Haight, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 151.

<sup>2</sup> The architectural historian Greg Stevenson defines the village as the smallest form of community that still contains space shared in common: “Today a village is understood as a collection of buildings (usually at least 20) that is larger than a hamlet, yet smaller than a town, and which contains at least one communal or public building. This is most commonly the parish church, though it can be a chapel, school, public house, shop, post-office, smithy or mill. Villagers will share communal resources such as access roads, a water supply, and usually a place of worship.” Greg Stephenson, “What Is a Village?” (BBC, 2006)

In this chapter I will argue that Eliot's humanistic aspirations were confirmed in her representation of the village, but forced to come to terms with a widening of the scale of social life in the form of the nation. The village is where the humanistic potential of sympathy is fully defined. It is the community where the individual is *realized* in his or her most humane form. But it is also ephemeral. As Eliot's provincial novels suggest, it is visible only in the reconstructions of retrospective nostalgia. In the absence of a shared material basis for life, Eliot saw the possibility that the social foundation would blend into an enervating form of materialism, where the basis of social life would be subordinated to economic, bureaucratic, and institutional structures. Eliot would develop an interest in the nation as a mediating communal form, between the impossibility of the village and the unlimited cosmopolitanism that she read into both present and future. I develop this argument through an interpretation of Eliot's novel of change in the English countryside, *The Mill on The Floss* (1860), where the breakdown of relationships is captured by the disintegration of the Tulliver family at their ancestral mill.

Having established the conceptual categories and aesthetic features of the village and sympathy in *Mill*, I then read the parallel storylines of Eliot's sweeping last novel, *Daniel Deronda*, as an exploration of two paths that she thought nationalism might take. The first is represented by the novel's "English" subplot, in the marriage and growth to maturity of the young upper-class woman Gwendolyn Harleth, and the second by the novel's so-called "Jewish" subplot, that of the aristocratic Daniel Deronda, his discovery and adoption of his Jewish parentage. This is *Daniel Deronda's* surprising conclusion: the main character comes into a sense of purpose and maturity through his identification with the structures of historical descent revealed by his true parentage. Eliot's philosemitism presents a different

basis for the nation, and in doing so suggests her turning away from the English model of shared imagination.

## I.

Eliot's novels depict a rural life where individual action was diffused into the makeup of the social world itself. The village is where the individual is not taken to be an agent with decision-making powers, but a participatory force in a community defined by an aesthetic of cooperation and mutuality. The village was supposed to represent a social ethic *realized* in its most complete form, but in doing so it sacrificed the development of the individual's capacity to judge in matters of conscience. The village diffuses conscience in favor of a static, naturalized social order. As other critics have argued, the choice to present an idealized harmony of country life put Eliot at risk of a reactionary social organicism, where her novels have been accused of constructing an ahistorical, quietist rural falsehood.<sup>3</sup> It is quite fair to criticize Eliot for a "moral" approach to fiction that shielded her from an interest in materialisms or structural analysis, but I want to argue that the historical unreality of the rural village was dedicated to the problem of sympathetic inclusion and social benevolence. In her late work, this was a problem that she exploited to great effect: if the individual is *not* embedded within a community that inspires an immediate identification with a set of comprehensible ends, then, by Eliot's psychological approach to realism, it followed that the direction of the life-course must somehow be developed from *within*, through the individual development of correct judgments and ethical capacities that

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<sup>3</sup> For an important critique along this line, see Daniel Cottom, *Social Figures: George Eliot, Social History and Literary Representation*, Theory and History of Literature, v. 44 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987)

reconstitute the ends supplied by the community—real or imaginary. The village becomes a shadow version for what the individual *could* or *would* achieve in its absence; impossible because it bears no resemblance to the historical situation in England, but necessary because it presents an intelligible model of the relationship between individual and the community.

It is in the context of a systemic emphasis on individualism that I want to consider Eliot's Christian humanism. Eliot understood that social life would become increasingly dominated by a model that ascribed a still-uncertain set of rights and powers to the individual. Even as she became steeped in a social science of her own time that treated the individual as an atomic social unit, she understood the everyday individual to be an unreal and aspirational fantasy. But unlike the impossibility of the village, individualism could be practiced, inculcated as expectation and practiced in the anarchical, "real" historical life that Eliot observed around her.<sup>4</sup> The individual act could be spontaneous, historically indifferent to the past in a manner that any community never could. Without systematic guidance for individual conduct, the individual would be required to *think and act systematically*.

Eliot understood that individuals were not *essentially* different than they had been prior to this change. Individualism required the development of capacities that had come about historically, cultivated within systems and for historical reasons that had lost their hold on the present. This was the promise of Christianity for Eliot: a systematic way of thinking that

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, Eliot's cautious exchanges with Frederic Harrison and the English positivist tradition. See Terence R. Wright, *The Religion of Humanity: The Impact of Comtean Positivism on Victorian Britain* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), Chapter Five.

was both historically true, but in its *humanistic* form, decontextualized, free to become a spontaneous principle of action. Eliot believed that a humanistic principle of action had the capacity to internalize what had otherwise been an external principle of social construction. That is to say, what defined the village as a community had to become part of the individual conscience. Humanism had to become the spiritualized expression of a community left behind, a historical circumstance given endless life as the basis for individualism.

The question posed by this chapter, then, is why Eliot was not able to follow through on the promise of her own humanism. Christianity in its secular, humanized form was supposed to make an individual with an ethic for all circumstances. Instead, what we see in Eliot's late work is a turn *back* to a form of community committed to its own historically specific past. What must be explained is why Eliot turned away from her reliance on sympathetic imagination in the present, the organic ethic of the village, and the "virtualization" of village principles on a national scale. Instead—as in the Jewish subplot of *Daniel Deronda*—the community would be based on a specific commitment to its own exclusive historical past, extended into the founding of the nation. The final entry in Eliot's career as a novelist becomes a contest for the future: between moral capacities and moral communities. And her final novel *Daniel Deronda* decides in favor of the latter.

Let us further develop this problem by way of an old dilemma concerning her most famous novel, *Middlemarch*. Its subtitle, "A Provincial Novel," has led critics to disagree about the extent to which her portrait of country life elided the forces of historical change that roiled

England.<sup>5</sup> Was the country, for Eliot, a mystifying, socially neutralizing escape from the “real” England represented by, say, an industrializing Manchester or Birmingham (where Marx had done his research), or was Eliot simply taking a different view of these same forces?<sup>6</sup>

Eliot set her novels in the country because it allowed for a degree of escape from contingent historical forces that rend social life into opposing interests and forces.<sup>7</sup> Both her essays and her novels contain the idea that there was something romantically essential about country life, that it was constitutive for the proper development of human potential. In *The Mill on the Floss*, she tells the story of the young Maggie and Tom Tulliver, before and after their family’s financial misfortunes dislodge them from their ancestral homestead next to the fictional River Floss: “One’s delight in an elderberry bush overhanging the confused leafage of a hedgerow bank” is “an entirely justifiable preference” to “any of those severely regulated minds who are free from the weakness of any attachment that does not rest on a demonstrable superiority of qualities.”<sup>8</sup> The countryside provides an aesthetic education that may be imperfectly *formed*, but it is not *designed* or *imposed*. By this

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<sup>5</sup> For a concise overview of how the changes in labor relations within the English countryside presaged England’s overall industrialization, see chapter 5, “The Agrarian Origins of Capitalism,” in Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism : A Longer View*, [New, revised and expanded edition]. (London ; New York: Verso, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> See Terry Eagleton’s canonical critique of Eliot’s supposed ahistorical representation of the countryside Terry Eagleton, “Ideology and Literary Form,” *New Left Review* I, no. 90 (1975): 81–109. For a more recent defense of Eliot’s incorporation of history into *Middlemarch*, see Henry Staten, “Is Middlemarch Ahistorical?” *PMLA* 115, no. 5 (2000): 991–1005, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/463266>. The various answers to Eliot’s interest in a realistic history tends to turn on a diagnosis of Eliot’s undeniably conservative tendencies.

<sup>7</sup> Eliot (1819-1880) and Marx (1818-1883) were almost exact contemporaries. While there is reason to believe she would have been familiar with some of his most well-known work (his *Communist Manifesto* was published in England in 1850), she never mentioned him in any of her papers or letters.

<sup>8</sup> Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, 152.

argument, the country was superior because its values simply presented themselves, free of the strictures of human intentionality. So far we are in well-traveled critical territory, reviewing Eliot's debt to a romantic tradition that led her to frequently identify with an organic conception of society.<sup>9</sup> From her early intellectual life as an essayist and reviewer into her career as a novelist, the country served as an alternative mode of human organization, opposed to the economic and political machinations through which the English society agonistically *made itself*—politically, deliberately— into a modern nation and empire.

The deliberative institutions of the city (law, markets, civic life) contrast with Eliot's depiction of the country as a zone of immediate self-identity between the part (e.g., the individual, the class) and the whole (i.e., the provincial village). Within the organic village the parts of human society are distinct but know their relationship to the whole intrinsically, by virtue of their conformity with a deeper, "natural" order on which they have a prerational dependence.<sup>10</sup> As Raymond Williams has observed, there is an ideological function to the landscape in Eliot, which depends on the aesthetic harmonization of conflictual and contingently historical social relationships.<sup>11</sup> Williams is

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<sup>9</sup> In one of her most-cited essays, "The Natural History of German Life" (1856), Eliot signals her own approval of a certain organic constitution of society through a survey of the work of German proto-sociologist Wilhelm Riehl: "The nature of European men has its roots intertwined with the past, and can only be developed by allowing those roots to remain undisturbed while the process of development is going on until that perfect ripeness of the seed which carries with it a life independent of the root," in George Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," in *Essays*, ed. Thomas Pinney (New York: Columbia University Press, n.d.), 288.

<sup>10</sup> Organic social relationships are the basis for what I have called the "village" model of society in Eliot's novels.

<sup>11</sup> Williams: "Another way of putting this would be to say that though George Eliot restores the real inhabitants of rural England to their places in what had been a socially selective landscape, she does not get much further than restoring them *as a landscape*" (emphasis in original). In Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, 1st Oxford University Press pbk. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 168

surely right about the effects of the agrarian setting, where natural outgrowths and human purposes seem to exist to support and justify one another. This is exactly what can be detected in the detached but still-familiar tone of the narrator within *Middlemarch*.<sup>12</sup>

Without (yet) fully confronting the neutralization of social difference presented by Eliot's organicism, we can comment on the epistemological and ethical implications of the village. For the inhabitant of the town Middlemarch, their locale is a legible, spontaneously knowable place. The town's compactness as a social unit projects through the familiarity of its landscape: "Little details gave each field a particular physiognomy," writes the narrator of *Middlemarch*, "dear to the eyes that have looked on them from childhood."<sup>13</sup> The field, a site of commercial extraction for market value according to the particular power dynamics of the countryside, becomes a timeless artifact when it is joined to the organic body of the community.

The "past" that Eliot creates in her fiction—a "recent past" that would have been within memory of her reading audience, but far enough in hindsight to allow for the sense of break with the present—is a past whose outlines are already known through the desires of her readers, with a deliberately manufactured familiarity and simplified social relations.<sup>14</sup> The elements of country life (especially the Wordsworthian presentation of the agrarian

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, in a single paragraph of *Middlemarch*, the mutuality of natural and human borders ("the gray gate and fences against the depths of the bordering wood;") the use of natural metaphors for human structures ("stray hovel, its old, old thatch full of mossy hills and valleys") the responsiveness of nature to human need ("the great oak shadowing a bare place in mid-pasture;") and vice-versa ("the sudden slope of the old marl-pit," used to obtain clay and silt for building, makes "a red background for the burdock" plant). In George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, Modern Library edition (New York: Modern Library, 1994), 98

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>14</sup> See Fred C. Thomson, "The Theme of Alienation in *Silas Marner*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 20, no. 1 (1965): 77, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2932493>.

working classes) are understood to have a different relationship to their own past, what Eliot calls their “incarnate history.”<sup>15</sup>

As a matter of representation, Eliot’s provincial novels contains a localist epistemology: to know a thing is to be close enough to it to have seen it develop through personal experience, to have a firsthand knowledge of its past, and to have the knowledge that it arose according to laws of nature.<sup>16</sup> As *Middlemarch* makes clear in the failure of its most ambitious and modern scientific systematizer, the young doctor Tertius Lydgate, there can be no knowledge of things in general, only of what is close at hand to the observer. The organic functions of the village, for all their apparent ability to resolving intractable social differences, can only function through the limitation imposed by borders. That is, a strict delineation of the knowable “inside” and the different “outside” that implicates its observer in the community itself. The village of Middlemarch must contain *its* specific inhabitants and physical makeup, even as it is canonized within the novel as a village archetype.

Eliot believed that the systematic approach to understanding a community was wrong because it was second order. What holds the village together can be found in her most famous and often obscuring moral-philosophical concept: “sympathy.” Eliot explains in her “German Life” essay that “appeals founded on generalizations and statistics require a

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<sup>15</sup> Eliot, “Essays,” n.d., 288.

<sup>16</sup> From her essay *The Natural History of German Life* (1856): “The nature of European men has its roots intertwined with the past, and can only be developed by allowing those roots to remain undisturbed while the process of development is going on until that perfect ripeness of the seed which carries with it a life independent of the root.” In *ibid.*, 288. Her praise for Wilhelm Riehl is directed at the fact that he took an empirical, early ethnographic approach to the peasant classes of Europe: approaching them not as ideal types, but as objects of study within detailed fieldwork.

sympathy ready-made, a moral sentiment already in activity.”<sup>17</sup> This claim can be taken two ways. First, the scientific outsider, for whom the community operates through discernible social laws, takes the *outcome* of the peasants’ sympathetic identification with one another and makes it into a (falsely) general law. As a result the scientific observer sees neither the true essence of the peasants’ relationship, nor the limitations of the “law” in the local context of the village. And conversely, from the inside, the inhabitant of the village will not respond to appeals founded on disinterested rationality; to communicate within the village is to speak about objects already known, things with which the inhabitants have a relationship, i.e., a “sympathetic” understanding.<sup>18</sup>

The villager’s cognitive style is based on an understanding of the limits of reason. The villager knows the world through sympathetic identification, by referring all questions back to the involvement of one’s own self.<sup>19</sup> Eliot’s choice to set her most important half-dozen novels in the countryside, then, could be taken as a claim about a particularly valuable form of knowledge: it is an attempt to generalize the village’s intrinsically local way of knowing. Again in “German Life” she writes: “Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 270.

<sup>18</sup> Eliot cites an example from Riehl in “German Life” about the reaction of peasant populations to political reforms compared to the reactions of the “educated townsman:” “The very practical views of the peasants with regard to the demands of the people were in amusing contrast with the abstract theorizing of the educated townsmen. The peasant continually withheld all State payments until he saw how matters would turn out, and was disposed to reckon up the solid benefit, in the form of land or money, that might come to him from the changes obtained. While the townsman was heating his brains about representation on the broadest basis, the peasant asked if the relation between tenant and landlord would continue as before, and whether the removal of the “feudal obligations” meant that the farmer should become owner of the land!” In *ibid.*, 284.

<sup>19</sup> “Eliot shows how the stance of detached analysis undermines the individual’s moral character and responsiveness, and also produces false forms of knowledge. The ideal of participant observation in Riehl is then presented by Eliot as a solution to both the moral and epistemological consequences of this dangerous detachment.” In Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance : Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton [N.J.]: Princeton University Press, 2001), 12

mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot.”<sup>20</sup> The novel becomes the best example of the proper limits of knowledge. There is an implicit realism to Eliot’s formulation: the novel is a kind of system for knowing things *as they really are*, to the extent that the same sympathetic relationship internal to the situation also animates the system of representation in the realistic novel. The novel becomes a paradox of social representation: the village’s organic composition, with a constitution that is resistant to being known from the outside, becomes capable of representation in the novel form.

## II.

If the breakdown of the village—the erosion of relationships on a sympathetic basis—was a development that Eliot anticipated on several fronts, I should also present the claim that Eliot not only recognized an abstractive, systematizing, scale-expanding tendency, she also promoted it in her own way: in a universalizing project represented by her disillusionment with traditional Christianity, and subsequently in her spiritual rehabilitation as a “Christian humanist.”

In January of 1842, when she was 22, Eliot made the first public declaration of a private spiritual crisis by refusing to attend church with her father.<sup>21</sup> Although she would eventually return to worship on occasions in the future, the significance of the incident is reflected in letters that speak to Eliot’s commitment to what she understood as the *purpose*

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<sup>20</sup> Eliot, “Essays,” n.d., 271.

<sup>21</sup> Letter by Robert Evans, 2 January, 1842. In George Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters*, Yale edition, vols. 1 (1836-1851) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 124

of Christianity, alongside her rejection of its exclusive rewards for adherents to Christian doctrine: “I can rejoice in all the joys of humanity,” she writes in the same month when she stopped going to church, “in all that serves to elevate and purify feeling and action.” But “not will I quarrel with the million who, I am persuaded, are with me in intention though our dialect differ.”<sup>22</sup> Eliot was beginning to fall away from the dialect of her birth Anglicanism toward a more general revelation of the affinity between versions of the divine. The question that presented itself—as it did to many freethinkers of Eliot’s era—was the nature of the “general truth” that could be extracted from Christianity’s exclusive claims.

What Eliot arrived at in her letters bore a fundamental, more than rhetorical, resemblance to the language of sympathy we have reviewed above: “agreement between intellects seems unattainable, and we turn to the *truth of feeling* as the only universal bond of union.”<sup>23</sup> The problem of the general religious truth pits the limits of reason against the translatability of the sympathetic bond. As in the village, “true” knowledge exists outside of systematic understanding. Where the function of sympathy in humanistic practice differs from the organic constitution of the village by sympathy is this: humanist sympathy (Christian or otherwise) has a capacity for unlimited translation. The sympathetic aspect of Christianity made its particular truth accessible to almost any person. It contained universal wisdom about the connection between peoples of all religious traditions. Eliot

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<sup>22</sup> Letter by George Eliot, 28 January 1842. In *ibid.*, 125. See also this letter by Eliot (2 February 1842) a month later: “I regard these writings as histories consisting of mingled truths and fiction, and while I admire and cherish much of what I believe to have been the moral teaching of Jesus himself, I consider the system of doctrines built upon the facts of his life and drawn as to as to its materials from Jewish notions to be the most dishonourable to God and most pernicious in its influence on individual and social unhappiness.”

<sup>23</sup> Letter by George Eliot, 9 October 1843. In *ibid.*, 162

would go on to develop this idea against the spiritual territorialism of evangelical religion.

This, from an essay a decade later that was critical of the prominent English evangelical preacher John Cumming:

But Dr. Cumming's God is the very opposite of all this: he is a God who instead of sharing and aiding our human sympathies, is directly in collision with them; who instead of strengthening the bond between man and man, by encouraging the sense that they are both alike the objects of His love and care, thrusts himself between them and forbids them to feel for each other except as they have relation to Him.<sup>24</sup>

What Eliot understands by true religion is the very basis for communication ("strengthening the bond between man and man") and social life. Cumming's violation is not just wrong on ethical grounds, because it encourages individuals to turn against one another: it also contains a substantive error in its refusal to acknowledge the ontological oneness at the basis of religious traditions, a fact that Eliot often anthropomorphized in the patrilineal description of the Christian father and shared spiritual inheritance.<sup>25</sup>

Christianity's truth was unthinkable outside of the specific historical and theological path that it took to achieve its "mature" form, but now that that form had taken shape, the specific historical formation could be, more or less, left behind. By means of its particular and exclusionary history, Christianity had yielded general lessons.

These youthful formulations of anti-religion were of course not original to Eliot, but few young intellectuals of Eliot's persuasion would contribute as much to their development

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<sup>24</sup> George Eliot, "Evangelical Teaching: Dr. Cumming," in *Essays*, ed. Thomas Pinney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1855), 188.

<sup>25</sup> In a letter from 28 January 1842: "I fully participate in the belief that only heaven here or hereafter is to be found in conformity with the will of the Supreme; a continual aiming at the attainment of that perfect ideal, the true Logos that dwells in the bosom of the One Father." Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters*, 125

and spread. Just a few years later, her early convictions would result in a still-authoritative 1846 translation of David Friedrich Strauss' infamous *Das Leben Jesu*.<sup>26</sup> The prolonged encounter with Strauss further shaped Eliot's humanism as it departed from Christianity. Strauss' devastatingly controversial "insight" about Christianity was that it could be both literally false, in the sense of getting the details of the historical Jesus factually wrong, while also being true on a higher, "mythical" ground. The literal truth of Christianity, Strauss asserted, relied on the Bible's unreliable account of supernatural events and miracles during the life of Christ, culminating in a skeptical review of the accounts of miracles surrounding Christ's resurrection and ascent to heaven. Strauss' devastating catalog of the inconsistencies in the historical evidence meant, in his view, that the "historical" Jesus had to fall.<sup>27</sup>

As a result, Eliot read in Strauss, a new relationship had opened up between the traditional, "naive" believer (my term) in religious revelation, and the critical believer who retains an interest in religion for its mythological truth. The naive believer lives in a separate epistemological plane, where belief exists on the basis of faith alone. Criticism has nothing to say to the believer who believes out of faith, while the critical believer can accept the essential truth of Christianity on the basis of a higher, "philosophic" admiration.<sup>28</sup> Religion could be "true" for the critical understanding at the level of a universal essence (an "idea")

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<sup>26</sup> *The Life of Jesus*, published 1835 in Germany, translated by Eliot to English in 1846.

<sup>27</sup> See Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*, Revised ed. edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 233-44 for an excellent overview of the historical reception and theological significance of Strauss' work.

<sup>28</sup> David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. George Eliot, Lives of Jesus Series (Ramsey, NJ: Sigler Press, 1994), 757-58.

that appears in a historically appropriate garb according to the epistemological requirements for understanding by a specific culture.<sup>29</sup>

Strauss himself would attempt to unify the gap he opens between faith and knowledge. In the last section of *The Life of Jesus*, he argues that the historical past can be subjected to historical-critical scrutiny, harvested for philosophical insight—and the husk of its past thrown away. Strauss' final declaration that criticism must “re-establish dogmatically that which has been destroyed critically” represented a double-sided sword for Eliot. On one side he “saves” Christianity by decoupling its truth or falsity from the historical truth of the Apostles' accounts. On the other, he raises the problem (which his anti-foundational critical method is not prepared to confront) of *how* the “idea” of Christianity's past can be reconciled with the needs of the present (outside of dogma).

But Eliot's interest in the sacred status of the text was tied to a more germane question for her own commitments: how to make sense of the difference between specific historical truths and general truths within an ethics of the present that sought to cultivate a widespread form of humanistic concern. Whether or not an intellectual like Eliot chose to discard the divine nature of religious revelation entirely, Strauss's historico-critical approach to biblical analysis made it far more plausible to consider the historicity of a text that claimed to speak timelessly, separating the elements that were narrowly constrained by circumstances from the “general” religious phenomenon that raised itself above the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 197.

meanness of time and place. “No educated person can dispense with some knowledge of the evidence,” Eliot declared, on which sacred texts were based.<sup>30</sup>

The form of the problem that would trouble Eliot was this: by attempting to save a tradition from what Eliot would call the “extreme heterodoxy” of historicism, the interpreter puts tremendous pressure on the mechanism that sifts the “general” truth from the particular.<sup>31</sup>

To be sure, Eliot was confronted by innumerable philosophical and hermeneutic approaches to this problem, perhaps the most significant being the progressive revelation of a Hegelianism that informed Strauss himself.<sup>32</sup> But Eliot wanted to understand the problem synchronically, as a question about the level of moral improvement that individuals might achieve in her own time as a result of a cumulative general synthesis of historically revealed truths. Eliot’s assimilation of the historical problem was therefore fundamentally ethical, a matter of the capacities for individual sympathy for one’s fellow.<sup>33</sup>

What was at stake in the difference between an evanescent historical manifestation of an

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<sup>30</sup> George Eliot, “Introduction to Genesis,” in *Essays*, ed. Thomas Pinney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1856), 255–60, 258. One strand of this problem would crystallize into the Victorian formulation of what came to be known as the “faith-and-doubt” problematic, which will be considered in greater depth in the next chapter on Herman Melville’s long poem, *Clarel*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>32</sup> Eliot laid out the Hegelian approach in a 1856 essay on the historical-critical approach to the interpretation of Genesis, which she called a “mild heterodoxy, which allows the presence of mythical and legendary elements in the Hebrew records, and renounces the idea that they are from beginning to end infallible, but still regards them as the medium of a special revelation, as the shell that held a kernel of peculiarly Divine truth, by which a monotheistic faith was preserved, and the way prepared for the Christian dispensation.” In *ibid.*, 257

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Avrom Fleishman’s characterization of her interest in Feuerbach (who she would also translate): “She cannot have agreed with everything in the book, as she claimed,” but “Where she was undoubtedly in sympathy with Feuerbach is the ethical implication of his idea: “The other is my *thou*, –the relation being reciprocal...In another, I first have the consciousness of humanity; through him I first learn, I first feel, that I am a man: in my love for him it is clear to me that he belongs to me and I to him, that we two cannot be without each other, that only community constitutes humanity.” Avrom Fleishman, *George Eliot’s Intellectual Life* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 75

idea and the appearance of “general” knowledge was the possibility that the ethical concern would run up against a hard limit, a border for the conscience of some kind. I have deliberately framed the problem in these particular rhetorical terms because I want to suggest that it was exactly the question of a “border” between the individual and the moral community that led Eliot to consider the *nation* as a carrier for humanistic ideals. And, I want to argue, it would be the particular compromise that Eliot accepted in the form of the nation that would threaten her general humanism in her late work.

The question of national construction contains a parallel conceptual difficulty to the problem of a general humanistic doctrine. It was apparent even in the nineteenth century that the concept of the “nation” has to neutralize various forms of historical difference across localities into a constructed form of generality. This constructedness of the nation did not, for Eliot, detract from its morally durable elements. For example, the bureaucratic aspect of the state that Eliot viewed, in *German Life*, as essentially secondary to sympathetic concern between citizens of the same nation.<sup>34</sup> Like the problem confronting Eliot the humanist, the “oneness” of the account relies on *both* the manifestation of particular historical and material “facts” that are resistant to synthesis *and* on the unifying resources of a (collective) capacity of imagination.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> The philosopher Ernest Gellner argues for the importance of institutional structures to nationhood, noting the need for “politically centralized units, and” a moral-political climate in which such centralized units are taken for granted and are treated as normative,” as a “necessary though by no means sufficient condition” for nations to occur. See Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2nd ed., New Perspectives on the Past (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2008), 4.

<sup>35</sup> For instance, the late twentieth-century theorist of nationalism Benedict Anderson makes a case for the nation as a construction that is almost entirely reliant on imaginative capacity, noting the contradiction between the “objective modernity” of nations versus their “subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists,” and the “political power of nationalisms versus their philosophical poverty and even incoherence.” In Benedict R.

In both essays and her late novels, Eliot provides evidence that she held two thoughts in tension: that the nation represented a unifying imaginative leap beyond the historical circumstances of any particular locale, and that it was a cultural form that was aesthetically equipped to be a carrier for some of the novelist's highest humanistic aspirations.<sup>36</sup> An acceleration of interest and hope placed in the nation toward the end of Eliot's life can be found in her last published work, the unconventional, rambling un-Eliotian monologue *The Impressions of Theophrastus Such*. In that text she writes that "there is often no more immediate hope or resource" than "that of striving after fuller national excellence, which must consist in the moulding of more excellent individual natives." Eliot suggests this is both an empirical and normative fact of European history. The nation is a historical formation that is both "impossible to arrest" and the source of "healthy sentiment" that is "worthy of all effort."<sup>37</sup> This has led to the claim among interpreters of Eliot that, toward the end of her career, she abandoned or deferred the universalist goals of her Christian humanism *in favor of* the nation as a vehicle for a wider human concern.<sup>38</sup>

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Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised edition. (London: Verso, 2016), 13

<sup>36</sup> This account will primarily consider *Daniel Deronda* and *The Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, but the construction of the nation was also an important principle behind the analysis of culture in "The Natural History of German Life."

<sup>37</sup> George Eliot, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1879), 227–28.

<sup>38</sup> For instance, Bernard Semmel writes in *George Eliot and the Politics of National Inheritance* that "in her mature thinking...Eliot had become convinced that the *Gesellschaft* values of individualism and cosmopolitanism that prevailed in British liberal circles would impair both family affection and social cohesion. Only a nation, a society that she saw as based on filial sentiment, perceived national kinship, and common historical traditions...could provide a realistic foundation for communal solidarity...Any more ambitious ascent from egoism to harmonious identification with all of mankind, she came to believe, could not be managed until a very long time into the future." In Bernard Semmel, *George Eliot and the Politics of National Inheritance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 6. With respect to the Jewish communities that would be central to *Daniel Deronda*, Alan Arkush writes that "she had arrived, intellectually, at a position that reconciled her high estimation of the moral efficacy of national consciousness with her prognostication of

This chapter rejects an account of Eliot's nationalism that understands it to be a substitute for her humanistic ambitions. Rather, I want to understand the nation as a development of the problem of history that is *internal* to her humanism. As I have stated above, we can understand Eliot's humanism as the aspiration that an historically-particular truth would become generally available to a given people—or multiple peoples—regardless of their closeness or distance from that revelation's original historical provenance. In this chapter I take the nation as one of Eliot's most important examples of the generalization of an historically-specific truth.<sup>39</sup>

What was at stake in the nation as humanistic community will be seen through a reading of two competing versions of national inheritance in Eliot. This study begins from a definition of nationality with the English village form in *The Mill on the Floss*, and ends with the comparison between English and Jewish nationality in her *Daniel Deronda*. We will see that Eliot's England, as the "village nation" (my term), is constructed on the principles of imaginative identification and sympathy in small-scale village life. *Mill* is the paradigmatic account of this form of community in its romantic form in England—and of the symbolic downfall of that form. Her later novel *Daniel Deronda* represents an attempt to explore the composition of English nationality once the village has been called into question. This is accomplished through the novel's comparative presentation. *Deronda* contains two nations constructed on different principles and at different points of development. The first case of

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its eventual replacement by one or another form of cosmopolitanism" In Allan Arkush, "Relativizing Nationalism: The Role of Klesmer in George Eliot's "Daniel Deronda"," *Jewish Social Studies* 3, no. 3 (1997): 61–73, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4467504>, 69

<sup>39</sup> This understanding is in keeping with a constructivist account of the nation, where historically realized nations exceed all cultural, institutional and geographic antecedents. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities* and Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*

England is understood to be mature and realized in political actuality. The novel implies that English nationality, in its maturity, flirts with decadence.

The comparative case is represented by Eliot's intensive late-career interest in Jewish culture, and her representation of the Jewish peoples as a second community alongside and within England. Eliot understood the Jewish community as an unrealized nation in her own time, an historical fact that gave her ample room to speculate about the path from diasporic Jewish life to a future nation. *Deronda* therefore offers an alternative basis for nationality—and the conditions for the success of a nation more generally. The difference between the English and Jewish forms of nationality turns on what I will call the importance of a “traceable past.” The English village-to-nation historical movement, as she understood it, relied on preservation of sympathetic attachments even as the small-scale communal life that produced those attachments withered away. As a result the English nation required an imaginative extension of a past condition to which present-day England had a distant connection. England, she implied, had (or would soon) lose the ability to trace its own past from the standpoint of its industrialized, cosmopolitan present. In the case of the Jewish peoples, by contrast, the past remained enlivened and imaginatively present, despite the effects of geographic dispersion and historical oppression. The best example of this is the title character of the novel, Daniel Deronda, for whom the best attempts by family and circumstance to conceal his Jewish heritage will providentially *reveal* that past. This chapter explores how Eliot depicted the erosion of the English nation's “traceable” character, in particular when it is compared to the traceability of the past in a figure like Daniel Deronda.

I will make this argument through detailed readings of two novels. First, I will read *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) as her piece that most fully constructs the categories of the first possibility represented by the English case, the nation as imaginative construction. In addition, I will argue that *Mill* charts the rise of a “materialist” basis to community as a rival that threatens to overtake the role of the imagination as the basis for the construction of the nation. *Mill*, I want to argue, sketches out the basis for the imaginative nation in its organic model of the village community, and in doing so brings an alternative into relief: a materialism through which relations with the community become abstracted into “systems” in general—obscuring the organic, experiential basis of the village.<sup>40</sup>

Turning to *Daniel Deronda* (1876), I will argue that its two-part structure—an “English” subplot and a “Jewish” subplot woven together—reflects a mature understanding of the two alternatives of nationhood. *Deronda* poses a problem about which version of nationhood to accept against the wider cosmopolitanism of a European elite. I will argue that *Deronda* resolves itself in the direct of the Jewish subplot, in favor of an interpretation of Jewish nationality and the Jewish historical condition whereby the sympathetic act of imagination in the English case proves less durable than the commitments fostered by the novel’s Jewish characters. Judaism becomes a national “Other” that Eliot can construe as more favorable—and more essentially a “nation”—than the situation of England. Within the larger framework of Eliot’s humanism, this represents a trade-off away from history’s anti-

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<sup>40</sup> Eliot’s aversion to abstraction was well-marked in her critical essays in the years leading up to her novelistic career. This from an 1868 essay on form in art: “Abstract words & phrases which have an excellent genealogy are apt to live a little too much on their reputation & even sink into dangerous impostors that should be made to show how they get their living.” George Eliot, “Notes on Form in Art,” in *Essays*, ed. Thomas Pinney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 431–36, 432

materalist, “general tendency,” an emphasis on the particular historical circumstances of a given people over the general truths that they might bequeath to a theory of history and humanistic insight.

Eliot’s fictional *oeuvre* can be divided between those novels that are primarily negotiations of the terms of group membership within provincial life, and those that concern the efforts of individuals to navigate what I will call open-ended, “cosmopolitan” situations.<sup>41</sup> Among the former group, to take an example like *Adam Bede*, I want to make clear why I am calling this a provincial novel: the narrative builds on a set of stable character roles (clergy, gentry, laborers) whose impetus for action is easily apparent: an unmarried woman is both desirous of and eligible to be married, and the courtship involves suitors from various elements of society. The boundary between provincial life “inside” the narrative and life outside can be seen (as is often the case with Eliot’s novels) through the plot device of the main characters’ exile from the community. But the novel concludes with a new situation (marriage, death, departure) that was already recognizable as a possibility from the outset. In summary, the drama of the provincial novel is premised on the reorganization of a set of known cultural positions.<sup>42</sup>

By contrast, in a cosmopolitan novel like Eliot’s *Romola*, the narrative is still centered on a

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<sup>41</sup> My use of the term “cosmopolitan” here is meant in a sense like that used by Kwame Anthony Appiah, where each individual necessarily possesses a reference point in some form of provinciality—“a home of one’s own, with its own cultural particularities”—but is positioned in a manner that is inevitably led into evaluative judgments about other ways of life (provincialities) that are *not* one’s own, “[takes] pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people.” See Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Cosmopolitan Patriots,” *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 3 (1997): 617–39, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1344038>, 618

<sup>42</sup> See Gillian Beer on *Middlemarch*: “Sequence and analogy enrich our sense of the kinship of human lots even while they register what constricts and determines.” In Gillian Beer, *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), <https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/8209631>, 170

single “culture” (the happenings of fifteenth-century Florence), but it concerns the movements and reconfigurations of multiple distinct cultures that exist in a more coequal peer relationship. *Daniel Deronda*, with its many subplots and divided communities, contains elements of the latter.

But neither *Mill* nor *Deronda* are completely identifiable with either the provincial or the cosmopolitan option, because the closed nature of provincial society in Eliot’s sense is unimaginable except as an ideal state of retreat from cosmopolitan disruption. Eliot came to the understanding from Strauss and Feuerbach that each period of history included self-contained elements particular to a given culture’s understanding, even as these self-contained elements revealed a general truth available from the benefit of chronological hindsight. If an analogy can be made between Eliot’s historical study to her fictional productions, the particular details of the province are so well-established because there is an implicit, coordinating “outside” (the analogue of historical guidance) that is not knowable. Eliot so often makes reference to an outside in the provinces (e.g., the *deus ex machina* of *Mill*) to ironise it with cosmopolitan symbols.

Eliot’s provincial zones are also lacking in self-consciousness. These micro-cultures do not have well-defined programs for representing themselves *to* themselves as a distinct way of life. But from the standpoint of the *nation*, a supervening perspective of a meta-culture that coordinates multiple provincialities into a “whole,” they are only representations.

Historically speaking, in the Victorian decades, as industrial and modernizing forces gained power over England’s *national* culture, the interest in representing English provincial and

aristocratic traditions reached a new form of mania.<sup>43</sup> In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams observes that only some nineteenth-century English communities were “knowable” in their idiosyncratic distinctive individuality, while in others “rural inhabitants” are known through ready-at-hand markers offered by provincial life.<sup>44</sup> Traditional culture obscures its animating mechanisms to non-participants, while national culture offers coordinating strategies that combine and coordinate traditions.

The provincial zone stands in an uncertain relationship to the national culture which subtends it. Organicism is at the center of Eliot’s conservative political commitments that appear in both her criticism and in fictional images like the “web” of Middlemarch.<sup>45</sup> She resurrects the fictional persona of Felix Holt in an 1868 essay for *Blackwood’s Magazine*, after the passage of the second Reform Bill enfranchised most of the male English working class, bringing the constitution of the English polity to a new crossroads: “society stands before us like that wonderful piece of life, the human body, with all its various parts depending on one another, and with a terrible liability to get wrong because of that delicate dependence.”<sup>46</sup> Eliot’s particular invocation of the organic body appears to have provided

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<sup>43</sup> Arno Meyer, quoted by Franco Moretti in *The Bourgeois*: “Though devoted to ‘creative destruction in the economic sphere’, concludes Arno Mayer, when the new men entered the sphere of culture they became ‘enthusiastic champions of traditional architecture, statuary, painting...enveloping their exploits and themselves with historical screens.’” In Franco Moretti, *The Bourgeois : Between History and Literature*, Paperback edition. (London: Verso, 2014), pp. 114.

<sup>44</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, 168.

<sup>45</sup> see Eagleton, “Ideology and Literary Form.”’s canonical critique of Eliot’s organic collectivism.

<sup>46</sup> George Eliot, “Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt,” in *Essays*, ed. Thomas Pinney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1868), 420.

the conceptual tools, in which the nation's respective limbs cohere into a single national body.<sup>47</sup>

Eliot's use of the organic metaphor suggested that the national body hung together through an intrinsic necessity. Barring abnormal pathology, it preserved its own distinctness by means of a sustainable balance between the self-assertion of its inward forces and the pressures of its environment.<sup>48</sup> Political intervention runs the same risk as interruption of a biological process, where an error with respect to the parts means the potential collapse of the whole.<sup>49</sup> The organic polity, then, is both like and unlike a mechanism: like because its operations are understood through the model of lawful definition, but totally unlike other mechanical systems in that the makeup of the system cannot be surfaced in explicitly systematic principles.

### III.

*The Mill on the Floss* (hereafter, *Mill*) depicts a community in which the past is not historical *difference*, that is to say, the basis for a continuous, linear set of changes, but rather a form of cyclical identification of the present with the past.<sup>50</sup> I will read the setting of the mill by

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<sup>47</sup> The organic metaphor was present in Eliot's life from sources close to her like partner George Henry Lewes, as well as a topic of combined interest between the diverging, increasingly specialized cultures of science and humanistic inquiry. See Lewes' most important work on scientific concept of organic unity, George Henry Lewes, *The Physiology of Common Life*. (New York, D. Appleton and Company, 1860)

<sup>48</sup> "...the result of a nearly equal struggle between inner constitution & the outer play of forces." In Eliot, "Essays," 1963, 434.

<sup>49</sup> "What I am striving to keep in our minds is the care, the precaution, with which we should go about making things better, so that the public order may not be destroyed, so that no fatal shock may be given to this society of ours, this living body in which our lives are bound up." In Eliot, "Felix Holt.", 422.

<sup>50</sup> Hereafter, *Mill*. Unless otherwise noted, all citations to the text reference the following edition: Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*.

the fictional River Floss—and the experience of the Tulliver family by that mill—as Eliot’s depiction of an ideal: the village model of community, and its subsequent dissolution. The basis of sympathy in *Mill* is the community’s sense of its own past, which the novel shows to be slipping away amidst an ascendant financialized capitalism. In place of individual sympathetic identification with one’s peers in the village, *Mill* charts a regime of what I call “strategic” or “abstract” values. This reading will serve as a background for an imaginative identification between individuals that will be at issue again in *Deronda*.

The village participant may understand herself to have a relationship to the past, but the past no longer supplies a justification for present or future. Historical nostalgia is not a conservative choice but a condition, a climate of mood that sits atop the present. The ideological basis for the village remains unchanged, even as new forms of action become comprehensible for individuals. *Mill* shows the contradictions of individual action in the village, when this action is understood as strategic imperative. In Eliot’s contemporary moment, the bourgeois communal ethic is neither generative (that is, it does not produce action in any meaningful sense) nor moral (i.e., actors cannot speak about moral ends). When forms of moral judgment are codified rather than personalized, the individual loses the ability to decide about action. Instead the individual must act on the basis of a social code. *Mill* becomes a chronicle of the way in which social life of the community becomes an abstraction. Indeed the individual takes action by treating the social as another static element in a strategic plan. Without a communally-sanctioned purpose for action, the internalization of a principle of action becomes the basis for the incomprehensibility of the individual to the community. The village lingers in the figure of the individual conscience.

Rather than *through* collective life, the individual acts against or despite it, to achieve an end against which the community is just another object.

*Mill* preserves the organic, localist village to the reader as *mood*, as a sense of presence that can neither be used nor discarded. Conscience becomes collective residue, and backward-looking loss (i.e., nostalgia) is *Mill's* principle of realism. The most enduring dilemma of *Mill*, which *Deronda* will take up, is the stubborn persistence of the principles of the village, an idealized past, as the basis for national experience. *Deronda* decides what to do with this persistent element of the past.<sup>51</sup> The nation in its organic aspect is not visible but intuited. What is visible is process, a flux of transformation, grasped not for what it is, but for what it is always in the process of becoming.

Eliot began *Mill* soon after becoming a widespread commercial success on the basis of her first full novel *Adam Bede*. *Mill* was widely considered the greatest novelistic achievement in her first period of writing. The novel is about one family, the Tullivers, and tracks the childhood and early adulthood of brother and sister in that family, Maggie and Tom. The siblings grow up in near-idyllic anticipation of a future much like the present, in the countryside where their father owns and runs a mill on the fictional river Floss, passed down to him from several generations past. Maggie and Tom's *de facto* childhood ends abruptly in their teens, when their father foolishly sues one of his wealthier and more sophisticated neighbors, Wakem, in a boundary dispute, is defeated in court, and has to pay for his losses by selling off the mill and most of the rest of his property. The family

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<sup>51</sup> The "vital connection with the past" must in England be "recall[ed] by an effort of memory and reflection," Eliot writes: "Protestantism and commerce...have modernized the face of the land and the aspects of society in a far greater degree than in any continental country." Eliot, "Essays," n.d., 288

patriarch is forced into menial wage employment in service of his neighbor, and soon after suffers a debilitating stroke from the stress of the episode. The action of the main narrative explores the consequences of this loss for the family.

Tom, though still only sixteen, eventually manages to apprentice himself at an accounting and management firm in which his uncle is a partner. Obsessed by the loss, the son Tom is driven to “rise in the world,” to clear his family’s debts and restore their reputation.<sup>52</sup>

Maggie, mostly confined to a repetitive domestic existence with her stricken father and despondent mother, revives an earlier friendship she had with the neighbor Wakem’s son, Philip, that soon becomes a romantic interest.

Maggie and Philip become estranged when Tom discovers and forbids the relationship. From this point on, the diverging paths of Maggie and Tom tell the story of Maggie’s scorn and Tom’s outwardly rising fortunes in the world: Tom succeeds in business and pays back the debts just before their father dies, later repurchasing the mill and taking up residence there alone. Maggie cuts off contact with Philip on Tom’s demand, but will later receive the attention of a young wealthy local heir, Stephen Guest, inheritor of the fortune of an important accounting firm. Stephen is Philip’s best friend and the soon-to-be fiancé of Maggie’s cousin and friend, Lucy. Stephen tries to propose clandestine marriage to Maggie, but she refuses on grounds of loyalty to Philip and Lucy. Despite her refusal, Maggie still receives the majority of public blame for the scandal of her relationship with Stephen, leading to her ostracism. This includes her brother Tom, who disowns her on grounds that she brought disrepute to the family reputation he sought to restore. The narrative is

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<sup>52</sup> Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, 492.

“resolved” abruptly when a tremendous flood hits the countryside and Maggie commandeers a rowboat, returning to the ancestral mill to rescue her brother Tom, whereupon brother and sister are both killed by a floating piece of unmoored industrial machinery from the nearby wharf.

The biographical basis for *Mill* was Eliot’s own childhood in the West Midlands of England. Maggie’s difficulty meeting her conservative family’s expectations were a reflection of Eliot’s own precociousness. Eliot’s connection to the scenes and situations described in the novel can be read into the involvement of the unnamed narrator, who speaks as if she were involved in the action, recounting a scene from hazy memories.<sup>53</sup> The pastness of *Mill* is a nostalgia evoked for an era approximately thirty years prior to the novel’s writing. *Mill* will be a study of the collective inertia of memory, how the inability to relate to the future—or even conceive of a connection between past and future—leads to a collapse of basic categories in the social imaginary. Maggie despairs near the end of the novel that “if the past is not to bind us, where can duty lie?” Indeed, I will argue that Maggie’s condition reveals her *diagnosis* to be correct. The siblings have no other model of the life course on which to rely other than a memory of their past, however they understand it. And yet it is just this past that has become most implausible, most dreamlike—as in the novel’s opening. In the absence of a future that is like the past, her appeal to conscience, her moral claim, is disastrous. The very exercise of individual judgment about duty and honor is the source of Maggie’s ostracism.

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<sup>53</sup> “I remember those large dipping willows. I remember the stone bridge,” she declares, putting her eyes in place of Maggie’s sight. *ibid.*, 7.

In the first scene of the novel, the narrator describes the mill and River Floss. The mill participates in an aesthetic of authenticity, where the significance of the river for the narrative is related to its presence. There is a stylistic manner about *Mill* that expects its readers to be the narrator's direct peers, as if the scenes she describes in the novel were not fiction but a memory that she and her readers already share in common.<sup>54</sup> *Mill* makes its appeal to a real experience of the English past that is generalized into an aesthetic: "[H]eaven knows where that striving might lead us," the narrator declares about adult experience, if people were not attached to "old inferior things" with "deep immovable roots in memory." The correlate of the memory is a common set of plants in the English landscape: the "elderberry bush" and "hedgerow bank" that spurs recollection.<sup>55</sup> It would be plausible to view this constructionist move on the part of the narrator as suffocatingly specific in its historical location, as if the the text's range of possible readers were limited to only the fictional characters who already inhabit the fictional town of St. Ogg's.<sup>56</sup>

But the narrator's emphasis is on inference from experience. The mind is most formed, most dependent, on the simplest elements of background experience. What the narrator calls the "inferior things" are, in the epistemology of *Mill*, best known because they are closest at hand. The narrator begins the novel with a description of the rushing River Floss that surrounds the Tulliver family mill, where it is described not in geographical terms but

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<sup>54</sup> As in this statement by the narrator about Maggie and Tom's childhood: "There is no sense of ease like the ease we felt in those scenes where we were born, where objects became dear to *us* before we had known the labor of choice, and where the outer world seemed an extension of *our* personality." In *ibid.*, 151 (emphasis added).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>56</sup> For example, the narrator begins the story with no introduction to its principle characters: "Before I dozed off, I was going to tell you what Mr. and Mrs. Tulliver were talking about." *ibid.*, 9.

as an interior location. The mill is a village-in-miniature, where the river itself forms the boundary of the known world, “like a great curtain of sound, shutting one out from the world beyond.”<sup>57</sup>

The family relationship with the mill and surroundings is analogous to the gap between village and an outside. This is why the narrator must describe as if she were there. The only mode of understanding in the village is an *involvement*, as if she were moving along the river in an almost phenomenological mode before assuming the traditional spectator position of narrator: “It is time, too, for me to leave off resting my arms on the cold stone of this bridge...”<sup>58</sup>

The narrator begins from an involved position in *Mill* because the novel will finally trace the implausibility of this position. The Tulliver family experiences a shift: from a community built on involved participation to one composed of strategic adversaries. Relationships are no longer defined by the concretions of the “elderberry bush” or the “hedgerow bank”, but (as we see in the conflict between Tulliver and his savvier neighbor) by the capacity to abstract from specific realities to the symbolics of the situation.

The action begins with the elder Mr. Tulliver facing a dilemma: his family’s inheritance of generations (“a hundred years and better!”) has lost most of its useful supply of water from the River Floss, which has been diverted by a new neighbor who purchased the land as an investment.<sup>59</sup> The Tulliver claim to a way of life is based on the apparent stability of this

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 155.

natural order, whose actual dependence on technological power and legal imprimatur is revealed by a new neighbor backed by the evolving needs of speculative capital. In the organic community the social order is coincident with the natural order. For the old neighbors, “nobody ever heard of...meddling with the River”<sup>60</sup> But the new owner, Pivart, enters the scene well-capitalized and advised by the shrewd business interests of the lawyer Wakem, who has implicitly reinterpreted the relationship between landowners as a legal push-and-pull. Tulliver understands the incursion in theological, demonic terms. Wakem represents “the particular embodiment of the evil principle now exciting Mr. Tulliver’s determined resistance,” a morally bedrock category into which there can be no further understanding.

Tulliver is, of course, mistaken about the inscrutable, almost Manichean characterization of his foe. To Tulliver, the threat to the mill is the threat to an entire world and way of life, while Wakem merely sees a particular advantage in a larger schema of interests and probabilities. Wakem represents a disinterested, “cold” stance on Tulliver’s involvement with the situation. Tulliver has only his circumscribed experience as a proud and independent yeoman farmer to draw upon. But the pervasive significance of this episode is that it demonstrates how Tulliver now views his surroundings and community: as an adversarial space whose objects are tools to gain a strategic advantage. Tulliver is poorly suited to a competitive mindset with his neighbor, whose strategic acumen he attributes to a superior education. This leads to a disastrous decision about his son.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 155.

What Tulliver disparagingly calls the “tricks o’ these fellows” are what he intends his son to learn.<sup>61</sup> Tulliver consults with another acquaintance of his, Riley, who gives him the poor advice—out of a desire to seem helpful—to send his son to be tutored by an Anglican clergyman in the classics. Tulliver hopes to create a shrewd posture of mind that could counter the legal and financial stratagems of the lawyer Wakem, a desire at drastic odds with the classical education fit for the clergy. He is poorly advised by his friend Riley, who like him understands only a gap between the entirely experiential education they have had as farmers, and the various forms of abstraction represented by both the clergyman’s and the lawyer’s knowledge.

Riley intends his advice to be gestural, an affirmation of social solidarity that is completed through the act of giving.<sup>62</sup> Tulliver, however, “invests” in an education to provide his son with the intellectual defenses against forces that threaten their way of life.<sup>63</sup> Tulliver senses that he no longer lives within the same ethic that guided his life up until this point, but he is also unable to fully reorient himself. The category mistake is a defining feature of the Tulliver family. There is a tragic aspect to the action that the narrator grasps: action that would be comprehensible within the reciprocity of village life takes a different cast in the competitive environment. Tulliver believes completely in the life of the mill, and his

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<sup>61</sup> “But I should like Tom to be a bit of a scholar [sic], so as he might be up to the tricks o’ these fellows as talk fine and write with a flourish. It’d be a help to me wi’ these lawsuits and arbitrations, and things.” *ibid.*, 9

<sup>62</sup> “Consider, too, that all the pleasant little dim ideas and complacencies—of standing well with Timpson, of dispensing advice when he was asked for it, of impressing his friend Tulliver with additional respect, of saying something, and saying it emphatically, with other inappreciably minute ingredients that went along with the warm hearth and the brandy-and-water to make up Mr. Riley’s consciousness on this occasion—would have been a mere blank.” *ibid.*, 27

<sup>63</sup> “But then, you know, it’s an investment; Tom’s eddication ’ull be so much capital to him.” Eliot:2008aa, 71

commitment to education is only instrumental. But in the father's ignorance, he introduces his son to a different set of intrinsic values. The clergyman's educational regime has no effect on Tom, and it will soon be forgotten in the wake of his family's ruin. At that point, when Tom is handed an unofficial apprenticeship at his Uncle Dean's holding company, his true education begins.

The elder Tulliver's tragic misunderstanding of his situation becomes the catalyst that launches him fully—but without preparation—into a different order of relationality. This can also be seen in the decision that Tulliver makes with respect to financial management. He has incurred a debt to his wealthier sister-in-law, mostly to support his own impoverished sister and her many children. The debt becomes a source of tension, a lever for ordinary bickering between the households. But then Tulliver makes a disastrous decision. To assert his independence from the sister-in-law, Tulliver takes out a mortgage from the bank to prove he can repay her, moving him “onto the books,” from a system of debts guaranteed by the hereditary relationship with his wife's kin, to a bank lien against his property. However dissatisfied Tulliver may be about his debts, they were formerly a product of the embedded, informal network of kin relationships.<sup>64</sup> Tulliver has set himself up for disaster when his boundary dispute with his neighbor sets off the processes of formal litigation. After losing his suit with Wakem, he has no liquid assets with which to pay his mortgage.

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<sup>64</sup> The narrator's explanation of the situation: “...and when Mrs. Tulliver became rather pressing to know *how* he would raise it without mortgaging the Mill and the house which he said he never *would* mortgage, since nowadays people were none so ready to lend money without security, Mr. Tulliver, getting warm, declared that Miss Glegg might do as she liked about calling in her money—he should pay it in, whether or not. He was not going to be beholden to his wife's sisters. When a man had married into a family where there was a whole litter of women, he might have plenty to put up with if he chose. But Mr. Tulliver did *not* choose” *ibid.* 75-76

The mill, over which we would have had full legal possession had the debt existed merely among family members, is now exposed—and lost—as collateral.

Tulliver's action is only comprehensible within an honor culture where status is conferred by position: the position of independent, yeoman farmer. Independence implies a degree of respect which is compromised by the debt. But even as the connection is stressed, the meaning of Tulliver's relationship to his sister-in-law is stabilized by their social relationship. Regardless of the debt's status, and whether it is repayed, Tulliver is likely to remain in a secure position with respect to this wife's family. The material debt is immaterial to the relationship. Tulliver understands himself to be making a statement against his sister-in-law which will not threaten his underlying independence. But in changing source of the debt, Tulliver unintentionally shifts himself into a different system of relationships: from a system where his position is certain and fixed, to one where position is an accidental outcome of win-and-loss calculations on a balance sheet. That is, his independence depends on the result of assets measured against debts. This calculation eventually fails him.<sup>65</sup>

Tulliver's own economically pointless gesture makes a notable contrast with the victory by Wakem, who projects an almost complete indifference to the concept of revenge, and perceives further material advantage to allowing Tulliver to remain on his ancestral property as a renter. Tulliver's identity, by contrast, depends on a fragile whole. He must be the sole, unimpeachable *owner* of Dorlcotte Mill. The loss of this independent status is

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<sup>65</sup> See "Was Edward Tulliver made bankrupt? An analysis of his financial downfall," in Dermot Coleman, *George Eliot and Money: Economics, Ethics and Literature*, Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture ; (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), Appendix B.

shattering, the end of life's comprehensible horizon. Wakem, by contrast, has a sense of position based on a continuous stream of capital transactions, any one of which is minor, but which tally up to a collective significance.<sup>66</sup>

The most profound symbol of the Tulliver family's stumble across a new boundary is the father's instruction to his son Tom: to mutilate the family Bible with an inscription about the vendetta against Wakem. The family Bible, whose meaning is fixed in the theological order, is tied to the mill, which no longer has the significance it once did for the Tullivers. Divine and secular time had a certain unity in the location of the mill itself, which has now passed on. "I wish evil may befall him. Write that," Tulliver says, directing his son to the cover page, thereby conferring permanent status on what will prove to be a temporary loss.<sup>67</sup> The elder Tulliver understood his condition to be permanent, given from a time before memory, and so a change in condition is not a contingency (as Wakem would understand it), but a change in the balance of cosmic powers, the work of the devil. The inscription in the Bible confirms that the family was never positioned to understand its condition. Tulliver's understanding of time is at an end. What is transmitted to the son is a request for revenge that represents the restoration of an order that has vanished.

*Mill* depicts a type of knowledge that stays with the Tullivers, even as their intuitive identification with their surroundings is replaced by calculative values. The narrator carries out a dual role: that of acting out embedded knowledge (as in the scene-setting

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<sup>66</sup> This is part of Tulliver's confusion about Wakem's *modus operandi*. Tulliver believes that Wakem possesses an education which instructs his operation, a demonic principle from which he is barred from participating. Instead it appears that Wakem operates by being relentlessly opportunistic, by having no fixed opinion about anything outside of its qualities for moneymaking.

<sup>67</sup> Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, 267.

gesture by the river), and reflecting on the uses and purposes of that knowledge. In the former, he maintains an awareness that the village is not a group of participants separate from space and place, but embedded in those locations. Here the narrator is involved with the characters at the level of humane concern. In the latter, the narrator achieves a distance from the community, exercising a judgment that reflects on their errors and limitations. The novel will continue to reflect the perspective *of the village* while showing that it no longer has an intersubjective purchase on that situation: that what I have called “embedded reason” in its phenomenological form of the village becomes a merely private concern and private judgment. In the events that cause the downfall of the Tulliver family, we discover that the social order is ruled by an ethics of abstraction.

The siblings Maggie and Tom inherit their father’s understanding of the family’s position: they are tied to the mill and everything that it represents. But where they differ is in their ability to abstract from their symbolic relationship and develop a picture of their situation. Tulliver has no “general” picture of the world, only one based on an understanding of his position. His children possess a general morality created on the basis of a private view of the world. Tulliver’s private and public view are fused, even as the “public” on which his view depends has disappeared. His children lose access to the public world when their father fails, developing an internal opposition to it. Whereas the elder Tulliver appealed to a public view of the situation that did not exist, his children understand that the public must be a virtual creation, from conscience. Whereas Mr. Tulliver exhibits an internal sense of order that is responsive to a public reality, his children Maggie and Tom understand that the inner life of the individual is something oppositional, that it should be used *against* the social order. Tulliver expects the social order to provide him a public recognition that no

longer exists—indeed, a *public* no longer exists in sense that he understands. His stroke and breakdown can be understood as the incomprehension of symbolic dislocation from the mill: “I wanted to die in the old place, where I was born and where my father was born.”<sup>68</sup>

After their “downfall,” Tom and Maggie disengage from their prior life in shame. Maggie, in the aftermath of her parents selling the mill to Wakem, measures her life in empty time as a caretaker for her parents: “Her lot was beginning to have a still, sad montony, which threw her more than ever on her inward self.” Confined to the home and a life of caring for her father and mother, both of whom are rendered nearly insensible by their misfortune, Maggie has only an endless sameness: “She could make dream-worlds of her own – but no dream world would satisfy her now.” She develops a penchant for self-satisfying religious tracts in the Pietist works of Thomas à Kempis. In religious inwardness, she finds “insight, strength and conquest, to be won by means entirely within her own soul.” Learning to look at her life as an “insignificant part of a divinely guided whole,” she refers her suffering to a higher necessity that becomes an “unquestioned message.”

Tom, for his part, leaves his ill-suited schooling with his Latin tutor at sixteen, and apprentices himself at to an investment and general management firm where his Uncle Deane is a partner.<sup>69</sup> From the activities reported in *Mill*, the main activity of Deane’s firm seems to be that of a holding company for various investments. The actions that it takes include the buying and selling of real-estate assets, and speculation on economic trends in

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>69</sup> “At sixteen, the mind that has the strongest affinity for fact cannot escape illusion and self-flattery; and Tom, in sketching his future, had no other guide in arranging his facts than the suggestions of his own brave self-reliance.” *ibid.*, 225

the stock markets. Tom, obsessed by his family's loss of face that is made material in their loss of the mill, shows his worth in his uncle's firm, and pays back the debts shortly before his father dies. Later he will buy back the mill and take up residence there, alone. But Tom will not return to the mill to restore his father's life. That is, to *work* the mill and enact a past life in the present. Instead he seeks merely to *be* in the mill, to occupy it as a form of memorial.<sup>70</sup>

Perhaps an even greater representative of the connection between present and past in the village is Maggie, who becomes conflicted because she sits between two different regimes of relationship between past and present. Four years before the publication of *Mill*, Eliot published a short study of Sophocles' *Antigone*, the Greek figure who chooses to honor her dead brother Polynices with burial, even as the laws of the city set down by King Creon forbid it. There is no evidence that Eliot had consulted Hegel's canonical interpretation of the play, but she, too, reads it through conflicting norms for which there can be no satisfactory resolution. In view of Eliot's reading of *Antigone*, Maggie's situation makes an illustrative contrast. When Antigone is caught between the two codes, she *chooses* to obey the law of family obligation and bury her brother. The Greeks would not have understood Antigone's choice in terms of conscience, but Eliot's anachronistic modern reading understands her to have exercised a faculty of internal judgment *over* the external code of conduct.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> "It was my father's dying wish that I should try and get it back again whenever I could; it was in his family for five generations. I promised my father; and besides that, I'm attached to the place. I shall never like any other so well." *ibid.*, 398.

<sup>71</sup> "The struggle between Antigone and Creon represents that struggle between elemental tendencies and established laws by which the outer life of man is gradually and painfully being brought into harmony with

Maggie, for her part, can decide on no definite obligation to the present. But where Maggie differs from Antigone is that the bonds of conscience entail doing nothing. The scandal that ensues happens simply by being seen in public with Philip Wakem, the representative of her family's disgrace, or Stephen Guest, who pursues her while being engaged to Maggie's sister Lucy. Maggie will not go forward with either engagement. The choice to marry either Philip Wakem or Stephen would have had a comprehensible public meaning with its own train of consequence. That is, her life would have "played out" according to the traditional duties of being a wife. But her obligations to the "past," as unrealizable as they are persuasive, trap her in a Hamlet-like cycle of deliberation. She does nothing because any decisive act of loyalty (to Tom, to Philip Wakem, to Stephen Guest) would entail a betrayal to one aspect of her past. The ethical bond of conscience, her private reasons, are *convincing* to her (and to the reader through the intercession of the narrator) but paralyzing in the face of a public.<sup>72</sup>

Maggie's stance is a principled one based on conscience. But the choice to do nothing and simply *inhabiting* that internality invites public disaster. From Maggie's perspective, her hesitation places her in the space of reasons where the outcome is ethical. It becomes the weighing of obligations and the choosing of her family. When she is predictably subjected to the gossip and public judgment of St. Ogg's, there is no private equivalent for which she could give reasons. The narrator rehabilitates the space of reasoned conscience, bringing it

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his inward needs." George Eliot, "The Antigone and Its Moral," in *Essays*, ed. Thomas Pinney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1856)

<sup>72</sup> "And a choice of what? O God!...Her life with Stephen [Guest] could have no sacredness; she must forever sink and wander vaguely, driven by uncertain impulse; for she had let go the clue of life,—that clue which once in the far-off years her young need had clutched so strongly." Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, 471.

to a comprehensible picture *for the reader*, but for Maggie she is ruined. Maggie's ruin and ostracism is *Mill's* most important depiction of a debt to the past that cannot be discharged. A significant subtext of the narrator's voice in *Mill* is spent sketching out the unreality of the past, a kind of romantic fantasy that becomes even more alluring as it becomes more unthinkable—and more impossible to incorporate into the present.

*Mill* attempts to convey the past of the village as mood, as an undischageable debt and perpetual weight that hangs in the present. Several interstitial elements, written from the perspective of the narrator, show how *Mill* constructs the village past. The past will have the status of myth, different in kind than the present. The narrator contrasts the squalid everyday locales—like the one in which Maggie and Tom live—to a romantic alternative.<sup>73</sup> The past is not a source of inspiration or hope for the future, but an example of a resource that is lacking *for* the present. The past is not even geographically close. The narrator, signaling that this is a state of mind more than an observation, stacks the deck with an almost comical point of comparison to the present: the ruined castles that she has seen on the banks of the German Rhine. “Therefore it is that these Rhine castles fill me with a sense of poetry,” writes the narrator with an ironic nostalgia: “they belong to the grand historic life of humanity, and raise up for me the vision of an epoch.”<sup>74</sup>

Measured by the impossible standard of a romantic idyll, the present that the narrator describes in the modern-day St. Oggs registers as an inversion of value. What is present is everything that is most tawdry, cheap, and unworthy. This form of nostalgia is a common

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<sup>73</sup> “That was a time of colour, when the sunlight fell on glancing steel and floating banners.”

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

move for the Eliotian narrator. It can be seen in the well-known opening to *Adam Bede*: “Leisure is gone—gone where the spinning-wheels are gone, and the pack-horses, and the slow waggons, and the pedlars, who brought bargains to the door on sunny afternoons.”<sup>75</sup> The ethical disjunct that this passage sets up, between present (“technology, speed, rationality”) and past (“slowness,” “leisure,” “contemplation”) should not be read as an actual diagnosis of that past, but as signal that we are exiting a realistic setting and triggering a nostalgic mode. The narrator mixes platitudes with which it would be difficult to disagree—alluding to the general fallenness of the world—while also signaling his questionable judgment. This is the possibility that the narrator’s entire nostalgia may be mistaken: “for had he not kept up his character by going to church on the Sunday afternoons?”<sup>76</sup> Such an obviously dubious statement prepares for the narrator’s admonition to the reader: “Do not be severe upon him, and judge him by our modern standard!”<sup>77</sup> The past is superior to the present because it brings the dissatisfactions of the present into relief (“Even idleness is eager now—eager for amusement; prone to excursion-trains”), but it should also be an indication that we have exited the mode of descriptive realism.

This community etched in the past is the village form to which Tom and Maggie understand themselves to be responsible. Romance replaces the comprehensible past with something standing for a higher principle. As with Maggie’s and Tom’s relationship to their own

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<sup>75</sup> George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, ed. Carol Martin (Oxford : New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 2001), 164.

<sup>76</sup> “Even idleness is eager now—eager for amusement; prone to excursion-trains, art museums, periodical literature.” *ibid.*, 165

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

childhood at the mill, the narrator conveys a romantic perspective that can find no use for the present.<sup>78</sup> This form of sentimentalism turns away from an awareness of its own constructions, understanding them as the outgrowth of something pre-given and transparent, or a rediscovered nature. In St. Ogg, where the action in *Mill* is set, awareness of the historical past has fallen into just this kind of sentimentalism. The narrator declares it “one of those old, old towns which impress one as a continuation and outgrowth of nature, as much as the nests of the bower-birds or the winding galleries of the white ants.”<sup>79</sup> This acquiescence to romanticism in the narrator contrasts with the present’s condition of forgetfulness, the pointed absence of history from the consciousness of the townspeople. And the history of St. Ogg, its implication in new regimes of economic life and abstraction, is not present to the modern-day townspeople. St. Ogg in its present form is simply “what is.”<sup>80</sup>

The narrator can only break the mundane, totalizing illusion of the present by a problematic return to mythic history, with the declaration that “the shadow of the Saxon hero-king still walks there fitfully”—a signal that this will be a type of history with which the present has made a decisive break.<sup>81</sup> In this voice the narrator explains how St. Ogg’s received its name during an epoch with no memorials in a narrow-minded present, when the Norman ferryman St. Ogg brought a woman and her child across the River Floss during

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<sup>78</sup> The present is “irradiated by no sublime principles, no romantic visions, no active, self-renouncing faith.” Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, p. 272.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p 115.

<sup>80</sup> The town is “where the black ships unlade themselves of their burthens from the far north, and carry away, in exchange, the precious inland products, the well-crushed cheese and the soft fleeces which my refined readers have doubtless become acquainted with through the medium of the best classic pastorals.” *ibid.*, 115

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

a flood, animated by a sentiment that, the narrator suggests, would be foreign to the present even as the town of St. Ogg carries the name of those events: "I will carry thee across...it is enough that thy heart needs it."<sup>82</sup> From here mythic history turns to previous eras of secular time. More recent traumas have also been forgotten.<sup>83</sup> Finally, for contrast, we are given a snippet of consciousness of an aunt of the Tulliver's, the arch-philistine Mrs. Glegg. Her attachment, we are shown, is mostly to class signifiers, confirming the narrator's conclusion that the past is unable to touch the present in its current state.<sup>84</sup>

The past is mythic origin, to which contemporaries of St. Ogg have no connection except as fantastical myth. The past is also the memory of trials, of which they, the current residents of St. Ogg, are happy to be rid. The present, in turn, is a homogeneous present, in which the occurrence of decisive historical events seems impossible to imagine. The narrator testifies to the evacuation of anything related to public spirit, regarded as a waste of time "liable to make one insolvent."<sup>85</sup>

*Mill* ends with conflict between values: on one side, the persistence of a localist, organic ethic. On the other, the ethics of abstraction. Maggie and Tom Tulliver both inherit the organic ethics of their mother and father: Tom through his commitment to honoring his father's public stature even in ruin, and Maggie through her attempts to remain faithful to

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>83</sup> "But the town knew worse troubles even than the floods...where first Puritans thanked God for the blood of the Loyalists, and then Loyalists thanked God for the blood of the Puritans. Many honest citizens lost all their possessions for conscience' sake in those times, and went forth beggared from their native town." *ibid.*, 117.

<sup>84</sup> The mind of St. Ogg's did not look extensively before or after. It inherited a long past without thinking of it, and had no eyes for the spirits that walk the streets." *ibid.*, 118

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

the web of familial commitments and private friendships from her early years. But their immersion in the performance of the ethics of localism, as each shows signs of a romantic unworldliness, survives the change in their family's material circumstances. Material exigencies force them to grow up under a regime of abstract values: Tom moves into a financialized world, and Maggie withdraws into spiritualism. And the significance of their old, localist ties—what I have called their “organic” individualism—rises up again and leads to the novel's tragic outcome.

Neither Tom nor Maggie can resist returning to the mill, which will become the site of both their deaths. If *Mill* can be cast as a tragedy in the mold of *Antigone*, then it stages a conflict of values between appearances and depth. As characters defined by their actions, each sibling adopts a new regime, but as individuals with “depth” they continue their organic orientation. Their loss of material independence means that Maggie and Tom are forced to act out a way of life according to abstracted values. This can be seen in Tom's pursuit of “respectability,” and Maggie's decline of marriage. But this obligation creates a more fundamental lack of action, since the normal course of life stops for them both. Tom, having fulfilled his “greatest desire” by reacquiring the mill, retreats into solitude. Maggie refuses her offers of marriage, living as an outcast with another family near the mill. Their organic orientation renders them static characters, grown children who can live in abstract society by reflecting its values, but who cannot participate in shaping them. That their death occurs upon Maggie's “return home” to rescue Tom in the flood is a detail that should not be missed. At the level of personality, they still live within the organic values of the village. As paradigms of the subject, Maggie and Tom reveal the indelibility of the organic sensibility at the level of the individual. But the resolution of *Mill* can be read as a reconciliation of

appearance and reality: nature wipes away a world that the reorganization of the village had already rendered irrelevant.

*Mill's* tragic ending affirms the centrality of an organic ethics even as these values disappear from viability within the novel. In *Mill* the community is reorganized according to the values of abstraction while the individual, represented in Maggie and Tom, lives in the bubble of organic, village localism. The deconstruction—and ultimately *destruction*—of the Tulliver family reveals its unsuitability to an ascendant regime of economic, abstracted relations. The mechanisms of allegiance that would bind the Tullivers to one another, internally, as a family unit, have been dissolved. The three remaining members—mother, sister, brother—live (and die) apart from one another. An equal diagnosis applies to the external social comprehensibility of their way of life: the community no longer recognizes the function of the mill, in which Tom lives like a historical preservation even as it no longer contains an economic purpose. Maggie and Tom's physical destruction in the flood upon their reunion is only an emphatic material confirmation of their irrevocable separation from both their community and the direction of English modernity.

#### IV.

As we move from *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) to *Daniel Deronda* (1876), we shift not just to the end of Eliot's career as a novelist, but also across a range of experiments in content, theme and setting bounded by her realistic practice.<sup>86</sup> Between *Mill's* antiquated, nostalgic

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<sup>86</sup> Her last novel, the experimental monologue *The Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (relevant to our discussion of nationalism in *Deronda*) would be published in 1879, not long before her death in December 1880.

localism and *Daniel Deronda's* aristocratic, modern cosmopolitanism (*Deronda* would be her only novel set among her contemporaries), she ventured into historical fiction with *Romola* (1863), set in the Italian Renaissance, and labor unrest within the countryside in *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866), and finally her great novel of the English provincial life *Middlemarch* (1872). Her artistic choices in the interim between *Mill* and *Deronda* suggest a search for cultural models ostensibly far from her own (e.g., the cultural upheavals of 15th-century Italy) alongside a recurring concern with the specifically *English* problem of the provincial community: e.g., *Middlemarch*.

Given these forks in Eliot's career between what is recognizably English and what is not, the bifurcated plot structure of *Daniel Deronda* represents a fitting synthesis. One subplot concerns the growth to adulthood of a young English woman, Gwendolyn Harleth, descended from a colonial fortune that her family loses after a bad investment. This event leads her to marry into the family of an English aristocrat, Henleigh Grandcourt. The second concerns a young English gentleman of the leisure classes, Daniel Deronda, who develops a relationship with the Jewish population of London after saving a young Jewish singer from drowning on the banks of the Thames. The lives of both characters take a new course when Daniel, who was adopted, meets his birth mother and discovers that he is Jewish himself.

What have been called the "English" and "Jewish" subplots of the novel have something more fundamental in common. This is the entrance of a third, mediating term into *Mill's* dynamic between organic individualism and the abstract community: the question of the nation, and what nationhood should mean as a form of mediation between the individual

and an increasingly cosmopolitan Europe. If *Mill* concerned the fate of characters within a community defined by a small-scale, localist ethic who must come to terms with the breakdown of their own communal norms by *cosmopolitanizing* forces (e.g., financial abstraction, industrialization), then *Deronda* comes at the same problem from the reverse angle: how individuals in already cosmopolitan circumstances (aristocrats, the culturally mobile colonial bourgeoisie) come to a realization of their location in material and historical particularity.

As I have argued, *Mill* develops a psychology of the individual in which the ties of material, sensory familiarity are essential to the constitution of the subject in general. *Deronda* carries over this sense of the importance of local familiarity, of the centrality of organic principles to the constitution of individuals, along a different axis than *The Mill on the Floss*. For *Daniel Deronda*, the question that brings together the two halves of the novel, that makes its two main characters Daniel Deronda and Gwendolyn Harleth participants in one plot, is the question of the proper object of obligation and duty. Daniel says in one of their meetings that “it is the curse of your life—forgive me—of so many lives, that all passion is spent in that narrow round, for want of ideas and sympathies to make a larger home for it,” an admonition delivered with a confidence that belies his own uncertainty before the unexpected discovery of his own Jewish parentage.<sup>87</sup> When Gwendolyn is forced to deal with the sense of dislocation after her husband drowns in a boating accident, she will be brought to a more irresolute consideration of the same questions.

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<sup>87</sup> G. Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, ed. Graham Handley, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford University Press, n.d.), 387, <https://books.google.com/books?id=OKkEAQAIAAJ>.

In my reading of *Daniel Deronda* I will pursue the following lines of argument: first, I will explain the characterization of *Deronda* as a “cosmopolitan” novel. I understand cosmopolitanism in relation to the ethics of abstraction that were outlined in *Mill*. *Deronda*’s problem of cosmopolitanism inherits the abstractive dynamic of Eliot’s Christian humanism. For Eliot, her humanism entailed a sense of fundamental obligation to one’s fellow human being from a “standpointless” position: a cohesion between individuals that does not depend on a shared and pre-existing history. The ethics of abstraction come into effect in the absence of a strong attachments to any particular community. *Deronda* portrays a generation of English elite that have lost their attachments to the old aristocratic hierarchy of value, but not (yet) fully installed an equivalent new regime of bourgeois values in its place. In the absence of communal identification, abstraction results in a rootless and inward romanticism: in Daniel and Gwendolyn, the individual is marked by a roving, objectless drive toward inspiration and purpose that is unlikely to fix itself in any particular form of commitment.

Second, *Deronda* will attempt to find a way out of the ethics of abstraction that became ascendant in *Mill*. What is sought is a place for an intelligible model of cosmopolitan individualism, splitting the difference between the dislocations of English colonial modernity and the narrowness of the provincial identity represented in *Mill*. This is the idea of *the nation*, which *Deronda* developed in two competing forms that would contribute to one of the most notable aspects of the book: its philosemitism.<sup>88</sup> The novel forges a

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<sup>88</sup> Allan Arkush writes that “if G. E. Lessing’s *Nathan the Wise* can be classified as the most philosemitic literary masterpiece published in the eighteenth century, George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* holds the best claim to such distinction in the nineteenth.” Arkush, “Relativizing Nationalism.”, 61

comparison between the English version of nationhood and a prospective Jewish nation, depicting a Jewish people making up a *de facto* nation within an English nation *de jure*. But the novel's conclusion—in Daniel's departure from England to found a Jewish state—suggests that Eliot found a possibility of renewal in the Jewish model of nationhood that was lacking for England. Daniel discovers that he does not just have a sympathetic identification with the Jewish people in a “cultural” sense, but that he is, in fact, bound to a Jewish community through his hidden parentage. It is this latter fact that allows Daniel to move from an ethics of abstraction to an ethic of sympathy in his acceptance of the Jewish project of nationhood and exit from England.

Finally, I will argue that Eliot's embrace of the Jewish model of the nation, while satisfactory in terms of the problem set out in *Daniel Deronda*, suggests that Eliot had run into difficulties in her larger humanistic aspirations: to abstract Christian ethics from their source. Eliot's humanism, as I have argued, entails the expansion of an historically specific local ethic to a (hypothetically) universal scope. A version of this process must happen in some form if England is to become a nation. England, in the imaginary of her novels, is based on a village ethic. And local village ethics must be expanded into a national ethic. When *Mill* and *Deronda* are taken in parallel, England is shown to be a nation with strong ethical attachments at the *provincial* level, but no process that will reliably turn a people imaginatively rooted in the village into a wider nation.

Eliot uncovers a persistent difficulty in the matter of virtually expanding the provincial village into a meaningful national community. England's ruling classes, Eliot suggests, are indifferent, unaware or unable to generate any object of inspiration that would form a

sense of duty equivalent to what Daniel discovers in his Jewish identity. For all its particular optimism, then, *Deronda* suggests that neither the organic village, which for Eliot is the form of community identical with England, nor Christianity, which in Eliot's view formed the basis for a distinctively English form of ethics, had a viable place in a modernity defined by cosmopolitanism.<sup>89</sup>

*Daniel Deronda* opens in a casino, a symbolic microcosm of the cosmopolitan culture that will be the wider setting of the novel. It is the site where Daniel first meets and notices Gwendolyn, and the point of reference in the present from the which the rest of the story will be told, first flashing back and then moving forward. This very first scene of the novel is what the narrator offers as a "beginning," because, as she notes in the first line, "men can do nothing without the make-believe of a beginning." This will be a spiritual rather than chronological starting point for the novel. The casino offers a worth entry point into *Deronda's* presentation of cosmopolitanism as both condition and problem.

When Daniel Deronda enters the room, Gwendolyn is a notable sight in her very figure: a woman, alone and engaged in avid gambling. For that time it was an unusual sight, placing her at the head of the table in full view of all the other patrons, some "fifty or sixty persons" gathered around one corner in a fictional German resort town. The narrator notes the conspicuous cosmopolitanism of the patrons: "Livonian and Spanish, Graeco-Italian and miscellaneous German, English aristocratic and English plebeian." The gambling house is marked by a nervous energy: "Here was a striking admission of human equality," the

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<sup>89</sup> This is also true of her final novel, *The Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, which I will visit briefly.

narrator notes with some irony. For all their difference in appearance, the patrons of the casino are subject to the leveling forces of calculation and utilitarian self-interest.

The details of the casino are presented like those of an allegory, about a culture unsure of its own values and its own ends. Indeed, the behavior described in the casino scene is less a description of the values, motivations, or goals of the individuals described than an account of their deferment, of how the question of self-interest strips away the purposive dimension of the individual. For all the differences between the characters in the room, their equality is borne out by their similarity of affect, a focused intensity that removes any sense of particular background or historically conditioned difference.

All that separates the players from one another is the outcome of “the game.” It is a scene of “dull, gas-poisoned absorption,” ruled by dissimulation and calculated detachment of the social actors in question. The scene suggests an absence of mutuality; success, but with minimal sense of significance. Boredom exists amidst great (monetary) stakes: “a certain uniform negativeness of expression which had the effect of a mask—as if they had all eaten of some root that for the time compelled the brains of each to the same narrow monotony of action.”

This scene in *Deronda* captures the regime of abstraction that was just coming into view in *Mill*. Abstraction means, first, the loss of a view of the individual origin. The individual represents something, but is not *from* something or somewhere. All identities are part of a singular picture. This is the standpoint from nowhere represented by the ethics of abstraction. Second, in the case of Daniel and Gwendolyn, the ethics of abstraction

represent the avoidance of other questions. The novel implies that this is the state of cosmopolitan Europe, or at least Europe in its elite, aristocratic form.

When it was first published, *Daniel Deronda* was derided for the apparent incongruity between its two plot lines. Many English critics were impressed by Gwendolyn Harcourt, calling her Eliot's most impressively realized female character, but—reflecting the mainstream anti-Semitism of the time—were confused and even repulsed by the Jewish narrative. Daniel and Gwendolyn, whose very different lives are united for a while by circumstances and a need for a confidant, will be cast in separate directions, with Daniel leaving under the vague pretense to help found a Jewish homeland and Gwendolyn declaring that “I will live,” in spite of her eventual misfortunes and indefinite future prospects.

In the casino, calculative abstraction becomes the method for social exchange. What makes it possible for these diverse faces of Europe to appear and relate to one another in the same room is the common basis of the game being played. Indeed, as the slowly-emerging backstory of Daniel and Gwendolyn makes clear by the end of this scene, the “game” of wagering, winning and losing is intended to serve as a form of escape. If the casino offers a macroscopic view of how the rules of abstraction govern a whole society, then Daniel and Gwendolyn offer a picture of the integrative situation between individual and whole.

Abstraction creates a relationship between social actors, but I will argue that the view of Daniel and Gwendolyn's individual situation provides a picture of membership without participation, that what I have called “abstract” individualism imposes minimal requirements of membership on Daniel and Gwendolyn, allowing them to discharge their

membership without involving them as agents. That is, the terms in which they understand themselves to be a participant in the community are not those under which they actually participate.

Gwendolyn Harcourt is the eldest daughter of a family with West Indian colonial wealth. When she is around twenty-one, her stepfather's death and the dwindling of the family's fortune force Gwendolyn, her mother, and siblings to move near her uncle, the rector in a rural English parish. When her family loses the rest of its fortune in further bad investments, she is forced to choose between becoming a governess and—in an improbable event of “good” fortune—marriage to a wealthy landed aristocratic scion, Henleigh Grandcourt, who, despite Gwendolyn's new arrival into poverty, develops an interest in her for reasons of his own. Although Gwendolyn does not particularly like him, she eventually accepts his marriage offer out of duty, securing her own future and that of her mother and siblings.

At the novel's opening Gwendolyn is the pride of her family, doted on by her mother, and considered one of the most desirable prospects for marriage among her peers. This the root of what I want to call her abstract personality. She has a sense of having been marked for something more momentous than the expected outcome to her life: marriage and submission to domestic responsibility. This even if, in her limited experience and prospects as a leisured woman, she cannot imagine what that would be. Her sense of being meant for something more is both a source of moral distortion and blindness. Gwendolyn is accustomed to being “waited on by mother, sisters, governess and maids, as if she had been a princess in exile”—and the root of a retreat into romantic, unspeakable fantasies that

allow her to avoid the thought of marriage in favor of fantastical “dramas in which she imagined herself a heroine.”<sup>90</sup>

The surface-level characterization of Gwendolyn as the “spoiled” child (the title of an early chapter in the novel) belies her ambivalent sense of agency. While she is absolutely certain of her social standing in a sense of her structural position within the English class system, her status as social object within the social determination of marriage has the effect of stunting her sense of herself as an agent.<sup>91</sup> The result is the denial of her fate, the retreat into fantasy, and the casual indifference to others, because Gwendolyn is someone for whom her actions do not, in any pragmatic sense, *matter*.<sup>92</sup> Gwendolyn’s unarticulated absorption of her own status leads to a loss of purpose outside of amusement. Of her internal life, the narrator tells us that she projects an “inborn energy of egoistic desire, and her power of inspiring fear as to what she might say or do.”<sup>93</sup>

Daniel Deronda is the adopted son of a wealthy London nobleman, Hugo Mallinger. Daniel’s birth origins are hidden from him by his adoptive father, and become the source of a lifelong unease. This paralyzes him in early life, but also creates the circumstances through which he discovers his birth parentage. This will become the source of a vision—the dream

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<sup>90</sup> Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, 18.

<sup>91</sup> John Rignall attributes the split in Gwendolyn’s awareness between unmistakable outcome and fantasy to the result of her unconscious entrapment in a Darwinian system of sex selection: “Through Gwendolen, Eliot reveals the illusion of choice: Gwendolen believes she is free to make her own sexual selection, but her experience reveals, crushingly, her actual powerlessness.” John Rignall, ed., *Oxford Reader’s Companion to George Eliot* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), entry to “Darwinism” (accessed electronically).

<sup>92</sup> Gwendolyn’s predicament recalls a line from *Mill* exchanged between the siblings, where Tom mocks Maggie by asking why she does not act on any of her sentiments: “because you are a man, and can do things in the world,” 277.

<sup>93</sup> Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, 43, 53.

of Jewish statehood—that will become Daniel’s adopted cause and vocation. He is widely believed to be Mallinger’s illegitimate son, but the real story of Daniel’s past only starts to unlock itself when he stops a young Jewish girl, Mirah Lapidoth, from drowning herself in the Thames in London. She was born in London and spent her early life there, before being kidnapped by her father and brought to the United States to work in theater as a singer, and fleeing when her father tried to sell her into prostitution. Daniel resolves to help her find a brother that she has returned to London to search for. In the process, he immerses himself in the search across London’s Jewish community, becoming fascinated by Jewish religion and culture after meeting a young, dying Jewish mystic calling himself “Mordecai.” Mordecai regales Daniel with his Zionist aspirations of a Jewish state, and Daniel becomes increasingly taken by Mordecai’s dream. His ties to the Jewish community expand from there. Daniel discovers that Mordecai is Mirah’s sought-after brother, Ezra, and then, upon receiving a letter from his birth mother that she is dying in Lisbon, Daniel discovers that he, himself, is Jewish.

If Gwendolyn’s abstract individualism is defined by a sense of listless superiority brought on by a *lack* of power relative to her status as agent, then Daniel Deronda’s abstraction is brought on by an *excess* of possibility, by an indecision brought on by an involuntary status of being freed from loyalties.

Daniel does not know who his birth parents are and feels unable to ask, as he suspects that he is the illegitimate son of his adopted father, the Baron Hugo Malinger. Not having a past is a source of shame and, the narrative suggests, rootlessness. “There had sprung up in him a meditative yearning after wide knowledge,” writes the narrator. Indecision leads him to

shy away from prizes or conspicuous recognition, for “Success,” the description says, is “a sort of beginning that urged completion.” Having been informed by his adoptive father that he stands to receive a modest inheritance for the rest of his life, Daniel is paralyzed by restless exploration and contemplation.<sup>94</sup>

Privileged circumstances breed a sympathy and concern for everything but himself, because he has no firm basis on which to organize his abilities or ambitions. “There was hardly a delicacy of feeling this lad was not capable of,” the narrator tells us. But no remark better captures the source of his abstraction than the narrator’s knowing assessment that he was “questioning whether it were worth while to take part in the battle of the world,” but that this questioning was sustained by “three or five percent on capital which somebody else has battled for.” The source of Daniel’s freedom is a return on a fungible assets on a market, represented not in the old English aristocracy’s receipt of rents and income paid on agricultural production, but in the ability of financialization to turn a bundle of assets into a wealth generating machine.<sup>95</sup> The superfluousness of Daniel’s action to his own source of material sustainment is a fitting counterpoint to the lack of knowledge that he has about his familial history. As a social elite whose position is maintained by the abstract mechanism of the markets, Daniel’s own sense of himself as an agent is no less ungrounded than Gwendolyn’s, even if his gender makes him a representative of social power. His reluctance to use that power for any definite course of action suggests a certain

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<sup>94</sup> “He longed now to have the sort of apprenticeship to life which would not shape him too definitely, and rob him of the choice that might come from a free growth.” *ibid.*, 153

<sup>95</sup> See Coleman, *George Eliot and Money*, Chapter 8, “The Politics of Wealth: New Liberalism and the Pathologies of Economic Individualism.”

shared condition with her. The status of the young Englishman and Englishwoman, the novel suggests, is that of a pointless, automatic expectation, cutting off the individual's access to his own subjectivity before it develops. In response to the ethics of abstraction, both Daniel and Gwendolyn have adopted a version of self-negation, an inculcated bad faith that obscures their own freedom to themselves.

These portraits of Daniel and Gwendolyn explain how the ethics of abstraction are differently inflected by their individual situation. The later divergence in their fate will turn the novel's two halves into a set of competing models about what the nation can and should be. *Daniel Deronda* is an experimental case in this regard, achieving a degree of subjective purposiveness by his movement from one national community—the English—to his adventitious (or one might claim providential) reunion with the Jewish community of his birth. As he declares at the novel's end, Daniel's decision to subordinate his English identity to a new identity centered in his Jewish birth is driven by the desire to pursue the nationalistic project of Zionism. Daniel declares that "the idea that I am possessed with is that of restoring a political existence to my people, making them a nation again, giving them a national center, such as the English have, though they too are scattered over the face of the globe."<sup>96</sup> But the choice itself is rooted in a more fundamental difference between the English and Jewish versions of the "nation" that the book contains.

The novel suggests that the English nation, for all its geographic and political reality, lacks an understanding of its own center of gravity. As a totality, the novel suggests, it fails to assemble the materials, rituals and practices that create a sense of obligation *in* the

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<sup>96</sup> Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, 688.

individual *to* the nation. As another young aristocratic woman and peer of Gwendolyn, Catherine Arrowpoint, says to her parents when she chooses to pursue an artistic career, marrying outside of acceptable class and racial lines to the Jewish musician Julius Klesmer: “I will not give up the happiness of my life to ideas that I don’t believe in and customs I have no respect for.”<sup>97</sup> Indeed, the great virtue of the English nation is shown to be its flexibility and openness to self-contradiction, to difference from itself. “I want to be an Englishman, but I want to understand other points of view,” Daniel tells his adopted English father about his plans for education before his revelation.<sup>98</sup>

The novel portrays England as a creation rooted in imagination rather than materiality, where the form it takes is dependent on the capabilities of the individual members of the national project. There is nothing so compelling about English nationhood in itself that forces a certain allegiance or course of action on its members. The novel’s unusual (for Eliot) focus on an “elite” strata of English life can be seen as an attempt to analyze England in its most generalized, representative form, through the avatars of Englishness at the national level. England is a play of opposites in the novel, encompassing all of what are essentially “villain” characters like Gwendolyn’s husband Harleigh Grandcourt, apostates to aristocratic duty such as the above-mentioned Catherine Arrowpoint, and putative members of the old aristocratic traditions such as Daniel’s adopted father Hugo Mallinger. England, the novel suggests, depends on a collection of individual, elective leaps of “sympathy” that foster the continuation—or dissipation—of English nationhood.

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 155.

The version of Judaism and the Jewish nationality in *Deronda*—such as it is constituted through Eliot’s own research in the years before she composed the novel—represents Jewish nationality as a phenomenon that is materially and institutionally dispersed, while nonetheless being “essentially” unified. I should note from the outset that Eliot’s treatment of Judaism, while unusually candid and sympathetic for its time, should be understood within a nineteenth century interest in the historical and anthropological origin of European peoples, as well as through the lens of an idealized demographic “other” that gives the novel an outside position to critique English nationhood. Eliot’s understanding of Judaism, in both its historical and contemporary forms, was of her own making and for her own purposes.<sup>99</sup> Eliot’s portrayal of the Jewish communities of London suggests a competing model of national determination by historical particularity.

England is characterized by liberation from the obligation to its own historical structures, by its apparent lack of essential determining factors of its members, and by an openness both to provincial inwardness and the cosmopolitan aspiration. Jewish nationality, by contrast, is shown to have a force of historical reassembly: the ability to maintain its cohesion through a consistent referral *back* to its specific historical past by its present members. In *Deronda* this can be seen in the return of its diasporic lost members back to service in the nation (e.g., Daniel Deronda and Mirah Lapidoth) while dispensing a kind of cosmic punishment on those, like Daniel’s mother and Mirah’s father, who deliberately stray from the duties of stewardship and charity toward their peers.

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<sup>99</sup> See Amanda Anderson, “George Eliot and the Jewish Question,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 10, no. 1 (1997): 39–61, [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/yale\\_journal\\_of\\_criticism/v010/10.1anderson.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/yale_journal_of_criticism/v010/10.1anderson.html) and Saleel Nurbhai and K. M. Newton, *George Eliot, Judaism, and the Novels: Jewish Myth and Mysticism* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002).

In *Deronda* this pastness manifests in the providential forces that lead the title character back to his original (Jewish) parentage. There can be little doubt that this phenomenon was an important source of fascination and, perhaps, envy for Eliot in the final phase of her career as a novelist. This about the Jewish people from her last published work, *The Impressions of Theophrastus Such*:

On the whole, one of the most remarkable phenomena in the history of this scattered people, made for ages “a scorn and a hissing,” is, that after being subjected to this process, which might have been expected to be in every sense deteriorating and vitiating, they have come out of it (in any estimate which allows for numerical proportion) rivaling the nations of all European countries in healthiness and beauty of physique, in practical ability, in scientific and artistic aptitude, and in some forms of ethical value.<sup>100</sup>

Jewish nationality represents a paradox for Eliot, in that its very environmental and material precarity seems to affirm the existence of an unseen, deeper unity and drive-to-cohere. By virtue of its historical specificity, Eliot suggests, the Jewish nation inherits the principle of its own consistency. Therefore I want to suggest that the Jewish nation can be taken as an important example for Eliot’s own broader humanistic project. The apparent resilience of Jewish peoples to dissolution through historical trauma and accident suggests the reliance on a more fundamental rootedness in a historical “truth,” one that allows the Jewish people to persist within an enduring principle of life.

For Eliot, who sought to cultivate a form of humanistic common concern tied to Christianity that was both liberated from its historical structures while still remaining essentially compelled by those same structures, Jewish nationality was a parallel phenomenon of

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<sup>100</sup> Eliot, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, 222–23.

sorts. The nation, which would be built on top of but also necessarily exceed its historical basis, was analogous to the Christian humanist's movement from first (historical) appearance to a general principle. As with the aspiration that England could be the organic expansion of the village, and Mordecai's hope that the Jewish nation can resist the eroding forces of assimilation and diaspora, the nation represents a virtual kinship where none exists through experience. The question that Eliot must answer is whether her humanism looks more like that of the English nation, where excellence will be a rare and occasional achievement by individuals, or that of a nascent Jewish nation: a persistent form that resists the redefinition by individuals while also representing the fulfillment of individual aspiration.

Daniel is first introduced to the reader in his early maturity, before the events of the novel begin in earnest, "fallen into a meditative numbness" and "gliding farther and farther from that life of practically energetic sentiment which he would have proclaimed (if he had been inclined to proclaim anything) to be the best of all life, and for himself the only way worth living."<sup>101</sup> Daniel's adopted father, a baron and holder of numerous estates, seeks to encourage his son but, reflecting his own well-balanced ease and lack of urgency, can offer no advice of consequence. "What do you intend me to be?" Daniel asks, and receives the answer from Mallinger that he is to choose "whatever your inclination leads you to, my boy." [Eliot:1876aa, 149] Mallinger continues: "what I wish you to get is a passport in life," making a qualified recommendation of university study to him, but ultimately recommending a career in law and politics, on grounds that "we want a little disinterested

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<sup>101</sup> Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, 308.

culture to make head against cotton and capital, especially in the House.” Then again, he declares, “if you have any turn for being a Don, I say nothing against it.” Finally, Mallinger’s indifference between perfectly “good” options is tempered with assurance that Daniel “need not take up anything against the grain,” that he will have a “bachelor’s income” and “consider himself secure for seven-hundred-a-year.”<sup>102</sup> But for Daniel, freed from the compulsion of pecuniary upkeep, it is incorrect to see his sense of being in the middle between all things as a blessing. Alongside his freedom from want there is an implied desire for self-determination. Says the narrator: “many of us complain that half our birthright is sharp duty. Daniel was more inclined to complain that he was robbed of this half.”

Although Daniel begins the novel too inarticulate to understand why the problem of his past—his parentage—might be connected to question of future action, he regards this answer to the question as if it were a religious secret, arcane knowledge whose purpose cannot be known in advance: “the words Father and Mother had the altar-fire in them; and the thought of all closest relations of our nature held still something in the mystic power which had made his neck and ears burn in boyhood.”<sup>103</sup> In the most general sense it can be said that Daniel has no definite capacity to take a action but a predisposition to sympathy in Eliot’s sense, an indiscriminate tendency to identify with the condition of others, duty rendered latent by an excess of freedom. Indeed, right up to the moment that he sees Mirah Lapidoth and prevents her from drowning herself, Daniel enjoys the openness of

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 402.

possibility, “occupied chiefly with uncertainties about his own course; but those uncertainties, being much at their leisure, were wont to have such wide-sweeping connections with all life and history.”<sup>104</sup>

If Daniel is a portrait of potentially honorable motive and intention, but without object to which it can be applied, then his peer and Gwendolyn’s eventual husband, Harleigh Grandcourt, will be his antithesis. He is like Daniel in that he lacks for social direction or duty, but different in that he seems to seek out the annihilation of *any* ideals as such.

Daniel’s eventual choice to become a “social captain” of the Jewish national cause makes him into something of a gauzy romantic hero. Grandcourt, by comparison, is a romantic villain figure, represented by an internal life that only serves to reveal the details of his schemes. Compared to Daniel, who looks for an entirely different *order* of purpose than the various lines of development available to an aristocrat, Grandcourt reacts to his determination by class status and material position—wealthy heir, eligible bachelor—with a kind of nihilistic disgust.

Drawn to Gwendolyn by a perception of a spiritedness, like a prize to be won and tamed, he understands himself to have nothing to offer outside of his class and material rank, and sees no action worth taking in excess of these naked advantages that he presents to suitors. Of his marriage to Gwendolyn, “he had won her by the rank and luxuries he had to give her, and these she had got: he had fulfilled his side of the contract.”<sup>105</sup> He treats the question of marriage as a game, and projects an indifference to the consequences of a materially

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 573.

unwise marriage to Gwendolyn, who has no property or great rank of her own. And Gwendolyn, for her part, will regard him as an obstacle to be overcome for later plans that do not include determination by a husband. Her observation, that “after marriage she would probably be able to manage him thoroughly,” proves disastrously wrong when the marriage becomes a struggle for control.<sup>106</sup> In the absence of significance that can be imparted to the union (Grandcourt) and necessity (Gwendolyn), the absence of purpose is transformed into resentment, as Gwendolyn, used to making use of others, finds herself *made use of* in a life “carried on without the luxury of sympathetic feeling.”<sup>107</sup>

In her marriage Gwendolyn arrives at a state where “she had a world-*nausea* upon her, and saw no reason all through her life why she should wish to live.” Grandcourt, for his part, has “no imagination of anything in her but what affected the gratification of his own will”<sup>108</sup> Gwendolyn’s instinct of negation comes full circle with that of domination by Grandcourt.

As a result, what I have called the condition of Englishness reveals itself to be a sort of creativity at throwing away the possibilities of freedom, varying by the “quality” of the individual aspiration, but limited by the type of inspiration available. The lack of a constructive project becomes a panoply of turning-inward, the “delicacy of feeling” and the “well-bred silence” of Gwendolyn and Grandcourt.<sup>109</sup> The “English half” of the novel is encased in a kind of purposeless present, which is only made bearable by means of ironic

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 364.

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.*, 231 (first quotation), 474 (second quotation)

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*, 142 (first quotation), 575 (second quotation)

detachment. The joining of the “Jewish half” of the novel with the English half, through the boundary character of Daniel, represents the eruption of a kind of action in the novel’s moribund surface.

Daniel confronts a new order of consequence after his meeting with Mirah. When Daniel sees her from his own boat in the Thames, she has already failed to find her brother and mother and has resolved to drown herself. An act that Daniel views as a crime gains a more profound context in Mirah’s act: “I thought it was not wicked. Death and life are one before the Eternal.” The significance of her death to herself recedes in the face of mythic history: “Then I thought of my people, how they had been driven from land to land and afflicted, and multitudes had died of misery in their wandering—was I the first?”<sup>110</sup> Mirah’s life is not *simply* individual life but collective life. What she calls her “command” to live is Daniel’s unforeseen act at the moment she intends to drown herself. Mordecai, Mirah’s sought-after brother that Daniel will meet in the coming weeks in London’s Jewish quarter, will tell him when they are standing on a bridge over the Thames that “I have always loved this bridge...[I]t is a meeting-place for the spiritual messengers.”<sup>111</sup> The narrator suggests that Mordecai knows Deronda is his kinsman even before Daniel travels to meet his birth mother in Genoa and learn his true ancestry. Mordecai speaks in a proleptic fashion about the fulfillment of his Zionist ambitions to Daniel, as if his way of apprehending the world already makes him privy to such knowledge. “You will be my life,” Mordecai says:

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 423.

“...it will be planted afresh; it will grow. You shall take the inheritance; it has been gathering for ages. The generations are crowding on my narrow life as a bridge: what has been and what is to be are meeting there; and the bridge is breaking.”<sup>112</sup>

But if the discovery of Daniel’s Judaism is only a confirmation of Mordecai’s plans, the revelation is utterly essential to the sense of purpose that infuses *Deronda*. Mordecai already understands *Deronda* to be the one who will inherit his spiritual aspirations after his bodily death, but the task is beyond Daniel’s sense of personal duty as the situation then stands. Daniel declares to Mordecai that I am “not of your race,” receiving back Mordecai’s cryptic but unshaken response that “it can’t be true.” Only when he confirms Mordecai’s suspicion is Daniel able to understand their link in spiritual terms. The spiritual claim that Mordecai’s vision has on Daniel *comes after* the knowledge of their common heritage. It is exactly because of their shared membership in a single historical people that he is able to take the “inheritance” from Mordecai, i.e. the “bridge” that “has been gathering for generations.” To put it in Eliot’s terms, Daniel’s sympathy with Mordecai can only follow from a shared materiality stretching into the immemorial past.

Daniel’s situation is resolved through the *deus ex machina* of his revealed past. The revelation about his past suggests that the capture that Mordecai has on his imagination alone is not enough.<sup>113</sup> Daniel’s tenuous claim on Englishness that his mother shatters is reassembled so that a *claim* is placed on him by his Jewishness.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 429.

<sup>113</sup> At this point in the narrative *Deronda* has already begun to study Hebrew with Mordecai, spending many of his days in the Jewish quarter of London.

The reversal undergone by Daniel bears comparison to his co-protagonist, Gwendolyn, in her two most devastating scenes of the novel: when her husband Grandcourt drowns in her presence, and when Daniel tells her he is Jewish and will leave to go “to the East.”

After her husband’s drowning, Gwendolyn confides her sense of guilt and responsibility in Deronda. She was a bystander to the event, and her husband quickly fell beneath the surface before she could throw him a lifeline. But despite her “innocence” in a legal or strictly moral sense of the deed, Gwendolyn is at pains to convince Deronda that she bears some guilt for her husband’s death amidst their miserable marriage. “I saw my wish outside me,” she tells Daniel, convinced that she had wished her husband’s disappearance so strongly that she was somehow complicit in his fate.<sup>114</sup> Daniel takes the route of reassurance, pointing out the difference between moral intention and moral outcome, between “the momentary murderous will” and “the course of events.” But in doing so he misses the growth of sympathetic involvement in Gwendolyn’s powers of conscience.

The change brought on by the event in Gwendolyn is of a kind of power of imagination, of feeling implicated in her husband’s death *just because* of the nature (or dearth of) her sympathetic connection with him. Gwendolyn reinterprets an invisible power, which can be dismissed as “mere” emotion, as the basis for the relationship itself. In contrast to Daniel, for whom the material connection undergirds the reach of sympathy, Gwendolyn’s imaginative leap transcends even the lack of a material cause. She understands what was most essential about their relationship as the sympathetic connection, and in the aftermath of his death, repents at the state of her “momentary murderous will” to seek forgiveness.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 596.

The act of private moral imagination that strikes Gwendolyn is given more dramatic form at the end of the novel, when Daniel tells her he is Jewish, that he is marrying the singer Mirah Lapidoth (the Jewish woman he had stopped from drowning in the Thames), and that their friendship will end, and that he is leaving London and England entirely. "The idea that I am possessed with is that of restoring a political existence to my people, making them a nation again, giving them a national center, such as the English have," Daniel tells Gwendolyn about the task that "presents itself to me as a duty."<sup>115</sup> Gwendolyn's understanding of this revelation is multifaceted: shock at the clarification of Daniel's past, regret that the implicit prospect of marriage between them is gone, and finally a sense of awe at the scope of Daniel's ambition. It was "the sort of crisis which was at this moment beginning in Gwendolen's small life," of "being dislodged from her supremacy in her own world" and "getting a sense that her horizon was but a dipping onward of an existence."<sup>116</sup> At that moment Gwendolyn has visions of "the great movements of the world," and thinks of wars and catastrophes in her own time for which she had heretofore felt no possible connection to her own limited individual existence.<sup>117</sup>

Gwendolyn's sense of ultimate insignificance is an ambivalent recognition of her own *potential* connection to her surroundings, to the way in which she and her environment are, at whatever distance, co-constitutive of one another. But in comparison to Deronda and his founder's mission, Gwendolyn, by virtue of her gender and position in life, will remain at

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 688.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 688.

<sup>117</sup> This point stands in contrast to the narrator's own assessment at the novel's beginning: "Could there be a slenderer, more insignificant thread in human history than this consciousness of a girl, busy with her small inferences of the way in which she could make her life pleasant?" *ibid.*, 102.

the level of moral and sympathetic insight, with no basis to bring the insight into active life. As a result, Gwendolyn's assessment of her situation at the end of the novel is fundamentally private: "I shall live. I shall be better." The sympathetic revelation that marks her new maturity has no grand project. On a more mundane level, it has no active, communal occasion by which to mark and expand itself.

By the novel's end, both Daniel and Gwendolyn gain a sense of their position with respect to an intuitive whole, or something like a cosmic location. But a difference opens up between them with respect to the kind of life that seems possible within the community. The nation shapes a horizon of outcomes for its members, forming a kind of secular account of fate in Eliot's novel. Eliot has long been noted for a providential function in her novels, and the function of providence reaches perhaps its peak in *Daniel Deronda*.<sup>118</sup> Here, providence confirms the working-out of historical processes which, for Daniel, have been raised to the level of individual consciousness.

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<sup>118</sup> Daniel's meeting with Mirah, his encounter of Mordecai, and his mother's letter all have their providential dimension. See Peter New, "Chance, Providence and Destiny in George Eliot's Fiction," *English: Journal of the English Association* 34, no. 150 (1985): 191–208, <https://academic.oup.com/english/article-abstract/34/150/191/530760?redirectedFrom=PDF>. This fact is further confirmed by the reverse of providence, by a kind of cosmic punishment signified by *Deronda's* mother. A revered but dying opera singer by the time *Deronda* meets her, she tells him that she gave him up to adoption to *Deronda's* adopted father Hugo Mallinger, with whom she had an affair, to escape the obligations of motherhood for her own ambitions. Now she understands her fatal sickness—and her son *Deronda's* enthusiastic embrace of his Jewishness—as a punishment which she must do her best to correct: "If my acts were wrong—if it is God who is exacting from me that I should deliver up what I withheld—who is punishing me because I deceived my father and did not warn him that I should contradict his trust—well, I have told everything." Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, 567. In the terms of the novel, Daniel's mother has been forced to choose between the claims of individualism and those of the nation. That she is clearly a tragic figure, caught between two irreconcilable norms, does nothing to lessen the sense in which her choice is a kind of separation from the source of her vitality. *Deronda's* mother, unlike the English, *has* a people where she is located, and as a result becomes, in Allan Arkush's assessment, the "most graphic illustration of the damage that can result from too abrupt a desertion of one's ancestral ways." Arkush, "Relativizing Nationalism.", 65

Daniel has developed a different relationship to his own past than he had as an Englishman, and in doing so has reconfigured his possible future. Daniel's future will contain forms of *activity* radically different from those that his adoptive father, the English Baron Hugo Mallinger, could envision "befitting" a person of his class and stature in the English elite. Hugo Mallinger's understanding of the role of the English gentleman emphasizes its passivity and foregone status, a quality which reaches its decadent extreme in the example of his heir and Gwendolyn's former husband, Henleigh Mallinger Grandcourt: in his cruelty born out of boredom, and in his sense that all of life is a game.

By contrast, in Daniel's transition from his adopted past to his birthright past, he has gained not only a task worthy of his indefinite, yet grand ambition—the founding of a Jewish state—but a sense of participatory agency in his real-and-living community. We should refer what Daniel has inherited at the end of *Deronda* to the condition of the Tulliver siblings near the end of *Mill*. Those siblings have a past which forestalls their agency; to "be" a Tulliver at the end of *Mill* is simply to return to their inactive homestead: to an empty time, to an open-ended waiting for the past to turn into the present. From this perspective their death can be seen more as a confirmation of an underlying status of being stranded in the past, rather than a reversal of fortune. Maggie will rebuff one possible future for herself, the suitor Philip Guest, with the objection that "it would rend me away from all that my past life has made dear to me."<sup>119</sup> Maggie receives a past whose weight she cannot anticipate, which crushes the possibility of an active life. The force of the past in the English village is an arresting presence, against which any specific form of present activity threatens to become

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<sup>119</sup> Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, 478.

inadequate. If the village was “supposed” to disappear in the English transition to a mature national life, *Mill* instead shows its persistence in phantasmatic form.

Viewed across the texts, both the English village and the fractured condition of the Jewishness contain an essential element of commitment to a lost past. But what distinguishes them is the manner in which this past is summoned in the present: more specifically, whether it coheres into honorable action or elevates into a unrealizable fantasy. For the Tullivers in *Mill*, we see the outlines of a fantasy begin to take shape, anchored in the honorable but irrecoverable relationships of village life. The imperative to obey what Maggie Tulliver calls the “the divine voice within us—for the sake of being true to all the motives that sanctify our lives” is prone to error and the limitations of the individual in the historical present.<sup>120</sup> This can be seen in the narrator’s dim view of the town of St. Ogg as a whole. But if the Tullivers represent the roots of the English nation in an honorable and, at some indefinite stage, historically specific version of small-scale, communal English village life, then *Deronda* reveals the consequences for England of several additional generations of remove from the village. What was imperfect but within the purview of cultural memory for *Mill*, has, in Eliot’s choice to set *Deronda* in her contemporary moment (1876), become a much more recognizable, more ethically dubious form of fantasy. This can be seen when we compare the situation of Daniel and Gwendolyn at the end of the novel.

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 477.

Daniel tells Gwendolyn about his plans to go “to the East” in ancestral lands of the Jewish people, to see about “making them a nation again.”<sup>121</sup> He imagines this will be an “ideal task,” a “social captainship” that “would come to me as a duty” rather than “be striven for as a personal prize.”<sup>122</sup> The idealism of these statements is readily apparent, but I take them in reference to the mode of relationships in Daniel’s ideal community. He aspires to a form of mutuality which, the novel claims by implication, cannot be found in the England of his time. The mutuality that Daniel aspires to contains a resonance of the village. Not a competitive environment, but a striving toward the same ends in common. Yet this difference must be emphasized: what Daniel has found is a mode of action in which these ideals can be realized in the individual life. His disappearance from the scene at the novel’s end, to an unrepresented outside, suggests that he now inhabits a different plane of action than its other characters.

Daniel’s active life at the end of the novel bears contrasting with Gwendolyn’s last words once she is “freed.” That is, free *both* from an obligation to her domineering husband Grandcourt after this death, *and* from any expectation of a future with Deronda. “I shall live. I shall be better,” she tells her mother.<sup>123</sup> And this in a letter to Deronda on the occasion of his wedding to Mirah: “It is better—it shall be better with me because I have known you.”<sup>124</sup> Gwendolyn has shed the vestiges of a fantastical inner life that marked her at the novel’s

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<sup>121</sup> Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, 688.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 642.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 692.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 695.

beginning, even if her epiphany in the scene where Daniel revealed his past to her retains traces of grandiosity.<sup>125</sup>

Gwendolyn's particular gendered and socially prescribed helplessness at the end of *Deronda* contains obvious parallels with Maggie Tulliver's limitations at the end of *Mill*. But I also want to understand it in more generally symbolic terms, representing the condition of English national life that Daniel leaves behind. Gwendolyn's sense of being removed from her own confined world, of being located in a ethically significant universe of which she is a mere part, has no definite possibility of translation into a communal field of action. Gwendolyn is alone, with little hint of public or private responsibility. This state can be seen in the formulation of her final words to Deronda—and to herself—in an imperative future tense: “I *shall* live. I *shall* be better.” I take her as representative of Eliot's own aspirations for an ethically significant humanism in England, which has become a form of individual resolution that has lost the sense of the object on which to exercise its will.

There is an irony in the relative position of these two nations at the novel's conclusion that would not have been lost on its most astute readers: England remained a nation—indeed, an

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<sup>125</sup> The text of Gwendolyn's epiphany: “The world seemed getting larger round poor Gwendolen, and she more solitary and helpless in the midst. The thought that he might come back after going to the East, sank before the bewildering vision of these wild-stretching purposes in which she felt herself reduced to a mere speck. There comes a terrible moment to many souls when the great movements of the world, the larger destinies of mankind, which have lain aloof in newspapers and other neglected reading, enter like an earthquake into their own lives—where the slow urgency of growing generations turns into the tread of an invading army or the dire clash of civil war, and gray fathers know nothing to seek for but the corpses of their blooming sons, and girls forget all vanity to make lint and bandages which may serve for the shattered limbs of their betrothed husbands. Then it is as if the Invisible Power that had been the object of lip-worship and lip-resignation became visible, according to the imagery of the Hebrew poet, making the flames his chariot, and riding on the wings of the wind, till the mountains smoke and the plains shudder under the rolling fiery visitations. Often the good cause seems to lie prostrate under the thunder of unrelenting force, the martyrs live reviled, they die, and no angel is seen holding forth the crown and the palm branch. Then it is that the submission of the soul to the Highest is tested, and even in the eyes of frivolity life looks out from the scene of human struggle with the awful face of duty, and a religion shows itself which is something else than a private consolation.” *ibid.*, 688

empire—*de jure*, while the Jewish state still waited for its founder and founding. And yet in *Mill* and *Deronda* the state of England as a *community* is merely aspirational, encased the imaginative leap made by Gwendolyn—while the incipient Jewish nation has already realized itself in the activities of Daniel’s new life. This takes us back to the problem that had motivated Eliot’s intellectual journey in the first place: the division between historical circumstance and ethical principle that was the basis for Eliot’s humanism.

## Chapter Three:

### *Clarel and the Community of Pilgrims*

The term “community” has, within this project, acted as a conceptual placeholder between two positions. The first is an individual subject position, which the text enacts through the conventions of an epistemologically detached, “internal” perspective on events. One can point here of the figure of the *Bildungsroman*, whether Wilhelm Meister in the *Wanderjahre* or Gwendolyn Harleth in *Daniel Deronda*. This is the individual who, through the techniques of realistic interior narration, comes to stand apart from the “the social” as a background condition of the text. This background is the second position, a pole that stands, at least in theoretical terms, *against* the individual in its construction of a regular, everyday reality, separate from the individual experience—which has in the texts of previous chapters been stabilized through the conventions of realism.

Within this model, the internal perspective can be communicated, because the individual is not *just* a subjective occurrence; rather, the arrival at the possibility of the individual is also a historical achievement. In addition, certain basic standards of representation are enforced on the everyday itself. For example, in the nineteenth-century realistic text, the narrative action is generally confined to secular history, individuals obey mortal limits on their occupation of time and space, and men and women seek out privately realized forms of happiness like marriage and what we now call “self-actualization.”<sup>1</sup> These conventions allow for the plausibility of any number of nineteenth-century genres of fiction that, in their

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<sup>1</sup> See Guido Mazzoni, *Theory of the Novel* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017), 255–57.

aggregate, make up the protean tradition that designates the “novel.” Of particular relevance to this account has been the picaresque, the epistolary novel, and the *Bildungsroman* which, I have claimed, all construct the figure of the individual around a process of *development*. One could understand a great deal of the structural tension at the heart of the individual’s development within the novels of this project by considering the “objective background” of realism—i.e., time and experience—against the vagaries and uncertain outcomes of the individual life course. That is, the text’s realistic world is defined by any number of regularities that move the individual inexorably toward death and historical obscurity; nonetheless, the individual, as the novel’s *subject*, is an open-ended project.

The drama of the developmental novel is that the individual does not understand what he or she is *for*, what the proper limits of private happiness should be, and whether he or she lives in “heroic” circumstances or, as in Hegel’s sarcastic assessment, is certain to “marry and become a Philistine like everybody else.”<sup>2</sup> What I call the “community” is, to continue with the Hegelian formulation, a dynamic arrangement whereby the individual and background conditions that form the “real” within the novel are worked through one another to a final form within narrative time.

The community as *commune*, as I call it in Goethe’s *Wanderjahre*, is a fitting setting for the realization of vocational ideals, and the community as *village*, as I call it in Eliot, is an idyllic setting where individuals relate within an organic web of affinities. In a tension with these individual ideals, both novels contain multiple versions of the real that I have, at different

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<sup>2</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics : Lectures on Fine Art (Volume 2)*, trans. Thomas Malcolm Knox, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 593.

points, interpreted as a kind of managerial rationality (Werner of the *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre*), technological utopianism (the colony projects of the *Wanderjahre*) and cosmopolitan abstraction (George Eliot's diagnosis of nineteenth-century Europe). To take one example, I have interpreted Goethe's *Wanderjahre* as a text that seeks to make sense of a vocational *individual* ideal within the terms of a reality that resists just this variety of strong individualism.

But in all cases of this project, I have argued that the community—as *mediator* between part (individual) and whole (“the real”)—becomes an imaginative construction of an historical illusion, an aspiration exactly because it did not (or could not) exist in any historical setting. The drama that I traced in both texts was driven by the production of the commune and village through an uncertain hypothetical, as a possibility on its way to utopian realization. In doing so, the community became a *telos* that mediates between the individual and the totality of “the world” outside of the community. The project of individual development has definite ends represented by the needs of the community itself.

The community is the practical basis of a reliable and settled everyday world. It represents closure for the individual project of development, what Franco Moretti calls, in *The Way of the World*, the project of “socialization” whereby the individual “internalizes” the social world in the creation of a stable individual identity.<sup>3</sup> But the community can often—perhaps *more* often in the texts of this project—fail as a source of stability, leading to a breakdown of the settled structures of representation in the text. In *The Mill on the Floss*, the reliability of

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<sup>3</sup> Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987), 15–16.

everyday life is upended for the young Maggie Tulliver when she ventures far from her home at the Mill. This happens first as a child, when she runs away from home, “to the gypsies,” and finds herself radically decentered by a culture on the periphery of her own. Second, as a young unmarried woman, when Maggie and her suitor Stephen Guest are pulled away from the simplicity of life in their village by a boat in the current of the River Floss. Maggie’s reputation as an unmarried woman is ruined, and she lives the remainder of her life on the margins of public life, in the memory of her childhood by the mill. Maggie returns to the original basis of her community in a gesture of symbolic permanence at the novel’s end, when she dies at the mill during a flood that kills Maggie and her brother Tom. *Mill* is a text that advances through a breakdown of the developmental trajectory of an individual life. The novel works through a dramatic, staged withdrawal of the communal structures established in its early chapters, by taking apart the direct relationships that define provincial life. A mode of life which is developmental when oriented to a likely future becomes, for the individual with a fixed orientation to the past, an inert and crippling romantic nostalgia. Put differently, when “what is real” becomes identical with *Mill*’s romantic subtext, the developmental view of the individual within the novel becomes untenable. The siblings Maggie and Tom exist in the romantic isolation of their own subjectivity, against a modernity defined by its structures which will not admit them. *Mill* shows the community, a bridge between individual subjectivity and these structures, breaking down with disastrous results. Within *Mill*, a dynamic individualism typical of the realistic *Bildungsroman* becomes the static figure of hopeless romantic inwardness and social estrangement.

Realism papers over the contradictions that come into view in *Mill*. For example, the

problem of living in the present while remaining connected to the past, and the problem of reliable knowledge of particulars (if we can describe *Mill's* epistemology in this way) versus the power conferred by (financial, legal, social) abstractions.

In this final extended reading, I want to look to a text which is both oriented to a certain kind of individual development—that of the spiritual “breakthrough” or “epiphany” characteristic of religious belief—while rejecting the very *possibility* of individual development. For this reason, this final chapter moves from a reading of a novel to poetry: Herman Melville’s obscure and enigmatic long poem *Clarel* (1876). Whereas the realistic novels I have read so far each contain developmental assumptions about their individual characters, *Clarel* aspires to a construction of character that is closer to a static representation of older poetic forms. I have in mind here the epic, as I will argue that *Clarel* itself is an example of what Franco Moretti calls the “modern epic.”<sup>4</sup> But Melville’s *Clarel* also contains the same potential of inwardness present in the novels of this project, while removing the expectation of individual developmental “resolution” within a distinct communal form. The community that exists in *Clarel* takes the form of the pilgrimage, a community dedicated to the *individual repetition of the founding moment of a tradition*. Pilgrimage, as it is depicted in *Clarel*, is the repetition of a collective tradition for the revelatory benefit of the individual. The “community” exists to put the individual in a position with respect to the founding moment of a (religious) tradition.

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<sup>4</sup> See Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic : The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez* (London ; New York: Verso, 1996)

I choose a shift in genre and form for this final chapter because it embodies a particular tension in its poetic construction, which underlines and heightens the problematic of my earlier texts. Melville's *Clarel* is a text steeped in an individualism with respect to *how one decides* about the nature of the divine. For *Clarel*, religious questions require the individual character's acceptance of God. As the narrator of *Clarel* intones in the middle of the desert: "But, to redeem us, shall we say / That faith, undying, does but range, / Casting the skin—the creed."<sup>5</sup> Religious traditions themselves are the "skin" for the definitive religious action: the achievement of faith itself. And the pilgrimage, in turn, is a journey through *Clarel* that contains its own kind of ontological background: a "real" defined by a materially inert world, indifferent to the characters isolated from their respective faith communities and stripped of their cultural defenses.

What I will call the dual "epic" and "lyric" aspects of the poem is a version of the opposition between individual and background reality that I have relied upon across this entire project. I will use *Clarel* to explore a thematic conundrum at the center of this project: that of the relationship between individual and world when the community takes the form of a *facilitator* for this unmediated relationship. That is to say, a pilgrimage.

To give a brief overview of the work: *Clarel* is a long poem about a young, American seminary student who makes a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, only to find shortly after he arrives that he has doubt about his faith that he cannot shake. His loss of belief first manifests itself in his flat affect when he takes in the sights of Jerusalem. The student arrives in the Holy

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<sup>5</sup> 3.5, 84-86. All citations to the text in this chapter are by part, canto and line number. In Herman Melville, *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land*, Northwestern-Newberry ed., vol. 12, Melville, Herman, 1819-1891. Works. 1968 ; V. 12 (Evanston : Chicago: Northwestern University Press ; Newberry Library, 1991).

Lands alone. Gradually he notices the myriad other cultures, faiths and traditions on raucous display. Clarel concludes that so many of the faces betray the same “blankness” that struck him upon arrival. Doubt is individualized in the character of Clarel, but generalized by the indifferent silence of the setting toward faith.

By the end of the poem’s first part, Clarel joins a religiously diverse and loosely associated band of seekers on a ten-day pilgrimage across different sites in the rest of the Holy Lands. Each of the subsequent three parts is situated within a geographical section of this journey. Part Two, “The Wilderness,” is a three-day walk that takes the wanderers away from Jerusalem to the east, across the Judean desert and to the banks of the Dead Sea. Then, in the third part (evening of the fourth day) “Mar Saba,” they reach the Greek Orthodox monastery by that name, southwest of the Dead Sea in the Kedron valley. There, the travelers spend the next several days observing and participating in religious rituals and talking amongst themselves, leaving on the morning of the seventh day. The last three days of the journey take the party further west to Bethlehem, where they contemplate the sites associated with Jesus’ birth and life.<sup>6</sup> The poem finally concludes back in Jerusalem on the eve of celebrations for Easter Sunday, where the student Clarel learns, to his shock, that the woman to whom he became betrothed in Jerusalem shortly before his departure, Ruth, has died. At its conclusion, the poem arrives at an implicit comparison between the celebrations that memorialize the Christian miracle of Christ’s resurrection and the irrevocability of Ruth’s death and Clarel’s loss.

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<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed schematic breakdown of Clarel’s chronology, see page 709 in the Northwestern-Newberry critical edition of *Clarel*.

As Melville admitted when the poem was published to immediate obscurity in 1876, this was a difficult, ungainly, thoroughly against-the-current book on almost every level. Even if it drew on his eclectic and eccentric eye for transmuting his own travels into fiction—which in an earlier era of literary productivity created an enthusiastic audience for his work—*Clarel's* 18,000 lines of tortured but unrelenting iambic tetrameter were as, Melville himself correctly assessed in a letter to one of his few admirers at this late stage of his career, “eminently suited for unpopularity.”<sup>7</sup> This, along with an overall critical ambivalence about Melville’s turn away from fiction and his embrace of an unconventional poetic style, helps to account for the past and current obscurity of the work.

To summarize its provenance, then, Melville’s *Clarel* is an original American contribution to a mostly British body of texts, about the ambivalences and contradictions of religious faith during a time of rapid European scientific, technological, and social progress. The problems raised belong to the Victorian tradition of literature, philosophy and art known as the “faith and doubt” tradition.<sup>8</sup> By adopting the problem of faith and doubt as its central dilemma, Melville’s *Clarel* is part of genre which exemplifies the bifurcation between individual and world. The individual accepts an either-or proposition with respect to the divine, as someone who either “believes” or “doubts.” This can be seen with respect to Melville himself, in a journal entry that Nathaniel Hawthorne writes about him from 1856. He was

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<sup>7</sup> In Herman Melville and Harrison Hayford. *The Writings of Herman Melville: Correspondence*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1993, p. 483.

<sup>8</sup> For an overview of the thematic features in the so-called “Faith and Doubt” tradition in Victorian Literature, see the entry by this name in the *Broadview Anthology of British Literature*, Volume 5, p. XLVIII. For a discussion of the relationship of Melville’s work to the Faith-Doubt tradition, see Vincent Kenny in *Herman Melville’s Clarel: a Spiritual Autobiography*. Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1973, pp. 34-45

someone, Hawthorne writes, who “can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief.”<sup>9</sup> The form of the faith-doubt conundrum as I understand it is that this “ultimate” question—to *believe* or *not believe*—becomes a prerogative of the specific, historically situated individual. This problem can be found as well in each of my prior chapters: in Wilhelm Meister’s physical adaptation of his body to the demands of his surgical practice, exemplified in archetypal terms by the novel’s invocation of the individual progression through the craft guild. And it can be seen in the shared sensorium of everyday materiality for the villagers in George Eliot’s novels. In both cases the physicality of the individual, the connection between individual bodies and places, is essential to understanding the mechanics of the community.

But here, I want to understand the problem of the individual’s situated, embedded position in terms of Clarel’s faith-and-doubt thematic. As with the condition that Hawthorne points to in Melville himself, “faith and doubt,” as a problem confronted by *individuals*, compresses a collective tradition into an act of “decision” from a finite and limited perspective. That is, the individual is tasked with a decision about ultimate questions from his or her particular historical standpoint with respect to those questions. Both “faith” and “doubt” encourage a model of religious practice, an assent modeled on a view of the subject as a confident decision-maker. The result, I will argue, is the dropping-out of a *support* for individual faith in the life of a community. This has the consequence of prying apart the gap between individual and the background of the real—that is, between the specific concerns of finite individuals and the abstractions of “ultimate” questions. The failure of the pilgrimage to

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<sup>9</sup> See Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Passages from the American Note-Books of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Scholarly Press, 1970), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/pst.000030347168>, journal entry dated November 20, 1856

yield a definitive vision of either “God” or an ultimate good is, I will argue, a feature of its reliance on the individual in his or her decision-making capacity about ultimate questions. Therefore the faith-doubt problematic reveals the consequence of a text without the mediation of a community. *Clarel* depicts a group of pilgrims, pulled away from the support of their communities, thrown upon their own fragility as subjects in doubt about ultimate questions.

### **Chapter Schematic**

In this chapter, I will first examine how the poetics of *Clarel* both build on the realistic paradigms of my previous chapters and further develop the problem of the distinction between individual and world. The poem can be analytically separated into what I call a “lyric” subject and an “epic” structure, where the lyric represents the culturally embedded, historically particular individual and the “epic” forms an ontological totality that resists the functions of individual agency. I will highlight one impersonal totality that dominates the poem’s imaginary: that of a Darwinian, scientific materialism that haunts the pilgrims entrapped in the cycle of doubt.

Second, I will argue that the poem exemplifies its lyric-and-epic construction in the dilemma of “faith and doubt.” The poem’s monological presentation unfolds within the psychological typology of *indecision*. Under the poem’s particular adoption of this thematic, the individual is caught in an either/or problematic: *either* complete identification with a structural ultimate—that is, “faith” as the complete identification with a reality beyond the individual ken—*or* “doubt,” as a permanent distancing with respect to ultimate questions. In its stark, all-or-nothing framing of the individual’s relationship to the divine, it depicts

characters caught in the dilemma of choice, who either give their assent to a metaphysical question about which the everyday world is silent, or are radically isolated by their failure to accept the intimations of a divine presence. For *Clarel* the pilgrim is, in the end, alone to decide about his doubts, and the precarity of faith creates the condition for the recognition of the absence of a community in which these questions could be worked out. But the absence of a durable form of community among the pilgrims also raises the condition for the possibility of a new form of relationship between the pilgrims. These are the two forks explored by the text: the poem's exploration of the absence of a communal resolution for the "faith-and-doubt" question, and the birth of a new type of collective religious life. It is these possibilities that I will work out in the remainder of the chapter.

On the question of the absence of community, which I will cover in the third section of this chapter, the poem depicts characters who cannot mediate their experience of an ultimate reality. They offer a stark picture of the individual in direct conflict with the poem's epic structures. The individual doubter, wandering in the desert between the chaotic picture of Jerusalem (Part 1) and the serenity of religious ritual in the Mar Saba Monastery (Part 3), is brought to his fullest instantiation in a figure I call, borrowing from Walter Bezanson, the "monomaniac." The monomaniac is a figure who identifies his subjectivity completely with what he understands to be an ultimate reality. He seeks to close the distance completely with this ultimate. As such he is an ambivalent figure, who vacillates between epiphanic deliverance and nihilistic self-destruction. As such, this section represents an investigation into the progression of what I call the poem's scientific-materialist ontological background, leading to the figure of the monomaniac. In reading this subtext, we find the negation of the individual in the absence of the intermediating element of communal life.

In the monomaniac, the figure of the individual meets the absolute, without the mediation of institutions, rituals and the possibility of objectification in social life. I develop a reading of the monomaniac's importance to the text by way of two important characters: first, the ship's helmsman Agath ("The Timoneer"), who tells a story about a shipwreck in an unnamed place far away. Through the breakdown of relationships on the ship that leads to the disaster (of which the Timoneer was the only survivor), the Timoneer's understanding is invaded by superstition, intimations of malevolent force, and despair. For the Timoneer, what underlies the regularity of the everyday is chaos. I read him as a character who argues for the irreducible necessity of individual pattern-making and association about the whole. In the face of disaster and the absence of answers, the Timoneer will turn to any explanation—even one that accepts the totality of evil—to make general sense of his world. His turn prepares for a reading of a second, even more fanatical, monomaniac figure: the political radical and failed revolutionary Mortmain, who confronts the failure of his revolutionary political aspirations by turning to nihilism. In Mortmain's death, the doubter's estrangement from the divine presence reaches a dramatic and structural low point. As a figure for whom reintegration into any community proves impossible, Mortmain represents a kind of logical conclusion of individual separation from meaning-making structures. At this point, having made sense of the individual figure represented by Mortmain and the Timoneer, we are prepared to consider the text's positive vision of community in the activities of ritual.

The fourth and final part of this chapter concerns the forms of community that arise among the pilgrims in *Clarel*. I examine the relationship between the specific, historical life of the individual and a background condition that flickers between intimations of the divine and a

skeptical materialism. The poem stages a progression of rituals, which I understand in the broadest sense as a repeatable pattern of life. The text's framing example of ritual is the pilgrimage, recreating the original insight of a religious tradition for the pilgrim. The ritual is an attempt by the pilgrims to codify and discover an organized pattern that defines their relationship to absolutes. To unpack the ritual, I will trace a progression of characters, from a desert monk ascetic, to Zionist settlers, to finally the recreation of the most important miracles in the Christian mythology: first in the pilgrims' visit to Jesus' birthplace in Bethlehem, and second in Clarel's return to Jerusalem on the eve of Easter Sunday. In each ritual, the task is to make sense of the specific situation of the individual, and in his or her determination by cultural milieu, choice, chance, and fate. The ritual, I argue, offers a pathway by which all of these elements can be brought together in a comprehensible pattern that forestalls the inflexible positions of "faith and doubt." In lieu of a decision, the ritual promises a formative and sustainable act of participation in a religious tradition. But the final resolution of the ritual in *Clarel*, I will argue, displays an ambivalence between absorption in the *object* of ritual and the inescapable doubt that the ritual must assuage for the pilgrim. In the end, for the student Clarel, the ritual reveals an inability to make sense of the divine from his particular, situated reality. The miracle of Christ's death and resurrection during Easter Sunday is not adequate to make sense of his own sense of loss at the conclusion. I read Clarel's experience of personal loss, in the death of his fiancée Ruth, as a restatement of the dilemma that motivates the poem's faith-and-doubt problematic: *Clarel* is Melville's most emphatic statement of the individual attempt to make sense of something beyond himself in the face of his own insuperable limitations.

### **Realism and *Clarel's* Poetic Aspects**

My argument is that *Clarel* contains “lyric” and “epic” dimensions of construction contain a framing which makes sense of the particular conundrum that faces the individual pilgrim. This claim should be situated within this chapter’s departure from the genre forms that have dominated the project so far. The makeup of *Clarel* as a poem—or at least, the argument I want to make for the purposes of this project—depends on the conviction that it decouples the elements of individual and collective voice that were combined in my previous chapters. The tools and effects of the novel—realism and narrative, to name just a few—must be reconsidered if we are to sensibly relate *Clarel’s* presentation of the individual to those of the previous chapters. I therefore begin this section with a review of realism’s function in this project, then move to a discussion of *Clarel’s* combination of the lyric and epic modes. Finally, I will offer several close readings of the poem’s use of place and space to argue that the lyric and epic aspects of the poem arise in a dialectical fashion from one another.

The function of the community as an ideal in Goethe and Eliot was to mediate the processes of individual development. Despite its dissimilarity from the other texts of this project, *Clarel*, which is sometimes classed in the uneasy category that Franco Moretti has called the “modern epic,” presents an important counterpoint to the texts that I have presented in the previous chapters.<sup>10</sup> Poetry, I want to suggest, lays bare some of the contradictory tendencies that were central to the realistic effect in my so-called “novel of

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<sup>10</sup> See Moretti, *Modern Epic*

individualism.”<sup>11</sup> The work contains what I want to call a “lyric” voice, which I understand as the problem of the situated, historically specific individual. This individual lives within totalizing structures appropriate to the epic, presented in the poem as the scientific picture of reality. My larger project relies heavily on the assumptions behind the realistic novel, motivated by a claim about historical representation in nineteenth-century narrative fiction. I have reserved the term “realism” here with as few commitments as possible, intending only to designate those group of texts whose primary mode is *narrative* and *developmental*; that is, where the individual internalizes norms according to a developmental trajectory.

“Realism” registers the meaningfulness of the representation of social life. It offers an aesthetic commitment—however attenuated—to a picture of social life that can be meaningfully reflected with fictional models, even as it is undercut by its own formal choices and ideological dependencies. As Fredric Jameson writes in *The Antinomies of Realism*, realism has an inherently conservative tendency in matters of aesthetics if not also politics. It presents its readers with an object that is simply given, as if it were the “thing itself.” What is *real* thereby assumes “a conviction as to the massive weight and resistance of the present” and “an aesthetic need to avoid deep structural social change as such.”<sup>12</sup> The individual that emerges *within* the realistic nineteenth-century tradition creates an inherent tension. If, as Jameson maintains, the importance of the individual is part of a “thoroughgoing revolution in the social order itself,” then it would “disqualify those

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<sup>11</sup> See “Introduction” to this work (Chapter 1)

<sup>12</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (New York: Verso, 2013), 145.

materials of the present which are the building blocks of narrative realism.”<sup>13</sup> I take Jameson to mean that, if realism offers an interpretive model of fiction as a form of history’s reproduction, then some attention must be paid to the aspects of *fictionalization*, to the processes by which the individual could come to be recognized in the form of realistic depiction.

But *Clarel*, in its quixotic appeal to epic conventions, anti-modern presentation, and relentless despondence, can be said to concern the absence of individual dynamism, the fixation of the individual subject within positions of faith and doubt—and a separation from “ultimate” metaphysical questions. *Clarel* is a text with no middle factor. Or, the breakdown of a mediation between the individual and what it presents as a cosmic whole defined by a Darwinian, materialist scientific rationality. Melville’s text therefore offers a different angle of analysis for this project—by means of the negative example. Its narrative, about a group of pilgrims journeying across the holy sites of Jerusalem and Palestine, offers an exploration of the disappearance of the community. For Melville that disappearance takes the form of the individual’s absolute subjection to a disenchanting version of the cosmos. The philosopher Ernest Gellner writes about a version of the modern, scientific cosmos that “was homogeneous, subject to systematic, indiscriminate laws, and open to interminable exploration, offered endless possibilities of new combinations of means with no firm prior expectations and limits: no possibilities would be barred, and in the end nothing but evidence would decide how things were, and how they could be combined to secure

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 145.

desired effects.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed, *Clarel* is a text about a world broken up into pieces of evidence that must be interpreted by the individual subject, about the inability of world-structures defined by their regularity to provide evidence of a divine presence.

The text is a “religious poem,” as it has often been called, in the tradition of the Victorian “faith-and-doubt” model, in which the individual is stranded between religious commitments that can neither be embraced nor relinquished. For the main character, Clarel, and many of their fellow pilgrims, the poem is about being “stranded” in the position of doubt, of living with a doubt that no simple intimation of a divine presence can confirm. The poem stages the de-dynamization of the dialogue between individual and the perception of ultimate structures. What is at stake is the loss of this middle position. This, I will argue, intensifies the dilemma of the individual agent: the one who thinks and acts from a particular, embedded position. The absence of community represents an inability to form a dialogue between individual and whole. The poem confronts this phenomenon through intractable dialogue between its characters. *Clarel* documents their ultimate turning inward, their abandonment of a reliance on collective answers and traditions in favor of the individual’s perspective.

To begin with a simple contrast that introduces the difference between lyric and epic in *Clarel*: if the lyric creates a world through persuasion about the first-person perspective, the epic exalts what is familiar. The epic has the *form* of conviction, while lyric has to produce it. But in representing a religion as a monolith, as a world inheritance held in

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<sup>14</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2nd ed., New Perspectives on the Past (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2008), 22.

common, the poem embodies the epic aspiration, or more accurately the “modern epic” in the sense described by Franco Moretti.<sup>15</sup> The generic expectation of the epic is that of a storytelling form in which the action is already understood. Events may resist the completion of a difficult action, but not the significance of that act.<sup>16</sup> Odysseus is tested in his return home, but there is no question that he must leave Circe’s island and do so. By contrast, the modern epic puts the significance of the act in question while nonetheless retaining the obligation to act. But this obligation does not provide for that act’s intelligibility, only the necessity of *taking* action. The intelligible act implies a response by the world that meets expectation, that can be assimilated into standards of what is, say, difficult or worthy or necessary. By this model it is possible to do “right” and “wrong” by the standard. The world of *Clarel* retains an epic character by its insistent reflection on the importance of what is right, but the stakes of “right” are, in a sense, much higher than in traditional epic, where the problems are essentially ethical, about honor and duty. *Clarel*’s question about “what is right” is primarily a question about the underlying reality of things, their organization in service of religious ultimates.

*Clarel* is a poem that takes place in what is most obviously described as a religious setting, about a group of characters on a religious pilgrimage, all of whom are concerned in one way or another with making sense of a set of religious problems. Religion, for *Clarel* provides a “universal” theme: the pilgrimage, in Melville’s understanding and experience, was a project-in-common across multiple world-historical religious traditions. But *Clarel*

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<sup>15</sup> Moretti, *Modern Epic*.

<sup>16</sup> See Hegel, *Aesthetics* 1044-45 and N. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, Princeton Paperbacks (Princeton University Press, 2000), [https://books.google.com/books?id=\\\_4h2jwEACAAJ](https://books.google.com/books?id=\_4h2jwEACAAJ) 318-20

resists the epic form through its psychological presentation of the individual. It plays on the implausibility of a universal setting (e.g., the Holy Lands of Jerusalem and Palestine: the site origin of “world religions”) and the *failure* of universals as *the* paradigmatic problem to be confronted by the individual religious adherent.<sup>17</sup> *Clarel* was composed at a moment of interest in cross-cultural comparison of sacred texts that would lead to the formulation of the “world religions” as an event in history, a unifying approach to the heterogeneous transcendental elements of various cultures which arguably created the concept of religion as such. While there remains uncertainty about the depth of Melville’s familiarity with the growth of comparative religion as a scholarly practice, he participated in a new wave of interchange between colonial center and periphery that was brought on by the intensification of global travel lines.<sup>18</sup>

The individual’s inability to decide on any particular version of these ultimates, what the narrator names the “complex passion,” turns the problem of *the nature of religion* into a repetition of individual actions which cannot make progress on its questions because it cannot approach them. *Clarel’s* version of God is a silent one. He cannot supply the answers, only the interlocutor position.<sup>19</sup> The traditional epic should display a certain incapability of interrogating its underlying ideals of right and wrong; to do this would undermine the

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<sup>17</sup> I draw on Franco Moretti’s designation of the features of the “modern epic,” invoking a cultural totality which is undermined by “a discrepancy between the totalizing will of the epic and the subdivided reality of the modern world.” Melville set *Clarel* in a locale that is at the origin of a certain version of “Western” history, but what startles the student Clarel about this locale, the wide-open “blankness” of the Holy Lands, is represented in the text are a sure sign that it is just another element that participates in historical time. See Moretti, *Modern Epic*, 5

<sup>18</sup> As I have already mentioned, a journey to Jerusalem and its surroundings in 1857 formed the basis of Melville’s firsthand knowledge and notes when he began his composition of *Clarel* several decades later.

<sup>19</sup> “Deem vain the promise now, and yet / Invoke him who returns no call” Melville, *Clarel*, 1.3, 190-91

significance of action. Melville's work can for this reason be considered a negative image of the traditional epic. In the traditional epic, the dramatic reversals and uncertainties of events conform to a more fundamental order sanctioned by the epic reality: this is the burden of the hero, the inevitability of death, the return home, and so forth. *Clarel*, by contrast, produces a sense of disorder through the individual character's unease against the suspiciously smooth and resolved surface of reality: through the persistence of intractable questions which have been dismissed by science and positivistic culture.

Thus the character in *Clarel* is "individualized" in the face of the necessary self-generation of the Holy Land's "blankness."<sup>20</sup> A property of the world is internalized as a function of character; certainty is not possible, and yet the question of "what to believe" persists. From this perspective *Clarel* appears to stage a modern consciousness inside of a premodern expectation inherent to the pilgrim's journey of confirmation at the source. This description could also be taken as a version of the condition of modernity, in which case *Clarel* creates the modern religious problematic of "faith" and "doubt" out of its own categories of order and disorder.

I have already claimed that *Clarel* does away with a developmental perspective that was implicit in the texts of my previous chapters. The disappearance of this perspective characterizes the individual as the formal representative of what is anti-systematic and particular. Individual knowledge is represented by being embedded, by coming from a particular standpoint. This is the character as agent, for whom the real must be related to a

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<sup>20</sup> Clarel's first sight of Jerusalem: "Like the ice bastions round the Pole, ☐ / Thy blank, blank towers, Jerusalem!" 1.1, 60-61

situation: to a set of circumstances—biography, history, tribal membership—that in their totality describe him as a representative of a tradition. The perspective of the individual is incapable of theoretical knowledge about the whole, and for that reason contains a necessarily incomplete factor. The ability to represent the individual as particular *standpoint* implies that the articulation of his position is a contingent part of the systematic description of a world. The character's standpoint is opposed to the representation of the whole. The epic dimension of the text obligates the depiction of convincing *structures*, where the epic is the depiction of the whole of the real from the perspective of nowhere.

The poem's avoidance of the developmental perspective allows for multiple possible resolutions of the tension. First, there is the possibility that the "modern" individual permanently eschews metaphysical concerns. The individual "leaves behind" the particular standpoint in a posture like the acceptance of disenchantment. That is, the individual accepts a principle whereby the experience of phenomena becomes "evidence" of a controlling, systematic reality. A world order that appears in the form of evidence submits to the controlling organization of a system of a scientific-materialist or evolutionary nature. The individual accepts, or rather looks past, his status as fragment of an overall presence or absence. This stance represents a kind of disenchantment, an acceptance of a kind of absurdity of the individual perspective.<sup>21</sup> The second possibility is the stubbornness of the *significance* of the individual view: the embedded, necessarily incomplete standpoint represented by the individual remains essential to an "aporetic" (i.e., always, necessarily

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<sup>21</sup> I want to connect this possibility of world-as-evidence to the problem of disenchantment, as articulated by Max Weber ("*Entzauberung*"), and given one contemporary formulation in the work of the philosopher Charles Taylor. See Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993) and Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007)

problematic and incomplete) perspective. This possibility is represented in the meaning of the term “pilgrim” itself: etymologically speaking, the one who is necessarily “stranger” to the world that he or she inhabits.<sup>22</sup> The presence of a scientific-materialist perspective in the text only raises the urgency of the question of an individual’s “escape,” of a release from the structures of the present.

If the lyric has traditionally been a form that deliberates on the situation of the speaker, then Melville’s lyrical voice is marked by the awareness of its own self-dependence, by the necessity of a constructivist approach to the modern predicament. The individual pilgrims are separated from the world of tradition and membership in a given religious “community.” As “doubters” along with *Clarel*, they become thinking and discriminating judges of religious signs: from religious *members* of a tradition to decision-maker on traces left by a possible divine. Melville’s lyric foregrounds the breakdown of the religious institutions, signs and structures of enchantment (foremost the structure of the pilgrimage itself) so that it can be *memorialized* by the individual speaker.

My use of the term lyric accepts, from the outset, the protean, slippery nature of the term. Given this project’s emphasis on the individual voice, of greatest relevance to this analysis are those claims in close association with romantic-era theorization of the lyric: that it presents a direct address between speaker and audience, that it aims to describe an

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<sup>22</sup> The Oxford English dictionary traces the etymology of the modern “pilgrim” through a mix of borrowing from the Middle French *pelerin* (“stranger, alien”) and the Latin *pelegrinus* (“foreigner, one from abroad”). Entry for “pilgrim” in Oxford University Press, ed., “The Oxford English Dictionary.” (Oxford : New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1989), <http://dictionary.oed.com/>.

experience with minimal intercession by poetic device or artifice, and that it represents the voice of individual against a collective demand.<sup>23</sup>

The poem participates in the lyrical tradition by depicting the situation of the disillusioned, but dogged, religious pilgrim: visitor to the origin of a tradition, who seeks to witness a sacred tradition's entrance into the world. In this sense the pilgrim's journey is one of confirmation, a process of, as one commentator describes the pilgrimage, a "personal quest for meaning that strengthens an existing identity."<sup>24</sup> The archetypal pilgrim-journey seeks out an originary (religious) truth already established, yet still available in some form at its source. This is the traditional purpose of the pilgrimage.<sup>25</sup> But *Clarel* reverses this expectation by turning the pilgrim into a carrier of doubt, who seeks confirmation through reversal by judgment, dialogue or revelation. Regardless of the means, the pilgrim in *Clarel* seeks a fundamental transformation of perspective that would reconfigure the meaning of the journey, from doubt to confirmation. The position of the speaker in *Clarel* becomes a kind of action in itself, where doubt must bring something conjectured into being. The pilgrim does not approach the site of "pure" religious revelation seeking to experience. Indeed, what is striking about *Clarel* is that religious vision, in the sense of the mystical experience or witnessing of the miracle, is pointedly absent. Rather the pilgrimage itself is

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<sup>23</sup> See Heather Dubrow, "Lyric Forms," in *The Lyric Theory Reader : A Critical Anthology*, ed. Virginia Walker Jackson and Yopie Prins (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 114–27, 114–115

<sup>24</sup> Matthew T. Loveland, "Pilgrimage, Religious Institutions, and the Construction of Orthodoxy," *Sociology of Religion* 69, no. 3 (2008): 320, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20453230>.

<sup>25</sup> See Victor Turner, "The Center Out There: Pilgrim's Goal," *History of Religions* 12, no. 3 (1973): 191–230, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1062024> on the traditional structure of the pilgrimage journey. Bezanson writes that when Melville drew on his own journals and journeys for the composition of *Clarel*, he began by "passing up any direct treatment of the weeks he had spent in Greece, Turkey, Egypt and Italy," instead "using the ancient pattern of a pilgrimage." In Walter Bezanson, "Historical and Critical Note to *Clarel*," in *Clarel* (Northwestern University Press, 1991), 531

an action that seeks to establish. On the oldest widely known Greek lyrics, the theorist Jonathan Culler writes that they consist of a ritualized speech which is performed, “sometimes deemed of divine origin,” and with the intention to “produce truth.”<sup>26</sup>

Culler writes that the archaic lyric speaker could be a singer at an event (e.g., wedding), an official praising the gods, a lamenter for one who has died, or a speaker of praise for a hero. The lyric contains “a context of ritual foreground the question of the poem’s own ritualistic character as spell or chant, confirmed by various forms of repetition.”<sup>27</sup> In each case the lyric presumes a direct address from a particular, situated standpoint, since it constructs the impression that an actual speaker lies behind the contents (what Culler calls an “enunciative apparatus”) who is in a position to say something authoritative about the nature of what is under discussion<sup>28</sup> Culler writes that the lyric “attempts to be itself an event rather than the representation of an event” and “assertions or judgments that are not relativized to a particular speaker or fictional situation but offered as truths about the world.”<sup>29</sup> The lyric does not know the truth, but purports to put itself in what I want to call a truth position by drawing itself close to both the event in question and sources of authority. The speaker in *Clarel* has personal authority, based on the experience of the events themselves. At certain moments, and at times drawing on this authority, characters may argue and press a point. But the subject matter is the same in all cases.

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<sup>26</sup> Jonathan D. Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 49.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, 16

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

In the lyrical mode of *Clarel* there is little space for a narrator, for a gap between the condition being addressed and the diegetic world being shown. The thought attacks the speaker; narration often introduces or frames lines spoken by character, but in doing so it bleeds into them, reducing the abstraction between the presumptive speaker and the situation, by making the speaker appear to speak “at” the situation. This is what Culler calls turning the past into an “occurrence in the lyric present.”<sup>30</sup> Finally, the lyric is a genre defined by the elevation of its subject matter, what Culler calls a “deliberately hyperbolic quality,” which appears to be a form of spiritualized enchantment: to “remake the universe as a world, giving a spiritual dimension to matter.”<sup>31</sup>

I want to claim about the lyric that it is a *situational* device, depicting speech from within the position of tribal membership, traditional affiliation, personal history, and associated rituals.<sup>32</sup> To speak of the individual in this situation is to address a presence that is only isolable in a virtual sense. As Walter Bezanson has pointed out, Melville’s “typological” approach to character in *Clarel* ensures that no character stands for themselves, that they are representative of a set of definable worldviews, if not a specific cultural group.<sup>33</sup> The lyric represents the speaker as the hypothetical individual who *can only* speak from a position of compromise by the situation. Culler highlights the “complexity of the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>32</sup> Susan Sontag: “The earliest experience of art must have been that it was incantatory, magical; art was an instrument of ritual.” Susan Sontag, “Against Interpretation,” in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (Picador, 1966)

<sup>33</sup> For Bezanson’s interpretation of these typologies see Bezanson, “Historical and Critical Note to *Clarel*,” 613-635

enunciative apparatus” that, while “articulated in the first person,” is “anything but a straightforward statement by a speaker.”<sup>34</sup>

To expand on the difference between lyric and epic perspectives, I read the function of the lyric and epic modes within *Clarel's* use of *place*. The purpose of this close reading is to demonstrate how questions of individual positional and impersonal structure arise dialectically from one another: that, for example, one cannot make sense of the physical misery imposed by the desert without the pilgrim’s spiritual *reason* for entering that desert, and that the landscape will always elude the individual’s attempt to make it serve human needs and wants. The landscapes of *Clarel* are both immovable from the individual subject perspective but, in their immovability, reveal new forms of subjectivity. Having understood the ways in which subject and structure are opposed to one another in *Clarel*, we will be prepared to consider the central forms of subjectivity—“believer” and “doubter”—in the poem itself.

We should first distinguish between *Clarel's* use of *place*, noted for the integration of a human presence (as in Jerusalem, the monastery at Mar Saba) and *spaces*, which oppose the human—as in the desert. To give one example of how these functions oppose one another, *Clarel* depicts the individual character diminished by the overwhelming totality of the desert (space), then re-entering the Mar Saba monastery to participate in Christian rites of monastic worship. The first stark difference between the two terms occurs in the approaching pilgrim’s experience of space outside Jerusalem (“Romance of mountains!,”<sup>35</sup>)

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<sup>34</sup> Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 16.

<sup>35</sup> 1.1, 47

and the inscrutability of the city's physical presence ("Thy blank, blank towers, Jerusalem!"<sup>36</sup>) that sets up a reversal: the human fullness of Jerusalem's chaotic, streets overflowing with the suggestive crowd ("These like tides together clash / And question of their purport raise."<sup>37</sup>) and the inscrutable Mount Olivet looming above.

At the end of the poem's first part, as the band of pilgrims prepares to depart from Jerusalem, Clarel takes note of "The mountain mild, the wrangling crew" in "contrast" with one another.[1.44, 27] The pilgrims are at the edge of Jerusalem, still in view of Mount Olivet, which "tease[s] the sense" with "vague unrest" and "unconfirmed significance." [1.44, 29-31] The ambiguous appearance of the mountain contrasts with the resolve of the characters on the verge of their pilgrimage outside the city walls.

In the dialogue between individual and structure, the sands of the desert both erase and intensify the meaning of the individual by imposing their materiality. The monastery at Mar Saba becomes the site of the reconstitution of the individual in the figures like the ascetic and the monk. The human construction of place in the form of the monastery exists at the edge of the desert's capacity to obscure, a capacity for repression of the human that paradoxically affirms the generative capabilities of the embedded individual: "Man sprang from deserts: at the touch / Of grief or trial overmuch, / On deserts he falls back at need."<sup>38</sup>

In the desert the individual's relationship to space develops without the mundane forces of maintenance and continuation that allow for permanent human settlement. Here the

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<sup>36</sup> 1.1, 61

<sup>37</sup> 1.6, 12-13

<sup>38</sup> 2.16, 106-8

human retreats to erase itself and begin anew. The narrator suggests that the desert outside of Jerusalem contains a “pure” emptiness for which North America (Melville presumably intends the wooded East with which he was most familiar) has no direct comparison, since the American wilderness can be bent to settlement and agriculture.<sup>39</sup> Wilderness does not carry a human history; no civilization can claim it, and yet it admits entrance on uncertain terms to the pilgrims. For the individual it both lacks the social processes of integration by which the individual could claim to “be a part” of nature, but is also open to the evidence provided by the individual faculties. As a result desert is not the site of cooperative interpretation, but of experience. As the poem suggests by its reference to John the Baptist, to make sense of it one must enter without intentionality, prepared to receive a vision and witness the impossible.<sup>40</sup> The wilderness erases certainty through the absence of familiar human things, by presenting materiality on its own terms. In doing so it mixes familiar intellectual categories; it can be a place where Darwin, figure of scientific disenchantment, draws on the romanticism of Shelly:

Darwin quotes

From Shelley, that forever floats

Over all desert places known,

Mysterious doubt—an awful one.

He quotes, adopts it. Is it true?

Let instinct vouch; let poetry

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<sup>39</sup> The pilgrims note the “the contrast of their vernal homes— / Field, orchard, and the harvest cheer.” 3.5, 29-30

<sup>40</sup> Allusion to Mark 1.6: “But to pure hearts it yields no fear; / And John, he found wild honey here.” 2.11, 95-96

Science and instinct here agree,

For truth requires strong retinue.[2.11, 13-20]

In unsettled places, “instinct” will “vouch” for other human achievements, rendering the rational and intuitive mind equal to one another. The desert strips away the romantic interpretation of nature through the intensity of its materialistic presentation to the senses (“science and instinct agree”), but also evades reduction to the scientific and the material. It has the power to oppress the pilgrims as involved observers. The “doubt” it imposes overwhelms the adequacy of even the scientific explanation. In the dust storms and scenes of distant peaks (Mt. Sinai) obscured by desert winds, the desert marks the limit where knowledge of place is obscured.<sup>41</sup> The desert marks what can be assimilated into human categories and what lies beyond. This is the point at which emptiness can be brought into civilization, where dialectical interchange between collapses the difference between categories.<sup>42</sup> If empty space is the space where development meets its opposite, it is also the place where concepts and paradigms smash into one another. Empty space is unified, having no need of an opposite to balance it, but the opposition between nature and the human becomes the basis of all other opposites. Emptiness can still represent a strong division, the space between ‘self’ and ‘other.’

The unsettled place becomes a zone of potentially radical sacredness through its exclusion of the human. As with a Syrian monk-ascetic that the group will later meet, the desert is blank, open to the possibility of being filled with a “pure” subjectivity of the intensely

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<sup>41</sup> “Yonder on the horizon, red / With storm, see there the caravan” 2.11, 44-45

<sup>42</sup> “Science and Faith, can these unite?” 3.5, 64

concentrating observer. It forms a step for the pilgrims who must make sense of their own traditions by passing through their total exclusion in the desert. The wilderness reveals the absolute consistency of matter, the essential difference between intimations of the immaterial and of the earth. In resisting the human, the desert reveals the presence of a radical other which can be filled with divinity, as when the narrator cites episodes of lightning strikes in antiquity: “men here adore this ground / Which doom hath smitten.”<sup>43</sup> In its potential to destroy the human body the desert intimates something more-than-material.

The epic is normally associated with a picture of the world in which the material and immaterial contain resonances of each other. As Hegel writes in his *Lectures on Aesthetics* about the epic:

The whole comprises both the religious consciousness, springing from all the depths of human spirit, and also concrete existence, political and domestic life right down to the details of external existence, human needs and means for their satisfaction; and epic animates this whole by developing it in close contact with individuals, because what is universal and substantive enters poetry only as the living presence of the spirit.<sup>44</sup>

The traditional epic portrays the totality of material and spiritual concerns “in close contact” with the individual. This is neither, as in the lyric, the individual as an agent responsible for construction of a “picture” of the world; nor, as in the *modern* epic, the mechanistic indifference of the world to the individual. In the epic traditionally conceived, there is no gap between world and individual, in which a constructivist account of

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<sup>43</sup> 2.11, 87-88

<sup>44</sup> Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 2:1044.

individual subjectivity could arise. But the experience of place in *Clarel* changes this configuration. Wilderness remains close to the pilgrim while standing apart, making the subject aware of his own materiality through the minimization of his own subjective importance. *Clarel* depends on a sense of a relationship between what is inside and outside the human, and it maintains this sense in the dichotomy between place (settlement) and space (wilderness). The community of doubters knows that the materiality of space is opposed to them, that it must be approached in worship, reverence and mystery rather than lived in as a home. The pilgrim who has lived through the erasure of the individual in the indifferent totality of the desert has arrived, through the wilderness, at a revised understanding of the human.

At the end of the journey through the desert, the pilgrims sight the Mar Saba monastery, situated alongside a cliff: "Anchored in seas of Nitria's sand, / The desert convent of the Copt—"45 The spiritual exceptionalism of the monastery depends on its closeness to empty space: "No aerolite can more command / The sense of dead detachment, dropped ☐/ All solitary from the sky."46 The monastery achieves at a group level the extraordinary individual's withdrawal from the public participation, the precondition of spiritual reflection: "Saba abides the loneliest: / Saba, that with an eagle's theft / Seizeth and dwelleth in the cleft."47 Residing in empty space is an animal act, the attempt to be raise one's consciousness through lowering oneself in the order of creation. The monk lives and moves among this desert, whose purpose is to make them aware of death:

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<sup>45</sup> 3.9, 7-8

<sup>46</sup> 3.9, 9-11

<sup>47</sup> 3.9, 36-38

But up and down, from grot to shrine,  
Along the gorge, hard by the brink  
File the gowned monks in even line,  
And never shrink!  
With litany or dirge they wend  
Where nature as in travail dwells;<sup>48</sup>

The heightened awareness of the monks walking close to death along the cliff is essential to the construction of the monastery. The openness of space is the memory of time compressed beneath the shallow human human layer of settlement, beneath the technosphere with its distractions: “Full fifteen hundred years have wound / Since cenobite first harbored here”<sup>49</sup> The description continues:

What memories elder? Far and deep  
What ducts and chambered wells and walls  
And many deep substructions be  
Which so with doubt and gloom agree,  
To question one is borne along—  
Based these the Right? subverted the Wrong?<sup>50</sup>

Human settlement is the basis for history, but also the site where the deep time of space confronts the fragility of memory in *place*. The landscape always includes the sediments, the multiple orders of time. Outside of Mar Saba the pilgrims meet a geologist, Margoth,

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<sup>48</sup> 3.9, 44-49

<sup>49</sup> 3.9, 62-63

<sup>50</sup> 1.16, 6-12

emblem of spiritually contemptuous scientific materialism. The geologist's study of deep time within the sediment challenges the possibility of an historically revealed transcendence: "The bones of men, deemed martyrs crowned, / To fossils turn in mountain near;"<sup>51</sup> Materiality holds onto the aspirations of the human, but in its own form.

Place in *Clarel* (as in Jerusalem) represents the transformation of time into the visible cultural forms of the city. The empty materiality of space (as in the desert) works according to its own laws. Space, directly confronted in the desert, is the best symbol of resistance to the settled categorization of inhabited zones in the city. In this sense the embrace of materialism by a scientific character like Margoth is both bewildering and revealing: to embrace unconditional materiality is to accept the ways of another order hostile to the human one, to accept the homelessness it entails. A character like the geologist Margoth, a contemptuous disbeliever, is not more knowledgeable, only more indifferent to the questions raised for a doubter like the student Clarel. The poem *Clarel* suggests that the geologist has a false ally in his materialism. The doubting pilgrims represent a community aware that it does not have the knowledge of essences—an awareness which Margoth does not have. The geologist has lost a sense of space and time as "Other," as a force in which he is not at home. This is what Clarel realizes when his first view of Jerusalem clatters into disillusionment.<sup>52</sup> Doubt becomes as a condition through which the subject comes to argue with himself about the questions that the geologist ignores.

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<sup>51</sup> 3.9, 64-65

<sup>52</sup> "Romance of mountains!" becomes "What change the near approach could lend." "And, at the last, aloft for goal, / Like the ice bastions round the Pole, ☐ / Thy blank, blank towers, Jerusalem!" 1.1, 59-61

Community (i.e., place) begins where the desert ends. The emptiness of the desert is not simply a lack, but the presence of an order that impairs the human capability to see. Empty space has a supernatural quality to it, an alternative order marked by a “terror” where “never did shepherd dare to draw.” To be empty is not natural but supernatural: “Of one, some ghost or god austere- / Hermit unknown, dread mountaineer-.”<sup>53</sup> Deserts are simply a collection of earth, the immovability of place in its most manifest form. This is why the narrator cites the pyramids, “Cheops’ indissoluble pile,” as a notable human structure.[2.11, 61] Drawn from the sand and clay of the desert, they give form to the materiality of their surroundings. The desert resists the attempt to give it permanent shape, hence the monumentality of the Egyptian achievement: the imposition of form on bare clay and sand at a monumental scale. What humans have created can always be turned back to the earth. To take from it and live within it (as the text cites John the Baptist) is an achievement won by individuals with extraordinary powers of vision. But the collective project of civilization ends in the desert. The desert represents the defeat of expectation, where doubt can still live.

The hostility of bare materiality that Clarel finds on his approach to Jerusalem through the desert (e.g., “stony strait,” the “scorch of noon,” “Afric’s fiery sands”) is not a conclusion in itself, but a recognition that conviction is now confronted with indifference, at odds with the moral cosmos sought by the pilgrim.<sup>54</sup> This brings us to the thematic of faith and doubt. In the psychological dynamics of place, I have traced the contours of a spiritually-intoned

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<sup>53</sup> 2.11, 53-54

<sup>54</sup> 1.1, 53; 1.1, 56

subjectivity (the lyric) and a sense of materiality that overwhelms the individual (the epic). The figure of doubt can be seen in the pilgrim's always-present sense of isolation against the landscape, but the possibility of faith exists in the liminal possibility of reversal through vision, in the figures of epiphanic revelation cited by the text: Moses and the burning bush, John the Baptist, and finally the character Nehemiah from the group of pilgrims who will be discussed more fully below. Therefore the desert is a zone of *both* desolation and extraordinary spiritual clarity.

The all-or-nothing quality to place in *Clarel*, the possibility of bare materiality reversed into revelation, is an ample introduction to the condition of faith and doubt in the poem. Doubt is also a precondition for a form of individualism in *Clarel*, where the interior contours of the individual result from the subject's ability to be divided against himself. If belief concerns the subject's intuitive *identification* between subject and object, then doubt provides evidence that "subject" and "world" can be split by doubt, which allows the subject to fall at odds with itself over the import of the evidence. My purpose in the next section, then, is to elucidate the terms of the faith-and-doubt dilemma. *Clarel* is poised, on the one hand, between the potential enlargement of the distance between subject and world by the problem of doubt, and on the other, by the possibility of the overcoming of distance between these two by a mediating term.

### **The Function of Faith and Doubt in *Clarel***

*Clarel* treats the faith and doubt problem as an articulation of the individual's distance from a totality, as defined by a materialist edifice. But we must first explain what is meant by both "faith" and "doubt." First, I will argue that this psychological definition of character in

*Clarel* distinguishes its representation of the pilgrim's individualism from the developmental psychology on display in my previous chapters. *Clarel's* archetypal character is the doubting pilgrim, and doubt is not a problem to be overcome, but a permanent condition of individual subjects. The dilemma entailed by the coupling of these two positions is that they stand opposed to one another, with little apparent possibility of exchange. To the doubting character, faith appears to be an impossibility. The believer is "exoticized," in some cases through an Orientalist aesthetic of a primitive past that adheres to faith, and a modernity that moves away from it. This will be seen in a reading of *Clarel's* first experience of the crowd, among the pilgrims and citizens of Jerusalem.

In showing that doubt entails the articulation of a condition rather than a working-through to a conclusion, *Clarel* turns the pilgrim's temporary distance from the religious source, which in the classical structure of pilgrimage should disappear in the moment of experience of the religious source, into a way of individualizing the subject, of distinguishing him through the particular contours of his or her doubt. At this point we are prepared to consider the two resolutions of the faith and doubt dilemma that coalesce across the text: either the hardening of this condition into permanency, or a way out through mediation between part and whole.

What *Clarel* called, upon observing the massed crowds in Jerusalem, the "intersympathy of creeds" is presented as a cross-cultural condition, in which spiritual content of individual life becomes a form of individual self-expression about the distance from cosmic structures.[1.5, 209] *Clarel* explores the relationship between individual and world through the Victorian literary trope of "faith and doubt."

*Clarel's* structure of faith and doubt describes the necessity of a middle term to negotiate between individual and universal. This middle term, something like a space of being together in a set of shared rituals that produces a relationship to universals, is what is missing and sought after across the course of the poem. In its absence, the perspective of the poem on either the unresolvable internality of the individual doubter or the structures of materiality, objectivity and abstraction.

The doubter is the one who remains captured by the unresolvability of contradiction, individuated by the realization that he is "implicated" in structures without a sense of involvement in them. The believer, by contrast, maintains sight of the universal within her individual position of contradiction; the standpoint is the source of the identification with universals.

I have sketched the bifurcation of the narrative between the embedded individual and a view of the whole in the texts of prior chapters. The individual in prior chapters is also an agent who contains various forms of material implication. He or she has an "interest" in the surroundings. This is the character who pursues the material demands of a vocation within the commune (Goethe), or is constituted by an organic form of awareness within the village (G. Eliot). On the other pole, of maximal abstraction from individual concerns, there is a notion of a whole, of a universalization of the agential qualities that make up the individual. In Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Wanderjahre*, the universalization of individual vocation is represented by the movements of the *emigrant*, who commits to the community in service to the inner demands of work. In Eliot's *Deronda*, the individual is universalized within the nation, which virtualizes the material closeness and comradery of the village. But in the two examples just cited there is a third term, an intermediary between the situated

materiality of the individual agent and a universal “other.” This third term is what I have defined as the “community”: in Goethe’s *Wanderjahre* the commune, in Eliot’s *Deronda* the village, and in Melville’s case of *Clarel* what I call the community as absence.

In my first two texts, there is a realistic effect that makes the community a comprehensive, contextual world for the individual. This creates a specific world between the individual and the world-at-large. The real is what creates the regularity of the community, what causes it to operate according to necessary laws that allow for accurate individual judgment.<sup>55</sup> If realism is a set of formal devices that enable the community to act as a “thick” textual object—one with a basis for the action to play out—then *Clarel* makes an unusual entry to this argument.

But as I have already argued, *Clarel* departs from realistic convention: as the construction of a naturalized present, as the function of the life under the rules of the “everyday.” *Clarel* does not present the everyday situation, but the working-out of the individual in an historically exceptional location (Jerusalem and Palestine) and in situations of extremity (i.e., loss of faith). If realism implies the establishment of a *process*, of a regularity that convinces the reader that this is how the world (community) *really is*, then the representational values of “faith and doubt” are closer to a static picture, where the two

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<sup>55</sup> For example, see Terence Wright on Eliot’s debt to positivism as a model for individual judgment about the laws of community, specifically their negative illustration in *The Mill on the Floss*’ fictional village of St. Ogg’s: “But George Eliot frequently uses some of the synonyms Comte enumerated for the word ‘positive:’ real, exact, precise. Many of her characters are judged by their failure to recognise the operations of the law of consequences, that certain actions lead to inevitable results. Their belief in providence is seen as a baptized form of egoism and their resort to mysticism as an abandonment of ‘real’ phenomena open to observation and verification. The mind of St. Ogg’s, for example, is well below the positive stage.” My previous chapter argues that while *Mill* depicts the failure of the village as a form of community, it nonetheless outlines the ethical principles of the village negatively, through that failure. In Terence R. Wright, *The Religion of Humanity: The Impact of Comtean Positivism on Victorian Britain* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 181.

positions face one another, without the developmental bridge provided by (to give one example) the realistic *Bildungsroman*. Those with faith are unable to communicate “reasons” to the doubter, while the doubter looks with envy at a condition from which he is permanently exiled. Faith and doubt can therefore be seen as a competition between typological character positions. Its characters do not move through a realistic world defined by a process of maturation, but rather ruminate and expand the internality of their own “believing” or “doubting” position. Faith and doubt are more like permanent psychological binaries, fixed in the articulation of psychological possibilities.

*Clarel* works through an opposition between these psychological options. The believer, the character with “faith,” functions as *representative* of a tradition, spanning the contradiction between ideal and embedded reality of the individual as *member* of a tradition. The believer is secure in a world of metaphysics, of ideal explanations for appearances. The doubter is the psychological type who can no longer accept evidence as self-evident. The doubting individual is no longer a *participant* within a tradition, empowered by the mere fact of membership in a given religious “community,” but an autonomously self-constructed, thinking and discriminating judge of religious signs; not religious adherent, but decision-maker about traces left by a possible divine.

The static opposition between faith and doubt opposes the essential monism of the realistic text, which dynamizes a contradiction (faith and doubt is just one example) through a developmental resolution.<sup>56</sup> A realistic depiction of the faith-doubt dilemma would lead to a resolution of doubt itself, in the “arrival” at faith. In the *Lehrjahre*, Wilhelm Meister may

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<sup>56</sup> See the discussion of Fredric Jameson’s *The Antinomies of Realism*, above.

not have secured a career in the theater, but he can look back on events of his time in the theater with the satisfaction of “inward” maturation, that he has achieved a new “outlook” and, however unintentionally, the project of personal cultivation that he conceived of more superficially at the novel’s beginning. Only retrospectively can he understand that his developmental project always had the character of inwardness. His *burgher* fate is to be “noble” in spirit rather than—as he first styled himself—in *appearances*, as befits the aristocrat and the theatrical world. *Clarel* makes programmatic the project of individual “inner” development that had only just come into view for *Wilhelm Meister*, but it refuses the realistic *resolution* to the problem in the form of individual development. Instead of inner resolution it gives something like an ethical posture, substituting hope for faith.

*Clarel* offers no immediate resolution between these two positions. By using its faith-doubt problematic to foreclose the possibility of a realistic presentation, I want to argue that the poem maximizes the distance between the individual and universal position. As a result of the replacement of a realistic aesthetics with one of types and universals, what is lost is the intermediating structure of the community in which individual development is worked out. *Clarel* stages the unresponsiveness of the community in the asking of its ultimate questions. Without the reconciling practices of the community, doubt is the final position of the individual ensnared by contradiction. *Clarel* removes the function of “the real” as a medium through which individual action and judgment becomes effective within contradiction. The community is the space in which individual action becomes effective. Faith and doubt is a stand-in for the permanent state of contradiction facing the individual in the absence of a basis in community.

What I claim in this chapter—the total erosion of community as a middle term between individual and world—would appear to go against one of the central features of the text’s “intersympathy of creeds.” Within the mechanics of the poem this becomes an exchange of dialogue between the individual pilgrims representing distinct religious traditions. But the search for a common basis between religious traditions reveals its double-edged character. It is a project that vacillates between what I want to call a “metaphysical” search for intrinsic similarities between religious traditions, and an undermining, scientific “explanation” of tradition that dismisses it as object. *Clarel’s* search for universals displays the aspiration for a new religious community defined by practices held in common—an option which the pilgrims demonstrate in the dialogical nature of their journey—and the deflation of religion through its subsumption in practices of evidence and explanation. The view of the universal raises both the possibility of the founding of a new community *on the basis of that universal* (this is one interpretation of *Clarel’s* “intersympathy of creeds”), and the annihilation of community on a religious basis through scientific skepticism. The universalism of science suggests the erosion of specific communities in favor of their assimilation into logically assimilable structures, while the universalism of the project of intersympathy represented by the pilgrims creates a new basis for a collective from the standpoint of the individual in a particular tradition. The individual becomes part of a particular cultural tradition, because the individual always takes a particular standpoint. There can be no “things in general” from the standpoint of the character in *Clarel*, only evidence about which the individual decides.

As Clarel demonstrates when he sees the massed diversity of the crowd, made strange and anonymized by its otherness, doubt is the precondition for becoming a particular

individual. Those who doubt emerge from the narrative to have their own voice. To believe is to be part of a typological “compulsion” to worship, the “intersympathy of creeds” that makes up the background of the religious crowd, particularly in the parts of the poem that take place within Jerusalem.

By contrast, the situation of the doubter is that of being locked into internal monologue or driven to conversation with one another. In either case the problem is the inspiration of conviction, to reach a point at which it would be possible to decide. The doubter is at a distance from something transcendent and immanent, but nonetheless refuses to let it go. Doubt is a condition that leads the individual to seek evidence, to engage in an open-ended argument on one’s own terms about the constitution of the world, to believe that it contains something that puts one at ease. This is the ironic nature of the pilgrimage in *Clarel*, a journey undertaken not to see the founding objects of conviction but *to be convinced*. In a mode of doubt the pilgrimage becomes a venture into the plausibility of completing the pilgrimage, of certifying the religious tradition.

I want to briefly read the scenes of the crowd as Clarel experiences them upon first arriving in Jerusalem. The faith-and-doubt problematic appears in the contrast that appears between the “faith” of the crowd and Clarel’s incipient, crushing doubt about his own beliefs.

On his first day in the city of Jerusalem, a brooding Clarel visits the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, traditionally (though, by the historical record, doubtfully) the site that contains both Christ’s place of crucifixion and his tomb of resurrection. In the market of Jerusalem, faith and doubt are presented in Orientalist terms. Western student, earnest but serious and graduated to an “adult” responsibility to discern the world in its true form, is

confronted by “simpler nature[s]” whose civilizational development has not yet taken them to the same point of maturity.

Immediately upon entering the church, Clarel is struck by the presence of “strangers:”

“Strangers were there, of each degree, / From Asian shores, with island men.”<sup>57</sup> The

experience immediately disorients Clarel’s expectations, disrupting the experience of the holy through the confrontation with cultural difference. Because of the dark, the candlelight and the lack of ventilation, he is in “smoke Befogged,” like a “heat and cell” that “seem to choke.”<sup>58</sup> “Faith” is identical with naiveté, which is possible for the “simple nature” of the racial and geographical Other. The other does not possess “mean irreverence,” Clarel now corrects himself, but the behavior of one who is “free,” by which he means not plagued by “Europe’s grieving doubt.”

From here Clarel’s literal and imaginative eye sweeps across the many cultures represented in the city. He sees, in a “vision,” communities of Muslims, themselves diverse in origin (“Convergings from Levantine shores”<sup>59</sup>), brought together by the significance of their city for their shared faith (“Allah, toward whose prophet’s urn / And Holy City, fond they turn / As forth in pilgrimage they fare”<sup>60</sup>), religious adherents from India passing through the crossroads of Jerusalem (“The tawny peasants—human wave / Which rolls over India year by year”<sup>61</sup>), and finally Asian peoples (“Crossing the Himalayan mound, /

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<sup>57</sup> 1.5, 14-15

<sup>58</sup> 1.5, 31-32

<sup>59</sup> 1.5, 199, 154

<sup>60</sup> 1.5, 159-61

<sup>61</sup> 1.5, 188-89

To kneel at shrine or relic so/ Of Budha, the Mongolian Fo"<sup>62</sup>). This noisy panoply, which compresses the overwhelming confrontation with the archetypal stranger that makes up so much of Clarel's experience in Jerusalem, finally fades away from Clarel's inner eye, leaving him with questions about motivation and the source of all inspiration. He asks: "What profound / Impulsion makes these tribes to range?"<sup>63</sup> Faith is a question for Clarel that is answered in the moment by the cultural Other, in their "impulsions" of the myriad that shield them from doubt. He identifies an "intersympathy" between the groups:

Now first he marks, now awed he heeds

The inter-sympathy of creeds,

Alien or hostile tho' they seem—

Exalted thought or groveling dream.<sup>64</sup>

Clarel's wonder is directed not at any particular universalistic religious principle they hold in common, but rather this "impulsion" —from his own doubt, increasingly unbelievable— -that brings them to Jerusalem. From a distance their apparent absence of doubt seems to both unite them and separate them from Clarel.

To be secure in faith, as Clarel views it, is to have permission to participate in the fullness of human behavior, but not to speak. Doubt moves to understand the reality of one's condition. Those who do not know they doubt are no less cut off from the source of the divine, like "children" playing in a walled zone without full knowledge of self. The child turns outward to a celebration of the world, while the one who doubts turns inward, and

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<sup>62</sup> 1.5, 203-04

<sup>63</sup> 1.5, 205-06

<sup>64</sup> 1.5, 208-11

the narration of the self begins. After Clarel's walk in the tomb the narrator addresses the reader directly:

Thou,  
Less sensitive, yet haply versed  
In everything above, below—  
In all but thy deep human heart;  
Thyself perchance mayst nervous start  
At thine own fancy's final range<sup>65</sup>

The "final range" is the loss of faith in the order of appearances, a falling away of conviction about the world's order, something which happens to the subject: "But how of some which still deplore / Yet share the doubt?"<sup>66</sup> Celio, another tourist within Jerusalem from the West, mirrors Clarel's condition in a dark fashion, committing suicide a few cantos later:

This world clean fails me: still I yearn.  
Me then it surely does concern  
Some other world to find. But where?  
In creed? I do not find it there.  
That said, and is the emprise o'er?  
Negation, is there nothing more?  
This side the dark and hollow bound<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> 1.3, 153-57

<sup>66</sup> 1.3, 164-65

<sup>67</sup> 1.12, 98-103

Doubt becomes a condition that *forms* the subject. Doubt is a mood far beyond the posing of any specific theological problem, which both ensnares the subject and makes it possible to speak. Self-knowledge of this doubt becomes a precondition for speaking at all in the poem (the “simple natures” that Clarel notes have no voice in *Clarel*), and doubt is the precondition of knowledge. To doubt one’s surroundings is the beginning of de-divinizing the world, making it flat and without the aura of the holy. Soon after exiting the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Clarel comes upon a group of “Greek Matrons” who greet him like a pilgrim whose journey has ended in fulfillment, asking with no apparent irony: “Home do thy pilgrim reveries stray? / Art thou too, weary of the way?”<sup>68</sup> Clarel, in turn, sees them from across a gulf, repeating the phrase that appeared before “simple nature”

For how might break

Upon those simple natures true,

The complex passion? might they view

The apprehension tempest tossed,

The spirit in gulf of dizzying fable lost?<sup>69</sup>

The “complex passion” is a break with what came before, the loss of a narrative that brought resolution in the figure of the believer. This produces the doubter, the “complex” character, who loses touch with the stories (“fable”) that guide the conclusion of the pilgrimage. The failure of the original mission of the pilgrimage is the beginning of awareness about the universality of doubt.

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<sup>68</sup> 1.5, 214-15

<sup>69</sup> 1.6, 214-221

The early stage of simple dichotomy, between an “advanced” doubt and a “simple” faith, will be dismantled by the universality of the condition that the student Clarel first describes, and represented through a diversity of religious traditions, in an extraordinary eclecticism. The Northwestern-Newberry Critical edition of the novel lists over thirty significant characters in its index, representing sects of what we would now call the ‘Abrahamic’ religions, more obscure syncretic traditions that Melville had encountered (e.g., Druze), and what Melville appeared to view as secular “substitutes” for religion: political revolutionaries, radical cynics, wealth-hoarding Mammon figures, unreconstructed militants, and other secular fanaticisms. To call these static characters “types,” as the early *Clarel* interpreter Walter Bezanson does, is correct, since character does correspond with a certain typological symbolism: characters are particularized in a modern sense by the representation of their individual subjectivity within the poem, but also stand in for the various faiths and cultures that Melville imagined together in the Holy Lands. But Bezanson’s claim that the characters are “types” must be contextualized within a poetic register defined by the articulation of what *Clarel* calls the “complex mood,” meaning the condition of doubt that must be “lived in” and “lived with” rather than “worked on” through individual attention and initiative. By universalizing the (primarily Protestant) structure of faith and doubt, *Clarel* resists the traditional pilgrimage structure of the Holy Lands whereby—as one source writes of the nineteenth-century pilgrimage—“each traveler’s individual response to the Holy Land was determined chiefly by his or her religious affiliation.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Doron Bar and Kobi Cohen-Hattab, “A New Kind of Pilgrimage: The Modern Tourist Pilgrim of Nineteenth-Century and Early Twentieth-Century Palestine,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 39, no. 2 (2003): 138,

*Clarel* ascribes particular capabilities to the subject through faith and doubt. The believing personality is capable of immediate identification with a non-empirical presence, of “feeling” and “knowing” a truth that is not generally available. The difference between believer and non-believer is captured in a later, Arcadian vision that Clarel has in the Mar Saba monastery (“Frankly roved the gods with men / In gracious talk and golden”<sup>71</sup>) and in Clarel’s contrasting vision of a world at odds with itself: “Such counter natures in mankind– / Mole, bird, not more unlike we find: / Instincts adverse, nor less how true / Each to itself. What clew, what clew?”<sup>72</sup>

Belief is the capacity to have an immediate intuition for what is extraordinary or even impossible. What is impossible requires a definition, which the poem supplies in remarkably modern, rational-scientific terms. The description of the materialist-atheist geologist Margoth by another pilgrim summarizes the viewpoint: “Sterile, and with sterility / Self-satisfied.”<sup>73</sup> The believer knows in light of an ontological order that allow science without knowledge: “Much as a light-ship keeper pines / Mid shoals immense, where dreary shines / His lamp, we toss beneath the ray ☐ / Of Science’ beacon. This to trim / Is now man’s barren office.”<sup>74</sup> The believer is capable of an identification with his surroundings that resists deductive, propositional knowledge, which can in itself never produce sufficient closure to certify belief. We might say that the believer has knowledge

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<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4284295>.

<sup>71</sup> 3.20, 17-18

<sup>72</sup> 3.2, 39-42

<sup>73</sup> 2.20, 73-74

<sup>74</sup> 2.21, 98-102

*despite* evidence, since evidence is what can be gathered and presented in always-limited, discursive terms.

The discursive background of the poem presents theoretical knowledge as a master, orienting code, with the use of evidence (in an empirical sense) as its structuring epistemology. The believer sits in an uneasy position with respect to evidence. As Barbara Herrnstein Smith writes, evidence forms an “autonomously resistant object” which “duly corrects” perception like a physical barrier, in the manner of a “brick” or a “rock.”<sup>75</sup> If subjectivity in the realistic novel implies a certain capacity to make sense of the world’s structures and move through them with accuracy and care, then the believing subject in *Clarel* violates these conventions. As a consequence of refusing to engage in arguments with evidence, the believer appears as a character less individuated than the doubter. The believer is never fully individual because he is still identified with a *tradition*, as Clarel notes to himself in the friars tending to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre: “Tradition... Here rules—tradition old and broad. / Transfixed in sites the drama’s shown— / Each given spot assigned;”<sup>76</sup> The believer appears in the guise of the crowd, a part of the “Tribes and Sects,” as it is put in the sixth canto of the first part: “These like to tides together dash / And question of their purport raise.” In failing to doubt, the believer appears as a form of *evidence* to the doubter.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Barbara Herrnstein Smith, “Belief and Resistance: A Symmetrical Account,” in *Questions of Evidence: Proof, Practice and Persuasion Across the Disciplines* (University of Chicago Press, 1991), 139.

<sup>76</sup> 1.3, 84-86

<sup>77</sup> 1.6, 12-13

Through this reading of the crowd scenes in *Clarel*, I have attempted to draw out the particular contours of the believing and doubting subject. I have argued that the doubter is a subject entangled in an unending skein of skepticism, of giving reasons for things, of evidentiary requirements with no obvious escape. And the believer is represented as *different in kind* with respect to his own subjectivity, as if he were an individual with another order of cognitive faculties. *Clarel* creates a dramatic tension through the invisibility and illusory nature of this apparent difference: the believer is impossibly different, and yet he moves alongside the pilgrim. Having shown that the poem cast faith and doubt in a particular opposition, I want to consider *how* it traces the unfolding logic of doubt.

### **Materialism and Nature**

So far I have argued, in readings of *Clarel's* use of *place* and *the crowd*, that the poem establishes doubt as a form of individualism constituted by the subject's estrangement from a sense of totality or whole. This is what I have called the materialistic edifice of the poem, but more work must be done to understand what this materialism entails: that is, how a theoretical construct is worked into the internality of *Clarel's* characters and the consequence of that internalization. I have already argued that a materialist ontology can be read in the poem's landscapes. From the text's representation of subjective phenomenology, place in *Clarel* largely repels the attempt of the individual to identify with it. Doubt is brought into relief by its exclusion from nature, by Jerusalem and the desert's refusal to confirm or deny its suspicions. But there is a second level to this problem that must now be raised if we are to follow *Clarel's* full exploration of the consequences of

doubt. *Clarel* is a dialogical poem, and materialism is represented in a scientific worldview debated by the pilgrims. Science, in these situations, is represented as both the ready-at-hand answer to questions of doubt at the same time as it is inadequate to the questions being asked. In lieu of adequate answers, *Clarel* depicts the necessity of identification with the whole in some form.

The result of an attempt to make sense of the materialist totality in the absence of a tradition leads to the possibility of a kind of nihilism in the poem. This can be seen in two stories. First, in the Timoneer's story told in the Mar Saba monastery, the totality reverts, in the absence of guidance, to a division between good and evil. That is, the blankness of the desert turns nature into a malignant presence, the disenchanted space of demons and omens. Second, in the so-called "monomaniac" (Walter Bezanson's term) figure of the failed revolutionary Mortmain, material blankness becomes the impossibility of individual sense-making and the annihilation of the individual subject position.

We begin with one of many discussions of scientific rationality in *Clarel* to get a portrait of how the pilgrims understand their own tools of sense-making. What order *Clarel* does establish should be considered within its relationship to models of scientific totality. My intention by naming *Clarel* as a "scientific" epic has multiple senses which need to be disentangled. A scientific "worldview" is both a background condition of the presentation of the Holy Lands as a world (Clarel declares upon entering Jerusalem: "now is heir / To nature's influx of control"<sup>78</sup>) and a topic of dialogical reflection between characters. The felt *disorder* of *Clarel's* world must be seen in terms of the disenchantments of science. This is

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<sup>78</sup> 1.1, 66-69

the sense that the everyday has been rendered “logical” or “sensible” but purposeless, as in the exchange between two members of the pilgrimage, the American Rolfe and Anglican priest Derwent:

Cried Rolfe; “for one I spare defiance

With such a kangaroo of science.”

“Yes; qualify though,” Derwent said,

“For science has her eagles too.”

Here musefully Rolfe hung the head;

Then lifted: “Eagles? ay; but few.

And search we in their a-ries lone

What find we, pray? perchance, a bone.”

“A very cheerful point of view!”

“’Tis as one takes it. Not unknown

That even in Physics much late lore

But drudges after Plato’s theme;

Or supplements—but little more—

Some Hindoo’s speculative dream

Of thousand years ago. And, own,

Darwin is but his grandsire’s son.”<sup>79</sup>

Rolfe intends something like science’s lack of ability to inspire (“What find we, pray? perchance, a bone”) while still admitting that it is the end toward which humanity has “progressed,” in something like a world-historical sense (“in Physics...drudges after Plato’s theme”). The priest Derwent, who maintains an optimistic attitude toward the conflict

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<sup>79</sup> 2.21, 10-25

between science and premodern metaphysics (e.g., Plato), admits that that the former leads to the latter (“but drudges after Plato’s theme”). Derwent therefore answers Rolfe’s objection, that science’s proceduralism leaves it spiritually barren, with a claim about the historical unity of premodern metaphysics and modern science. The picture of the world as scientific object is both a theme and a mood that pervades the poem. The hierarchical transparency of values in the traditional epic is leveled in the modern epic to the equivalency of signs, in their collapsing of the subjective and the objective perspective. As the character Celio says while walking in Jerusalem: “The natural law men let prevail; / Then reason disallowed the state / Of instinct’s variance with fate.”<sup>80</sup>

Science’s disenchantment must also be situated within a set of expectations about the character of the “Holy Lands.” Melville himself experienced the confusion and disappointment of the devout pilgrim encountering the irreverent chaos of Jerusalem for the first time, a well-documented part of the popular nineteenth-century travelogue for Jerusalem and surroundings.<sup>81</sup> But this reaction takes on a particular cast of the *deus absconditus* in *Clarel*, made visible in the disconcerting indifference of the Holy Land to the student Clarel when he enters. What strikes Clarel upon his first sighting Jerusalem is not the irrelevance of a God replaced by science, but the palpability of God’s absence. The character Celio, another student whom Clarel meets briefly, and who will commit suicide in

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<sup>80</sup> 1.13, 57-59

<sup>81</sup> For Melville’s journals during this period, see the entries from the 3rd-26th of January 1857, 73-95 in Herman Melville et al., *Journals*, Northwestern Newberry ed, *The Writings of Herman Melville*, v. 15 (Evanston : Chicago: Northwestern University Press ; Newberry Library, 1989). For a quantitative study on the reaction of the typical pilgrim to this area see N. Collins-Kreiner and N. Kliot, “Pilgrimage Tourism in the Holy Land: The Behavioural Characteristics of Christian Pilgrims,” *GeoJournal* 50, no. 1 (2000): 55–67, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41147449>, 61-62.

a dark foreshadowing of Clarel's own impending loss of Ruth, articulates this "negative condition" in a walk through the old city of Jerusalem:

This world clean fails me: still I yearn.

Me then it surely does concern

Some other world to find. But where?

In creed? I do not find it there.

That said, and is the emprise o'er?

Negation, is there nothing more?

This side the dark and hollow bound

Lies there no unexplored rich ground?

Some other world: well, there's the New—

Ah, joyless and ironic too!<sup>82</sup>

Celio's reaction to "failure" of the pilgrimage must first pass through the experience of this loss as a negative condition. The worldview of the modern (reading the "New" world) is only available in the *passage through* the negative experience of God as absence ("Some other world: well, there's the New—").

Moretti relates the modern epic to the rise of the bureaucratic state, where the totality of experience is no longer "living and inseparable from individuality," but the individual must "confine" itself to "obeying" forces outside of it; to "master its own energies, and keep to what is prescribed."<sup>83</sup> In his view the individual still participates in a totalizing cultural form. But the totality has changed in nature, de-divinized (one presumes) in line with

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<sup>82</sup> 1.12, 97-106

<sup>83</sup> Moretti, *Modern Epic*, 12.

projects of scientific and technocratic management. The individual participates in a totality that has lost its aura.

Melville offers a competing model of the epic, not by lowering the image of totality but by equating it to everyday processes: by disenchanting it, reducing it to forces, defined and mastered by science, which are indifferent to the observer. This is the basis of my claim that the individual participates in scientific structures without being *part* of them.<sup>84</sup>

A process of disenchantment that we have already discussed takes place in the description of landscape (the wilderness outside of Jerusalem and the monastery of Mar Saba), which acts at a distance that promises harm without understanding. This of a rockslide: “They closed. And came a rush, a roar– / Aloof, but growing more and more,/ Nearer and nearer.”<sup>85</sup> The laws of nature are not the restorative presence defined by an earlier generation of romantics, but a force that obeys lawful patterns, better understood from a distance than close at hand. Like the view of the crashing rocks available to the pilgrim visitors, the scientific totality suggests that a “force” exists that is, by definition, blind to the standpoint of the individual. The individual is an optional presence in the scientific model.

The schools of blue-fish years desert

Our sounds and shores—but they revert;

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<sup>84</sup> The condition that I want to relate to *Clarel's* scientific cast can also be seen in the so-called “problem of evil.” For example, William Potter writes that “where, Rolfe wonders, does the Christian vision of a heaven of ‘indemnifying good’ originate in a world so obviously overrun by evil, and how can the life prescribed by Christ hope to survive in such a world? This question, which Melville had explored in detail in *Pierre* and *The Confidence Man* and which also was a major concern for Dostoevsky, is repeatedly voiced—explicitly and implicitly—in *Clarel*. We see depicted symbolically in Celio’s bitter outcry, Nehemiah’s simple faith, Nathan’s confused spiritual odyssey, and Derwent’s ‘easy skim’ not only untempered hearts, but also the imperfect and utterly impractical issues of Christ’s teachings in their respective encounters with the real world.” William Potter, *Melville's Clarel and the Intersympathy of Creeds* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2004), 99

<sup>85</sup> 2.39, 127-29

The ship returns on her long tack:

The bones of Theseus are brought back:

A comet shall resume its path

Though three millenniums go. But faith? Ah, Nehemiah—and, Derwent, thou!

'Twas dust to dust: what is it now

And here? Is life indeed a dream?<sup>86</sup>

The implacable regularity of the animal (“schools of blue-fish”) and cosmic (“A comet”) forces are part of a larger, durable mechanism that forms a contrast with the fragility of faith: gone like “dust,” the entirety of human experience rendered less real (“And here? Is life indeed a dream?”). Against the mechanical regularity of the celestial bodies, faith—the presence of the divine—proves fragile, capable of permanent loss.

I have claimed above that “scientism”—that is, science as a source of truth and value—is woven into the dialogical assumptions of the core group of pilgrim travelers. The problem of scientism can be seen in the way that the pilgrims conflate science’s instrumental value with its truth value. Science offers a seductive way out nature’s inability to speak, albeit one that the most prominent pilgrims of *Clarel* find inadequate or uninspiring. But the fullest consequence of the doubter’s inability to make sense of nature’s silence can only be found in characters who are already on the margins of the other pilgrims, who appear to be beyond inclusion in even the fragile and temporary communities of pilgrimage. The first of these is Agath, the “Timoneer” (ship’s helmsman) who tells a story of his survival and disillusionment after a shipwreck.

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<sup>86</sup> 3.14, 110-118

The Timoneer's story argues for the persistence of individual speculation about the whole in the face of its blankness. The Timoneer comes at nature's material indifference not theoretically (as with some other pilgrims), but by virtue of his experience in voyages across the world, culminating in the vision of evil he has as the only survivor of a shipwreck. This is a premonition that is later confirmed during a visit to see Darwin's giant tortoises in the Galapagos Islands. The Timoneer reflects Melville's own biography and travels, as well as his most famous novel *Moby Dick*. But while *Moby Dick* concerns a long voyage amidst a working community of sailors, the Timoneer tells us only of ruin at the end of his journey. I read his story as an argument for the necessity of making sense of an apparently indifferent universe, even at the cost of turning the relationship between good and evil on its head. In his struggle to make sense of a catastrophe, he recounts another journey to the Galapagos Islands made famous by Darwin. What Darwin understood as an indifferent material process becomes, in the eyes of the Timoneer, a confirmation of nature's opposition to human flourishing. His insistence on reading a determinate meaning in the signs left by nature prepares us to understand perhaps the fullest monomaniacal figure in the poem, Mortmain.

The narrator describes the Timoneer as one who has the "Dumb patience of mere animal, / Which better may abide life's fate / Than comprehend."<sup>87</sup> He tells a story as the pilot of a "near mutinous" crew sailing from Egypt to Venice, carrying a stowaway who has slipped an illicit cargo of swords and cannons onto the ship, ironically named the "Peace of God."<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> 4.3, 106-8

<sup>88</sup> 3.12, 79

As the ship encounters a storm, the Timoneer struggles to turn it away from the rocks that will eventually destroy it, drowning everyone except for him. The cause he assigns to the action is somewhere between physical explanation and a hint at the general moral disorder of the world represented by the cargo meant to spread death (for example, the cannons: “shipped off to be sold and smelted / And into new artillery melted”<sup>89</sup>). The explicability of the disaster is represented in the compass, which, the Timoneer implies, was caused to spin wildly by the smuggled weapons which sat directly beneath it in the cargo hold: “I heard the clattering of blades / Shaken within the Moor’s strong box / In cabin underneath the needle.”<sup>90</sup> The ship goes down accompanied by signs of the oracular, the presence of three birds cawing above him: “How screamed those three birds round the mast” as the ship crashes against the rocks.”<sup>91</sup> Thus the story pits cause of disaster against signs of disaster, a thing which is signified by a higher power against an accident of nature caused by the malfunction of the compass.

The Timoneer seems to understand the disaster primarily in terms of omens, the visible signs of disorder at a moral level. His weapons were not just another cargo, but have moral *and* physical import. “I’m far from superstitious, see; / But arms in sheaf, somehow they trouble me.”<sup>92</sup> The Timoneer is torn between torment over the moral consideration of his actions, and dismay over the presence of a more comprehensive reality. To understand the world in terms of material presence is to be racked by its failures. The Timoneer’s position

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<sup>89</sup> 3.12, 84-85

<sup>90</sup> 3.12, 113-15

<sup>91</sup> 3.12, 115

<sup>92</sup> 3.12 129-30

is an exemplar of disbelief. The closing down of doubt into disbelief is the turning-away from a moral universe, toward total materialism, where the form taken by presence is the working of the scientific law identical with nature. The sense of *sin* present in the Timoneer's story appears as the rant of unbridgeable conviction: the "Wahabee" he smuggled aboard the ship "dealt in blades that poisoned were, / A black lieutenant of Lucifer."<sup>93</sup>

Although he is convinced of a presence beyond the natural that caused his calamity, he is unable to articulate any kind of religious vision, only the converse signs of malevolence left in their place. His mode of storytelling is the articulation of the omen, and of a presence that the Timoneer cannot fully interpret himself yet cannot let go.

The sign of the divine becomes an ominous presence that runs the ship aground. The Timoneer's story picks up and continues in the Galapagos islands, where the malignancy is revealed not to be any form of special intercession in the world at large, but rather the background condition.

The alternative to doubt for the Timoneer is not belief but a diabolical, anthropomorphizing materialism. If material world is not a set of signs to be interpreted, the consequence is not the inability to interpret, but the omen's imposition on the storyteller in the form of entities and forces. The Timoneer conveys the import of the omen in a final story about his understanding of the tortoises of the Galapagos Islands made famous by Darwin. At the center of the "terraced orchard's mysteries" is the tortoise, whose slow movement, encased in the dead granite materiality (like, the Timoneer notes, a tomb

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<sup>93</sup> 3.12, 125-26

he carries with him) make him a form of inert-but-living of matter. The tortoise is life's materiality taken to its extreme: "Dull as the jar in vaulted tombs / When urns are shifted.

With amaze / Into the dim retreats ye gaze. / Lo, 'tis the monstrous tortoise drear!"<sup>94</sup>

The tortoise's long life is not a gift but a burden, a sentence of imprisonment in which to mull over his barren materiality. He suggests that natural selection is a force of punishment which strips life of its ensouled aspects in order to bind it more closely with its material environment. The giant tortoise's inherited suitability to its environment is construed as a kind of fallenness from a higher form: "A soul transformed—for earned disgrace / Degraded, and from higher race. / Ye watch him—him so woe-begone: / Searching, he creeps with laboring neck,"<sup>95</sup> The Timoneer's impression might be a study in opposites to that of Darwin. In contrast, Darwin's wonderment over the attribution of nature's complexity to mechanical forces at time takes on a kind of awe.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> 4.3, 59-62

<sup>95</sup> 4.3, 73-76

<sup>96</sup> For instance, see the ending to Darwin's *Origin of the Species*: "It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us. These laws, taken in the largest sense, being Growth with Reproduction; Inheritance which is almost implied by reproduction; Variability from the indirect and direct action of the external conditions of life, and from use and disuse; a Ratio of Increase so high as to lead to a Struggle for Life, and as a consequence to Natural Selection, entailing Divergence of Character and the Extinction of less-improved forms. Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved." Charles Darwin, *Darwin: Texts & Commentary*, ed. Philip Appleman, 3rd ed., Norton Critical Ed. (New York: Norton, 2001), 174

For the Timoneer, the world disenchanted by the import of materialism reduces life to that of the turtle who expires "After a hundred years of pain / And pilgrimage here to and fro."<sup>97</sup>

In the Galapagos islands the Timoneer finds the ominous footprint of malignancy in the shell of a giant tortoise, the symbol of the matter form that encases all life. For the Timoneer matter will be the sign of absence, the weight that drives life back to a sense of its own dead materialism.

In the Timoneer the divine manifests itself in oracular signs of evil: the spinning compass, the birds above the shipmast, the unknowing stare of the giant tortoise. Nature collapses into an unrelenting succession of suggestive shadows. Disbelief is not atheism—the absence of belief—but a sinking into the phantasmagoric signs that rise up through this unchecked materiality. Not skepticism generally, but an attack by what is most unknown in the pattern of the whole. The scientific materialist has a being like that of the turtle, the calamity of life mired in pure physicality. Evidence of the divine fails the Timoneer by becoming its reverse, by the omen which is coincident with the physical world and therefore coterminous with the mechanistic order of natural selection.

The Timoneer displays the consequence of the disjunct between subjectivity and materialism, and between faith and doubt. Without the tools or an ability to mediate with the divine, the Timoneer reverses the unknown into a kind of evil. But the distinction between his own subjectivity and this larger edifice of evil remains in place. The Timoneer cannot identify with a totality that he takes to be hostile.

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<sup>97</sup> 4.3, 87-88

In the figure I read next, I draw on Walter Bezanson's note about the persistent of the "monomaniac" in *Clarel*. Bezanson notes that each of the text's four parts contain some version of this character. I understand the monomaniac as a figure who, by way of the denial of the inescapability of doubt, identifies completely with one of the background ontologies of the text. He represents the extension of—and logical conclusion to—the Timoneer's dilemma. Not withdrawal from malignancy into his own sense of inadequacy, but an attempt to identify completely with it, to erase doubt through cancelling his own doubt. The monomaniac's sense of unity with the cruelty of the materialistic world is eventually revealed to be a failure, a fatalistic abandonment on the prerogatives of what it would mean to be an individual, of self-responsibility and the requirement to act within uncertainty. This can be seen in the example of the failed revolutionary, Mortmain, whose self-annihilating identification with a pervasive malignancy in the background of the world leads him to hang himself outside of the monastery of Mar Saba.

The son of Swedish aristocrats, Mortmain was a radical participant in the failed revolution of 1848 in France, which led to the ascension of Louis Bonaparte and the establishment of the Second French Empire. At the root of Mortmain's life and personality is an attempt to make sense of the collective failure of the political to provide an escape from his sense of failure.

The speaker Mortmain attempts to make arguments with matter itself, as when he is looking at the brightness of Mars by night while standing by the Dead Sea. The star sets off reasoning about a process: "It is the star / Called Wormwood. Some hearts die in thrall / Of

waters which yon star makes gall," Mortmain declares, turning his view downwards to the salty water at his feet.<sup>98</sup> A disjunct arises between the palpable sterility of a sea choked with salt and the vagueness of the evil at which he gestures, those unnamed "malefactors" who are "guilty of sins scarce scored as crimes / In any statute known, or code-."

Nonetheless the sea congeals the immaterial evil spread across the entire earth, those "sins refined, crimes of the spirit," creating a "doom well imposed...In some god's reign, some god long fled." The sea is the "gaseous puff of mineral breadth / Mephitical," a sign of "sins there be inscrutable / Unutterable."<sup>99</sup>

The reason for Mortmain's sense of failure is all the more central to the poem because his political aspirations were on a different plane than the crippled, cryptic mysticism that he trades in now. Mortmain's aspirations are likened to a reversed Edenic religious vision:

Peace and good will was his acclaim—

If not in words, yet in the aim:

Peace, peace on earth: that note he thrilled,

But scarce in way the cherubs trilled

To Bethlehem and the shepherd band.<sup>100</sup>

Mortmain sought the same end that will complete the pilgrim's journey: Bethlehem, or the opening up to the world's new paradise. Like so many of the characters across Melville's *oeuvre*, Mortmain is the character possessed by the possibility of the success of a vision just beyond his ability to grasp it:

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<sup>98</sup> 2.36, 22-24

<sup>99</sup> 2.36, 83-84

<sup>100</sup> 2.5, 32-36

> Europe was in a decade dim:  
Upon the future's trembling rim  
The comet hovered. His a league  
Of frank debate and close intrigue:  
Plot, proselyte, appeal, denounce  
Conspirator, pamphleteer, at once,  
And prophet. Wear and tear and jar  
He met with coffee and cigar:  
These kept awake the man and mood  
And dream. That uncreated Good  
He sought, whose absence is the cause  
Of creeds and Atheists, mobs and laws.<sup>101</sup>

Although the poem gives us only a general account of how Mortmain participated in revolution, Mortmain, the “conspirator” and “pamphleteer,” stands in for the revolutionary spirit itself. We are presented with someone who works with a conviction that the “uncreated Good” could nonetheless be brought into being through the violent overthrow of the existing order.

At one time, the narrator implies, Mortmain had a conviction about an ultimate good that was as dogged and unshakeable as his conviction about the omnipresence of evil in the desert: (“Wear and tear and jar/ He met with coffee and cigar”). The failure of these convictions which seemed so assured for him is presumably tied to the realization that he

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<sup>101</sup> 2.5, 40-51

cannot escape the worldly imperfections of the human beings. What amounted to a kind of political theology for Mortmain turns out to be an unrealized good that can only draw upon the resources of the human:

The vain, foolhardy, worthless, blind,  
With Judases, are nothing loath  
To clasp pledged hands and take the oath  
Of aim, the which, if just, demands  
Strong hearts, brows deep, and priestly hands.<sup>102</sup>

The result is that Mortmain turns to despair about the omnipresence of evil. His situation is the problem of assigning materiality to the immaterial evidence of God's absence.

Mortmain's doubt is not a positive longing for God but a hankering for a material byproduct of God's negativity, a sign of his absence as a presence. God is absent because, in the material world he can discern, the worse part is dominant. The lyric has brought that worse part into being, given it objectivity in the "Mephitical" salty waters of the Dead Sea.

Mortmain's lines are delivered not in manner of conviction but as appeal: "In the dust / Of wisdom sit thee down, and rust."<sup>103</sup> Mortmain reverses the function of certainty: to know is not to be able to act but to "rust" in the impossibility of effective action. The voice of the individual, in the achievement of certainty, wipes out the individual as authority and turns to the structures that oppress it. The monomaniac shows the community of belief and doubt as a space prone to reversals. Still, to "believe" rather than to doubt is, regardless of outcome, to fix the world in a certain image and achieve a place to stand. To know, as

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<sup>102</sup> 2.5, 55-59

<sup>103</sup> 2.4, 113-14

Mortmain does, that existence is composed, “at bottom,” by an evil substrate is still an achievement. Negative knowledge (cynicism) becomes an end in itself. We should contrast Mortmain’s position with that of the doubter, who expresses the individual’s distance from systematic accounts, accepting the necessity of articulating one’s own standpoint with respect to questions about the divine. But the monomaniac pursues a relationship with the systematic character of the world, identifying with a whole that he perceives to be evil. The monomaniac erases the individual standpoint, accepting the outcome regardless of whether it erases the human standpoint. In doing so, Mortmain collapses the individual and structural view of his situation, identifying completely with an impersonal malignancy that becomes the substance of his world.

The monomaniac Mortmain’s total identification with an inscrutable force beyond his ken is the exception that proves the distance between individual characters and the indifference of the whole. This “blankness,” as Clarel observes about Jerusalem, is a background condition that separates individual subjectivity from the grand structures of the text.

The individual’s separation from these structures of *Clarel* (e.g., the holy sites, the landscape, the religious traditions themselves) is realized in the absence of (or inability to participate in) the religious community provided by the pilgrimage. In this way the band of pilgrims becomes a placeholder for community, a running dialogue about the absence of the traditions on which they had previously relied. As the monomaniac demonstrates at the cost of his own self-destruction, the individual is dependent on his own psychological resources to identify with a sense of the whole. This is how I understand doubt within the text. And the possibility of belief, in turn, becomes an achievement of the individual, not a

participation in a tradition but an act of insight. This is what I will argue shortly in the case of the Syrian Monk. The believing individual in *Clarel* achieves something *individual* that cannot be made programmatic, codified, or ritualized. In matters of belief, I will argue, *Clarel* relies on the mystical mode of the religious innovator. The believer sees beyond the world's surface by an inexplicable act of insight that is both too simple and too profound for the doubter. In the condition of doubt, questions of evidence always lead to new questions. The doubter, then, is constituted by his sense of separation from the possibility of knowing the divine, by the monotony of evidence and answers that hardens experience into a "worldview," of which the monomaniac like Mortmain represents the extreme position. *Clarel's* narrative will trace the individual's attempt to find a way out of this individual subject position, to identify and create community around the structures that repel individual membership.

### **Elements of Ritual in *Clarel***

In this chapter, I have so far examined the opposition that defines the thematics of the poem (lyric and epic), the psychological structure of the poem's individual psychology ("faith and doubt"), and an interpretation of the individual's struggle with doubt *in extremis*, without the influence of a space between the limited standpoint of the individual and the remoteness of a divine presence. *Clarel's* depiction of a *deus absconditus* takes the form of the individual, left to his own resources, not adequate to answer the questions which are, by necessity and without explanation, thrust upon him. In this last section, I will argue that the poem also considers a redemptive possibility, and that it ventures to answer how the problem of mediation between individual and world might be answered for the

historical moment in which *Clarel's* pilgrims encounter it. If a possible solution—as it has been throughout this project—is a new or revitalized form of community, my claim is that *Clarel* represents the community brought together through the bonds of ritual, which I understand here in the broad sense of an action that be codified and repeated in service of a tradition. Ritual in *Clarel* comes in many forms: as specific as a rite of pilgrimage, an act performed in the monastery of *Mar Saba*, or the celebrations of Easter Sunday with which the poem concludes. Several figures in the latter part of *Clarel* establish the terms by which ritual is developed across the poem.

First, I will read the figure of the Syrian monk-ascetic, encountered at the end of the pilgrims' time in the desert, as an example of a ritual that sets the terms of the problem within the faith-and-doubt psychology. He is a character who has a mystical experience of the divine in the desert, but the experience *fails* in that it is incommunicable to the other pilgrims. The problem with ritual that he introduces is how the ritual makes itself into something recognizable. That is, how can the ritual become a concretized presence in the world without being drawn into the blankness of materialism. After the monk I read the story of Nathan (father of Clarel's eventual fiancé Ruth), as an example of how community can be constructed around the performance of a myth, how the desire to live out a myth across the life-course—as Nathan does by become a Zionist settler outside of Jerusalem—constitutes a kind of ritual. The final problem connected to ritual that I will consider is the problem of the miracle, represented by the pilgrims' bafflement during their visit to the sites of Christ's birth, and the events of Easter Week back in Jerusalem.

The Syrian monk is an ascetic met by the American pilgrims Clarel, Rolfe and Vine. They come up to him sitting on a mountain, solitary “in a lone recline” and “of aspect thin/ From vigils which in fast begin.”<sup>104</sup> The monk-ascetic testifies to a mystical religious experience in desert. The monk’s testimony is marked by its simultaneous conviction and inability to communicate itself. It is understood that his story is “vision” driven by his isolation and extraordinary state of mind. In telling the group “Of Satan” and “The Saviour” which “lay there at my feet” he turns the ascetic’s extraordinary subjectivity into a form of public evidence. The ascetic reveals the gap between the two:

Of old. I sat me down to brood  
Within that ruin; and—my heart  
Unwaveringly to set apart  
In meditation upon Him<sup>105</sup>

The monk returns from the wilderness with a story about the gods that defies interpretability by his audience. One of the American pilgrims, Rolfe, declares that “Surely, not all we’ve heard: / Peace—solace—was in end conferred?—.”<sup>106</sup> The ascetics’ story is a vision received, the testament of something new and original. The ascetic is not in full possession of the truths he claims because they come to him in paradoxes and riddles which demand an answer: “Thou’lt find how thought’s extremes agree,— /The forethought clinehed by afterthought, / The firstling by finality.—”<sup>107</sup> A gap opens up between storyteller

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<sup>104</sup> 2.18, 9-10

<sup>105</sup> 69-72

<sup>106</sup> 2.18, 151-52

<sup>107</sup> 2.18, 142-44

(the monk) and audience (the pilgrims). The storyteller is one who lives *in* doubt, satisfied by even the enigmatic answer because it is the product of *his* experience. The storyteller is persuaded by his own signs that represent his own story. The difference is between what is knowable in the experience of the speaker, and what can be represented. This kind of oracular storyteller has access to the “thing in itself” behind the signs: “The Saviour there—the Imp and He: / Fair showed the Fiend—foul enemy; / But ah, the Other pale and dim: / I saw but as the shade of Him.”<sup>108</sup> The *condition* of doubt creates a radical subjectivity, where knowing is dependent on the telling. Story in its classical form is incantation to the muse-god, which participates in a special order of truth *simply by being told*. But stories about the gods in *Clarel* reveal their ordinary status, their dependence on evidence, and hence their radical undecidability.

The Syrian Monk’s evidence for his experience is the character he plays, the demonstration of his serenity and conviction: “And skyward patient he appealed, / Raising his eyes./ First to the pilgrims’ waiting view / Their virginal violet of hue.”<sup>109</sup> Thus the Syrian Monk is forced into the role of an *actor*, and can do little more than have a theatrical *effect* on his audience, whose reactions mix between dismay at the indeterminacy and hopefulness. The monk’s role as storyteller falls somewhere between a rhetorical function of inspiring conviction through argument and *being* an object of conviction himself.

The more general problem staged in this scene is that evidence is understood in terms of arguments to *dispel* doubt, while what is sought is a conviction *for* faith. What is given is

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<sup>108</sup> 2.18, 79-82

<sup>109</sup> 2.18, 147-50

something like an account of faith, even as what the pilgrims seek is something like experiential demonstration. The possibility of the erasure of doubt must answer to the resolution of an open status. But the monk provides an experiential notion of faith that the party relates to as observer. The communication of the vision fails; instead what we have is its evaluation. What the monk provides in the close of his address is a rebuke to Rolfe's request for an answer. The mystical experience requires uncertainty to retain its status. What is adequate to faith from the monk's position does not take the form of an answer. In the close of his address to the group the Monk provides something of a rebuke to Rolfe's request for an answer: "Content thee: in conclusion caught / Thou'lt find how thought's extremes agree,- / The forethought clinched by afterthought,/ The firstling by finality.'"<sup>110</sup> The doubting pilgrims become a group *against* the believing by an inability to accept his demonstration of knowledge.

The Syrian Monk lives within the practice of conviction, not rehearsing the *reasons* for belief but living a set of practices in support of what is already, immediately known from his involved position as the sufferer in the desert. By acting out an immediate relationship to divinity, the monk repudiates the possibility of arguing about the immanent nature of this divinity. The way of the ascetic and the mystic—the believer—is beyond *logos*, a paradoxical vision that affirms the reason for belief. His religiosity takes the form of a performance of a religion rather than an identification with a religious act. He displays a form of inner conviction that cannot give rational reasons for itself. Nothing in the

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<sup>110</sup> 2.18, 141-44

structure of the event can reveal the truth of the monk's religious experience; it is attested to through the character of the monk himself.

The pilgrim is defined by the central contradiction of his status *as* pilgrim. As the one who attends the site of a religious revelation in order to witness it firsthand, the pilgrim revitalizes for the individual what has already been affirmed in collective memory. The lyric is bisected by an analogous contradiction. On the one hand it is compromised by the "enunciative apparatus" (Culler), the entirety of the situation from which speech is possible. On the other it seeks to create something original, to perform a kind of capture of an event which does not just *repeat* in the manner of ritual, but *produce* something original by the pilgrim's reaction. The lyric speaker stands in a position between the stability of tradition and something like what Habermas calls the "lifeworld," where the background conditions of life are made ready-at-hand for assimilation into self-reflective conditions of culture.<sup>111</sup>

*Clarel's* pilgrim does not, of course, enact the passage of knowledge from lifeworld to cultural certainty, but works within an incongruity that has some parallels: between the Holy Land as lived experience, and as fixed cultural object. The poem's use of doubt is, in poetic terms, the inability of the speaker to be identified with the acts of pilgrimage. To the extent that there is the emergence of something like an individual "voice" in *Clarel*, it can be traced to the difference between the substantive meaning of the sites, the ritual of

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<sup>111</sup> Habermas: "From a perspective turned towards the situation, the lifeworld appears as a reservoir of taken-for-granted, of unshaken convictions that participants in communication draw upon in cooperative processes of interpretation. Single elements, specific taken-for-granted, are however, mobilized in the form of consensual and yet problematized knowledge only when they become relevant to the situation." Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, vols. Volume, Two (Beacon Press, 1987), 124

pilgrimage, and the “internality” of the speaker. The speaker is caught in a dilemma: to accept the meaning of the ritual as it is presented—the beginning of what I have called a “dialogue”—or the end of the subject’s implication in the surrounding and its replacement by the open-ended play of theoretical knowledge.

The difficulty faced by the Syrian monk is that his experience is incommunicable. The rituals of the ascetic are supposed to stand for themselves. The power of the Syrian monk is that he is required neither to understand the truth to which he attests, nor articulate it. Performance of the rituals of asceticism is sufficient. And while his ritual is an individual act which can command respect from the other pilgrims, I want to also see it as a model for the participatory, collective forms of ritual which appear later in the novel. The figure of Nathan, who settles the areas outside of the Holy Lands, is one such example.

Northrop Frye describes the myth as “unaffected by canons of plausible adaptation to familiar experience,” which can thereby inform “the imitation of actions near or at the conceivable limits of desire.”<sup>112</sup> By staging what is near-impossible or implausible in present-day terms, myth puts distance between its characters and audience, making storytelling dependent on the fantastic nature of the characters themselves. But the structure of myth can also be a call to action, a cultural form that continually returns the individual to a collective pattern. I will argue that *Clarel* understands myth as a kind of participatory ritual *through* which the individual citizen comes into a relationship with a given culture. I want to review an example in *Clarel* of this individual participation, where the ordinary, secular individual becomes the “proof” of the structure, the certifying element

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<sup>112</sup> Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 136.

that imparts significance to the entire story through the necessary articulation of a particular standpoint *within* the mythology.

Clarel will meet the pivotal character Nathan, father to Ruth, who represents a kind of Beatrice-like figure, a beacon of spiritual purity for him at the end of the doubt-laden steps of his pilgrimage. Nathan himself, an American who has chosen to live a settler's life outside of the walls of Jerusalem, is a figure whose identity and group identification evolves as a form of the settler mythology.

Nathan begins life as a member of the New England establishment class, then moves east to the then-frontier of Illinois before finally becoming a Jewish convert, moving his family outside Jerusalem as a Zionist settler. Nathan's story is that of an identity that changes to persist within the myth of life lived against the hostility of nature: "Nathan had sprung from worthy stock— / Austere, ascetical, but free, / Which hewed their way from sea-beat rock / Wherever woods and winter be."<sup>113</sup> Nathan lives within the myth of the American frontier, of movement and the expansion without limits, "emigrants which inland bore."<sup>114</sup> Nathan's story as told by the narrator is one of perpetual distancing from the past in service of a renewal of the frontier imperative.<sup>115</sup> The canto about his life, the longest in the poem, tells a story of the perfection of human settlement's falling-away from its attunement with nature, searching in new places: "The gloom here of grim hemlock woods / Breeding the witchcraft-spell malign;" From the early settlements of the New England woods to the

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<sup>113</sup> 1.17, 1-4

<sup>114</sup> 1.17, 10

<sup>115</sup> "But shall the children all be schooled / By hap which their forefathers ruled?" 1.17, 7-8

agricultural paradise of the Illinois plains ( “In fine / To Illinois—a turf divine / Of promise, how auspicious spread”<sup>116</sup>).

Nathan tells of his revelation of nature’s malignancy (“nature” being something like the conditions of life in yeoman subsistence agriculture), emerging from his naive faith in its suitability to human happiness. He understands nature’s ambivalence to human purposes when he glimpses the skull of a dead Native American.<sup>117</sup> After an uncle is killed in a New England rock slide (“Our mother, Earth: the founded rocks / Unstable prove: the Slide! the Slide!”<sup>118</sup>), Nathan’s loss of faith in nature seems to be tied to the understanding that it is not indifferent to the human, that, as with the Timoneer, it gives its own hints of malignancy.

At this point he tells of a succession of conversion experiences, from discovering a deistic tract of Thomas Paine’s writings on a neighbor’s windowsill, to a turn with pantheist thought reminiscent of the transcendentalists, and finally to a conversion to Zionist Judaism. The frontier myth is a story about going back to the beginning of creation and resetting humanity’s relationship with nature—and with it to society. The participant in the frontier myth engages, Rousseau-like, in the project of benign participation in a nature uncorrupted by the social abstractions that poison the human relationship nature, the divine, and society itself. In the form that it takes for Nathan’s character, it will be a story of going back to the source of tradition, to the “pure” experience of living against the

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<sup>116</sup> 1.17, 35-37

<sup>117</sup> “vase vined round and beautiful ☐ / With flowers; felt, with bated breath / The floral revelry over death.” 1.17, 70-72

<sup>118</sup> 1.17, 88-89

wilderness, which his own unsettled unease cannot touch. Nathan's eventual turn to Zionism should be seen through this frontier history. The chance meeting with a Jewish woman, and its attendant possibility of marriage, becomes a possibility for him to rebuild his relationship to both nature and God:

"Of crumbling faith; for rear-ward shows

Far behind Rome and Luther what?

The crag of Sinai. Here then plant

Thyself secure: 'tis adamant.<sup>119</sup>

Nathan's story intersects with the dynamics of faith and doubt, where doubt seeks to plant itself in a historical happening—the Jewish religion at the root of a broader tradition—that is beyond questioning. But Nathan's story is finally about his relationship with history, finding he cannot simply "be" Jewish, but must go further and live it out in the mythology of Judaism: "Having taken thus the Hebrew bent,/ Might not abide inactive so."<sup>120</sup> His Judaism is an "empty form" for which "nervous energies find vent," leading him to uproot his family and live in Jerusalem.<sup>121</sup> Nathan lives his religion in contradiction; doubt about security of a tradition requires an active relationship to his faith. The contingency and security of his religious beliefs requires that he reside fully within them as an *activity*. He interprets a traditional phrase from Passover, "Next year in Jerusalem," as a literal call to return. Yet his "return" to the Jerusalem, the narrator implies (and the narrative shows), will be a prophetic fulfillment of his initial fatalism ("And Fate, which from her ambush springs /

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<sup>119</sup> 1.17, 222-25

<sup>120</sup> 1.17, 261-62

<sup>121</sup> 1.17, 263, 265

And drags the loiterer soon or late"<sup>122</sup>) a deeper order which leads to his death at the hands of other Arab settlers.

Nathan arrives in Jerusalem through a succession of conversions and recommitments. His biography is a continuation of the frontier myth, although the "people" to which he commits undergo continual change. This will be a commitment not along ethnic or hereditary grounds, but to a style of contending for a way of life. Nathan enacts a perpetual frontier story. Nathan's story is subjective, personal and *individual* in his compulsive need to live out a relationship to his uneasy faith—but also only possible in the act of (re-)constructing the community. His dedication to the mythology of the frontier began in America but is now transferred to a different wilderness.<sup>123</sup> His membership was not an inheritance but an elective act which can be willed across context. The story of a character becomes the story of his separation from any particular community but also the necessity of membership. The group is not an inheritance but a dedication to a particular way of life that is chosen, responsive to a felt need. The group is the setting in which the hostility to a way of life will be faced and beaten back. Community becomes a struggle that memorializes Eden. The community is built around the contradictions of a shared condition, in this case the unrealized awareness of the prelapsarian harmony between surroundings and way of life.

Myth becomes the blueprint for the individual life which is lived out in a set of communities with the same convictions about nature's provision for human life. There is a relationship

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<sup>122</sup> 1.17, 341-42

<sup>123</sup> "Hittites—foes pestilent to God / His fathers old those Indians deemed:/ Nathan the Arabs here esteemed  
☐/The same—slaves meriting the rod,"1.17, 313-16

between Nathan's unease with the underlying benevolence of the world and his compulsion to live in one or another frontier. The American participates in a frontier myth of ever-westward movement, in search of the new Eden, as he realizes that his current garden contains traces of the human. Doubt about the nature of the world is the reason for a way of life. Nathan reveals the ultimate logic of the frontier myth when he moves from "new world" to 'old world;' the American style of life was not the basis for the community; instead it was the conviction that the ground they stood on had a 'virgin' character, that nature welcomed and would provide for the settler. Nathan's confidence in nature's cooperation is revealed to be a theological assumption which is shaken and then turned to a search for religious innovation, ending with the 'return to source' represented by Judaism. His choice to live a life of struggle against marauders in the desert is a literalization of the problem: that each individual lives in a wilderness of conviction alone. Doubt becomes a movement without end, to confront the source of existential uncertainty in its objectified form.<sup>124</sup> Nathan, the narrator tells us, contains an "inveterate zeal."<sup>125</sup> Nathan's form of community, "alone" against hostile peoples on the perpetual frontier of cultures in the old world, represents the isolations of doubt. To be Jewish is not to live as part of a community but to live closest to the source, still alone. Collective story (myth) is lived out through the travails of individual story. Nathan's story is a spiritual autobiography, for which the individual stands alone to account. The story becomes a zone for the suspension of doubt, a watch for signs of structure above or alongside the human.

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<sup>124</sup> "The return of Judah to her prime...Here was an object: Up and do!" 1.17, 267, 269

<sup>125</sup> 1.17, 335

Nathan's story portrays a providential force in the world that is immanent in the pattern of life itself: in the return to the struggle against nature in the forests of Illinois and, eventually, the cause of Zionism. But in the figure of the Syrian monk, providence is reduced to the immanent testimony of the monk's personality itself. The providential force is perspectivized through its embodiment in the monk, and therefore forced *from* the world.<sup>126</sup>

Nathan's example is that of an ambivalent vision of the divine turned to a pattern of communal living. It becomes apparent through the telling of his story that his religiosity is founded in the providential aspect of the American frontier myth. The settler perseveres against a hostile nature through God's benevolence. Nature's apparent indifference to the human project becomes the basis for mutual cooperation in the wilderness. Nathan exemplifies this promise in his relentless pursuit of a hostile environment, through continually rededicating himself, across his lifetime, to ever-more radical visions of settlement, ending with his arrival at his historical and spiritual source of Christianity by converting to Judaism, and working toward the re-founding of Zion. The possibility of

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<sup>126</sup> Max Weber on Christianity's radical divorce between a providential dimension and the world: "Belief in the providence is the consistent rationalization of magical divination, to which it is related, and which for that very reason it seeks to devalue as completely as possible, as a matter of principle. No other view of the religious relationship could possibly be as radically opposed to all magic, both in theory and in practice, as this belief in providence which was dominant in the great theistic religions of Asia Minor and the Occident. No other so emphatically affirms the nature of the divine to be an essentially dynamic activity manifested in god's personal, providential rule over the world. Moreover, there is no view of the religious relationship which holds such firm views regarding God's freely distributed grace and the human creature's need of it, regarding the tremendous distance between god and all his creatures, and consequently regarding the reprehensibility of any 'deification of creatures' as a sacrilege against the sovereign god. For the very reason that this religion provides no rational solution to the problem of theodicy, it conceals the greatest tensions between the world and god, between the actually existent and the ideal." Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, 144

survival on harsh ground is only possible through mutuality and cooperation in a community.

I want to understand the final scenes of the poem, in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, as a search for the terms of participation in the founding rituals of Christianity: first in a visit to Christ's traditional birthplace in Bethlehem, then in Clarel's discovery of his fiancée Ruth's death amidst the Easter Week celebrations in Jerusalem. The final test of the ritual—whether it can make sense of a *particular* crisis of Ruth's death for the student Clarel—is revealed in its inadequacy. The Easter story of resurrection is both ironized and of little solace to Clarel amidst his own loss. Clarel's sense of the contingency and indifference of nature remains. This final section, then, considers the status of miracle to be of crucial significance to the problem facing the pilgrims: can a ritual of approach and encounter with the founding miracles of a tradition free them from their sense of entrapment in the existing order?

When the pilgrims visit the traditional site of Christ's birth in Bethlehem, they are asked to come to terms with the *signs* of miracle, asking what remains of the site today to mark the entrance of something new into the world—this as the pilgrimage is nearing its end on Eastern Sunday. In the poem's last cantos, the significance of the miracle of Christ's birth and resurrection is measured against the tragedy experienced by Clarel, in the violent death of Clarel's betrothed Ruth. Clarel's doubt is concentrated in the absence of possible redemption of her death, in the gap between the promise of resurrection and the loss of Ruth in the secular time that ends the poem. The tragedy of Ruth's death, and Clarel's loss, reveals the gap between the occurrence of the miracle and the presence of miracle to the pilgrims.

A miracle is a happening beyond what is reasonable to expect. But even miracles, in order to be recognized *as* miracles, require a degree of assent by the believer. They can even, within an expanded view of events, be *expected*. But the miracle is an occurrence that must be recognized on its own terms, whether or not they conform with the sense of what is possible. But there can be no miracle without an expansion of the world's manifest order in which the miracle has a part. The miracle is *super-natural*, in that it could not occur by ordinary means, or according to the orderly flow of events. Therefore the miracle is only possible through a crossing-together of two ontological orders, an intercession of the divine or the merely extraordinary.<sup>127</sup> The recognition of the miracle, therefore, requires the ability to conceive of the extraordinary within the terms of everyday, secular time.<sup>128</sup> The doubter in *Clarel* is unable to be convinced that the extraordinary exists, but is in the position of seeking out confirmation that is analogous to what the miracle provides: proof of the extraordinary which will entail a change of *condition* in the doubter.

We can understand doubt as the participant's lack of involvement in the phenomenon doubted. In the Cartesian experiment, where doubt concerns being and non-being, what cannot be doubted is the aspect of self closest to that same subject, the fact that it is the "thinking thing" that raises doubt. What distinguishes the miracle in *Clarel* is not its

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<sup>127</sup> The theological understanding of miracle is, for the purposes of this discussion (and in keeping with Melville's primary referents), primarily Christian. Miracles in *Clarel* are those phenomena not in keeping with the materialistic regime of explanation.

<sup>128</sup> Lorraine Daston writes that "Augustine treated miracles within an Aristotelian framework that made nature considerably more orderly and autonomous than Augustine's profusion of marvels, ordinary and extraordinary, had allowed. Dividing causes into a higher and lower order, Aquinas contended that God's miracles transgressed only those of the lower order, which exist by God's will, not by necessity." In Lorraine Daston, "Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe," in *Questions of Evidence: Proof, Practice and Persuasion Across the Disciplines* (University of Chicago Press, 1991), 246

plausibility, but that it is marked by the effect it has on the subject. Like the Syrian Monk, the character who knows a miracle to be true has a different code of behavior: less self-conscious, more silent, less perturbed by what is strange or outside of experience. By itself these aspects do not constitute a different kind of subjectivity, but they do entail a different form of belonging. The believer has a different potentiality as a subject. For the individual believer an action is the practice of the belief, implicitly referred back to it. The doubter who cannot decide about the nature of the miracle exists with a state of dialogue, of question-posing and question-answering. Doubters inherit the burden of *logos* in the sense of giving an account of something provisional.

The doubter remains trapped in a cycle of articulation about that doubt; to believe is to reach a point of inarticulate rest. The community of doubters is marked by those who ask questions and acquire evidence. The doubter is unable to affirm the transformation of the world represented by the miracle. For *Clarel* the miracle is not a revelation about the nature of things, but a clarification about the condition of the subject.<sup>129</sup> The one who has assented to a miracle, the overturning of the existing order, is paradoxically the one who must ask no more questions about the nature of the world. To know that a miracle is possible is to know the underlying reality of things, below their surface presentation.

In Bethlehem, the poem's final part, what the narrator describes as a "Tuscan monk," of the Franciscan order leads the group of pilgrims through the traditional sites of the nativity.

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<sup>129</sup> Daston again: "Yet their very preoccupation with explaining why miracles could no longer be expected drove Protestant theologians to develop a new view of miracles as evidence: if miracles were proofs, how and what did they prove? Many medieval miracles were probative, certifying the sanctity of persons and the authenticity of relics. Many others, however, presupposed and confirmed faith rather than compelling it." *ibid.*, 265

The narrator characterizes the monk by guessing at his reasons for spending time in the church. His mannerisms show “The slumbering of a vivid spark” (4.13, 31), and his motives seem unusually earnest.<sup>130</sup> This is the first concern of the group upon meeting him (“Hereon, they, pacing, muse–” 4.13, 39). The experience of the temple is channeled through the back-and-forth judging of reaction between pilgrims and their guide. To put this situation in slightly different terms, the temple is overlaid with its historical consequence.

The pilgrims’ sense of space is reflected not just in this site’s significant event in the past, or in their own experience of the temple now. Rather, they experience it through the *movement* from past to present. The peasants “[think] of Baldwin, past king of Jerusalem” and “The Manger in its low remove / Where lay, a thousand years before, / The Child of awful worshiping”<sup>131</sup> Then, a gap opens up in the tour of the shrine. This is the divide between the gravity of the events begun by Christ’s birth, and the human interchange between the observers. The Anglican priest Derwent comments on “The clashing of the East and West,” (85) and an “Odd sense of incongruity” (86) and considers making a joke to the monk. Yet Derwent refrains, offering this explanation: “But no: I’ll curb the Protestant / And modern in me—at least here.” The monk, in turn, seems to intuit Derwent’s mood even without the joke: “Some little trace, / The Tuscan from his aspect caught” (96-98) and leads the group down to the traditional site of the nativity. The nativity is caught in a gap between the expected and actual appearance. The pilgrims expect simplicity, not the regal adornment of jewels appropriate to a secular king:

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<sup>130</sup> “Was this youth self-given / In frank oblation unto heaven? / Or what inducement might disarm/ This Isaac when too young to know?” 4.13, 35-38

<sup>131</sup> 4.13, 72-75, 78-80

This, this the Stable mean and poor?

Noting their looks, to ward surprise,

The Italian: "'Tis incrusted o'er

With marbles, so that now one's eyes

Meet not the natural wall.<sup>132</sup>

The group is surprised at the appearance of Christ's birthplace: why can the stable not stand on its own? The group also finds themselves in a cave, a detail from the "real" nativity they had not known. Again, their guide corrects their impression: "Yes, caves of old to use were put/ For cattle, and with gates were shut."<sup>133</sup> This raises the question of why the chamber was not kept in its original form, why it need to be covered in precious metals.

The nature of the miracle is such that it is being performed through the pageantry of precious metals; decoration adorns the simplicity of the original. As the pilgrims study the monk, it is suggested that they see a "fervor," which points to unfulfillment:

He warmed. Ah, fervor bought too dear:

The fingers clutching rope and cross;

Life too intense; the cheek austere

Deepening in hollow, waste and loss.

They marked him; and at heart some knew

Inklings they loved not to pursue.

The pilgrim Rolfe muses on the resemblance between the monk and Saint Francis: "In vigils, fervent prayers and trances, / Agonies and self-consumings- / Renewest thou the

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<sup>132</sup> 4.13, 125-29

<sup>133</sup> 4.13, 131-32

young Saint Francis?"<sup>134</sup> The monk's religious figure, as one anxious *to* believe, suggests that his fervor could go in several directions, to renewal or exhaustion. Derwent, by contrast, imagines that his anxious questioning will subside: "'Tis doubtless the poor boy's first year / In Bethlehem; time will abate / This novice-ardor; yes, sedate / He'll grow, adapt him to the sphere."

Impressive was it here to note

Those herdsmen in the shaggy coat:

Impressive, yet partook of dream;

It touched the pilgrims, as might seem<sup>135</sup>

The priest points to a group of simply-dressed shepherds worshiping nearby. He claims that they came to escape persecution elsewhere, to which their visible injuries testify. The guide sees their presence in the holy site as evidence of God's triumph: "The manger marked them for his own; But Christ redeems them."<sup>136</sup> But we are given the reaction of Ungar, ex-Confederate soldier, "visibly the red blood shot / Into his thin-skinned scar."<sup>137</sup> Ungar's doubt rebounds against the "image" of faith presented by the shepherds, the image that "partook of dream." As characters the shepherds are "types," a typological character that the monk makes the image of faith for the pilgrims. Other beings in the church have become a form of evidence, and the pilgrim the mark or test of the "success" of the evidence presented. Above all else the monk seeks to please his tour group, to see their reactions

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<sup>134</sup> 4.13, 176-78

<sup>135</sup> 4.13, 243-46

<sup>136</sup> 4.13, 220-21

<sup>137</sup> 4.13, 225-26

reflected back at him like a satisfied believer: “like a maid in the lily of youth / To cozen men of foolish looks.”<sup>138</sup>

The monk exudes an “innocent,” naive faith, still believing it can escape from doubt.

Derwent offers a kind of counsel at the end, that “Signori, here, believe ☐/ Where night and day, while ages run / Faith in these lamps burns on and on.”<sup>139</sup> The possibility of a certain kind of belief is concretized in the site. History and admiration, the pose of reverence, replaces a faith can be actualized in the individual. Faith is “out there,” in objects. The decking of the birth cave is an unintended reflection of faith’s objectival form. Faith as the object in the subject-object binary. The group accepts the lavish adornments on what was a simple stable: “The adornment of the sacred Urn. / Impressive was it here to note.”<sup>140</sup>

In the Church of the Nativity the miracle becomes an object, albeit one which must be worked on in order to be seen in its proper form. The objects in the church are choreographed to be both more than they are (in anticipation of their world-historical Christian import) and shown in their simple, “natural” form, in line with the humility from which the pilgrims expect Christianity to have originated. The miracle holds out the possibility that doubt will be exhausted, or rather that freedom from doubt is possible. It promises to free the pilgrim from their expectations, and as such it is constructed as a test, a marker of character disposition which segments the attendees at the church into possible positions. First there is the believer for whom, like the shepherds, an acceptance of the miracle object marks them as simple, undivided consciousness. Second, the guide, the one

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<sup>138</sup> 4.13, 246, 49

<sup>139</sup> 4.13, 251-53

<sup>140</sup> 4.13, 242-43

in charge of 'showing' or 'displaying.' And third the doubter, who exercises a critical, discriminating intelligence on the miracle. The site of the miracle is the inflection point for a decision about the divine, where the subject must decide between presence and absence.

A decision must occur because the miracle is regarded as only halfway in the past. The pilgrims of *Clarel* treat the miracle as an event that ought to show signs, or at least have implications, for the present. After the visit to the Church of the Nativity the celebrations of Easter Week begin back in Jerusalem. On approach to the walls of Jerusalem the party stumbles upon a burial and Clarel, with a sense of premonition, uncovers the body to discover that it is Ruth, daughter of Nathan, to whom he became engaged immediately before leaving on the pilgrimage. Ruth's gravediggers tell Clarel that, along with her mother, she has died of "grief" when her father was killed by Arab settlers outside the walls of Jerusalem. Clarel's sense of total absence after Ruth's death, of waiting in "empty time," occurs alongside the culmination represented by the miracle of resurrection during Easter Week.

Clarel's grief after Ruth's death is a dark reversal of the interval between Christ's death on the cross and resurrection. His sense of expectation thereafter becomes an empty time in which he must nonetheless persist: "Day passed; and passed a second one, / A third-fourth-fifth; and bound he sate / In film of sorrow without moan-." <sup>141</sup> The narrator answers the question: "Why lingers he" so: "Ask grief, love ask-fidelity / In dog that by the course abides / Of shepherd fallen-abides, abides." <sup>142</sup> Clarel receives a resurrection of

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<sup>141</sup> 4.32, 1-3

<sup>142</sup> 4.32, 20-22

sorts, in a vision that appears to him of the pilgrims and hangers-on who have died over the course of the poem: "Illusion of grief's wakeful doom: / The dead walked. There, amid the train,"<sup>143</sup> Visions of the dead do not offer comfort to Clarel, but emphasize the gap between living and dead: "But Ruth—ah, how estranged in face! / He knew her by no earthly grace: ¶/ Nor might he reach to her in place."<sup>144</sup>

The canto "Easter" opens with bitter invocation of the miracle: "BUT ON THE THIRD DAY CHRIST AROSE," it states.<sup>145</sup> The narrator invokes the significance of the holiday. The student Clarel does not perceive the miracle in terms of its "higher significance," but rather with reference to his own specific person. Resurrection is exactly what appears to be most inaccessible to Clarel, the individual character. He notes the "The hallelujah after pain," (4.33, 21) which "Still through the ages has rehearsed / That Best, the outcome of the Worst."<sup>146</sup>

Belief is marked by participation in the ritual. For Clarel at this stage there can be no answer to his question of doubt without an answer for Ruth's death: "The maiden up; Christ is arisen: ¶/ But Ruth, may Ruth so burst the prison?"<sup>147</sup> The question could imply concern for salvation, but more directly concerns Clarel's immediate loss. Belief in the miracle of the Easter resurrection exists alongside Clarel's irreversible loss of Ruth.

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<sup>143</sup> 4.32, 86-87

<sup>144</sup> 4.32, 99-101

<sup>145</sup> 4.33, 1

<sup>146</sup> 4.33, 23-24

<sup>147</sup> 4.33, 65-66

At this conclusion of the poem, then, *Clarel* leaves its readers with a bitter contrast: the failure of the personal perspective (Clarel's loss) on the ritual, amidst the "success" of the collective Easter ritual celebrating Christ's death and resurrection. By success I mean the ability to return the individual to an awareness of the source or purpose that justifies the ritual. In the symbolic register of the poem, there should be little surprise that the "simple" crowd of believers, who inhabited the opening scenes in Jerusalem, return to prominence on Easter. Acceptance of the significance of the ritual is for those of a different nature than Clarel. I have advanced an argument in this chapter that the pilgrimage represents a very specific form of community, a minimum collective structure through which the individual confronts a cultural totality represented by religious practice. The pilgrimage in *Clarel* represents a kind of logical extreme to this end, by which the individual confronts the community's lack of relationship with the whole. For *Clarel* the cosmos is silent: doubt is the final ritual through which the community asks questions of the divine.

That there would be no resolution to Clarel's (and the group's) doubt at the end of the poem could have been foreseen by its structure. But the specific character of the loss that Clarel experiences at the poem's end ought to be understood in the terms we have established. The poem's "epic" character was first presented in the contrast between matter and spirit. That is, between the *appearance* of the Holy Lands to Clarel and others, contrasted with the richness of the tradition that animates the pilgrim to undertake the pilgrimage. What was epic in *Clarel* (or as I have argued, what gave it a *modern epic* character) was a remote or inaccessible set of cultural structures for the individual pilgrim. But however silent the voice of gods for most of this poem, there was still the possibility of his speaking to an intact, mundane, everyday life inhabited by the pilgrims. The student

Clarel's willingness to find a partner (Ruth), and commit to marriage amidst his own doubt, speaks to an assumed integrity and continuity of the everyday structure of life. It assumes a certain level of background confidence that secular life will persist.

This is the consolation of "faith and doubt:" that the everyday goes on *despite* the doubt. Such a reading of the poem makes Melville's choice of conclusion all the more devastating, an apparent confirmation of the "bad omens" glimpsed by the Timoneer. In Ruth's death, the instability of theological questions spills over into the everyday, threatening the closure of both the "higher" and everyday view of the individual life-course. The ritual, as a device that brings these higher realities down to temporary manifestation in the everyday, is called to account for events in secular time for which it was never meant to provide answers. *Clarel's* doubt about the divine reaches its most dire point not with respect to these higher questions, but in the community's absence within the most inevitable of everyday possibilities: the death of the individual.

## **Conclusion:**

### **Criticism and Social Forms: Commune, Village, Pilgrimage**

This project has depended on the use of communal forms whose unifying thematic function within each chapter have sometimes exceeded my willingness to exhaust them as critical objects. I will now give a more careful explanation for this decision.

To borrow Raymond Williams' formulation of a related problem from *The Country and the City*, the general forms of community that I use in this project (e.g., "commune," "village," and "pilgrimage") are "knowable" in a sense that is more typological than historically specific.<sup>1</sup> For instance, when I discuss the common basis of the "village" as a community in George Eliot's novels, I consider how the countryside became an important nineteenth-century marker of taste and status for Victorian England's increasingly urban, and industrialized, bourgeois ruling classes.<sup>2</sup> But there is a clear sense—in this case and across the project—in which I am not interested in being limited by the historically specific English village as a mediator of tensions between industrial and aristocratic Victorian ideals. Instead, I argue that George Eliot's work offers us an English *example* of the village that reveals a form of agency—what I call "organic individualism"—that recurs broadly across the realistic tradition. But it should also be apparent that, if we compare the situations of these texts, something like village organic individualism appears in shadow form throughout the project. The relationship between these different forms of community, and the way in which they appear in aspects simultaneously across my texts, provides access to this

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<sup>1</sup> See Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), Chapter 16.

<sup>2</sup> See Franco Moretti, *The Bourgeois : Between History and Literature* (London: Verso, 2014), 113-14

project's unifying problem. The individual character, which we initially defined in a paradigm of "buffered" mastery that *detaches* the individual from the background conditions of reality, is "re-implicated" in these same conditions through participation in a form of community.

When Wilhelm meets the strange, anachronistic figure of Saint Joseph the Second high up in the mountains, Joseph offers a sage defense of a quasi-village ideal: "On the whole, there is something more humane about life in the mountains than in the flatlands," he says. "The inhabitants are closer to one another and, if you will, also farther apart." This is because "each person must rely more on himself," his "own hands" and "own feet," while also remaining "closer to his neighbor," because he "sees him more often" and is "engaged in a common venture."<sup>3</sup> He describes the village where he makes his home, and his own form of organic individualism, fostered by a community that holds a set of immediately available sense referents in common: this is what Joseph can touch with his "hands" and "feet." St. Joseph's sense of calling leads him to recreate the Biblical life of Joseph out of the materials of his own life, and to live it in the rough grain of the village—a pattern that recurs in the *Wanderjahre*. The individual's pursuit of a vocation requires attention to the right materials, and keeping those materials at hand. For Eliot, the village creates the sensory conditions for a realism that resists the detached stance of mastery. What I called organic individualism in the chapter on George Eliot's novels is also present in Joseph's community of the *Wanderjahre*, because Joseph's world requires the agent's complete commitment to a

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<sup>3</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years, or, the Renunciants*, ed. Jane K. Brown, trans. Krishna Winston, Goethe's Collected Works, Princeton Paperbacks (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 105.

practical involvement in his surroundings. There should be little surprise at this coincidence, since it should now be apparent that both vocational and organic individualism are a style of individual attachment to one's surroundings, a strategy for refusing the stance of mastery.

At the end of *Middlemarch*, Dorothea Brooke, distraught over her relationship with Will Ladislaw and his entanglement in the distressed marriage of Rosamond Vincy and Tertius Lydgate, looks out of her window after a sleepless night, and sees in an ordinary scene of country life that she is part of the ordinary village life of Middlemarch:

She opened her curtains, and looked out towards the bit of road that lay in view, with fields beyond outside the entrance-gates. On the road there was a man with a bundle on his back and a woman carrying her baby; in the field she could see figures moving—perhaps the shepherd with his dog. Far off in the bending sky was the pearly light; and she felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labor and endurance. She was a part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the division between observer and observed in the window through which Dorothea views the ordinary landscape, the scene emphasizes Dorothea's involved position with what she sees: the symbolic resonance of its anonymous characters bearing the burden of labor; childrearing; the biblical figure of the shepherd; the invocation of a cosmic dimension in her view of the stars and, finally, a sense of the infinite opening of the sky. All return her dispersed personal concerns to the here-and-now to the ordinary life in front of her. And the didactic intrusion of the narrator in the final sentence ("she was a part of that

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<sup>4</sup> George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, Modern Library edition (New York: Modern Library, 1994), 751.

involuntary, palpitating, life...”) sanctions what the aesthetics of Dorothea’s view had already shown: that moral concern is compelled by the very possibility of Dorothea having this view. The background material of the village, what makes it legible to the reader *as* a community in which an individual life like Dorothea’s plays out, is the transformation of observer and observed into coequal participants in the village.

But this scene from *Middlemarch* also resembles the view of the rural life that Raymond Williams critiques as a concealment of the full material and social basis of communal life: that “a country community, most typically a village, is an epitome of direct relationships: of face-to-face contacts in which we can find and value the real substance of personal relationships.”<sup>5</sup> A politically skeptical critical perspective reasserts the importance of the window that keeps Dorothea from being out in the field. They do *not* meet each other “face-to-face,” however she imagines it. She may be learning not to stand apart from the wider village according to her ethical principles, but on the material basis of her life she is quite detached from the scene. Citing Eliot as one example of this problem, Williams describes the general case: that “rural inhabitants” like those outside Dorothea’s window (i.e., peasants) become a “chorus” or “ballad-element” within the novel, more like an element of the landscape itself, present “as themselves” only in “externally formulated attitudes and ideas” as in Dorothea’s beneficent sunrise vision.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, 165.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 168. See also his *Culture and Society* concerning Eliot: “Yet it is a fact that when she touches, as she chooses to touch, the lives and the problems of working people, her personal observation and conclusion surrender, virtually without a fight, to the general structure of feeling about these matters which was the common property of her generation, and which she was at once too hesitant to transcend, and too intelligent to raise into any lively embodiment.” In Raymond Williams’ *Culture and Society: 1780-1950*. New York: Columbia University Press. 1983, 109.

Now we have arrived at a dilemma. Williams is surely right about the circumscribed world of Dorothea's view through the window, which appears to connect Dorothea with a greater whole in a vision of village *communitas*.<sup>7</sup> The village is—all at once—a romantic trope, cultural memory, aspiration, and a concealing cliché. But still, the picture outside of Dorothea's window *does* have an efficacious ethical power, for her, within the limited, elite social boundaries that Williams describes. As the narrator tells the reader next, "what she would resolve to do that day did not yet seem quite clear, but something that she could achieve stirred her as with an approaching murmur which would soon gather distinctness."<sup>8</sup> Later that day, as a result of her resolve, Dorothea will go the house of the troubled couple and help them mediate their feud, befriending Rosamond so that she does not view Dorothea as a rival for Tertius Lydgate's affections.

Williams' criticism reorients us to the two poles of this project. On the one side, various individualisms, and the possibility of individual agency with an adequate self-conception and ability to work itself out in social life. On the other, the need for the whole of social life to have a credible integrity, and the submission of the individual to the necessarily circumscribed forms of agency available to any organized sociocultural body. In Dorothea's status as moral actor we are presented with a credible, ethical individual agency. In Williams' criticism, we see the call to attend to the real basis of the community.

I have argued that the appearance of "community" as an issue for the realist novel was an attempt to resist the stance of instrumental mastery which was inherent to realism itself.

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<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 3, "Liminality and Communitas," in Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Aldine Publishing, 1969)

<sup>8</sup> Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 751.

This is because realism creates a background stability so that a set of particulars (e.g., individuals) can realize a sense of their own freedom, but the very social, institutional, and cultural precursors of that stability threaten to limit or negate the most credible forms of agency. A picture of “the real” like the one we have examined here, by which the novel presents Dorothea’s view to the reader, becomes a smooth surface through the window, and the picture it frames becomes a kind of illusion. The illusion of community, this argument goes, makes certain forms of agency available *to Dorothea* while limiting her (and our) view of the fullness of both other individuals and the structure of relationships as a whole. These other individuals, however anonymous and typological as characters, are nonetheless agents in an *ideal* sense, in the life-worlds and systems by which they form a part of a community. The credibility of a certain epiphany *for Dorothea* comes at the cost of fixing the community under her own optimistic, necessarily limited, view. To change her own life and those of her close acquaintances, the depth and texture of the lives of others in the village must be turned to “inspiration,” to an illusion that is useful to her—but goes no further.

Assuming we accept that Dorothea’s observation reveals a failure to grasp the full truth of her situation from the involved—and individual—perspective, I want to suggest that her lack of awareness is a ripe target for a certain critical view of her situation. Now I want to suggest three ways of thinking about the critical view of Dorothea’s limitations.

First, that Dorothea believes a kind of ‘noble lie,’ which exaggerates her sense of connection to her surroundings; she sacrifices “true knowledge” of her surroundings for a certain state of mind, so that she can exercise a more limited form of fellow-feeling. Second, that Dorothea lacks a self-critical capacity; that there is a gap between what we know about her

situation and her own fuzzy intuitions of unity with her village. Third, that the narrator of Dorothea's view commits the fallacy of spiritualizing her experience, falling into an affective "solution" to the problem of understanding her village from the window. Putting all three questions together, I want to use this textual episode as a thought experiment about the value of my communal forms to this project.

We can understand Dorothea to be steeped in a modern "noble lie," to which Eliot's aestheticization of village life is vulnerable, as critics like Terry Eagleton have pointed out.<sup>9</sup> The purpose of Plato's original noble lie in *The Republic* was to fix a certain configuration of the social at the expense of the freedom of its individual participants.<sup>10</sup> From the lowest to the highest-ranked individual, Socrates would instill the same ideology: that social position springs from the individual's affinity with the precious earth metals—gold, silver and bronze—rather than as a social construction by active participants in a culture.<sup>11</sup> While the noble lie seeks to ensure that individuals only exercise a narrowly circumscribed form of agency (that appropriate to their citizenship class), the rules of the illusion can be broken if an individual is judged to have been born into the wrong category of citizenship.<sup>12</sup> Thus a constructivist lie, which (Socrates argues) has a certain usefulness for *organizing* society, becomes a limitation on the individual. The forms of available agency have no bearing on

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<sup>9</sup> See Terry Eagleton, "Ideology and Literary Form," *New Left Review* I, no. 90 (1975): 81–109

<sup>10</sup> Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, ed. and trans. Alan Bloom, Second edition (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 414b–415d, 93–95.

<sup>11</sup> "I'll attempt to persuade first the rulers, and the soldiers, then the rest of the city, that the rearing and education we gave them were like dreams; they only thought they were undergoing all that was happening to them, while, in truth, at that time they were under the earth within, being fashioned and reared themselves, and their arms and other tools being crafted." *ibid.*, 414d–e, 94

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 415b–c.

Plato's noble lie; the lie exists to limit the effective exercise of just these available agencies. If we extend the example to Dorothea, the occupant of a social position with the possibility of a wide latitude for ethical agency, we can observe that she makes use of the social lie that Raymond Williams describes: to seek out her own form of "the good." The Platonic lie requires a belief in stratified social *difference*, while Dorothea's lie is premised on an illusion of democratic egalitarianism: only by failing to see her implication in the forms of exclusion outside her window, by seeing others as *like* her, is she able to recall her moral powers to their proper sphere of exercise. Morality is agency exercised on *her* social peers: those like *her*, however defined. But both lies—Dorothea's and Plato's—have the effect of intensifying certain forms of individual action at the expense of a picture of the whole. The noble lie may obscure the immediate truth about the whole, but it is (supposed to be) in service of a more profound whole: that of the organization of Plato's Republic, which totalizes the vision of the good. But the forms of domination and contingency that make Dorothea's social vision possible offer no such guarantee of a coherent whole. Social life, in its political exclusions, economic contingencies, and manifest injustices, is contingency all the way down—to the advantage of someone like Dorothea who enjoys the privilege of observing others through the window.

Another salient difference between Plato's "lie" and Dorothea's is that Dorothea has no metaphysical commitments equivalent to those of Plato (the "soft" metaphysical register invoked by the night sky are an echo of that absence), making it easier to dismiss her self-understood unity with her surroundings as an "ideological" formation. But while Plato has a metaphysical "good" in view around which his city is organized, the lie—let us call it the

the ideology of his republic—has the entirely instrumental purpose of social control<sup>13</sup> Plato’s citizen accepts the the particular form of agency that it entails (e.g., that of a craftsman); which is to say that Plato’s citizen does not become an individual in the modern sense of someone with a degree of distance from the demands of social life. This is how a lie, backed by a strong vision of the good, can have no ethical value for its participants, while the lie in *Middlemarch*, that we can best account for in the substratum of Dorothea’s own materially conditioned unconscious, *does* have an ethical force.

Dorothea’s lie allows her to achieve agential effectiveness, at the cost of her vision of the whole being able to pass “critical” scrutiny.<sup>14</sup>

American literary criticism for the twentieth century onward has generally cared more about the latter than the former. That is to say, when the literary analyst chooses between making sense of the “structures” that limit the effect of Dorothea’s moral vision, and evaluating her path through the novel as a moral agent, the critique of structure certainly gets more traction. Dorothea is vulnerable to a traditional structural critique of her position relative to the peasants she views through the window, because the critic is in a position to see what she is not. To the extent that we can reconstruct Dorothea as the representation of an intentional mind in this passage, the source of her moral agency—her

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<sup>13</sup> This fact would explain why Socrates’ consideration of the noble lie ends not with a discussion of its truth value, but with strategies for finding “some device for persuading them of this tale.” *ibid.*, 415c

<sup>14</sup> I use “ethics” here in the broad sense of the value-considering capacity that makes human beings into agents in concrete situations. To quote Roger Crisp, I mean the “systems of value and custom instantiated in the lives of particular groups of human beings.” This is distinguished from the more narrow purview of morality, and its concern with subsets of questions around right and wrong. Roger Crisp, “Ethics and Meta-Ethics” (Taylor; Francis, 1998)

belief that she is connected to the others in this picture as she believes—is the weakness that the structural critic identifies.

This brings us to the second criticism I laid out above: that we ought to apply greater scrutiny to her epiphanic identification with the villagers. The impulse to reconcile with another woman in a similar position, Rosamond Vincy, bears little relation to any possible identification with the peasants outside the window. The lines confirming Dorothea's sense of identification with the peasants is reported in the free indirect style: "She was part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining." The sentence only unambiguously shows itself as a product of Dorothea's mind. The reader is left to infer this connection by the commentary the sentence offers on the just-observed scene, and by her resolve to take action consistent with the sentiment of common purpose that it establishes. The sentence, therefore, floats on a plane between Dorothea and the narrator. The narrator cannot claim it is mere moral commentary on the scene, and yet we cannot simply give credit for the insight to Dorothea, either.<sup>15</sup> The sentence also contains a contradictory sentiment: that Dorothea is both "part of" the peasants' life (in some fundamental ethical

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<sup>15</sup> Doritt Cohn writes about the free indirect monologue that this "equivocation" is essential to its effect: "And this equivocation in turn creates the characteristic indeterminateness of the narrated monologue's relationship to the language of consciousness, suspending it between the immediacy of quotation and the mediation of narration. Accordingly, its function fluctuates when it is found in the immediate vicinity of the other techniques: when it borders on psycho-narration, it takes on a more monological quality and creates the impression of rendering thoughts explicitly formulated in the figural mind; which it borders on spoken or silent discourse, it takes on a more narratorial quality and creates the impression that the narrator is formulating his character's inarticulate feelings." The framing of Dorothea's situation appears closer to the latter. At minimum the most plausible reading of the scene is that her sense of unity with the people outside the window has an inarticulate component, only plausible *as a general description in addition* to a moral injunction to herself. Doritt Cohn, "Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction," in *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, ed. Mickael McKeon (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 493–514, 497

sense) and separated from it (by the window), “looking out” from her “luxurious shelter.” The difference between the latter and the former creates an internal drama that leads to the moral accusation.

To be involved while keeping a distance means that one is in error, that one has made a mistake about what the *view* of a structure implies about the *makeup* of that same structure. Dorothea *is* part of the scene, subject to a critical evaluation that the novel could not possibly anticipate. But the ideology it contains cannot change the fact that the sentence takes the form of a moral accusation. The disembodied, indirect voice that speaks here comes from the background of Dorothea’s life, a kind of ethical aura surrounding her situation: you are part of this scene, yet you hold yourself back. The insight of identification occurs alongside the realization of the failure to act. The moral resolve that Dorothea achieves is contained in the form of an accusation against someone in her position.

The accusation leveled by what I have called the ethical aura of the scene is that she in fact stands apart, a point made rhetorically with two negations: she was “*neither...a spectator,*” “*nor*” able to stop in “selfish complaining” (emphasis added)—a statement which contains the implication that she does both in her moment of indecision. And yet the identification with the village persists and strengthens her resolve. This brings us to the third viewpoint I want to consider: that Dorothea’s sense of unity with her surroundings happens on the level of a spiritual pull, a ‘mood’ or a sort of soft, indefinite spiritualism evoked by the aesthetics of her situation.

If the scene contains forces of both distinction-making, of setting out how Dorothea is different from what comes above, it also contains an impulse to unify. The evidence of this

unity takes the form of an insight with the aesthetics and conventions of epiphany: The old, organic metaphors recur (“involuntary, palpitating life”), and the indefinite distance to the sky seems to reach back to the peasants (“far off in the bending sky”) who are near to her on the road outside her window. The difference between human action and acceptance of fate is elided by a sheltering nature.<sup>16</sup> Eloquence appeals on the basis of totalities. What Lauren Berlant calls the “dissipated subjectivity” of an affective situation makes sense of Dorothea’s connection to the scene.<sup>17</sup> No particular entity, force, or structure is responsible for this situation; it emerges from the elements viewed as a totality that is close to an aesthetic. Her situation maps onto what Lauren Berlant calls an “impasse” in the present, a “stretch of time in which one moves around with a sense that the world is at once intensely present and enigmatic, such that the activity of living demands both a wandering absorptive awareness and a hypervigilance that collects material that might help to clarify things.”<sup>18</sup> The ‘spiritual’ dimension of this scene is the presumption that Dorothea, the narrator, and the reader can all arrive at the same conclusions through attention to an emergent phenomenon.

In each of the ways that I have understood Dorothea’s relationship to her village—as noble lie, as self-criticism, and as spiritual experience—Raymond Williams’ criticism cannot be dismissed. For Williams the textual self-interpretation of a scene like this one—that Dorothea could identify with the villagers because she understands their plight—accepts, in principle, that Dorothea could imaginatively cross barriers of class and social position.

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<sup>16</sup> “...she felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labor and endurance.”

<sup>17</sup> Lauren Gail Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 9.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

Williams, a committed Marxist, would regard what I call the social form of the village as just a precritical, ideal social type: a hazy abstraction that makes an act of Other-effacing identification with the peasants possible, despite their differences in material, social and institutional position. We can think of the aforementioned “noble lie” as the ideology that makes Dorothea’s act of identification socially efficacious, which refracts it from the anonymous figures of the laborer and the woman with a child to the individualized faces of Rosamond Vincy and Tertius Lydgate.<sup>19</sup> The text is not in a position to offer this kind of critique, to understand differences in the material basis of social life. Instead it displays an urgency, rooted in Eliot’s ethical approach to writing, to turn the epiphany at the window into a situation of action. The accusatory spirit of the critic, his reduction to structural difference between character (Dorothea) and Other (peasants), is outside of the text’s earnest orientation to action represented in Dorothea. Finally, the critic’s tendency to split apart differences is resisted by the presentation of all the figures as a ‘unity,’ in the form of spiritual epiphany.

Eliot’s village in *Middlemarch* makes a certain kind of action possible for Dorothea. It leans toward a picture of ethical clarity. As Williams writes, this is a simplification of social relations that makes the world legible for selective action. The alternative that I want to develop in opposition to Williams leans on the double-sided nature of this claim: that the act of identification performed by Dorothea in the text both conceals her social world in

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<sup>19</sup> Williams writes about the knowable community in Jane Austen that it is “outstandingly face-to-face,” and that meaning of one’s neighbor (note the Biblical resonance of the “neighbor”) is “not the people who are actually living nearby” but the people “who can be visited” (as Dorothea will visit Rosamond and Tertius later that day). To state the point more directly, the “knowable community” is a “network of propertied houses and families.” Williams, *The Country and the City*, 166

image of the village, and makes a possibility open up. The unity she experiences with the village makes her into an agent that she was not before. Williams offers us a detached, diagnostic perspective, within the bounds of what Paul Ricoeur famously termed the “hermeneutics of suspicion,” whose purpose is to see a situation more clearly, to break down the viewer’s confidence about the construction of a scene.<sup>20</sup> The question is still how we ought to handle this contingent, historical object like the village, which we can be “seen into” and “taken apart” through Williams’ critical, materialist perspective. And yet the potential of the village is not exhausted by Williams’ perspective, because we are forced to weigh the value of the new situation that the village has created over the value of what has been obscured.

What I want to explore over the following pages is the problem of making sense of the individual as an ethical actor within a literary-critical project, because this is the foundational question raised by my simple communal forms: commune, village, and pilgrimage. I will consider this problem through two distinct, but related dialectics. First, that of *Bildung* against what I call the “curatorial” perspective. And second, the vantage point of a specialist versus that of a generalist. The result of this discussion will provide us a fuller view of how my use of these communal forms opens up the agency of the individual within the novel.

## I.

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, Terry Lectures (Yale University Press, 1970).

I want to first consider two positions, or two ways of imagining how a critic might make sense of a social formation like that of the village. The first returns to the intellectual tradition of *Bildung* that has figured across this project. It is the idea that the critic should discover or produce a new cultural formation *through* the text. The second is that the critic should consolidate the features of an existing consensus of some kind; this consensus can be organized on the basis of a claim to special skills, like a method or type of analysis. It can also be founded on the basis of a particular affinity for one's chosen object, an understanding of its social or political significance. I call this the "curator" perspective. The *Bildung* perspective sees the critic as the producer of an original intellectual model, the author of a new cultural object through a creative act; the curator understands the critic as the bearer of a particular perspective provided by a contemporary position. I call this a "curator" because the ideal type of this criticism consists of the application of a toolkit of methods and disciplinary knowledge, rather than *Bildung's* emphasis on interstitial connection between disparate tools, frameworks, and disciplines. The *Bildung* position can be provisionally identified with a diachronic relationship to culture as a resource. The critic, motivated by the concerns of *Bildung*, wants to know about the configuration of larger bodies of knowledge, how unlike elements are alike; this with less attention paid to their historical position. The *Bildung* position (in keeping with its somewhat apolitical roots in the German Enlightenment), *because* it is "open and connectable to all concrete situations in life," as Reinhart Koselleck writes, "produces ties between heterogeneous factors."<sup>21</sup> The curator position is primarily concerned with the application of historical

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<sup>21</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, "The Anthropological and Semantic Structure of *Bildung*," in *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2002), 194.

knowledge, with the version of “the real” appropriate to the contemporary. The curator takes a more active stance, starting from the position that we want to recognize aspects of our existing knowledge in a text, and that the author must incorporate his own commitments and worldly involvements to resist the effect produced by the author.

As Rita Felski writes in *Critique and Postcritique* about an ideal-type critic who approaches my formulation of the curator, its baseline presumption about the text is that it “helps to naturalize or lend ideological support to real-world institutions and practices due to shared genealogies and underlying conceptual structures.”<sup>22</sup> The job of the curator is therefore to uncover these hidden commitments. The curator carries the sense that we have already developed the methods that we need to understand our critical objects, but that this knowledge must be applied in the right way. The curator position is more easily brought to the conviction that criticism is oriented to action, that it ought to take a position with respect to pragmatics. The critic of *Bildung* is more interested in discovering conceptual possibilities that have gone unremarked in existing material. The resources of the past are unpredictable, always threatening to erupt into the present, while the curator brings a stable body of knowledge to bear on new objects.

We can observe a tension between the *Bildung* and the curatorial perspective within the texts of this project, as they attempt to come to terms with what the village ought to be as a social form.

George Eliot understands the past as a force that works silently on the the present.

“Traditional” life, that is to say the life of the rural classes more distant from the processes

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<sup>22</sup> Rita Felski and Elizabeth S. Anker, eds., *Critique and Postcritique* (Duke University Press, 2017), 6.

of rationalization at work in urban life, is subject to sedimentary potentials contained in its own past, which it can neither understand nor control.<sup>23</sup> Her conservatism carries a touch of the *Bildung* orientation. The past can become the basis for something new; not an object we can understand in the present, but a force that, if we listen and allow it, will reveal something new. This is why, according to Eliot, the artist is in the best position to understand the meaning of tradition: because she is prepared to *receive* a message from the past, rather than shaping it to her own ends with the capacity for sympathy.

I read this tension, between receptive and constructive tendencies, into the the village in *The Mill on the Floss*, where the Tulliver family is led to ruin when they expect the forces of the past to carry them, like the current of the river, into a future that they trust to provide. Their fate is evidence of the tragic side of a reliance on the past as a creative resource, and the source of an ambiguity in the text's ethic of conservatism. Is the financialization of the countryside, its invisible transformation into abstract capital beneath the Tulliver's very feet, a *potential* inherited from the past, or is it (as Eliot seems to have held) a yoking of the past to systems of abstract judgment, to the methods and technologies which can claim to have "superseded" the naiveté of the village?

In this respect the view of the past in a work like *Mill* also contains a curator's perspective. The curator takes both the village (however imperfectly conceived) and the financialization of the countryside as equally contingent historical phenomena. The life of yeoman's independence lived by the Tullivers gave the preconditions for desirable forms of human

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<sup>23</sup> Eliot: "The nature of European men has its roots intertwined with the past, and can only be developed by allowing those roots to remain undisturbed while the process of development is going on until that perfect ripeness of the seed which carries with it a life independent of the root." George Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," in *Essays*, ed. Thomas Pinney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1856), 288.

agency: for mutuality, cooperation, genuine moral concern and solidarity. The curator recognizes the village through the capacities that it made possible, and reads the financialization of the countryside as a process that renders the village an impossibility. To summarize, we take the perspective of *Bildung* when we understand Eliot to be representing a past that has a latent existence in the present, when we see her imagining how the loss of the village has obscured a type of agency that is still potentially available—e.g., to engage in sympathetic cooperation with others. The *Bildung* orientation understands the village as a possible world in the present.

But we take the position of curator when we understand the village as a past—perhaps an illusory, idyllic, never-existent past—that throws light on our situation in the present. The curator's perspective is also capable of taking the village (or aspects of the village) as a *desideratum*, but here the village serves to critique the fallenness of the present, to provide relief for what has been loss in the movement from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*. The curator views the loss of the village form of community as the outcome of a tragic historical process for which there are no obvious alternatives (or at least not within the tools of the critic), while *Bildung* takes it for a call to reimagine the present, to open up our sense of contingency that the present could still be otherwise.

In Goethe's *Wanderjahre* the village is an act of creation, a resistance to the circumstances of history that constrain individual choice in the present. The setting in the *archive* is an ambivalent background to the novel. On the one hand it suggests a documentary verisimilitude, storing all evidence of the past regardless of its significance. On the other, making use of its material requires a principle of selection, of choosing what is most

relevant to the needs of the present. The village appears in the *Wanderjahre* in the sense of small, close-cooperating communities with a direct relationship to the material byproducts of their sustainment. But I have called its distinctive form of community the *commune* because of its fixation on the present. The commune depends on individual wills acting in concert. The commune is not built on an inheritance from the past, but on the sense that its members must take control of the present, must organize it around the integrity of their own principles.

The colony of weavers, a Pietist religious commune, organizes their community around the division of labor that suits both their work and their religious calling. This divinely sanctioned division of labor is what is threatened by the (historically) inevitable growth of automation in textile production. As the text suggests—and the historical record would confirm—the weavers are justified in expecting the full erasure of their community. The weavers are an aggressive statement of individual self-assertion and freedom with respect to the present, a willful indifference to historical conditions. The curator looks to Goethe's exchange with Johann Heinrich Meyer during his travels through Swiss weaving communities that were already a technical and social anachronism. They are recorded in the *Wanderjahre* as if they are living archaeological specimens, the implausibility of their way of life making them representatives of a way of organizing the community that is unavailable in the present. The curator's view dominates in this mode: to document and show why their community is historically impossible according to the teleology of history as it is presently understood.

But while the implausibility of the weavers can explain their relevance to the narrative as a marker of the outer limits for the commune as a form of life, the wider sweep of the *Wanderjahre* also contains a *Bildung* assumption in the sense of organizing the chaos of the archive into a form. “We are happy to extract from every lesson, from every tradition, what can properly be extracted,” says the leader of the Pedagogical Province to Wilhelm when he visits with his son, Felix, “for only in that way can the concept of what is significant develop in young people.”<sup>24</sup> The purpose of the Pedagogical Province is to rifle through history, freely and gratuitously, creating the student who answers the needs of the present. This present, we find out, will be the society of emigrants, who imagine the future as a village, of sorts, but founded only on technical problem-solving and “practical” needs—a world that is yoked to a present that *destroys* the past through accelerating change. The presentist perspective of *Bildung* also makes sense of the strangeness of St. Joseph at the beginning of the book. What strikes Wilhelm about Joseph, modern recreation of the likeness of a 2,000 year-old mythical figure, is the readiness with which he mines the past in service of the present, his indifference in appropriating a sacred tradition for the mundane needs of the present. In his gratuitous, naive and free-spirited mixing of past and present, St. Joseph is a figure of *Bildung*.

Finally, the archive itself enters the text, in the collection of hundreds of aphorisms that Goethe and Eckermann inserted into the midpoint and ending of the novel’s 1829 second edition.<sup>25</sup> In the multiple paths that can be traced through this “archive” of aphorisms, we

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<sup>24</sup> Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister’s Journeyman Years, or, the Renunciants*, 209 (Blackall).

<sup>25</sup> “*Betrachtungen im Sinne Der Wanderer: Kunst Ethisches, Natur*” and “*Aus Makariens Archiv*”

find a direct challenge to the curator's perspective, which would assign to them a specific hermeneutic outcome or historical tendency. The *Bildung*-oriented critic will have more success choosing a path through the archive in a creative fashion, as an expression of subjective interest that the critic must claim as his own. The concerns of *Bildung* emerge whenever the need arises to reexamine a historical artifact (real or illusory), to put it to use, or to discover how it could be useful to the present. The curator seeks to control the past, to show how it assimilates into the settled truths of the present. In contrast, a perspective driven by *Bildung* takes the present as an opportunity for departure from these truths, and can be seen whenever the need arises to reconfigure the present. The curator who revisits the past encounters the *Bildung* imperative to do something with the past, the difficulty of allowing it to lie inert without being remade for present needs.

When the British historian Frederic Seebohm, writing in 1883, published his seminal economic history of the medieval English village and its relationship to manorial serfdom, he begins his account by contending with the village as a model of unity. The multicolored strips of land, endeared to the the English imagination by William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, will have their visual harmony dispelled from social cohesion. They are not a visual proof of the *unity* of the community implied in Langland's account, but a chaotic mix of ownership and rights, "intermixed, and it might almost be said entangled together, as though some one blindfold had thrown them about on all sides of him." Seebohm continues:

"What was 'the faire feld ful of folke,' in which the poet saw 'worchyng and wandryng,' some 'putten met to the plow,' whilst others, 'in setting and in sowyng swonken ful harde'? A modern English field shut in by hedges would

not suit the vision in the least. It was clearly enough the open field into which all the villagers turned out on the bright spring morning, and over which they would be scattered, some working and some looking on."<sup>26</sup>

This is the village, understood as model of for a romantic nineteenth-century eye like George Eliot's, built around a principle of cooperative labor by free association. Seebohm, with the careful archival and historical eye of the curator, will situate it in historical time and geographic space alongside its feudal counterpart, the manor, where he concludes that the so-called free villager was more likely the enserfed "*villein*," working the land under manorial bondage to a lord. In contrast to the ideal village, where economic life is subordinated to the planning of communal self-determination, under the manor it becomes crushing necessity, submission to a more powerful will.<sup>27</sup> Seebohm's reconstruction reverses Langland's vision from an everyday to an ideal: there was never a time of *communitas*, of free individuals working in open fields toward its own needs.<sup>28</sup>

An imaginary past that was used (by Eliot *et al*) to bring the fractures of the nineteenth century community into focus is revealed as a fantasy under Seebohm's critical scrutiny.

The curator anticipates the later enclosure and capture of the English countryside by powerful interests in even the premodern structure of medieval villages. The village as an

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<sup>26</sup> Frederic Seebohm, *The English Village Community Examined in Its Relations to the Manorial and Tribal Systems and to the Common or Open Field System of Husbandry an Essay in Economic History*, Third edition (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1884), 18, [http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/MOML?af=RN&ae=F102116798&srchtp=a&ste=14&locID=chic\\_rbw](http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/MOML?af=RN&ae=F102116798&srchtp=a&ste=14&locID=chic_rbw).

<sup>27</sup> "Surely there is too short an interval left unaccounted for to allow of great economic changes — to admit of the degeneracy of an original free village community of a widely spread institution, into a community in serfdom." *ibid.*, 179

<sup>28</sup> "At this point, as we have seen, the internal evidence of the open-field system, at the earliest date at which it arises, comes to our aid, showing that as a general rule it was the shell, not of household communities of tribesmen doing their own ploughing like the Welsh tribesmen by co-aration, but of serfs doing the ploughing under an over-lordship." *ibid.*, 419

ideal of communal self-determination cannot survive the historical review of the curator. And yet a later generation of early twentieth-century British historians would revive the ideal of the village, in its real and ideal form, against the “inevitable” feudal tyranny of the manor. Paul Vinogradoff’s 1904 *Growth of the Manor* takes the village for a regulative ideal that brings together rural heterogeneous communities around the “the multifarious communalistic incidents of rural life.” The village exists, not by the “organizing power of the landlord,” but by the “requirements of agricultural settlement” itself.<sup>29</sup> The village, therefore, persisted as an ideal alongside its members.

Though infringed in its historical realization, it is the placeholder for the aspiration to “ensure the attainment of common aims and the protection of common interests.” A *Bildung* perspective can be found in the assertion that the community never absolves its ideal version of itself, and never loses sight of self-regulation in potential form. Little surprise that Vinogradoff arrives at a qualified organicism in his judgment on the village. He writes that “the fabric of the village community...is substantially organic,” and “it grows, and is not based on agreement, people cannot accede to it or recede from it without being admitted, by some natural process, birth, marriage, adoption, to the union of holdings, and, theoretically, it is the holdings in their unconscious and unwilling combination which form the group and define its aims.”<sup>30</sup>

Thirty years after Seebohm and Vinogradoff, another British historian, H.S. Bennett, begins his *Life on the English Manor: A Study of Peasant Conditions, 1150-1400* (1937) with a

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<sup>29</sup> Paul Vinogradoff, *The Growth of the Manor.*, Reprints of Economic Classics (New York, A. M. Kelley, 1968), 85.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

fictional “ideal picture” of a day in village life. This is because the necessary work of the historian, with its “scrutiny, assembly and arrangement of innumerable documents and pieces of evidence,” is “apt to divert him from what many will hold to be his chief duty—to see life steadily and see it whole, and to present this vision to his readers.”<sup>31</sup> The title that Bennett gives to this prologue, “faire feld ful of folke,” is from *Piers Plowman*: the same line of the work that Seebohm had criticized as an obscuring idealization in 1883.

The temptation from the *Bildung* perspective is to bring the past toward an ideal; the *Bildung* critic mixes, skips and ignores as needed. The curator corrects the excesses of *Bildung* by bringing the frank perspective of everyday life to bear on a romantic and selective cultural memory. *Bildung* uses the past to attempt to remake the present, until the curatorial perspective points out the violence that *Bildung* does to the past. These two perspectives appear inseparable from one another: the curator brings a sense of the past back to the present, but does it through the illusions created by *Bildung*. Without a notion that the past is reconfigurable through *Bildung*, it would not have the importance that it does.

The British art critic and the novelist John Berger left England with his family in 1962, to pursue a lifestyle resembling a modern-day romantic idyll in the French countryside. Living among French peasants and learning about peasant life through them, he memorialized the experience in a trilogy of novels, *Into their Labors*. In the introduction to the first book he notes a basic dichotomy in the worldview of his peasant neighbors. The peasant, Berger

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<sup>31</sup> Henry Stanley Bennett, *Life on the English Manor : A Study of Peasant Conditions, 1150-1400*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought (New York: Macmillan, 1937), 3.

notes, comes from a “culture of survival. He persists on the uncontrolled margins of society by adapting to relentless change, and” envisages the future as a series of repeated acts for survival.”<sup>32</sup> And yet his very intense exposure to the forces of historical change mean that he is fiercely conservative, even reactionary, resistant to disruptions to his way of life and wedded to a “tradition handed down by instructions, example and commentary.”<sup>33</sup>

What defines the peasant way of life, viewed as a *tradition*, is the fact that the peasant *endures*—despite the presence of institutional powers that threaten to erase him. The peasant is an historical remainder that looks to the past for proof of the possibility of his own existence. But he remains intensely rooted in the pragmatism of the here-and-now to ensure he survives into the future. The past is the inspiration for his creativity. That he *has* endured is evidence that he *can* endure. And this is why his attention which must be focused on only the objects he sees and feels in front of him in the present. As Berger writes, “a peasant’s ingenuity makes him open to change, his imagination demands continuity.”<sup>34</sup> The peasant experiences his cooperative and historically singular way of life by concentrating his attention on the act of survival. To do this the peasant must look outside of his community, making himself into the ultimate generalist because he knows that all specialized ways of life—what Berger calls “work” as opposed to “survival”—are bound to pass away over time.

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<sup>32</sup> John Berger, “Pig Earth” (Vintage International, 1979), xix.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, xxii.

The orientation of *Bildung* creates a provisional version of the past that provides the structure for a later, curatorial perspective. Like the peasant's way of life that John Berger describes, *Bildung* combines elements of the environment toward a need in the present. The *Bildung* perspective is an inherently generalist orientation, willing to repurpose existing disciplines and narrow tracks of knowledge in search of an overall view. The critic oriented to *Bildung* sees, in the pilgrims of *Clarel*, the need for the individual to revisit the founding myths of a religious tradition, to make the past one's own out of the materials of the present. It understands that the persistence of an image of the self must revisit these questions for new needs. This perspective coalesces around human capacities and an image of the human; it is at its weakest when it has to search for structural or specifically disciplinary explanations for its *explanandum*. The curator position seeks to arrange and categorize these same materials in service of a specifically defined position of assessment. It sees in the common condition of the pilgrims—that is, doubt—a comparative approach to religion, applying a Protestant, *belief*-based structure to a general model of religion. It can explain the text's divorce of spiritual from material within a framework of secularization that explains our own present. We notice its effectiveness best when it links disparate concerns into a systematic explanation (e.g., on the relationship between religion and science in the text), weakest when tasked with foundational interrogative questions, e.g., *why* is religious doubt a concern, and *to what end* is the pilgrimage being conducted? To put the difference crudely, *Bildung* criticism is at its strongest on questions defined by their breadth, and the curator is strongest when the task requires depth of specialist knowledge. This is what I will consider next: the problem of the generalist and specialist orientation as it relates to my criticism.

## II.

An organizing metaphor for this project has been the importance of the individual view of the whole—and with it the limitations of a particular standpoint. The individual exists within, but also against, the community through a variety of activities: through integration as a challenge and a trial (*The Mill on the Floss, Daniel Deronda*), through the construction of new communities (*Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*), and as the producer of a tension with a totalizing vision (*Clarel*). In each of these activities, and in each of these works, I have at points understood the individual perspective as a response to the abstractions representing the whole: economic calculus, scientific models, and biological metaphors, to name a few. The individual is important because an expressive reality cannot be represented in any other way than *through* a perspective.<sup>35</sup> The individual therefore represents a position that restores subjectivity to a realist text's "objectivity," threatening to obscure the view from the individual position.

Both the critical techniques of the aforementioned *Bildung* and those of the curator can be understood in their expressive function *for* individuals: *Bildung*, by making history

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<sup>35</sup> Charles Taylor, from whom my concept of "expressive individualism" draws most, writes on the difference between expressionism and scientific objectivity: "The expressivist anthropology thus sharply breaks with the modern scientific objectification of nature, at least as far as human nature is concerned...In seeing human life as an expression, it rejects the dichotomy of meaning against being; it deals once more in the Aristotelian coin of final causes and holistic concepts. But in another respect it is quintessentially modern, for it incorporates the idea of self-defining subjectivity. The realization of his essence is a subject's self-realization; so that what he defines himself in relation to is not an ideal or order beyond, but rather something which unfolds from himself, is his own realization, and is first made determinate in that realization." In Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 17-18. At least on the matter of textual aesthetics, I go a step farther than Taylor and want to argue that for individual expressivism, as it is represented in the *fictional text*, a subjective version of the subject's expressive reality becomes a part of the novel's realist ontology. Human nature and general nature are not so neatly separable in the ontology of fiction, and especially in realism.

productive and creative, and the curator by making the past comprehensible according to the norms of the present. But the potential of *Bildung* that first distinguishes itself through its novelty, through non-instrumentality, can also be restricted and limited to socially determinant ends. An example of this can be found in Reinhart Koselleck's introductory essay on *Bildung*, where he notes the concept's history as a qualification and sorting mechanism for the German civil service. A cultural ideal becomes, in one realized form, a restrictive professional credential that "created career paths and career organizations through which *Bildung* was converted into formal education to such an extent that class-specific privileges or those of new corporate groups could be derived from it."<sup>36</sup> An example of the social determinism of the curatorial perspective can be seen in contemporary crises of public legitimacy with respect to specialized scientific knowledge, where the application of established scientific methods to geologic history in anthropogenic climate change leads to a direct conflict between specialized scientific "truths" and a broad-based social commitment to economic growth. Here the risk is that scientific methods are forced into the politically acceptable position of being abstract, provisional, and theoretical—without the proportional tension that incorporates their conclusions into other cultural practices.<sup>37</sup>

Yet another example, which gets us further into the contradictions of this problem, can be seen from George Eliot's intellectual life: in the attempts of Frederic Harrison and the

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<sup>36</sup> Koselleck, "The Anthropological and Semantic Structure of *Bildung*." 172.

<sup>37</sup> See, for instance, the philosopher of science Bruno Latour's recent efforts to elevate the social prestige of scientific institutions on the climate change issue: Bruno Latour, "Down to Earth : Politics in the New Climatic Regime" (Cambridge, UK ; Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2018)

tradition of nineteenth-century English positivism to persuade her to insert a programmatically positivist “message” into her work. For Harrison and his Comtean “Religion of Humanity,” the specific successes of science were to be translated into a general method for the hierarchy of knowledge and the ordering of society. This version of positivism was a collection of specializations (i.e., scientific proto-disciplines) that sought to make itself general, to repurpose methods intended to organize a distinct purview of specialized knowledge (a curation function) into a coordinated total positivist “method” that obviated the subjective position on reality, an operation that looks more like a mechanical replacement for the *Bildung* orientation. Bernard Semmel describes Eliot’s objection to a suggestion by Harrison that she incorporate positivistic “principles” into her next novel. The disagreement turns on the difference between the definite ends set forth by science and the aesthetic whole that she held to be the domain of fiction. His description of her reply is mostly taken from her letters:

George Eliot replied with pleasure to Harrison’s praise of *Felix Holt*, but noted the “tremendously difficult problem” of accomplishing the work he had outlined. She had conceived her task as a writer to be that of making ‘certain ideas thoroughly incarnate’ as if these had been discovered ‘in the flesh’ of living beings and not as intellectual abstractions. Art had to deal with life ‘in its highest complexity,’ and thus it was ‘the highest of all reaching.’ If writing moved from ‘the picture’ of these complexities to ‘the diagram’ of a utopia, ‘it ceases to be purely aesthetic’ and ‘becomes the most offensive of all teaching.’ It would not necessarily be offensive to set forth ‘avowed Utopias,’ but such a book would be scientific, not aesthetic, in character. It could not ‘work on the emotions,’ or ‘flash’ conviction’ by ‘aroused sympathy.’<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> In Bernard Semmel, *George Eliot and the Politics of National Inheritance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 60. For a more thorough review of Eliot’s relationship to the English positivists, see the chapters on George Eliot in Terence R. Wright, *The Religion of Humanity: The Impact of Comtean Positivism on Victorian Britain* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), and the discussion of

Every mode of criticism (e.g., *Bildung*, curation) is caught between the restriction of its methods to specialized knowledge and its application to culture in general. And as the positivism of Eliot's era makes clear, these two possibilities do not necessarily move in a single direction. Methods with great power but tight disciplinary boundaries can be spurred to a general perspective—as with the successes of nineteenth-century science turned to positivistic ends. And a general perspective on a culture, as Eliot's novels surely sought to be, always risks the temptation to submit its broad view to a definite and specialized end, as Harrison urged Eliot to do with a “positivist novel.”

Both movements commit the error of ignoring the specificity of their own position: the generalist forgets that her advantage comes from the avoidance of a “goal” or “end” for the panorama she creates, and the specialist forgets that she subordinates other views (specialized and general) to her own.<sup>39</sup> Thus we arrive at implicit conflict between general and specialized perspectives within these works, to which I propose to submit the social forms in this project (e.g., commune, utopia, village, pilgrimage) for a further level of consideration.

One of the few characters to continue from *Wilhelm Meisters Apprenticeship*—novel of *Bildung*—into the narrative of *Wilhelm Meisters Journeyman Years*—novel of professional

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Eliot and Frederic Harrison's relationship in Martha S. Vogeler, *Frederic Harrison : The Vocations of a Positivist* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

<sup>39</sup> Koselleck argues that it can be difficult to ascertain whether a method is truly general or specialized before considering its “transformative” effect on other ways of knowing: “Every individual field of knowledge that differentiates and establishes itself must contain explanations for other fields of knowledge within itself. The test case for a specialized method is still whether it is compatible with related fields of knowledge, or whether it has a transforming effect on all neighboring fields.” In Koselleck, “The Anthropological and Semantic Structure of *Bildung*,” 196. The specialist who subordinates other forms of knowledge to her own therefore performs an act of surreptitious generalism.

specialization—is that of Montan (formerly Jarno), Wilhelm’s old companion from the theater company. At the beginning of the novel Wilhelm, still in the mountains with his son Felix after the encounter with St. Joseph, finds that his former colleague has become a geologist, roaming for rock samples among the hills and espousing the virtues of complete dedication to his craft. Montan presents the first genuine worldview of specialization in the novel, establishing an early contrast with Wilhelm’s generalist status as “wanderer,” and with the pragmatic improvisations of St. Joseph’s subsistence way of life. Montan tells his companion that while “liberal education” may still be desirable as a preparation, it “merely establishes the context with which the specialist can *work* effectively, since only that gives him adequate space.”<sup>40</sup> Montan is another representative of the stance of mastery that was introduced at the beginning of this project. In a sense Montan becomes a renewed, sophisticated and challenging representative of Werner’s position in the *Apprenticeship*. We live in the age of the specialist, Montan implies, because he *does* and *accomplishes* while the generalist merely *considers* or *sets the scene* (“establishes the context”) for the specialist’s work.

But unlike Werner, Montan claims to be more than just an instrumentalist: the specialist, he claims, discloses a deeper ontology available only to his careful development of the mastery perspective: “to restrict oneself to a craft is the best thing” for an expert like Montan, because “in the one thing he does properly, he sees the likeness of that this done properly.”<sup>41</sup> To the extent that there is a generalist standpoint, it arises through an

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<sup>40</sup> Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister’s Journeyman Years, or, the Renunciants*, 118 (emphasis added).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

unspecified homology between different specialties. Whether this symmetry is materialist in nature or entails a more metaphysical set of claims is never made entirely clear by Montan or the text. He is a figure who hovers between the instrumental scientific knowledge necessary for the new colony project and the premodern affinity for an enchanted science of the cosmos, as represented in his own esoteric pronouncements and his symbolic counterpart Makarie's astrological mysticism. But it should be noted that Montan is ultimately a scientist in the modern sense, and that he demonstrates his final worth through what he contributes materially to the colony. Montan reverse the priority between "liberal education" and the scientific accomplishment through an integration into the new, more positivistic ends of the emigrants' colony—from which there is (as intended) no official general perspective. This is more than can be said for Wilhelm, who still carries a hint of the generalist in his wanderings up to the novel's concluding scene, and who remains unresolved in the matter of communal integration.<sup>42</sup> The challenge remains for generalism to prove its worth in a space of socially demonstrable, valuable accomplishment by specialists.

It should be clear from what has already been stated so far that the social forms at the center of this project (commune, village, pilgrimage) all bear a degree of contrarian affinity for the standpoint of generalism. But what has not been fully explored, and what will be elucidated by a further discussion of the generalist and specialist perspectives within my project, is what the generalist resists in the the drive to specialization. I will argue in what follows that the generalist orientation of these social forms maintains a space for ethical

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<sup>42</sup> That is, Wilhelm chooses to be a member of no definite community at the novel's end.

capacity that the specialist has lost—or delegated to other specializations. The simple social forms anchoring each chapter of my project represent an attempt to assert the importance of an individual, situated, *positional* perspective that maintains its primarily generalist character. This is the insistence of the individual perspective on maintaining its expressive potential in the face of its reduction to specialized or “structural” effects.

First, I will offer a definition of how I intend the terms “generalist” and “specialist.” I want to consider the ways in which this opposition occurs as a thematic and formal problem *within* my texts, but also how a consideration of these problems informs the critical approach to understanding, what sorts of questions and possibilities in the text that the generalist perspective opens up.

I use the term “specialist” in two important senses. First, as a claim to knowledge which requires particular and exclusive training, usually recognizable in terms of methods or tools that the practitioner can be said to possess as a result of training. Second, in terms of a claim to have achieved an explanatory power over one’s objects of study, taking various forms including causal explanation, the power of instrumental control, and—this last sense is most relevant to literary study—systematic knowledge of the controlling “structures” within a hermeneutically suitable object, i.e., a text. The word “structure” here implies a variety of different codes, from a formal analysis of semiotics, linguistic patterns, or poetic meters, to aesthetic elements of a text which can be rigorously analyzed, to the parsing of a text for systematic ideological determinations that characterizes North American “Critical Theory.” As in Montan’s powerful dismissal of a “liberal education,” the specialist can claim to *work* toward culturally desirable ends through the skills that he or she develops. In a democracy the specialist can act on behalf of (what he perceives to be) democratic ends,

but the link between the democratic whole and the specialist rests finally on his legitimacy to the public, on the legibility to the public sphere created by the success, power and control of specialist knowledge.

If the specialist rests on the social proof provided by his tools and professional certifications, generalist knowledge relies on the power of its own figure, on the social weight carried by the exceptional individual for the culture at large. Generalists rely most directly on the notion that they are gatekeeping and tastemaking figures, and that they are socially recognized as a significant subject. One of the classic nineteenth-century examples of this function can be seen in Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, where "culture" is a subset of the "best" learning—sometimes produced by specialists—which is then sifted by extraordinary individuals for the benefit ("sweetness and light") of humanity in general.<sup>43</sup> Whereas the specialist arms himself with tools and methods, the generalist is closer to being "naked" of (recognizable) theories and tools, more reliant on the felt urgency of a humanizing *function* of the intellectual which is not performed by other branches of knowledge.

Gerald Graff writes in his classic history of humanistic specialization, *Professing Literature*, that generalist scholars in the pre-professionalized humanities "tended to dispense with elaborate pedagogical theories and methods in the effort, as they saw it, to let the great

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<sup>43</sup> "The great men of culture are those who have had a passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time; who have laboured to divest knowledge of all that was harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive; to humanise it, to make it efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and learned, yet still remaining the *best* knowledge and thought of the time, and a true source, therefore, of sweetness and light." Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 53, emphasis in original.

masterpieces of literature teach themselves.”<sup>44</sup> Or, putting the point more controversially, Graff cites René Wellek’s assessment of the generalist as the “individual who was unable to make his ideas felt institutionally.” Generalism, then, could sometimes align with overlooked schools or methods of specialist training, but in practice came to clash with other institutionalized specialists over the question of humanist’s “cultural leadership” in a more Arnoldian sense.<sup>45</sup> In the situation Graff describes, the generalist develops an account of his institutional homelessness that explains it in terms of some central, humanistic function that the specializations in power overlook. Insofar as the generalist is a specialist himself, he claims to attend to a central humanistic duty to which all specializations are ultimately obligated.<sup>46</sup>

Here we move closer once again to Montan’s position: that in the modern era, the generalist is always, to some degree, implicated first in a specialist discourse or identity, out of which the “general” perspective arises.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 86.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>46</sup> For a salient example of this dynamic in institutionalized literary criticism, see Frank Lentricchia’s characterization of the opposition between the “aesthetics” of New Criticism and the hope for a humanistic reorientation in the generation that followed: “The great hope for literary critics in 1957, when the hegemony of the New Criticism was breaking, was that the muse would be demystified and democratized and that younger critics would somehow link up poetry with the world again as, in Clive Bell’s contemptuous formalist phrasing, they brought art down from the ‘superb peaks of aesthetic exaltation to the snug foothills of warm humanity’—to the place where the forbidden subjects of history, intention and cultural dynamics could be taken up once again.” In Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 7.

<sup>47</sup> Also of relevance to this problem is Gramsci’s conceptualization of the intellectual, particularly the “organic intellectual,” who arises out of the unique material conditions of class conflict, giving his group “a consciousness of its own function in the economic sphere.” See Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, ed. Joseph A. Buttigieg, trans. Antonio Callari, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), Volume 2, note 49 (“The intellectuals”), 99. Gramsci represents a version of generalism that arises through the individual’s unique historical positioning, rather than as a result of specialized discourses. The intellectual is foremost representative of a general experience of reality.

But this route to generalism does not fully describe the work done by the simple communal forms studied in this project. I want to argue that Montan's reorientation to specialization better describes a historical predicament by which the various communal forms represented in these works (commune, village, pilgrimage, etc.) became necessary *exactly because* they are unreal and ideal constructions: to serve as representations of an alternative historical and social reality which had been obscured. One could even argue that Montan's route to generality puts him at risk of a enlightened *amateurism*, rather than *generalism*, since the specialist who makes a claim to general knowledge draws on his specialized professional accomplishment and credibility, but no specific tools or knowledge *with respect to the general*. Hence the charge of amateurism, which turns on a question of whether generalism is a special capacity of knowledge.<sup>48</sup> The Arnoldian generalist appears to invoke a capacity or mode of generalism which is distinct from any particular specialization. This type of generalism is not the result of general goodwill from the public earned by his specialist accolades, but a specific accomplishment in itself.

To step back for a moment: from a theoretical, moral, experiential, historical and sociological perspective, I want to reiterate that there are clear problems with the Arnoldian form of generalism in itself, questions of authority that are just hinted at by the tendency Graff finds in Arnold and others to retreat to "catchphrases" and "abstractions"

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<sup>48</sup> The two are often equated with one another, including in the two collections of aphorisms in the *Wanderjahre*. For a recent, trenchant discussion of the relationship between amateurism, generalism, and specialization see Saikat Majumdar, "The Critic as Amateur," *New Literary History* 48, no. 1 (2017): 1-25. See, for instance, his discussion of the difference between the critic (amateur, generalist) and the scholar (specialist): "The scholar is defined by his commitment to his archive of study. His subjective sense of self is subordinated to (though not effaced by) this commitment. The critic, on the other hand, celebrates and foregrounds his subjectivity; the archive, in his case, is subordinated to the self, through which it is processed and presented, the very personal color of that refraction remaining the most cherished element of the process" (7).

(e.g., “sweetness and light”) when pushed to justify their claims to general knowledge.<sup>49</sup> But this is why the specific presentation of the general by the texts in this project—in the a form of community for signaling an agential or subjective capacity—must be insisted upon. The community becomes the setting for an individual, *expressivereality* with a general character.

Jürgen Habermas notes the unique status of the knowledge claim made by the human sciences, which developed from what were once “specialized professional knowledge.” For “the humanistic tradition of poetics,” one finds a lineage in “historical narratives and theories of language and literature;” and “the new sciences of the state and society developed out of the classical doctrines of politics and economics.”<sup>50</sup> But what constitutes the uniqueness of these disciplines’ knowledge claim is that methods that were once “professional practices” are now used for the study of general, pretheoretical human realities negotiated through a process of symbolic reciprocity and everyday taken-for-granted in the social world (roughly: “the lifeworld”). As Habermas writes, a “*methodologically guided* curiosity is now directed to comparing and analysing the diverse cultural forms of life, which, although accessible only from the participant perspective, are used *as sources of data* from the observer perspective and are processed into historical, cultural or social facts.”<sup>51</sup> So the study of “social facts” must be tied back to the participation of the individual, to the specialist’s implication in an everyday reality that will always resist

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<sup>49</sup> Graff, *Professing Literature*, 253.

<sup>50</sup> Jürgen Habermas, “From Worldviews to the Lifeworld,” in *Postmetaphysical Thinking II*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 19.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 (emphasis in original).

complete theoretical determination. The humanist or social scientist can never claim *just* reliance on their own specialist objectivity because, insofar as he or she practices the human sciences, he is also implicated in this “general” perspective. The “everyday experiences and practices” which make up this lifeworld are the basis for both specialized disciplinary knowledge *and* the basis for any general perspective.<sup>52</sup> It is in the latter sense that I understand the significance of a generalized perspective within the simple social forms of the commune, village, and so forth. This open-ended reality is what Guido Mazzoni called the unique representational capacity of the novel itself. That is, its ability to provision “the schemata that enabled the stories of individuals inhabiting the immanence to become narratable.”<sup>53</sup> The simple social forms of my texts form the representational schema for an individual expressive aspiration toward the general.

The criticism represented in this project has been pulled between specialist and generalist imperatives, between insights and conclusions that are drawn from identifiable, and privileged sources of knowledge (specialism), what might be called the “wisdom traditions” of uncertain provenance (generalism). The purpose of the above discussion was to acknowledge the back-and-forth of these two imperatives within my understanding of the particular social forms that I have chosen. To repeat one example: without a view of the village as a “generalist” concern, there could be no accounting for its historical durability and attraction across a variety of contexts. But without the specialist’s critical hesitations, the idea of the village overwhelms historical and anthropological limitations of the concept.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>53</sup> Guido Mazzoni, *Theory of the Novel* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017), 146.

I now want to consider my three most important social forms—commune, village and pilgrimage—from the standpoint of both generalist and specialist.

The social form of the commune in Goethe's *Wanderjahre* is a collection of individuals described by what Charles Taylor calls "inner depths," with the possibility of articulating an inner life, because the commune is a society whose voluntary membership structure implies the intentional assent of its members—through vocational dedication. The commune is a social form in which the constitution of its individual members contains a motivational similarity to the makeup of the whole: both part (member) and whole (the commune) are intentionally directed: *for* something, symbolically pointing to a definite ideal or end of some kind. The commune is a utopian ideal. Its actually existing form is always directed at a more perfect form of itself, and in this sense it can never *fully* exist in actuality. For the individual the necessary incompleteness takes the form of the vocational ideal, where the imperfection of the everyday is inhabited through the original moment of "calling" to a higher thing outside mundane reality, in keeping with the ideal's religious heritage<sup>54</sup>

The commune's utopian dimension is dedicated to a way of life that aspires beyond its historical contingency. Not the accidental way, or the right government for this situation, but a government that is right in general, on the basis of a principled stance toward the

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<sup>54</sup> Robert Benne describes the Christian vocation as it was defined in the work of Martin Luther (mostly from *The Freedom of a Christian*) in terms of, first, its "vertical relationships" between the human and God, and, second, its "horizontal relationships," or the obligation to be "dutiful servant of all." The vocational ideal was grounded in the vertical relationship, but what gave the Christian vocation its distinctive worldly importance was its orientation on the horizontal plane: "[T]he Christian is simultaneously before God and in relation to his fellow humans. There is no spatial demarcation of the reign of God with His gospel and that with His law. Christians are at the intersection of both planes. They cannot escape them nor collapse them into one." See Robert Benne, "Martin Luther on the Vocations of the Christian," ed. John Barton, Oxford Research Encyclopedias (<http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-363>: Oxford University Press, 2016) (accessed electronically). For a classic study of Luther's concept of vocation, see Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957).

realities of practical life. The individual is joined to the commune through an intention that may exceed the realized form of the community, but which he or she expresses in its ideal form through participation in communal life. But the intentional structure of both the commune's parts and whole creates a contradiction. The individual participates in the commune because its everyday activities point toward a general truth, because the community is about more than the description of its everyday activities<sup>55</sup> But the commune, in its vision of utopia, also coordinates its parts (i.e., its members) in service of a vision of the whole. The "whole" envisioned by the makeup of the commune itself can come into conflict with the general form of the truth sought by the individual. Another way of putting this is that the utopian vision, in its pursuit of a totalizing vision, risks subordinating the individual to a specialized function, to an "instrument" of the final vision. A brief example from the history of utopian thinking lends color to this dilemma. Thomas More's original *Utopia* (1516) describes an exhaustive aesthetic balance, with a prescribed number of citizens per city, per dwelling, per unit of residential space and per family.<sup>56</sup> A community devoted to the elimination of early-modern ills which led to the shortening and degradation of everyday life could become as the most complete form of functionalization of the individual life. Harmonious balance becomes a kind of totalitarianism. This includes the prescription of work, travel, family structure, diet, commerce, religion and many other categories of human endeavor—all in service of a perfected whole. The perfection of the

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<sup>55</sup> This is most directly seen in the *Wanderjahre's* depiction of the Pietist weaving communities, who are unable to mobilize for a change in their handwork-driven way of life in part because it is *not* just an economic form, but also an exemplification of something inarticulably higher. The only members of the community who are able to react and flee the weavers' situation are those (including the "Nut-Brown Maiden") who have lost their religious faith.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas More, *Utopia*, 9781107568730 (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 56–58.

individual is implied in the form of the whole, so long as the individual sees his own sense of the good expressed in his functional expression of the whole. Taken in its most extreme form, More's *Utopia* causes the individual to vanish in a specialized function not unlike the birthright sorting conducted by Plato's "noble lie" within the *Republic*. For Plato, the vision of the whole is everything; even the exalted philosopher-king contains none of the expressive potential of a modern individual. Even this philosopher-king plays his part. It can be objected that More's *Utopia*, on the historical precipice between a modern and premodern form of individualism, is equally irrelevant to the relationship between member and society in communes like those of Goethe's *Wanderjahre*. But the tension between specialization as a condition of individual membership, and his or her general relationship to the commune, is what animates the vision of the colony project. "The whole" here becomes a community of technical specialists, working to construct a grand mechanism. Werner's refrain from the *Apprenticeship*—that there shall be "nothing superfluous" in his absolutely organized future—is echoed in Lenardo's cry to his band of emigrants: "Where I am *useful* is my fatherland."<sup>57</sup>

The specter of a mechanistic coordination of specialties has haunted the constructive principles of the commune from its beginnings. Utopia turns to dystopia when membership becomes a form of mechanical necessity, when the act of assent by its members is replaced by the applicability of specialist knowledge to the essential functions of the community.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years, or, the Renunciants*, 365 (B), emphasis added

<sup>58</sup> The narrator of Thomas Carlyle's history of medieval Europe, *Past and Present*, likens the mechanism to the status of animals. The culture that builds itself around machines is no better than this, the work suggests. "Your cotton-spinning and thrice-miraculous mechanism, what is this too, by itself, but a larger kind of Animalism? Spiders can spin, Beavers can build and show contrivance ; the Ant lays-up accumulation of

Eliot's Victorian contemporaries devoted substantial consideration to this concern. In his 1890 utopian fiction, *News from Nowhere*, Alfred Morris describes a commune formed around the anti-machine, to the point that the formation of any governmental body becomes a kind of machine that is tyrannical in principle.<sup>59</sup> Morris' fiction arrives at a community with such tremendous capacity for informal consensus that its own politics and forms of government waste away from collective memory out of disuse.<sup>60</sup> Here the resistance to specialization takes the form of a political de-differentiation, of a kind of return to a communal state of nature *before* politics. Generalism is construed in terms of democratic participation, by the renunciation of political hierarchies for all its members. The basis of the community is not the fulfillment of mutually supportive tasks (as in the *Wanderjahre's* technocratic colonies), but the performance of political life.

Within the commune, the resistance to specialization must nonetheless provide for the specific form of labor implied by the vocational ideal. To be of service to one's neighbor under the vocational ideal implies a particular sacrifice of the "general" personality in service of the greater good. In the largest sense, the *Wilhelm Meister* novels grapple with this problem through the extended metaphor of the guild of craftspeople (discussed at

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capital, and has, for aught I know, a Bank of Antland. If there is no soul in man higher than all that, did it reach to sailing on the cloud-rack and spinning sea-sand; then I say, man is but an animal, a more cunning kind of brute: he has no soul, but only a succedaneum for salt." Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present*, People's Ed. New York 1871-74. V.14 (Chapman; Hall, 1872), <https://books.google.com/books?id=JF1AAAAAYAAJ>, 190.

<sup>59</sup> Of the previous government one of the characters in the utopia writes: "The government itself was but the necessary result of the careless, aimless tyranny of the times; it was but the machinery of tyranny. Now tyranny has come to an end, and we no longer need such machinery; we could not possibly use it since we are free. Therefore in your sense of the word we have no government." In William Morris, *News from Nowhere, or, an Epoch of Rest : Being Some Chapters from a Utopian Romance* (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1995), <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/3261/pg3261.txt>, 81.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

length in Chapter Two). Viewed as a commune, the guild is unified by the craft to which all of its members are devoted, but internally differentiated by the gradations of skill and seniority: apprentice, journeyman, master, and so forth. Its members devote themselves to the same general “mystery” at the basis of their craft.<sup>61</sup> The aesthetic that unites the guild is that of continual ascent or movement toward mastery. Yet mastery, for the guild, avoids becoming an exclusive perspective so long as the mentorship function of the guild is held in view. This can be distinguished from Werner or Montan, who think of their activities from the perspective of a *goal*, that is, what mastery will deliver (instrumentally) once it is achieved. For a figure like Montan, mastery leads to a pursuit of more profitable application. Montan leaves the hills and mountains where he learned his craft in pursuit of greater applications with the colony. For Wilhelm the ascent toward mastery is never complete. His wanderings continue, and the title of journeyman persists. In the metaphorical regime of the craft guild, then, the general perspective is that which takes a view of the task performed (i.e., the craft itself).

Specialist technique can never escape its obligations in a social world. From the modern perspective embodied in Adam Smith, this self-sustaining focus was the source of the problem with craft guilds: that they attended to the needs, interests and structure of their internal membership over the practice of their specialized craft for the general good. Smith represents a view of the benefits of specialization turned toward a public, of a natural “market” good that arises when individual actors eschew generalism as a distinct

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<sup>61</sup> See the first section of my second chapter, on the *Wanderjahre*, for a discussion of traditional European guild structures and the “guild mysteries.”

perspective.<sup>62</sup>

The specialist, then, represents a paradox for a community oriented to general form of the good. In the individual's limited capacity *as* specialist, he promises to become a "bit player," who can be arranged toward the higher good represented by the entire community. That is, he can play a functional part in a community divided by the division of labor. The higher challenge, posed in the end by Wilhelm's lasting ambivalence toward the communities of the *Wanderjahre*, is that the commune must also integrate its individual members *within* its general form. This is where the form of the commune fails Wilhelm, the novel's final figure of generalism.

On the form of the commune or utopia, we are left with this conclusion: that while the commune contains a view or aesthetic of the whole by virtue of its aspect as a *designed* artifact, it subordinates its individual members to this vision. For evidence, we might refer to Lenardo's elaborate schematics of colony life in the *Wanderjahre*, or the elaborate geometric and numerological balance of More's *Utopia*. The commune is a dream conceived from a generalist perspective, but it demands an individual specialist view—limited in its purposes, intentions, and development—to realize itself. This accounts for Chapter Two's conclusion in my reading of the *Wanderjahre*. The community contains an intentionality, repeated in the individual according to the demands of vocation, which divides, criticizes and dissects its parts. The commune represents an implicit critique of the disorders outside its border, but implicit to this criticism is the imposition of order against chaos, the division of reality into particular levels, compartments and hierarchies such that it can be controlled

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<sup>62</sup> Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, Penguin Classics (London: Viking Penguin, 1986), Book I, Chapter X, where he attacks the prerogatives of "corporations" (i.e., guilds).

in the vision of a whole. The *Wanderjahre* represents a generalism at the level of *intention*, that is a *concern* with uncovering what is general at the level of aspiration, but the view it provides of the whole depends on the individual's induction into a limited and specialized way of life.

The defining feature that we have identified in the commune—its *intentionality*—requires its members' assent to a common vision of the whole. This provides us with a beginning to introduce our next social form, the village. The village is a social zone with the premise that no act of intentional agreement is necessary to form the community. Across the village communities that we have investigated in this project—the *Wanderjahre* (St. Joseph), much of Eliot's *oeuvre*, the Zionist settlement of the American Nathan in *Clarel*—the escape from intentionality takes the form of an agreed-upon version of the past, of material objects held in common, and of a common social unit. The nuclear family, kinship networks, and the guild can all be considered villages according to this aspect. The most archetypal form of the village that appears in this project is that of the provincial farmers of the fictional St. Ogg's, in half of George Eliot's *Mill on the Floss*: "I remember those large dipping willows. I remember the stone bridge," says the narrator about a setting which has long since passed into memory. In the commune the things held in common are *agreed upon* by means of the intellectual faculties. In the village they are diffused into the very makeup of the community; each member of the village can claim the same inheritance in their relationship to the whole. The historian of the English village form Frederic Seebohm, who we have quoted above, notes that village life was both brought into being and contested on its patchwork system of fields, where the day's labor occurred in a cooperative fashion, and the exclusive claims of ownership were moderated by the copious intermixing of plots in

the same area.<sup>63</sup> Knowledge of the village was available to all in this scene which, as Seebohm notes, created the historical basis for the English village imaginary in a work like *Piers Plowman*. The English village comes into being when its members can point to the same material objects that make up their shared way of life.

It is for these reasons that in the village, unlike the commune, there can be no division of labor that demands true specialization. By “division of labor,” I mean an organization of society in which individual attention is divided between as many separate objects as possible.<sup>64</sup> The village does not have specialists because that would mean only some have access to work that informs the whole. For the members of a village, whatever difference in capacity or preference between individuals, work must draw its significance from the same objects.

The village is threatened when some members of the community form a relationship to different objects than their peers, or when they develop a different relationship to the same objects. Both scenarios can be found in George Eliot’s depiction of the village. A village of the first kind, when members of the community develop an attachment to different objects, can be found at the root of the Tulliver family’s conflict with their community. Their

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<sup>63</sup> Of the scattering of ownership Seebohm describes the scene thus: “It is the fact that neither the strips nor the furlongs represented a complete holding or property, but that the several holdings were made up of a multitude of strips scattered about on all sides of the township, one in this furlong and another in that, intermixed, and it might almost be said entangled together, as though some one blindfold had thrown them about on all sides of him.” Seebohm, *The English Village Community Examined in Its Relations to the Manorial and Tribal Systems and to the Common or Open Field System of Husbandry an Essay in Economic History*, 7

<sup>64</sup> This point recalls a remark that Reinhart Koselleck makes about *Bildung*: that “modern *Bildung*...is open and connectable to all concrete situations in life, and that understood as work, it is the integrating element of the world based on the division of labor.” If we can speak of the integrative function of the village, it too depends on a drive to concretion that defeats all possible abstractions. This concretion needn’t be an object, but it must be specific enough (as in the existence of a familial lineage) that its significance is indisputable by all relevant actors.

neighbors change from working farmers to rent-seekers and financial speculators; the river and land that the Tullivers know by intuition is of indifferent value to these new personages, for whom objects near and far are of the same kind. But we can also say that this central conflict in *Mill* has an aspect of the second breakdown of the village, a differential relationship to the *same* object, since the crafty lawyer who will eventually win the Tulliver land sees the same land as a *resource* with *value*. His calculative abstractions diminish and flatten the objects that the Tulliver family knows through direct experience. The greatest and most important abstraction I considered in my chapter on Eliot was that of the shift from village to *nation*, where the question is how the community both changes its objects of reference, and how this object changes qualitatively, to being a different object in kind. If the objects held in common for village are plainly available to understanding and communication, the mystery of the nation is that its principle of unity is never precisely set out. For Eliot the nation represents a kind of spiritual successor to the village, since that way of life is represented in her novels as unavailable. The difficulty that they both inherit, however, is that of perspectivalism. What becomes a profound concern in *Daniel Deronda* is already present in *Mill*: the village depends on the same view of the whole, yet the means of agreement between individuals, the question of whether they all actually *looking* at the same object, is never entirely established. There is always a tension between a hypothetical set of goods held in common, and a collection of individual perspectives on this good.

In his classic twentieth-century anthropological study of a pseudonymous small community in Wales, Ronald Frankenberg's *Village on the Border* (1957) makes the—perhaps unsurprising—observation that no two members of this village can articulate the

same understanding of the village: its boundaries, fault lines, membership requirements, history, and essential features:

Each sees himself as the centre of a group of kindred and friends who will come to his aid, or who have other obligations to him and claims on him. No two villagers are the centre of the same group and the groups surrounding each overlap and intermesh. This is a major factor in giving the village its cohesion. The very characteristics that unite some divide others within the group of Pentre people.<sup>65</sup>

The unpredictable nature of the individual's particular view forces the villagers to agree on its common basis. To the extent that the village exists, no one can possess it entirely.

Common objects are the start of a conversation. "We can summarize the community life of Pentrediwaith by saying that it is the daily social interaction of a number of individuals living in the area which centres on the actual village," Frankenberg writes.<sup>66</sup> The village is set of concentric circles of self-identification emanating from the *individual*. The difference of these configurations from one villager to another is what creates the possibility of identification with the whole, since the individual must come to inhabit these circles through a working-out of his or her own position. Commonality is negotiated on the basis of a trust and implicit understanding that the villagers accord to one another, a kind of pre-rational belief that they inhabit a shared place. The villager therefore comes to a specific relationship with the general concept of the village.

The villagers of Pentrediwaith learn to see both sameness *and* difference. "Proximity, sex, close family, broad kinship, religious affiliation and Welshness are all ties which unite

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<sup>65</sup> Ronald Frankenberg, *Village on the Border; a Social Study of Religion, Politics and Football in a North Wales Community*. (London, Cohen & West, 1957), 64.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

villagers with each other,” he writes, but of course, “not all villagers are united by all these ties.”<sup>67</sup> Frankenberg documents how a basic form of objectivity confirm their membership in the same village: common geographic location. But this basic commonality also becomes the source of “violent conflict” when a beloved valley, the birthplace of several well-known Welsh poets, is threatened with partial flooding by a hydro-electric civil works project.<sup>68</sup> The potential for dissolution of the village as a way of life is greatest when history threatens to objectify some aspect of a unity that is otherwise symbolic and always-in-process. Once the valley is flooded, the space of negotiation over a shared meaning is replaced by victory for some villagers, a loss for others, and irreversible change for all. When the concrete physical footprint of the village is flooded under water, negotiation over the village ends because a common object has disappeared. Thus the events that Frankenberg recounts in the Pentrediwaith’s history that put it at greatest risk of fracture are those that threaten to impose a settled objectivity on the village, which make communicative negotiation about its meaning more difficult. Among the greatest of these that Frankenberg mentions is the disappearance of the village’s local economic base, requiring the villagers to look outside their border for a living.

But what is outside is, by sheer virtue of being recognized, never merely outside; the village’s connections with this outside will, with time, scramble its shared objects of reference. For instance, roads that led one place within the village are now understood by the path they provide to an outside world. Work that was once a chance for the villagers to

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 28.

concentrate on shared landscape becomes, instead, an occasion for the intermingling of the settled reality of the village with cultural paradigms that the villagers learn secondhand.<sup>69</sup> These pre-rational objects are the basis for village life to arise within a shared, intersubjective context. When the significance of these objects becomes determined by an outside rationality which settles the conversation, the village ceases to be. Each villager seeks a general understanding of his or her common life, but when the village is reduced to a series of specialized functions in a larger *economy*, the individual's orientation to the generality of the village loses its relevance and efficacy in the present.

The village treats the individual perspective as if it were an authoritative view of the community itself. Each individual has equal and complete access to the whole. The commune, in turn, requires the individual to *serve* the needs of the whole, which are represented as general. What each has in common is an assumption that the whole is what is elusive and requires definition, that the individual is but a shard of a perspective until he or she achieves systematic connection with this larger representation. The individual is in the best position to make sense of a particular reality, but he lacks a certain capacity of synthesis. As in the guild model of the *Wilhelm Meister* novels, the community provides a structure, such that there is an assurance of a wider view, which emerges through the organization of an individual activity; individual vocation is the pathway of behavioral norms that *produces* a relationship to the whole. In the village, a picture of the whole

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<sup>69</sup> "The villagers still reside together in their compact nuclear settlement, but many no longer work in the valley alongside their fellow-villagers. The roads, built to take Pentrediwaith's products to a wider market, now serve to take the man of the village to their daily work outside the valley and, if not right outside Wales, outside Welsh-speaking areas. The quarries brought Pentrediwaith men into daily contact with men from Melin, and Pentrenesaf, and other villages and hamlets within the valley. Now they work as labourers on building sites and as hands in factories, side by side not only with people of the valley, but with Englishmen, Irishmen, and even Poles drawn from a wide area of North Wales and Shropshire." *ibid.*, 10

emerges through an act of conversation, everyday coordination, and endless improvisation. For both village and commune, specialization antagonizes the general orientation of the community. For the commune, the specialist's narrow view destroys the balance of its parts. And the specialist cannot take seriously the villager's amateurism, the fact that his or her naive view is in control of what the village is and should be. But the last form of community I will review, that of the pilgrimage, has a use for a certain kind of specialization, if we understand specialization as a necessary, intentional limitation. This is the pilgrim's need to see a cultural tradition *for* himself, from his necessarily amateurish view. And the limitations of the specialist have something in common with a figure from the beginning of this project, the wanderer (or the term used by the *Journeyman Years*, the *Renunciant*).

Pilgrimage, taken as a form of community, restores the particular perspective that is lost through an excess of generalism. I have seen the pilgrim in *Clarel* as a figure who restores the particular to forms of experience with an excess of general abstraction. The pilgrim feels a compulsion to encounter a tradition for himself, to relocate in himself what lives in the edifice of a tradition. In a broader sense, across all my texts, we see a kind of pilgrimage being made whenever there is an insistence on bringing the reality of a situation back to the particularity of the individual. The distinction between the generalist and the specialist takes a modified form at this point: general knowledge is what can be known indirectly, by virtue of exercising an intellectual or ethical agency. A generalist view arises through practical reason in the *Wilhelm Meister's Wanderjahre*, ethical inculcation in the *Mill on the Floss*, and theoretical distancing in *Clarel*. As we have noted above, what is general is several steps removed from the individual-created through organization rather than

immediately perceived. Specialization becomes the “embedded,” phenomenological reality that is unique to the individual perspective.

For instance, in the ideological background of *Clarel*, the intellectual situation to which the poem reacts, I chart the influence of what I call “scientism,” or an orientation to scientific inquiry and conclusion as the highest form of truth and value. The poem presents the pilgrim as a figure who insists on the primacy of a quixotic, potentially tragic existential question against a materialistic redefinition of the world by science. The pilgrim in *Clarel* asserts that these tools of general and theoretical meaning-making must be made available *to him*, brought back to their use by individuals. To take the terms of the poem, on the question of “faith and doubt,” there can be no answer that overlooks the individual’s capacity to believe in the divine. This is because the world of *Clarel* is awash in a certain kind of generalism. Experience becomes identical with the theoretical picture. But we can trace a rejection of the general that motivates the pilgrimage back across most of the major texts of this project: to the financialization of the countryside in *Mill*, Daniel Deronda’s rejection of his inherited European cosmopolitanism and adoption of his birthright Judaism, and finally the vow of renunciation and itinerant observation that Wilhelm Meister agrees to—and never fully leaves behind—in the *Journeyman Years*. This last example of the wanderer brings us to an affinity between the concerns raised at the beginning of this project, and those at the end. Goethe’s figure of the wanderer prefigures the pilgrim in Melville. Like the pilgrim, the wanderer undertakes to make the individual experience the measure of everything. Goethe’s wanderer is the “renunciant,” the one who abjures the higher perspective of the whole in the performance of his daily duty. If some forms of community within this project have valorized a view of the general, this proceeds from the

assumption that the individual has no choice but to submit to specialized limitation; that is, to “renounce” the whole in a negative sense. But the pilgrimage rethinks and reverses the meaning of the specialist. To “specialize” in this sense is not to turn away from what is important in the view of the whole, but to attend to the details that the individual is best suited to comprehend. For the pilgrim who limits his view to materials he can confirm for himself, a kind of individualism emerges, defined not by specialist mastery, but according to the whole of what can be known and done within the limits of his tradition.

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