

Affective Time: American Realism as Resynchronization, 1860-1910

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Abstract

Affective Time: American Realism as Resynchronization, 1860-1910

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My dissertation, *Affective Time: American Realism as Resynchronization, 1860-1910*, examines the disciplinary functions of the clock and attendant temporal systems in U.S. literature and culture from the mid-19th to early 20th century. I am specifically interested in the way American realism brings temporality itself to the fore as a critical but often ineffable dimension of our embodied and intersubjective life. That our sense of time shifts with the vicissitudes of our emotional states is common sense: time flies when we're having fun, drags when we're bored, freezes when we're afraid, and so on. Yet surprisingly little attention has been paid in literary studies to the ordinary relationship between temporal and affective experience, nor to the various social, political, and aesthetic contexts of this connection. My project focuses on the role of modern time discipline and synchronicity in factory labor and class stratification, reconciliationist cultural memory of the Civil War, women's time-thrift and domesticity, and white supremacist narratives of cultural history and national progress.

I argue that U.S. literary realism developed as a means of negotiation between the chaotic pluralism of perceptual times, which threatened what William James described as "the turbid privacy of sense," and the large-scale reification of clock time and related systems (e.g., factory shifts), which sustained many social and political institutions by subordinating individuals' variable, emotionally mediated temporal experiences to a regulatable and necessarily disembodied meter. As efforts were made to standardize time, laying the foundation for broader networks of social synchronicity in the second half of the 19th century, more complex studies of the evolutionary mind and body were emerging in psychology, neurobiology, and physiology that highlighted the critical adaptability of our inner clocks. Extending what Michael O'Malley has called 19th-century America's "crisis in the authority of time," I thus situate the emergence of literary realism within a period of conflict among disparate understandings of temporal "reality" and the impacts of new social constructions of time upon the body. Throughout my archive, feelings of synchronization with and desynchronization from social time draw attention to the various temporal modalities and time scales individuals had to negotiate during this period,

whether implicitly or with great difficulty and self-awareness. I focus on moments of disjuncture – experiences of slipping or being jolted out of habitually lived and socially shared time – whereby the feeling of time is brought to the surface of characters’ and readers’ attention, enabling them to question previously uninterrogated social constructions of time and the (often oppressive) institutions they tacitly sustain.

I take the term “desynchronization” from phenomenological psychiatrist Thomas Fuchs, who has charted a new course in the interdisciplinary field of time perception by extending the terms “synchronization” and “desynchronization” from chronobiology – the study of our diurnal rhythms (e.g., sleep-wake cycles, libido, and appetite) – to psychosocial and cultural dynamics, including “common attitudes, fashions, styles, values and memories” that provide the feeling of “a basic ‘contemporariness’” (180-81). Fuchs’s characterization of modern time consciousness is germane to the social and historical context of realism, but furthermore, it speaks to the interplay between synchronization and desynchronization embedded in realism’s narrative forms, which aim to synthesize the “mutual commitments, agreements and arrangements” necessary to the feeling of shared time, while also registering periodic disjunctures which compel us to question the terms of those agreements. Desynchronization from social time thus arises as both opportunity and threat in my archive: it offers new vantage points on sociopolitical constructs, “releasing subjects from the normativity of intuition and making them available for alternative ordinaries,” in Lauren Berlant’s words (5-6), but it also unsettles a shared sense of reality.

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I can't help but begin with a cliché: it really is impossible to express how grateful I am to have felt emotionally, financially, and professionally supported throughout my seven years at the University of Washington. The English Department faculty and staff helped encourage my development as both a scholar and teacher, and as exciting as it is to finally finish, I know I'll leave this place with a heavy heart.

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*For Anthony,
Who keeps it light*

Table of Contents

Introduction

Realism and the Reconstruction of Time..... 1

Chapter One

The Art of Habit in “Life in the Iron Mills”..... 40

Chapter Two

Civil War Cycloramas and Bierce’s Counter-Aesthetics of the Abrupt..... 83

Chapter Three

Kate Chopin’s Darwinian Philosophy of Becoming..... 121

Chapter Four

“That note in music heard not with the ears”: Ragged Time in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*..... 176

Works Cited 228

– Introduction –

Realism and the Reconstruction of Time

On November 18, 1883, a group of American railroad companies implemented a system of four standardized time zones in an event later dubbed the “day of two noons”—so named for regions where clocks were set back to 12:00 from anywhere between 12:01 and 12:30. Railway engineers had agreed to coordinate their clocks around seventy-fifth meridian time, whereupon they would become accurately synchronized “to hundredth parts of a second,” as *The New York Times* reported the next morning, “a space of time so infinitesimal as to be almost beyond human perception” (“Turning”). The *Times* reporter recalls the ceremonious atmosphere in Room No. 48 of the Western Union Telegraph Building as Mr. James Hamblet, Superintendent of the Time Telegraph Company, stopped the pendulum of his clock for precisely three minutes and 58.38 seconds. With the sudden arrest of the clock’s “delicate machinery” there was a palpable silence: the audible clicking of the device “ceased” at once, as did “the corresponding ticks on similar instruments in many jewelry and watch stores throughout the City.” When the necessary time had elapsed, “the heavy pendulum was again set in motion and swung backward and forward in its never-varying trips of one second each from one end of its swing to the other,” and thus “the clicking of the little instruments all over the City at intervals of two seconds between each click was resumed.” Engineers in New York City, Washington, Allegheny, and Cambridge compared times by telegraph to ensure the “absolute accuracy” of their synchronicity, and jewelers, business owners, mariners, and citizens had no choice but to adjust their clocks and watches to the new standard. In a matter of minutes, “Mr. Hamblet had changed the time of New-York City and State.”

The long transition to standardized clock time was by no means seamless. Beyond the recalcitrant survival of local times—Chicago, for example, had refused to adopt the new system

that day, presumably because its meridian was not chosen as the touchstone—there was resistance from the public on affective and epistemic grounds. Many people found it disturbing that time could be so conspicuously constructed and reconstructed for the sake of social convenience.¹ Throngs of mystified New Yorkers gathered before the Western Union building, City Hall, and jewelry stores throughout the city, struggling to comprehend “how the time could be changed without some serious results”: as the *Times* reporter notes, “There was a universal expression of disgust when it was discovered that all that was necessary to effect the change was to stop the clock for four minutes and then start it again.” Though mechanical time had been around for centuries, it had long been woven into the laws of God and nature, and the variability of clock times in any given town created more flexible expectations when it came to time discipline, punctuality, and social synchronicity. Yet in the latter half of the nineteenth century, events such as the day of two noons magnified the unsettling implications of the expedient and irrevocable reconstruction of secular time in the industrial age—which regarded neither sun and moon nor local customs—to accommodate the needs of American businesses.²

There is a curious and tellingly imperfect analogy to be drawn between the commercial efforts to coordinate and synchronize local times throughout the U.S. in the late nineteenth century and the attempts of literary realists to construct a cohesive, pragmatic sense of reality, and in particular a shared sense of time, from the plurality of experience. The process of standardizing time in this period occurred alongside the emergence of more nuanced understandings of the post-Darwinian, evolutionary body. As Jane Thraillkill argues, we must understand works of realism together with concurrent developments in psychology, neurobiology, physiology, and pragmatist philosophy, which introduced new ways “of thinking about the interanimation of the human mind and body, in which emotion was increasingly understood to mediate our experience of the exterior

world” (*Affecting* 8). That our emotions mediate our perception of time, in particular, is indeed evolutionarily beneficial: the sense of temporal protraction that accompanies fear, for instance, is a crucial feature of our fight-or-flight response, allowing us to react quickly to a threat. Yet the advancement of chronometry and the sociopolitical institutions that were being constructed around it expanded the possibilities for greater national synchronicity by purging emotional and subjective experience from the understanding of time. Thus while neuroscientists and philosophers alike were expounding numerous ways of understanding, experiencing, and using time, the clock was rationalizing time, transfiguring it from a subjective, perceptual facet of embodied experience into a supposedly objective reality, measured and imposed from without. By the turn of the century, in a variety of social and political contexts, the clock had become an instrument of tremendous power and control.

At the heart of this dissertation is the underexplored relationship between time perception and affect in U.S. literature between roughly 1860 and 1910. Temporality is an implicit concern in studies of affect and emotion, though typically discussed only in the context of the duration of feelings: affects such as rage or terror are usually acute and short lived, and moods more chronic and enduring. Without precluding such considerations, I am specifically interested in feelings *of* time in American realism: experiences that bring temporality itself to the fore as a critical but often ineffable dimension of our embodied and intersubjective life. That our perception of time shifts with the vicissitudes of our emotional states is common sense: time flies when we’re having fun, drags when we’re bored, freezes when we’re afraid, and so on. Yet surprisingly little attention has been paid in literary studies to the originary relationship between temporal and affective or emotional experience, nor to the various social, political, and aesthetic contexts of this connection.

Because all narratives must represent time, however implicitly, attitudes toward time are often read and discussed ahistorically in literary scholarship, if acknowledged at all.³ When pressed, however, we recognize that conceptualizations of time and the roles they play vary widely across history and culture.⁴ In an excellent book on new chronometric technology and diurnal narrative forms in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England, Stuart Sherman points out that there is an inherent relationship between clocks and narrative: clocks “count” time, whereas narratives “recount” it, and any one narrative will therefore, “by the particulars of its form, absorb and register some of the temporalities at work in the world that surrounds its making, and having configured them in language and in structure, will offer its temporality back as a new or newly combined enactment of current time-consciousness” (x).⁵ Taking up Raymond Williams’s oft-cited “structures of feeling,” Sherman proposes “a structure of feeling about time” emerging in his period of study (9). While I am wary of ascribing an overarching structure of feeling about time to an entire nation, I take a cue from Sherman’s methodological approach: thinking about time consciousness in dialogue with Williams’s concept of shared, culture-specific, and “emergent or pre-emergent” sets of feelings helps contextualize the “universal disgust” among the spectators at Western Union, for example.

Extending the implications of what Michael O’Malley has called nineteenth-century America’s “crisis in the authority of time,” I situate the emergence of realism within a period of heightened anxiety over conflicting understandings of temporal “reality” and the impacts of new social constructions of time upon the body (8). I argue that literary realism developed as a process of negotiation between the chaotic pluralism of perceptual times, which threatened the solipsism that William James describes as “the turbid privacy of sense” (*Pluralistic* 105), and the large-scale reification of mechanical time and temporal systems (e.g. factory shifts), which sustained many

social and political institutions by subordinating individuals' variable, emotionally mediated temporal experiences to a regulatable and necessarily disembodied standard. Changes in the social construction and experience of time in this period manifest throughout the texts in my archive as feelings of synchronization with and desynchronization from intersubjective time, and the transitions from one to the other draw attention to the variety of temporal modalities and time scales individuals had to navigate, at times implicitly, and sometimes with greater difficulty and self-awareness. If, as the *Times* reporter suggests, people were being subjected to a degree of chronometric accuracy "so infinitesimal as to be almost beyond human perception," realism produces palpable moments of temporal disjuncture—experiences of slipping or being jolted out of implicitly lived and socially shared time—whereby the feeling of time is brought to the surface of both characters' and readers' attention, enabling them to question social constructions of time and the (often oppressive) institutions they support.

I take the term "desynchronization" from phenomenological psychiatrist Thomas Fuchs, who has contributed to the field of time perception by extending the terms "synchronization" and "desynchronization" from chronobiology—the study of our diurnal rhythms (e.g. sleep-wake cycles, hormone levels, libido, and appetite)—to psychosocial and cultural dynamics, including "common attitudes, fashions, styles, values and memories" that provide the feeling of "a basic 'contemporariness'" ("Melancholia" 180; 181). Desynchronization, as he defines it in "Temporality and Psychopathology," is "a retardation or acceleration of inner time in relation to external or social processes," states which "often bring the body to awareness as an obstacle as well" (75). Ordinarily, we need not attend to the "basic synchrony" of our social lives, but Fuchs argues that with the exacerbated pressures of modern synchronicity, a consequence of the greater

precision and standardization of clock times, people have become more attuned to disruptions of synchronization. Fuchs explains:

. . . the processes of social synchronization become more noticeable in the manifold ways of timing, of day- and week-time regulation, date scheduling, punctuality, etc. In a wider sense, synchronization manifests itself in all mutual commitments, agreements and arrangements which are kept up by individual self-constraint and standardization. This coupling of individual times has been increasingly institutionalized and internalized in the modern age, leading to the nearly perfect synchronization of all members and sequences in industrial society, without which it would, for all its complexity, fall into a functional chaos. (“Melancholia” 181)

The increasingly meticulous synchronization of individuals, social groups, and technological systems has become a pragmatic necessity: if every clock and watch on the planet were to vanish, or if everyone were to suddenly reject the reality of the time their clocks tell, Western civilization, then and now, would unquestionably “fall into a functional chaos.” Fuchs’s characterization of modern time consciousness and discipline is germane to the social and historical context of realism, but it furthermore speaks to the interplay between synchronization and desynchronization embedded in the narrative forms of realism, which attempt to synthesize the “mutual commitments, agreements and arrangements” of the social world, while registering disjunctures from time that compel readers to question the terms of those agreements. Desynchronization from reified social times therefore arises as both opportunity and threat in these texts: it offers new vantage points on sociopolitical constructs as constructs, “releasing subjects from the normativity of intuition,” in Lauren Berlant’s words, “and making them available for alternative ordinaries” (*Cruel* 5-6), but it also destabilizes a shared sense of reality.

In her influential study of American literary realism, Amy Kaplan reconsiders how and to what extent realism participates in “a broader cultural effort to fix and control a coherent representation of a social reality that seems increasingly inaccessible, fragmented, and beyond control” (8). Her argument is that realist novels “attempt to mediate and negotiate competing claims to social reality,” particularly the different realities of the working and upper classes, “by making alternative realities visible while managing their explosive qualities” (11). Whereas many approaches to realism since the 1960s had inadvertently quarantined realist fiction from the real social processes it grapples with,⁶ Kaplan insists that we must understand social change “as the foreground of the narrative structure of each novel”: realist narratives do not merely represent and “juggle competing visions of social reality,” but indeed “encompass conflicting forms and narratives which shape that reality” (9; 13). I build upon Kaplan’s understanding of realism, but specify that an especially pressing problem for American realists was registering and managing competing forms and narratives that shape, and are shaped by, a new social reality of time.

Throughout the chapters to follow, I examine what I characterize in chapter one as new temporal habits and habitus⁷ that were formed in both public and private life as a response to the impacts of mechanical time and attendant forms of time discipline. I have chosen a range of texts that offer insight into the way class, regional, gender, and racial divisions were producing differential relationships to and inhabitations of time in the nineteenth-century U.S., or in Sherman’s terms, distinct structures of feeling about time. These texts—Rebecca Harding Davis’s “Life in the Iron Mills” (1861), Ambrose Bierce’s *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* (1892), Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899) and short stories, and James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912)—furthermore portray how intermittent desynchronization from intersubjective time can reorient individuals to social systems that are

sustained by typically uninterrogated temporal constructs, including factory shifts and class stratification, reconciliationist memory of the Civil War, women's time thrift and domesticity, and white supremacist narratives of cultural history and national progress.

The introduction will briefly sketch the technological history of mechanical timekeeping and trace its role in the emergence of new forms of time discipline in the mid-to-late nineteenth-century U.S., the impacts of which were not only social but physiological and neurobiological. Although personal timekeeping devices had been available to the upper classes since the early modern period, I emphasize in this first section that the unprecedentedly broad access to affordable timepieces and the concomitant concretization of clock time as the secular basis of industrial capitalism led to distinct forms of time consciousness and time discipline. Subsequently, I complement this technological and social context with multidisciplinary work on the impacts of these changes on “the neurologically networked human body,” in Thraikill's words (*Affecting* 21). Here I synthesize important studies of temporal experience, affect, and emotion in contemporary science and philosophy, centering on the contributions of William James. I conclude by establishing how this cross-disciplinary framework helps us recognize feelings of time as an explicit and central concern in the emergence of American literary realism, which will be approached in several contexts, as described in the chapter breakdown.

A Brief History of (Mechanical) Time

In his thorough history of clock technology and its role in the shaping of modernity, David S. Landes identifies the “Great Invention” of clock technology as the transition in the seventeenth century from a weight-driven gear train mechanism to an oscillatory device (i.e. a pendulum). The oscillator “beats time,” he explains, and functions as the regulator for the escapement, the device

that counts the oscillatory pulses and releases the wheel train that turns the clock hands (7-9). The most consequential aspect of the improvements to clockmaking technologies in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, beyond greater precision in time measurement, was the miniaturization of timekeeping devices so that they could be installed in the home or even worn on the wrist. The clocktower of a monastery or public square could regulate prayer times, structure the opening and closing of the marketplace, announce the start and end of the work day, or “move people around,” as Landes explains, but it was not always visible or audible as people moved around the city, and it chimed just once per hour, thus providing only “intermittent reminders” of the time (89). Yet a clock in the home, for those who could afford it, was “an ever visible, ever audible companion and monitor,” and the circling, ticking minute hand became a more palpable “measure of time used, time spent, time wasted, time lost”—a “prod and key to personal achievement and productivity” (89).⁸ Time measurement therefore transformed from a convenient means of social organization to an aspect of consciousness and habitual self-discipline.

Clock and watchmaking in Europe, particularly in Great Britain and Switzerland, had long held tremendous prestige as a form of delicate craftsmanship, and in the nineteenth century the industry still catered primarily to the wealthy elite. As Landes notes, both British and Swiss clockmakers had thus looked down upon the young American clock industry, which was built upon “the production of assembled objects from machine-made, standardized, interchangeable parts” (308). The value placed on uniform reproducibility and the use of interchangeable parts as a means to achieve it became a distinct quality of U.S. industry in the nineteenth century, such that the British explicitly designated, and denigrated, “the uniformity principle” as “the American system of manufacture” (310). This system was pioneered by Eli Terry, a New England clock craftsman who revolutionized the process of clockmaking with the use of machines at his water-

powered factory in Connecticut during the first decade of the century (311). The American clock industry thus began using machine-made, interchangeable parts to manufacture and commodify time, which was likewise conveniently spatialized as a succession of atomistic, uniform, mechanically quantifiable units of duration. By the mid-1830s, a “Terry-styled” wooden shelf clock could be purchased for under \$10, and soon brass clocks by Chauncey Jerome and similar manufacturers cost as little as \$1.50 apiece (O’Malley 32).⁹ To put this into perspective, Landes notes that in Britain in the late 1830s, a bracket clock cost around £5, or \$25 U.S.D., about “a month’s wage for a skilled worker” (312). The mass production of affordable and accurate clocks and watches thus democratized and privatized time in the U.S.; in the second half of the century, clocks in the home and eventually personal watches were available to almost anyone who wanted one, and mechanically measured time gradually pervaded both public and private life.

As efforts were made to synchronize local times, as on November 18th, 1883, time was transformed from a concept “rooted in nature and God,” O’Malley explains, into “an arbitrary, abstract quantity based in machines,” thereby generating “new patterns for self-discipline, social order, and the organization of knowledge” (ix). Mechanical clock time had long been integrated—indeed quite easily—into the Puritanical-capitalist discourse of labor and business. In his influential work on modern time consciousness in industrial factories, E. P. Thompson cites Oliver Heywood’s *Meekness for Heaven* (1690) as an especially telling example of the early fusion of religious and commercial time thrift. Heywood warns his readers that time “floats away apace,” and yet “what is everlasting depends upon it,” thus calling for productive use of their borrowed time: ““This is our working day, our market time . . . O Sirs, sleep now, and awake in hell, whence there is no redemption”” (qtd. in Thompson 87). In the postbellum U.S., however, the moral duty to spend the hours industriously and efficiently—to “redeem the time”—was gradually decoupled

from a Christian worldview and recast in secular terms. Thompson notes that the discourse of time thrift became “more debased, the apostrophes to eternity . . . more shop-soiled, the homilies more mean and banal” (90). The rigidity of the system remained, but without the threat of damnation or the prospect of salvation motivating it.

By midcentury the clock had become a prominent symbol of industrialization, materialism, and the accelerating pace of urban life, and was thus unsurprisingly a frequent target of critique or satire in American romanticism. Nathaniel Hawthorne means to pay Owen Warland a compliment by characterizing him as a dreadful watchmaker, a man prone to “freaks” of improvisational and decidedly unwelcome flourishes while repairing his customers’ timekeeping devices (362). His “irregular genius” opens him up to a purer “love of the Beautiful” and a “singular distaste at the stiff and regular processes of ordinary machinery,” and though he originally apprentices as a watchmaker with the hope that “his strange ingenuity might thus be regulated, and put to utilitarian purposes,” neither he nor his author cares an ounce about the practical “measurement of time” (359; 361). Edgar Allan Poe’s deranged fiddler in the belfry and Henry David Thoreau’s Artist of Kouroo are likewise artists whose creative genius and individuality resist subordination to the mechanistic behavior, conventionality, and banality emblemized by the clock.

Yet while the clock is positioned as a blunt foil to art and truth in stories such as Hawthorne’s “The Artist of the Beautiful” and Poe’s “The Devil in the Belfry”—“mean time” set against eternity, the social against the individual, the material against the ideal—time becomes a messier problem to be reckoned with as the dualistic post-Kantian frameworks of romanticism give way to the pluralism of American pragmatism, and furthermore, as psychologists and physiologists begin to emphasize the extensive material impacts of disparate temporal realities, not least of all clock time. As Stephen Kern explains, the work toward standardizing time

“triggered theorizing about a multiplicity of private times that may vary from moment to moment in the individual, from one individual to another according to personality, and among different groups as a function of social organization” (33). What is particularly helpful about Thompson’s study is his consideration of the way time’s social construction was gradually internalized by workers, thus transforming from an abstraction—as made more visible (and audible) on the day of two noons—into physiological and habituated ways of being in and knowing the world. Thompson distinguishes between older forms of task orientation and a modern “time-sense in its technological conditioning”—“a severe restructuring of working habits,” he argues, impacted “the inward notation of time” (80; 57). While Thompson is focused on industrial working conditions, we will see forms of such technological conditioning pervading many other social and institutional domains by the end of the nineteenth century, from military discipline to domestic time thrift.

Edward T. Hall describes the reification of clock time during this period as an “extension,” a process whereby instruments that originate as “biological and physiological functions” are “extended” to speed up evolution (e.g. telescopes and microscopes as extensions of the eye or cameras as extensions of our “visual memory”) (121). As a result, people have been conditioned to conflate the clock with “the reality it replaces,” yielding an intricate, naturalized temporal system and attendant “schedules, manners, and expectations” with which people must coordinate their bodies, “when, in reality, it should be the other way around” (121). Indeed, Hall asserts, it was with the more extensive reification of clock time in the nineteenth century that people became especially attuned to experiences of temporal variation—the sense of time racing or crawling, for example—which creates a feeling of tension between our variable inner times and the “real,” external time to which we are supposed to subordinate them. In terms similar to Hall’s, Fuchs notes that we “have created the dominion of time to which we are then exposed as a seemingly

independent process,” and this constructed time system therefore “appears as an autonomous, godlike force that demands its sacrifices”: “It is this alienated and reified time,” he argues, “that in melancholia falls back on the subject from the outside” (“Melancholia 185). The changing role of clock time in personal and public life therefore had not only social but physiological and psychological impacts, which, as I will discuss in the next section, were of considerable interest to the emerging neurological, psychological, and philosophical studies of the mind and body in this period, and to the concomitant development of literary realism.

Felt Time in the Postbellum U.S.

In *American Nervousness, Its Causes and Consequences* (1881), the neurologist George M. Beard expounds the neurological and philosophical dimensions of a “modern, and originally American” condition he had deemed “neurasthenia,” the symptoms of which range from premature balding to hay fever.¹⁰ In a chapter dedicated to the causes of this vague class of maladies, a subsection titled “Clocks and Watches.—Necessity of Punctuality” attributes the proliferation of many cases of nervous exhaustion to the greater perfection of timekeeping devices, which “compel us to be on time, and excite the habit of looking to see the exact moment, so as not to be late for trains or appointments” (103). Before, Beard explains, “men judged of the time by probabilities, by looking at the sun, and needed not, as a rule, to be nervous about the loss of a moment, and had incomparably fewer experiences wherein a delay of a few moments might destroy the hopes of a lifetime” (103). The important takeaway from Beard’s work is that the new pressures of modern time consciousness could affect the nervous system. “A nervous man cannot take out his watch and look at it when the time for an appointment or train is near, without affecting his pulse,” Beard observes (103-104). Neuroscientists such as Beard appreciated that the social construction of time,

however artificial it seemed in events such as the “day of two noons,” had indisputably real physiological and emotional impacts: this “extension,” as Hall characterizes it, made an impress upon the nervous system, which Beard argued could lead to an array of crippling and even life-threatening disorders.

Indeed, as mechanical timekeeping systems were constructing the foundation for broader networks of social synchronicity, some of the first in-depth studies of the mind and body were emerging in the burgeoning fields of psychology, neurobiology, and physiology. My attention to the impacts of new multidisciplinary understandings of the embodied mind on literature of the period is most heavily indebted to Jane Thrailkill, whose *Affecting Fictions: Mind, Body, and Emotion in American Literary Realism* (2007) combats the enduring consequences of New Criticism’s campaign against the Affective Fallacy and argues for the long-neglected importance of embodiment and emotional experience to the aesthetics of American realism. By the time Davis published “Life in the Iron Mills,” the earliest text in my archive, Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* had been fervently read, discussed, and debated on both sides of the Atlantic for two years, and *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871) and *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) were soon to have an even greater impact on U.S. fiction.¹¹ Homegrown studies of physiology and the emotions were also emerging that would pave the way for pragmatism: the philosopher, psychologist, and founder of the interdisciplinary journal *Mind*, Alexander Bain, had published *The Senses and the Intellect* in 1855 and *The Emotions and the Will* in 1859; physician, poet, and novelist Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. had been lecturing and publishing since the 1840s; and William James was about to launch his career as America’s most influential psychologist and philosopher.

Thraikill points out that despite the so-called affective turn in literary criticism, the understanding of literary realism has been stilted by a tendency to tether “the epistemological status of realist works” to “scientific positivism”: the idea that the realist author is supposed to maintain a scientific (i.e. objective) distance from the “facts and objects” she represents, often using excessively detailed, empirical descriptions to signal that objectivity (23; 24). Against this trend, Thraikill proposes “a conceptual genealogy for a new understanding of literary realism,” advocating for greater attention “to the neurological and affective components of human experience”: rather than “mimesis, referentiality, and fixity,” she calls for the importance of “mediation, relationality, and above all *motion*” to the work of realism (10). Building upon Thraikill’s innovatively interdisciplinary approach to this literary period, I focus specifically on the way contemporary understandings of temporal experience in relation to affect and emotion inhere in the affective dynamics of realism.

Today, scholars studying either time or emotion almost always trace their ideas back to the foundation laid by William James. From the 1870s to 1910, James charted a course in what Gerald E. Myers describes as “physiological psychology,” which leaned away from the classically metaphysical concerns of Enlightenment psychology toward empirical research on the nervous system. Without ever committing wholesale to materialism—he was an insistent pluralist to the end—James attended much more scrupulously than was typical in psychology to the embodied seat of “perception, emotion, thought, memory, attention, will, and association,” and, furthermore, of aesthetics, which had typically been conceptualized as moralistic or intellectual judgments, far above and safely detached from embodiment and emotion (54). James’s work on “the sense of time,” consciousness, and emotional experience throughout his roughly forty-year career is exceptionally copious and all tantalizingly quotable (he is a master of metaphor). An in-depth

study of the phenomenology of time would certainly have to engage with James's career-long struggle to theorize temporal experience to his complete satisfaction.¹² Yet because my concerns are not expressly philosophical—I am more focused on the social and political implications of these studies of time as they were taken up and explored in realism—I restrict my discussion to just three of James's most pertinent ideas about feeling and time: 1). His soft distinction between sensation and perception, and its relationship to recent understandings of affect and emotion; 2). His concept of the “specious present,” which anticipated what is now called the “internal clock model” of time perception; and 3). His effort to theorize an intermediary position between a chaotic plurality of perceptual times, and thus of realities—the source of anxiety which Kaplan situates at the center of realism—and the monism implied by Henri Bergson's phrase, “the real time” (or “true time”) of duration, which ignores the reality of “*felt times*” that “coexist and overlap or compenetrates each other” in the stream of everyday experience (*Pluralistic* 105).

Sensation, Perception, Affect, and Emotion

James argues that although both sensations and perceptions entail cognition, sensations are “the *immediate* results upon consciousness of nerve-currents as they enter the brain, and before they have awakened any suggestions or associations with past experience,” while perception is “the higher consciousness about things,” wherein “[i]deas *about* the object mingle with the awareness of its mere sensible presence” and we begin to “name it, class it, compare it,” and so on (*Psychology* 12; 13). Thrailkill points out that what James refers to as “eagerness,” or what John Dewey calls “affection,” was neither “a matter of the mind suppressing the body,” nor “an unmediated corporeal experience that somehow bypassed the mind” (*Affecting* 44). Rather than draw a crisp line between sensation and perception, as dualistic philosophers had done to quarantine the mind/thought from body/feeling, James situates them within the same “continuum”:

“Sometimes the eagerness is more knit up with the motor activities,” he explains, “sometimes with the perceptions, sometimes with the imagination, sometimes with reflective thought” (“Blindness” 328-29). While James typically held that experiences of pure sensation are impossible in mature adulthood, or arguably even past infancy, Myers notes that James leaves room for certain exceptions: extraordinary experiences in which rational explanations falter and sensations provide “remedies” (86). We will see examples of these exceptions throughout my archive, particularly in Davis’s and Bierce’s accounts of habit disruption amid crisis or trauma.

James’s framing of sensation and perception overlaps with his theory of affect. His 1884 article for *Mind*, “What is an Emotion?” introduces what came to be known as the “James-Lange Theory of Emotion.”¹³ Here James argues, “Hardly a sensation comes to us without sending waves of alternate constriction and dilation down the arteries of our arms”—without impacting “the heart-beats and the rhythm of breathing,” the glands of the mouth and skin, and so on, and given “the various permutations and combinations of which these organic activities are susceptible,” James speculates “that no shade of emotion, however slight, should be without a bodily reverberation as unique, when taken in its totality, as is the mental mood itself” (191-192). Although our common sense tells us that we weep because we are sad or we shout because we are angry, James reconsiders the “order of sequence” in this assumption, contending instead that sadness *is* the feeling of weeping; rage *is* the feeling of shouting, rising body temperature, the acceleration of our pulse: that is, the phenomena we call emotions do not cause but rather are constituted by the feeling of certain complexes of physiological, embodied changes in sensation (189; 192).¹⁴ Some emotions are evolutionarily conditioned feelings about particular sensations, James argues, and some are developed through habit formation and socialization, as we saw among the men in Beard’s study who grew anxious at the sight of their watches. In either case, the emotion can be explained

neurologically: “Quick as a flash, the reflex currents pass down through their pre-ordained channels, alter the condition of muscle, skin and viscus; and these alterations, apperceived like the original object . . . combine with it in consciousness and transform it from an object-simply-apprehended into an object-emotionally-felt” (203).

But can we “sense” time? The tricky part, of course, is that while we see with the eyes or hear with the ears, there is no sense organ dedicated to the direct sensation of time. James titled his chapter on time in *Principles of Psychology* “The Perception of Time,” which would seem to suggest a socially mediated, conceptual translation of some more basic sensory experience. But as Myers notes, “James was anxious to show that time is sensed”—“to prove that time is a datum of experience, something apprehended immediately and directly” which can therefore acquaint us with something “real” outside of ourselves—suggesting that the chapter’s retitling as “The Sense of Time” in James’s reworking of *Principles* into *Psychology: Briefer Course* (1892) was a deliberate and telling choice (147).¹⁵ “In arguing that time can be sensation,” Myers explains:

James was defending not only a theory of time-perception but also the concept of knowledge by acquaintance. He believed that a mode of awareness called sensing can acquaint us with things differently from perception. . . . Perceiving is more complex than sensing and involves awareness of the relations surrounding the objects sensed; it is thus knowledge about rather than acquaintance. . . . Sensing, being acquainted with the object directly and immediately, is less complex psychologically than perception, but it is knowledge insofar as it makes us aware of what something is like. (147-48)

Without getting too deeply mired in questions about the ontology of time, I want to emphasize that if sensation “can acquaint us with things differently from perception,” James’s insistence upon time-sense suggests the possibility of feelings of time that are not filtered as immediately or

automatically through constructs such as minutes and hours, factory shifts, or domestic schedules, for example. The difference between knowledge about time, which James understands as socially and culturally mediated, and acquaintance with time, as in the aforementioned exceptional experiences in which familiar, rational frameworks fail and sensations offer remedies, will help highlight the role socialization has played in conditioning us to perceive and feel certain ways about various constructions of time. The “continuum” between sensation and perception will furthermore help me attend to the illuminating moments in realism when characters’ and readers’ socioculturally mediated “perceptions” of time—and, correspondingly, expectations of narrative (the “recounting” of time)—are disrupted, questioned, and contested.

The terms “affect” and “emotion” are often used interchangeably, though several prominent affect scholars have insisted upon the importance of their differentiation.¹⁶ Jonathan Flatley offers a connotative distinction that is particularly useful for situating affect centrally within the work of realism, and moreover within the line of thinking that roots back to James.¹⁷ “Where *emotion* suggests something that happens inside and tends toward outward expression,” Flatley explains, “*affect* indicates something relational and transformative”; put another way, “One *has* emotions; one is affected *by* people or things” (12; Flatley’s emphasis). James’s theory of emotional experience, especially when taken together with his post-Darwinian understanding of consciousness as a “selecting agency, directing its attention to what is most interesting” to an organism (Myers 56), resonates in particular with Silvan Tomkins’s influential theory of affect, developed during the 1960s and made more widely available by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank in *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader* (1995). Tomkins characterizes affects as a “motivation system” that points us to what is valuable—of interest to us—in the environment, whether that value is “positive or negative” (68). Like James’s concept of

consciousness (or “experience” in his later phase of radical empiricism), affects thus function as filters, directing our attention to what matters to us in particular contexts and environments. Flatley extrapolates that affects in this sense “are always amplifying, dampening, or otherwise modifying some other affect, or drive, or perception, or thought process, or act or behavior,” and therefore, “In a real sense, when one is experiencing shame,” for example, “a different world is being perceived than when one is joyful or fearful” (16). When we are affected by something or someone, we are moved—reoriented to the world in a particular way, which thus impacts not only what we attend to but how we attend to it. This speaks to Thrailkill’s assertion that realism is “dedicated to elaborating what William James [. . .] described as ‘feelings of reality,’” and helps us understand furthermore why one person’s or one social group’s feeling of reality is so often incongruent with another’s (*Affecting* 9).

In the chapters that follow, I focus in particular on how affects can both produce and be produced by disparate feelings of temporal reality, which pose a particularly troubling but often tacit or ineffable threat to the stability of realism’s social worlds. Like Darwin, who had observed in *Expression* that “the different races of man express their emotions and sensations with remarkable uniformity throughout the world” (131), Tomkins identifies a handful of core affects—shame, interest, surprise, joy, anger, fear, distress and disgust—a list which gestures toward infinite permutations and combinations (Sedgwick and Frank 5). Flatley explains that in a failed effort to disprove Tomkins’s argument, Paul Ekman discovered in his research with Carrol Izard that although affects are indeed remarkably universal across cultures, “What was variable . . . were ‘display rules,’” or “the norms and habits through which people manage their emotional expressions” (15). Ekman and Izard furthermore found that there are cultural differences as to which objects those affects could or should relate one to (15). Though there is a set of affects that

are quite basic, “what are not at all basic are the ways our affects are educated as to which objects are right for which affects in which situations (i.e., one should be ashamed of this, but angry about that, disgusted by this other thing, but only if other people are present, and so on)” (15).

Affects such as fear and shame are therefore basic and irreducible—indeed, as Darwin had argued, evolutionarily inborn—but the anxiety that the men in Beard’s study felt upon catching a glimpse of their watches is an example of how a particular social group within a particular culture during a particular moment in history has been socialized to be affected by that object in a relatively specific way. And indeed this is where Sherman’s extension of Williams’s structures of feeling to the historicity of time consciousness becomes especially useful for my study. While there is no precise name for this feeling of anxiety about clocks and watches, Beard’s efforts to describe the feeling are strikingly affective: the new pressure to “be on time” and “not to be late” now “excite[s] the habit of looking to see the exact moment” for certain men; they are more often “nervous about the loss of a moment,” and afraid that “the delay of a few moments might destroy the hopes of a lifetime.” Beard’s language suggests that these men’s culturally particular feelings, though nameless and difficult to classify, are nevertheless already encoded and *felt* as deviant. “Lateness” is just one particular form of desynchronization, an experience that is by no means new in the nineteenth century, but which has become more disturbing because it is set against a newly objectified standard: the clock has created a more rigid norm—a system of habitual synchronicity, punctuality, and productivity (*maximizing* one’s time)—and deviations are thus experienced and described as lateness or laziness, impatience, loss (of time), or being “out of sync.”

By highlighting connections between affective and temporal experience in realism, I aim to de-universalize the impacts of changing technologies of time as portrayed in much of the scholarship on this period. The familiar narrative of synchronicity and “acceleration” in modernity,

as has been recapitulated by Benedict Anderson, David Harvey, and Paul Virilio, ignores the uneven impacts of new time technologies and institutions on people with different cultural upbringings, socioeconomic circumstances, careers, and gendered or racial positionalities, for example.¹⁸ Yet by attending to the affectively differential relationships to time produced by social and cultural constructs—and by taking seriously that from one structure of feeling about time to another, “a different world is being perceived”—we can begin to consider what is at stake in American realists’ narrative instantiations of disjuncture from what Fuchs described earlier as the shared “commitments, agreements and arrangements” that provide for the feeling of synchronization and shared “contemporariness.” To put affect into more explicit dialogue with James’s continuum of sensations and perceptions, I am interested in the forms of temporal disjuncture amid which certain normative, socialized, affective relationships to various modalities of time undergo transformations, whereby both characters and readers are reoriented to their temporal assumptions and made to feel a different sense of time.

The Specious Present and the Internal Clock Model

I turn now to the intersections between James’s most explicit contribution to phenomenological studies of time, his characterization of the “specious present,” and more recent work in neuroscience and psychiatry on time perception. Simply put, this subsection addresses how and why we sometimes feel as though time is ‘racing’ or ‘dragging,’ depending on the contexts and moods we find ourselves in. These connections are particularly pertinent to disruptions in what Fuchs describes as the “microdynamics of everyday contact”—challenges to “the continuous fine tuning of emotional and bodily communication” required to feel ‘in sync,’ both rhythmically and affectively, with others—which will arise throughout the texts in my archive (“Melancholia” 181). While the emotional mediation of our time perception is utterly

commonplace and, furthermore, helpful to us from an evolutionary standpoint, this project will consider contexts represented in realism in which the discrepancies between different individuals' or social groups' perceptions of time point to more significant, and sometimes even insidious, social problems.

James's most influential explanation of our time sense is his characterization of "the specious present, "a sort of saddle-back of time with a certain length of its own, on which we sit perched, and from which we look in two directions into time" (*Psychology* 280). Like Edmund Husserl, James argues that time has a tripartite structure in phenomenal experience: a perceptual unit of duration is like a ship "with a bow and a stern," or "a rearward- and forward-looking end," which we apprehend in its totality rather than a series of successive points. He explains, "We do not first feel one end and then feel the other after it, and from the perception of the succession infer an interval of time between, but we seem to feel the interval of time as a whole, with its two ends embedded in it" (280). In contrast to his most famous metaphor, the "stream of consciousness," and likewise in contrast to Bergson's insistently non-spatialized duration, James describes the content of perceptual time as a series of overlapping "duration-blocks," wherein the beginning and end are perceived synthetically, "although attention looking back may easily decompose the experience, and distinguish its beginning from its end" (281).

James's specious present thus resembles Husserl's model of time perception as comprised of retention and protention, the emphasis being that the present is always limned by our awareness of the just-past and anticipated future, giving time a kind of depth or volume. Were it not for these overlapping features of the specious present and our awareness of both the beginning and end of the interval, as both James and Husserl contend, we would experience a melody, for instance, as nothing but a succession of utterly isolated and disconnected notes, or a sentence as a series of

meaningless syllables: “Our consciousness would be like a glow-worm spark,” James explains, “illuminating the point it immediately covered, but leaving all beyond in total darkness” (*Principles* 571). For James, our perceptual experience thus entails intervals rather than points of sensory content, but a duration block can cover at most roughly twelve seconds (*Psychology* 281). Longer spans of time, whether an hour, year, or millennium, are “more or less symbolic,” because “[t]o realize even an hour, we must count ‘now! now! now!’ indefinitely”: each atomistic “‘now’ is the feeling of a separate *bit* of time, and the exact sum of the bits never makes a clear impression on our mind” (*Psychology* 281). In other words, our experience of time scales beyond these duration blocks can only be perceptual—“knowledge about” rather than “acquaintance with.” Therefore in contrast with the clock and calendar, adopted out of convenience to organize social and institutional processes, our more immediate sense of time cannot be broken down into frozen instants; experience is in perpetual motion, and each “duration block” is always in overlapping and ever-transitioning relationship with a preceding or successive one.

James wrote surprisingly little about the sense of time beyond his discussion of the specious present. Yet in *Principles* he does point to “a certain emotional *feeling* accompanying the intervals of time,” which he categorizes as “a qualitative”—that is, “aesthetic judgment, in fact”—as opposed to a quantitative judgment of duration (582-83). He subsequently attempts to account for the way perceptual time is influenced by our emotional and rhythmic experience: “Our heart-beats, our breathing, the pulses of our attention,” and the like (*Principles* 584). It is impossible to speculate about the feeling of time in and of itself, James argues, because we cannot eliminate the sensation of ever-changing processes which co-constitute it. Even when we close our eyes, “we perceive a dark visual field in which a curdling play of obscurest luminosity is always going on”—and indeed, “we are always inwardly immersed in what Wundt has somewhere called the twilight

of our general consciousness” (583-84). If we have no organ for the sensation of empty time, then our experience of duration is based upon “the *filling* of the time” and “our *memory* of a content which it had a moment previous, and which we feel to agree or disagree with its content now” (583; James’s emphasis). “Awareness of change,” whether an outward or inward sensation or the “process of attention or volition,” is therefore what makes the “perception of time’s flow” possible (584). Our subjective or “inner” feeling of time is intricately tied to our bodily rhythms, sensations, and affection, all of which are processes of unceasing interaction and negotiation between organism and environment.

James’s work anticipates what Marc Wittmann has dubbed the “emotive turn” in the interdisciplinary field of time perception, a shift away from an enduring tendency to focus exclusively on cognitive factors (“Inner” 1956). The neural basis of time perception is still up for debate: studies have shown that our subjective sense of time is influenced by processes such as attention, working and long-term memory, biological drives, moods, and emotions, but because “time itself is not a property in the empirical world,” as Wittmann contests, it poses a “riddle for philosophers and scientists alike” (1955). James’s specious present notably resembles what is now called the “internal-clock” model of interval timing, which Sylvie Droit-Volet and Warren H. Meck characterize as a kind of pacemaker: the number of “pulses” stored in the pacemaker’s accumulator determines how one gauges temporal duration—a metaphor which likens the mechanism within the body to the oscillatory regulator and pulse-counting escapement that Landes describes above (“How Emotions Colour” 505).¹⁹ In another study, Droit-Volet and Sandrine Gil link perceptual time to both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, such as emotional experiences and social rhythms, respectively, and underscore that shifts in subjective time do not stem from defective internal clocks, “but rather from the excellent ability of the internal clock to adapt to events in

one's environment" ("Time-emotion" 1943). Recent work in time perception thus emphasizes that the variability of our inner time is evolutionarily advantageous, but posits that disruption to our ability to synchronize our movements with various rhythms and time scales around us is more crippling than has been adequately acknowledged. We become most conscious of changes in our time perception when there is a conflict or disjuncture between our own time perception and the social or 'world' time, and this conflict can become chronic.

The important role of time perception in our day-to-day lives is demonstrated by the numerous pathologies that are accompanied by the feeling of either temporal acceleration or distention, which correspondingly makes it difficult for those afflicted to interact "adequately" with the environment (Wittmann "Inner" 1955). As Wittmann points out, there are many neurological disorders that produce a sense of chronic temporal acceleration, making it difficult for those suffering from them to drive a car, for instance. He points furthermore to a general correspondence between negative affects and moods—fear, anxiety, boredom, social rejection, and depression, for example—and a feeling temporal protraction: the sense that time is slowing, stretching, dragging. There are two interrelated explanations for this: first, these are feelings that tend to make us attend more explicitly to time's passage (just imagine a teenager watching the clock during an insufferably boring class); and second, these experiences often entail the accumulation of more "pulses" in the internal pacemaker, particularly in high-arousal states such as fear or anxiety, which creates the feeling that "world" time is passing more slowly than one's internal clock (1960). Fuchs argues that inhabiting implicit time requires: 1). The synthesis "of inner time consciousness," by which he means the fluid experience of the specious present, and 2). What he calls "the conative-affective dynamics of life," or the future-directed feelings of will,

affection, volition, and striving, which will be the focus of chapter three (“Temporality and Psychopathology” 75).

Because my project concerns those who feel disenfranchised or alienated from social conventions and habits of perception, we will see many experiences of temporal protraction associated with anxiety, depression, and fear throughout my archive. Yet more broadly, my project aims to highlight the relevance of these recent accounts of what Wittmann calls “time distortions” to the way literary realists narrate their characters’ feelings of time. We will see that in realism’s ‘recounting’ of time, to return to Sherman’s earlier point, the discrepancy between felt time and an external and seemingly objective gauge such as the clock might be utterly mundane, but at times it can also signal grave emotional or social distress. Throughout the four chapters to follow, I contend that realist narratives emphasize both the potential and precarity of disjuncture from social time. While the disruption of what Fuchs calls “implicit time”—time lived unreflectively and fluidly, in harmony with others—can expose the oppressiveness of previously unquestioned social constructs, chronic desynchronization is tremendously dangerous, often leading to a sense of hopelessness, social alienation, and melancholic depression. If systems of temporal organization and the structures of feeling about time they produce can thus support or impair one’s psychobiological wellbeing and affectivity, as we will see throughout this project, realist writers represent troubling time distortions to establish that the solution is not simply a matter of individuals transforming their moods, but of society amending the temporal systems responsible for them.

Temporal Pluralism and La Durée

Having now introduced some relevant connections between time and affect at the personal and social levels, I turn finally to broader philosophical questions about time which concern

literary realism, whether implicitly or explicitly. As Sanford Schwartz observes in *The Matrix of Modernism*, modern philosophers such as James and Bergson began to distinguish “reality” at the turn of the century as what “lies in the preconceptual flow of appearances, which is irreducible to rational formulation,” both thinkers emphasizing that “our concepts, far from representing a reality beyond the sensory stream, are merely instrumental devices for organizing it” (19). They emphasize peeling back the layers of intellectual habits, conceptual frames, and institutionalized logics to get at a long-obscured and more mobile *sense* of reality. Bergson writes of “this covering that we must grasp in order to tear it off,” “casting off ready-made concepts,” “recasting and sometimes completely setting aside conceptual thought” (*Creative Mind* 27; 29; 61), and a plethora of similar metaphors are scattered throughout James’s work. Yet while James found much to admire in Bergson’s philosophy, he bristled at phrases such as “real time” and “real duration.” In this last subsection, I suggest that James’s discomfort with aspects of Bergsonian time can help us situate the anxieties and goals driving literary realism.

Bergson’s philosophy is taken up more extensively in my chapter on Chopin’s fiction. For now, I focus only on his concept of duration so that I can contextualize James’s response to it. The platform for Bergson’s intervention in philosophy is his endeavor to restore movement and duration to time. Duration “eludes mathematical treatment,” Bergson contests: “Its essence being to flow, not one of its parts is still there when another part comes along” (*Creative Mind* 12). He insists that conceptualizing time as linear, measurable, and divisible is an act of intellectual abstraction: it denies the true fluidity of time by translating it into a kind of space. Because “the role of science is to foresee,” it therefore “extracts and retains from the material world that which can be repeated and calculated, and consequently that which is not in a state of flow” (13). This is, of course, a social necessity. Yet true duration, “which science eliminates,” is indeed “what one

feels and lives” (13). Whereas James explicitly appeals to a spatial analogy in his characterization of the specious present as “duration blocks,” notwithstanding his efforts to reconcile that concept with his understanding of consciousness as a fluid stream, Bergson critiques the way many mathematical, scientific, and philosophical arguments fall back upon spatial language and concepts, insisting that they empty time of its continuity and mobility.

In his chapter on Bergson in *A Pluralistic Universe*, James champions many of Bergson’s ideas, but the sticking point for James is Bergson’s insistent references to duration as the “real time,” which implies a monistic concept of the universe. James refers to one of Bergson’s examples in *Creative Evolution*, a sugar cube dissolving in a glass of water, and extrapolates:

We feel the time to be long while waiting for the process to end, but who knows how long or how short it feels to the sugar? All *felt* times coexist and overlap or compenetrates each other thus vaguely; but the artifice of plotting them on a common scale helps us to reduce their aboriginal confusion, and it helps us still more to plot, against the same scale, the successive possible steps into which nature’s various changes may be resolved, either sensibly or conceivably. We thus straighten out the aboriginal privacy and vagueness, and can date things publicly, as it were, and by each other. The notion of one objective and ‘evenly flowing’ time, cut into numbered instants, applies itself as a common measure to all the steps and phases, no matter how many, into which we cut the processes of nature.

(104)

Like Bergson, James understands clock time, one “common scale” along which we plot our experiences, as an intellectual translation of real experience. Felt times, he insists, “have originally no common measure” (104). Yet whereas Bergson conceives of such social conventions as the mathematical division of “one objective and ‘evenly flowing’ time,” James sees this as a pragmatic

system of managing a plurality of perceptual times “in their aboriginal privacy and vagueness” (104). If we accept Bergson’s assertion of one singular time, “the real time” of duration, James wonders, “do we not also escape from sense-reality altogether?” (105).²⁰ As an insistent pluralist, or what he likes to call “a radical empiricist,” who is adamantly opposed to the monistic “philosophy of the absolute” at this stage in his career, James is more inclined to see the value in shared systems of meaning, adopted out of social convenience, like the standard time zones implemented by the railways (25). With the mathematical translation of time into a shared system, “we escape wholly from the turbid privacy of sense”—the utter incongruence of disparate perceptual times and realities (105).

I want to point to several illuminating connections between James’s philosophical position in the passage above and the processes that manifest in realism. First, to expand upon what I argued earlier, realist fiction is one form of “artifice” that quite literally plots “*felt times*” that “coexist and overlap or compenetrates each other . . . on a common scale,” so as to protect against the threat of “their aboriginal privacy.” Yet by registering the lived and often quotidian, but sometimes perilous, experience of desynchronization from those common scales, realist works help “us still more to plot, *against the same scale*, the successive possible steps into which nature’s various changes may be resolved, either sensibly or conceivably.” Realism produces processes of both synchronization with and desynchronization from the cohesive social world it is actively constructing in order to gesture toward the possibilities of new or amended social systems of time. Realism thereby shows us that pragmatically shared concepts and systems of time, though “patently artificial,” are indeed practically necessary, but by no means absolute or fixed: they require continual reevaluation and revision as we, too, change, adapt, and learn from the flux of experience.

Chapter Breakdown

The first two chapters introduce how felt tensions between personal and social temporal experiences manifest at the narrative level in literary realism. Both Davis and Bierce attend to crises that disrupt characters' (and readers') habits of perception, and distend narrative time to trace the microtemporal dynamics of sensation as it unfolds less determinately into perception, and affect as it unfolds into emotion and expression. These authors model how realists produce transitions from synchronization to desynchronization both thematically and formally: by destabilizing our assumptions about time, they likewise aim to destabilize our tacit assumptions about the institutions which social constructions of time implicitly reinforce. The third and fourth chapters address how the forms of time consciousness and discipline discussed in the first two chapters—synchronization with linear, measurable, and disembodied time, which extends in Bierce's chapter to reconciliationist historiography and cultural memory—produce and sustain affectively differential relationships to and habits of time that reify hierarchical social structures along gender and racial lines. Building upon the issues of the first two chapters, the second half of the dissertation considers the broader philosophical and historical concerns and implications of realists' processes of resynchronization. While each chapter takes up questions of time perception and time discipline in a specific context, the project as a whole emphasizes both the revelatory potential and psychobiological danger of falling out of sync with—or in many cases being forcibly excluded from—dominant modalities of time.

The first chapter, “The Art of Habit: Temporal Conflict in Davis’s Iron Mills,” introduces the psychobiological impacts of new forms of temporal organization in the context of factory labor. I argue that Rebecca Harding Davis’s “Life in the Iron Mills” illuminates how modern time contributes to the growing rift between upper- and working-class habitus. I frame habits in this

chapter as more or less particular to the individual, though always necessarily socialized and social in function, and habitus as habits that are shared by specific social groups. Habits as conceptualized by James, John Dewey, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty are a kind of interface between the individual and the environment: they are acquired forms of bodily know-how that empower us to act and react without having to pause and deliberate. Yet while habits and habitus are evolutionarily beneficial—nobody is more miserable than the person “in whom nothing is habitual but indecision”—James also acknowledges that habits and habitus forestall social change: “Habit,” he argues, is “the enormous fly-wheel of society, its most precious conservative agent”—“It alone is what keeps us all within the bounds of ordinance, and saves the children of fortune from the envious uprisings of the poor” (*Principles* 126; 125). Processes of personal and collective habit formation, disruption, or reformation therefore provide a useful starting point for my project because habits encompass socialized forms of time consciousness and time discipline and, relatedly, structures of feeling about time. Desynchronization from social time is thus a disruption of embodied habits—of socially educated ways of acting upon and knowing the world—which can be both enlightening and destabilizing, as we see in Hugh Wolfe’s experience.

I turn to Ambrose Bierce’s *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* in chapter two, “Civil War Cycloramas and Bierce’s Counter-Aesthetics of Desynchronization,” which argues that Bierce’s disturbing short stories model an aesthetic response and alternative to the conventional understandings of realism that had emerged in the 1880s, particularly an aspiration to mimetic verisimilitude, modeled after the presumed objectivity of the photograph. To represent the temporal experience of trauma, Bierce repeatedly magnifies the disjuncture between a short span of clock time and dense, distended experiences of shock or crisis, allowing him to trace what James describes as the transition between sensation and perception slowly enough for readers to notice

the flaws—the false assumptions and desperate self-delusions—in characters’ attempts to rationalize their experiences using familiar political or military rhetoric. As in the first chapter, Bierce’s realism entails disrupting the reader’s immersion in the story and forcing her to recognize her positionality as a reader, though in this case, this positionality is historical rather than socioeconomic: readers are made to feel like spectators of a real, and overwhelmingly traumatic, past. Bierce’s fiction militates against the mythic, reconciliationist narratives that proliferated in the postbellum U.S. to gloss the devastating causes of the Civil War and the ideological fractures and disparate memories which remained in its wake. I incorporate contemporary and more recent trauma studies, particularly Bessel Van der Kolk’s psychiatric work on the dis-integration of temporal and affective experience in traumatic stress, to analyze the way Bierce transformed his firsthand experience of the neurobiological effects of traumatic combat into an aesthetic mode. Whereas the visually illusive realism of mass spectacles such as *Gettysburg Cyclorama* worked by creating “a seemingly whole, though actually fragmented, vision of reality,” as Cynthia Griffins argues (48), Bierce’s fiction highlights the way private, idiosyncratic traumatic memory exposes and destroys the illusion of national and cultural memory.

Whereas Bierce produces desynchronization to emphasize the enduring pull of the personal and cultural past, Chopin draws upon her exceptionally thorough readings of multidisciplinary studies of the embodied mind to offer a means of affective reorientation to the future. “Kate Chopin’s Darwinian Philosophy of Becoming” focuses on the feelings of time required for and rendered habitual by leisure-class domestic time discipline at the turn of the century. This chapter argues that Chopin’s challenge to conventional gender roles is built upon her extensive scientific and philosophical knowledge: her fiction bridges post-Darwinian understandings of biological selfhood and evolutionary time to the dynamics of indeterminacy and virtuality that were

beginning to emerge in Bergson's philosophy of duration. At stake in Chopin's realism, I argue, is the difference between awaiting the future and striving toward it, which she presents as both a physiological and philosophical problem to overcome. Chopin's fiction underscores the distinction between possibilities, a set of choices perceivable in and thus prefigured by the past and present, and potentiality, or the feeling of indeterminate and unforeseeable change. In *The Awakening*, Edna gradually awakens to the way habits of domestic time economy are built upon the assumption that tomorrow will not deviate in radical or unpredictable ways from today, which by necessity preempts the feeling of potentiality. Yet Edna ultimately falls victim to a simplistic but culturally prevalent misreading of evolutionary selfhood as an insurmountable conflict between nature—conceived as her mysterious, subconscious drives and desires as a reproductive woman—and culture, which is directed by an often equally mysterious and unassailable array of social rules and expectations. She therefore remains desynchronized from her middle-class social world, coming to conceive of resynchronization as capitulation to a life a life emptied of all spontaneity and virtuality: a succession of repetitive and thus predictable sexual and appetitive desire and its fulfillment. In the narrative extending from “At the 'Cadian Ball” to its sequel, “The Storm,” however, accidents such as thunderstorms figure for the radical irruption of potentiality into everyday life, leading Calixta and Alcée to a kind of spontaneous expression within form. Reading Chopin's short stories as solutions to Edna's dichotomous sense of self suggests the potentially restorative benefits of intermittent desynchronization and resynchronization with the world, experiences in which the everyday becomes limned by the indeterminacy of evolutionary time, and mere endurance is transformed into what Bergson would call duration.

In the final chapter, “‘That note in music heard not with the ears’: Ragged Time in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*,” what Bergson critiques as the spatialization and

linearization of time has far more insidious consequences: Johnson exposes how territorializing time as a kind of space becomes a means for white citizens to reinscribe the concept of whiteness and eject nonwhite citizens from “the” national present. In this context, Johnson’s generically experimental, “autobiographical” novel asserts a musical, and by extension temporal, analog to what he calls the “double audience,” an application of W. E. B. Du Bois’s “double consciousness” to the specific challenges of black authors in the first decade of the twentieth century. Johnson imports the aural and chronopolitical possibilities of ragtime and jazz—specifically syncopation, “the break,” and repetition—structurally, rhythmically, and thematically into *The Autobiography* to navigate the problem of the double audience, and, more importantly, to combat the rampant appropriation of black music and cultural history by white songwriters. These rhythmic strategies provide a way for Johnson to represent embodied, and specifically racialized, experiences of time that have been blanketed over by white supremacist narratives of America’s political and cultural history. As Bruce Barnhart points out, the experience of European classical music is epitomized by what Theodor Adorno describes as sublimation: the subordination of material and temporal conditions of embodiment to an abstract, timeless appreciation of the symphony’s perfect unity. Johnson aims to create a record of African American music that protects its place in American music history while managing to convey what is “not susceptible to fixation”—that is, not reducible to Euro-American musical notation nor, indeed, to Euro-American conceptualizations of time more broadly (“Race Prejudice” 754). Mapping the decidedly antiheroic narrator’s movements between whiteness and blackness onto his movements between European classical music and ragtime, Johnson represents how Jim Crow constructions of race during the nadir of race relations in the U.S. were reinforced by racist constructions of time. This chapter encompasses many of the temporal issues taken up in the first three, but Johnson’s novel will emphasize the

limitations of literary attempts to reconcile socially distinct perceptual realities, marking the transition out of realism.

1. The *Times* report concludes: “When the reader of THE TIMES consults his paper at 8 o’clock this morning at his breakfast table it will be 9 o’clock in St. John, New Brunswick, 7 o’clock in Chicago, or rather in St. Louis—for Chicago authorities have refused to adopt the standard time, perhaps because the Chicago meridian was not selected as the one on which all time must be based—6 o’clock in Denver, Col. and 5 o’clock in San Francisco. That is the whole story in a nut-shell.”

2. Michael O’Malley explains that early nineteenth-century chronometry necessitated a shift from “apparent time”—time measured by the sun’s apparent position, which varies throughout the year due to earth’s elliptical orbit—and “mean time,” an average of the sun’s apparent position (3). Put more simply, the clock aimed for more consistency than could be asked of the sun in the sky. “At its extremes,” O’Malley notes, “an ordinary clock” on mean time “read up to sixteen minutes fast or fifteen minutes of the sundial four times a year” (3-4).

3. Paul Ricœur distinguishes between “tales of time” and “tales about time,” contending that all narratives are tales of time, “inasmuch as the structural transformations that affect the situations and characters take time” (101). For narratives about time, on the other hand, the experience of time itself is what is “at stake” (101). Yet quite tellingly, Ricœur often struggles to sustain this distinction throughout *Time and Narrative*. Critiquing Ricœur’s dichotomy from a poststructuralist perspective, Mark Currie argues that “the novel which disguises its textuality is no less textual than the novel which declares it,” and “language which denies that it is language is no less linguistic for it”; thus if we presume that a novel is not about time, we are tacitly “accepting the way that conventional narrative temporality has embedded a certain view of time in our universe” (4).

4. For studies of diverse cultural understandings and practices of time around the world, see Robert Levine’s *A Geography of Time: The Temporal Misadventures of a Social Psychologist, or How Every Culture Keeps Time Just a Little Bit Differently* (1997) and Jay Griffiths’s marvelous *A Sideways Look at Time* (1999).

5. Sherman traces the etymology of “count” to the Old English *tellan*, “to narrate,” which “is cognate with Middle Low German *tellan*, to count, reckon,” with an emphasis on chronology in both (*ix*; *x*). His book aims to emphasize that because time itself is such an elusive concept, it is “peculiarly susceptible of cultural construction,” and clocks in particular embody and reflect cultural constructions of time across history; “by its look and sound, its

modes of motion and of definition, its placement and its purpose,” the clock expresses its culture’s “way of conceiving time, using it, inhabiting it” (x).

6. Kaplan describes these two approaches as either formal or historical in their focus: the first approach aimed to identify realism’s distinguishing formal qualities yet ignored “the social context embedded in those forms,” while the second over-privileged historical periodization and reduced literary works to their degree of “mimetic accuracy,” thus quarantining literature entirely from “the arena of social history” (4-5). She lists Donald Pizer, Harold Kolb, and Charles Walcott as proponents of the former, noting their attention to “the formal characteristics, the recurring imagery, and the philosophical dimensions” as the distinguishing features of realism (5). Warner Berthoff’s *The Ferment of Realism* and Jay Martin’s *Harvests of Change* epitomize the latter in that both focus on how literature between the Civil War and World War II responds to industrialization, urbanization, the rise of capitalism, and the like, but ultimately find these texts “lacking in organic form and narrative unity” (5). Their critiques of realism, as Kaplan argues, recapitulate the rigid divide between “social context and literary form” that she aims to bridge (5).

7. In the first chapter, I frame habit and habitus primarily through William James and John Dewey. I use habit to designate an individual’s personal means of bodily know-how—e.g., how one walks, smiles, or plays the piccolo—and habitus to refer to sets of habits, or “body techniques,” in Marcel Mauss’s words, that are shared by a particular social group.

8. Stephen Kern also points out that the influential invention of the modern electric clock in 1916 introduced a second hand, which circled continuously and in a more fluid motion than the intermittently ticking minute and hour hands of earlier clocks. Before this, he notes, “clocks could offer no model for time as a flux” (20).

9. As one American traveler mused in the 1840s, “‘in Kentucky, in Illinois, in Missouri, and here in every dell in Arkansas,’ and even ‘in cabins where there was not a chair to sit on, there was sure to be a Connecticut clock’” (qtd. in O’Malley 32).

10. Beard first coined the term neurasthenia in *A Practical Treatise on Nervous Exhaustion (Neurasthenia): Its Symptoms, Nature, Sequences, Treatment* (1880).

11. In *The Descent of Love* (1996), Bert Bender notes that most discussions of Darwin’s influence in the U.S. fixate exclusively on the *Origin of Species*, though *The Descent of Man* and *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* were far more influential on the American literary scene (7). He points out that of William James’s

references to Darwin's work in *Principles of Psychology*, seven are to *The Descent of Man* and eight to *The Expression of the Emotions*, while there are only four to *Origin of Species* (7).

12. Myers explains that the phenomenology of time was deeply connected to consciousness for James insofar as he repeatedly asserted a "felt continuity" to consciousness: "If time is not continuous," in James's view, "then neither is consciousness" (150). Yet James's accounts of time and consciousness were inconsistent, and late in his career he tended to neglect the feeling of time in his discussion of consciousness. Myers discusses the pertinent gaps and conflicts in James's corpus in the chapters "Consciousness" (54-80) and "Time" (150-154).

13. Carl Georg Lange was a Danish physician who at around the same time had developed a similar account of emotions independently of James.

14. Framing the role of emotions as capacities in a post-Darwinian evolutionary context, James argues, "The neural machinery" of the human organism "is but a hyphen between determinate arrangements of matter outside the body and determinate impulses to inhibition or discharge within its organs" (190).

15. Myers points to numerous expressions that speak to James's insistence upon time as sensed: "sense of time," "sensation of duration," "intuition of duration," and "feeling of time," for example (147).

16. Brian Massumi and Lawrence Grossberg have argued adamantly for the absolute distinction between affect and emotion, which they say operate on distinct levels, one linear and the other superlinear: affect, Massumi argues, is pre-cognized, indeterminate "intensity," whereas emotion is "the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience . . . the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits"—in short, emotion is affect "owned and recognized," and thus reduced, "captured" (28). Understanding affect as an intensity that destabilizes "meaningful sequencing," or narration, is useful but often troublesome for literary scholars. Sianne Ngai points out that the insistence upon delineating between these phenomena "originated in psychoanalysis for the practical purpose of distinguishing third-person from first-person representations of feeling," and the revived efforts to theorize their differences likewise creates a "subjective/objective problematic" (25; 27). Ngai thus suggests more labile boundaries between affect and emotion, which resonates with James's fluid continuum between sensation and perception: a "switch from formal to modal difference," she contends, allows for "an analysis of the transitions from one pole to the other," or "the passages whereby affects acquire the semantic density and narrative complexity of emotions, and emotions conversely denature into affects" (27). Thinking of sensations and perceptions, and affects and emotions, along a continuum of experience

will be particularly useful for understanding the way Davis and Bierce distend short intervals of clock time to trace how characters process shock and crisis. Yet whereas Ngai uses the terms synonymously, I find Flatley's connotative distinction between the terms more useful in the context of realism, which is indeed interested in the relational and transformative.

17. Flatley's *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (2008) argues that particular writers at the turn of the twentieth century represent forms of melancholia that attune those afflicted to the social and historical roots of their moods, producing an "affective map," as Flatley calls it, which empowers them to transform their melancholia with "counter-moods" that restore their interest in the world (2).

18. Examples of such narratives of temporal acceleration in modernity can be found in Virilio's *Speed and Politics* (1977, English translation 1986), Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989), and Robert Hassan's *The Chronoscopic Society: Globalization, Time, and Knowledge in the Network Economy* (2003). For a persuasive critique of these "speed theories," see Sarah Sharma's *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics* (2014).

19. As in James's duration-blocks, time perception involves the integration of successive sensations or events "into a unit or perceptual *gestalt*": as an example, Wittmann explains that we do not hear the individual beats of a metronome, "but automatically form perceptual units, such as 1-2-3, 1-2-3, etc." (1959). And again, like James's duration-blocks, these processes of interval timing are limited to very short spans of time—intervals of at least a few hundred milliseconds and no longer than two or three seconds.

20. James's disputes with both monistic and dualistic idealism are asserted even more bluntly in his lecture, "Pragmatism and Common Sense" (1907): "We assume for certain purposes one 'objective' time that *aequaliter fluit*, but we don't livingly believe in or realize any such equally-flowing time"; indeed, "Cosmic space and cosmic time, so far from being the intuitions that Kant said they were, are constructions as patently artificial as any that science can show," and in day-to-day reality, the "majority of the human race never use these notions, but live in plural times and spaces, interpenetrant and DURCHEINANDER"—that is, confused (*Pragmatism* 123).

– Chapter One –

The Art of Habit in “Life in the Iron Mills”

“... segregated classes develop their own customs, which is to say their own working morals. . . . There is no common ground, no moral understanding, no agreed upon standard of appeal.”

—John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*

In her epigraph to “Life in the Iron Mills,” first published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1861, Rebecca Harding Davis borrows a stanza from Alfred Lord Tennyson’s *In Memoriam A. H. H.*, but takes the liberty of making a few modifications. We feel in the original the consistent meter and rhyme scheme of the Memoriam Stanza:

O life as futile, then, as frail!
O for thy voice to soothe and bless!
What hope of answer, or redress?
Behind the veil, behind the veil. (56.25-28)

In Davis’s version, on the other hand, the quatrain is reformed into a tercet: lifting the first line from another *In Memoriam* stanza but amputating two of its feet, she willfully unsettles the iambic tetrameter:

Is this the end?
O Life, as futile, then, as frail!
What hope of answer of [*sic*] redress? (11)

In this moment of what Dana Seitler has called “ungenre,” Davis “disregards foot, rhyme scheme, and the standardization of the four-line stanza” and “deconventionalizes the poem” (531). Swapping out the first line and omitting the fourth altogether, Davis creates a tercet that refuses the resolution of Tennyson’s ABBA rhyme scheme: compared to the Memoriam Stanza, Davis’s

epigraph thus feels conspicuously open ended. Seitler very compellingly reads this twist from conventionality as a “nodal moment in which aesthetic relations are in flux,” a sign of Davis’s search for a form better suited to express the social ills of the industrial age (528). But more specifically, by disrupting readers’ expectations of the meter, this epigraph gestures toward an aesthetic that exposes the unmetrical plurality of rhythms that had to be navigated in mid nineteenth-century American life.

Davis’s epigraph formally embodies what phenomenological psychiatrist Thomas Fuchs calls “desynchronization,” an experience of falling out-of-sync with intersubjective time amid which the feeling of time becomes the object of our attention (“Implicit and Explicit” 195). Endeavoring to better understand the importance of temporal experience to social life, Fuchs distinguishes between what he calls “implicit” and “explicit” time: “time as pre-reflectively lived vs. consciously experienced,” respectively (“Temporality and Psychopathology” 75). Beginning with the interaffectivity infants learn from their mothers,¹ “the microdynamics of everyday contact imply a habitual synchronization” that allows for the “basic feeling of being in accord with the time of the others,” of inhabiting “the same, intersubjective time” (“Melancholia” 181). Yet time becomes explicit when “a *disturbance or negation*, whether this be shock, surprise, pain, shame or loss . . . breaks through the habitual” (“Temporality and Psychopathology” 79; Fuchs’s emphasis). Davis’s disarrangement of Tennyson’s poetics produces for readers this very break through the habitual, making rhythm, and by extension time, explicit.

By desynchronizing her epigraph from the meter of one of the most widely read and frequently recited Romantic lyrics among British and American middle-class readers alike, Davis begins to point us to an important connection between “habitual synchronization” and literary form. Though “Life in the Iron Mills” precedes the other works in my archive by several decades,

it offers a useful starting point for my project because of its concern with the emergent tension between the rationalization of clock time and experiences of both acute and chronic desynchronization—literally embodied, as we will see, by the illegible figure of the korl woman. This chapter argues that Davis magnifies the rift between working- and middle-class habitus to problematize the way new technologies and systems of time discipline have helped create and maintain class divisions. Reproducing the problem of desynchronization and habit disruption at the level of its own narrative form, Davis’s “Life in the Iron Mills” aims to represent, break, and reform readers’ social habits of perception, including not only those embedded in and reinscribed by romantic and sentimental literary modes, but the middle class’s enculturated ways of ‘reading,’ broadly conceived.

Socioeconomic Habitus, from the Drawing Room to the Factory

“To present a coherent view of a society as a whole,” Amy Kaplan argues, “realists draw boundaries and explore their limits,” especially boundaries between social classes (11). She characterizes the impetus for William Dean Howells’s fiction not as social injustice itself, but rather the fear that socioeconomic divisions were creating distinct and irreconcilable realities, which posed “a problem of social cognition, of knowing others” (20). The crucial work of realism in his view was to reveal the essential human experience beneath the “competing and seemingly mutually exclusive realities” perceived by distinct social classes (11). Kaplan frames Howells’s fiction as an attempt to construct the “common,” which he defined in several conflicting ways: 1). the lower or working class; 2). people’s shared experience (i.e. the so-called “human condition”); or 3). the quotidian (21). If the first two meanings of “the common” are in tension with one another because the reality of the working class does not map neatly onto that of middle-class readers,

Howells hoped that the everyday or the commonplace could offer a means of synthesis. “Realism thus has a utopian impulse,” Kaplan explains; it aims to “dissolv[e] the threats of otherness—whether from individual strangers or organized classes—into the common denominator of the ordinary” (25). Notwithstanding the democratic appeals of Howellsian realism, it is motivated by an essentially conservative social vision—by the fear of instability, divisiveness, and social revolution haunting the periphery of middle-class life.

While Kaplan is interested in the synthetic work of realism—by which I mean its impulse to synthesize and find common ground between disparate social realities—I want to highlight the synchronic dynamics of what Sharon Harris calls Davis’s “metarealist” aesthetic: a concern with synchronous but divisive inhabitations of time in daily life.² Davis had grown up in Wheeling, a burgeoning mill town and the indisputable model for the novella’s unnamed “town of iron-works,” and like the “Life” narrator, she could look out from the Harding house at the workers streaming to and from the mills (Olsen 69). Against the synchronicity that increasingly precise chronometry and social institutions both promised and rendered necessary, we find in Davis’s lurid portrayal of Wheeling’s iron mills not only an alien spatial environment for many middle-class readers, but an alien temporal environment that is disconcertingly coeval with their own.

Of particular relevance to my reading of “Life in the Iron Mills” is the way clock time by midcentury had become a source of oppressive power for mill overseers seeking to discipline workers and eke out maximal labor. E. P. Thompson’s well-known work on factory time documents the transition from “task orientation,” in which “the working-day lengthens or contracts according to the task – and there is no great sense of conflict between labour and ‘passing the time of day,’” to “time discipline,” marked “by the division of labour; the supervision of labour; fines; bells and clocks; money incentives; preachings and schoolings; the suppression of fairs and

sports,” all of which systematically compelled workers to internalize the bedrock of industrial capitalism: time is money (61). “*Defining time*,” as Michael O’Malley explains, “gave owners an edge over their employees”: factory owners quickly realized they could very easily manipulate the factory bells “to wring an extra half hour’s work out of employees who had no reliable way of measuring time themselves,” and employees thus “began feeling the lack of a reliable standard of time” (39).³ It was obvious to workers that “the mill owners were cheating,” O’Malley explains, “hiding behind impressive-looking clocks while they tampered with time for their own advantage” (40). Factory owners’ control of time thus gave them the power to impose new forms of time discipline. Workers had to synchronize their labor with the clock, while growing suspicious that “*the time*” it told did not correspond to some fixed reality, but was rather a disciplinary tool being manipulated at their expense.

This chapter centers on the way new forms of time consciousness and discipline in the industrial age necessitated the formation of new habits, in both a physiological and social sense, which helped workers adapt to and cope (albeit tenuously) with the physical and psychological pain of more stringently clocked labor. Thompson notably invokes the sociocultural influence of habit in articulating his central question about time discipline: if industrialization involved “a severe restructuring of working habits,” to what extent does this transform “the inward notation of time?” (57). He concludes that as a result of industrial time systems enforced by the division and supervision of labor, factory bells, clocks, and the like, “new labour habits were formed, and a new time-discipline was imposed,” which speaks to the way time measurements from without become internalized as self-discipline, which we embody and act on, as discussed in the introduction (90). While many thinkers since Descartes have disparaged habit as a function of the ‘lower,’ mechanical body, distinguishing it, as Pierre Bourdieu does, from acquired cultural habitus,

philosophers such as William James, John Dewey, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty frame habit as a crucial, adaptive, and empowering way we engage with and know the world through the body. Whereas breathing, digesting, and the like are involuntary functions, Dewey explains, habits are acquired, involving “skill of sensory and motor organs, cunning or craft, and objective materials” (*Human Nature* 17). They are also conditioned by and for social contexts, formed through an individual’s development and interactions in various environments. Dewey repeatedly describes habit as an art, yet he also asserts the crucial distinction “between routine, unintelligent habit, and intelligent habit or art” (72), a distinction which will be helpful in understanding Davis’s complex negotiation with the various uses, limitations, and possibilities of individual and social habits.

In this chapter, I am interested in the way Davis directs our attention to the roles of not only habit but shared “habitus,” conceptualized most famously by Bourdieu and Marcel Mauss to designate culturally conditioned forms of bodily know-how that allow for more purposeful thought and action in one’s environment. In his effort to parse the history of the concepts, habit and habitus, Nicholas Crossley notes that Bourdieu and Mauss were anxious to differentiate habitus from habit, understanding the latter to be utterly mechanistic bodily reflexes: habitus, for Bourdieu, “captures the skilled activity of the expert player rather than the conditioned response of the lab rat” (139).⁴ Yet James, Dewey, and Merleau-Ponty made less of a distinction between idiosyncratic personal habits (say, whistling in the shower), and social habits (wine tasters “savoring” their sips, for instance), because they understand that even personal habits are necessarily formed by and for social interaction. To highlight the important connections between social groups’ habits and structures of feeling in this chapter, I work from Crossley’s loose heuristic distinction: habit will be used to designate an individual’s relatively personal means of bodily know-how (e.g. Hugh

Wolfe's habit of sculpting figures out of korl), whereas habitus will refer to sets of habits that are shared by a particular social group (140).

Because both habit and habitus are embodied and social, and entail interactions between individuals and their environments, they provide a fruitful source of insight into the connections between time perception and affect. As a social group's shared "body techniques," in Mauss's words, habitus encompass and express what Raymond Williams calls "structures of feeling." Whether they relate to "manners, dress, [or] building," Williams argues, social changes "do not have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action" (131; 132). It is these "emergent or pre-emergent" but nevertheless palpable changes that Williams refers to as structures of feeling. He explains, "We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and relating continuity" (132). The term "structure" aims not for the rigidity of institutionalized ways of knowing, or even of ideology, but a social change that is underway, the yet inarticulable, undefinable effects of which are shared by a particular culture or subculture, though perhaps "taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating" (132).

While habits and habitus are indeed adaptive, they also entail how we internalize social and cultural norms physiologically—including industrial time discipline, for example—to facilitate our actions in day-to-day life. As Bourdieu argues in *The Logic of Practice*, habitus are "structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (53)—or, in Crossley's slightly less dizzying paraphrase, "The actor incorporates social structures as habitus and perpetuates them, by force of habit, in their practices" (141). In this sense, we can see why James

describes habit as society's "most precious conservative agent," operating like an "enormous fly-wheel"—a machine propelled by rotational energy, the inertia of which renders it resistant to changes in speed or direction (*Psychology* 143). Habit "alone is what keeps us all within the bounds of ordinance," James explains,

. . . and saves the children of fortune from the envious uprisings of the poor. It alone prevents the hardest and most repulsive walks of life from being deserted by those brought up to tread therein. It keeps the fisherman and the deck-hand at sea through the winter; it holds the miner in his darkness, and nails the countryman to his log-cabin and his lonely farm through all the months of snow . . . It keeps different social strata from mixing. (143)

For James, as for Dewey and Merleau-Ponty, habituation to even the most grueling or degrading circumstances is an absolute necessity, for life in such conditions would otherwise be unbearable. Indeed, as we will see in Davis's novella, habit is a safeguard against desynchronization, a risk encompassing the psychobiological dangers among workers subjected to brutal labor conditions. Yet habit and habitus in this sense are also impediments to social transformation. James's characterization of the sociological function of habit as a "conservative agent"—one that potentially "keeps different social strata from mixing"—is particularly poignant in the context of emerging factory time systems such as night shifts, which not only force workers to acclimate to chronic fatigue and the disruption of circadian rhythms, but moreover essentially remove them temporally from the diurnal quotidian life of the middle class.

Along these lines, this chapter will frame industrial time consciousness and its attendant impacts upon workers' habitus and structures of feeling as a phenomenon through which modern conceptualizations of time create and maintain class divisions. The novella exposes how distinct relationships to time develop along class lines, leading to socioeconomically divided habitus and

forms of synchronicity and, consequently, distinct aesthetic, ethical, and epistemological perspectives on ‘reality.’ Davis represents the emergence of divisive structures of feeling in two interrelated ways: first, by repeatedly reminding her middle-class readers of their own spatial, temporal, and ideological positionality as outsiders, and second by inserting middle-class readers into the text in the form of bourgeois men who struggle to interpret Hugh Wolfe’s kohl woman. This confrontation among disparate habitus reflects Dewey’s argument about habit’s role in social transformation: in Crossley’s paraphrase, “a degree of social mixing is inevitable,” and in such moments of confrontation “differences in collective habits will come to the fore, often leading to conflict”—leading, indeed, to the disjuncture from what Fuchs calls “implicit” time (154). While Davis’s opening pages reveal the destructive psychological and physiological effects of workers’ habituation to factory time, she intermittently highlights the potentialities sensed by inhabiting temporal modalities that reorient one to abstract, reified, socially oppressive temporal habitus. Jonathan Flatley asserts that when narratives disorient us from our assumptions about spatiotemporal relationships, “we may see that the logic of the world we live in is not compulsory. Things might work differently” (81). In what follows, I analyze the way Davis explores the potentially revelatory experience of temporal desynchronization and reattunement to one’s habitus—and what one’s habits enable or impede—while nevertheless reckoning with the grave importance of synchronization for one’s physiological and psychological wellbeing. By destabilizing readers’ habits of reading, particularly the passive sympathy encouraged by sentimental and romantic literature, Davis begins the process of literary resynchronization—the formation of new habits of perception and, more importantly, grounds for action.

Time Discipline in the Mills

Davis destabilizes the notion of some singular temporal ‘reality’; time in this novella is uneven and socially divisive, which is most severely felt by workers “on the clock.” In the opening pages of “Life in the Iron Mills,” readers are given an eerie glimpse into a world bereft of circadian rhythms, a “scene of hopeless discomfort” in which workers can only be thankful that their sleep-deprived “waking stupor” “smother[s] pain and hunger” (12). When Deborah, or “Deb,” pale and physically deformed from years filled with 12-hour days at the spools in a cotton factory, journeys to the mills to bring dinner for her beloved cousin Hugh Wolfe, the narrator attempts to illustrate the dire biological and psychological repercussions of factory labor, and of night shifts in particular.⁵ Using the metonymic language of “hands” and “watches,” the narrator critiques the mechanical, disembodied time systems to which workers have had to subordinate their own physiological rhythms and needs:

The hands of each mill are divided into watches that relieve each other as regularly as the sentinels of an army. By night and day the work goes on, the unsleeping engines groan and shriek, the fiery pools of metal boil and surge. Only for a day in the week, in half-courtesy to public censure, the fires are partially veiled; but as soon as the clock strikes midnight, the great furnaces break forth with renewed fury, the clamor begins with fresh, breathless vigor, the engines sob and shriek like ‘gods in pain.’ (19)

Clock-governed factory time—explicitly likened here to the stringent precision of military discipline—indiscriminately subordinates “unsleeping,” “breathless” machines and the bodies of workers alike to its rhythm. The hellish world painted in this passage is thus strangely rationalized and metered by a system of time that is indifferent to circadian or homeostatic rhythms. The workers are reduced to lives of “incessant labor, sleeping in kennel-like rooms, eating rank pork

and molasses”—lives punctuated exclusively by the unappeasable pangs of hunger and exhaustion (15).⁶ Yet the narrator goes on to distinguish the personified river, which “knows that beyond there waits for it odorous sunlight,” from the mill worker whose prospects are merely “[t]o be stowed away, after his grimy work is done, in a hole in the muddy graveyard” (13).

From the start, the narrator therefore portrays a world confined to what Max Weber describes as the modern capitalist economy: an “immense cosmos into which the individual is born, and which presents itself to him, at least as an individual, as an unalterable order of things in which he must live” (54). And in this apparently immutable world, “Labour must . . . be performed as if it were an absolute end in itself, a calling” (62). The spatiotemporal confines of the iron mill worker’s life as portrayed here—the ceaselessly repetitive rhythms of the watches, the smoke hanging heavily upon the streets and obscuring the horizon, and the like—delimit the affective possibilities of the working-class habitus: there is no hope without an awareness of alternative possibilities or potential change. And in the first of many metafictional injunctions to the reader, the narrator asks, “Can you see how foggy the day is?” (13), implying not only the literal smoke in the atmosphere but, moreover, the beclouded horizon of expectation toward which workers direct their physical and emotional lives.⁷

The wearying pace of the novella’s opening pages can thus be read as a way to make palpable the workers’ temporal habitus and its affective impacts. As we are introduced to the world of the mills, we see smoke “roll[ing] sullenly in slow folds,” a “long train of mules, dragging masses of pig-iron,” a river that “drags itself sluggishly along . . . slavishly bearing its burden day after day,” all of which is likened to “the slow stream of human life creeping past, night and morning, to the great mills” (12). Davis’s struggling syntax, superfluous commas, and repetition throughout the opening pages work to encumber and frustrate the reader’s progress. The

environment painted in these first few pages, like the narrative itself, is weighed down by the sense of temporal protraction that Fuchs connects to acute attention to time itself. The sense of temporal heaviness is poignantly visceral. Fuchs notes that the relationship between implicit and explicit time is intricately connected to what is known in phenomenology as the ‘lived’ body, “the body functioning in the tacit mode, as the medium of everyday performance,” and the ‘corporal’ body, or the body as “the object of attention, for example, when it puts up resistance to our purposes, or is used as an instrument deliberately” (“Implicit and Explicit” 195-96). He goes as far as to say that “implicit temporality and tacit performance of the body are nearly synonymous: Lived time may be regarded as a function of the lived body, opened up by its potentiality and capability” (196). Through her narrative pacing, Davis relates the sense of disjuncture from implicit time to an oppressive attention to time’s heavy, sluggish passage, which serves not merely to represent the time consciousness of workers in the mills, but to make time explicit for—*felt* by—her middle-class readers.

Analyzing the film *Double Indemnity* in *Ugly Feelings* (2005), Sianne Ngai discusses a tactic she describes as “narrative expansion or stretch,” which is achieved when “‘discourse time’ becomes considerably longer than ‘story time’” (13). She characterizes this as an “anticathartic device” that exacerbates the sense of impotency or thwarted agency responsible for the kinds of ugly feelings (e.g. irritation or anxiety) that she treats in her book (13-14). Davis seems to be producing such anticathartic effects for readers, a tactic for which she offers no apology. Just as readers might feel inclined to carp about the dragging rhythm of the opening few pages, the narrator warns that the upcoming narrative will offer no reprieve: “You may think it a tiresome story enough,” she derides, “as foggy as the day, sharpened by no sudden flashes of pain or pleasure. – I know: only the outline of a dull life, that long since, with thousands of dull lives like

its own, was vainly lived and lost” (13). Through the narrator’s disclaimer, Davis is quite barefaced in explaining that her goal is not to entertain or amuse her readers but to expose them to a particular socioeconomic reality and habitus with its own attendant temporal and affective limitations and possibilities. “Stop a moment,” the narrator then demands, explaining, “I want you to hide your disgust, take no heed of your clean clothes, and come right down here with me,— here, into the thickest of the fog and mud and foul effluvia. I want you to hear this story. There is a secret down here, in this nightmare fog, that has lain dumb for centuries: I want to make it a real thing to you” (13-14). If readers have been feeling impatient with the slow pacing of the first two pages, the narrator’s command that they “[s]top” and “hide [their] disgust” suggests that discomfort and frustration are a necessary part of Davis’s realist aesthetic, and of the cultural work she aims to do. The triggering of self-awareness is integral: by explicating the impatience readers perhaps feel implicitly, the narrator forces them to reflect on how their ‘habits’—their clean clothes along with their socioeconomic habitus—have prefigured their temporal expectations of this story.

The way the narrator uses verb tense to manage her temporal relationship to readers is also an important factor in the reader’s discomfort. “As I stand here, idly tapping the window-pane, and looking out through the rain at the dirty back-yard and the coal-boats below, fragments of an old story float up before me,—a story of this old house into which I happened to come to-day,” the narrator writes, in a distinctive effort to underscore her spatiotemporal presence as she speaks to a reader who is elsewhere but coeval with this unfamiliar social reality (13). As Richard A. Hood argues, the way the narrative frame is “coterminous with the reader’s world” but spatially removed from it “tends to emphasize the enormous epistemological distance between the reader and Hugh” (75-6).⁸ Though the narrator is telling an old story (Wolfe has long been dead, and Deb has long been absorbing the virtues of ‘Christian patience’ somewhere in the distant hills), she

emphasizes her presence in the mill town by detailing its materiality: her physical stance, her idle tapping of the window, the surfacing of her memory, along with the falling rain, the passing coal ships she perceives through her window, all of which positions the narrator as more of a documentarian than an artful storyteller. It is the sense of conflicting realities achieved through this framing—the reader’s sudden awareness that he or she inhabits time differently, albeit simultaneously in history, than others—that helps highlight the “epistemological distance” between the 1860s middle-class reader’s habitus and Wolfe’s. As this narrative makes increasingly clear, social divides create affectively differential experiences of time which neither clock nor calendar can unify.

The story demands further self-awareness from readers by suggesting their identification with a group of middle-class visitors to the mill: the mill overseer, the owner’s son, a reporter, a doctor, and a gentleman named Mitchell. Like Davis’s readers, these visitors are intruding upon an unfamiliar spatiotemporal world. After we overhear their abstract, disembodied discussion of the mill operations, the narrative pivots to reconfigure the mill from the perspective of Mitchell, who “survey[s] critically the half-clothed figures of the puddlers, and the slow swing of their brawny muscles”—a line which again links distinct social positionalities to disparate perceptions of time, echoing the aforementioned accusation to readers (“You may think it a tiresome story enough”) (28-29). Mitchell is characterized as a man with an “anatomical eye” who, “sucked the essence out of a science or philosophy in an indifferent, gentlemanly way,” representing a class of men who “are not rare in the States” (29).⁹ The mill is so unfamiliar to Mitchell that he can only understand it as fiction. He romanticizes the horror of the scene, shamelessly declaring, “I like this view of the works better than when the glare was fiercest”—“works” presumably referring to the various views of machinery and exhausted workers sleeping on ash heaps—for he thinks the

darkening shadows “and the ampitheatre of smothered fires are ghostly, unreal,” leading him to “fancy these red smouldering lights to be the half-shut eyes of wild beasts, and the spectral figures their victims in the den” (31). This scene of gritty reality offers Mitchell the thrilling pleasure of a Poe story. He fictionalizes not only the social space itself but the workers: these emaciated, sun- and-sleep-deprived people are transformed into “spectral figures,” ejected from the space and time of the living altogether.

Mitchell’s Gothic romanticization of the reality before him speaks to the way literature had preconditioned the middle-class perception of the working poor. That Mitchell’s experience of a social reality is filtered through literary models highlights how literary forms, like habits, are at once adaptive and conservative: like the reading practices they help teach, they function in Bourdieu’s terms as “structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures.” Tillie Olsen notes that before “Life in the Iron Mills,” very few authors were interested in portraying the real working-class world of mills and factories, and if “industry was considered at all” in literature, “it was as an invasion of pastoral harmony, a threat of materialism to the *spirit*” (88), something like what Leo Marx calls the “machine in the garden” trope. The actual workers were even less visible as living, breathing citizens in these texts. Olsen explains, “If working people existed—and nowhere were they material for serious attention, let alone central subject—they were ‘clean-haired Yankee mill girls,’ ‘mind[s] among the spindles,’ or Whitman’s ‘workwomen and workmen of these States / having your own divine and strong life’” (88). The metafictional techniques of Davis’s novella distinguish her aesthetic intervention not only for her unflinching choice of subject matter, but for the way her narrator repeatedly demands the audience’s self-reflection: Davis continually attunes her readers to the way their habitus has shaped their perception as readers. Yet her attention to the conflict between socioeconomically distinct habitus and attendant ways of

seeing by no means undermines the tremendous value of habits: rather, it impresses readers with the exigency of recognizing, breaking, and reforming problematic, and in many cases prejudicial, habits of perception.

Reading the Korl Woman

In his “off-hours from the furnace,” the narrator explains, Hugh Wolfe “had a habit” of sculpting human figures from korl, the porous, flesh-colored industrial waste from the processing of pig metal (24).¹⁰ Wolfe’s craft is further described as “a curious fancy in the man, almost a passion,” which occupied “[t]he few hours for rest” he had each day “until his watch came again”—the temporal refuse analogous to the material scraps he used for his craft (24). But although Wolfe would spend months on a single figure, “hewing and hacking with his blunt knife,” he would ultimately destroy each finished work “in a fit of disappointment” (25). Wolfe’s sculptures seem to constitute what Dewey distinguishes as artful habit: though self-taught, Wolfe has actively refined his craft over the years by repurposing the materials available to him.¹¹ And yet habits are “social functions,” as Dewey emphasizes: they serve to facilitate the cooperation of the organism and its environment (*Human Nature* 17). Thus when an individual develops or refines a habit, such as Wolfe’s creation of these “curious” but “strangely beautiful” korl sculptures (24), it necessarily “sets up reactions in the surroundings”: “Others approve, disapprove, protest, encourage, share and resist” (19). As we see in this section, Wolfe’s idiosyncratic habit alienates him not only from his fellow workers, who felt he was “[n]ot one of themselves,” although “outwardly as filthy and ash-covered,” but also from the middle-class men who misread his sculpture and, by extension, the habitus and inarticulable structure of feeling to which it is giving nascent form (24).

By thinking of Wolfe's sculptures as the expression of an emergent structure of feeling, which Wolfe perhaps believes "to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating," we can better understand why he repeatedly destroys his own art. Whereas the narrator, limited to language and narrative, claims she "can paint nothing" of the "reality of soul-starvation, of living death" in this town, promising only "the outside outlines of a night," Wolfe's korl sculptures demonstrate the point Williams makes about structures of feeling, which can "exert palpable pressures" and delimit a social group's field of action well before they are articulated or classified. On the night featured in this story, Wolfe has sculpted "a woman, white, of giant proportions, crouching on the ground, her arms flung out in some wild gesture of warning" (31). "There was not one line of beauty or grace in it," the narrator adds, "a nude woman's form, muscular, grown coarse with labor, the powerful limbs instinct with some one poignant longing," expressed though "the tense, rigid muscles, the clutching hands, the wild, eager face, like that of a starving wolf's" (32). The description of the sculpture centers on the physical and affective aspects of the woman's habit: the figure's posture, gestures, musculature, and bearing toward the world. The few attempts made at asserting what she feels and represents—"some wild gesture"; "some one poignant longing"; an expression "like that of a starving wolf's"—are cast in explicitly ambiguous terms. The narrator, too, is groping for a means of expression.

While the narrator instructively refrains from a premature attempt to name or classify what exactly the figure represents, she does make it clear that it is bound up with a working-class time consciousness. "I want you to come down and look at this Wolfe," the narrator explains in an effort to help the readers perceive this figure properly: "I want you to look back, as he does every day, at his birth in vice, his starved infancy; to remember the heavy years he has groped through as boy and man,—the slow, heavy years of constant, hot work. So long ago he began, that he thinks

sometimes he has worked there for ages. There is no hope that it will ever end” (25). The korl woman’s embodiment of psychobiological breakdown and abjection—qualities of the life to which workers have been habituated—emphasizes the extreme risks posed for those subordinated to alienating temporal systems such as night shifts, which as we have seen disrupt workers’ circadian and social rhythms. The figure moreover gives corporeal shape to the impacts of chronic desynchronization on one’s habit in both a behavioral and physiological sense. Crossley explains that “body techniques may reflect psychological ‘facts’. They may, for example, embody a mood (e.g. when we walk aggressively) or purpose (e.g. walking quietly to avoid making a noise)” (140). That the korl woman’s limbs harbor her longing and her groping arms and clutching hands corporealize a more existential hunger highlight Davis’s keen attention to the psychobiological impacts of factory time.

Yet the narrator’s impulse to contextualize the figure by reminding readers of Wolfe’s distinctly working-class time consciousness begins to set up the problem of conflicting habits of perception and interpretation. The most illuminating moment in the novella with respect to Davis’s trailblazing aesthetics is when the overseer, the mill-owner’s son, and a few other middle-class visitors to the mill attempt to read Wolfe’s sculpture. Kirby (the son of the mill owner) and Doctor May circle the korl woman like predators. The sculpture is “[n]ot badly done,” in Doctor May’s estimation, “A working-woman,—the very type of her class,” praise thus based in part on the mimetic accuracy of the work from an anatomical perspective, and in part on what he sees as its typological accuracy.¹² Yet while attempting to rationalize and scientize the figure—“Where did the fellow learn that sweep of the muscles in the arm and hand?” he asks in hyperbolized, clinical fashion—Doctor May ultimately “cannot catch the meaning” (32). He reads from his position as a doctor, interpreting the groping arm as “the peculiar action of a man dying of thirst” (32). When

asked what the figure is supposed to mean, Wolfe responds, “She be hungry,” which Doctor May insists is a “mistake,” for Wolfe has “given no sign of starvation to the body,” which “is strong—terribly strong,” and “has the mad, half-despairing gesture of drowning” (33). Wolfe struggles to offer clarification—“Not hungry for meat”—which Kirby misconstrues as literal thirst: “What then? Whiskey?” he jokes (33). The closest approximation Wolfe can offer is that the figure is thirsting for “Summat to make her live,” drawing nothing but more “coarse laughter” from Kirby (33). Wolfe’s explanations do not satisfy the visitors because they can only understand hunger and thirst as pure biological drives, rather than a collective and affectively charged experience of chronic desynchronization and an oppressive sense of embodiment among those toiling in the mills. In contrast with Doctor May’s insistently disembodied, hyper-rational response to the figure, Mitchell reacts affectively. Upon first glimpsing the korl woman, “Mitchell started back,” the narrator notes, “half-frightened” by his encounter with the face of a figure in the dark (31). He “drew a long breath,” and in a telling reversal of his earlier fictionalization of the workers, he admits that he thought the sculpture “was alive” (31). Just as Wolfe cannot fully articulate the ‘meaning’ of the figure, the narrator does not classify Mitchell’s affective experience: we know only that the sculpture “touched him strangely,” which is to suggest he finds the effect of the figure and her expression inarticulable or undefinable (32).

Davis stages a confrontation between distinct socioeconomic habitus and the conflictual structures of feeling therein, amid which we see divergent aesthetic, ethical, and epistemological readings of a single figure and its context. Habits “undergird the classifications that we make, our tastes, moral and aesthetic sensibilities, intellectual operations, perceptions and actions” (Crossley 150). Indeed, the implications of these outsiders’ various (mis)readings of Wolfe’s art extend beyond aesthetics to the sense of their social roles and ethical responsibilities, or lack thereof.

Kirby has plenty of sympathy for his father's mill 'hands,' with "[s]o many nerves to sting them to pain," asking at one point, "What if God had put your brain, with all its agony of touch, into your fingers, and bid you work and strike with that?" (34). Yet we see how worthless pity is when he immediately admits that he does "not think at all" about what might be done about any of it, and instead washes his hands "of all social problems,—slavery, caste, white or black," because his "duty to [his] operatives has a narrow limit,—the pay-hour on Saturday night" (35). "Drift with the stream" is Doctor May's sarcastic paraphrase of the young Kirby's philosophy, "because you cannot dive deep enough to find bottom" (35). Mitchell, the most cynical of the lot, argues, "Reform is born of need, not pity," explaining that throughout history, the impetus for change has worked upward from "the heaving, cloggy mass," rather than from the pitying 'top'—the middle or upper classes—downward: a slightly different take on the matter, but one which likewise unburdens these men of any social responsibility (39). The passivity in these perspectives belies these men's position in and implicit assumptions about time, an important aspect of their socioeconomic habitus: they all "[d]rift with the stream" in one way or another, a metaphor which recalls the narrator's earlier point about the river that "knows that beyond there waits for it odorous sunlight" and "air, and fields, and mountains." In Fuchs's terms, drifting with the stream is inhabiting implicit time, and in this context, the metaphor also expresses a shared habit of patience and trust in time itself to remedy social ills. Yet the workers are confined to the "stagnant and slimy" segment of the river: with their futures beclouded by tawny fog and their faces habitually "bent to the ground," they occupy time explicitly and cannot enjoy the privilege of patience and hope.

In this brief but remarkably insightful scene, Davis magnifies the way socialization in distinct socioeconomic classes leads to distinct physiological bearings and affective orientations

toward the world. As the embodiment of a working-class habitus and emerging structure of feeling, the korl woman's "powerful limbs instinct with some one poignant longing" constitute a physical way of knowing the world through the body, much as Doctor May's hawkish circling of the figure to take in every anatomical angle constitutes his habit of perception and knowledge. In the context of Davis's novella, the visitors and the workers, with their distinct "body techniques," inhabit and refer to distinct sociotemporal realities, which constitutes the ontological and epistemological threat that Howells would seek to mitigate in his realism. Next I turn to the impact of this encounter on Hugh Wolfe, for whom this was more an experience of being seen and read than seeing and reading others.

Desynchronization and Illumination

In the events that follow Wolfe's confused conversation with the bourgeoisie, Davis underscores the precarious possibilities of what Fuchs framed earlier as a disturbance that ruptures the habitual, leading to a more explicit sense of desynchronization and onerous embodiment. Wolfe's realization of how he inhabits time is notably intensified by the way the visitors inadvertently objectify him as they attempt to read his sculpture. Wolfe's exacerbated sense of abjection is attributed in particular to the experience of being seen by Mitchell, "a Man all-knowing, all-seeing," whose "keen glance" falls "like a sceptre on other men" (40). Before his departure, Mitchell, leaning "indolently" against a wall and sneering at the mills, had noted its "thick, unclean odor"—"The slightest motion of his hand marked that he perceived it, and his insufferable disgust" (38). Now, in the aftermath of this encounter, Wolfe "looked at himself with sudden loathing, sick, wrung his hands with a cry, and then was silent," thus recasting the earlier description of Mitchell's gaze from the vantage point of the seen (40). Caught between his perspective as subject and object

vis-à-vis Mitchell, whom he idolizes as the paradigm of that “mysterious class that shone down on him perpetually with the glamour of another order of being,” Wolfe is disoriented from his habitual way of being in and apprehending the world (27). To frame the experience in Fuchs’s terms above, we see here the imbrication of explicit time and embodiment. Wolfe is made to feel his own body, and more broadly his habitus, as “the object of attention”—as a burden and obstacle to his future-directed aspirations. Over the course of many years he had developed his ambitions “out of the knowledge of what he could do,” and “day by day made this hope a real thing to himself,—a clear, projected figure of himself, as he might become,” an orientation toward the future which involves “the lived body, opened up by its potentiality and capability,” as Fuchs put it. But other times Wolfe lost sight of this more pragmatic, “defined hope” in his “frantic anguish to escape,—only to escape,” and tonight, following this encounter with another class, “he panted for life” (40-41).

In the first of several transformative realizations, Wolfe learns that, in the simplest terms, money is what distinguishes him from a man like Mitchell; money constitutes the means to another set of possibilities and spatiotemporal realities (37-8). The narrator deems what follows “the crisis of [Wolfe’s] life” before pleading for readers’ empathy (26). Lauren Berlant describes crisis as a “heightening interpretive genre, rhetorically turning an ongoing condition into an intensified situation in which extensive threats to survival are said to dominate the reproduction of life” (7). This offers very useful insight for understanding the narrator’s explanation of Wolfe’s unfolding experience:

Do you remember rare moments when a sudden light flashed over yourself, your world, God? when you stood on a mountain-peak, seeing your life as it might have been, as it is? one quick instant, when custom lost its force and every-day usage? when your friend, wife, brother, stood in a new light? . . . So it came before him, his life, that night. The slow tides

of pain he had borne gathered themselves up and surged against his soul. His squalid daily life, the brutal coarseness eating into his brain, as the ashes into his skin: before, these things had been a dull aching into his consciousness; to-night, they were reality. He gripped the filthy red shirt that clung, stiff with soot, about him, and tore it savagely from his arm. The flesh beneath was muddy with grease and ashes,—and the heart beneath that! And the soul? God knows. (39-40)

Wolfe's chronic desynchronization—his long life of subjection to the repetitive, grueling, painful effects of factory time—constitutes the “ongoing condition,” in Berlant's terms, that comes to a head and is affectively “intensified” by this crisis. The shock of Wolfe's insight unfolds in the span of a “quick instant,” amid which he comes to recognize custom as just one of many possibilities: “reality,” in this passage, is glimpsed by suddenly recognizing the reified customs that delimit one's sense of the possible. This is moreover an experience that intensifies Wolfe's acute attention to his own oppressive embodiment, compelling him to rip the clothes straight from his body: he thus sheds his ‘habit’ in several senses here—recognizing perhaps the narrator's earlier assertion that he “was by habit only a coarse, vulgar laborer” (25)—and is temporarily freed to reexamine his life, and the habitual rhythms and affective orientations of his class, from multiple perceptual vantage points.

In such moments, Davis signals the potential of particular experiences of disrupted habit and desynchronization to illuminate alternative possibilities to naturalized industrial labor systems and forms of class oppression. Later that evening, Deb insists upon giving Wolfe some money she has stolen from Mitchell. Though “stunned with pain and weariness,” Wolfe has no intention of keeping the money until Deb argues, ““But it is hur right to keep it”” (44-45). This word—‘right’—

“struck him,” the narrator explains, subsequently tracing the protracted interval in which Wolfe struggles with his circumstances, sifting through several available perspectives:

He did not deceive himself. Theft! That was it. At first the word sickened him; then he grappled with it. Sitting there on a broken cart-wheel, the fading day, the noisy groups, the church-bells’ tolling passed before him like a panorama, while the sharp struggle went on within. The money! He took it out and looked at it. If he gave it back, what then? . . . Then he saw himself as he might be, strong, helpful, kindly. The night crept on, as this one image slowly evolved itself from the crowd of other thoughts and stood triumphant. He looked at it. As he might be! (45)

Wolfe’s thoughts circle around the concept of “theft” much as Doctor May had circled around the kohl woman, trying to “catch the meaning.” A carefully positioned semicolon links Wolfe’s initial shock to his reflective “grappl[ing]” process, intimating what James characterizes as the transition or threshold between sensation and perception, as discussed in the introductory chapter. Here we see the naturalized logic of the law dismantled into multiple and contradictory rationalizing discourses. While the mere word “theft” initially compels Wolfe’s socialized revulsion, he gradually comes to perceive money—“a little blotted slip of paper, nothing in itself”—and theft from different vantage points with distinct logics: “A thief! Well, what was it to be a thief?” he wonders, confronting “the question at last, face to face” (46; 47). He goes on to reason that “God made this money”—that God “never made the difference between poor and rich”—thereby coming to consider the social and legal censure of theft as just one reality from one particular perspective (47). This experience culminates in a shift in Wolfe’s orientation from one dominated by a perpetually thwarted, bedimmed hope to one charged with a more open-ended sense of prospect,

intuited through what the narrator continually articulates as his “artist-eye”: “If he took the money?” Wolfe repeatedly asks himself, as he envisions himself “as he might be” (46).

Wolfe’s experience unfolds in a seemingly distended modality of time—a night that “crept on” as his vision of life as he *might be* “slowly evolved itself from the crowd of other thoughts and stood triumphant” (46). In the midst of this protracted crisis, a new conditionality is born in which “reality” becomes more unstable and more dynamic, charged with vague but nevertheless thrilling possibilities. The quotidian social rhythms around Wolfe—the sun’s passage, the din of passers-by, the clock-time signified by the clangor of church-bells—take on a certain unreality; passing “like a panorama,” these ordinary activities recede into a kind of two-dimensional, static background, Wolfe’s attention directed instead toward “the sharp struggle . . . within.” This is of course a silent, private experience for Hugh; the passing churchgoers “saw only a sickly mill-boy watching them quietly at the alley’s mouth” (45). It is a scene that highlights the privacy of subjective time perception, and notably links the destabilization of a shared temporal reality to the potential rupture of the status quo. Davis’s narrator explains with what we can take to be a degree of characteristic irony, “I do not plead [Wolfe’s] cause. I only want to show you the mote in my brother’s eye: then you can see clearly to take it out” (46). Of course, she has repeatedly reminded her readers of the ‘mote’ in their own eyes, and thus the purpose is not to subordinate Wolfe’s quixotic dream to another reality—say, Kirby’s contentment to drift through the teleological river of time or Mitchell’s ‘bottom-up’ formula for social change—but rather to expose the problem of an irreducible plurality of realities produced by distinct positions in social space and time. Wolfe’s disjuncture from his habitus as an iron mill worker offers him new perspectives on a suddenly destabilized and dynamic cultural ‘reality,’ but what is most exemplary of the metarealist

aesthetics of Davis's fiction is the way the reader is forced to consider how her own spatiotemporal position likewise shapes her vantage point on Wolfe's crisis.

The Danger of Desynchronization

Whereas Henry David Thoreau's artist of Kouroo makes "no compromise with Time" as he whittles his staff (219), Wolfe's protracted night of deliberation does indeed come to an end, and the morning dawns before Wolfe has managed to develop a path for action. Indeed, an especially important distinction between Davis's fiction and romanticism or sentimentalism is that she takes seriously the psychobiological importance of habit, and with it implicit ("lived") time. While disruptions to habit can be revelatory, the novella does not underestimate the terror and disorientation of such crises, and of what Fuchs has described as intense desynchronization from social rhythms. "Habituation is part of human nature," Crossley explains: "It is a power to conserve structures of perception, communication and action which prove useful to us, thereby enhancing agency" (146). Wolfe's night of reflection feels like an unravelling of such "structures of perception": triggered by a new perspective on the meaning of 'right,' Wolfe's ingrained understanding of other words—e.g. money and theft, and the social structures and ethical codes they signify—likewise falls apart. Wolfe comes to believe he "*knew*—nothing," as the narrator relates: "There was nothing of which he was certain, except the mill and things there," the hard, palpable, material reality to which he had been restricted all his life (46). And without these habitual means of being and knowing—not least of all his personal habit of sculpting korl figures—he has no sense of agency.

Wolfe thus finds himself at an impasse, for while he cannot return to what he knew, he sees no way forward. Having glimpsed the possibility of life as a man "free to work, to live, to love,"

Wolfe can no longer perceive his current life—nor, indeed, his own body—without a newborn disgust (47). Upon realizing that it was his watch at the mill, he realizes that “[h]e need not go, need never go again,” and “shake[s] off the thought with unspeakable loathing,” turning his attention instead to his potential future with “a new eagerness . . . a new disgust, a new sense of sudden triumph, and, under all, a new, vague dread, unknown before, smothered down, kept under, but still there” (48). What we sense from this vertiginous catalogue of seemingly contradictory and temporally inflected affects is that Wolfe’s sudden disjuncture from the rhythms and feelings to which he had been habituated is a precarious experience: while it opens him up to other realities—momentarily enabling him to imagine a life “as he might be”—it simultaneously drives him further toward the psychobiological decay and abjection we see so viscerally embodied by the *korl* woman. Rita Felski has noted that while overdependence on habit can lead to a “complacent acceptance of the way things are,” thus maintaining “conservative ends,” as James had suggested in his likening of habit to a great fly-wheel, she echoes James’s and Dewey’s assertions of the underappreciated importance of habit to everyday life, and underscores the “profound disorientation and distress” one can feel with the disruption of such habits (*Doing Time* 91). This helps explain the dizzying shifts in Wolfe’s continuum of experience throughout the course of the night. He has seen beyond what Weber described earlier as the “immense cosmos” of the laboring class, but has no habitual recourse or means through which to actualize his potential existence beyond that cosmos.

Fuchs posits that in such cases of extreme desynchronization, a return to habitual life cannot occur without “a phase of disorientation and dying of the past” (“Melancholia” 182). Wolfe does proceed to wander through the night “from one to another of his old haunts, with a half-consciousness of bidding them farewell” (48). But his wandering is repeatedly described as aimless

and idle: he can no longer see his old habitus through his own eyes, but only through the eyes of Mitchell, and yet he simply doesn't know what to do or where to go. Wolfe has therefore entered a state of desynchronization from lived time in which prior "orientations, roles and attachments have become anachronistic," in Fuchs's words, but the crucial steps forward are "dammed back" (182). Wolfe's feelings and point of view are all that move as he sits "there on a broken cart-wheel." As James asserts, what is important is not the moment new habits are formed, but rather "the moment of their producing *motor effects*, that resolves and aspirations communicate the new 'set' to the brain" (*Principles* 128). He goes on to explain, "Every time a resolve or a fine glow of feeling evaporates without bearing practical fruit is worse than a chance lost; it works so as positively to hinder future resolutions and emotions from taking the normal path of discharge" (129). Throughout his night of crisis, Wolfe experiences the intermittent thrill of expectation amid which "the sun-touched smoke-clouds opened like a cleft ocean,—shifting, rolling seas of crimson mist, waves of billowy silver veined with blood-scarlet, inner depths unfathomable of glancing light"—language which expresses the invigorating, albeit vague and abstract, excitement of a future that has been habitually obscured for Wolfe (47). But these surges of hope evaporate before Wolfe acts on them, and thus before the necessary neurological pathways are forged in the process of new habit formation. Eventually "the night had come on foggy, damp; the golden mists had vanished, and the sky lay dull and ash-colored," leaving Wolfe to continue ambling through the streets "idly wondering what had become of the cloud-sea of crimson and scarlet" (49; 50).

Unable to overcome this sense of desynchronization—Wolfe realizes the anachronism of his old habits but is unable to develop new ones—Wolfe and the narrator alike confront the dawn with no way forward. Ultimately "[t]he trial-day of this man's life was over, and he had lost," and "What followed was mere drifting circumstance," a line which links Wolfe's lot with Kirby's

fatalistic “Drift with the stream” philosophy (50). After expounding the vague possibilities Wolfe is able to imagine by inhabiting such distended moments of disrupted habit, the narrator abruptly reveals that Wolfe has been tried and sentenced to 19 years in prison. “You wish me to make a tragic story out of it?” the narrator taunts; “Why, in the police-reports of the morning paper you can find a dozen such tragedies,” thus ironically trivializing her previously drawn out narrative by re-contextualizing it within an archive of other identical stories found in the daily newspaper (50). Middle-class readers are therefore exposed to their own potentially detached perspectives on the lives of the other half, embodied most unsettlingly by Doctor May’s callous account of Wolfe’s sentence. While leisurely perusing the paper, he remarks to his wife, “Here he is; just listen: — ‘Circuit Court, Judge Day. Hugh Wolfe, operative in Kirby & John’s London Mills. Charge, grand larceny. Sentence, nineteen years hard labor in penitentiary” (50). After a quick, conclusive appraisal from the doctor—“Scoundrel! Serves him right!”—“His wife said something about the ingratitude of that kind of people, and then they began to talk of something else” (50). The rushed, telegraphic emulation of such reports in the morning paper, juxtaposed with the more psychologically and physiologically grounded account of Wolfe’s crisis, rings conspicuously shallow, crude, disembodied, and dehumanized. Perhaps nowhere do we feel a more palpable rift between temporal habitus than we do here between the doctor’s reading of the flitting, flippant world of “the news” and our perspective on Wolfe’s impending 19 years of “hard labor,” which can be hardly more oppressive and monotonous than all his “countless cankering days” and “countless nights” at the mill (25).

As the novella nears its close, the narrator paints Wolfe’s continued, exacerbated disjuncture from his habituation to social time as increasingly clarifying and mystifying, simultaneously, allowing him to question what seemed like the unquestionable cosmos of the iron

mills but severing him more irrevocably from the means to know or act. Wolfe gazes out through his cell window and sees the market in preternaturally keen detail: he sees “golden melons,” the light that “flickered on the pheasant’s breast” and “the purplish blood dripping over the brown feathers,” at which point there comes “the sudden picture of what might have been, and now” (55). Wolfe’s earlier vision of life “[a]s he might be” has undergone a noteworthy syntactical change: having become “what might have been,” the conditionality of future-oriented hope is transformed into past conditionality—into regret for what did not actualize. The ultimate result of this chronic sense of desynchronization, as Fuchs has postulated, is melancholia, as “explicit time establishes a merciless rule; its passing by is noticed painfully, and the future of lived time seems closed forever” (“Implicit and Explicit” 196). He argues furthermore that the lost past for the depressive “can be expressed in a continuing *perfect tense* instead of the *preterite*”: as we clearly see for Wolfe, “the future subjunctive withdraws into the past and becomes past subjunctive, an empty possibility” (“Temporality” 98-99). Seitler also pays careful attention to the implications of verb tense in this moment, suggesting that “[t]he affective and grammatical mood of Hugh’s desire,” in both tenses, “is subjunctive,” which she reads as “the mood used to express various states of unreality,” or intimations of the possible (544). However, Wolfe’s attunement to such nascent but yet unrealizable alternative possibilities ultimately leads him to conclude, “It was all wrong; but let it be!” (56). It is only at this moment, “[w]hen Wolfe trades in the subjunctive mode for the simple present tense,” Seitler asserts, that he “ceases to live because living in the text is equated with one’s ability to inhabit the possible” (544). Unable to conceive of any recourse to act upon his sense of injustice, Wolfe “bare[s] his arms” and takes his life (59).

Aesthetic Anachronism: “a phase of disorientation and dying of the [literary] past”

As we saw in the novella’s epigraph, there is furthermore a sense of desynchronization and subsequent impasse at the level of Davis’s aesthetic form. Whenever Wolfe is reoriented affectively from the pain of his past to a more future-directed sense of excitement, the narration shifts from its coarse realism to a conspicuously lofty, romantic style, as in the sudden transformation of the beclouded sky into “waves of billowy silver veined with blood-scarlet.” Readers are not to be drawn in by these aesthetically and texturally opulent visions of the future, as Wolfe is. These are but dreamy, nebulous abstractions, which ultimately have no use for Wolfe because they have nothing to do with action: they produce no “motor effects,” as James puts it. Harris notes that “[f]or Davis, dreams are always to be observed with skepticism,” not only because they deceive one about “the realities of existence” and of “one’s potential,” but because they so often become an obstacle to real social reform (38).

Wolfe’s vision of the future is, in actuality, thus delimited by the romantic tropes of the literary past. In this sense, what Fuchs calls the “orientations, roles and attachments [that] have become anachronistic”—the aspects of the past which must die, so to speak, in the process of resynchronization—encompass not only Wolfe’s habituation to grueling labor conditions but, furthermore, the idealism of transcendental literature and philosophy through which the narrator represents his aspirations. It is important that amid Wolfe’s addled deliberation over the stolen money he wanders into a church “for the second time in his life” (48). “Wolfe forgot himself,” in this space, “forgot the new life he was going to live, the mean terror gnawing underneath,” so inspired was he by “[t]he distances, the shadows, the still, marble figures, the mass of silent kneeling worshippers, the mysterious music,” all of which “thrilled, lifted his soul with a wonderful pain” (49). Yet the description of the preacher’s sermon is steeped in critical irony:

The voice of the speaker strengthened the charm; it was clear, feeling, full, strong. An old man, who had lived much, suffered much; whose brain was keenly alive, dominant; whose heart was summer-warm with charity. He taught it to-night. He held up Humanity in its grand total; showed the great world-cancer to his people. Who could show it better? He was a Christian reformer; he had studied the age thoroughly; his outlook at man had been free, world-wide, over all time. His faith stood sublime upon the Rock of Ages; his fiery zeal guided vast schemes by which the gospel was to be preached to all nations. . . . In burning, light-laden words he painted the incarnate Life, Love, the universal Man: words that became reality in the lives of these people,—that lived again in beautiful words and actions, trifling, but heroic. (49)

The sermon awes and inspires these likely working-class parishioners, and lulls Wolfe into forgetting not only his past suffering but furthermore the aspirational “life he was going to live,” but it does so only by effacing the material reality to which they all must return the moment they walk back out into the street. From “the Rock of Ages,” presumably offering a timeless, placeless, ideal vantage point, the reformer concocts his “vast schemes,” a caustic description which undermines the integrity of a sermon which Wolfe unknowingly assumes to express great wisdom and magnanimity, though sounding “in his ears a very pleasant song in an unknown tongue” (49). The preacher “meant to cure this world-cancer”—sin—“with a steady eye that had never glared with hunger, and a hand that neither poverty nor strychnine-whiskey had taught to shake,” but “[h]is words passed far over the furnace-tender’s grasp, toned to suit another class of culture”—tuned to the key of another habitus, which knows neither literal appetitive pain nor “soul starvation” (49). This satirical portrait of the preacher critiques both the veiled passiveness of many contemporary Christian reform doctrines and the idealism of the transcendentalists. Davis would

write in her autobiography, *Bits of Gossip* (1904), that what struck her while meeting Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Bronson Alcott in Boston was that “while they thought they were guiding the real world, they stood quite outside of it, and never would see it as it was” (38). Whether they were talking about “pears or the war,” their conversations “gave you the same sense of unreality”: their ideas were like “beautiful bubbles blown from a child’s pipe, floating overhead, with queer reflections on them of sky and earth and human beings, all in a glow of fairy color and all a little distorted” (40).¹³ Wolfe stops and marvels at these marvelous bubbles, so to speak, reveling for an hour or two in the sublimity of the church, the preacher’s out-of-reach language, the exquisite music, but Davis portrays this indulgence in the transcendental sublime as a dangerous form of escapism from a reality that will inevitably meet Wolfe at the door.

Wolfe’s suicide ushers in perhaps the most generically perplexing aspect of the novella. Rather than indulge us in Wolfe’s last words, the narrator reveals only that the dying man looked into the moonlight “as one that said, ‘How long, O Lord? how long?’” (60). This narratorial ambiguity perhaps serves to reposition this rhetorical question as one posed by the novella itself, broadening out beyond the specificities of Wolfe’s life to call for more comprehensive, systemic social and indeed aesthetic reform. We are reminded here of similar questions posed in the epigraph—“Is this the end?” and “What hope of answer of redress?”—and yet while the desynchronization of Tennyson’s lyric meter was framed as a departure from earlier aesthetic modes, the narrator here seems to relapse back into sentimental fiction: though Wolfe dies, Deb is rescued from the godless world of the mills (and “[n]ot too late”) by a Quaker who takes her to the distant hills and teaches her “slow, patient Christ-love” (63). Davis’s sudden recourse to Christian hope at the end of this narrative has posed a problem for many critics attempting to pigeonhole the novella into a generic category, which testifies to its complex, transitional position in literary

history. Harris has tried to reconcile this moment with what she calls Davis's metarealism by differentiating between the passive and thus complicit Christian reformists such as the grandiloquent preacher and the Quaker's more active, effectual practice of Christian values. Yet the patience the Quaker encourages jars with the resounding question: "How long, O Lord?" As we saw earlier in the misreadings of Wolfe's korl woman, patience comes with the privilege of a middle-class habitus, and acts as an anesthetic to the realities of a crisis which quite obviously demands immediate action. Thus even the Quaker's benevolent charity, certainly preferable to the utter inaction of the mill visitors, is inadequate to the exigencies of working-class conditions; there is simply no time for patience.

The narrator's tone takes an unexpected turn in the concluding paragraphs, as Davis creates a troubling distance between the narrator's ultimately quixotic perspective and the earlier realism of her story. We learn that all Wolfe has left behind is one sculpture, the korl woman, which the narrator has surprisingly hidden behind a curtain—a veil—in the corner of her library because "it is such a rough, ungainly thing" (64). At last we can hear the ghostly echo of the previously unspoken final line of Tennyson's stanza: "Behind the veil, behind the veil." However, the narrator writes, "Sometimes,—to-night, for instance,—the curtain is accidentally drawn back, and I see a bare arm stretched out imploringly in the darkness and an eager, wolfish face watching mine: a wan, woful [*sic*] face, through which the spirit of the dead korl-cutter looks out, with its thwarted life, its mighty hunger, its unfinished work" (64). In this sudden twist, the narrator is more like her passive, detached middle-class readers than one might have guessed from her earlier mockery: she, too, prefers not to see the "rough, ungainly" reality of labor conditions, thus hiding the figure behind a veil. The tale ends with the vision of the korl woman's outstretched hand reaching "through the broken cloud to the far East, where, in the flickering, nebulous crimson, God has set

the promise of the Dawn” (65), invoking the dream-like imagery which Davis had used to characterize Wolfe’s romantic visions of the future, like the incandescent theory-bubbles of the transcendentalists. If Davis believed dreams are frivolous, even dangerous, in the context of social reform, we must ask why, then, she leaves us up in the clouds rather than down in “the thickest of the fog and mud and foul effluvia” (13).

Emily Dolan has recently challenged scholars’ overinvestment in narrative conclusions as the source of a text’s literary value or success, asserting that it is precisely through Davis’s intentionally “troubled conclusions” that she enables “the narrative tensions to remain unresolved,” thereby problematizing “sentimental conclusions and ushering in literary realism” (251; 254). Seitler similarly argues that the formal inconsistency and generic indeterminacy of Davis’s novella highlights “the aesthetic problem of what forms of representation exist or do not exist at any given moment that make imaginable new forms of personhood or even social change” (525). What Davis offers us is an “aspirational narrative,” which takes up conventions such as the sentimental conclusion only “to record the problems of doing so” (524). These arguments have started to revive the scholarly conversation surrounding Davis’s position in and impact on the course of American literary history, while moreover offering productive ways to read aesthetic tensions in realist literature as formal manifestations of social and ideological problems, transitions, and possibilities.

Indeed, despite the narrator’s unexpected acquiescence to literary and ideological tropes she has heretofore mocked, readers have been primed throughout the story to recognize Davis’s tart irony in the final pages. The narrator’s shift into the present tense belies a certain discomfort in her own complacent optimism: “The deep of the night is passing while I write. The gaslight wakens from the shadows here and there the objects which lie scattered about the room”—a “half-

moulded child's head," music, "homely fragments," and other unfinished projects which "recall some task or pleasure of the coming day"—all except the korl woman (65). "I turn to look at it," the narrator writes, refusing to provide the sense of not only spatial but temporal distance which typically allows readers to enjoy the sympathy inspired by sentimental fiction without feeling implicated in any social reality. If we again consider Dolan's assertion of Davis's "intentionally troubled" conclusion, we might read this apparent generic tension as a formal manifestation of what Fuchs calls explicit time. Occupying an aesthetic "period of *awaiting* or *aspiration*," the novella is determined to reach like the groping korl woman toward literary and sociocultural possibilities that have yet to take clear shape—or, more accurately, are in the process of taking shape in Davis's pioneering aesthetic ("Temporality and Psychopathology" 79; Fuchs's emphasis). Put another way, the dissatisfaction readers are supposed to feel when the narrator falls back into an old habit—faithful Christian patience as she waits for divine intervention in the atrocities of class stratification—ought to provoke the very opposite of patience and passivity. With Wolfe's death, Davis seems to be signaling the necessary dying of the literary past, specifically the misleading idealism of romantic and sentimental literature. Davis's metarealist fiction therefore begins to lay the groundwork for a process of literary resynchronization—the breaking of old, anachronistic habits and the formation of new ones that are better suited to the temporal and time-sensitive social ills of the industrial age.

Conclusion

Davis's insistent efforts throughout this narrative to attune her middle-class readers to affectively and ideologically divisive experiences of time, aspects of distinct socioeconomic habitus, make palpable what Hood described above as the "epistemological distance" sensed amid confrontations

between disparate realities. Class divides create distinct positions in and perspectives on space and time, which cannot be unified by the calendar, clock, factory bell, or morning newspaper, a representational as well as a sociopolitical problem which becomes an integral concern to literary realists and naturalists of the 1880s and '90s. By tracing the relationship between Wolfe's disjuncture from his habitus and his temporary sense of exhilarating possibility, Davis establishes temporal disjuncture as an opportunity to see social constructs as constructs, and to thereby imagine alternatives to even the most naturalized of institutions. Wolfe's melancholic alienation from his working-class habitus opens him up to new perspectives, productively destabilizing reified, oppressive social systems and enabling him to see beyond the working-class "cosmos" into which he had been born.¹⁴ However, Fuchs, along with James, Dewey, and Crossley, have also helped us recognize that such alienation from social time and habit is a tremendously precarious experience. Wolfe's intermittent inklings of the possible (or the not yet) therefore come at a cost: in the depths of chronic melancholic depression, Fuchs explains, one "drops out of shared time," inhabiting "an 'anachronistic', slow-moving time of his own" ("Temporality and Psychopathology" 97). Indeed, this is precisely what we sense as Wolfe bleeds to death in his prison cell, his gaze fixed upon the moon as it works its way, "inch by inch, slowly," across the sky (61). The necessary process of resynchronization therefore entails action, not romantic visions: not only affect—the vague excitement afforded by Wolfe's disjuncture from habit and implicit time—but a motor expression of that affective excitement whereby new neural pathways are formed and one's sense of agency is restored.

James's account of habit formation or reformation helps distinguish between the aesthetic aims of sentimental literature and Davis's metarealism: the former aims to produce intense feeling (i.e. sympathy) in the reader, but falls short of compelling readers to act on that intense feeling in

the actual world. When Doctor May gives Wolfe what he imagines to be an inspiring speech, becoming “heated, glowing with his own magnanimity,” he exposes the delusional self-satisfaction that Davis associates with intense but non-interventional sympathy, which constitutes her principal critique of Christian reform and sentimentalism. In contrast, Davis’s narrator forces readers to recognize their own positionality vis-à-vis the text and the socioeconomic realities it represents. Quoting Janice Radway, Thrailkill argues that what sets romance and sentimentalism apart from the aesthetics of realism is “the extent to which the former ‘mask the reader’s active collaboration in the production of textual meaning’” (“Emotive” 381). Davis’s frequent reminders to readers of their position in space and time indeed forces them to recognize their habituated modes of reading—of meaning-making—and thus their participation in the veiled and perhaps distant but coeval social reality of the mills.

Crossley explains, “Habit arises when we arrive at a new (relatively stable) way of handling or using the world, which in turn then constitutes its meaning differently for us, and it consists in this” (149). That Wolfe repeatedly destroys his own sculptures in fits of disappointment speaks to his recognition that they are not yet legible, so to speak; they express an emergent structure of feeling that has yet to find articulate expression and meaningful reception by others. And yet the narrator acknowledges that they are “strangely beautiful” figures, suggesting that the grounds for the aesthetic value of Wolfe’s art is a matter of perspective, or of habitus, and that the framework for recognizing this value is in the process of being constructed in Davis’s fiction. Crossley further notes that for Dewey, everyday life consists of “continual crises,” on both a small and, occasionally, major scale, “which motivate both a continual recourse to habits of reflection and a continual revision of certain habits” (Crossley 152). Davis likens her own nascent literary form and the emergent structure of feeling it expresses to the korl sculpture to highlight the role of art

in breaking old habits and necessitating new ways of seeing and reading. As we see in “Life in the Iron Mills,” art can produce these everyday “continual crises,” and what Dewey describes as the inevitable clashes between socioeconomic habitus, which are necessary for continual self-reflection, habit reformation, and social change.

Harris identifies two predominant aspects of Davis’s background that shaped her fiction: her upbringing in a mill town, as previously discussed, and her firsthand experience of the Civil War in a town that was caught, spatially and ideologically, between North and South (1).¹⁵ In the aforementioned chapter of *Bits of Gossip* in which Davis describes the time spent with “the ‘Atlantic’ coterie” in New England, she is particularly critical of their romanticization of the Civil War. She recalls how Alcott, whom she refers to as a “would-be seer,” had “chanted paeans to the war,” standing grandiloquently before them “in front of the fireplace, his long gray hair streaming over his collar, his pale eyes turning quickly from one listener to another to hold them quiet, his hands waving to keep time with orotund sentences which had a stale, familiar ring as if often repeated before,” all while Emerson looked on “with profound submissive attention” (38). Yet what sets Davis apart from these men is she “had seen the actual war”:

. . . the filthy spewings of it; the political jobbery in Union and Confederate camps; the malignant personal hatreds wearing patriotic masks, and gluttoned by burning homes and outraged women; the chances in it, well improved on both sides, for brutish men to grow more brutish, and for honorable gentlemen to degenerate into thieves and sots. War may be an armed angel with a mission, but she has the personal habits of the slums. (39)

It was Hawthorne, notably the biggest influence upon Davis’s fiction of the romanticists,¹⁶ who “at last gathered himself up lazily to his feet, and said quietly: ‘We cannot see that thing at so long a range,’” rescuing Davis from the “droning flow of [Alcott’s] prophecy” (39). Though at the time,

what Hawthorne meant by “so long a range” was a more figurative, experiential distance from the war, the temporal distance of historical retrospect would become just as important to the way the Civil War was discussed, remembered, and reconstructed in postbellum discourse and art. In the next chapter, I turn to Ambrose Bierce’s *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* (1891). Like Davis, Bierce had actually experienced the war—had, moreover, fought for the Union army in over a dozen of the deadliest battles which have to this day been fought on U.S. soil—and was likewise skeptical of the various attempts by outsiders to represent the war and its aftermath, whether by romanticizing it à la Alcott or by capturing it ‘objectively,’ as both photographers and journalists proclaimed to do.

1. In “Embodied Affectivity: on moving and being moved” (2014), Fuchs references J. S. Kestenberg’s *The Role of Movement Patterns in Development* vol. 1 (1979) and Kestenberg and K. M. Sossin’s *The Role of Movement Patterns in Development* Vol. 2 (1979) as particularly thorough studies of interaffectivity between mothers and infants.

2. By “metarealist,” Harris means texts that reflect and participate in the transition to literary realism, which began in the U.S. well before the 1880s. The metarealists, she explains, “typically synthesize several modes (romanticism, sentimentalism, regionalism), but realism remains their most explicit focus,” and realism functions in their fiction as part of “a conscious effort to transform literature from the mystical or other-worldly realm of romanticism into an art form that represents quotidian experience” (19). Like Harris, I use the term “metarealist” not to delineate sharply between generic styles such as realism and romanticism but to highlight “the continuities in realistic techniques from the early nineteenth century through the 1880s and 1990s” (19). Davis’s attention to the affective and ideological divisiveness of experiential time makes her a more useful starting point for my study than Howells, though he is more often credited as the pioneer of American literary realism.

3. O’Malley notes that the New England Association of Farmers, Mechanics and other Workingmen reported in 1832 that “in Hope Factory, Rhode Island, the time for shutting the factory gates at night was ‘eight o’clock, by the

factory time, which is from twenty to twenty-five minutes *behind* the true time,’ and that in Nashua and Dunstable, New Hampshire, ‘the *factory time* [was] twenty-five minutes *behind* the *true solar time*’” (40). The report went on to document evidence of similar incongruences in other factory clocks around the country, in an effort to make known the upsetting reality that time was being manipulated by mill owners (40).

4. Crossley contextualizes the distinct philosophical positions of Bourdieu and Mauss, on the one hand, and James, Dewey, and Merleau-Ponty, on the other. Historically, he explains, thanks in large part to the influence of Pavlov and the behaviorist school of thought, habit was limited to the purview of scientific empiricism and regarded as a purely materialist understanding of the human organism, whereas habitus was taken up by transcendental philosophy in an anxious effort to elevate the human mind and soul above the mechanistic operations of the material universe. However, as new scientific developments have mitigated the older sense of tension between the mind and body, there is less philosophical pressure to quarantine habitus from habit (144-45).

5. Adam Sonstegard suggests that the author “truncates” Deborah’s name to Deb “to show the cotton industry cutting into her identity as it twists and harms her body itself” (103).

6. What Dewey disparages as oppressively mechanical routinization would seem to characterize the labor demanded by the tireless machinery of the industrial factory system. Dewey warns of circumstances in which those in power encourage the kinds of routinization that become unintelligent and mechanical, for this “enables them to do the thinking and planning, while others remain the docile, even if awkward, instruments of execution” (43). As we see in Davis’s portrayal of the Wheeling mills, this is made possible in large part by the increasingly oppressive function of time discipline in industrial labor, which subordinates workers’ bodies to the mechanical rhythms and vile conditions that essentially necessitate “waking stupor.”

7. Though “horizon of expectation” has come into fairly common usage, I borrow the phrase specifically from Reinart Koselleck’s *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (2004).

8. This is a signature technique in Davis’s fiction. In “Blind Tom,” published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1862, a blind, autistic child “with the vacant grin of idiocy, they thought, already stamped on his face” is born into slavery on a Georgia tobacco plantation (85). When it is discovered that the child is a musical prodigy who can play anything he hears once on the piano, he is exploited by the opportunistic plantation owner and forced to perform around the country. As we see in “Life in the Iron Mills,” the narrator shifts to the present tense and second person in the final paragraph, mocking the reader for her ignorance and complacency: “You cannot help Tom, either; all the war is

between you. He was in Richmond in May. But (do you hate the moral to a story?) in your own kitchen, in your own back-alley, there are spirits as beautiful, caged in forms as bestial, that *you* could set free, if you pleased” (94).

9. Davis would write of Emerson in her autobiography, “He studied souls as a philologist does words, or an entomologist beetles”; he was someone who would take “from each man his drop of stored honey, and after that the man counted for no more to him than any other robbed bee” (*Bits of Gossip* 42; 43-44).

10. As Sonstegard points out, most U.S. sculptors of the 1860s studied the European classical tradition and sought to create “ideal, allegorical depictions” (100). “Exhorting readers to get themselves dirty in attempting to understand a working-class environment,” he explains, Davis focuses on “a hero who similarly struggles to make art out of the very grit and foulness of proletarian life”: “Readers encounter Davis’s working-class figure shaping a body of his own, the sculpture in korl, and encounter the owners of the mill trying to shape Hugh into a body of their own, a mill-hand that selflessly serves the industry’s needs” (100). Hugh Wolfe thus “attempts to transmute the forces that ordinarily shape him according to physical needs, into his own means of shaping and creating” (104).

11. Dewey argues that artful habits require “a beginning, middle and end”—that is, “Every stage marks progress in dealing with materials and tools, advance in converting material to active use” (*Human Nature* 18).

12. Though scholars typically read the korl sculpture as a representation of Wolfe, a few have made persuasive connections between the figure and Deb. Harris points out that like Deb, who has suffered years of unrequited love for her cousin—enduring the way he looks at her with an involuntary look of disgust and pity—the sculpture conveys a longing: “the ravaged face of the Korl Woman is starving for Hugh *Wolfe’s* affection, drawn as it is from Deb’s ‘gnawed’ face” (37). There are several telling echoes of the narrator’s characterization of Deb in the descriptions of the sculpture. Doctor May’s crass compliment that the figure is “the very type of her class” echoes the narrator’s earlier assertion that Deb is “even more fit to be a type of her class” because of her physical deformity and appearance of “hopeless discomfort” (21).

13. Emerson was like a prophet to the intellectual elite and the working class alike, who easily learned to parrot the “new dialect of Transcendentalism,” and “Up to the old grey house among the pines in Concord they went—hordes of wild-eyed Harvard undergraduates and lean, underpaid working-women, each with a disease of soul to be cured by the new Healer” (44). Davis writes, “You heard much sound philosophy and many sublime guesses at the eternal verities; in fact, never were the eternal verities so dissected and pawed over and turned inside out as they were

about that time, in Boston, by Margaret Fuller and her successors. But the discussion left you with a vague, uneasy sense that something was lacking, some back-bone of fact” (39-40).

14. Indeed, as Jonathan Flatley argues, “The melancholic state of mind, then, even as it dwells on ruins and loss, is at the same time liberated to imagine how the world might be transformed, how things might be entirely different from the way they are” (37).

15. Adam Sonstegard explains, “Davis's best-known fiction takes place on the regional borders that make for great differences in individual lives. Wheeling, the setting of *Life in the Iron-Mills*, sits on a narrow strip of Southern land between the free States of Ohio and Pennsylvania. Davis's autobiographical *Bits of Gossip* (1904) locates Wheeling on the national road between the North and South, on the paths of West-bound settlers, and at a multiethnic crossroads for European immigrants (*Writing Cultural Autobiography* 24-25). The seemingly remote outpost becomes a check-point on nearly every cultural journey that matters. Wheeling belonged to Virginia, but when the State seceded in 1861, the town provided the meeting hall for an assembly that reversed Virginia's decision. Wheeling and much of northern Virginia soon voted to leave the Secessionist State, and to rejoin the Union as New or West Virginia. ‘Nowhere in the country, probably,’ Davis writes, ‘was the antagonism between its sections more bitter than in these counties of Virginia which the North thus wrested from the South—‘for keeps’” (102)” (101).

16. For more on Davis’s and Hawthorne’s unique friendship throughout the Civil War, see “Boston in the Sixties,” the second chapter of Davis’s autobiography, *Bits of Gossip*, and Harris’s *Rebecca Harding Davis and American Realism* (58-62; 88-90).

– Chapter Two –

Civil War Cycloramas and Bierce’s Counter-Aesthetics of the Abrupt

ABRUPT, *adj.* Sudden, without ceremony, like the arrival of a cannon-shot and the departure of the soldier whose interests are most affected by it.

—Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil’s Dictionary* (1906)

Publishers want nothing of me but novels—and I’ll die first.

—Bierce, Letter to George Sterling (1903)

In the moments leading up to Peyton Farquhar’s hanging in Ambrose Bierce’s “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” (1890), the scene unfurls like a series of still images in a clumsily edited film reel. In dispassionate and wearisome prose, the narrator describes the execution as a matter of mere physics: the plank upon which Peyton stands “had been held in place by the weight of the captain”; “it was now held by that of the sergeant,” and “at a signal from the former the latter would step aside, the plank would tilt,” and the prisoner would “go down” (*Tales* 11). Yet as the narrator shifts his focus from the Union executioners to the condemned man in the noose, we begin to sense a growing rift between distinct temporal realities. The narrator pans from Peyton’s “unsteadfast footing” upon the precariously balanced plank to “the swirling water of the stream racing madly” below (12). He then follows the man’s gaze to a piece of driftwood floating downstream and interjects, “How slowly it appeared to move! What a sluggish stream!” (12). This free indirect discourse functions as a narratorial sleight of hand with which Bierce subtly draws readers out of the meticulous, mechanistic choreography of military discipline and into the unruly perceptual time of the body in crisis. As we make this transition, the stream is simultaneously “racing” from one vantage point and stagnating from another. Peyton’s desynchronization becomes more obvious when his experience is set into explicit conflict with the monolithic standard of clock time. He

grows aware of a “new disturbance” interrupting the thoughts of his wife and children, “a sharp, distinct, metallic percussion like the stroke of a blacksmith’s hammer upon the anvil” (13). Though “its recurrence was regular,” the narrator insists, as if providing an objective perspective from above his own story, it seemed “as slow as the tolling of a death knell” to Peyton, who “awaited each stroke with impatience and—he knew not why—apprehension” as the gaps grew “maddening” (14). It is finally revealed, of course, that what Peyton hears is the ticking of his watch.

In “Mechanism in Thought and Morals,” an address delivered to Harvard’s Phi Beta Kappa Society in June, 1870, Oliver Wendell Holmes remarked, “We know very little of the contents of our minds until some sudden jar brings them to light” (282).¹ By “contents of our minds,” Holmes was referring in particular to unconscious thought: the “mechanisms” at work in the brain, independent of active reflection, volition, or moral sense, which are from time to time shocked into consciousness.² In “An Occurrence,” the unconscious sensation which is brought to light just before Peyton’s delusion of escape is the aural ticking of clocked time, a sound to which much of the nineteenth-century American public had become quite thoroughly habituated. With the triggering of his fight-or-flight response, however, Peyton’s nervous system is set into overdrive, and with the acceleration of his internal clock, the second-long intervals of “world time” made audible by his watch seem distended by contrast. At a certain point, Peyton drops from the bridge and begins to swing “through unthinkable arcs of oscillation, like a vast pendulum,” and his body thus becomes the “oscillator” of the reader’s timepiece for the subsequent narrative of the man’s pre- (or post-?) mortem fantasy of escape (15). It is only in the final paragraph of the story, as Peyton’s, and thus the reader’s, vision is punctured by other repressed realities—the pain in his neck, the swelling of his tongue, the bulging of his eyes, “a blinding light,” and “a sound like the

shock of a cannon”—that the narrative abruptly collapses back into the perceptual frame of the executioners: we discover that “Peyton Farquhar was dead; his body, with a broken neck, swung gently from side to side beneath the timbers of the Owl Creek bridge” (19). What felt like several hours in the depths of Peyton’s consciousness—while “his brain was on fire” with sensations “unaccompanied by thought” (15)—took place within the span of a few seconds of clock time.

While numerous scholars have discussed the profound influence of the Civil War on the course of American literary history, this chapter focuses on how new understandings of the mind and body impelled postbellum writers to pose more complex questions about the feeling of time in traumatic and post-traumatic experience. In the previous chapter, we examined the impacts of new time discipline on factory labor, which has been well documented, particularly by Marxist scholars such as E. P. Thompson. This chapter traces the impacts of this period’s emphasis on synchronicity to postbellum reconstructions of historical memories. In *Bits of Gossip*, Rebecca Harding Davis had recalled being saved from the “droning flow” of Bronson Alcott’s “paeons to the war” by Nathaniel Hawthorne’s matter-of-fact interjection: ““We cannot see that thing at so long a range”” (39). I argue that Bierce’s short stories of trauma manipulate time as a means to destabilize reconciliationist myths, which likewise gloss the enduring ideological fractures which had led to the Civil War by representing its violence and aftermath from a long-range perspective, both spatially and temporally. Not only is there a frequent rift between ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ times in Bierce’s stories, as we have just seen in “An Occurrence,” but between the narrated Civil War trauma “in the very act of occurring,” in Bierce’s words, and the retrospective vantage point of the postbellum reader.³ Bierce’s fiction repeatedly exposes what is made possible by the “jar,” which produces the kind of desynchronization that enters into realism as both opportunity and threat. By disrupting readers’ tacit inhabitation of time, Bierce aims to unsettle the uninterrogated

forms of knowledge such as inhabitation permits, thereby opening up alternative forms of historical memory and its representation.

Short Stories of American Trauma

Though he has long been cultishly caricatured as “Bitter Bierce”—the witty, pessimistic satirist whose worldview can be whittled down to “Nothing matters” (in his own words)—there is a surprisingly deep-seated and earnest contempt bubbling up into Bierce’s journalism and correspondences that deserves serious attention.⁴ Bierce had likely seen more combat than any other veteran who attempted serious war fiction in the postbellum U.S.: after enlisting in the Union army at nineteen, he had fought in Shiloh, Chattanooga, and Chickamauga, for example, and had survived a gunshot wound to the head at Kennesaw Mountain in 1864, and eagerly returned to his regiment as soon as he had healed (Blight 244). In his biography, Roy Morris, Jr. maintains that when we demythologize Bitter Bierce, we’re left with “1st Lt. Ambrose Bierce, Ninth Indiana Infantry,” the soldier who had fought in over a dozen brutal Civil War battles and whose uniquely personal experience of combat is what ultimately separates him “from his more talented contemporaries Mark Twain and Stephen Crane” (270). Rather than recapitulate the impulses to defend or impugn Bierce’s literary merits in relation to his peers, this chapter draws upon both contemporary and more recent trauma studies to interrogate the way Bierce manages to transform his firsthand experience of war trauma into an aesthetic mode—an intervention not only in postbellum cultural memory, but in particular forms of realism in visual art and literature.

In an illuminating set of analogies that he returns to again and again, Bierce compares the realist novel to the panorama for its protracted, linear, plot-driven narrative and to the photograph

for its aspirations to mimesis. Defining the novel as a “short story padded” in *The Devil’s Dictionary* (1906), Bierce maintains:

As it is too long to be read at a sitting the impressions made by its successive parts are successively effaced, as in the panorama. Unity, totality of effect, is impossible; for besides the few pages last read all that is carried in mind is the mere plot of what has gone before. To the romance the novel is what photography is to painting. Its distinguishing principle, probability, corresponds to the literal actuality of the photograph and puts it distinctly into the category of reporting. (567-68)

The first point to note is Bierce’s concern with the temporality of the reading experience. Leery of the reader’s short-term memory, he insists that an aesthetic experience take place in a single sitting: the affective power of a story relies upon the reader’s fully embodied, uninterrupted engagement from the first word to the last. Bierce argues in his 1897 essay “The Short Story” that all arts indeed share a common ground, “addressing the same sensibilities, quickening the same emotions”—and, most pertinently, “subject to the same law and limitations of human attention” (253). He uses the panorama as a spatial metaphor for what he finds to be an essentially temporal problem in the novel: by widening or stretching out the reading process, the novel dilutes and fragments the reading experience so that art is reduced to nothing more than plot, or a plausible sequence of events rendered to approximate ordinary experience. Furthermore, Bierce contends that the realist novel reduces literary art to journalism, for its over-commitment to ‘literal actuality’ precludes the “three essentials” of fiction: “imagination, imagination and imagination” (*Dictionary* 568). Bierce’s analogies convey his distrust of writers who conflate art with either a camera or data log in what he sees as a misguided and misleading attempt to capture ‘literal actuality.’

To frame what I mean by Bierce's "counter-aesthetics of the abrupt," it is important to first contextualize his critique of both the novel and particular forms of realism. As regards the former, Bierce draws from the literary criticism of Edgar Allan Poe and Brander Matthews, both of whom emphasized the "unity of effect" which is possible in short fiction.⁵ It was Matthews who coined the term "short-story" in 1885, arguing that whereas the novelist can "bend his best energies to the photographic reproduction of the actual," contenting us with "a cross-section of real life," the short story writer must achieve greater "originality and ingenuity." Matthews's critique of the novel begins to intersect here with Bierce's distaste for certain forms of realism, which he believed were hitching art to the insistent objectivism of the natural and social sciences. Bierce's references to photography and panoramas point us to several different understandings of realism that had become easily recognizable by the 1890s. In a spirited letter to *The Dial*, published on April 16, 1893, Hiram M. Stanley identifies three prevalent brands: 1). "deceptive" or "illusive" realism; 2). "scientific" realism; and 3). "higher" or "selective" realism (238-39). The first of these forms, he argues (in a familiarly snobbish vein), endeavors to offer viewers a painting so realistic that they "take it for the reality," though it is nothing but "a marvel," and "one more fit for the dime museum than for the art gallery" (238). Bierce would undoubtedly classify the panorama's mode of realism as the "illusively" mimetic variety. The second is concerned less with mimesis in this visual sense than with the "perfect record of facts"—it aims to become "a complete and accurate register" of the events it transcribes (239). This applies to Bierce's critique of the "probability"-driven realist novel, which he defines as "a story written by a measuring-worm" (*Dictionary* 593). The third form of realism, the so-called "higher" realism, Stanley explains, is essentially a psychological study in the guise of fiction. Emotions are presented from a "purely intellectual" standpoint: "to incarnate not beauty but truth is its aim," and what readers therefore experience is "a wholly

unimaginative, unemotional, impersonal” work of fiction (240). In all three concepts of realism, Stanley underscores an emerging “science-born craving for reality,” a “passion for the actual,” which he fears will lead to the full-blown scientization of art (239-40). Bierce shares not only Stanley’s elitist concerns about the future of art, but his biting skepticism about the pursuit of some ‘objective’ reality. At the close of his satirical rant against the various realisms, Stanley writes, “Yet at bottom reality is but an idea and ideal to which the Realist seeks to be true, and Realism is only a mode of Idealism subject to the laws and limitations of all idealism” (240). This proto-postmodern argument resonates with Bierce’s outlook, and bespeaks precisely what is at work in the reconstruction of postbellum historical memory, which sought to supersede the effects of the country’s ideological and racial fissures, individual and collective post-traumatic stress, and loss on a senseless scale.

Bierce’s critique of realism frequently takes one of the two tacks that Amy Kaplan identifies in literary criticism of the 1960s, as outlined in the introduction—reducing realism to either a set of formal characteristics or artless, historical mimesis—but the failures he emphasizes inform how we can read his fiction as an aesthetic response. Many scholars have focused on Bierce’s various ‘supernatural’ tales and placed him squarely between Poe and H. P. Lovecraft.⁶ Others have deemed him a realist using now-outmoded criteria, as Robert A. Wiggins points out, praising “the strength of his selection of detail, his verisimilitude that conveys some sense of fidelity to events as they really happen in real life, his photographic accuracy,” and the like—in other words, the very criteria Bierce and Stanley detest in art of the 1880s and ’90s (1).⁷ However, attention to emergent understandings of the body and emotion in psychology, neurobiology, and medicine at the turn of the century can furnish a more complex understanding of Bierce’s approach to realism. Eric Solomon’s celebration of Bierce’s uncanny ability “to evoke the feeling of reality”

(185) in 1963 means something markedly different than Jane Traillkill's recent characterization of realism as a movement dedicated "to elaborating what William James [. . .] described as 'feelings of reality'" (*Affecting* 9).⁸ Traillkill's framing of realism involves the fully embodied reader's participation in an aesthetic experience, thus intersecting with Bierce's own assertion that not merely the basics of plot, but feeling—the moment-to-moment "impressions made" by parts of a story—must be "carried in mind" by the reader from the first word to the last.⁹ In this chapter, I will emphasize more specifically that Bierce's realism entails the reader's feeling of disjuncture from familiar structures of time and narrative.

In this respect, I build upon Michael Fried's spatial argument about realism by considering the complementary problem of representing perceptual time. In *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration*, Fried identifies a "disjunction" in realist painting and writing: the perspectival discrepancy between the 'vertical' plane of reality—or experience—and the 'horizontal' plane of writing, drawing, or narrative (79). These modes can never be perfectly reconciled, Fried argues, and thus constitute the problem of representation at the heart of realism, which is produced reflexively in the works of Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane. Fried's study centers on the problem of how one can accurately transpose a perspective in three-dimensional space onto a two-dimensional surface, whether the canvas or the page. I adapt Fried's framework by situating the gap between lived and "recounted" (narrative) time as the chief representational challenge and cornerstone of Bierce's interventional realism.

I therefore begin not with two-dimensional paintings but with Civil War cycloramas: massive, cylindrical panoramas housed in elegant rotundas, which enjoyed tremendous commercial success throughout America in the 1880s and '90s and were celebrated precisely for what critics and spectators described as their remarkable realism.¹⁰ The cyclorama compounds the

problem Fried outlines not only by extending a two-dimensional representation back into three-dimensional space through *faux-terrain* and dioramas, but moreover by introducing temporal experience to the challenges of representation. In *Shivers Down Your Spine*, Alison Griffiths stresses that in contrast with earlier panoramas, which she describes as ‘naturalistic’ in their focus upon a still landscape from a singular vantage point, works such as Paul Philippoteaux’s *Gettysburg Cyclorama* are necessarily “composite” in form, amalgamating various moments from battles that spanned hours or even days into a single, frozen painting (44). The composite cyclorama creates “a seemingly whole, though actually fragmented, vision of reality” (48). The cyclorama’s illusive tactics therefore conceal rather than engage with the representational problems Fried highlights, furthermore circumventing the complexities of time and traumatic memory as representational problems for realism. It was considered an unprecedentedly immersive art form—indeed a precursor not only to film but to IMAX—and its ubiquitous praise as a model of artistic verisimilitude is important not least of all because it aimed to present viewers with a shared experience of a mythologized and decontextualized history. As I will discuss in the next section, the problem of divisive temporal realities in the cyclorama is concealed by a deceptively immersive and reliable recreation of historical space rent from historical time.

I relate Bierce’s familiar resistance to the novel to his (flippantly) morbid definition of the ‘abrupt’ in this chapter’s epigraphs in order to invoke the intersection of temporality, literary form, and trauma that underpins Bierce’s intervention in various approaches to realism that were emerging in retrospective treatments of the Civil War. Bessel Van der Kolk’s recent work in trauma theory has helped clarify that traumatic experience at the neurobiological level involves the dis-integration of affective experience from time, along with the breakdown in the centers of the brain responsible for language and narrative.¹¹ Traumatic experience thus presents a distinct

challenge to narrative forms committed to recording “facts, all the facts, and nothing but the facts,” in Stanley’s words (239). In reading Bierce’s experimental fiction against forms such as the Civil War cyclorama, I draw from Thrailkill’s project of redirecting the focus from realism to realization: “the coming to consciousness of an experience, which entails being ‘moved’ in the dual sense of emotionally engaged *and* repositioned with respect to the world” (*Affecting* 366). In Bierce’s most successful short stories, readers are abruptly shocked, disoriented, and affectively moved in the sense Thrailkill describes, creating an alternative to either the stretched-out, linear plotlines of the novel or the photorealistic ambitions of the panorama.

In the final section, I read “Chickamauga,” one of the most disturbing of Bierce’s *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians*, as a model of Bierce’s counter-aesthetics. In this dense and devastating story, Bierce represents and creates distance among the disparate temporal modalities and timescales that comprise historical experience and memory—the second-to-second, microtemporal vicissitudes of affective experience in the midst of crisis, the arc of an individual battle or entire war, a decade, a millennium—modalities which were implicitly glossed in the composite scenes of cycloramas. “Chickamauga” is paradigmatic of the way Bierce traces unfolding perceptual processes of characters in the midst of crisis, intermittently desynchronizing a character from his surroundings as well as the readers from the story in order to destabilize their implicit inhabitation of time and, more to the point, their tacit embrace of reconstitutive narratives of the Civil War. In his abrupt endings, characters and readers alike are attuned to their (mis)reading processes and ultimately ‘moved,’ in the sense Thrailkill describes. Bierce’s production of desynchronization leads to powerful moments of realization whereby readers must confront the recalcitrance of traumatic experience in the face of retroactive attempts to narrativize it into a recuperative, monolithic historical reality.

The Cyclorama's Spectacular Realism

Over 620,000 people were killed and over a million injured from 1861 to 1865, and many millions more suffered catastrophic loss, both directly and indirectly. For some of us, it is impossible to imagine the sheer scale of violence that the Civil War brought to Americans' doorsteps: this was the loss of about two percent of America's population, which would translate to well over six million people today (Finseth *American* 12). Participants and witnesses had experienced trauma in a powerfully private sense: the kind of shock that in Kai Erikson's words "breaks through one's defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively" (187). Yet the Civil War moreover constituted what Erikson describes as collective trauma, which is more than an aggregate of individuals' traumatic experiences; it is "a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality" (187). The nation had been rent into North and South—the victors and the defeated—and Americans on each side recalled and reconstructed their memories of war into radically different and irreconcilable narratives.

Competing narratives of the causes and consequences of the Civil War have survived to this day. David W. Blight categorizes these into reconciliationist, white supremacist, and emancipationist visions, but points out that the reconciliationist narratives and attitudes have tended to prevail for many Americans, "sentimental remembrance" winning out "over ideological memory" (2; 4). Between the Civil War and World War I, the reconciliationist vision focused on the glory of battle, divorced from all context, thus "forging unifying myths and making remembering safe" for (white) veterans (9). At the semi-centennial reunion at Gettysburg in July, 1913, Blight notes, Virginia's governor spoke in a tent erected where Pickett's Charge had taken place: "We are not here to discuss the Genesis of the war," Gov. William Hodges Mann declared, "but men who have tried each other in the storm and smoke of battle are here to discuss this *great*

fight . . . we came here, I say, not to discuss what caused the war of 1861-65, but to talk over the events of the battle here as man to man” (9; Blight’s emphasis). We can find examples of the affective and ideological amnesia encouraged by reconciliationist efforts in many postbellum art forms, including those which laid claim to the various kinds of realism Stanley had excoriated.

Partisan fractures in the nation’s historical consciousness spurred heterogeneous approaches to and conceptualizations of realism, as artists aspired to capture some essential, authentic experience of war and restore cohesion to a fractured nation.¹² Miles Orvell notes that panoramas, circus shows, popular theater, and other immersive mass spectacles all exhibit a tendency in late nineteenth-century popular culture “to enclose reality in manageable forms, to contain it within a theatrical space, an enclosed exposition or recreational space, or within the space of the picture frame”: “If the world outside the frame was beyond control,” Orvell explains, “the world inside of it could at least offer the illusion of mastery and comprehension” (35). One of the most unique and efficacious marvels of postbellum mythmaking was the Civil War cyclorama, which indeed supplied spectators with an immersive experience in an enclosed (spatial) recreation of the historical past, seeking to supplant the divisive, uncontrollable reality of post-traumatic memories by concealing the ‘frame’ of the experience altogether.

The explosive popularity of Philippoteaux’s *Gettysburg Cyclorama* following its 1883 premier in Chicago quickly led to its reproduction in Boston, New York City, and Philadelphia, inspiring cycloramas of a half-dozen other battles from the late 1880s to the early 1900s (**fig. 1**). The now-restored Boston duplicate of Philippoteaux’s *Gettysburg*, the only surviving canvas of an original Gettysburg cyclorama, helps us imagine what visitors would have seen from the viewing platform (**fig. 2**). In the rotunda, it is July 3, 1863, the third day of the Battle of Gettysburg. In the background rests a serene landscape of tree-lined hills painted with classical atmospheric

perspective; in the foreground rages the final clash of a three-day battle in which nearly 60,000 people, mostly Confederate soldiers, would die. Lieutenant Cushing's legendary death is one of the prominent events rendered in the foreground, and serves to establish the position of spectators on the viewing platform as the center of the Union line ("Cyclorama"). Pickett's army is attacking the Union line on Cemetery Ridge in what had been mythically re-cast as the turning point of the Civil War (**fig. 3**). These cycloramas of Gettysburg utterly astounded their visitors, shattering what many thought possible in an artistic representation. One reviewer for *The Washington Post* proclaimed, "It is even more than a representation, it is a battle itself" ("Battle"). Another critic for the *Chicago Tribune* warned that the "dead and wounded soldiers, the smoke of cannon, the bursting of shells," and "the blood stained ground" are all rendered "with a realism that is almost painful" (qtd. in Griffiths 60-61). This was the deadliest battle of the Civil War, reproduced in the round in a disarmingly graphic manner and with astonishing, photorealistic attention to topographical and historical detail.

Photorealism is not a mere metaphor. Indeed, Yoni Appelbaum explains that in addition to interviewing veterans and collecting journals and other firsthand documentation of the battle, Philippoteaux and his team enlisted the help of photographers ("Half-Life"). Before setting brush to canvas, Philippoteaux traveled to the Gettysburg battlefield and constructed a large, raised platform from which to capture the surrounding landscape. He and his crew then drew a circle around the platform, eighty feet in diameter, and partitioned the landscape into ten sections, each of which was further divided into foreground, middle ground, and background. Photographers took pictures each section that were later "taped together, overlain with a grid," and finally reproduced on the canvas. This process resembles a technique Rembrandt Peale recommends in his 19th-century painting manual, *Graphics*, which Fried references to demonstrate the challenge of

translating a ‘vertical,’ three-dimensional scene from life onto a ‘horizontal,’ flat surface without distorting the perspective. Peale suggests that to achieve “the most perfect perspective,” the painter should hold up a sheet of glass vertically, trace the real objects within view onto the glass, and then translate the traced figures onto the horizontal surface of the canvas (qtd. in Fried 78-79). For the cyclorama, Philippoteaux similarly begins by breaking up a three-dimensional scene with a grid and replicating the fragments on two-dimensional surfaces—in this case photographs. Yet compared to the two-dimensional panorama, as a writer for *Scientific American* had noted, achieving a faithful perspective in the cyclorama “is a matter of special calculation,” and he commended “the technical details of [the cyclorama’s] construction and the solution in it by means of photography of the problems of cylindrical perspective” (“Cyclorama”).

The reviewer’s turn to photography as the “solution” to the challenges of rendering a Civil War battle in the round reflects the interconnected impact of both photography and traumatic violence on the emergence of realism in postbellum America. As Finseth argues, the rise of photography during the Civil War “made the representation of ‘reality’ a matter of course,” for “the photograph, seemingly, could not lie, and it set a standard for reliability that the canons of professional journalism echoed by emphasizing ‘objectivity’ as a core principle of the reporter’s craft”—a point which recalls Bierce’s earlier critique of the realist novel’s almost journalistic dedication to “the literal actuality of the photograph” (*American* 11). (It is also worth noting Bierce’s definition of the photograph as “a picture painted by the sun without instruction in art” (*Dictionary* 579).) Finseth moreover contends that photographs “seem to mark the rise not only of a newly ‘realist’ approach to war but of the visual epistemology of modernity itself” (“Civil War” 542). Borrowing from what was seen as the spatial objectivity of photography, the cyclorama medium worked by re-presenting the fragmented and divisive remembrance of war as a cohesive,

composite, and synecdochical image. It is telling that the walls of the parlor adjacent to the ticket office at “Gettysburg Cyclorama” in Boston were covered in photographs of the battle sites, thus priming visitors for a factual, thoroughly researched depiction of war (Harris).

Integrating photography, painting, and architectural space, the cyclorama forged new representational possibilities with beguilingly powerful effects (**fig. 4**). Its sheer scale made the cyclorama an astonishingly immersive experience: the canvas for Boston’s *Gettysburg Cyclorama*, for example, was a staggering 365 feet long and 42 feet high (Harrison 52). Surviving pamphlets and reviews tell us that the battle was moreover extended into the physical space of the rotunda through the use of *faux terrain*—rocks, shrubs, cannons, artillery, and the like—which was recreated at the Gettysburg National Military Museum and the Atlanta Cyclorama and Civil War Museum. Dioramas, which began at the edge of the platform and extended forty-five feet to the painting’s surface, created an especially convincing illusion of depth (**figs. 5 & 6**). Appelbaum notes that each diorama was unique, but all held “thousands of individual artifacts” that were illusionistically scaled: items nearest the viewing platform “were life-size,” but the objects receded in size the closer they were to the canvas, with those nearest the wall matching the panorama’s scale and thus blending almost imperceptibly into the painting (“Half-Life”). As Griffiths points out, in the cyclorama rotunda, there was therefore no sense of a frame; while the conventional frame of a painting provides “a window onto an illusionistically rendered space,” the frameless battle scene in the rotunda achieved an “invocation of presence” that gave spectators “the sense of ‘being in a different time and space’” (39; 40).¹³

The patrons and artists who undertook these tremendously technical and expensive projects undoubtedly realized that as a mass medium, the cyclorama had the potential to foster feelings of national cohesion and patriotism at a time when the enduring rift between North and South had

produced conflicting historical narratives of the causes and consequences of the war. Jeffrey Uecker argues that the cyclorama did so by sanitizing the violence, glossing the grittier details of combat and romanticizing the heroism and bravery of the soldiers who fought and died in battle (39). As one critic commented upon visiting Portland's Gettysburg cyclorama, the "horror and disgust with which many enter the building is quickly changed to a grave consideration of the nobler characteristics of the great battle" (qtd. in Uecker 48). The architectural space was even designed to keep spectators at a physical distance from the canvas: the brushstrokes are choppy and impressionistic, but designed to look realistic from the distance between the viewing platform and the canvas (Felten 27). Looking too closely would destroy the illusion. One critic recalls a time he was able to go "behind the scenes" at *Gettysburg*, whereupon he discovered that "most of the cannon in the foreground were of galvanized iron, the thickness of a sheet of tin, and so were the soldiers and wagons," which left him even more impressed with "the skill of the deception" but nevertheless "thoroughly disillusioned" upon his return to the viewing platform (qtd. in Appelbaum "Half-Life"). Such accounts reveal only a thin, brittle illusion of reality: parlor tricks designed to astound the audience rather than force them to grapple with the messier disunity of the nation's collective trauma. The soldiers on the canvas were the equivalent to Howells's "wire and card-board" grasshoppers, "very prettily painted in a conventional tint," with a convincing veneer of photorealism and historical objectivity (11). As Appelbaum argues, the cyclorama portrays the battle with exquisite attention to historical detail, from the overall topography down to the soldiers' uniforms, but it omits the partisan causes that spurred the war in the first place ("The Great Illusion"). In his words, Philippoteaux's "stunning rendition of a battle utterly divorced from context appealed to a nation as eager to remember the valor of those who fought as it was to forget the purpose of their fight." Appelbaum goes on to explain that the cyclorama viewing experience

was so immersive, it “supplanted the fading memories of the war” and “froze time itself.” Uecker and Appelbaum both suggest that the cyclorama succeeds in its aim by replacing an irreconcilable plurality of war experiences and memories with a shared, synchronized, retrospective experience in the present.

Yet not everyone’s memories of the war had faded in the span of those two decades, and the cyclorama’s illusionistic approach to realism could not always sublimate the profound effects of trauma. Even before the war, Alexander Bain had observed in *The Senses and the Intellect* (1855), “The shock remaining in the ear and the brain after the firing of artillery must pass through the same circles, and act in the same way, as during the actual sound. . . . The rush of feeling has gone on the old tracks, and seizes the same muscles, and would go the length of actually stimulating them to repetition” (qtd. in “Bain on the Senses” 225). In an 1887 column for *The San Francisco Examiner*, Bierce himself had confessed, “To this day I cannot look over a landscape without noting the advantages of the ground for attack or defense . . . I never hear a rifle-shot without a thrill in my veins. I never catch the peculiar odor of gunpowder without having visions of the dead and the dying” (qtd. in Fatout 159). A traumatic memory is not simply the conjuring up of an image from an archive, but involves, in Thrailkill’s words, “the reanimation of the parts of the body that had been originally enlisted in the event being remembered” (*Affecting* 106). With neuroimaging technology, recent trauma research helps us understand why the remembering of traumatic events is indeed so neurologically and physiologically unique. Van der Kolk explains that traumatic experiences lead to a breakdown in the brain’s integrative processing, resulting in intense, fragmented affects decontextualized from place and time. In situations when we fear for our lives, the amygdala, the part of the brain that triggers the fight-or-flight response, goes into overdrive. Concomitantly, the right and left dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC), responsible

for contextualizing experiences in time and determining their meaning, shuts down. If we cannot escape from a threat and the fight-or-flight response is prolonged, “sights, sounds, smells, and touch are encoded as isolated, dissociated fragments, and normal memory processing disintegrates”; the result, Van der Kolk asserts, is that “time freezes, so that the present danger feels like it will last forever” (*The Body* 60). Because the original experience involves dissociated sensations—and a breakdown in the ‘higher’ brain’s ability to integrate experiences into a narrative and situate them in time—the brain fails to place the trauma safely in the past. Post-traumatic triggers can provoke affective responses identical to those experienced during the original trauma; the trauma is repeatedly re-lived as intensely as it was lived the first time. While our brains typically allow us to live in the present from one moment to the next by distorting the past, this capacity shuts down during traumatic experiences: “it keeps you back there,” Van der Kolk explains, “and you are the victim of an incomplete experience” (“The Body” Interview 155-6).

These recent neurobiological accounts of trauma help explain why many veterans who visited cycloramas felt violently transported back to the war. Numerous sources describe soldiers weeping on the viewing platform. One soldier reportedly found it so overwhelming to re-experience the violence, he forced himself to ignore the battle and focus instead on the landscape in the background (Appelbaum “Half-Life”). A writer for *The Washington Post* related the experience of a Gettysburg veteran who, upon entering the rotunda, “forgot everything,” suddenly believing he “was out in the fight again,” and pointed to a spot where he claimed to have lost a canteen decades earlier (“Battle”). And perhaps most suggestively, John Gibbon wrote in a letter to Henry Hunt, “I never before had an idea that the eye could be so deceived. . . . I say nothing more than the truth when I tell you it was difficult to disabuse my mind of the impression that I was actually on the ground” (qtd. in Harrison 52).

Though Gibbon was obviously not speaking in neurobiological terms, his expression—‘disabuse my mind’—unwittingly anticipates the intricate neurological relationship between temporal and affective experience in trauma. These accounts of veterans’ experiences expose a very different experience than what Uecker and Appelbaum suggest: not one not of a controlled deference for a glorious past, but rather intense, and potentially unbearable, re-living. In transfiguring war into spectacle and attempting to supplant divisive histories with a shared narrative—that is, in seeking to “resynchronize” Americans within a faux-historical space decontextualized from historical time—the cyclorama failed to account for the unmanageable psychobiological impacts of traumatic experience, a dimension of many visitors’ experience in the rotunda.

The “merry spectacle” of Chickamauga

In clear contrast, Bierce’s war stories in *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* (1891) repeatedly center on and reproduce the effects of traumatic experience by dis-integrating the various temporal modalities and attendant feelings that comprise the reader’s experience. The signature trajectory of his short stories, as Cathy N. Davidson has noted, is that (typically adult male) protagonists suffer a crisis that destabilizes their once-assured powers of perception, whereupon they experience “an almost infantile regression,” revel in “repressed aspects of [their] being as if for the first time, and [exhibit] a childish delight in the unstructured play of senses simply taking in a new world,” eventually discovering sensations and perspectives “beyond the ken of their previously shackled imaginations” (28). In Holmes’s terms, Bierce’s stories begin with a “jar” that brings previously unconscious sensations and processes to light, which is at once destabilizing and illuminating for characters and readers alike. In the midst of Peyton Farquhar’s terror-induced,

temporally protracted fantasy of survival, for example, he comes to recognize that he had been taken in by empty war rhetoric: “patriotism,” as Bierce defines it, is but “[c]ombustible rubbish ready to the torch of any one ambitious to illuminate his name” (*Dictionary* 577). Yet beyond these more obvious political and ideological implications, as readers realize more fully by the story’s end, it is the unconscious “mechanisms” of the reptilian brain which are brought to light at the level of the narrative in section three: with the jarring snap of the rope, amid the microtemporal threshold from life to death, mysterious, evolutionary features of Peyton’s brain have allowed him envisage an elaborate and temporally distended plan of escape. Yet while Bierce almost always traces an adult man’s crisis-induced relapse into a more flexible, childlike empiricism, “Chickamauga” represents this process a bit differently, beginning with an impressionable child’s relatively uninhibited sense of violence and culminating with the moment when he suffers a traumatic reorientation to his environment.

Thrailkill has argued that childhood is a key metaphor for the pragmatic method. In contrast with earlier Romantic tropes of either purity or lost innocence, as Thrailkill explains, “childhood seen from an evolutionary perspective is itself temporal and unfolding: a risky but immensely fruitful time of dependence, learning, and culture acquisition” (“Pragmatism” 268). Thrailkill goes on to note that William James often celebrates childhood as a time of play—“a full-bodied, curious encounter with and manipulation of the material world” (270). James suggests that in childhood, perceptual processes are more open to experimentation and interrogation, while for adults, sense impressions are most often instantly and habitually filtered through cultural and social systems of classification, evaluation, and language. This is what was discussed in previous chapters as the distinction between sensation and perception, which is germane to Bierce’s fiction. Again and again, the narrator of “Chickamauga” slows down to narrate the child protagonist’s rapidly shifting

perceptual processes so as to reproduce the transitions between sensation and perception before abruptly interjecting with his own savvy explanations. This begins somewhat playfully before becoming one of the most disturbing dynamics of the reading experience, a tactic which not only dramatizes the rift between (a child's) immediate experience and narrative representation, but consequently forces the reader to acknowledge her own presence and participation as a spectator of past violence.

In the opening paragraph of "Chickamauga," the narrator introduces the boy with an indefinite article and subsequently refers to him as an "it." This depersonalization is then extended through the invocation of an unexpectedly vast historical and evolutionary scale. The boy's excitement to venture alone into the woods is indebted to the "thousands of years" throughout which he "had been trained to memorable feats of discovery and conquest—victories in battles whose critical moments were centuries, whose victors' camps were cities of hewn stone" (20). This strikingly naturalistic passage sets this individual child's night of discovery against the backdrop of deep time, a scale on which it is possible for the narrator to collapse centuries into a series of 'critical moments.' Bierce begins his account by compressing time, accelerating through the history of humanity and its repeated resorts to bloodshed so as to recontextualize what he frames as this boy's evolutionarily inborn delight in imperial violence. It is perhaps with some irony, then, that the narrator remarks upon 'its'—the child's—"new sense of freedom from control" upon setting out into the forest (20). In "An Occurrence," the ending had suddenly shined the spotlight on the shadowy evolutionary features of Peyton's embodied mind, yet here we begin with the evolutionary features of the boy's experience, which establishes a rift: the narrator lays out a seemingly impersonal, deterministic thrust to the story—a timescale that transfigures a person into an 'it'—while acknowledging the boy's immediate experience as a "sense of freedom."

Whereas the cyclorama offered an immersive experience through the seeming absence of a pictorial or narrative frame, Bierce begins by magnifying the gulf between the microdynamics of second-to-second experience in the boy's present and narrative attempts to represent—and unavoidably frame—such experience retrospectively.

However, the vast timescale of the opening paragraph introduces what soon becomes a scaled-down narrative of a boy who gets lost in the woods on the first night of the Battle of Chickamauga, the second-deadliest battle of the Civil War and a battle which Bierce had experienced firsthand.¹⁴ The son of a veteran soldier sets out with a handmade wooden sword, which “he now bore bravely, as became the son of an heroic race” (20). After fighting and winning an imaginary battle, he is startled by a rabbit in his path that sends him careening deep into the forest in terror. This scene is endearing precisely because of the distance between the child's affective response to the rabbit—short of breath and “blind with tears,” he cries out for his mother inarticulately, his “little heart beating hard with terror”—and our own savvy perception of the rabbit as harmless (21). What is amusing is the boy's innocent *misperception*. The boy soon exhausts himself and falls asleep on the bank of a creek that we perhaps only later realize is Chickamauga, and Bierce goes on to fill this almost cloyingly sentimental scene with chirping birds and squirrels as harmless as the rabbit.

Yet it soon becomes clear that the real power of “Chickamauga” involves the cognitive dissonance Bierce creates for readers by tracing the way the boy filters and processes what we identify as naïve impressions of war that permit his unabashed relish for destruction. Waking up from an hours-long nap to find himself thoroughly lost at night in the woods, the boy sees a vague shape in motion in the distance. Rather than disclose outright what the boy struggles to name and assess, the narrator draws out his process of apprehending his surroundings:

Suddenly he saw before him a strange moving object which he took to be some large animal—a dog, a pig—he could not name it; perhaps it was a bear. He had seen pictures of bears, but knew nothing to their discredit and had vaguely wished to meet one. But something in form or movement of this object—something in the awkwardness of its approach, told him that it was not a bear; and curiosity was stayed by fear. He stood still and as it came slowly on gained courage every moment, for he saw that at least it had not the long, menacing ears of the rabbit. Possibly his impressionable mind was half conscious of something familiar in its shambling, awkward gait. (22)

The narrator takes pains to trace how this shadowy image, like a Rorschach blot, is processed through the boy's preconceptions, desires, and fears. While these perceptual processes often take place too quickly and habitually in adult experience to record, Bierce's protracted account of this experience, littered with syntactical interruptions, turns, and equivocations, elucidates this child's less assured process of assimilating feeling and thought. Not only has the boy seen pictures of bears, but he has 'vaguely' harbored a desire to see one, a subconscious wish that influences one of several possible ways he might identify the vague form before him. Yet his recent run-in with the rabbit and his lingering fear also mediate his perceptual process here, mixing with and complicating his curiosity. Confined to what the boy can see and rationalize, readers at this point are unsettled to learn that "the whole open space about him was alive with them—all moving toward the brook" (22). We are suspended in the gap between narrative levels—the boy's immediate experience and the narrator's withheld knowledge.

Once he has thoroughly unnerved the readers with an obscure image of a landscape teeming with unidentifiable movement, the narrator abruptly hits them with his understanding of the situation: what the boy sees are maimed soldiers dragging themselves along with what remaining

limbs they have, crawling “by dozens and by hundreds” as far as the eye can see so that “the very ground seemed in motion toward the creek” (22). The historicity of the scene is now unmistakable: it is September 19, 1863, and by the end of the following day over 30,000 soldiers will have disappeared or been captured, injured, or killed. “Occasionally one who paused did not go on,” the narrator casually notes, for “he was dead,” while others stopped to raise their arms up “as men are sometimes seen to do in public prayer” (22). While readers are horror-struck by this ghastly landscape in which mutilated bodies flood the entire field of vision, the boy sees “little but that these were men, yet crept like babes” (22).

By creating distance between readers’ own sense of history and the feelings and thoughts of a child who cannot yet understand what he is seeing, this revelation momentarily divests ‘The Soldier’ of its prior associations and reorients us to how we position these men as objects of our gaze, so to speak. Gerald E. Myers notes that while James typically argues that a pure sensation (like ‘hot’ or ‘cold’) is a mere abstraction, possible, if ever, only in the earliest moments of infancy, he also accounts for exceptions (86). James has offered a version of semantic satiation as an example, explaining that if a reader stares at a single, isolated word for an extended period of time, “it ends by assuming an entirely unnatural aspect”—the word “stares at him from the paper like a glass eye, with no speculation in it. Its body is indeed there, but its soul is fled. It is reduced, by this new way of attending to it, to its sensational nudity” (*Principles* 726). As Myers writes, “James thought of sensations as remedies for the ill moments when reason goes astray” (86). The perceptual discrepancies registered in “Chickamauga” help produce this unsettling phenomenon while moreover desynchronizing readers from the narrative. We do not experience the diegetic time of the story ‘implicitly,’ to borrow Thomas Fuchs’s language, but rather become alert to the

temporal distance between distinct presents: our own present and the boy's, or our own and the soldiers' who lie disfigured in anguish, dying slowly en masse on the river bank.

The naiveté that had prompted the boy to flee from a rabbit twists into what the reader gradually comes to recognize as a disturbing misunderstanding of war as a form of play. As he wanders from bloodied soldier to soldier, peering into their grotesque, ashen faces, he is reminded of a clown he had seen at the circus and begins to laugh with delight:

But on and ever on they crept, these maimed and bleeding men, as heedless as he of the dramatic contrast between his laughter and their own ghastly gravity. To him it was a merry spectacle. He had seen his father's negroes creep upon their hands and knees for his amusement—had ridden them so, 'making believe' they were his horses. He now approached one of these crawling figures from behind and with an agile movement mounted it astride. The man sank upon his breast, recovered, flung the small boy fiercely to the ground as an unbroken colt might have done, then turned upon him a face that lacked a lower jaw—from the upper teeth to the throat was a great red gap fringed with hanging shreds of flesh and splinters of bone. (22-23)

Like Mitchell, who we saw misread the reality of Davis's iron mills as a work of Gothic fiction, the boy misreads the horrors of war as theater. Yet what is most piercing in this passage is the way the reader's tacit position in history becomes increasingly explicit and unsettled. Against the reconciliationist modes of postbellum art, which circumvented the discussion of slavery as the cause of the war or the unrelenting surge of white supremacist violence in its wake, Bierce forces readers to confront their history in the figure of this young son of a Southern planter—"the son of an heroic race" (20)—who on his plantation had watched and ridden enslaved men as they crawled on their hands and knees at his behest, "making believe" they were animals—*his* animals, no less.

Indeed, while the reader is apt to recognize the child's tragic ignorance of the horrors before him, the transfiguration of this bloody scene into a spectacle produced for his viewing pleasure reenacts the very theatricality we see in cycloramic representations of Civil War battles for throngs of paying spectators. The boy scales a nearby tree to take "a more serious view of the situation" and beholds "the clumsy multitude dragg[ing] itself slowly and painfully along in hideous pantomime—mov[ing] forward down the slope like a swarm of great black beetles, with never a sound of going—in silence profound, absolute" (23). From this vantage point, the panoramic vision reduces this military operation to beetle-scale, harkening back to the evolutionary timeframe invoked in the opening paragraph. This eerily silent, "hideous pantomime" becomes a dark perversion of the cyclorama spectacle, as the cyclorama magnifies spatial scale to aggrandize rather than dwarf the plight of soldiers. Yet the boy is only just beginning to sense a greater gravity to the scene before him, which merely inspires him at this point to begin leading this grotesque, pathetic march, still perceiving the situation as a form of entertainment. Whereas in the cyclorama viewers mistake spectacle for realistic experience, here a boy tragically mistakes real experience for spectacle.

Continuing to distance the reader's retrospective vantage point from the boy's immediate experience, the narrator notes disparate objects strewn about the forest—blankets, rifles and the like—which for the boy "were coupled no significant associations" but for the readers serve as traces "of retreating troops, the 'spoor' of men flying from their hunters" (23). We have seen discarded objects similarly scattered about the foreground in the *Gettysburg Cyclorama* and moreover extended into the physical space of the rotunda as real, material objects in the diorama. Yet in the cyclorama, these objects create a spatial realism that seems to blur the line between a historical reality and artistic representation—so wholly, as we might recall, that it purportedly led

a veteran to try to point to the spot on the canvas where he had lost his canteen in the battle. The cyclorama furthermore creates an atmosphere in which the spectators are momentarily willing to accept an object—a cannon, rock, or panoramic rendering of an individual battle—as synecdoche for the greater experience or meaning of the Civil War itself. In “Chickamauga,” however, these objects are mediated more problematically through the eyes of a child whose experience is divided from that of the soldiers he witnesses. Fluctuating as the objects of two distinct perspectives—one of the immediate experience of the child and the other of a mature narrator speaking in past tense—these objects arguably become ‘things.’ “Temporalized as the before and after of an object,” in Bill Brown’s (5) words, “thingness amounts to a latency (the not yet formed or the not yet formable) and to an excess (what remains physically or metaphysically irreducible to objects).” Bierce’s ‘things’ work aesthetically by attuning readers to their own indeterminate position between disparate perspectives within “Chickamauga.” The realism of such moments is achieved by forcing readers to reckon with an irreducible temporal and semiotic distance between a once-mundane, everyday object such as a canteen, and a recreation of such an object to serve as a synecdoche for a historical event.

In the final, horrific moments of the narrative, the child awakes, having slept through one of the bloodiest battles of the war, and revels in the fiery destruction before him, “danc[ing] with glee in imitation of the wavering flames,” for again quite inappropriately “the spectacle pleased” (25). Yet his perspective immediately undergoes a critical change. “Shifting his position,” the boy starts to recognize some of the buildings around him until finally, “the entire plantation, with its inclosing forest, seemed to turn as if upon a pivot” (25). The feeling of being lost and subsequently delighting in an unstructured realm of play morphs into an uncanny feeling that there is indeed something unsettlingly familiar at the heart of this unreal scene of mutilation and destruction. The

boy's "little world swung half around; the points of the compass were reversed," for the boy "recognized the blazing building as his own home!" (25). As when Peyton Farquhar's protracted fantasy suddenly collapses back into clocked military time, the narrative frame and the child's experience suddenly converge. Through this geographic and aesthetic reorientation, the spectacular merges with—and becomes indistinguishable from—the real.

At last the boy realizes that he is not in an imaginary world, but indeed standing upon his own plantation with his own mother lying murdered at his feet:

There, conspicuous in the light of the conflagration, lay the dead body of a woman—the white face turned upward, the hands thrown out and clutched full of grass, the clothing deranged, the long dark hair in tangles and full of clotted blood. The greater part of the forehead was torn away and from the jagged hole the brain protruded, overflowing the temple, a frothy mass of gray, crowned with clusters of crimson bubbles—the work of a shell. (25)

On the one hand, the vision is rendered as though it were a painting. The 'conflagration' lends chiaroscuro to the scene; the mother's insides are vibrantly described as "overflowing," "frothy," and "crowned with clusters of crimson bubbles," tempting us to imagine shades and textures of rich paint rather than place ourselves in the scene of insufferable anguish. Yet the narrative protraction dis-integrates form and meaning: we experience the mutilated body slowly, one fragmented body part at a time, before the identity of this object—this "body of a woman"—dawns on us, much like the shadowy, teeming bodies crawling along Chickamauga.

Like Eakins's *The Gross Clinic*, Bierce's lurid image of the child's dead mother concomitantly draws in and estranges the viewer in the story's culminating moment of realization, yet Bierce is more focused on the perceptual temporality of trauma than spatial perspective: his

narrative concludes with a refusal to merely supplant the dis-integrating forces of traumatic experience. After discovering his mother's body, "the child moved his little hands, making wild, uncertain gestures" and "uttered a series of inarticulate and indescribable cries—something between the chattering of an ape and the gobbling of a turkey—a startling, soulless, unholy sound, the language of a devil." At last, "he stood motionless, with quivering lips, looking down upon the wreck" (25). Up to this point, we realize, the boy's experience has been primarily visual, while the reader's has been entirely verbal. Yet after producing various rifts between the narratorial perspective and the boy's moment-to-moment perceptual processes, Bierce has managed to collapse these disparate modalities while capturing how trauma divides visceral experience from speech, and thus from narrative. "All trauma is preverbal," as Van der Kolk (*The Body* 43) asserts; it "drives us to the edge of comprehension, cutting us off from language based on common experience or an imaginable past." Because trauma inhibits activity in the Broca's area, one of the brain's speech centers, people in duress "may scream obscenities, call for their mothers, howl in terror, or simply shut down"—a phenomenon that Bierce transfigures into the frantic utterances of a deaf and mute child before cutting off noise altogether (43). Whereas earlier in the story the narrator repeatedly stepped in, albeit belatedly, to explain the boy's naïve processes of sensation and perception, in the end he leaves us with a soundless, *near*-still image. The child's "quivering lips" offer a faint sense of movement as if to signal that external time continues to pass. Yet for the boy, time has frozen—the spectacle is over, and so is the story. The readers become voyeurs, seeing the boy see "the wreck" of his mother's body and his home, but without the cyclorama's offering of a historical narrative to assimilate the gruesome and intensely personal details of this ultimately inexpressible trauma. Readers are left with the quivering and the looking—with a

recalcitrantly unfixed scene that refuses to settle into a static photograph or composite panorama of war.

Thraikill's call for a critical shift from realism to realization resonates with the impulse behind Finseth's suggestion that rather than conceptualize realism as a fixed genre, we ought to think of it as "a process of navigating the relation between experience and the world, one driven by epistemological anxiety and skepticism toward myth" ("Civil War" 538). Both attempt to highlight that at its most successful, realism is dynamic: it animates characters and follows the vicissitudes of their thinking and feeling bodies as they navigate a dizzying array of phenomenological and epistemological uncertainties. The quivering at the close of "Chickamauga," though subtle, is tremendously instructive: Bierce's approach to realism involves illustrating experience in its motion. Bierce's fiction furthermore ensures that the reader be attentive to her presence as a participant in the experience of reading, in both a spatial and temporal sense, as we saw in Davis's metarealist novella. If, as Erikson asserts, collective trauma "works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it" and thus lacks the "suddenness normally associated with 'trauma'" (187), Bierce's tactics of desynchronization—and, more importantly, his use of the short story form—produce moments in which readers are abruptly moved: made to feel the tears in "the basic tissues of social life" that aren't visible from the cyclorama platform. In the previous chapter, I referenced Thraikill's assertion, extrapolating from Janice Radway, that what distinguishes romance and sentimentalism—and, in Bierce's case, the cyclorama's "illusive" brand of realism—from the aesthetics of realism is "the extent to which the former 'mask the reader's active collaboration in the production of textual meaning'" (*Affecting* 381). Bierce's stories leave us with idiosyncratic experiences that overwhelm purportedly objective modes of representation such as the photograph or cyclorama, along with the mimetic

approaches to realism they inspired. Reproducing the dis-integrating effects of trauma as an aesthetic experience, Bierce prompts readers to see through, and more importantly between, disparate temporal vantage points, compelling them to confront the lingering fissures and traumatic impacts that simmer beneath the glossy surface of postbellum myth.

Realism as Realization “in the act of occurring”

Bierce “reveled in memory,” Blight writes, but for the same reasons that he reveled in gloom and the macabre (244). In later years, Bierce had set out on several tours of the Georgia and Tennessee battle sites he had seen in combat: he was 71 years old in the last of these trips, at which point it had been nearly fifty years since he fought at Chickamauga (244). He wrote to George Sterling in April, 1912, of his time in Richmond: “a city whose tragic and pathetic history, of which one is reminded by everything that one sees there, always gets on my nerves with a particular dejection. True, the history is some fifty years old, but it is always with me when I’m there, making solemn eyes at me” (*Misunderstood* 221). What he means by “gets on [his] nerves” is of course not irritation but a deeper disturbance: he feels the irrepressible, neurobiological impacts of the past set back into motion in the present. French psychologist Théodule-Armand Ribot makes a distinction in *The Psychology of the Emotions* between two kinds of memory: the “*false or abstract memory*” of feelings, in which there is but “the representation of an occurrence, *plus* an affective characteristic”—“only a sign, a simulacrum, a substitute for the real occurrence, an intellectualized state added to the purely intellectual elements of the impression, and nothing more”—and “true or concrete memory of impressions,” which entail “the *actual* reproduction of a former state of feeling, with all its characteristics” (160-62). Bierce recognized that the difference is palpable: “an emotion which does not vibrate through the whole body is nothing but a purely intellectual state,”

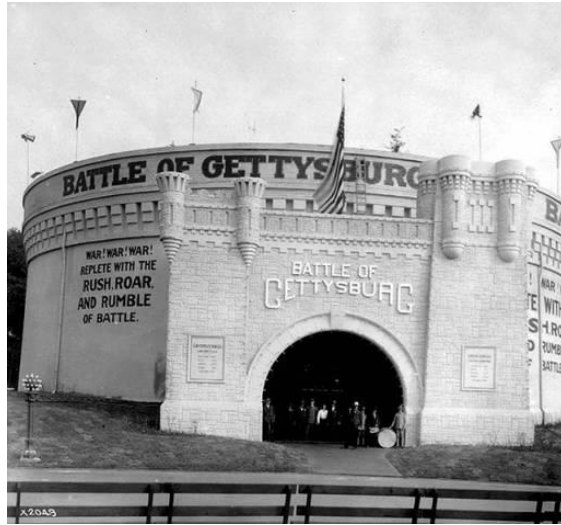
as Ribot argues (163). It was these concrete memories, the affective memories, to which Bierce sought to resynchronize his readers in his abrupt and moving war tales.

In situating Bierce's narrative processes of desynchronization and resynchronization in the context of post-traumatic experience, I have emphasized his fixation on reconstructing—and in the process, demythologizing—the past. Yet in a review for the *St. Louis Republic* in December, 1900, Kate Chopin wrote of Bierce, “His originality defies imitation,” explaining:

He, too, is a product of the West, but he has that peculiar faculty or privilege of genius which ignores subservience. He acknowledges no debt and pays no tribute. His ‘Soldiers and Civilians’ might be called an eccentricity of genius. It is certainly a marvelous flash of the horrors of the possible. Depicting not so much what we are familiar with as what might be, hence, the shudder. (*Private* 224)

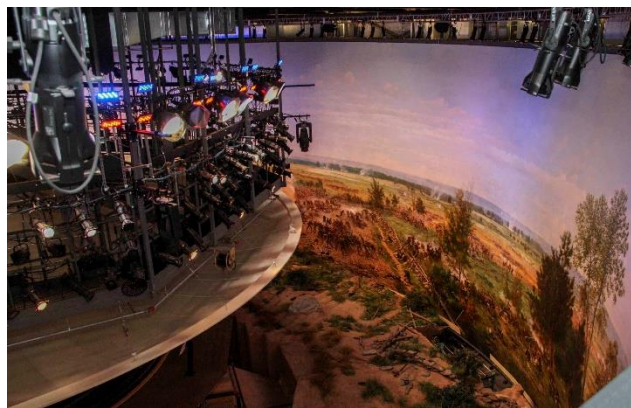
Curiously, what Chopin finds compelling about Bierce is not how he reorients us to what was, but to “what might be.” In the next chapter, we see that Chopin shares Bierce's fascination with the evolutionary body, the unconscious processes which can be jarred into explicit thought and feeling. Yet as her celebration of Bierce suggests, she is more concerned with reorientation to the future: in the possible lies “the shudder,” the thrill of excitement and occasionally fear at the prospect of unforeseen and unforeseeable change. Thus to different ends in the context of women's time, but with Bierce's unflinching incisiveness, Chopin digs beneath the prim surface of habit and time discipline to unveil the more unmanageable and yet psychobiologically indispensable vicissitudes of embodied time and future-directed striving.

Fig. 1.



Battle of Gettysburg Cyclorama, Pay Streak, Alaska Yukon Pacific Exposition, Seattle, 1909. University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, Nowell x2049.

Fig. 2



View from above Philippoteaux's *Gettysburg Cyclorama* for Boston, currently displayed at the Gettysburg National Military Park. National Park Service photograph. <www.nps.gov/media/photo/gallery.htm?id=13866382-1DD8-B71B-0BE67D9F3AC30A69>.

Fig. 3



Detail of Pickett's Charge on Cemetery Ridge, Philippoteaux's *Gettysburg Cyclorama* for Boston, currently displayed at the Gettysburg National Military Park. National Park Service photograph. www.nps.gov/gett/learn/historyculture/gettysburg-cyclorama.htm.

Fig. 4



Civil War battlescene at the Atlanta Cyclorama in Atlanta, Georgia. Photograph in the Carol M. Highsmith Archive, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division. www.loc.gov/item/2011630674/.

Fig. 5



Detail of a diorama in Philippoteaux's *Gettysburg Cyclorama* for Boston, recreated at the Gettysburg National Military Park. National Park Service photograph. <www.nps.gov/media/photo/gallery.htm?id=13866382-1DD8-B71B-0BE67D9F3AC30A69>.

Fig. 6



Detail of the diorama recreated for *Atlanta Cyclorama* at the Atlanta Cyclorama & Civil War Museum. The panorama, "The Battle of Atlanta," was painted by the American Panorama Company between 1885 and 1886. Photograph in the Carol M. Highsmith Archive, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division. <www.loc.gov/item/2011631098>.

1. To defend the study of the brain by “materialists” and “spiritualists” alike, Holmes notably likens the brain to a clock. He writes that “the instrument” of the brain is like “the piano which must be as thoroughly understood as the musical box or clock which goes of itself by a spring or weight” (263).

2. Holmes traces his understanding of the unconscious back to Gottfried Wilhelm (von) Leibniz, whose work had been interpreted and applied by the pioneering psychologist Wilhelm Wundt in the nineteenth century. He points to others who worked from this account as well, including the 19th-century British psychiatrist, Henry Maudsley (227-78).

3. In a letter to Gustav Adolphe Danziger in 1900, Bierce insists that “all ‘explanation’ is unspeakably tedious. . . . Far better to have nothing to explain—to *show* everything that occurs, in the very act of occurring” (*Misunderstood* 71).

4. This frequently quoted motto comes from one of Bierce’s many letters to his friend, George Sterling. In a letter dated September 12, 1903, Bierce complains about the ruthless literary marketplace, claiming, “All my life I have been hated and slandered by all manner of persons except good and intelligent ones,” and he imagines literary critics must “lie awake nights to invent new lies” about him “and new means of spreading them without detection” (*Misunderstood* 110-111). Yet he encourages people like him to find comfort knowing that “in a few years they’ll all be dead—just the same as if you had killed them. Better yet, you’ll be dead yourself. So—you have my entire philosophy in two words: ‘Nothing matters’” (111).

5. Poe’s review of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Twice-Told Tales*, a touchstone for studies of the American short story, argues that the most important feature of the successful “tale” is “unity of effect or impression,” which requires that the story be readable in a single sitting (216). Poe goes on to explain, “Without a certain continuity of effort—without a certain duration or repetition of purpose,” and indeed a sense of “momentum”—the reader “is never deeply moved” (216).

6. Robert A. Wiggins takes this position, arguing right out of the gate that “to pin the label of ‘realist’ upon Ambrose Bierce is possible only if one distorts reality” (1). He contends that scholars have erred by fixating on just a few of Bierce’s anomalous stories (namely “Chickamauga” or “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge”) and neglecting his “more frequent preoccupation with the outré, the bizarre, the grisly grotesque, and the Gothic.” While Wiggins is right to call for more attention to Bierce’s complex and extensive oeuvre—an effort that drives Lawrence Berkove’s endeavor to study Bierce “developmentally”—our understanding of realism has now expanded well beyond what

Wiggins frames as either historiographic verisimilitude, on the one hand, or subscription to formal characteristics such as “selection of detail” on the other. Rather than muscle a limited definition of realism onto Bierce’s fiction, I follow the cues of Amy Kaplan and Jane Thraikill and consider how Bierce’s complex aesthetics complicate and lend more depth to our critical understanding of literary realism.

7. Howard W. Bahr’s 1963 study of Bierce quite presciently attempts to re-conceptualize realism and Bierce’s position toward and within it. Yet studies of Bierce in the past decade have yet to profit from the recent emotive turn in studies of realism.

8. For a more detailed survey and critique of Bierce scholarship up through the ’80s, see Cathy N. Davidson’s introduction to *Critical Essays on Ambrose Bierce* (1982).

9. Lawrence Berkove’s recent endeavor to connect “Bierce’s concern about the use of reason to his concern for mankind” by determining “the basic elements of his thought, and by describing the operation of his literary techniques” (xiii-xiv), embodies what Thraikill critiques as the tendency to relate literary realism to “‘cognitive value’ rather than aesthetic experience: with the rational, and rationalizing, mind instead of the feeling body” (“Emotive” 365). The tacit privileging of mind over body is particularly limiting in a study of Bierce, whose stories repeatedly expose the unreliability of the rationalizing mind in crisis, highlighting instead the knowledge of the sensing body.

10. Talk of cycloramas has resurfaced in the past few years as historians fight for funding to restore the massive, moldering canvases. At the time I am writing, the 1886 *Battle of Atlanta* cyclorama is being moved from Green Park to the Lloyd and Mary Ann Whitaker Cyclorama Building at the Atlanta History Center—an expensive and intricately technical project. On February 17, 2017, Alan Blinder published a piece in the *New York Times* documenting the complicated efforts to salvage this “titanic, deteriorating example of an art form that has mostly disappeared.” For other recent media coverage, see Phil Gast of CNN, Sam Whitehead of NPR, Jeff Martin of AP News, and Bo Emerson of The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

11. This is a very brief introduction to Bessel Van der Kolk’s (2014) explanation in *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, which will be discussed in more depth shortly.

12. Blinder (2017) notes, for instance, that during the *Battle of Atlanta* cyclorama’s tour of the North, it was interpreted “for what it was: a decisive and pivotal victory for the Union that left an estimated 12,140 people dead, most of them Confederate troops.” Yet when it traveled to the South in 1892, it was advertised in *The Atlanta Constitution* as “the ‘only Confederate victory ever painted’” and drew in huge, predominantly white, crowds. And of

course, these tensions are by no means ancient history. Blinder points out that even over 150 years after Sherman's campaign, the restoration efforts for the *Battle of Atlanta* cyclorama have had to navigate enduring "political and racial sensitivities," particularly as they join in a larger movement to de-mythologize "the traditional Old South narrative" of the Civil War, such as Sherman's purported cruelty.

13. For many visitors, the blurred line between reality and representation was profoundly shocking, thanks in large part to the deceptive organization of space. As Rev. J. L. Harris reflects in *Zion's Herald*, while the spectator "seems to be in the very midst of the fiercest battle scenes, his vision embraces a horizon of sixty miles in circumference; and so natural do the plains, hills, forests and distant mountains appear, that it is difficult to realize that you are not standing under the open skies, looking upon the scene itself, and not upon its picture" (1885). Describing the diorama, he goes on to marvel that from the viewing platform, the spectator cannot distinguish between the diorama and canvas: "Here, on the made earth, is a real shanty made of rough boards," he explains, "a few feet distant is one on the canvas; one looking as real as the other" (1885). When the New York reproduction was burglarized in 1889, the *New York Times* reported that one officer investigating the scene in the dim light grabbed one of the dummy corpses from the diorama and cried "I got him!"—embarrassed only until one of his colleagues made the same mistake moments later ("Burglars" 1889). Numerous accounts such as these reveal a phenomenon whereby the cyclorama's representation is conflated with reality, overcoming even the staunchest skeptics' powers of discernment.

14. Ray Morris Jr. has traced several parallels between the boy's experiences and those of the Union army at Chickamauga. See chapter three, "The Woods of Chickamauga," in *Ambrose Bierce: Alone in Bad Company* (1998).

– Chapter Three –

Kate Chopin’s Darwinian Philosophy of Becoming

In January, 1899—just a few months before *The Awakening* was published—*The Atlantic* printed “In the Confidence of a Story-Writer,” a short essay in which Kate Chopin complains of “the Preacher” who told her, “Thou shalt parcel off thy day into mathematical sections. So many hours shalt thou devote to household duties, to social enjoyment, to ministering to thy afflicted fellow creatures,” and so on (CW 621). Chopin proclaims:

I listened to the voice of the Preacher, and the result was stagnation all along the line of “hours” and unspeakable bitterness of spirit. In brutal revolt I turned to and played solitaire during my “thinking hour,” and whist when I should have been ministering to the afflicted. I scribbled a little during my “social enjoyment” period, and shattered the “household duties” into fragments of every conceivable fraction of time, with which I besprinkled the entire day as from a pepperbox. In this way I succeeded in reestablishing the harmonious discord and confusion which had surrounded me before I listened to the voice, and which seems necessary to my physical and mental well-being. (621)

With her characteristic blend of insolence and humor, Chopin satirizes the Puritanical rhetoric of time thrift which had come to govern both the public and private spheres, along with the reification of time into a material resource to be spent, saved, or “besprinkled.” Her rebellion is “brutal” insofar as she willfully ‘kills’ time by playing cards, doodling, and subverting altogether the domestic tasks apportioned to each of the day’s “hours,” which she herself puts in ironic quotation marks. Sarcasm notwithstanding, Chopin was clearly concerned about the psychobiological costs of rigid time discipline as she was writing *The Awakening*.

The Preacher’s commandments parrot precisely the kinds of Puritanical directives one finds in household advice manuals dating back to the 1830s and ’40s.¹ Catherine Beecher’s

Treatise on Domestic Economy (1841), for example, advocates a “*habit of system and order*” consisting of “the right *apportionment of time* to different pursuits” (14; Beecher’s emphasis). Outlining the thrilling array of possibilities for partitioning every week, day, and hour into religious, intellectual, and social chores, Beecher cautions her young female pupils about “[t]he value of time, and our obligation to spend every hour for some useful end,” for “Christianity teaches, that, for all the time afforded us, we must give account to God; and that we have no right to waste a single hour” (180-181). The treatise sought to model a regimen that could protect against the physical and emotional maladies Beecher had observed in so many housekeepers: women’s control over their time was to ensure proper control over their feelings (6).^{2,3} The factory shifts among workers “who relieve each other as regularly as the sentinels of an army” in the iron mills or the mechanistically synchronized movements of the soldiers in “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” function similarly: whether in the factory, on the battlefield, or in the upper-class home, the regulation of one’s time promised to preempt dangerously unpredictable and destabilizing emotional experiences. The problem for Chopin, however, is that domestic habits of time discipline are built upon the conviction that tomorrow will not deviate in radical or unpredictable ways from today. If there is an emergent structure of feeling in Chopin’s account of leisure-class women’s time discipline, it arises from “stagnation all along the line of ‘hours,’” life purged of the uncertainty, “the harmonious discord and confusion,” which provides for a sense of potentiality and thus of volition.

At stake in Chopin’s rebellion against the militaristic discipline of women’s “time thrift,” I argue in this chapter, is the restoration of conation—from the Latin *conatus* (undertaking, effort, purposeful action). Providing “the root of spontaneity,” in Thomas Fuchs’s words, the psychobiological processes of conation entail “the basic ‘energetic’ momentum of mental life

which can be expressed by concepts such as drive, striving, urge or affection,” all of which are notably future-oriented feelings and actions (*Temporality and Psychopathology* 78). In the previous chapter, the disembodied modality of clock time was ruptured by traumatic distortions of perceptual duration wherein time and affect became dis-integrated. Yet Ambrose Bierce represented these processes to emphasize the enduring pull of the private and cultural past, indeed on several levels: the unconscious mechanisms at work in the reptilian brain amid trauma—the oldest part of our neurological makeup, from an evolutionary standpoint—and the post-traumatic resurfacing of war memories in the (reader’s) present. This chapter attends rather to how Chopin draws upon her exceptionally thorough readings of multidisciplinary studies of the embodied mind to produce affective reorientations to the future.

By reading *The Awakening* in dialogue with Chopin’s more radical short stories of the late 1890s, I assert that Chopin’s fiction bridges post-Darwinian understandings of biological selfhood and evolutionary time to the dynamics of indeterminacy and virtuality that were beginning to emerge in Henri Bergson’s concept of duration. Chopin’s insistence upon the role of spontaneity, even at the level of narrative, as we will see shortly, highlights the imperative distinction between possibility and potentiality for one’s conative orientation to the future, a distinction which figures prominently in Bergson’s philosophy of time. In Bergson’s account, possibilities are commonly understood as a set of choices, ostensibly calculable in advance from conditions inherent in the present, whereas potentiality is created with the “uninterrupted continuity of unforeseeable novelty” of duration (*CM* 35).⁴ Chopin understands spontaneity neither in the earlier romantic sense—e.g. Wordsworth’s “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”—nor quite in the way the literary naturalists anxiously portrayed it: as the unthinking, mechanistic reflexes of the biological organism. While Chopin incorporates her extensive studies of Darwinian evolutionary theory into

her fiction, she does not fall victim to the fatalistic misreadings that many of her contemporaries did; rather, she helps trace Darwin's emphasis on random variation and natural and sexual selection to the indeterminate array of contingencies that provide constant sources of potential for change, which both deterministic and teleological understandings of evolution had overlooked.

Chopin's Spontaneous Aesthetics

Chopin resented that she was so frequently compared to Émile Zola, whose fiction she found tediously descriptive. In a review of the 1894 novel *Lourdes*, Chopin describes the story as “more than two-thirds of the time swamped beneath a mass of prosaic data, offensive and nauseous description and rampant sentimentality,” further complaining, “Not for an instant, from first to last, do we lose sight of the author and his note-book and of the disagreeable fact that his design is to instruct us” (CW 697). While assured of Zola's “sincerity,” Chopin explains, “I am yet not at all times ready to admit its truth, which is only equivalent to saying that our points of view differ, that truth rests upon a shifting basis and is apt to be kaleidoscopic” (697). Chopin represents the kaleidoscopically shifting foundation of truth in her own fiction not only as the way one person's point of view differs from another's but, furthermore, as the way an individual's perceptual “truth” fluctuates from one moment to the next as one's feelings or interests shift. Chopin's point recalls Bierce's droll definition of “really” as “apparently” in *The Devil's Dictionary*, though her tone is far less cynical: whereas Bierce's critiques of social conventions and assumptions are soaked through with a sense of futility, Chopin revels in the indeterminacy afforded by her pluralistic understanding of perceptual reality.

Chopin was far more stimulated by the short stories of Guy de Maupassant, many of which were written during the author's late, addled stages of syphilis.⁵ In September, 1896, Chopin wrote

in an autobiographical essay for *The Atlantic* about how she had fortuitously stumbled upon some of Maupassant's stories about eight years earlier. "I had been in the woods, in the fields, groping around; looking for something big, satisfying, convincing, and finding nothing but—myself; a something neither big nor satisfying," Chopin recalls, a self-portrait which bears striking resemblance to Edna in the nascent stages of her self-discovery. Yet in the fiction of Maupassant she discovered the expansionary possibilities of reading and storytelling:

Here was life, not fiction; for where were the plots, the old-fashioned mechanism and stage trapping that in a vague unthinking way I had fancied were essential to the art of story-making. Here was a man who had escaped from tradition and authority, who had entered into himself and looked out upon life through his own being and with his own eyes; and who, in a direct and simple way told us what he saw. When a man does this, he gives us the best that he can; something valuable for it is genuine and spontaneous. He gives us his impressions. . . . Someway I like to cherish the delusion that he has spoken to no one else so directly, so intimately as he does to me. (qtd. in Toth *Kate* 205)

I want to draw particular attention to two interrelated points Chopin makes here: first, that aesthetic experience, at its most powerful, encompasses an implicit connection between the production and reception of art, between the creator and the reader or viewer or listener (note the telling shift into present tense in, "Someway I like to cherish the delusion that he has spoken to no one else so directly, so intimately as he does to me"); second, that spontaneity is a crucial aspect of the artistic process in what Chopin understands as literary realism, which should represent "life, not fiction." Chopin appreciates in Maupassant's "genuine and spontaneous . . . impressions" what Rita Felski describes as "representations that summon up new ways of seeing," as opposed to mere "echoes or distortions of predetermined political truths" (*Uses* 9-10). While reading others' work Chopin

had found “nothing but—[her]self,” which is to say she had not had her perspective shaken, surprised, and expanded. Yet Maupassant frees her from the mechanisms of plot that she had “in a vague unthinking way” believed necessary, which opens her up to a new sense of aesthetic, epistemological, and ethical possibilities.

Both Per Seyersted and Emily Toth, Chopin’s preeminent biographers, have emphasized the author’s determination to cultivate a reputation as an extemporaneous writer, though various manuscript drafts, diary entries, and letters that surfaced in the 1990s have revealed that Chopin “worked much harder at her craft than she ever admitted in print”—that in actuality she “wrote and rewrote, thought and rethought” (Toth *Unveiling* xxi). Given her work ethic, it’s worth considering why Chopin insisted upon the speed and effortlessness of her writing process. Chopin claims in a letter to Waitman Barbe, for example, that “the story must ‘write itself’ without any perceptible effort on [her] part, or it remains unwritten,” further insisting that not one story in the collection *Bayou Folk* (1894) “required a longer time than two, or at most three sittings of a few hours each”: indeed, her forthcoming story for *Century* (“Azélie”) “was written in a few hours, and will be printed practically without an alteration or correction of the first draught” (*Miscellany* 120). In a diary entry dated May 12th, 1894, Chopin critiques a story by “Mrs. Hull” for having “[n]o freshness, spontaneity or originality of perception,” the very qualities for which she praises Maupassant (*Private* 180). “Story-writing—at least with me,” Chopin writes in “On Certain Bright, Brisk Days”—“is the spontaneous expression of impressions gathered goodness knows where” (*CW* 160). Recollecting his friend’s perspective on various national literatures, William Schuyler notes in his biography for *The Writer* that Chopin finds Americans almost as good as the French, and, given “the advantage which they enjoy of a wider and more variegated field for

observation,” feels that they could “surpass them, were it not that the limitations imposed upon their art by their environment hamper a full and spontaneous expression” (“Kate” 117).

There are several possibilities for what Schuyler, ventriloquizing Chopin, means by the “limitations” that cripple American writers’ “full and spontaneous expression.” Given the public outcry against Chopin’s brazen treatment of sex and adultery in *The Awakening*, we might think first of the genteel sensibilities which William Dean Howells and company had likewise had to weigh against their pursuit of realism a decade earlier.⁶ There is also an obviously gendered context to the “hampering” environment of American art: for one thing, the trope of the naturally talented, spontaneous artist was typically figured in masculine terms, as Molly J. Hildebrand points out in her recent essay on Chopin’s work.⁷ Though these are certainly pertinent factors, I consider the broader philosophical implications by turning to Chopin’s witty rejoinder to critics of *The Awakening*, which she published in *Book News* in July, 1899, under the incongruous heading “Aims and autographs of authors”:

Having a group of people at my disposal, I thought it might be entertaining (to myself) to throw them together and see what would happen. I never dreamed of Mrs. Pontellier making such a mess of things and working out her own damnation as she did. If I had had the slightest intimation of such a thing I would have excluded her from the company. But when I found out what she was up to, the play was half over and it was then too late.
(Miscellany 137)

Chopin’s mock-apology is certainly tongue-in-cheek, but notwithstanding its playful tone, and in spite of its framing as the “aims” of the author, it makes an earnest case for the importance of unforeseeability not only in the reading experience but in the writing process. Jane Thrailkill astutely identifies several rhetorical registers of the phrase “*working out* her own damnation,” with

language of predestination (“damnation”) quelled by the intimation of agency and volition (*Affecting* 160). The phrase moreover implies what Thrailkill calls “creative passivity”—Chopin’s insistence that “despite being the author, she had not the ‘slightest intimation’ of her character’s actions” (160). Refuting the misunderstanding of possibility as a preexisting choice, Bergson argues in *The Creative Mind* that a possibility can only be said to exist after it has been realized, and we must therefore recognize “that the artist in executing [her] work is creating the possible as well as the real” (103). Indeed, Chopin underscores here that the possibilities of her fiction were not prefigured at the outset (i.e. by “the plots, the old-fashioned mechanism and stage trapping” she had presumed necessary before reading Maupassant); rather, she brought the possibilities for Edna into existence through the affectively future-oriented or conative, spontaneous act of writing.

To frame the social and political implications of Chopin’s aesthetic philosophy, I turn to two companion books published by Elizabeth Grosz in 2004 and 2005, respectively: *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* and *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power*. In both works, Grosz reexamines the interrelated developments of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century evolutionary theory and philosophy, arguing that the new concept of time that inhered in Darwinian natural and sexual selection—which has so frequently been oversimplified by neo-Darwinists and rejected by feminist scholars—laid the foundation for Bergson’s and Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophies. Whereas many have read Darwin as driving a wedge between the biological and the social or cultural, Grosz contends that the interconnected but crucially distinct processes of natural and sexual selection are what make the radical social upheaval and transformation envisaged by feminist, antiracist, and queer politics possible. Like Grosz’s study, Chopin’s fiction—heavily influenced by evolutionary theory and contemporary philosophy, psychology, and anthropology—“explores the region between biology and culture; between bodies

and sociotemporal organization, between the sciences of life and the study of social organization” (*Nick of Time* 1). Grosz points in particular to Darwin’s emphasis on unpredictable, chance variations as the crux of evolutionary time, which she positions as “a bridge between the emphasis on determination that is so powerful in classical science and the place of indetermination that has been so central to the contemporary form of the humanities” (92). While evolutionary time is, of course, not entirely “free and unconstrained” by the past—no human will be born with wings or gills this afternoon—it is also not “determined and predictable in advance”; it is characterized by “a systemic openness that precludes precise determination” (92). Whereas systems of social organization, including domestic time discipline, attempt to control and protect against such unpredictability and indeterminacy, I suggest that this sense of openness and contingency is precisely what Chopin means by the “harmonious discord and confusion” vital to her “physical and mental wellbeing” (92).

In *The Awakening*, Edna Pontellier ultimately refuses to resynchronize with the habitus of leisure-class women because it would mean re-attuning herself affectively to a life bereft of potentiality—to a habitual sense of a future inherent in, delimited by, and predictable from the conditions of the present. At a certain point, “all sense of reality had gone out of her life”: Edna had “abandoned herself to Fate, and awaited the consequences with indifference” (162). To “await” the future, rather than strive toward it, signals what Fuchs describes as the loss of “psycho-physiological conation,” or “affective directedness”—“the vital force” which directs people “towards the future” (“Temporality and Psychopathology” 82).⁸ The problem, as we will see, is that the men in Edna’s life, Dr. Mandelst in particular, impress upon her a reductive but culturally and literarily prevalent sense of conflict between nature—conceived as her mysterious, subconscious evolutionary drives and desires as a reproductive woman—and culture, which is

directed by an equally mysterious and unassailable array of rules and expectations. As a result of what is at bottom a misunderstanding of both time and affect in an evolutionary context, Edna is deprived of the feeling of volitional drive, much like Hugh Wolfe in the final pages of “Life in the Iron Mills,” who likewise takes his own life.

Yet in Chopin’s short fiction, particularly the narrative extending from “At the ’Cadian Ball” (1892) to its sequel, “The Storm” (written in 1898 but published posthumously, for obvious reasons), Chopin represents accidents that highlight the continual potential for rupture from the present and the predictable: while Calixta’s sudden decision to marry Bobinôt in the earlier story is presented as a disillusioned capitulation to a world of restrictive, socioculturally sanctionable possibilities, in the follow-up tale, the storm provides a radical irruption of potentiality into everyday life, leading Calixta and Alcée to a kind of spontaneous expression within form. Through the intertextual tale of Calixta and Alcée, Chopin asserts the restorative benefits of intermittent desynchronization from and resynchronization with the social environment, experiences in which the everyday becomes limned by the indeterminacy of evolutionary time, and mere endurance is transformed into what Bergson would call duration.

Bridging Darwin to Bergson

Chopin was exceptionally well-read in a range of disciplines—a biographical detail which can’t be stressed enough. As a friend of the author wrote, Chopin “had come ‘closer to maintaining a salon than any woman that has ever lived in St. Louis’” (Seyersted 62). Chopin would have certainly been familiar with the work of John Dewey and William James, both of whom contributed regularly to the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* in the 1880s and ’90s while Chopin was living in St. Louis, a city Seyersted describes as a “fermenting-ground for new ideas” at that

time (63). Seyersted posits that Chopin was a devotee of Darwin since as early as 1869 (84), and as William Schuyler notes in his biography of the author, “the subjects which . . . attracted her were almost entirely scientific,” particularly the latest biology and anthropology: “The works of Darwin, Huxley, and Spencer were her daily companions; for the study of the human species . . . has always been her constant delight” (*Miscellany* 117). After the death of her husband Oscar in 1882 and of her mother the following year, Chopin’s obstetrician and friend, Dr. Frederick Kolbenheyer, helped her overcome her grief by encouraging her to read, write, play music, and participate in his intellectual soirées (the antithesis to the “rest cure” Charlotte Perkins Gilman had endured under the supposed care of S. Weir Mitchell) (Seyersted 48-49). Dr. Kolbehneyer, an Austrian agnostic with radical politics, was “a specialist on such philosophers as Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer,” as Seyersted notes, and it is to his influence that Chopin’s friends attributed the change in her “religious opinions and philosophic attitude toward life”—as Daniel Rankin put it, she became “a Catholic in name only” (qtd. in Seyersted 49).

Because of Chopin’s extensive, cross-disciplinary reading, Seyersted speculates that the post-Darwinian “new view of man” was less disruptive to her than it was to others at the time (85). On the contrary, her knowledge of the latest evolutionary theory and studies of physiology and psychology sets her fiction apart from that of her contemporaries, many of whom had sea legs in this new intellectual environment.⁹ In *The Descent of Love*, Bert Bender points out that scholars have paid curiously little attention to the influence of Darwin on American literary realism, and have typically suggested that it was primarily the naturalists who were concerned with natural selection, which is almost always discussed in a social Darwinist context (1). Yet all realist authors were of course grappling with new and more complex understandings of selfhood in the wake of Darwin, who had upended humanistic foundations in several momentous ways. While *On the*

Origin of Species had helped popularize the concept of evolution, it was a concept that had been in circulation for quite some time. *The Descent of Man*, however, placed humanity squarely within evolutionary history—people became animals, meriting no special attention or status of exceptionality. Shame, self-awareness, the use of language, and even an aesthetic sense, those characteristics humans had trumpeted as signs of their distinction from animals, are presented in *The Descent of Man* as “already developed in some perhaps more elementary or less elaborated form in animal species” (Grosz *Becoming* 18). In *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, Darwin went on to note that emotional expression in cultures around the world was remarkably uniform, and furthermore, “the expressive actions of monkeys” are “closely analogous to those of man”: chimpanzees’ armpits are ticklish, for example, and when tickled, chimps react as human children do, with “a more decided chuckling or laughing sound,” or else noiseless laughter, and a wrinkling of the eyelids that is “characteristic of our own laughter” (131). It was with *The Descent of Man* and later *Expression* that Darwin really impressed upon readers a new sense of humans’ position in vast, evolutionary time.

To grapple with what it means to be human in this post-Darwinian context, as Bender explains, writers had to develop a “new psychology,” which he describes as “doubly dark” (34). First of all, “it pointed to an obscure remnant of the primitive mind that still lived deep in the most highly civilized mind,” as we saw “jarred” into consciousness amid traumatic experience in Bierce’s fiction. In even more evocative terms, Charles Taylor writes that human nature was now reconceptualized as an evolutionary past buried within “the deep subject, opaque to herself, the locus of unconscious and partly impersonal processes, who must try to find herself in the unmeasurable time of a dark genesis out of the pre-human, without and within” (349). Yet it was also ‘dark,’ Bender notes, in the sense that “the older generation” of writers and thinkers in the age

of Darwin had “kept this whole inquiry ‘under lock and key’” (34). When writers of the 1890s finally dared to explore these shadowy regions of our evolutionary selves more rigorously, they frequently misread Darwin or distorted his ideas to accommodate their fears and desires. Naturalist writers such as Frank Norris and Jack London had tended toward a fatalistic understanding of the self in evolutionary time, a perspective to which Edna will ultimately succumb in the final pages of *The Awakening*, while writers like William Dean Howells leapt at the chance to use Darwin to plot the movement of individuals and their culture teleologically as a natural progression from “lower” to “higher”—another blatant misreading, though certainly a cheerier one for his white, genteel readers (Bender 39). But as Darwin would write in the margins of his copy of the *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, “Never use the word [*sic*] higher & lower”; there are no hierarchies in the processes of natural selection (qtd. in Menand 210).¹⁰ The new sense of time Darwin had conceptualized was indeed irreducible to value-laden narratives of progress or regress; evolution leads neither to a better or worse state, but toward greater and greater complexity and variation within and between species.

Many feminist scholars have condemned Darwin’s portrayal of women’s passivity in sexual selection as a capitulation to and apology for the patriarchal logic of his time; however, Grosz contends that the implications of the complex interplay among random variation and natural and sexual selection in Darwinian evolution are indeed serviceable to feminist politics, which will help frame why Chopin found evolutionary theory so important to the feminist impulses of her fiction. Contrary to the commonplace tendency to conflate natural and sexual selection, the two processes are distinct, and their continual interaction subverts any thoroughgoing attempt to reduce evolutionary time to a predictable or progressive line. At times sexual selection “complements and extends natural selection, but at other times problematizes it,” Grosz notes: it may, for instance,

“privilege members of either sex who may not be the fittest in terms of strength, health, or ability, but may in some other sense function as the more attractive” (*Nick of Time* 66). Or sexual selection might yield secondary sex characteristics that are of no interest whatsoever for natural selection (e.g. men’s facial hair, as Darwin observes in *The Descent of Man* (576-77)). What is important to note is that sexual selection lends “an individual, idiosyncratic element to the operations of natural selection”—“more aesthetic and immediately or directly individually motivating factors to the operations of natural selection”—which means that the play of sexual selection “deviates natural selection through the expression of the will, or desire, or pleasure of individuals” (Grosz *Nick of Time* 66; 75). Grosz’s insight into the dynamic openness created by the involvement of aesthetic taste and “individual, idiosyncratic” factors in sexual selection will help contextualize Chopin’s treatment of not only sex and sexual desire, but beautiful or pleasurable aesthetic experiences more generally, particularly for Edna, who is said to have “a sensuous susceptibility to beauty” (57).

From her lively and generative rereading of Darwin’s work, Grosz is able to trace the implications of Darwinian evolutionary concepts through new ideas about time that were emerging in philosophy at the turn of the century. In contrast with the many literary naturalists who tended toward deterministic misinterpretations of concepts such as natural selection, Grosz emphasizes that “Darwin introduces indeterminacy into the Newtonian universe”—which had been understood as “a closed system in which matter is governed by a relatively small number of invariable, predictive laws”—and proposes in its place an “open systematicity of linguistic and economic systems on the one hand, and biological systems on the other,” which is amenable to Bergson’s notions of virtuality and potentiality (*Nick of Time* 9; 38).¹¹ There is in fact no telos, no “commitment to progressivism” in natural selection (90). Simply put, evolution is not progress; it’s adaptation. The species “selected” by nature are not the ‘best’ or ‘highest,’ nor are they the

most adaptive to their environments in some frozen snapshot of evolutionary time; rather, they are more capable of continuing to survive by remaining adaptable to shifting environments. As Richard Lehan puts it, “Darwin’s theory was progressive only so far as it postulated that a species tended to move toward greater adaptability—not toward a more idealized form” (8).

Because of Chopin’s exceptionally thorough engagement with contemporary science, anthropology, and philosophy, her fiction offers more complex perspectives on selfhood, and specifically womanhood, in the context of the post-Darwinian “new psychology” than many of her contemporaries were capable of. Edna’s desynchronization from the kinds of domestic habits Beecher had advocated, and which her friend Adèle Ratignolle models with such aggravating exactitude, fosters her awakening to new depths within herself: though she becomes more attuned and responsive to her typically repressed drives, urges, and moods, she ultimately struggles to understand what it means to be an evolutionary woman. Dr. Mandélet, who has been read as something of a proxy for Arthur Schopenhauer, ultimately deflates Edna’s awakening by framing her newfound feelings of liberating spontaneity as a manifestation of her inborn procreative drive—that is, as a series of evolutionary mechanisms that operate separately from rational thought, volition, and self-assertion. By internalizing Dr. Mandélet’s perspective, Edna sees herself caught between a return to the numbing monotony of *les convenances* and an equally repetitive and captive movement between procreatively-driven lust and satisfaction. In other words, she reduces the future to one of two prefigured, predictable outcomes—possibilities which she projects from her present sociocultural and emotional context—each of which robs her of conative volition, hope, and desire. Yet in Chopin’s short fiction, environmental accidents to which characters adapt—in both cases, unpredictable shifts in the weather—highlight the fundamental openness of evolutionary time, wherein periodic ruptures from the predictable open characters up

to conative and intermittently spontaneous growth. Offering potent alternatives to Edna's perspective in *The Awakening*, these stories underscore the crucial differences between endurance and duration; possibility and potentiality; and plot and evolution, distinctions which would be central to Bergson's philosophy and subsequently to the emergence of literary modernism.

Gendered Time in *The Awakening*

Edna's "mantle of reserve" is already slipping by the time readers arrive on the scene; she has spent the summer on Grand Isle immersed in French Creole society, and has been shocked but also allured by the uninhibited sensuality, expressiveness, and intimacy of the culture (57). The greater degree of freedom Edna comes to admire in her Creole companions offers a respite from the nagging supervision she suffers under her fastidiously priggish husband, Léonce Pontellier. His almost parodic concern with propriety is represented throughout the novel as an obsessive attention to measurable time—a habit he can't break even during his weekend getaways to Grand Isle—and he is preternaturally alert to Edna's slightest deviation from the routine that he thinks society expects of her (though utterly obtuse when it comes to what underlies such deviations). Léonce will later be bewildered by Edna's decision not to maintain her "reception day" on Tuesdays—which she "had religiously followed since her marriage" (100)—for Léonce had thought his wife had learned "by this time that people don't do such things," for "we've got to observe *les convenances* if we ever expect to get on and keep up with the procession" (101).

Among the novel's cast of characters, Léonce Pontellier most obviously embodies the unthinking internalization of time-governed social norms, so much so that he can't recognize the tautological reasoning behind his defense of social synchronicity: the purpose of keeping up with the schedule is . . . to keep up with the schedule. He is the "typical American man" whom Henry

Adams would caricature just five years later: a man with “his hand on a lever and his eyes on a curve in his road” whose life consists in “keeping up an average speed of forty miles an hour,” and who therefore cannot abide “emotions or anxieties or subconscious distractions” (445). Adams’s metaphor invokes one of the philosophical problems that Bergson points out in habits of the intellect that are sustained by social synchronicity with abstract, linear time. In “The Perception of Change,” he explains that the transfiguration of duration into static, successive, quantifiable units “is a certain state of things analogous to that produced when two trains move at the same speed, in the same direction, on parallel tracks: each of the two trains is then immovable to the travelers seated in the other” (*CE* 143-4). Our intellect requires a sense of stasis for us to act and be acted upon. The train passengers “can hold out their hands to one another through the door and talk to one another only if they are ‘immobile,’ that is to say, if they are going in the same direction at the same speed” (144). The fixing of a fluid and changeable reality into language and categorical concepts has practical and natural utility, as William James likewise noted, because “[o]ur action exerts itself conveniently only on fixed points; fixity is therefore what our intelligence seeks” (15). Yet because this sense of immobility is “the prerequisite for our action,” Bergson argues, we mistakenly “set it up as a reality, we make of it an absolute,” and subsequently fail to recognize that movement, not stasis, “is reality itself,” a notion of time which Grosz argues is strikingly commensurate with Darwin’s account of evolutionary processes (143).

Even the frank and unabashedly sensual Adèle Ratignolle, credited as “the most obvious” influence upon Edna’s loosening sense of restraint that summer, abides quite strictly by gendered temporal forms as a paradigmatic “mother-woman.” We find her in the early pages—in the middle of summer, on a sweltering island in the Gulf of Mexico, mind you—knitting winterwear for her children to the utter befuddlement of Edna, whose “mind was [understandably] quite at rest

concerning the present material needs of her children” (52). Adèle Ratignolle models the kind of time-thrift Beecher had advocated in her housekeeping treatise. And as Chopin expressed in her essay for *The Atlantic*, the shape and feeling of time enforced by Adèle’s domestic economy is for Edna something very much like “stagnation all along the line of ‘hours.’” Edna later finds the Ratignolles’ “domestic harmony” insufferable, for it offers Adèle “no regret, no longing,” consisting therefore in nothing “but an appalling and hopeless ennui,” a “colorless existence” of “blind contentment . . . in which no moment of anguish ever visited her soul” (107). This is to say that periodic anguish or at least the potential for it, like Chopin’s “harmonious discord and confusion,” is necessary for one’s psychobiological wellbeing—for one’s sense of drive toward the future.

Edna is characterized as having always recognized “the dual life” which society demands of her, and the resultant schism between “that outward existence which conforms” and “the inward life which questions” (57). It is important to note that the dual life consists not of “outer” and “inner” selves but rather “outward existence” and “inward life”; the latter set of terms suggests directional movement, like the tides, as part of an ongoing, rhythmic process of negotiation, or in Fuchs’s terms, processes of desynchronization and resynchronization, the “constant fine tuning of corporal and emotional communication” required for “intercorporal resonance” (“Temporality and Psychopathology” 81). Throughout *The Awakening*, Chopin represents experiences that intermittently transform Edna’s relationship to the future: moments when her feeling of time is suddenly limned by what Bergson characterizes as potentiality, and affective withdrawal is transformed into conative volition. It is to these experiences we turn next.

From Endurance to Duration: Edna's Transitory "awakening to a full meaning of time"

Edna's story begins with desynchronization: in the early pages, Edna's dawning realization of "her position in the universe" is notably first "vouchsafed" to her during a bout of insomnia, the first indication of an increasingly chronic falling-out from intersubjective time (57). The narrative then follows Edna's processes of resynchronization with her environment through music, painting, swimming, and sex, pleasurable aesthetic experiences which intermittently awaken Edna to her own physical and affective capacities, and intermittently restore her conative drive toward the future. As Cynthia Griffin Wolff observes, much of the first third of *The Awakening* "is paced by the rhythm" of Edna's "basic needs": if we were to try to plot out Edna's time on Grand Isle, "the most reliable indices to the passage of time would be her meals and her periods of sleep" (460). Edna's narrative of self-discovery is thus portrayed throughout the novel as a falling in and out of resonance with various rhythms, from sleep cycles, appetite, and libido to Gulf tides, music, and *les convenances*.

Edna's processes of resynchronization anticipate Adolf Meyer's early twentieth-century "commonsense psychiatry," a practical, therapeutic application of James's pragmatic psychology and John Dewey's aesthetics. In marked contrast to S. Weir Mitchell's infamous rest cure, or even Sigmund Freud's talking cure, Meyer proposed an approach he called "ergasiology" (from the Greek *ἔργον*: doing, action, work), which would productively shift the focus among practitioners "from a cold dogma of blind heredity and a whole-sale fatalistic asylum scheme"—the perspective one finds in Norris's emphasis on Trina McTeague's unalterable inheritance of an obsessive-compulsive miserly "gene," for instance—"to an understanding of individual, familiar, and social adjustments, and a grasp on the factors which we can consider individually and socially modifiable," factors relating to the person's "life history," her "somatic and functional assets and

problems, likes and dislikes, the problem presented by the family,” and the like (*Commonsense* 8; 9).

This ergasiological approach led Meyer to introduce occupational therapy as a method for treating those suffering from anxiety or depression, which was based largely upon helping people develop new relationships to and uses of time. “Our body is not merely so many pounds of flesh and bone figuring as a machine, with an abstract mind or soul added to it,” Meyer argues; “It is throughout a live organism pulsating with its rhythm of rest and activity, beating time (as we might say) in ever so many ways” (“Occupation” 641). Noting the multitudinous rhythms that one must continually attend to and synchronize with, often “under difficulty”—“the *larger rhythms* of night and day, of sleep and waking hours, of hunger and its gratification, and finally the big four—work and play and rest and sleep”—Meyer suggests that therapy begin with pleasurable exercise to create “an orderly *rhythm* in the atmosphere,” “the sense of a day simply and naturally spent, perhaps with some music and restful dance and play, and with some glimpses of activities which anyone can hope to achieve and derive satisfaction from” (641). By recovering the feeling of what Eugène Minkowski calls “lived time,” or Thomas Fuchs “implicit time,” the depressed or anxious person recovers furthermore a new appreciation for her capacities to inhabit and use time: what is notably afforded by Meyer’s treatment is not resynchronization with clocked schedules, but a more qualitative understanding of daily living, striving, and fulfillment. Meyer explains, “*The awakening to a full meaning of time* as the biggest wonder and asset of our lives and the valuation of *opportunity and performance* as the greatest *measure* of time; those are the beacon-lights of the philosophy of the occupation worker” (642; my emphasis). Meyer’s approach combats the more typical, “abstract exhortations to cheer up and to behave according to abstract or repressive rules”—as we saw modelled so blatantly by Léonce Pontellier in his circular defense of *les*

convenances (640; Meyer's emphasis). What is especially vital to take away from Meyer's innovative practices, for our purposes in this chapter, is the idea that the remedy for depression or nervousness lies not "within" the individual sufferer, but rather in the rhythmic and affective relationship between the person and her social environment.

As a rigorously trained and talented pianist herself, Chopin unsurprisingly turns to music in much of her fiction to explore the physiological dynamics of a person's resonance with the environment.¹² In "Wiser Than a God" (1889), Paula Von Stoltz, a gifted pianist, is faced with a decision between marrying the well-to-do but vapid George Brainard and pursuing an independent life as a true artist.¹³ Though George Brainard is also a musician, his impressive "proficiency" in handling his banjo is conspicuously undercut by the narrator's description of the instrument "swinging in mid-air like the pendulum of a clock" (CW 664). Chopin suggests a very different kind of aesthetic experience when Paula asks her suitor in a moment of melodramatic exasperation, "Is music anything more to you than the pleasing distraction of an idle moment? Can't you feel that with me, it courses with the blood through my veins?" (668). Rhythms, as Dewey defines them, entail live, unmetronomic "interactions" between organism and environment and are always embodied, which he expresses in terms that relate Paula's cardiovascular metaphor to the oceanic rhythms of *The Awakening*: "There is ebb and flow, systole and diastole: ordered change" (*Art* 16). Chopin, like Paula Von Stoltz, suggests that powerful aesthetic experiences can blur the boundaries between the self and others and produce powerful feelings of resonance with one's environment.

Adèle Ratignole plays the piano quite capably, but solely "on account of the children, she said; because she and her husband both considered it a means of brightening the home and making it attractive," which is to say her appreciation for music is more utilitarian than aesthetic (69). "She

played very well,” the narrator acknowledges, “keeping excellent waltz time and infusing an expression into the strains which was indeed inspiring”—an observation which the narrator seems rather reluctant to concede (69). That Adèle’s technical proficiency is, like George Brainard’s, equated with metrical regularity—keeping time—is telling; as a reflection of her social role and character as a model “mother-woman,” it falls into the same camp as knitting winter clothing for her unborn child in the middle of August and having another baby “[a]bout every two years” (52). Chopin suggests that because Adèle Ratignolle’s playing is tied up with the kind of time economy housekeeping manuals had advocated—wherein controlling one’s time was a means of keeping one’s emotions at bay—her music provides listeners with a more predictable and controlled emotional experience. Edna’s response to Adèle’s music is thus correspondingly tepid and guarded, notwithstanding the temptingly psychoanalyzable imagery of some of her visions while listening. Typically, we’re told, “[m]usical strains, well rendered, had a way of evoking pictures in [Edna’s] mind,” prompting her to both visualize and name what she hears (71). Edna had called one piece that Adèle frequently played “Solitude,” a piece which always prompted her to envision “the figure of a [naked] man standing beside a desolate rock on the seashore,” whose “attitude was one of hopeless resignation as he looked toward a distant bird winging its flight away from him”—a rather melodramatic, picturesque prefiguration of her own eventual death (71). It’s worth noting that Adèle’s music does not lead Edna to imagine static images, but rather short, suggestive moving pictures that translate the complex temporal experience of music into miniature narratives, to the extent that these scenes—a man watching a bird in flight, a finely dressed woman promenading down a hedge-flanked avenue, a “lady stroking a cat”—constitute narratives (71).¹⁴

Though seemingly innocuous, Edna’s ekphrastic conversion of music into narrative forms reflects temporal habits of listening that curb more indeterminate affectivity. In Bergsonian terms,

Edna preemptively reduces music to a spatialized representation of temporal and emotional experience. Bergson points in particular to the various ways that language has prestructured Western concepts of time—most problematically, the division of time into static, disconnected ‘now-points.’ Even the concept of succession, he points out, is a “logic immanent in our languages and formulated once and for all by Aristotle”: our intellectual imperative to make reasoned judgments requires “the attribution of a predicate to a subject,” which is reflected in the way Edna translates the duration of musical aesthetics into a lady stroking a cat, a man watching a bird in flight, or a woman in finery walking down an avenue (*CM* 69). Naming the subject essentially fixes it, Bergson argues; the subject is “defined as invariable,” with the potential for movement and change deferred to the predicate—“the diversity of the states that one will affirm concerning it, one after another”—and in conceptualizing experience in this way, proceeding “from the stable to the stable,” we therefore “follow the bent of our intelligence, we conform to the demands of our language and, in a word, obey nature” (69).

In striking contrast, at the start of Mme. Reisz’s performance, the sound of the first chords “sent a keen tremor down Mrs. Pontellier’s spinal column,” a detail which immediately grounds the impacts within the nervous system, as intense motion within the body, prior to expression (71). Perhaps Chopin had in mind Darwin’s observation in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* that “[f]ine music, from the vague emotions thus excited, causes a shiver to run down the backs of some persons” (68). The narrator goes on to clarify that this “was not the first time [Edna] had heard an artist at the piano,” but was perhaps “the first time she was ready, perhaps the first time her being was tempered to take an impress of the abiding truth.” In the context of ‘taking an impress,’ we are apt to think of “tempered” in the material sense—the preparation of clay for molding—suggesting that Edna is in a more plastic state: she is physiologically and emotionally

pliant, open, and indeed impressionable. The passive phrasing—we aren't sure who or what has 'tempered' Edna—positions Edna in the state of what Dewey would call “undergoing” or “receptivity.” As Dewey argues, a powerful aesthetic experience entails “surrender,” which is not a withdrawal of energy but a controlled “going-out of energy in order to receive”: “We must summon energy and pitch it at a responsive key in order to *take in*” (53). Dewey's suggestively musical metaphor speaks to another set of etymological layers to the verb “temper” and its variants that apply to Edna's experience: “To regulate (a clock),” common in the sixteenth century, as well as “To tune, adjust the pitch (of a musical instrument)” or “To bring into harmony, attune” from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The verb likely roots back to “tempus” or “tempor”—“the proper time or season” (*OED*). This etymological history reflects the connection we have seen throughout this dissertation between temporal and affective relationships. That Edna's being was “tempered” suggests that the music struck Edna not only during an opportune “season” in her life but during a moment when she was especially ‘tuned’ (or attuned), affectively and rhythmically, to the transformative power of her various aesthetic experiences.

If Adèle Ratignolle's music is akin to the plots and “stage trapping” of the stories in which Chopin had found “nothing but—[her]self,” Mademoiselle Reisz's music fosters the “genuine and spontaneous” aesthetic experience that she had found so transformative in the fiction of Maupassant.¹⁵ In marked contrast to the representational program music of Adèle, Mademoiselle Reisz's final piece is a Frédéric Chopin prelude,¹⁶ which music critics in the composer's time would have called “absolute” music.¹⁷ As Mademoiselle Reisz begins to play, Edna:

. . . waited for the material pictures which she thought would gather and blaze before her imagination. She waited in vain. She saw no pictures of solitude, of hope, of longing, or of despair. But the very passions themselves were aroused within her soul, swaying it, lashing

it, as the waves daily beat upon her splendid body. She trembled, she was choking, and the tears blinded her. (72)¹⁸

Beginning with what Edna expected but did not see, the narrative then traces the dynamics of preverbal affective intensity as it unfolds into thought: Edna doesn't speak, nor does the narrator say much to qualify her emotional state, but instead we are presented with how Edna is moved—the past-tense ('trembled') melting into past progressive ('was choking') and creating the sense of indivisible change underway. One would be hard-pressed to parse the causal chain of events in this experience, proceeding, as Bergson put it, "from the stable to the stable." It is unclear which, if not all of these passions are aroused for Edna—solitude, hope, longing, and despair—and it's not possible to plot her bodily responses narratively in the way that Edna created visual sequences of the emotions represented by Madame Ratignolle's playing. Instead, Chopin pauses upon Edna's suspension amid the transition from an unsettled expectation to a dynamic, indeterminate affectivity awaiting expression. Eventually asked how she liked the music, Edna responds physically rather than verbally: "unable to answer," she "pressed the hand of the pianist convulsively" (72).

As Thrailkill notes, nineteenth-century debates about the aesthetics of music were taken up in a variety of disciplinary contexts, from physiology to philosophy. Music was positioned as the "exemplary art" by figures such as Arthur Schopenhauer, Eduard Hanslick, Franz Liszt, and Richard Wagner, "and granted physiological preeminence by the likes of Charles Darwin, Edmund Gurney, and William James, who argued for music's privileged access to the innermost drives and even the evolutionary history of the species" (158). Quoting James's assertion in "What is an Emotion?" that "[h]ardly a sensation comes to us without sending waves of alternate constriction and dilation down the arteries of our arms," and that no "emotion, however slight, should be

without a bodily reverberation,” which was discussed in this dissertation’s introduction, Thrailkill suggests that as we see in Edna’s trembling, choking, and crying, “The line of transmission is therefore not representational, but vibrational” (*Affecting* 185). Chopin expresses the temporality of the James-Lange Theory of Emotion—in effect, we don’t feel sad and then cry, but rather sadness is the feeling of crying; fear is the feeling of our accelerated pulse, sweating, etc.—a concept of affective and emotional experience which was heavily indebted to Darwin’s *Expression of the Emotions*. Because feeling and cognition are so complexly imbricated, it is only through retroactive, reflective effort that we can attempt to approximate emotional experience by plotting it sequentially with language or representational images. The vibrational rather than representational dynamics of Edna’s experience of this Chopin prelude seem to attune her to a more direct path of feeling and expression than she had been accustomed to. As Maupassant offered Chopin his “impressions,” Edna “take[s] an impress of the abiding truth” while listening to Mademoiselle Reisz play, and what she discovers is the distinction, in James’s words, “between the idea of an emotion and the emotion itself” (“Emotion” 195). Edna’s aesthetic and temporal “habit-disruption,” as Meyer would call it, helps open up affective and expressive pathways in her that seem to have long been walled off, the consequences of which start to extend well beyond her experiences in drawing room recitals.

Mademoiselle Reisz’s music helps Edna recognize other less obvious forms of aesthetic experience, other forms of pleasure with which Edna finds resonance and through which she comes to recognize hidden aspects of herself. The pragmatic dynamics of what Felski calls recognition, one of the titular ‘uses of literature’ she identifies, involve “not just the previously known, but the becoming known”: the way something we might have previously sensed only “in a vague, diffuse, or semi-conscious way” comes back to us with “a distinct shape” and is thus

“amplified, heightened, or made newly visible” (25). While listening to Mademoiselle Reisz, this “becoming known” entails Edna’s sudden realization of the relationship between the lashing of her passions while listening to a Chopin prelude and “the waves [that] daily beat upon her splendid body” that summer: that is, she is becoming aware of the continuity—the duration and internal growth—of her awakening process, which seems to have begun long before she came to Grand Isle. This is not a transcendent experience; it does not take Edna outside of her embodiment or outside of time, as many critics have suggested, but attunes her to alternative sets of previously repressed or unnoticed rhythms in her life on Grand Isle. In a similar moment, the sight of the Gulf stretching into the distance reminds Edna of a summer day back in Kentucky when, as a child, she had wandered through a vast, green meadow. She at first tells Madame Ratignolle that these associations have no “connection that [she] can trace,” yet as she makes the effort to remember what it felt like to meander through a “meadow that seemed as big as the ocean to the very little girl walking through the grass,” who threw her arms outward “as if swimming when she walked,” Edna does indeed retrieve the associative connections between her past and present, and notably begins to talk about her childhood self in the first rather than third person (60). Joking that she had probably just fled from a boring church service, Edna tells Madame Ratignolle that religion later “took a firm hold upon” her, “until — until — why, I suppose until now,” and indeed until now, Edna “never thought much about it—just driven along by the habit” (61).

Bergson wonders, what if “instead of trying to rise above our perception of things we were to plunge into it for the purpose of deepening and widening it?” (*CM* 134). What if “we were to insert our will into it, and that this will, expanding, were to expand our vision of things” (134)? With effort and careful attention, he argues, and by inhabiting time as mobility and duration rather than mere succession:

What was immobile and frozen in our perception is warmed and set in motion. Everything comes to life around us, everything is revived in us. A great impulse carries beings and things along. We feel ourselves uplifted, carried away, borne along by it. We are more fully alive and this increase of life brings with it the conviction that grave philosophical enigmas can be resolved or even perhaps that they need not be raised, since they arise from a frozen vision of the real and are only the translation, in terms of thought, of a certain artificial weakening of our vitality. (*Key Writings* 266)

This sense of a more fluid, undetermined reality—oriented toward an open and potentially eruptive future rather than toward the constraints extending from the past, as in Bierce’s fiction—reflects the sense of time Fuchs deems necessary for conative volition, desire, and hope. Edna’s intermittent experiences of what Bergson would call duration spark more mobilizing perspectives in and on time. Chopin keenly attends to the way immersive aesthetic experience, embedded in the rhythms of daily life, can provide the feeling of participation in some “great impulse,” by which we feel “uplifted, carried away, borne along,” and we sense the dynamic pull of the future—an idea which Grosz traces to Darwin’s emphasis on variation and adaptation.

With her being “tempered” by the sensual rhythms of Grand Isle, Edna begins to experience not only more spontaneous responses to aesthetic experiences, but more spontaneous insight into and behavior in her social environment. When invited to go for a late-afternoon swim with Robert Lebrun early in the novel, Edna initially declines “with a tone of indecision” before acquiescing to the “loving but imperative entreaty” of the “sonorous” Gulf (56). Edna couldn’t understand “why, wishing to go to the beach with Robert, she should in the first place have declined, and in the second place have followed in obedience to one of the two contradictory impulses which impelled her” (56). The narrator extrapolates:

A certain light was beginning to dawn dimly within her, —the light which, showing the way, forbids it.

At that early period it served but to bewilder her. It moved her to dreams, to thoughtfulness, to the shadowy anguish which had overcome her the midnight when she had abandoned herself to tears.

In short, Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her. This may seem like a ponderous weight of wisdom to descend upon the soul of a young woman of twenty-eight—perhaps more wisdom than the Holy Ghost is usually pleased to vouchsafe to any woman. (57)

Robert's invitation leaves Edna momentarily suspended between "contradictory impulses" as her socially conditioned, knee-jerk reaction to repress her desire gives way to an alternative urge, an experience which recalls the way Hugh Wolfe's conditioned disgust with the word "theft" denatured into several different perspectives on justice. As with Edna's experience of Mademoiselle Reisz's prelude, suspension is not abeyance, but rather a dynamic period of indeterminate excitement unfolding into cognizable, expressible feelings and pathways for action. Chopin seizes upon and distends such illuminating pauses amid habit disruption: the delay in this moment of what the Greeks would have called *akrasia* is an occasion for Edna to register the conflicts among what are typically microtemporal, subconscious impulses.

Edna's hesitation between the invitation and her reaction represents what Grosz calls the "nick of time," which she frames as the most compelling link between Darwin and Bergson. Extrapolating from Bergson's *Matter and Memory*, Grosz explains that while evolutionarily simpler forms of life typically respond more or less automatically and immediately to a stimulus,¹⁹

with more complex life forms, “there is interposed both a delay, an uncertainty, between a perceptual reaction and a motor response, and an ever-widening circle of perceptual objects which in potential promise or threaten the organism, which are of ‘interest’ to the organism and which it can connect to the object perceived,” which is to say that “the more complex the form of life, the more unpredictable the response, the more interposing the delay or gap, the more freedom, and the greater consciousness” (166-67). As Edna’s “habitual reserve” is increasingly disrupted, we see more evidence that she is acting in accordance with her own interests and desires rather than social dictates. As Edna is swimming, for example, the narrator remarks, “She could have shouted for joy. She did shout for joy,” thus skimming effortlessly over the way an urge emerges in a moment of hesitation, cast first in the conditional tense, and is quickly followed, immediately recast in the past tense (73).

Thus intermittently, Edna seems to awaken to a sense of her own creative capacities as an evolutionary organism. When Mademoiselle Reisz asks Edna at one point why she loves Robert Lebrun “when [she] ought not to,” Edna responds, “Why? Because his hair is brown and grows away from his temples; because he opens and shuts his eyes, and his nose is a little out of drawing; because he has two lips and a square chin,” articulating, that is, the kinds of concerns that are at play in sexual selection. As Grosz explained earlier, sexual selection inserts “idiosyncratic” and “more aesthetic and immediately or directly individually motivating factors” into the process of natural selection (66; 75). During such times when she feels empowered by a sense of individual choice, Edna senses no conflict between herself and her surroundings: asked what she will do if and when Robert returns, Edna responds, “Do? Nothing, except feel glad and happy to be alive” (137). Yet the aforementioned passage about Edna’s dawning sense of her position in the universe ends with the ominous warning that “the beginning of things, of a world especially, is necessarily

vague, tangled, chaotic, and exceedingly disturbing.” That Edna’s awakening is characterized metaphorically as the beginning of a world lends a kind of blurriness to the post-Darwinian philosophical context of Edna’s emerging sense of selfhood. In this light—the light in which many of the naturalist writers cast their characters—what seem like liberating acts of spontaneous self-assertion are reconceived as corporeal urges incited by mysterious, evolutionarily ancient mechanisms operating silently beneath the surface of conscious thought and striving. Given the heightened awareness of the evolutionary drives and impulses within the body at the turn of the century, the difficult negotiation between these various physiological and social rhythms also speaks to an exacerbated philosophical tension between the romantic, idealist narrative of self-realization or self-improvement and the realist, materialist histories of much broader adaptation and transformation in the interest of the species, not necessarily the individual organism. In this context, the next section focuses on how and why Edna’s expansionary revelations in the first third of the novel give way to a more perilous feeling of self-division.

The Stranger in the Mirror: Edna’s Pivot from Darwin to Schopenhauer

A key turning point in the novel is of course Robert Lebrun’s abrupt flight to Mexico: loss is a major source of Edna’s deepening melancholy. Yet her struggle to overcome the heartbreak is exacerbated by her return to New Orleans, where she is expected to fall back into a more rigid and disembodied routine—her now-estranged habitus, which she had abandoned on Grand Isle—which furnishes few opportunities for “processes of coping and resynchronization,” in Fuchs’s terms (“Melancholia 181). Among several striking parallels between Edna’s experience and Hugh Wolfe’s in chapter one is her increasingly chronic sense of “explicit” embodiment. As Fuchs explains, the sense of “uncoupling from the environment” is very often accompanied by “an

unpleasant insistence of the body”—“A leaden heaviness, constant exhaustion, and a sense of restriction and tightening” that lead one to “feel the bare materiality of [her] body that is otherwise hidden in the movement and performance of life” (183).

Yet what is distinct about *The Awakening* is that Chopin represents Edna’s more oppressive sense of embodiment throughout the final third of the novel as both an affective and philosophical struggle with her “position in the universe as a human being, and . . . her relations as an individual to the world within and about her” in a more complex, post-Darwinian context. Lehan describes the new understanding of the “evolutionary interface between the animal and the human” in the late nineteenth century as the phenomenon of what he calls the “stranger in the mirror”: the recognition of a second self, an inner “animality that created a force antagonistic to rational control and development” (xxiii; 80). The greater awareness of vast evolutionary processes within and around us posed a threat to post-Enlightenment confidence in the separation of the mind from the body, the ideal from the material. As Lehan explains, this stranger in the mirror “can intuit the beautiful and sublime amid ugliness; it can reveal hidden human impulses; it can expose the contradictions that exist between natural impulses and social conventions; it can show generosity and display self-indulgence; and it can reveal both generate and degenerate forms” (xxiii), a catalogue which summarizes remarkably well the various perspectives—both expansionary and disturbing—to which Edna awakens.

On the one hand, the ‘stranger in the mirror’ helps Edna “to look with her own eyes; to see and to apprehend the deeper undercurrents of life,” adding “to her strength and expansion as an individual” until she is no longer “content to ‘feed upon opinion’ when her own soul had invited her” (151). However, the narrator explains that eventually, “There was with [Edna] a feeling of having descended in the social scale, with a corresponding sense of having risen in the spiritual,”

as if the two are in direct inverse rather than complex and mutually transformative relation to one another (151). Toward the end of the novel, we see a dangerous sense of dissociation between “that outward existence which conforms” and “the inward life which questions”—between Edna’s social self and the stranger in the mirror—which obscures the new sense of creative time and spontaneity she had been discovering.

Edna had indeed “cried a little” after having sex with Alcée Arobin for the first time, not only because of the “feeling of irresponsibility” and “the shock of the unexpected and the unaccustomed,” but most of all because of her regret that the inciting kiss—“the first kiss of her life to which her nature had really responded”—“was not the kiss of love . . . which had held this cup of life to her lips” (138). The most obvious way to interpret this is that Edna loves Robert, not Alcée. Yet we find an account of the deeper-seated anxiety that incites Edna’s tears in Dr. Mandelet’s explicitly Schopenhauerian assertion “that youth is given up to illusions,” and that what we often like to call love “seems to be a provision of Nature; a decoy to secure mothers for the race” (171).²⁰ There are clear echoes of Dr. Mandelet’s warning as Edna saunters despondently into the sea in the final pages: “To-day it is Arobin; to-morrow it will be some one else,” Edna reflects, and although “[t]here was no human being whom she wanted near her except Robert,” at present, she “realized that the day would come when he, too, and the thought of him would melt out of her existence, leaving her alone” (175). Edna’s sense of successiveness—one sexual urge after another, albeit in the guise of love—has a flattening effect, equating one romantic interest, or one pang of desire, with any other. The rhythmic undulations of Edna’s drives, desires, and moods which had led to transformative experiences of resonance with her environment on Grand Isle are transfigured in the latter third of the novel into a prison-house of inner forces which, far from providing a sense of volitional drive and spontaneity, preempt Edna’s capacity to imagine that the

future might become or bring about anything other than what she is experiencing in the here and now.

Having been influenced by her husband and by Dr. Mandelet to see her behavior as mechanistic and the rhythms of her life as monotonously successive, Edna gradually withdraws from the world about her. As we have seen in previous chapters, “lived time” depends largely on the feeling of “contemporality,” or synchronization, with others, which entails both rhythmic and affective resonance (Fuchs “Temporality and Psychopathology” 82). When Edna throws a party to celebrate her independent move from Léonce’s house into her own “pigeon house,” we see that Edna is deeply out of sync, temporally and affectively, with her guests, for whom “[t]he moments glided on, while a feeling of good fellowship passed around the circle like a mystic cord, holding and binding these people together with jest and laughter” (145). The “feeling of good fellowship” is the typically implicit feeling of inhabiting a shared time and affective atmosphere. In painfully stark contrast, as Edna “sat there amid her guests, she felt the old ennui overtaking her; the hopelessness which so often assailed her, which came upon her like an obsession, like something extraneous, independent of volition. It was something which announced itself; a chill breath that seemed to issue from vast cavern wherein discords wailed” (145). The narrator’s point about the ‘wailing discords’ that assail Edna takes us back to Chopin’s earlier assertion to the contrary that “harmonious discord” helps maintain her wellbeing. What is ultimately so injurious to Edna in the second half of the novel is not her moodiness; as Thrailkill astutely points out, “prior to the summer at Grand Isle, we presume, the emotionally somnolent Mrs. Pontellier likely had no moods at all,” which is hardly preferable (191). It is, rather, that she comes to experience these mood shifts as “the ‘aimlessness of a mere succession of excitations,’” in Dewey’s words, rather than opportunities

for “expansion,” which involves “an overcoming of factors of opposition and conflict” (*Art* 56-57; 14).

It is worth considering the echoes of Schopenhauer in Edna’s depressive decline toward the end of the novel because it is largely in opposition to Schopenhauer, along with Herbert Spencer, that Bergson frames his philosophy of duration. “Nature,” per Dr. Mandelet, “takes no account of moral consequences, of arbitrary conditions which we create, and which we feel obliged to maintain at any cost,” a recapitulation of the rigid dualism between nature and culture that creates a corresponding sense of division between the inner and outer selves (171). Edna’s addled response to the doctor is, “Yes . . . The years that are gone seem like dreams—if one might go on sleeping and dreaming—but to wake up and find—oh! well! perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one’s life” (171). Her language is strikingly similar to Schopenhauer’s in several respects. First, she parrots his argument about the illusory nature of time: “The past and the future (considered apart from the consequences of their content) are empty as a dream, and the present is only the indivisible and enduring boundary between them” (bk. I, vol. i 8). Second, she seems to draw from “The Metaphysics of the Love of the Sexes,” in which Schopenhauer argues that although the original desire for sex might seem to serve the individual, “The satisfaction, on the other hand, is really only for the benefit of the species,” and “Hence, then, every lover, after the ultimate consummation of the great work, finds himself cheated; for the illusion has vanished by means of which the individual was here *the dupe of the species*” (349; my emphasis). In stark contrast with Bergson’s concept of “creative evolution”—and likewise in contrast with Darwinian evolution—Schopenhauer insists that our temporal experience and with it our sense of volition and desire are a deception, a representation of an ideal, atemporal “Will”: because of our limited perception, he argues, human life consists

merely in enduring a series of atomized, infinitesimal, and disconnected now-points. “Succession,” he argues, “is the form of the principle of sufficient reason in time, and succession is the whole nature of time” (9), which Edna translates into, “To-day it is Arobin; to-morrow it will be some one else.” The interconnected affective and temporal implications of these philosophical perspectives translate to the difference between awaiting the future “with indifference” and striving toward it.

Considered in the context of Grosz’s genealogy, what leads to Edna’s depressive decline is not “her position in the universe as a [reproductive, female] human being,” in and of itself, as Donald Pizer has argued,²¹ but rather her ultimate inability to discover in that position the degree of constructive power and spontaneity which the interplay between natural and sexual selection leaves open to individuals and species. While Schopenhauer’s ideal Will is an extreme example of deterministic thinking, Bergson also critiques those philosophers who assert that there is free will, but present freedom as “a simple ‘choice’ between two or more alternatives, as if these alternatives were ‘possibles’ outlined beforehand, and as if the will was limited to ‘bringing about’ (‘realizer’) one of them,” which more aptly characterizes Edna’s perspective in the final third of the novel (*CE* 19). As Bergson explains, we frequently judge events that come to pass with a retroactive sense of causality, “[a]s though the thing and the idea of the thing, its reality and its possibility, were not created at one stroke when a truly new form, invented by art or nature, is concerned” (22). “One of these days,” Edna tells Alcée Arobin, “I’m going to pull myself together for a while and think—try to determine what character of a woman I am; for candidly, I don’t know. By all the codes which I am acquainted with, I am a devilishly wicked specimen of the sex. But some way I can’t convince myself that I am” (138). Though acknowledging her sense of dissociation here, and her earnest intention to overcome it, Edna’s perspective is very obviously delimited by gendered social

structures and attendant habits of time perception: she cannot delineate “between an evolution and an unfurling . . . between creation and simple choice,” in Bergson’s words (21). She feels confined to only “the codes which [she is] acquainted with,” which she implicitly assumes constrain not only the present but future. Yet as Bergson argues, possibility can only be said to have existed after it has been actualized. “As reality is created as something unforeseeable and new,” Bergson explains, “it finds that it has from all time been possible”—thus “it is the real which makes itself possible, and not the possible which becomes real” (101; 104).

Whereas Bergson critiques the spatialization of time from a chiefly metaphysical standpoint, Chopin is more interested in the physical and affective consequences of different conceptualizations and habits of time, and the implications for women at the turn of the century as they endeavor to realize—to bring into creation—social possibilities that are not yet predictable, definable, or even articulable. When Léonce finds Edna lounging on the porch well after midnight, “more than folly,” in his book, he commands her to “come in the house instantly” (77-8). “Another time she would have gone in at his request,” the narrator explains. “She would, through habit, have yielded to his desire . . . unthinkingly, as we walk, move, sit, stand, go through the daily treadmill of the life which has been portioned out to us” (77-8). The narrator’s likening of life to a treadmill poses the same problem that Bergson identifies in Schopenhauer’s likening of life to a cinematographic reel: the track is laid as the frames are set, and so “the film could be run off ten, a hundred, even a thousand times faster without the slightest modification in what was being shown; if the unrolling . . . became instantaneous, the pictures would still be the same” (18). Life as a treadmill, Chopin suggests here, is what we might call an emergent “structure of feeling about time” for non-‘mother women,’ like Edna, at the turn of the century. Yet Edna’s perspective suddenly shifts. Obstinate nestling deeper into the hammock to spite her fuming husband, Edna,

whose “will had blazed up, stubborn and resistant,” began to wonder whether Léonce “had ever spoken to her like that before, and if she had submitted to his command. Of course she had; she remembered that she had. But she could not realize why or how she should have yielded, feeling as she then did” (78). Whereas Edna therefore projects the possibility of her resistance backward, as a choice which might have been made in the past when Léonce had acted so despotically toward her, Bergson would argue that Edna creates the possibility the moment it is actualized, in this spontaneous assertion of her will. This is the kind of creative spontaneity Chopin emphasized earlier when she claimed that through her act of writing, Edna “work[ed] out her own damnation.” Again we see, as Bergson contends, that “the artist in executing [her] work is creating the possible as well as the real.”

It is tempting to pathologize Edna’s increasingly volatile mood swings as the root of her melancholic decline; many scholars have done so.²² Yet the problem is not that Edna keeps oscillating between a sense of aliveness and malaise, hope and hopelessness, enchantment and boredom; it is that she has been socially conditioned to read those natural rhythms of our affective life as symptoms of an impossible choice between living for oneself or living for others; of surrendering to either the “inward” or “outward” pulls of one’s “dual life.” Having dichotomized nature and culture in this way, Edna can only imagine one of two paths for herself: returning to the restrictive regimen of upper-class domesticity, which in her view might protect against volatile emotions but in doing so would sap life of all sense of spontaneity and drive; or “abandoning herself to Fate,” and to her evolutionary drives and emotions, which stripped of their guises, says Dr. Mandelet, are likewise endlessly successive and monotonous. In either case, Edna “awaits” rather than directs herself toward the future. While Edna ultimately falls victim to the interconnected philosophical and psychosocial anxiety associated with this tension, however, the

way Chopin portrays Edna's intermittent receptivity to natural and interpersonal rhythms suggests that the path of resynchronization for people who suffer from depression or anxiety ought to entail a much more thoroughgoing analysis of "the positively active and open constructive factors of nature," as Meyer puts it, instead of fixating on some vague "enemy in the depths of one or another organ or function"—Edna's libido, for instance (*Commonsense* 577). As I argue in the next section by turning to Chopin's short stories, Chopin's fiction attests that what Edna takes to be an impasse is indeed an opportunity for undetermined becoming, and that an individual's habit-disruption can be both illuminating and potentially revolutionary if it is resolved with new forms of synchronization.

Unchartable Weather in Chopin's Realism

Chopin's short fiction is even more experimental and more daring in its engagement with sex and womanhood in the wake of Darwin, perhaps because short stories are less constrained by readers' expectations with respect to plot. Stephanie Forward notes that women writers led the way in the development of the increasingly popular short story mode of the 1880s and '90s, finding it "a congenial and liberating form" (xi). Whereas the female protagonist-centered realist novel was expected to progress more or less along the standard narrative arcs of the female *bildungsroman*, "and to conclude with either marriage or death"—as in *The Awakening*—short story writers could present "episodes, encounters and impressions, analysing psychological responses to those moments" without needing to account for "patterns of cause and effect" (xii). Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" (originally titled "The Dream of an Hour") adeptly models the framing of a short story around an impressionistic "episode." In just over 1,000 words, Louise Mallard learns of her husband's death in a train accident, weeps "at once," realizes when the sentence-long "storm of

grief” is over that she is in fact relieved, privately revels in the idea of being “free, free, free!” for the rest of her days, discovers when her husband shuffles through the door that she was evidently misinformed, and, finally, dies from the shock.

To open my discussion of Chopin’s short fiction, I want to draw attention to what the narrator calls Louisa Mallard’s “storm of grief.” Indeed, as we will see more explicitly in “At the ’Cadian Ball” and “The Storm,” the weather is often thematized in Chopin’s fiction as a signpost for a shift in a character’s mood or interests and, correspondingly, her perception of reality. Dewey notes in *Art and Experience* that we typically experience our various sensations “as mechanical stimuli or as irritated stimulations, without having a sense of the reality that is in them and behind them” (21). However, using meteorological imagery to describe especially potent aesthetic experiences, he asserts, “When a flash of lightning illumines a dark landscape, there is a momentary recognition of objects. But the recognition is not itself a mere point in time. It is the focal culmination of long, slow processes of maturation. It is the manifestation of the continuity of an ordered temporal experience in a sudden discrete instant of climax,” an account of aesthetics which resonates with Bergson’s concept of creative evolution in duration (23-24). Along these lines, I focus in this last section upon the way changes in the weather function figuratively for characters’ experiences of suddenly heightened attunement and affectivity, moments when slower, subconscious processes of realization are brought to the surface of their attention. In the narrative extending across the two stories I examine here, Chopin points to a more complicated interplay between processes which Edna had, to her own destruction, determined to be absolutely separate: nature and culture, and the inward and outward life, are brought into more dynamic relation to one another, highlighting the growth involved in aesthetic experience, and attuning us to the potential

variation in nature and culture alike which can erupt as powerfully an unexpectedly as a summer thunderstorm.

Grosz notes that “the principles of self-organization” that inhere in Darwinian evolutionary theory apply likewise to ecological systems such as the weather and manmade systems such as highway traffic, both of which are phenomena that humans attempt to abstractly conceptualize, predict, and prepare for (32). “Broad patterns of regulated behavior emerge,” she explains, “but under certain conditions, these systems tip into chaotic forms, creating upheaval and unpredictability” (33). Grosz is not the first to make the connection between Darwinian evolutionary time and the weather. Chauncey Wright, a member of the Metaphysical Club formed by William James, Charles Peirce, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., among others, had begun to develop a concept of the weather in 1858 that turned out to be quite compatible with Darwinian natural selection as presented in *On the Origin of Species*, which was published the following year.²³ Wright had worked for the *American Ephemeris and Nautical Almanac* after graduating from Cambridge in 1852, where he had “composed ephemerides—tables giving the future positions of the sun, moon, planets, and principal fixed stars for use in navigation” (Menand 206). As Louis Menand explains, Wright believed that the “fickleness of the weather” was the source of organic change: “Plants and the lower orders of animals have no power to develop by themselves, he argued; they need the stimulation of external forces that act on them destructively,” and “[t]he inconstancy of the weather, he thought, might perform this function” (208).

Wright’s concept of “cosmic weather” helps contextualize the fuller (and more controversial) portrayal of eruptive potential in Chopin’s short fiction. While “The Story of an Hour” entails a traumatic and rather exceptional accident (or so Mrs. Mallard believes), as in Bierce’s *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians*, by reading it in concert with Chopin’s other stories, we

can see how Chopin highlights the relationship between both ordinary and extraordinary accidents—whether a train wreck, unexpected storm, or simple “mood swing”—and the kinds of variation which produce unforeseeable forms of adaptation and change in the Darwinian model of evolution. For Wright, the yet unimaginable ability to reduce the weather to a predictable set of “rules and predictions” is of profound reassurance; if weather and life alike were reducible to an utterly predictable model, as he explains in “The Winds and the Weather,” “Art and Science and Virtue would no longer be to man the objects of a genuine and reflective adoration” (272). Whereas Edna had come to perceive the evolutionary self in time in the mechanistic way that Wright warns against, Chopin, like Wright, is interested in the contingencies which render reality irreducible to rules and charts. We can think of Chopin’s realism as to the real what Wright’s cosmic meteorology is to the weather: it traces broad patterns that provide a necessary foundation for everyday behavior, but acknowledges and indeed emphasizes the deviations or ruptures from those patterns which distinguish organic life from machinery. What makes Chopin’s fiction such an exquisite example of realism is, paradoxically, that it points to realism’s pragmatic necessity as well as its thankfully insurmountable limitations.

Simply put, “At the ’Cadian Ball” is about unactualized potential—what might have been. First published by *Two Tales* in 1892 and republished in *Bayou Folk* in 1894, the story opens with Alcée Laballière, an upper-class Creole planter, leaving his farm to attend a party in New Orleans after his cousin, Clarisse, rejects his romantic advances and his 900 acres of rice are torn up by a cyclone. The narrator is sure to emphasize that the cyclone “was an awful thing, coming so swiftly, without a moment’s warning in which to light a holy candle or set a piece of blessed palm burning” (304). Prompted by these dual misfortunes, Alcée sets off to look for Calixta, a Cajun woman of New Orleans with whom he is rumored to have had an illicit affair at Assumption the year before.

At the ball, Alcée reunites with Calixta and they seem to pick up where they had left off at Assumption. But just as Calixta feels herself “reeling,” and the two seem to be on the verge of bringing to fruition what was only a false rumor of their previous “scandal,” they are interrupted by Clarisse who, overcome with jealousy, has pursued Alcée to the ball to demand that he come back with her. And he does, “without a glance back at” Calixta, having instantly “forgotten he was leaving her there” (309). The story ends with the disillusioned Calixta acquiescently agreeing to marry “that big, brown, good-natured” Bobinôt, who has suffered through years of unrequited love for her, and Clarisse likewise agreeing to marry Alcée. With what Calixta presumes to be the foreclosure of the potential to consummate the desire she and Alcée had repressed at Assumption, Calixta has, like Edna, lost interest in the future, no longer able to imagine that it might bring anything other than the possibilities, or choices, available the present (i.e. Bobinôt). When Bobinôt asks to walk her home, she responds, “I don’ care”; when he points out that her dress has been dragging through the mud, she again responds, “I don’ care; it’s got to go in the tub, anyway,” after which she dispassionately tells him, “You been sayin’ all along you want to marry me, Bobinôt. Well, if you want, yet, I don’ care, me” (310).

While Alcée seems decidedly more excited to marry Clarisse than Calixta is to marry Bobinôt, his temporal perspective undergoes a shift that renders unactualized potential, or what Bergson would describe as the virtuality of the past, irrelevant and immobilized, as Calixta’s likewise had. When Clarisse tells Alcée she loves him:

. . . he thought the face of the Universe was changed—just like Bobinôt. Was it last week the cyclone had well-nigh ruined him? The cyclone seemed a huge joke, now. It was he, then, who, an hour ago was kissing little Calixta’s ear and whispering nonsense into it.

Calixta was like a myth, now. The one, only, great reality in the world was Clarisse standing before him, telling him that she loved him. (311)

Alcée abruptly supplants one reality with another that he finds more immediately pressing, more suited to his current interests, presuming that his previous reality—the experience he has just had with Calixta, not an hour earlier—is utterly disconnected from the current one. Yet the syntax undermines his present self-assurance: the narrator notes, “The cyclone seemed a huge joke, now” and “Calixta was like a myth, now,” the comma in each case creating a conspicuously placed pause as if to suggest that even this “one, only, great reality” is ephemeral and by no means impervious to the kinds of contingencies that brought Alcée to Calixta as quickly as they drew him away from her. His initial confession of “love” to Clarisse is portrayed as if it were quite out of the blue—“he must have been crazy the day he came in from the rice-field, and, toil-stained as he was, clasped Clarisse by the arms and panted a volley of hot, blistering love-words into her face”—a strikingly unromantic scene that suggests that Alcée’s interest in Clarisse, and the sense of reality he constructs around her in that final passage, are as temperamental as the weather (303). Chopin underscores here her earlier point in the review of Zola: that “truth rests upon a shifting basis and is apt to be kaleidoscopic,” and though this would seem to threaten the stability of social truth and reality, it is simultaneously what protects against the notion of an utterly mechanistic universe.

Indeed in the follow-up tale, this virtual past—“a huge joke” to Alcée during this intense moment with Clarisse—becomes revitalized and made newly relevant, and we see the dynamic indeterminacy and contingency which Grosz argues thread Darwinian evolutionary theory through Bergsonian metaphysics. In “The Storm,” which Chopin wrote in 1898, five years have passed since Alcée left Calixta at the ball: Alcée is now married to Clarisse, Calixta to Bobinôt. Bobinôt has gone into town with their son to run errands when a storm rolls in unexpectedly, like the

cyclone in the earlier tale. As Alcée happens to be riding past Calixta's house, the storm breaks so suddenly and powerfully that she has no choice but to invite him inside. Lightning strikes a nearby chinaberry tree, startling Calixta and prompting Alcée to wrap her in his arms, drawing "her close and spasmodically to him": the touch "of her warm, palpitating body when he had unthinkingly drawn her into his arms, had aroused all the old-time infatuation and desire for her flesh" (928). When Calixta looks up at him, "there was nothing for him to do but to gather her lips in a kiss," for as the narrator explains, this "reminded him of Assumption" (928). "'Do you remember—in Assumption, Calixta?'" Alcée asks, helping propel what is already underway (928). "Oh! she remembered," the narrator avers, "for in Assumption he had kissed her and kissed and kissed her; until her senses would well night fail" (928). Before long they have sex with passionate abandon, as they had wanted to do at Assumption, while the storm rages outside. Alcée leaves once the weather has cleared, and "So the storm passed and every one was happy" (931).

Alcée's "unthinking," "spasmodic" embrace of Calixta warrants pause. Whereas a spasm would seem to fall into the kinds of mechanistic embodiment that disturbed and fascinated naturalist writers, Chopin is interested in the way Alcée's spasmodic movement seems to stir up a previously dormant past. It prompts Alcée's association of Calixta's touch with his embodied memories of an old "desire for her flesh," and Calixta is likewise reminded of the day at Assumption when "he had kissed her and kissed and kissed her." While this is a story very much about impulsivity, the lead-up to their sexual reunion emphasizes the role of physical and emotional memory: in other words, impulsivity is not exactly mindless. The past, according to Bergson, takes one of two forms: either as a kind of muscle memory—"habit-memories" that are more or less automatized to help us act efficiently in the present, or as "memory-images, which represent or picture past events in their detailed specificity" (Grosz 170-71). We develop habit-

memory through conscious effort and training, whereas a memory-image “occurs spontaneously” and produces what Grosz refers to as a “nick in time” (171). As Grosz notes, habit-memory, as it is described in Bergson’s *Matter and Memory*, is future-oriented; it does not re-present past experience but instead uses what was helpful in the past to enable fluid bodily action/reaction in the present. For Bergson, “perception always inclines us to the future,” Grosz explains:

. . . it is only because there is a delay or rift between perception and its future motor action that this orientation to and relevance of the past is possible. Movement and action drive the memory-image away, but equally, perception and action in the present gain their liberty, their capacity for innovation in the future through the unexpected intervention of memories, which enable this present to be cast in an unexpected light. The present is fractured or nicked only by the past. (*Nick of Time* 170)

The cyclonic weather of the first story returns in the later one as a figure for the reemergence of memory-images that indeed ‘fracture’ the present and cast it in a new light. The storm reawakens them to the virtuality of the past, transforming Alcée’s and Calixta’s earlier, more calcified sense of time and futurity into participation in the fluidity, continuity, and potentiality of duration. Such a storm is not an everyday occurrence—as Calixta had observed, it had been a couple of years since the last one—but in the ever-latent potentiality for an unexpected storm to break lies the figurative promise of a shift in perspective, a twisting of the kaleidoscope of “truth,” which might open out toward changes not yet conceivable from one’s present perspective—for instance, a future in which the woman’s *bildungsroman* need not end in marriage or death.

Thraikill calls “The Storm” a “more successful companion to *The Awakening*” (197). She relates the restorative but temporary break from ordinary life to the popular “rest cure” of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, which in Gail Parker’s words offers opportunities to “let

go for long minutes at a time,” and then return “to the business of living” (qtd. in Thrailkill 198). After the forbidden lovers part ways, Bobinôt returns with Bibi fully expecting to be chastised by “an over-scrupulous housewife” for the mud on their clothes, but is surprised to discover that Calixta felt “nothing but satisfaction at their safe return” (930). We soon find the family seated at the dinner table, laughing “much and so loud that anyone might have heard them as far away as Laballière’s” (930). Alcée, too, subsequently writes to his wife a letter of “tender solicitude,” and encourages her to stay on at Biloxi a month longer if they were having a good time, “realizing that their health and pleasure were the first things to be considered” (930). This does indeed resonate with Clarisse, who had been enjoying “the first free breath since her marriage” and feeling the restoration of “the pleasant liberty of her maiden days” (931).²⁴ “Devoted as she was to her husband, their intimate conjugal life was something which she was more than willing to forego for a while” (931). The narrator makes it clear that everyone does indeed go back “to the business of living,” and, even more provocatively, implies that they do so with a mutual sense of rejuvenation and a restored feeling of balance between the self and others.

“Far from being antagonistic toward the form of marriage as such,” Thrailkill argues, “Kate Chopin appears to have understood the need for a ‘storm’ now and then precisely to counteract monotony and to open space for moments of domestic harmony” (199). What makes “The Storm” unsettling for many readers is the amoralistic tone with which the narrator relates Alcée’s and Calixta’s resynchronization with their ordinary routines following their adulterous liaison. There is obviously no way Chopin could have published this in her lifetime; it troubles many readers to this day. Yet the resistance to its philosophical import stems from a tendency to read too much into the particular form of social transgression it represents: Chopin is no more encouraging everyone to go have a romantic affair than Thoreau was instructing everyone to

literally build a cabin in the woods.²⁵ What is worth noting, rather, is the concomitant importance of social form and habit—typified, predictable cultural patterns of behavior and feeling which offer a sense of stability—and the potential for ruptures, or “nicks,” from which the future takes an unpredicted path, a philosophy of becoming which manifests within and at the level of Chopin’s narrative forms.

Read in the context Grosz has helped me expound, “The Storm” distinguishes not only between possibilities and potentiality but between instinctual, mechanical reactions to stimuli and spontaneity, to return to what Chopin had learned from Maupassant. “Unthinking,” spontaneous behavior is by no means mindless; it is a climactic manifestation of a longer and possibly subconscious and corporeal (as opposed to some supposedly disembodied, objective, rational) process of realization, as in Dewey’s aesthetic “illumination.” Our “whole feeling of reality,” William James writes in *Principles of Psychology*, “the whole sting and excitement of our voluntary life, depends on our sense that in it things are *really being decided* from one moment to another, and that it is not the dull rattling off of a chain that was forged innumerable ages ago” (429). Spontaneous action—such as a stirring affective response to a prelude or a spasmodic embrace—provides a somatic avenue into a “feeling of reality” that is often stymied or repressed by more cognitively or socially filtered modes of thought. By relating the lovers’ brief, spontaneous liaison to the passing of an intense storm, Chopin blurs the supposed boundary between nature and culture, and suggests that social and cultural change might well be driven by unforeseeable variations, moving, like evolutionary change, toward greater complexity and adaptability.

1. On the very first page of *The American Frugal Housewife* (1835), Lydia Maria Child had cautioned her readers to gather “up all the fragments” of “*time* as well as *materials*,” for “Time is Money.” In *The Young Housekeeper* (1838), William Alcott had similarly encouraged domestic laborers to internalize clock time to regulate their diurnal rhythms: “there should be some ingenious contrivance, to awaken the housekeeper at first—perhaps an alarm clock,” to be used “until the habit is effectively formed” (63). See O’Malley’s “Time, Nature, and the Good Citizen” (42-44 and 48-52) for further discussion of various reactions against or appropriations of clock time in women’s advice manuals.

2. Beecher lists a handful of methods to maintain a cheerful household, charging the mother with the emotional atmosphere of the family. “In many cases,” she explains, “when a woman’s domestic arrangements are suddenly and seriously crossed, it is impossible not to feel some irritation. But it *is* always possible to refrain from angry tones,” and she encourages housekeepers to refrain from speaking “till she can do it in a calm and gentle manner”—“*Perfect silence* is a safe resort, when such control cannot be attained” (152). Beecher later insists, “A woman, therefore, needs to cultivate the *habitual* feeling, that all the events of her nursery and kitchen, are brought about by the permission of our Heavenly Father, and that fretfulness or complaint, in regard to these, is, in fact, complaining and disputing at the appointments of God, and is really as sinful as unsubmissive murmurs amid the sorer chastisements of His hand” (155).

3. There is a great deal of literature that takes up the nervous condition of so many middle-class domestic workers in the second half of the nineteenth century, the most famous of which is Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wall-paper.” There was also widespread debate among medical professionals, psychologists, and neurobiologists about how to diagnose and treat “hysteria,” including S. Weir Mitchell’s infamous “rest cure,” the target of Gilman’s story. For a discussion of this cross-disciplinary history, see “Nervous Effort: Gilman, Crane, and the Psychophysical Pathologies of Everyday Life” in Jane Thrailkill’s *Affecting Fictions* (117-154).

4. Bergson almost always uses the word “possibility,” though he is determined to differentiate his usage from the standard misconception of possibility as delimited choice. I borrow the use of “potentiality” to signify Bergson’s notion of undetermined possibility from Brian Massumi. See his framing of “potentiality” and “virtuality” in relation to Bergson’s philosophy in *Parables of the Virtual* (30-31).

5. Chopin published translations of a number of Maupassant’s short stories throughout the 1890s, stories which became marked influences on Chopin’s own short fiction, as Emily Toth points out. Toth notes the resemblances

between Chopin's "Her Letters" and Maupassant's "It?" and "Night"; Chopin's "The Night Came Slowly" and Maupassant's "Solitude"; and, finally, Chopin's *The Awakening* and Maupassant's "Suicide," which includes a line Chopin translated as, "a solitary existence left without illusions"—Chopin had considered *A Solitary Soul* as an alternate title to *The Awakening* (272).

6. Miles Orvell highlights the delicacy of Howells's endeavor to negotiate between the imperatives of realism and "the obligations of genteel culture," attributing to Howells "the adroitness of a tightrope walker holding a china tea cup" (108).

7. See Hildebrand's "The Masculine Sea: Gender, Art, and Suicide in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*" (2016).

8. The distinction between awaiting and striving toward the future is also central to what Martin Heidegger calls "authentic" and "inauthentic" temporality in chapter 68 of *Being and Time*. As David Couzens Hoy explains, authentic temporality entails "a sense of the future as a 'coming toward,'" in contrast with "the inauthentic understanding of 'going-into,'" the latter implying "simply awaiting, or merely expecting, things to occur to one" (148).

9. In the concluding chapter of *At Fault* (1890), Melicent Hosmer writes a letter to her brother about Mrs. Griesmann, whom she describes as "one of those highly gifted women who knows everything," a woman who insists that "it's impossible to ever come to a true knowledge of life as it is—which should be every one's aim—without studying certain fundamental truths and things"—"Natural History and all that," in David Hosmer's brusque paraphrase (*CW* 157). Seyersted argues that we ought to recognize Mrs. Griesmann's perspective as that of the author herself, and points us to comparable passages in Chopin's diary: her critique of "'the hysterical, morbid, and false pictures of life which certain English women have brought into vogue,'" for example, and her insistence that "a well-directed course of scientific study might help to make clearer [the] vision' of these unnamed women authors, or at least 'bring them a little closer to Nature'" (Chopin's diary, qtd. in Seyersted 84-5).

10. Spencer was the one who first used the term "survival of the fittest," ushering in the misapplication of Darwin to laissez-faire economics as "social Darwinism." Darwinian ideas were furthermore misused to assert the evolutionary inferiority of indigenous people along with Africans and African Americans. White Anglo-America could gaze down from their "comfortable vantage point" at the 'height' of evolutionary development upon "the 'barbaric' human—still clearly and conveniently available for study in the contemporary American Negro and Indian," as Bender puts it: "The savage occupied a place in the more distant evolutionary past, and, fortunately, the lower

animal forms from which the savage had evolved were so utterly distant as to be practically unthinkable” (Bender 39). The white supremacist misapplications of evolutionary time to race and culture will be important in the subsequent chapter.

11. As Grosz writes in *Time Travels*, “Instead of a reduction of culture to nature, as performed by sociobiological explanation, where culture is nothing but the direct and unmediated expression of a directive, even normative (genetic or instinctively given) nature, I am interested in . . . the ways in which the biological enables rather than limits and directs social and cultural life. Instead of submitting to the rigorous or binarized distinction between nature and culture that has become orthodoxy in contemporary critical, cultural, feminist, and race theory, I explore here the ways in which the natural prefigures and induces cultural variation and difference, the way in which biology impels culture to vary itself, to undergo more or less perpetual transformation” (43-44).

12. Adèle Ratignolle plays what was called “program music.” Particularly popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, program music, as Steven Paul Scher explains, is “instrumental music inspired by or based on ‘a nonmusical idea,’” such as a work of literature or a natural landscape (e.g. Beethoven’s *Pastoral Symphony*) (*Literature and Music* 177). As I suggest in the previous footnote, Chopin’s intensive studies of music, as in her paper on German symphonic poems, would have familiarized her with music criticism on program music.

13. Chopin also loved music and studied it quite seriously, once presenting a paper to the Wednesday Club called “The Typical Forms of German Music,” for example, after which she engaged in an analytical discussion “of the Symphony and the symphonic poem” (Toth *Unveiling* 126). Toth suggests that “Kate seemed truly interested only when she wrote about music” (*Kate* 80). She was especially fond of Frédéric Chopin, whose compositions influence the rhythms of *The Awakening*. There are a few notable similarities between the two Chopins, beyond their coincidentally shared surname. Kate Chopin was purportedly a quite talented pianist herself—at one point she had even considered playing professionally—and her very first publication as a young Kate O’Flaherty was a polka named *Lilia* in 1888, named for her daughter Lelia, who had been named after the titular heroine of a novel by George Sand, Frédéric Chopin’s long-term “mistress” (Crowley 96-7).¹³ She continued to play throughout her adulthood, and back in St. Louis after her husband’s death, Chopin, the Johnses, and the Schuylers often threw *soirées musicales* similar to those organized on Grand Isle in *The Awakening* (Toth *Kate* 255).

14. By including Edna’s ekphrastic habit, which is posed in immediate contradistinction to her experience of Mademoiselle Reisz’s music, Chopin references a contemporary debate about the referentiality (or lack thereof) of

music, elaborated most famously by Hanslick in his aforementioned *The Beautiful in Music*. In his most frequently cited articulation of his argument, he insists that the subject of music has nothing to do with its emotional or individual listeners' feelings, which are always purely subjective; rather, "Music consists of successions and forms of sound, and these alone constitute the subject. . . . music speaks not only by means of sounds, it speaks nothing but sound" (119). Music thus cannot represent the objects of definite feelings, "[o]nly their dynamic properties," Hanslick argues: "It may reproduce the motion accompanying psychical action, according to its momentum: speed, slowness, strength, weakness, increasing and decreasing intensity" (24).

15. In *Sounding Real*, a compelling and original study of the phenomenology of musical performance in American realism, Cristina Ruotolo focuses on novels such as *The Awakening* in which musical experiences "elaborate[e] a space of authenticity, freedom, and possibility that both temporarily suspends and throws into relief the social realities—the hierarchies and ideologies of race, class and gender—that ultimately limit and contain musical spaces" (2). Ruotolo reads musical performances as what Edward Said calls "temporal and "extreme occasions," ruptures from everyday life "in which normative social boundaries and differences dissolve at least momentarily into abstracted and seemingly collective musical experience" (3-4). On the contrary, I argue that it is important to recognize that Chopin portrays aesthetics as a part of the rhythms of everyday life rather than rarified breaks from it: indeed, she continually highlights the similar sense of resonance we feel while listening to a prelude or swimming or luxuriously surrendering to the appeal of a mid-afternoon nap. At their most effective, these various aesthetic experiences immerse Edna in what Bergson would call duration.

16. As a composer, Frédéric Chopin was fastidious, but his seemingly off-the-cuff, private drawing-room recitals gave listeners the simultaneous impression of virtuosic control and extemporaneity (Mullen 697). In particular, he was known for creating powerful—indeed, often troubling—emotional effects through the unusual rhythmic flexibility of his pieces, and his preludes in particular. Noting the "fractured syntax" and "stylized improvisation" throughout op. 28, Jeffrey Kallberg illuminates why Chopin's contemporaries were mystified by his preludes, recognizing that they were to be regarded neither collectively as an organic whole nor as piddling warm-ups for grander compositions; rather, each prelude drew upon but also "exceeded" the traditional form, demanding more difficult attention on its own unique terms (150). Schumann described the op. 28 Preludes as "*merkwürdig*"—curious, strange—writing:

I confess I imagined them differently, and designed in the grandest style, like his Etudes. Almost the opposite: they are sketches, beginnings of Etudes, or, so to speak, ruins, individual eagle pinions, all disorder and wild confusion.

In more celebratory terms but with equal surprise, Liszt wrote of his experience hearing Chopin's Preludes at a recital in Paris in 1841:

They are not only, as the title might make one think, pieces destined to be played in the guise of introductions to other pieces; they are poetic preludes, analogous to those of a great contemporary poet, who cradles the soul in golden dreams, and elevates it to the regions of the ideal. (qtd. in Kallberg 146)

Liszt's analogy was a common one: Chopin was often called "the poet of the piano." Yet whereas Liszt frames his aesthetic experience in explicitly Romantic terms—swaddled and rock-a-byed, he transcends to the realm of "the ideal"—Schumann is left below amid the "disorder and wild confusion" of the "ruins." Schumann offers a closer approximation of Edna's experience, though Kate Chopin's earlier point about the psychobiological necessity of "harmonious discord and confusion asks that we recognize both the disruption and, potentially, rejuvenation offered by such music.

17. Frédéric Chopin notably shared Hanslick's skepticism toward musical referentiality: Alexandra Mullen points out that the majority of Chopin's compositions were "narratively abstract," and whereas Liszt typically named his pieces "to evoke some external associations in his audience," Chopin seldom titled his work (699).

18. John W. Crowley contextualizes Edna's rather tangled response within a larger set of questions surrounding the power (and possible danger) of musical impressionability that arose in the late nineteenth century (97). Crowley cites Pozdnyshev's outlook in Leo Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889) as an especially poignant literary example. Pozdnyshev blames his wife's adultery on the toxic effects of music, an assertion which he attempts to support by relating how Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata* "irritates" him: Beethoven's piece "makes me forget myself, my true condition" he explains, "carries me off into another state of being, one that isn't my own," such that he feels he has discovered some "new reality" which has "absolutely nothing to do with the way [he has] been used to living and seeing the world," and yet which suddenly seems to him like "how it ought to be" (qtd. in Crowley 100-101). Curiously, it is the lack of obvious utility in such music that seems to threaten Pozdnyshev: he distinguishes Beethoven's sonata from a Mass, for instance, which compels listeners to take communion, or a march that instructs

soldiers to, well, march; the *Kreutzer Sonata* produces excitement, but “the action the excitement’s supposed to lead to simply isn’t there!” (qtd. in Crowley 100).

19. Yet Grosz is sure to stress that even the protozoan, for instance, “exercises a measure of freedom or indetermination . . . in its contractile possibilities, in the ‘choices’ it exercises over when to contract or to expand, what relation it has to external objects” (167).

20. As Schopenhauer argues, egoism is nature’s evolutionary tool for tricking individuals into thinking they are acting on their own behalf, when indeed they are acting for the survival of their species. He writes in *The World as Will and Representation* that in cases when an individual has to make a sacrifice “for the continuance and quality of the species,” he cannot recognize it as such, and thus “nature can only attain its ends by implanting a certain illusion in the individual, on account of which that which is only a good for the species appears as a good for himself, so that when he serves the species he imagines he is serving himself” (vol. 3 bk. 4 345). Schopenhauer drives home the sexual implications of this in the forty-fourth chapter of volume three, book four, “The Metaphysics of the Love of the Sexes,” where he contends that “every lover will experience a marvellous [*sic*] disillusion after the pleasure he has at last attained, and will wonder that what was so longingly desired accomplishes nothing more than every other sexual satisfaction; so that he does not see himself much benefited by it” (vol. 3 bk. 4 348-49). For an original analysis of Schopenhauer’s influence on *The Awakening*, see Gregg Camfield’s “Kate Chopin-Hauer: Or Can Metaphysics Be Feminized?” in *The Southern Literary Journal*, vol. 27, no. 2 (1995).

21. See Pizer’s “A Note on Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* as Naturalistic Fiction,” published in *The Southern Literary Journal* in 2001 (5-13).

22. See for example Jane Tompkins’s “‘The Awakening’: An Evaluation,” in *Feminist Studies* (Spring-Summer 1976).

23. Darwin became Wright’s hero. Menand points out that Wright did not call himself an “evolutionist”—that is, he did not mistake evolution for “the belief that the world was getting, on some definition, ‘better,’” as so many pseudo-evolutionists had done and would continue to do, but was confident rather in natural selection, which he saw as compatible with “his notion of life as weather” (209). Thus “Wright was, in short, one of the few nineteenth-century Darwinians who thought like Darwin—one of the few evolutionists who did not associate evolutionary change with progress” (210), nor indeed with deterministic fate of any kind.

24. Thrailkill points out that Alcée’s letter puts Léonce Pontellier’s weekly stays in New Orleans “in a new light,” but furthermore, Clarisse’s amenability to the arrangement offers us insight into Edna’s perspective, who likewise “nestles into the pleasures of a husband-free sojourn at the beach” (*Affecting* 198).

25. Allen Stein makes a similar observation, suggesting that critics of “The Storm” are perhaps “looking in the wrong direction as they examine this story” (53). “The key question,” in Stein’s reading, is “not what moral judgment to make about an act of transgressive behavior but whether moral judgment itself of any complex act is in fact possible, given how suspect any putative ‘truth’ can be about another human being’s nature, behavior, or motives” (53).

– Chapter Four –

“That note in music heard not with the ears”:

Ragged Time in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*

“Invisibility, let me explain, gives one a slightly different sense of time, you’re never quite on the beat. Sometimes you’re ahead and sometimes behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead. And you slip into the breaks and look around.”

—Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

In his 1928 essay, “The Dilemma of the Negro Author,” James Weldon Johnson identifies a “special problem” for “the Aframerican author”: “the problem of the double audience” (744-45). Building on W. E. B. Du Bois’s double consciousness to understand the predicament of black artists in the early twentieth century, Johnson stresses the challenge of negotiating the “differing and often opposite and antagonistic points of view” of his two audiences, “white America and black America” (745). This is the African American writer’s implicit charge and burden, he explains: “The moment a Negro writer takes up his pen or sits down to his typewriter he is immediately called upon to solve, consciously or unconsciously, this problem of the double audience” (745).¹

Throughout Johnson’s critical essays and prefaces, the problem of the divided audience is recurrently represented as a temporal and affective rift between European and African American music. He writes in his preface to the first *Book of American Negro Spirituals*, “Generally speaking, the European concept of music is melody and the African concept is rhythm,” which are rooted in distinct forms of time consciousness, as I will discuss more fully in the next section (i. 18). The implications of this rift often surfaced when white songwriters attempted to transcribe African or African American music using European notational forms, as we find in H. E.

Krehbiel's account of his visit to Dahomey Village at the Chicago World's Fair. Recollecting the players' "remarkable rhythmical sense and skill," Krehbiel insists that "[o]nly by making a score of the music" could one express the intricate detail of "the drummers by means of exchange of the rhythms, syncopation of both simultaneously, and dynamic devices" (qtd. in Johnson *Spirituals* 18). Yet when he and John C. Fillmore attempted to do so, he explains, "we were thwarted by the players who, evidently divining our purpose when we took out our notebooks, mischievously changed their manner of playing as soon as we touched pencil to paper (18). Krehbiel's impulse to transcribe reflects a broader trend among white musicians and critics at the time, who were attempting to translate the live ragtime performance by adapting it into European forms. Yet whereas Krehbiel made an effort to accredit the black musicians and songwriters who created and performed ragtime, these songs were more frequently being "taken down by white men, the words slightly altered or changed, and published under the names of the arrangers" (Johnson *Poetry* 691). Indeed, by the time Johnson writes the preface to the *Book of American Negro Poetry* in 1921, there is "a steady tendency to divorce Ragtime from the Negro; in fact, to take from him the credit of having originated it" (690). To "take down" the music—to fix it not only into European musical forms but moreover into a white musical history—meant suppressing the crucial historical and cultural origins of the music: its development out of several centuries of sorrow songs and spirituals with a collective, anonymous authorship.²

To combat this rampant cultural and historical dispossession, Johnson collaborated with his brother, Rosamond, and Bob Cole in the first decade of the twentieth century to score the rags of the 1890s along with their own original songs, though recognizing that setting ragtime songs to score was an inherently problematic enterprise (*Spirituals* 691). Syncopation in ragtime entails the interplay or tension between the backbeat—typically a 2/4 or 4/4 rhythm kept, say, by the "oom-

pah” or “oom-pah-pah” pattern of the left hand on piano—and the play of counter-rhythms by the right hand or of the other instruments over the beat (Waldo 59). Ragtime and early jazz are also distinguished by their unexpected breaks and starts, which create the sense of a shift in rhythm though the beat is continuous throughout. The ““swing”” of ragtime and jazz, as Johnson explains, which roots back to the spirituals, “is an altogether subtle and elusive thing,” owing to its intricate relationship to the physical response of the audience: in the spirituals, the effect is “largely psychological”—religious ecstasy manifests in “swaying heads and bodies”—whereas the dynamics of African American “secular music” involve “the patting of one foot, while the hands clap out intricate and varying rhythmic patterns” (29; 30; 31). Because of the complexity of these rhythms and their dependence on the physical interaction between performers and listeners or dancers, Johnson expresses doubt “that it is possible with our present system of notation”—that is the European classical system of notation—“to make a fixed transcription of these peculiarities that would be absolutely true; for in their very nature they are not susceptible to fixation” (*Spirituals* 30). It is telling that “Rag time” was defined in an October 1898 issue of *Etude*, one of the prominent classical music magazines of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as “a term applied to the peculiar, broken rhythmic features of the popular ‘coon song’” (qtd. in Berlin 5)—peculiar and broken, that is, because they won’t fit neatly into a classical score.

The differences between African American and European music traditions were not merely structural but affective, social, and historical, which Johnson was keen to expound throughout his career as an author, songwriter, cultural critic, activist, and art archivist with a double audience. Marveling at the music of the “black and unknown bards of long ago,” Johnson asks in one of his poems, “How did it catch that subtle undertone, / That note in music heard not with the ears?” (*CP* 55). The melodies and rhythms of the sorrow songs and spirituals would be incorporated into

ragtime and jazz, but as an affective rather textual dimension to which white listeners, whether fans or critics, seemed deaf and numb. In 1902, for example, the Johnson brothers and Cole took the spiritual, “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen,” rearranged it, rewrote the lyrics, and published it as “Under the Bamboo Tree”—a song that would be tremendously popular among white listeners for decades.³ The lyrics of the spiritual, “Nobody knows de trouble I see, / Nobody knows but Jesus,” became, “if you like-a me like I like-a you / and we like-a both the same” (Johnson *Spirituals* ii 34). Over time, the altered lyrics, now set to a quickened, upbeat tempo, transfigured a sorrow song into the kind of song Judy Garland would sing at a party (*Meet Me in St. Louis*).⁴ This stunning disconnect highlights the problem of capitulating to white listeners, one of Johnson’s many challenges as he endeavored to reclaim and archive African American music.

This chapter centers on Johnson’s interconnected challenges as both a black author and songwriter with a double audience in the early twentieth-century U.S. Dedicated throughout his life to what he calls “the art approach” to dismantling racism, Johnson endeavored in a variety of musical and textual forms to create a record of African American music that asserted its place in American music history while managing to convey what is “not susceptible to fixation”—that is, not reducible to Euro-American musical notation nor, indeed, to Euro-American conceptualizations of time more broadly (“Race Prejudice” 754). In *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, published anonymously in 1912 as an authentic autobiography and re-published as a novel under Johnson’s name in 1927, Johnson represents the artistic predicament of the double audience through a decidedly antiheroic and unreliable narrator who can pass, both phenotypically and musically, as white (99). Johnson’s novel maps the unnamed narrator’s movements between whiteness and blackness onto his movements between European classical music and ragtime, and between various positionalities within different social times and spaces, from a cigar stripper in a

factory to a white businessman in New York City. By taking up but riffing on various literary forms—the slave narratives of Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington, Du Bois’s autobiographical political critique in *The Souls of Black Folk*, and narratives of male passers by Charles Chesnutt and Frank Webb, for example—Johnson’s generically experimental novel exposes the racial politics of time that inhere within narrative representations of a shared national present and progressive future.⁵ The unnamed narrator’s story often zigzags and doubles back, stalls, and lurches, producing an erratic trajectory along which we see how Jim Crow constructions of race during what is known as the nadir of race relations in the U.S. are made possible by white supremacist constructions of time.

Critics such as Brent Hayes Edwards, Nathaniel Mackey, and Katherine Biers have recently argued that the most prevalent “formal preoccupations of black aesthetics are with the relations between literacy and orality,” in Biers’s words, rather than “with the overcoming of an oral, vernacular culture,” as many scholars have argued (*Virtual* 112).⁶ In his analysis of Johnson’s prefaces, Edwards focuses on the way Johnson consistently uses music as a metaphor when discussing his “compositional process,” such as his transcription of sermons into poetry (588). Along these lines, I argue that Johnson imports the aural and chronopolitical possibilities of black music and sermons structurally, rhythmically, and thematically into his first and only novel to navigate the problem of the double audience, and, more importantly, to contest the appropriation of black music and cultural history by white songwriters.⁷ After establishing the distinct forms of time consciousness that inhere in Euro-American music, on the one hand, and ragtime and jazz on the other, I focus on how and to what ends three particular rhythmic techniques—syncopation, the break, and repetition—are adapted into narrative practices in Johnson’s novel. *The Autobiography* incorporates and lends context to these aspects of African American music to expose the forms of

time consciousness that have sustained the insidious underpinnings of race construction. Through the play of music in his prose, he expresses the feeling of desynchronization from the ‘shared’ time of the nation—a concept of the “national-political present tense,” in Lauren Berlant’s words, through which white Americans forcibly and systemically sought to differentiate themselves from black Americans—and produces forms of resynchronization to alternative forms of time consciousness and historical possibility.

Ragtime, Symphonic Time, and the Novel

It is the narrator’s rich, white patron, frequently referred to as his “millionaire friend,” who most obviously embodies the modern time consciousness of white America that Johnson works to undermine in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. After hearing the narrator perform ragtime at a Harlem jazz club, the patron hires him as his own personal performer, and the narrator soon comes to realize that he had become the millionaire’s “chief means of disposing of the thing which seemed to sum up all in life that he dreaded—Time” (75). As the narrator explains, the patron sees time as something “to escape, to bridge over, to blot out” (75), yet in turning to ragtime to do so, the patron blatantly ignores what Johnson repeatedly emphasizes in his later essays and anthology prefaces: ragtime works primarily with and within time, drawing attention not only to temporal experience but to the body. One of the most disturbing aspects of the patron’s spectatorship is his seeming imperviousness to the rhythmic and physical dynamics of the narrator’s music. He listens for hours at a time during the narrator’s late-night, private performances, “his eyes almost closed, making scarcely a motion except to light a fresh cigarette, and never commenting one way or another on the music” (64). If the narrator stops playing, assuming the patron has fallen asleep, the patron orders him to play until he rises and says, ““That

will do” (64). The narrator recollects, “During such moments, this man sitting there so mysteriously silent, almost hid in a cloud of heavy-scented smoke, filled me with a sort of unearthly terror”—he appeared like a “grim, mute, but relentless tyrant” (64). By closing his eyes and entering a state of near-paralysis, the patron anesthetizes himself to the spatial and temporal immediacy of the live performance; he experiences ragtime as a state of timelessness only by shutting out its physical effects.

The problem, as Bruce Barnhart argues, is that the patron listens to ragtime the same way he would listen to classical European music. Yet unlike ragtime and jazz, Europe’s classical performances are based upon a concept of time that “revolves around necessity, calculability, and the expected”—a “progressive, sublimating time” which is conceived as “movement away from embodiment” (“Chronopolitics” 552). Barnhart’s framing of the relationship between European music and sublimation comes primarily from Theodor Adorno’s argument that the symphony offers the supreme musical experience because of the absolute unity and cohesiveness of its themes.⁸ It includes “nothing fortuitous,” Adorno argues; every detail serves a necessary function in relation to the synchronic whole (“Radio Symphony” 255). The synchronic impact is privileged over the diachronic experience of the performance, corresponding to the post-Enlightenment privileging of the mind over the body and of thought over feeling. For the symphony audience, Adorno contends, this formal cohesion and totality eradicates time; the listener only hears the first bar of a Beethoven movement once she has heard the final bar, for the perfect necessity of the relationships among thematic elements throughout results in the “suspension of time consciousness”—“the symphonic contraction of time which annihilates, for the duration of the adequate performance, the contingencies of the listener’s private existence” (255; 256).

Sublimation entails the subordination of material and temporal conditions of embodiment to an abstract, timeless appreciation of the piece's perfect unity.

However, the material and temporal conditions of embodiment are vital to the experience of ragtime. When the narrator suddenly shifts from his classical repertoire to ragtime at one of the patron's dinner parties, the guests demonstrate what the narrator had also discovered when he first heard it: "It was a music that demanded physical response, patting of the feet, drumming of the fingers, or nodding of the head in time with the beat," at the very least (53). When he begins to rag Mendelssohn's "Wedding March," the narrator's music "raised everybody's spirits to the highest point of gayety, and the whole company involuntarily and unconsciously did an impromptu cakewalk" (63).⁹ Though like the patron, these white guests spend "each day restlessly exploring and exhausting every resource of this great city that might possibly furnish a new sensation or awaken a fresh emotion," which is in large part why they are so electrified as the narrator begins to play, they at least respond physically to the music, as it demands (63). Whereas in the symphony, there is an absolute divide between the performers and the audience, ragtime and jazz performers adapt to the dancing and verbal cues of the audience, and vice versa. Each performance is vitally interactive and collaborative.

Notwithstanding the party guests' jovial reception of and response to the narrator's playing, the irresistible power of ragtime—specifically, the physical sense of swing which compels one to move in response to a note that feels displaced, falling where it is not expected—was perceived by many white listeners and music critics as a terrifying threat to rationality. In a June 20, 1918, article in *The Times-Picayune* of New Orleans, a white critic—after lumping jazz into the category of the dime novel and "grease-dripping doughnut," all "manifestations of a low streak in man's tastes"—characterizes jazz as "the indecent story syncopated and counter-pointed," and proceeds to

architect a hierarchy of musical spaces in which he positions jazz not merely at the bottom but underground (“Jass and Jassism”). After we glimpse the “inner sanctuaries of harmony” that house European classical compositions and their sophisticated, God-fearing audiences, there is a paragraph break, as if to wall off those sanctuaries, and we are led down into the subterranean den of ragtime and jazz: “a kind of servants’ hall of rhythm . . . where we hear the hum of the Indian dance, the throb of the Oriental tambourines and kettle-drums, the clatter of the clogs, the click of Slavic heels, the thumpty-tumpty of the negro banjo, and, in fact, the native dances of a world.” The projection of these various percussive and strikingly physical, onomatopoeically rendered sounds onto a host of nonwhite, non-Western people and cultures—and, furthermore, the eviction of these people and their music from “the world” to “a world”—belies the writer’s fear of rhythmic and embodied sensations that evade mastery. He goes on to assert that “rhythm is not necessarily music, and he who loves to keep time to the pulse of the orchestral performance by patting his feet upon the theater floor is not necessarily a music lover.” Along these lines but with a far more violent assertion of malice, music critic Edward Baxter Perry critiques ragtime, and the practice of ragging the classics (such as the “Wedding March”), as “syncopation gone mad,” and argues that this “disease” ought to “be treated successfully like the dog with rabies, namely, with a dose of lead.”

These critical responses to ragtime and jazz reproduce the binary structures of white and black embodiment and culture with which modern, white European culture had actively defined itself since the eighteenth century. In “Repetition as a Figure of Black Culture,” James Snead argues that one of the most revealing aspects of a culture is how it comes to terms with its own “recursiveness and repetition” (62). To be sure, repetition inheres in everyday life in any culture; what interests Snead is why and how a culture embraces or conceals its own repetitiousness. White

European and European-influenced (i.e. American) culture has actively struggled to define itself against black culture, he asserts, by subordinating the repetition of everyday life to overarching narratives of national progress and accumulation (63). Snead points in particular to Hegel's insistence throughout his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1822-1830) that "the African" cannot be said to participate in world history because in the "'main portion of Africa'" there is no self-conscious progress (the post-Enlightenment equation of reason with writing), but merely "'a succession of accidents and surprises,'" with 'succession' implying endless, empty repetition without development (quoted in Snead 65; Snead's translation and emphasis). European music therefore "uses rhythm mainly as an aid in the construction of a sense of progression to a harmonic cadence," subordinating repetition to "the fulfillment of the goal of harmonic resolution," as Adorno was sure to emphasize (74). In this context, we can see how the critique in *Etude* of "the thumpty-tumpty of the negro banjo" serves to differentiate European classical music and, by extension, "white" Western culture from "black" music and culture by asserting the superiority of melody—which maps more easily onto linear narratives of necessity and progress—to rhythm, which is associated with everyday, experiential time, embodiment and, correspondingly, repetition. White European and American culture thus purged itself of the joint threat of embodiment and repetition by conceptualizing blackness as atavistic, outside of and 'other' to their own historical and cultural present.

The distinction between European and black cultures and histories—which is, after all, "not one of nature, but one of force," as Snead is sure to emphasize (77)—extends to the way repetition is treated in literature. The novel emerged in conjunction with the modern conceptualization of European culture in the context of eighteenth-century European industrialization, colonization, and imperialism. To affirm the present and continued existence of

Western culture “in opposition” to its “others,” the novel had to transform the accidents and repetitiousness of everyday life into necessity, causality, and progression (64-65; 75). In the United States, “progress” had emerged in the nineteenth century as “America’s common time and as the basis of a renewed sense of national belonging,” as Lloyd Pratt puts it: nationalist rhetoric supplied “a virtual experience of time as linear progress” that all Americans could supposedly inhabit (4). The oppositional cultural and racial constructs that Snead identifies manifested as a set of cross-pressures in slave narratives and African American life writing, from Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) and Frederick Douglass’s autobiographies to Booker T. Washington’s *Up from Slavery* (1901). As Pratt explains, white readers had come to expect these writers to describe “the dehumanizing realities of slavery and racism”—graphic details of abuse, rape, and murder they had experienced or witnessed firsthand—yet simultaneously, the authors felt they had to assert “the resilient humanity of enslaved African Americans,” which meant proving African Americans’ ability to inhabit and contribute to the nation’s narrative of progress (157). Thus these stories were to somehow express “the dehumanization and the humanity of African Americans” simultaneously (157). To do so, many of these writers plotted their lives as stories of development, highlighting their chronological growth as individuals “away from the naïveté of childhood and into the maturity of adulthood,” as well as “the maturation of the race as a whole”: using the basic trajectory of the *Bildungsroman*, they coupled a “story of phylogeny” with “one of ontogeny” (157).¹⁰

As we see in the following sections, Johnson adapts the rhythmic and temporal forms of play in African American music, from the spirituals and sermons of the seventeenth-nineteenth centuries to ragtime and jazz in the early twentieth, into narrative strategies for invoking and upending white supremacist narratives of progress that had often pressured or been reproduced in

nineteenth-century African American life writing. First, I relate the dynamics of syncopation in ragtime to the way Johnson takes up this conventional autobiographical narrative but creates a series of counter-narratives and counter-temporalities that play out over it. As syncopation entails a persistent, predictable backbeat against, around, away from and back toward which the performers play, a counter-narrative requires a recognizable dominant narrative against which to push back. In *The Autobiography*, this is the deterministic, white supremacist, epochal narrative of national progress.¹¹

Stop Time: The Ex-Colored Man's Syncopated Story

The term “ragtime” is a portmanteau: this precursor to jazz was about “ragging”—that is, “teasing” or tattering—regular time. Waldo defines syncopation as “the continuous superimposition of an irregular rhythm ovetop of a regular one” (4). In a rag for piano, for example, the regular beat is kept by the left hand, which often alternates between “a low bass note with a chord in the midrange,” the accent thus falling upon the first and third beats of each measure (4-5). “Pitted against this regular meter,” Waldo explains, “is a constant series of rhythmic displacements in the right hand,” or by the other instruments in a larger ensemble (5). Consider the notation in the opening bars of Scott Joplin’s “*Stoptime*” Rag (1910)¹²:

2

“Stoptime” Rag.

To get the desired effect of “Stoptime” the pianist should stamp the heel of one foot heavily upon the floor, wherever the word “Stamp” appears in the music.

Fast or slow.

by SCOTT JOPLIN.
Composer of (Gladionus Rag.
Searchlight Rag.

Source: Jos. W. Stern, monographic, 1910. Notated Music. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200033278/.

As the instructions indicate, the regular 2/4 rhythm is to be kept by the “stamping” of the foot, but this stamped-out rhythm does not coincide neatly with the notes played and rests taken by the hands. Because of the regularity of the stomping and the way the notes fall in unexpected places, we feel a swing—a sense of physical motion and momentum—toward the next bar. The playing frequently creates the illusion of a shift in rhythm, but all the while the foot is stomping out an even beat which is therefore always felt, however implicitly. Just as it is impossible to perform the spirituals while sitting still, “and at the same time capture the spontaneous ‘swing’ which is of their very essence,” Johnson explains, the primary beat of ragtime is kept “by the patting of one foot,” as we see so explicitly in the notation of Joplin’s piece, “while the hands clap out intricate and varying rhythmic patterns” (*Spirituals* 31). Johnson clarifies that the play between the foot stomping and clapping “is not marking straight time, but what Negroes call ‘stop time,’” whereby the prominent “accent or down beat is never lost, but is playfully bandied from hand to foot and from foot to hand” (31). Whereas the symphony, per Adorno’s account, is supposed to create the experience of sublimation, ragtime renders the connections between time and embodiment more palpable.

Johnson notes that Europeans were fascinated by jazz but curiously incapable of performing it. In listening to even the most talented European ensembles, who will often “play the notes correctly,” an American listener “can at once detect that there is something lacking,” for “they play the notes too correctly; and do not play what is not written down” (*Spirituals* 28; 29). The live performance is crucial in this respect. As Waldo stresses, whereas the European classical notation system is based upon the even rhythmic divisions of half and quarter notes, the West African music that influenced ragtime is structured differently, with greater emphasis on complex polyrhythms layered upon the primary beat: African music tends to take an “additive” approach to musical performance, distinct from “the *divisive* European system” (5; Waldo’s emphasis). In further contrast to European classical music, African and African American music does not assert the separation between composer or musician(s) and the audience; the audience and musicians alike “participat[e] in the musical event through dancing, singing, or playing”; “Gestures and movements,” Waldo notes, “are just as important as the sounds” (6). Joplin’s notation, however innovative, can only intimate in part the physical aspects of the piece’s rhythm; the connection between polyrhythms and embodiment is only fully expressed in the interactive social space of the live performance.

Recounting his first experience at “the ‘Club,’” “a veritable house of mirth” filled with the “mingled sounds of music and laughter, the clink of glasses and the pop of bottles,” Johnson’s narrator highlights the aspects of the ragtime performance most irreconcilable with his classical training (53). Amid the boisterous noise of the club the narrator takes note of a young singer accompanied by a “short, thick-set, dark man” on the piano. “Between each verse,” he recalls, the singer:

did some dance steps, which brought forth great applause and a shower of small coins at his feet. After the singer had responded to a rousing encore, the stout man at the piano began to run his fingers up and down the keyboard. This he did in a manner which indicated that he was a master of good technic. Then he began to play; and such playing! I stopped talking to listen. It was music of a kind I had never heard before. It was music that demanded physical response, patting of the feet, drumming of the fingers, or nodding of the head in time with the beat. The barbaric harmonies, the audacious resolutions often consisting of an abrupt jump from one key to another, the intricate rhythms in which the accents fell in the most unexpected places, but in which the beat was never lost, produced a most curious effect.

(53)¹³

Among the details that stand out in this passage is the narrator's attention to the physical and emotional interaction between the performer and audience. The performers' singing, dancing, and playing have palpable consequences, "demand[ing] physical response"—applause, the showering of coins, shouts for an encore, foot patting and head swinging, etc.—to which the performers continually and energetically respond, which couldn't provide a starker contrast to the rich patron's catatonic spectatorship. As Johnson tries to express in this scene, ragtime is vitally adaptive to the environment in which it is performed: performers respond to their audience, improvising and modifying their playing to synchronize with the atmosphere and activity of one another and with dancers, rather than with an external timekeeping device, such as a metronome—a living aspect of the music that cannot be translated into the Western notational system. And, of course, we hear of the polyrhythmic dynamic of the music: "the intricate rhythms in which the accents fell in the most unexpected places" while the primary beat was "never lost," which are responsible for the impulse to move with the music.

The physical expression of syncopation in ragtime is swing, the sense of momentum that makes it almost impossible not to move with the rhythm. It is produced neither by a musician nor by a dancer, but in the live interaction between them—it consists in the affective atmosphere of a performance space, which is “relational and transformative,” in Jonathan Flatley’s words (12). To frame this in the terms Thomas Fuchs has offered previously, swing entails the “interactivity” made possible by the feeling of lived time and embodiment: the way “our body is affected by” another person’s “expression, and we experience the kinetics and intensity of his emotions through our own bodily kinaesthesia and sensation” (“Embodied Affectivity” 5). It is the dynamic, context-dependent, interaffective element of the music that the European musicians missed by playing only what is written down. “Swing,” as Johnson explains:

. . . is the more subtle and elusive because there is a still further intricacy in the rhythms. The swaying of the body marks the regular beat or, better, surge, for it is something stronger than a beat, and is more or less, not precisely, strict in time; but the Negro loves nothing better in his music than to play with the fundamental time beat. He will, as it were, take the fundamental beat and pound it out with his left hand, almost monotonously; while with his right hand he juggles it. . . . In listening to Negroes sing their own music it is often tantalizing and even exciting to watch a minute fraction of a beat balancing for a slight instant on the bar between two measures, and, when it seems almost too late, drop back into its own proper compartment. (*Spirituals* 29-30).

In his brilliant close reading of this passage, Edwards points out that we must presume that Johnson places “swing” in quotation marks for a reason, especially given that he does not demarcate the other forms of the word used throughout his preface (“swings,” “swinging,” or “swaying,” for example) (590). While the quotation marks reserved for “swing” could simply serve to indicate

that it is a neologism, Edwards is more inclined to read Johnson's punctuation as ironic: "it nounifies *swinging*," he asserts, "stiling the 'elusive' and performative connotations of what is in its verb form a paradigmatic black cultural *action* or *process*" and thus anticipating the problem Amiri Baraka would raise in "Swing—From Verb to Noun" of *Blues People* (1963) (590).¹⁴ The implications of this problem are underscored by Johnson's observation that although syncopation in ragtime was challenging for white listeners, who initially had trouble "getting the 'swing' of it," by the early twenties, "White America has pretty well mastered this difficulty"—and it's about time, Johnson adds, for "the Negro has been beating these rhythms in its ears for three hundred years" (28). Johnson's choice of the word "mastered" is especially conspicuous here. Considered in the context of the racist critiques of ragtime discussed in the previous section, the mastery of swing is oxymoronic; swing is "elusive" precisely because it belongs to no one individual. It isn't something to be "gotten," but rather is "intimately connected to, or performed in, the black body," Edwards argues, and conveys "an expressly black *time* implicated in the swing of the spirituals" (590; Edwards's emphasis). By drawing attention to the stiltedness of swing as a noun, Edwards asserts, Johnson furthermore registers the potentially dangerous effects of "his own transcription project" as a writer with a double audience, an issue he deals with by seeking "a middle ground . . . between the verb and noun forms of *swing*" (590). If the syncopated dynamics of the spirituals and secular songs, are, "in their very nature . . . not susceptible to fixation," as Johnson put it earlier, nor to "mastery" by "white America," he must somehow intimate in prose the effects of "what is not written down"—that is, the affective and physical dynamics which reside in the live interaction between performer and audience.

This section argues that Johnson produces a narrative analog of syncopation in the gaps between the dominant narrative and counter-narrative, a figurative version of the interplay between

the regular backbeat and counter-rhythms that produce stoptime. The “backbeat” to Johnson’s novel—the familiar, typified temporality upon which alternative rhythms and forms of time-consciousness play out—is the progressive chronology leading to the synchronic, national present, as framed earlier by Berlant and Pratt, which was frequently reproduced in African American life writing and slave narratives of the mid-to-late nineteenth century. *The Autobiography* narrator’s story is set up much as Douglass’s and Washington’s are. Beginning with his childhood, the narrator starts to trace his development as a talented and classically trained pianist; however, as is often the case in narratives of passing, there is an abrupt rupture from this progressive narrative beginning with the narrator’s discovery his race, or, rather, his racialization by his teacher and schoolmates, which affects the temporal structure of the rest of the novel. The principal visits the narrator’s class one day and asks all of the white students to rise; when the narrator, unaware that he is not white, stands up with his classmates, the teacher orders him to sit back down “for the present, and rise with the others” (11). The now-racialized narrator is explicitly and publically excluded by his teacher not simply “for the present” but “from the present,” that is, from the supposed “national-political present tense” (Berlant 6); his freedom to participate in this social space is deferred to the time of “the others.” That evening, he discovers that his mother is not white, but his father is “one of the greatest men in the country—the best blood of the South,” a discovery which “opened up a wedge” in the narrator’s heart (12; 13). He would remember his teacher’s humiliating cruelty as a “sword-thrust” that would take “years in healing” (13).

The narrator’s violent imagery of self-division provides a visceral account of his first experience of Du Bois’s double consciousness: the “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (5). It is an acutely felt “twoness,” Du Bois explains: “an American, a Negro; two souls,

two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (5). Du Bois likewise highlights the strange abruptness of the moment in childhood when “the revelation first bursts upon one, all in a day, as it were” (4). *The Autobiography* portrays this experience more specifically as one of temporal rupture: the discovery of a previously undetected rift between the collective present of the narrator’s white classmates and his time, the time of “the others.” If before the narrator inhabited time implicitly, “as a function of the lived body, opened up by its potentiality and capability” (Fuchs “Implicit” 196), he discovers in this pivotal moment that the experience of blackness in America delimits how one occupies not only social space but intersubjective time.¹⁵

The sudden “revelation” of one’s twoness therefore instantiates a far more insidious form of desynchronization than we have seen in previous chapters. As Fuchs argues, explicit time—time which rises to the surface of one’s attention, accompanied by an explicit sense of embodiment—entails “a *disturbance or* negation . . . a ‘rift in being’, as it were,” or as Johnson’s narrator puts it, a wedge in his heart, “which interrupts the smooth continuity and breaks through the habitual” (“Temporality and Psychopathology” 79). Johnson’s novel compels us to think about implicit time as one of the least visible but most consequential aspects of white privilege in America. Of particular relevance to the connection between racial formation and temporality is Fuchs’s work on the phenomenology of social time. “The intersubjective ‘now,’” Fuchs explains, “is constituted through the presence of the other, in particular through our simultaneous referral to the world, as in pointing or looking at, shared attention or joint action,” and is often explicated “by the use of indexical words such as ‘here’, ‘this’, ‘now’ etc.” (82). Though Fuchs doesn’t address the racial politics of intersubjective time, his framing of social time as a relation between oneself and ‘others’ warrants further consideration in the context of double consciousness. From the

position of *The Autobiography* narrator's white teacher and classmates, the sense of a shared present is made possible by distinguishing their collective present from that of "the others" in the room. From the narrator's standpoint, the teacher's command that he sit back down "for the present" asserts one time, "*the* present," while denying him the right to occupy that time equally with the white students. I referred in the previous section to Snead's point that the separation between European and black culture was "all along not one of nature, but one of force"; in the narrator's classroom, we see how the construction of cultural and racial difference is underpinned specifically by exclusionary forms of time consciousness—the teacher territorializes the time in her classroom and enforces her temporal boundaries in order to create a color line, spatializing and racializing time.

The narrator's first racial trauma transforms the temporal dynamics of his autobiography; what readers might have expected to be a chronological narrative of growth now becomes "ragged," figuratively speaking, alerting readers to a narrative and counter-narratives, time and counter-times, at play against one another. As Biers notes, the term "syncopation" is etymologically rooted in "syncope," which has two different but crucially interrelated denotations in the context of ragtime: 1. "failure of the heart's action," but more specifically "the loss of consciousness that results" from that arrhythmia, and 2. "the loss of letters from within a word, often to fit into a poem's metrical scheme" ("Syncope" 105). Physical experience and meter— affect and time—are thus intricately interwoven in the term for what is most vital to black music. One of the most sonically syncopated passages follows the narrator's first experience of double consciousness. At the start of chapter two, the narrator explains, "Since I have grown older I have often gone back and tried to analyze the change that came into my life after that fateful day in school" (13). While the transition from the first to second chapter does move us forward in time,

it forecasts a future which continually collapses into the past rather than taking the narrator progressively away from it. The second paragraph of the chapter begins, “And so I have often lived through that hour, that day, that week in which was wrought the miracle of my transition from one world into another”—the paragraph after that, “And this is the dwarfing, warping, distorting influence [of double consciousness] which operates upon each colored man in the United States”—and the paragraph after that, “And it is this, too, which makes the colored people of this country, in reality, a mystery to the whites” (13). To convey his recurrent returns to this scene of trauma, the narrator builds syncopated rhythms aurally into this uncharacteristic moment of sermoniac prose, most noticeably through anaphora—“that hour, that day, that week”; “my thoughts were colored, my words dictated, my actions limited”; “And . . . And . . . And”—and the meter of the gerunds, “dwarfing, warping, distorting.” The rhythms are at once stirring and exhausting; on the one hand, they reflect the repetitive temporality of double consciousness—thinking from the perspective of subject and object (of a white subject’s gaze) simultaneously—but they also suggest the experience of having to continually reiterate one’s experience for a white audience who repeatedly misunderstands. After the three “Ands,” the narrator abruptly shifts from the pattern in the fifth paragraph: “I believe it to be a fact that the colored people of this country know and understand the white people better than the white people know and understand them,” making explicit the perceptual problem which continually divides his story into the life lived as subject and life perceived as object of a white gaze (14). This is a poignant moment of self-reflexivity in the novel: throughout the narrative, Johnson, vis-à-vis this “autobiographer,” is transparent about his struggle to negotiate the ways his narrative will be read and/or misread by his double audience. By making the tension between distinct positionalities in and perspectives on time audible and palpable—performed in the lilting swing of his syncopated prose in the affective and temporal

aftermath of this trauma—Johnson furthermore contextualizes the rhythmic dynamics of ragtime, relating them to what Edwards described as the “expressly black *time* implicated in the swing of the spirituals.”

However, what most distinguishes this novel from its literary forebears is that while the narrator’s ability to pass positions him liminally with respect to “the color line,” he tends to recapitulate the master narratives that reify that color line and uphold white supremacy. More often than not, he unwittingly presents black life and culture through the mediating gaze of whiteness, which he has thoroughly internalized by the tale’s end. It is when his whitewashed sociohistorical perspective is set into tension against counterhistories—rather than the other way around—that Johnson’s innovative novel destabilizes the racist master narratives of national and cultural progress. A particularly illuminating example occurs on a train ride from Nashville to Atlanta. The narrator is able to pass, in both senses of the word, into the expensive smoking car, which under Jim Crow was reserved for white passengers, and overhears a “discussion of the race question” between a Union soldier and a Texas cotton planter (82). When the Texan insists that “no race in the world has ever been able to stand competition with the Anglo-Saxon,” the soldier refutes the implicit temporal logic of racial supremacy with a counterhistory:

The art of letters, of poetry, of music, of sculpture, of painting, of the drama, of architecture; the science of mathematics, of astronomy, of philosophy, of logic, of physics, of chemistry, the use of the metals and the principles of mechanics, were all invented or discovered by darker and what we now call inferior races and nations. We have carried many of these to their highest point of perfection, but the foundation was laid by others. . . . Why, we didn’t even originate the religion we use. We are a great race, the greatest in the world to-day, but we ought to remember that we are standing on a pile of past races, and enjoy our position

with a little less show of arrogance. We are simply having our turn at the game, and we were a long time getting to it. After all, racial supremacy is merely a matter of dates in history. (84-85)

To be sure, the logic of white supremacy is by no means absent from this lofty speech, but the Union soldier does expose the discrepancy between a historically and geographically insular narrative of white progress and supremacy, which has repressed the non-white origins of the “Anglo-Saxon’s” prized cultural, scientific, and technological achievements, and a longer, nonlinear, transnational history of white colonization, appropriation, and strategic amnesia. The soldier’s argument invokes what Wai Chee Dimock has called the *longue durée*: a more extensive historical and transnational framework within which the historian observes change at a slower tempo, allowing her to recognize how “continents and millennia” are woven “into many loops of relations, a densely interactive fabric” (4)—an excellent metaphor for the development of African American music in the diaspora. The soldier’s perspective also peels back what Snead describes as the “coverage” Euro-American culture has created for itself, by which he means not only security from “accidental and sudden rupturing of a complicated and precious fabric,” but moreover a “cover-up,” that is, “a hiding of otherwise unpleasant facts from the senses” (63): in this case, the non-white, non-European origins of what the Texan presumes to be irrefutable evidence of white supremacy. In this didactic monologue, Johnson highlights the history of cultural dispossession upon which the idea of whiteness has been built, which functions simultaneously as a warning to the double audience, highlighting the need to protect the authentic histories of black culture from those who would appropriate and misread it, as the narrator is, ironically, hoping to do by transmuting it—as he would say, purifying it—into European classical form.

The distinct forms of time-consciousness that structure European and ragtime music are inherently political: they each “emerge out of a specific positionality within a complex of social and economic conditions and practices, not out of any fixed cultural or biological essence,” Bruce Barnhart argues (“Chronopolitics” 553). Much as syncopation requires the listener to be aware of the regularity of the backbeat while simultaneously feeling the ‘swing’ from it, Johnson’s representation of the narrator’s double consciousness compels the reader to recognize the divisiveness of a concept of time to which she was, perhaps, previously habituated. The interplay between narratives and counternarratives, or “the” present and a time of “the others,” explicates the problem of Johnson’s double audience and compels readers to reflect on how they are positioned—or how they position themselves and others—in time. This chapter’s epigraph, taken from the prologue of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, resonates powerfully here. “Invisibility, let me explain, gives one a slightly different sense of time,” Ellison’s narrator writes; “you’re never quite on the beat. Sometimes you’re ahead and sometimes behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead. And you slip into the breaks and look around” (8). The syncopated dynamics of ragtime become for Johnson a means to express the connection between his narrator’s liminal racial identity and his racially delineated experiences of inclusion or exclusion from intersubjective time. In *Cruel Optimism*, Berlant points to ways “the singular”—say, a character’s “different sense of time”—“becomes delaminated from its location in someone’s story or some locale’s irreducibly local history and circulated as evidence of something shared” (12). In the following section, I turn to the way Johnson creates narrative versions of the ragtime or jazz break, into which he “slips,” supplanting the voice of his own narrator, and “looks around,” resituating the narrated events historically and culturally as “evidence of something shared.”

Johnson's Cuts from the Narrated Present

The break, though more familiar in jazz, is also common in the early ragtime pieces. Edward A. Berlin defines the ragtime break as “an interlude between main thematic sections” (98 n. 7). In “Dink” Johnson's *Stomp de Low Down*, for example, intermittent breaks are created by a dropping of the left-hand, during which the right-hand melody proceeds independent of the backbeat. In jazz, the break would come to define periods of more dramatic rupture, during which musicians have the time and space to improvise. “It is precisely this disjuncture which is the moment of truth,” Albert Murray writes: “It is on the break that you ‘do your thing.’ . . . It is when you establish your identity, when you write your signature on the epidermis of actuality. That is how you come to terms with the void” (112). What is important about improvisation's “pattern of procedure,” as Murray puts it, is that it takes place within a specific context and form; improvisation is not simply “winging it,” he explains, but rather playing “in terms of very specific idiomatic devices of composition,” which reflects how artists have over time developed a distinct “way of seeing things and doing things”—habits of bodily know-how, in John Dewey's sense, or the ‘art’ of habit, as discussed in chapter one (112). Murray stresses that the implications of the break—and the improvisation that plays out during the break—extend well beyond music “to educational methods, to scientific method, to inventions,” and we'll add for our purposes here, to narrative and storytelling (112).

The Autobiography traces the importance of the break in ragtime back to African American spirituals and sermons, as Johnson's essays and prefaces would likewise underscore. While on his travels through the South, the narrator observes the “Big Meeting,” a ritual where many of the black congregations in the area meet for several days of prayer and music. He has the chance to experience the sermons of John Brown, a renowned preacher, which tend to follow the same basic

trajectory: beginning “with the fall of man,” they then run “through various trials and tribulations of the Hebrew children, on to the redemption by Christ,” and end “with a fervid picture of the judgment day and the fate of the damned” (91). What sets John Brown apart, however, is the virtuosic way he modulates the rhythm and timbre of his voice to produce powerful emotional effects. He had begun one of his sermons “in the usual way,” as the narrator recollects, but then, announcing that he would take the congregation “on the heavenly march,” “seized the Bible under his arm and began to pace up and down the pulpit platform” (92). The narrator recounts:

The congregation immediately began with their feet a tramp, tramp, tramp, in time with the preacher’s march in the pulpit, all the while singing in an undertone a hymn about marching to Zion. Suddenly he cried, “Halt!” Every foot stopped with the precision of a company of well drilled soldiers, and the singing ceased. The morning star had been reached. Here the preacher described the beauties of that celestial body. Then the march, the tramp, tramp, tramp, and the singing was again taken up. Another “Halt!” They had reached the evening star. And so on, past the sun and the moon—the intensity of religious emotion all the time increasing—along the milky way, on up to the gates of heaven. Here the halt was longer, and the preacher described at length the gates and walls of the New Jerusalem. (92)

Though the sermon simulates a march toward a final destination (the heavenly gates), its rhythms produce a shared sense of repetition and cyclicity which is punctuated and thus emphasized by the abrupt halts. Throughout the repetitive “tramp, tramp, tramp . . . And so on” through these celestial cycles, the resting places ask the congregation to pause and heed the passage of time, the cycles of the sun and moon, and their own position therein (92). The “tramp, tramp, tramp” of the congregation’s stomping feet resembles the backbeat around which syncopated rhythms play out

in Joplin's "Stop-Time Rag," but in breaks from the march the preacher is able to improvise, like a jazz soloist, intermittently extending the duration of the halts to heighten "the intensity of religious emotion"—indeed, so successfully that the narrator, though "a more or less sophisticated and non-religious man of the world," recalls that he, too, "felt like joining in the shouts of 'Amen! Hallelujah!'" (92).¹⁶ Snead frames such sermonic shouts as linguistic versions of the jazz "cut," a filmic metaphor which he uses to convey the way a "preacher 'cuts' his own speaking by interrupting himself with a phrase such as 'praise God' (whose weight here cannot be at all termed denotative or imperative but purely sensual and rhythmic—an underlying 'social' beat provided for the congregation)" (72). Snead's parenthetical observation that these cuts are not "denotative or imperative" applies just as well to Johnson's narrative renditions of the break throughout *The Autobiography*, which draw attention to themselves precisely because they disrupt the forward momentum of the story and re-contextualize the narrated present from different vantage points.

Narrative instantiations of the break in Johnson's novel involve cuts from the genre and temporal perspective of the framing narrative—and, more importantly, of the framing narrator. They often appear as "discursive intrusions" which Heather Russell Andrade argues serve to create distance between "Johnson's own social authorial voice" and his narrator's (263). Many of Johnson's own experiences are indeed incorporated into this text, as his own autobiography would reveal, but Johnson's views are radically incongruent with those of *The Autobiography* narrator, whose comparatively unencumbered mobility between whiteness and blackness and between racially delimited social spaces in the U.S. and Europe, coupled with the indelible influence of his "millionaire friend," lead him to internalize many of the values and cultural hierarchies propagated to reify the color line. In the breaks, Johnson interpolates the fictional autobiography with his own philosophical, political, and aesthetic commentaries; indeed, the way the novel slips out of fiction

is underscored by the fact that many of the narrator's descriptions would be reproduced verbatim in Johnson's own voice in his later nonfiction, from *Black Manhattan* to his music anthology prefaces to his actual autobiography, *Along this Way* (including the description of John Brown's "heavenly march" sermon).

Yet in keeping with Murray's point about jazz improvisation, these breaks depart from but also return to the familiar trajectory and conventions of the narrator's story, and in doing so, "pressure narrative's capacities to its logical ends"—indeed "collapsing the distinctions between autobiography and fiction so flagrantly," as Jacqueline Goldsby argues, that they compel readers to interrogate "how the idea of 'fictiveness' comes into its own within U.S. literary history's canon formation" (xlv). This section centers particularly on moments of what Mark Currie describes as "the anticipation of retrospect": disruptions of the implicit "present" of the narrated past that re-contextualize it in relation to an actual or potential future (29). One of the envisaged futures that retroactively haunts the breaks of this text is one in which white America continues to dispossess African Americans of their artistic and cultural history, stealing credit for but adulterating and mishearing music such as ragtime. The breaks from fiction, and from the emotionally detached voice of the "autobiographer" and his cultural misreadings, provide apertures through which Johnson enters the story as an intervening historian and archivist of African Americans' distinct and transformative contributions to American culture and art.

After the narrator's first experience of ragtime, he becomes a regular at the Club. Before we hear about this part of his story, however, the narrator proclaims at the start of chapter VII, "I shall take advantage of this pause in my narrative to more closely describe the 'Club' spoken of in the latter part of the preceding chapter,—to describe it, as I afterwards came to know it, as an habitue" (55). The narrator presents "this pause" in his story—the chapter break—as though it

were not of his own making, but instead a fortuitous shift in rhythm to which he adapts, and during which he can improvise, like a ragtime or jazz performer. He must pause to describe the Club, he explains, “not only because of the direct influence it had on my life”—that is, not simply because of its narrative function—“but also because it was at that time the most famous place of its kind in New York, and was well known to both white and colored people of certain classes” (55). In a footnote, Goldsby notes that the “Club” is very likely a reference to Ike Hines’s Club on the western fringe of midtown, a place which Johnson knew well and would describe in *Along This Way* (52). This is one of many moments in *The Autobiography* when Johnson breaks out beyond the expectations of his genre and extends the possibilities of the novel for his double audience: readers begin to see how the fictional narrator’s individual story becomes enmeshed within a larger history of race relations in real social spaces and times in New York City.

During the break, *The Autobiography* transforms into a historical and social analysis of Ike Hine’s club in the Tenderloin district during the first decade of the twentieth century. In the parlor on the main floor, the narrator notes, “the walls were literally covered with photographs or lithographs of every colored man in America who had ever ‘done anything,’” including Frederick Douglass, Peter Jackson, and “all the famous jockeys and the stage celebrities, down to the newest song and dance team” (55-56). Adjacent to the parlor is the performance space, where black musicians, tragedians, and boxers as well as white “sight-seers” or “slummers” converged each night.¹⁷ “There were then no organizations giving performances of such order as are now given by several colored companies,” the narrator explains—contextualizing the historical importance of this artistic space—because at that time “no manager could imagine that audiences would pay to see Negro performers in any other role than that of Mississippi River roustabouts,” a problem Johnson would reiterate in *Black Manhattan* (57). The narrator recalls hearing “the younger and

brighter men discussing the time when they would compel the public to recognize that they could do something more than grin and cut pigeon wings,” their perspectives notably cast in the conditional tense: a syntactical shift with which Johnson urges readers to read the ambitions of these performers in this time and space, the narrated present, from the vantage point of future retrospect (56). This is encouraged furthermore by the presence of white minstrel performers who “came to get their imitations first hand”—an oxymoronic jab—“from the Negro entertainers they saw there,” those who were appropriating and degrading black music and theater (57). Robert B. Stepto reads the architectural layout of the Club as a temporal metaphor: the parlor enshrining black cultural heroes looks out onto a performance space, an “Afro-American ritual ground,” to produce “a spatial expression of the bond between artful acts in the present and a sense of tradition shaping past, present, and future into a single continuum” (125). As Stepto puts it, the descriptive archiving of this place “affords us a nearly prophetic vision of a race’s history of response to assault” (124). As the narrator concludes the chapter, he notes that any further observations he could include “would be better suited to a book on social phenomena than to a narrative of [his] life” (58)—a book such as *Black Manhattan*, for example. And thus with the transition to Chapter VIII, the narrator dispassionately subsumes the linear trajectory of his narrative: “On the day following our night at the ‘Club’ we slept until late in the afternoon . . .” (58).

We see an even more imperative and instructive break from the narrator’s “objective” account in chapter 10, which tells of his exploitative pillaging of black folk culture in the South for his musical project: an endeavor to “catch the spirit of the Negro in his relatively primitive state” and translate that raw material into European classical form (90). (We might note that “catch the spirit” recalls Johnson’s description of white America “mastering” the challenge of syncopated rhythm.) The narrator’s initial observations lay bare his perspective as an outsider—though he was

born in Georgia, he moved to the North at a young age, so this is his “first real experience among rural colored people” (87)—and although his perspective is steeped in the assumptions of white supremacy, he casts his descriptions in a “detached sociological tone,” as M. Giulia Fabi has noted (96). When he passes through Macon, Georgia, for example, he writes, “Occasionally I would meet with some signs of progress and uplift in even one of these backwood settlements—houses built of boards, with windows, and divided into rooms, decent food and a fair standard of living,” not only presuming one monolithic standard of progress, but moreover exceptionalizing the black southerners who measure up to it: in this case, these comparatively sophisticated backwoods domiciles are attributable only “to the fact that there was in the community some exceptionally capable Negro farmer whose thrift served as an example” (88-89).

Yet as the narrator begins to experience the music of the black church, the narrative becomes interpolated by blocked transcriptions of sorrow songs and spirituals, encyclopedic descriptions of how the sermons and accompanying music are performed, and critical reflections on the current and future place of the spirituals and slave songs in history. This chapter of *The Autobiography* incorporates the likely content and even occasionally the typography of what the narrator has been “jotting down in [his] note-book,” but supplements these jottings with contextual details that would be reproduced and reframed in Johnson’s own voice in later writing (90).¹⁸ As the narrator experiences the music of Singing Johnson, for example, the account of spirituals such as “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” are expressed not as raw folk “themes” to be alchemized into symphonies, as the narrator had imagined doing, but as live experiences which depend on Singing Johnson’s movements and gestures: the way he “sang with his eyes . . . indicating the tempo by swinging his head to and fro,” gestures which are crucially adaptive to the specific, intersubjective time of the congregation and can be traced back for centuries (94). The narrator then breaks to his

narrating present, noting “As yet, the Negroes themselves do not fully appreciate these old slave songs,” and many people among the “educated classes are rather ashamed of them” (95). While “[t]his feeling is natural,” as he acknowledges, because black Americans “are still too close to the conditions under which the songs were produced,” he asks his readers to reconsider these songs from the perspective of future retrospect: “the day will come when” songs like “Go down Moses” and “Nobody knows de trouble I see” “will be the most treasured heritage of the American Negro” (95). The narrator had initially planned to record “themes and melodies” of black music in the South to use in his project (90).¹⁹ Yet in the autobiographical narrative he has now constructed, long after abandoning the project which would have appropriated this “material,” this break reveals how necessary it is to supplement the notebook jottings of “themes and melodies” with historical, musicological, and sociohistorical context—living aspects of the music in this specific time and place in the U.S. In the break, Johnson undermines his narrator’s attempted plunder and emphasizes the material, experiential, context-dependent, living, and explicitly temporal experience of black music that will always exceed the expressive capacities of European classical notation.

The final break I consider, which is produced immediately after the aforementioned smoking car debate between the Texas planter and Union soldier, demonstrates how Johnson reorients readers to the future so as to destabilize the deterministic notions of race that inhere in dominant narratives of national progress. At the time, the Texan’s arguments “fell upon [the narrator] like a chill,” leaving him “sick at heart” (86). “But to-day,” he writes, “as I think over that smoking-car argument, I can see it in a different light” (86). “The Texan’s position does not render things so hopeless,” he explains,

for it indicates that the main difficulty of the race question does not lie so much in the actual condition of the blacks as it does in the mental attitude of the whites; and a mental attitude, especially one not based on truth, can be changed more easily than actual conditions. That is to say, the burden of the question is not that the whites are struggling to save ten million despondent and moribund people from sinking into a hopeless slough of ignorance, poverty and barbarity in their very midst, but that they are unwilling to open certain doors of opportunity and to accord certain treatment to ten million aspiring, education-and-property-acquiring people. In a word, the difficulty of the problem is not so much due to the facts presented, as to the hypothesis assumed for its solution. . . . So, when the white race assumes as a hypothesis that it is the main object of creation, and that all things else are merely subsidiary to its well being, sophism, subterfuge, perversion of conscience, arrogance, injustice, oppression, cruelty, sacrifice of human blood, all are required to maintain the position, and its dealings with other races become indeed a problem, a problem which, if based on a hypothesis of common humanity, could be solved by the simple rules of justice. (87)

What we see in the break from the past present to future present is that the process of racial construction in the U.S. is not merely “a matter of dates in history,” as the soldier had suggested, nor one of nature or divine providence, as the Texas planter argued, but rather the result of “force,” as Snead put it earlier: a systematic program of cultural and physical violence, condensed into the narrator’s sermonic litany of “sophism, subterfuge . . . oppression, cruelty, sacrifice of human blood”— motivated by the desperation “to maintain [white] power.” We cannot but read the narrator’s conclusion with a cynical sense of irony: if we have learned anything by this point in the novel, it’s that justice, a cultural and highly political construct, has no “simple rules.” But by

rehistoricizing and reconceptualizing the so-called “race problem” as a problem with “the mental attitude of the whites”—that is, in exposing the sociocultural habits of perception that have conventionalized both the soldier’s and planter’s conceptualizations of race—Johnson transfigures the future from a fixed telos into a contingent and open-ended array of paths toward sociopolitical intervention and transformation.

The break is thus a means of making the feeling of time explicit, resituating the narrator’s ‘presents’—the present of the narrated self and that of the narrating self—in their vital, shifting relationships to the past and future. These are breaks from narrative (indeed, from narrative itself, not simply from *his* narrative) which resituate the narrator’s fictional past within a real and often transgenerational history that is under continual reexamination and reconstruction from different and perspectives and positions in time. Whereas Adorno treasures the symphony as a form that promises “the succession of frictionless parts,” in Barnhart’s words, a flow “of necessary moments” which listeners experience as “essentially a ritualized celebration of universality purged of all contingency, particularity, or conflict” (“Chronopolitics” 559), Johnson’s narrative breaks create tensions and dynamic resonance between past and present as well as present and future, and, furthermore, between generic classifications as seemingly distinct as fiction and nonfiction. As a result, readers are asked to reconsider hardened concepts such as “the present” as a social conflux of power relations and positionalities, rather than an empty classification unit.

“. . . my thoughts go back”: Repetition and Resynchronization

The Autobiography begins with its ending, and ends with its beginning; the title alone divulges the “ex-colored” identity of the narrator, suggesting a retroactive significance to the narrative that is about to unfold. Furthermore, the narrator speaks in the first paragraph from his current

positionality *as* an ex-colored man, using the present, progressive, and future constructions while announcing that his story will lead to a “vague feeling of dissatisfaction, of regret, of almost remorse from which [he is] seeking relief, and of which [he] shall speak in the last paragraph of this account” (5). Searching for the right word to convey the feeling he is trying to escape, he tellingly gets stuck in circumlocution around the morpheme “re,” meaning back or backward, again, anew. At the end of the narrative, as promised, the narrator indeed re-turns to and attempts to clarify this source of regret. The “great secret” of his life, as we ought to have guessed from the title, is that he has passed undetectably into the white world: he married a white woman, with whom he had two children (she died giving birth to their second child), and he is now “an ordinarily successful white man who has made a little money” (110). The narrator concludes:

My love for my children makes me glad that I am what I am, and keeps me from desiring to be otherwise; and yet, when I sometimes open a little box in which I still keep my fast yellowing manuscripts, the only tangible remnants of a vanished dream, a dead ambition, a sacrificed talent, I cannot repress the thought, that, after all, I have chosen the lesser part, that I have sold my birthright for a mess of pottage. (110)

The ending makes it clear why Johnson’s narrator is typically read as an anti-hero. The final paragraph is, after all, a confession of failure: he has selfishly chosen to sell his birthright, not only the musical talent and training which afforded him a powerful means of expression as a black artist, but his sense of responsibility to join “that small but gallant band of colored men who are publicly fighting the cause of their race” (110). Even his regret is framed as a missed opportunity for personal gain—“I, too, might have taken part in a work so glorious” (110). Andrade argues that the generic complexity of the text—a fictional novel in the guise of an autobiography—creates enough distance between Johnson and his narrator to lend productive indeterminacy to the literary

form.²⁰ Along these lines, Fabi reads this as a moment of parody: Johnson reproduces but inverts the “race hero” and spokesman of 19th-century African American narratives, “not only as ridiculing but also as reverential imitation” (93). In this way it looks both backward and forward, synthesizing important conventions of post-Reconstruction African American writing while pointing ahead to the Harlem Renaissance (93).

More specifically, I argue in this section that repetition, when contextualized musically, is the most important source of the text’s transgressive generic and epistemological indeterminacy, and helps differentiate Johnson’s innovative work from the “mess of pottage” his narrator is left with. This requires us to hear the repetitions both within and beyond *The Autobiography*: echoes with known and unknown/unknowable origins that resonate throughout the text, the 1912 “autobiography’s” retroactively acquired significance with its 1927 republication as a novel under Johnson’s name, and Johnson’s repurposing of various passages and themes in *The Autobiography* in other artistic and non-fictional forms, particularly his poetry and anthology prefaces. By compelling us to read and re-read prospectively and retroactively, forwards and backwards, repetition within and about *The Autobiography* insists that the pasts narrated were not and never will be fixed, necessary steps toward “the” present, but are shot through with contingency, which can be seen variably in the shifting light of different ‘presents’ and positionalities therein. The novel tears the implicit determinism of the modern nation’s etiology asunder, and through the work of repetition with a difference, destabilizes the temporal assumptions that underlie many of his readers’ understandings of race.

From a musical standpoint, repetition in ragtime and jazz makes both syncopation and the break possible: it provides intersubjective, predictable, and yet simultaneously open rhythms around which musicians can play, and from which they and their audience can depart and return,

as we saw in the break. Barnhart's analysis of James P. Johnson's renowned performances of "Carolina Shout" centers on the way repetitive structures of the call-and-response between Johnson and listeners/dancers ensure both the potential reenactment of the experience "on the next night, in the next club or room," and Johnson's context-dependent, "improvised variations" within the intersubjective space and time of each particular performance ("Carolina" 847; 846).²¹ Three of the piece's four sections repeat at least twice, as Barnhart explains, and there is furthermore repetition within each of those four sixteen-bar sections (*Jazz* 84-85). Barnhart points to several crucial implications of repetition in the "Carolina Shout" performances that are germane to *The Autobiography*. First, he explains, "The possible and actual return of previous sections of the piece belies any belief in the possibility of fully mastering and moving beyond the past, for all the performance's past sections are also possible futures" (85), a point which speaks to the way the music both registers the irrepressibility of the past—including personal and transgenerational racial violence—and works as an empowering process of social resynchronization and response for black performers and audiences.

Unlike his narrator, Johnson would go on to champion and archive the history of African American music and art—from the spirituals and sorrow songs to ragtime to poetry to the various editions of his own novel—throughout his career. One of the ways he imbues the narrator's failure with retroactive significance and potentiality is by reproducing but also recontextualizing passages from the novel in his later work. There are numerous moments in *The Autobiography* that are productive to read intertextually with passages from Johnson's later essays and autobiography, but I focus here on a set of passages that deal with what was likely the most traumatic experience of Johnson's life, and the one that most chillingly embodies what Barnhart describes as "the possible and actual return of" the past: Johnson's narrow escape from being lynched for speaking to a white

woman in Jacksonville, Florida. *The Autobiography* narrator's account of his experience as a spectator of a lynching becomes a kind of mirror image of Johnson's account two decades later of being the victim of a near-lynching in *Along This Way*, a repetition—but with a crucial difference—that exposes how the legal and social constructions of race produced racially differential experiences of time with the collapse of Reconstruction, the living nightmare of Jim Crow Law, and a wave of lynchings throughout the south.

The Autobiography narrator establishes his experience of a lynching as the turning point in his story: it fills him with such “shame”—“Shame at being identified with a people that could with impunity be treated worse than animals” (100)—that he decides then and there to begin passing as a white man. At around 11:00 one morning in a small southern town, the narrator begins to sense anxiety in the air; there is a rumor that some crime—“murder! rape!”—has been committed, and he leaves his lodging to follow “the drift,” a band of “fierce, determined men,” “all white,” collecting near the railroad station (97). Just before noon, they bring in the condemned black man, dragging him “through the dust,” and place a rope around his neck, at which point “from somewhere came the suggestion, ‘Burn him!’”—an anonymous, disembodied cry which “ran like an electric current” (97). “Have you ever witnessed the transformation of human beings into savage beasts?” he asks, which we presume refers to the murderous mob of men preparing to burn a human being alive. Yet in the bitter twist of Johnson's irony, it turns out that the narrator is referring to the man who is being lynched. Perhaps nowhere is the narrator's internalized white supremacy clearer than in his portrayal of the victim: “There he stood,” he recalls, “a man only in form and stature, every sign of degeneracy stamped upon his countenance. His eyes were dull and vacant, indicating not a single ray of thought” (97). The narrator's passive construction is telling precisely because of what it does not tell. Derieck Scott poignantly rephrases this in the active voice: “It is

the white men who stamp on the lynched man's face the signs of degeneracy, of devolution to a premodern, noncivilized state," and the man's "'not-body,'" he writes, borrowing Fanon's term, "bears the mark and brunt of their savagery" (101). The narrator thus reproduces the process of racial construction that every lynching seeks to re-assert, and uses the passive voice to erase the role of the white men who act as the agents of that construction, thus naturalizing the dehumanization of blackness.²²

Though the narrator describes the lynching in graphic detail, he later notes that "[i]t was over before [he] realized that time had elapsed": "Before I could make myself believe that what I saw was really happening," he explains, "I was looking at a scorched post, a smoldering fire, blackened bones, charred fragments sifting down through coils of chain, and the smell of burnt flesh—human flesh—was in my nostrils" (98). This is the last of several traumatic events which disorient the narrator from clock time, speaking to the dis-integration of time and affect that trauma produces, as we saw in chapter three.²³ After one such moment, his first experience of double consciousness in the classroom, the narrator writes, "In the life of everyone, there is a limited number of unhappy experiences which are not written upon the memory, but stamped there with a die; and in long years after they can be called up in detail, and every emotion that was stirred by them can be lived through anew; these are the tragedies of life" (13). The use of the word "stamped" here echoes retroactively through its re-use for the lynched man's signification as nonhuman, linking but differentiating the narrator, whose mind has been "stamped" indelibly by silently watching. After he wanders from the scene to find a safe place to think, the narrator writes, "Whenever I hear protests from the South that it should be left alone to deal with the Negro question, my thoughts go back to that scene of brutality and savagery"—a comment which in its guise of dispassionate rationalization betrays the irrepressibility of this trauma and the narrator's

complicity in it. It is at this point that the narrator determines that he “would neither disclaim the black race nor claim the white race,” but would “change [his] name, raise a mustache, and let the world take [him] for what it would” (99). Scott interprets this decision as the narrator “repeating the work he has seen so ably performed” by the lynch mob: that is, “he banishes” the terror he had experienced “under the sign of blackness” (103). The lynching, more than any other event in the novel, haunts the final paragraph of the narrator’s story; “stamped” in his mind “with a die,” it threatens to pull him back to this scene of incomprehensible brutality each time the box of yellowing manuscripts is opened.

In 1933, Johnson would re-present another lynching experience, this one truly autobiographical, and from the vantage point of the (“stamped”) victim. This would break Johnson’s “thirty-year silence” about “the central event that shaped his life and creative output,” as Noelle Morrisette writes (28); until publishing his autobiography he had told no one but his brother—not even his parents (*ATW* 170). In 1901, Johnson, then in his late twenties, had been teaching at Stanton in Jacksonville, the city where he had been born and raised, when he witnessed The Great Fire—a historically catastrophic event in which over one hundred and fifty blocks burned to the ground. After the fire, Johnson had been helping rehouse the homeless and allocate relief aid and food packages to victims when a female journalist from New York came to Jacksonville to write an article on the fire, and asked for Johnson’s feedback (165). In the late afternoon, as they were seated on a bench at Riverside Park discussing the article, Johnson began to notice that it was a scene “of perfect semi-tropical beauty,” at which point he suddenly “became conscious of an uneasiness, an uneasiness that, no doubt, had been struggling the while to get up and through from my subconscious”; he then “became aware of noises, of growing, alarming noises; of men hallooing back and forth, and of dogs responding with the bay of bloodhounds”

(166). Johnson's unnerving account of the emerging affective atmosphere, and particularly his heightened sensitivity to noise, resounds back through the pages of *The Autobiography*, whose narrator had likewise become "conscious of that sense of alarm which is always aroused by the sound of hurrying footsteps on the silence of the night," and had suddenly "caught the murmur of voices, then the gallop of a horse," and "mutterings" (96).

Yet whereas the fictional autobiographer speaks to his double audience by universalizing the affective dynamics of fear, Johnson is sure to emphasize that the chronic "possible and actual return" of lynching produces a distinct affective time consciousness among African Americans—an ineffable but palpable structure of feeling, as we have seen in previous chapters—which is coeval and deeply interconnected with the nation's present, in spite of what Snead calls its "coverage" for such realities:

The noises grew more ominous. They seemed to be closing in. My pulse beat faster and my senses became more alert. I glanced at my companion; she showed no outward sign of alarm. On the other side of the fence death was standing. Death turned and looked at me and I looked at death. In the instant I knew that the lowering of an eyelash meant the end.

Just across the fence in the little clearing were eight or ten militia-men in khaki with rifles and bayonets. The abrupt appearance of me and my companion seemed to have transfixed them. They stood as under a spell. Quick as a flash of light the series of occurrences that had taken place ran through my mind: The conductor and motorman saw me leave the street car and join the woman; they saw us go back into the park; they rushed to the city with a maddening tale of a Negro and white woman meeting in the woods; there is no civil authority; the military have sent out a detachment of troops with guns and dogs to get me. . . . I take my companion's parasol from her hand; I raise the loose strand of

fence wire and gently pass her through; I follow and step into the group. The spell is instantly broken. They surge round me. They seize me. They tear my clothes and bruise my body; all the while calling to their comrades, “Come on, we’ve got ’im! Come on, we’ve got ’im!” And from all directions these comrades rush, shouting, “Kill the damned nigger! Kill the black son of a bitch!” I catch a glimpse of my companion; it seems that the blood, the life is gone out of her. There is the truth; but there is no chance to state it; nor would it be believed. . . . (167)

For “[t]he eternity between stepping through the barbed wire fence and the officer’s words putting [him] under arrest” (168), Johnson shifts from the past to present tense, and the rhythm of the sentences seems to move with Johnson’s quickening pulse to reproduce the feeling of time, again emphasizing the disintegrative physiological and neurobiological effects of trauma discussed in chapter two: the experience cannot be integrated temporally into the past, but must be repeatedly relived in the present—“every emotion that was stirred . . . can be lived through anew,” as the *The Autobiography* narrator had put it. Yet there is a grotesque literality to the psychic reproducibility of these traumatic wounds because lynchings were, and still are, future possibilities.

In *Each Hour Redeem*, Daylanne K. English argues that Angelina Weld Grimké’s, Mary Burrill’s, and Georgia Douglas Johnson’s antilynching plays of the 1910s turned from emerging modernist conventions back toward Victorian melodrama as a form of “strategic anachronism”: in stark contrast to the presentism of Du Bois and the later Harlem Renaissance writers, these playwrights developed an aesthetic means of representing the temporal experience of black Americans, for whom the end of Reconstruction felt like a historical relapse, and lynching became a “predictable, often-repeated form of violent trauma that, in certain ways, was not only fully known but fully expected” (11-12). Johnson likewise borrows from the literary past in this

autobiographical account to capture this recursiveness, but turns instead to sermons, as he so often does in *The Autobiography*. “Death turned and looked at me and I looked at death,” Johnson writes, borrowing from the sermonic power of epanalepsis—meaning “taking up again,” a “resumption”—the effect of which is at least twofold: it underscores Johnson’s acute awareness of looking out as subject while being looked at as—and constructed into—an object by the lynch mob; and, correspondingly, it positions him within this cyclical, tautological ritual through which these white men reassert and re-new (as in a resumption) their power.

It is a bitter and fitting coincidence that the woman whom Johnson is almost lynched for speaking to is a journalist. She is here to capture the ‘real’ story of the fire—and to authenticate it with the real testimonies of its witnesses—and ends up face to pale face with more reality than she had bargained for. “Quick as a flash of light the series of occurrences that had taken place ran through my mind,” Johnson recalls, invoking the rapid flashes of a camera to cast his future mediation: snapshots that patch together the story of his crime and capital punishment. Yet “the blood, the life is gone out of” the would-be documentarian of Jacksonville’s reality, who is powerless to do anything but watch; “There is the truth; but there is no chance to state it; nor would it be believed.” She had come for real “news,” but is paralyzed by the unassailable reality of a brutal American ritual that is instead startling old, recursive, and coeval with its storied modernity. Yet what Johnson means furthermore by the truth that “would not be believed” is that the journalist is a light-skinned woman of color, “with eyes and hair so dark that they blanched the whiteness of her face” (ATW 165). That she initially “showed no outward sign of alarm” as the sounds of the lynch mob broke in upon the silence intimates that there was indeed inward alarm, confirmed later when Johnson catches “a glimpse of [his] companion” and realizes “that the blood, the life is gone

out of her”—*that* is the truth, perceptible only to Johnson because he alone is in sync, interaffectively and temporally, with her.

Morrisette points out that this long-unspeakable trauma is at the center of Johnson’s autobiographical narrative in *Along This Way*, “and effectively splits his story—his life—into a before and an after” (35). “For weeks and months the episode with all of its implications preyed on [his] mind,” and he would wake up in the night “after living through again those few frightful seconds”; “It was not until twenty years after,” Johnson explains, “through work I was then engaged in, that I was able to liberate myself completely from this horror complex” (*ATW* 170). The most obviously pertinent work in which Johnson was engaged in the early 1920s was his antilynching campaign for the NAACP, which he would lead for two decades. Morrisette notes that in 1918, Johnson had worked fervently on the Dyer antilynching bill, traveling to the capital to garner support from Congressmen: “While it narrowly passed in the House of Representatives,” however, “it failed in the Senate through filibuster,” and Johnson was devastated, feeling “personally betrayed by the senators who had promised their support and then declined to defend the bill” (36). Yet Johnson was involved in other forms of activism, not least of all what he called “the art approach” in “Race Prejudice and the Negro Artist” (1928). After the crushing defeat of the Dyer bill—seventeen years after his near-lynching, six years after the first publication of *The Autobiography*, and fifteen years before he published *Along This Way*—Johnson wrote the poem, “Brothers—American Drama,” which takes the form of a dramatic dialogue between a lynch mob and its victim: “The mob speaks”; “the victim speaks”; “the mob speaks again”; “the victim speaks again” and, finally, “the mob concludes” (*CP* 57-58). The poem begins:

(THE MOB SPEAKS:)

See! There he stands; not brave, but with an air
Of sullen stupor. Mark him well! Is he

Not more like brute than man? Look in his eye!
No light is there; none, save the glint that shines
In the now glaring, and now shifting orbs
Of some wild animal caught in the hunter's trap.

...

Speak man!—We call you man because you wear
His shape—How are you thus? Are you not from
That docile, child-like, tender-hearted race
Which we have known three centuries?

...

(THE VICTIM SPEAKS)

I am, and am not.

The comments that Johnson had given to his narrator in *The Autobiography* are now voiced—in ironically lofty, poetic form—by the lynch mob directly: just as the narrator had looked upon the victim and seen “a man only in form and stature”—had seen “not a ray of thought” behind his “dull and vacant” eyes—these men see a brute with “[n]o light” in his eye. Yet here, the process of signification that underlies racial construction is made explicit: supplanting the narrator’s evasively passive observation of the “degeneracy stamped upon” the victim’s face, the mob here cries in the imperative mood: “Mark him well!” To mark can mean not only to stamp or brand, but “To indicate (a point in space or time)” (*OED*). The lynch mob territorializes not only space but time to reinscribe the belief in their whiteness, banishing the victim from “the world” to “a world,” as we saw in the *Times-Picayune* review of ragtime, and from “the present” (*their* present) to a time of “the others,” as in *The Autobiography* narrator’s classroom. However, while the last piece of dialogue falls under the heading, “The mob concludes,” it is the lynched man’s words on their tongues that we are left with; even after he has been murdered, his voice resounds as the mob asks,

“What did he mean by those last muttered words, / ‘*Brothers in spirit, brothers in deed are we?*’” (59). Johnson uses italics to etherealize this haunting echo, un-finalizing the mob’s “conclusion” (which we might read figuratively for the Senate’s legislative conclusion earlier that year) and blurring the end of the poem itself. In “Brothers,” Johnson therefore subverts the mob’s endeavor to “mark” their victim in character, space, and time, as the mob in Jacksonville had marked him seventeen years ago. The horror of lynching is that it is repeatable, but the representations of lynching throughout Johnson’s oeuvre become repetitions with a difference—in this case, in crucial contrast with his narrator in *The Autobiography*, Johnson gives the victim a voice to remark himself and remake the story of his life.

As Barnhart explains, when James P. Johnson repeats a melodic or rhythmic structure in “Carolina Shout,” he does so with a difference, making improvisational adjustments with each return to a previous section. Duke Ellington, who was a huge admirer of and was deeply influenced by Johnson, recalls that while experiencing his performances, “‘It seemed as though you never heard the same note twice’” (qtd. in Barnhart *Jazz* 86). Johnson’s improvisations within repeated sections illuminate their latent potentiality:

Driven by the belief that a repeated pass through any of the sections of the composition might yield a difference missed on the first time through, Johnson’s performance refuses to renounce the sections that have already passed by. “Carolina Shout” insists that the present is always insuperably attached to both the future and the past, and that repetition, if handled properly, is more likely to open onto a future possibility than onto a regressive past. (86)

In the repetitions of jazz resides a potent challenge to the deterministic historiographical narratives that position a “shared” present at the tail-end of a unidirectional, necessary, causal, and

progressive (numerical) chronology—a determinism which empties the past and present of their contingency and represses the attendant questions of how things could go, or could have gone, otherwise.

Likewise, by reading James Weldon Johnson's novel intertextually, we start to see how repeated but improvised sections loosen the past from its fossilization within a singular narrative. Though the narrator abandons his ambition to advocate for the expressive possibilities of African American art, the final paragraph intimates the ongoingness of his repeated returns to the past, which belies the finality of the novel's ending—as in the dubious finality of "Brothers—American Drama." When the narrator writes in present tense, "when I sometimes open a little box in which I still keep my fast yellowing manuscripts . . . I cannot repress the thought," his phrasing suggests that this regret is intermittent and recurrent. He fails to see what Johnson sees: that in admitting his continual returns to the past, he contradicts his own assertion of that past's inertness—his dream has quite obviously not vanished; his ambition is not dead; and the sacrifice of his musical talent for this "mess of pottage" is surely not irrevocable. Johnson further underscores the indeterminacy of the past by republishing the anonymous autobiography as a novel—a "repetition with a difference" in the literary marketplace—which required readers to return to and re-read the "autobiography" from an entirely new aesthetic and epistemological perspective. The intertextual forms of repetition that sound and resound throughout Johnson's literary-musico oeuvre desynchronize his double audience from national "time" as it has been constructed and naturalized, and reorient readers to those lived temporalities that are experiential, affective and embodied, manipulable, racially and socioeconomically circumscribed, and, most importantly, rife with radical potential.

1. Johnson has written about the problem of the double audience in other artistic contexts as well. In *Black Manhattan* (1930), for example, he emphasizes how the double audience constricts black playwrights and actors: before the flourishing of black theaters in the Tenderloin district of New York City from around 1910-1917, performers “had been constrained to do a good many things that were distasteful because managers felt they were things that would please white folks,” and refrained from representing certain things on stage—sex, for example—“because managers feared they would displease white folks” (769). Portraying sex or excessive tenderness between black actors was taboo, as Johnson explains, because of “the belief that a love scene between two Negroes could not strike a white audience except as ridiculous” (171).

2. Edward A. Berlin notes that while ragtime is frequently treated as though it arose suddenly and spontaneously, it can be traced back to African American musicians’ “rags” of popular nineteenth-century marches (99). A rag at its most basic entails a syncopated melody played over a march beat. Berlin also points out that marches and ragtime pieces had a common function: “providing music for the two-step, a dance with sufficient flexibility to permit both syncopated and unsyncopated accompaniment” (100). There are many structural parallels between these two musical forms, but the telltale distinction is in the rhythm; marches are rhythmically regular throughout, while the rags of those marches include “tied and untied syncopations” (100). Berlin traces the development of these rags back further to the “coon song,” which he characterizes as a popular “Negro dialect song frequently, but not always, of an offensively and denigrating nature” (5). Coon songs had long been featured in minstrel and vaudeville shows, but in the 1890s they became alternatively known as “ragtime” (5). Berlin explains, “By 1906 the popularity of the more flagrantly abusive form of coon song had faded, but popular vocal music retained the ragtime label”—and around this time, white musicians began to republish ragtime under their own names—and this was the theft and “deracialization of ragtime songs” which Johnson condemned and contested with his music anthologies and prefaces (5-6).

3. Berlin notes that the public was “entranced” by this song, inspiring not only imitations but entire subcategories of “jungle” songs (74). It would be parodied in T. S. Eliot’s “Fragment of an Agon”: “*Under the bamboo / Bamboo bamboo / Under the bamboo tree / Two live as one / One live as two / Two live as three / Under the bam / Under the boo / Under the bamboo tree*” (81).

4. A digitized recording of “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen,” performed by Marian Anderson (1924), is available to stream in the National Jukebox archive: <http://www.loc.gov/jukebox/recordings/detail/id/10169>.

Compare to “Under the Bamboo Tree,” as performed by Judy Garland and Margaret O’Brien in *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944). Department of Special Collections, Davidson Library, University of California, Santa Barbara. Inclusion of the recording in the National Jukebox, courtesy of Sony Music Entertainment.

5. See Heather Russell Andrade’s “Revising Critical Judgments of *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*” (2006) for an analysis of the generic hybridity of Johnson’s faux-autobiography. She argues that “like its racially hybrid narrator, the text itself is a kind of narratological *metisage*” (257).

6. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. explains in *The Signifying Monkey* (1988), “Hegel, writing in the *Philosophy of History* in 1813, used the absence of writing of Africans as the sign of their innate inferiority”: in the wake of Descartes, “Blacks were reasonable, and hence ‘men,’ if—and only if—they demonstrated mastery of ‘the arts and sciences,’ the eighteenth century’s formula for writing” (141-142).

7. Like Bruce Barnhart and Daylanne English, I take the term “chronopolitical” from the anthropologist Johannes Fabian, who argues in *Time and the Other* (1983) that time “is a form through which we define the content of relations between the Self and Other,” which is the starting point for his critique of the way nineteenth- and twentieth-century cultural anthropology has used time “to constitute its own object—the savage, the primitive, the Other” (xxxvii; 1). Extending Fabian’s argument beyond anthropology, Barnhart asserts, “time is always political because it governs the envisioning of otherness,” typically “by imposing an apparently insurmountable conceptual barrier between subject and object,” or what Fabian calls “an ‘epistemological dictatorship’” that cements divisive relational constructions “such as master and servant, white and black, primitive and civilized, worker and owner” (*Jazz* 5).

8. In his article on James P. Johnson’s “Carolina Shout” performances (2010), to be discussed in the final section of this chapter, Barnhart points also to Alain Locke’s use of the word “sublimation” in “Beauty Instead of Ashes” (1928). Barnhart points to the way Locke frames improvement in African American art as “‘sublimated and precious things’ in which what he calls ‘the folk temperament’ will scarcely be recognizable” (844). Barnhart attributes this perspective—the notion that the “impurities” of black folk art must be burned away—to “a cultural hierarchy valorizing the spiritual or intellectual at the expense of the corporeal,” a hierarchy which is underpinned by the conceptualization of “blackness as the realm of mindless bodies and whiteness as the realm of intellect and spirituality” (844).

9. By the early twentieth century, Berlin explains, the terms “rag,” “ragtime,” “two-step,” and “cakewalk” were used synonymously (106). Rags became popular shortly after the cakewalk, “a grand-promenade” dance style which originated on plantations: it was often performed in a kind of competition in which “the slave couple performing the most attractive steps and motions would ‘take the cake’” (104).

10. Pratt’s chapter aims to highlight that the temporality of these mid-nineteenth-century fugitive slave narratives is more complex than simply progressive/linear: he points in particular to “a competition among linear time” and what he calls “laboring time and spirit time” (158). While many critics have asserted that slaves were deprived of time, that attitude conflates “time” with the sort of monolithic progressive time. Pratt points out that laboring and spirit time were simply alternatives, which could feel problematic etc., but are nevertheless important in this chapter.

11. I use Homi Bhabha’s term, “epochal time,” to characterize the sweeping narrative of nationhood stemming from a supposed point of origin. In “Dissemi-Nation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation,” Bhabha points to the repressed but ever-present contradiction between the “epochal” narrative of the nation—the nation’s grand, abstract, progressive, unidirectional path from some point of origin in the distant past (say, the signing of the Declaration of Independence)—and the everyday performance of the people of a nation. The people of a nation “must be thought of in a double-time,” he argues: they are both objects of the epochal, historicist narrative, and subjects who in the more immediate present must repeatedly transform the “scraps, patches, and rags of daily life . . . into the signs of a national culture” (197). There is a disjuncture here, as Bhabha explains—an unbridgeable rift between the “accumulative temporality” of the nation and the “repetitious, recursive strategy” of the subjects who perform nationhood in daily life (297). Within this gap, the plurality of the people becomes “a problem of knowledge that haunts the symbolic formation of social authority”: they are “neither the beginning or the end of the national narrative,” but rather “represent the cutting edge between the totalizing powers of the social” (297).

12. A sample of Scott Joplin’s “*Stop-Time Rag*,” performed by Joshua Rifkin (1987), has been digitized and made available to stream in the Internet Archive of Music: https://archive.org/details/cd_piano-rags_scott-joplin-joshua-rifkin/disc1/16.+Scott+Joplin+--+Stoptime+Rag.flac. From *Scott Joplin Piano Rags: Joshua Rifkin, Piano*. Digitally sponsored by the Kahle-Austin Foundation.

13. This description of ragtime’s rhythm reappears almost word-for-word in Johnson’s preface to *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1921).

14. Baraka argues that it was with jazz that “the legitimate feeling of Afro-American music” could be “imitated successfully” for the first time, noting that ragtime was appropriated so quickly by white musicians, and “moved so quickly away from any pure reflection of Negro life that by the time it became popular, there was no more original source to imitate” (148).

15. In “Afro-Modernity: Temporality, Politics, and the African Diaspora,” Michael Hanchard likewise points to what he calls “racial time”: “the inequalities of temporality that result from power relations between racially dominant and subordinate groups,” which manifest as “unequal temporal access to institutions, goods, services, resources, power, and knowledge, which members of both groups recognize” (253).

16. It is worth noting here the political subtext of many religious slave songs and sermons, which the narrator overlooks entirely. Marveling at the history of these songs, the narrator writes, “The sentiments are easily accounted for; they are mostly taken from the Bible; but the melodies, where did they come from?”—a painfully obtuse simplification (94). While the lyrics of the spirituals are, obviously, biblical, Johnson notes that “there is no doubt that some of these religious songs have a meaning apart from the Biblical text” (695). In “Go Down, Moses,” for example, he points us to lyrics such as, “Oppress’d so hard they could not stand,” and “Tell old Pharaoh / Let my people go,” whose implications in the antebellum context ought to be obvious (695).

17. Goldsby defines “slumming” in her footnote as “[v]isiting areas or establishments below one’s socioeconomic class purely for the sake of diversion” (57).

18. This first occurs when “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” appears on the page as follows, a striking spatial and typographical break from the surrounding text:

Leader— “Swing low, sweet chariot.”
Congregation— “Coming for to carry me home.”
Leader— “Swing low, sweet chariot.”
Congregation— “Coming for to entry me home.”
Leader— “I look over yonder, what do I see?”
Congregation— “Coming for to carry me home.”
Leader— “Two little angels coming after me.”
Congregation— “Coming for to carry me home.”
—etc., etc., etc. (93)

19. As Barnhart puts it, the narrator originally seems to have internalized the patron's "free market theory of art," approaching his research "as a mining expedition in which he aims his headlamp at the obscure backwaters of small southern communities in search of the most valuable veins of musical ore to chisel out of their surroundings" ("Chronopolitics" 556).

20. Russell Andrade frames the distance between Johnson and his fictional autobiographer as a way of negotiating what Houston A. Baker Jr. calls "a tight space" in *Turning South Again* (2001): Johnson writes self-consciously from a position in which he "is always already 'framed' in relation to the dominant white social structure and thus affirms, subverts, or at least navigates through a social arrangement marked by 'domination and subjugation,' the white public's 'network of opinions and desires,' and 'the always ambivalent cultural compromises of occupancy and desire. . . . Who moves? Who doesn't?'" (257-258).

21. James P. Johnson's "Carolina Shout," performed by Thomas "Fats" Waller in 1941, has been digitized and is available to stream in the Internet Archive of Music: https://archive.org/details/78_carolina-shout_fats-waller-james-p.-johnson_gbia0004675b/Carolina+Shout+++%22Fats%22+Waller+++James+P.+Johnson.flac. Kahle/Austin Foundation. Barrie H. Thorpe Batavia Illinois Public Library Collection. 78rpm shellac discs donated from the Batavia Public Library Thorpe Collection to the Archive of Contemporary Music and digitized by George Blood, LP for the Internet Archive.

22. Fabi points out that although the narrator acknowledges the barbarity of the southerners responsible for the lynching, "he spends more time detailing the 'degeneracy' of the black victim," and furthermore seems to romanticize and aestheticize the southern men: "His ultimate concern is to reconcile what he has witnessed with his conviction that 'Southern whites are in many respects a great people,'" which constitutes part of his attempt "to both to rationalize self-interest out of his subsequent decision to cut himself off from 'a people that could with impunity be treated worse than animals' and to minimize his own passive complicity with the organized, communal racial violence of the white society he has decided to join in passing" (97-98).

23. After recounting his first experience of double consciousness, the narrator recalls looking at himself in the mirror, and notes, "How long I stood there gazing at my image I do not know" (12). After describing the murder of a white woman at the Club and his panicked flight into the streets, he writes, "How long and far I walked I cannot tell" (66). After realizing he is seated next to his white father and half-sister at the Grand Opera in Paris, but recognizes "that [he] could not speak," he rushes out of the theater and "walked aimlessly about for [*sic*] an hour or so" (70; 71).

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