Victorian Atlantis: Drowning, Population, and Property in the Nineteenth-Century Novel

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Abstract

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This strange document examines drowning, floods, and property in the nineteenth-century novel. Its four chapters are organized around four particular images: drowned corpses, liquefying crowds, sunken cities, and swamps. I read the drowned first as a neglected nineteenth-century population, visible only when looking back and forth between many different texts. They are united not through a shared origin, territory, class, race or ethnicity but through a shared ending in the abyss. The second chapter is a different take on population, looking at liquefying crowds, waves of people, floods of workers. These common metaphors offer a new way to approach nineteenth-century degeneration theory and, as well, a reconsideration of interpretive debates regarding surface reading. The second half of the dissertation discusses flood and property. There is a tendency in the nineteenth century to look at the city and see it threatened by flood or already sunk into the ocean. I call this hydroscopic vision and discuss the strange conditions in which a flooded city can look like utopia. The final chapter turns to the fear of swamps in nineteenth-century literature, and the surprising consensus among otherwise contrary figures that swamps were useless, needing to be drained and turned into profitable land.

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Introduction:

Into the Whirlpool

Never trust what writers say about their own writings.

Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*

Are we not like those mechanical toys that endlessly make the same gesture when everything else has changed around them?

Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?"

I feel as if we were all being swept into a ghastly whirlpool which roars over the bottomless pit.

George Gissing, *The Whirlpool*

Drowning in the nineteenth-century novel seems to offer clear passage to the disasters of the twenty-first century: the Salvadorian father and child washed up on the banks of the Rio Grande after trying to cross into the United States; the thousands of refugees sinking into the Mediterranean each year; the great cities of the world brought to a halt by storms; distant islands overwhelmed by hurricanes; the same cities, sinking into depleted water tables and rising sea levels; the same islands, in many cases, in danger of following Atlantis into the abyss and taking their part in the drowned world. But clear passage, if it is possible at all, rather seems to be in the opposite direction. The storms of the present materialize nineteenth-century dreams of drowning, flood, and property.

But it would be false to point to these common examples and act as if they form the genesis of a project that, as related as it is to these concerns, flows from elsewhere. First it comes from hermeneutical training in the church where, at a very young age, I was introduced to the mysteries of the first rain and first flood in which, as the story goes, Noah and his family were

preserved on an ark with representatives of every species while the majority of life on earth was wiped out in the deluge. Read a little further and there is another flood as Moses and the Israelites escape from slavery while Pharaoh's army are drowned in the Red Sea. Even before I could read the text of the scriptures, I was trained to believe that storms expressed meaning and that a flood could be read, and that the drowned were the dead who deserved to be dead.

The hermeneutics of cruelty are familiar to anyone who has ever encountered the church. It is encapsulated in an imperative to read literally and, in doing so, to defend all sorts of inequality and abuse. Yet the primary lesson of the church's literal reading is nothing to do with a methodical reading practice. Literal reading is malleable, here nodding to the historical conditions of textual production while there abstracting familiar truths from verses completely isolated even from the context of the surrounding chapter. Flip open a page at random and find there, reader, thyself. No, the primary lesson of literal reading is that there is a direct link between interpretation and life. Sell everything you have and give it to the poor – a verse contextualized to mean anything other than its literal meaning, precisely because taking it seriously would mean the inconvenience of selling what you have and giving it to the poor. In the church, the reader's life and livelihood is always threatened by the book.

And so it came to pass that my parents made the mistake of reading the book. They sold what they had and moved our family to Chiang Rai, Thailand, where they spent the next twenty years working with ethnic minorities that could not even be referred to as second class citizens, namely because of the difficulties they encountered in actually acquiring citizenship. It was only after a few weeks of moving to Chiang Rai that we woke up to a world transformed. After the heavy rains of the monsoon season, an earthen dam in the hills above us broke through and flooded the area, including our home, with the brown, mineral-rich water so characteristic of

northern Thailand. Streets became, overnight, fast-flowing rivers that we could wade through only by linking arms. The flood waters receded, leaving damaged goods and a dry world functionally the same as the drowned one—but what remained was a lingering sense that lurking in every monsoon was the possibility of a flood that could ruin property while, at the same time, revealing to all the vision of a new earth. These abstractions followed later, of course, manifesting first in my persistent dread of leaving books on low shelves where they might be ruined by the next flood.

I slept through the earthquake that, on December 26, 2004, triggered a series of tsunamis throughout Asia, killing a quarter of a million people. With other students from my school, I traveled to the coastal town of Khao Lak to help with relief work. By the time I arrived, most of the bodies were already collected from the wreckage. What remained of the drowned was visible in what they had left behind, plane tickets and baggage and scraps of clothing in the ruins of sea-side resorts. The floodgates of memory open up here in a dizzying series of impressions: playing takraw at sunset in the refugee camps after days of amusing the children; the horror of sitting down with locals to watch home videos of the tide receding far, far back from the beach before rushing back in on everyone who had idly walked out to witness the mysteries lurking on the ocean floor; the salt line high up on the palm trees that showed exactly how far the water had reached; the beached boat, deposited by the wave, tilted in a field a mile inland; the laughter of the locals as we tried to bag garbage out of their ruined neighborhood; warnings not to eat seafood because we might be eating the dead; injunctions to buy seafood to help the struggling fishermen; the charities and volunteers fighting over who would control the influx of donations and aide; the warning from a Thai friend to watch out for one of our hosts who, demon-possessed, was wandering around that night with a machete; the photos of hundreds of bloated

and mangled corpses—perhaps even photos taken by my father, who has been assigned to that unsavory documentation—where people could check for their missing loved ones. A whole museum of the drowned that, gathered on one wall, looked like a new, monstrous population.

Hermeneutics first introduced me to the flood and, in proper dialectic fashion, the flood returned me to hermeneutics. Years later, as one of the leaders of a religious service at my university, I wrote a reflection on the deluge indicating that it is a story of divine error from beginning to end as god regrets creating humanity, massacres its majority, and then promises to never do so again. It is an ineffectual cataclysm. The world of wickedness that exists before the flood is the same as the one that arrives after it departs. One way or another, god makes a mistake – a reading that, in its literal simplicity is utterly antithetical to orthodox theology. A representative from campus ministries met with me to explain that although, yes, my reading was right, it was irresponsible to share with the faithful who would so easily be led to doubt.

This is the history of my life as a series of floods.

There is a tendency in literary criticism to look at the present and retreat in despair from one's own work. Alongside present and future deluge, in the disaster catalogue, there is endless war, mass extinction, debt and inequality, climate collapse, regimes of cruelty, violation, dispossession, and abuse. The earth becomes subject to the instrumental rule of profit and appropriation. Fair enough. But the problem that has beset me, from beginning to end, is not that there is too little connection between life and mind, but that there is too much. If only hermeneutics could be, actually, hermetic. There is no distinction between hermeneutics and ethics, or between hermeneutics and politics. For many, this results in works of criticism that cannot explain the conditions of their own production. They deny the real work of interpretation—the absolute impossibility of distinguishing one thing from another within the

whirlpool—and repeat the very instrumental logic that they claim to subvert. But it takes the hard work of interpretation to find that the dream of the drowned in the nineteenth century is a different dream than that of utility. It is a dream that things can, after all, be wasted.

Everyone wants to be timely, to write the treatise that speaks to our moment of crisis, whatever that crisis might be. Human suffering and environmental despoliation demand urgency: the right idea to confront the plethora of fraudulent ideas in circulation, the right system that can expose those who are responsible and the emptiness of their ideologies. However much I have learned and benefited from such treatises, the self-satisfaction of being right has not resulted in restructuring the very realities that are, apparently, exposed. Indeed, the ideological victory of reactionary politics around the world seems to derive from the power of the anecdote, the lingering detail, the example that, on investigation, fails to represent a broader pattern. Michael Taussig establishes a similar pattern between scholarship and the world: "My belief is that detail, evanescent or banal, is necessary so as to unsettle reality, not because we need all the facts…but because the cunningly rendered detail can on occasion, sneak through the defenses we erect so as to keep reality from disturbing us" (27). This is a principle that I turn inwards, as self-criticism. Attending to disturbing details is a matter of delay, a way of slowing down the easy flight into abstraction that characterizes so much of literary criticism and political thought. When reality itself needs to be unsettled and disturbed, it no longer makes sense to be timely and, indeed, the examples themselves do not lend themselves to a temporality in which texts and ideas are best explained in proximity to the historical events in which they were birthed.

The novel, literature, narrative—pick a category at will, but all are valuable for their untimeliness. For decades, literary criticism spent its energy in demonstrating the captivity of the novel to historical conditions, how it could do little other than reify the bourgeois ideologies that

marked the time of its production. Surely these readings are, at the least, too easy. There's no reason to read a novel simply to find out what one already knew, and there is no reason to write criticism that can only repeat the same familiar narratives and chronologies that could be found elsewhere. Rather, consider the relationship that Catherine Gallagher describes between Victorian political economy, the novel, and literary criticism: "Reading political economy through these novels while also reading the novels through political economy will, I hope, defamiliarize not only those two modes of writing but also the very notions of life and feeling on which they relied" (6). Difference defamiliarizes the objects of inquiry, whether located in the novel or within apparently free-floating political-economic ideas. Gallagher's bent is historical, but not negative: the Victorian novel does not expose the corruptions and abuses of Victorian biopolitics, but gives it substance. Yet the orientation is not just historical. In the context of reading in the Anthropocene, Jesse Oak Taylor notes, "The rich fictive worlds of the novels are not retreats from contemporary debate but vantage points from which to defamiliarize the present" (15). So literary studies defamiliarizes the past, and the present and, ideally, the future. Anna Korbluh, critiquing the preoccupation of literary studies with history, writes that criticism—even historical criticism—need not be obsessed with excavating the past or with present conditions but that we might "practice criticism as future thinking. Literature makes in language something more than what already exists; it models futures possible. We can build with it" (32). To defamiliarize and build something new – a good model for this collection.

The Collector's World

The Victorian novel, from the point of view of drowning, is one long nightmare of deluge, death, and submersion, of property rearranged by flood, of waves of people united by a common

ending, and of sunken cities. Nothing about drowning is easy to interpret. Interpretation necessarily draws its energy through making distinctions. So often, when it comes to drowning, interpretation cannot float gently with the current, beginning at a trickling source and arriving at oceanic truth. The figure that must be approached and understood is, rather, the whirlpool. This is metaphorical, a mess of examples all swirling together, and literal, actual representations of whirlpools. Making distinctions is difficult in the whirlpool where, as in the end of *Moby Dick*, "concentric circles seized the lone boat itself, and all its crew, and each floating oar, and every lance-pole, and spinning, animate and inanimate, all round and round in one vortex, carried the smallest chip of the Pequod out of sight" (507). The whirlpool carries inside of it each shattered fragment, the living and the dead together. It is a figure of transformation and incorporation, but one that ends in annihilation. The sea carries on as it has since the formation of the world, unaffected. Everything, all at once, changes in an instant to nothing at all.

Understanding nineteenth-century drowning requires, first, a massive process of collection to mark what is sinking into the whirlpool. Collection itself has a strange place in Victorian literature. The shadow of Casaubon hovers over the deeps of every textual vortex, warning scholars about the dangers of accumulation. In his character we find the sterile and misguided collector, pursuing a strange key to all mythologies. Who can hear these ambitions without, like Will Ladislaw, laughing at the collector in comic disgust? He is a scholar "too much with the dead," who eats his soup too loudly, whose eyes are damaged from squinting at texts, who theorizes on Dagon and "other fish deities" but cannot concentrate on Dorothea's practical plans for cottages, "this dried-up pedant, this elaborator of small explanations about as important as the surplus stock of false antiquities kept in a vendor's back chamber" (192). Collection, intended to arrive at a system, concludes with local explanations and mere examples.

There is already a strange antagonism here, in collecting, between the wet and the dry. The dried-up scholar dries out the fish gods. Bird-like, Casaubon is nevertheless out of place in the swamp, "utterly condemned to loneliness as in the despair which sometimes threatened him while toiling in the morass of authorship without seeming nearer to the goal" (79). But what is the morass? Here, it is another metaphor of scholarship, an alternative to the whirlpool. The morass is pure collection that cannot be systematized so that the wet and the dry, which seemed far apart, come together in a mess of papers. The antagonism between wet and dry becomes secondary to that between life and manuscript. Collection, so often an effort to understand life in the nineteenth century, is itself anti-life, even in the basic sense here that for Casaubon there is neither production nor reproduction—an absence that is the mark of a failed marriage in the Victorian novel. The open vista of possibility becomes, for Dorothea during their honeymoon, a claustrophobic labyrinth. It's bad to be Casaubon, and the way to avoid him is to stay out of the swamp.

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The custom, in introductions to works of literary criticism, is to begin with a set of allegiances, a description of theoretical foundations, the boundaries of a field that one is intervening upon, the resources and tools at one's disposable in an interpretive project. Yet in the whirlpool, there is no discernible foundation or field or bedrock. It is structured by a central absence around which everything spins. So it seems better here to begin with absence, to identify the fragmented forms and organizations swirling around the vortex, and to address collection itself as a foundational method for literary criticism. Out of the wreckage of the old, a new method forms.

The first absence: individual text and author as the organizing principle for chapters.

The individual text forms the basis for the vast majority of dissertation chapters, book chapters, articles, seminar papers, and conference presentations. Its neglect here no doubt seems on first glance—perhaps, even, on second glance—perverse. It's possible, after all, to imagine a different model for approaching the Victorian drowned through the list of texts from the first seminar of Victorian literature that I attended, which was structured around four novels: *Jane Eyre, David Copperfield, Adam Bede, Sign of Four*. This series would itself offer a sensible organization for a dissertation on the drowned, one that could focus on a limited core of examples: Jane's bizarre watercolors, including one of a submerged ship and drowned corpse; David Copperfield dreaming of pushing Em'ly into the ocean to save her from sexual corruption, or Ham and Steerforth drowning together off the coast; Hetty Sorel throwing her baby into a pond; Tonga and stolen property lost in the Thames. The examples span the century, and the drowned form a line for the surprising connection between Gothic literature, the realist novel, the historical novel, and detective fiction. Each chapter would arrive with a ready-made frame—whatever is discovered about the examples of the drowned can immediately be related back to the text at hand. The watercolor offers a new understanding of a neglected aspect of *Jane Eyre,* a path to reconsider Bronte's work as a whole. Together, the four texts form a new approach to Victorian literature. Or, consider a different series. The melancholy man of *Pickwick Papers* who imagines throwing himself in a river; Quilp stumbling drunk off of a pier in *The Old Curiosity Shop;* Ham and Steerforth; Compeyson drowning in the *Great Expectations;* Bradley Headstone and Silas Wegg in *Our Mutual Friend;* Edwin Drood in Dickens' uncompleted final novel. Together, a view of Dickens from beginning to end. Or, a third series. After Hetty Sorel's baby, Maggie and Tom drowning in *Mill on the Floss,* sunken ships and anti-drowning charms in

Romola, Grandcourt sinking off the coast of Italy in *Daniel Deronda*. A new understanding of Dickens, a new understanding of Eliot.

The criticisms come ready-made: there's something hopelessly provincial, within the continental expanses of nineteenth-century literature, about attending to a single author; or, as in Moretti's version, it is merely wishful thinking to suggest that any four texts, however well-suited, form a sample large or representative enough to speak of a new approach to Victorian literature. Or, that what is good for organizing a seminar is not at all what is good for organizing a written study. But it is good to be suspicious of ready-made criticisms, especially of an approach that has been immensely productive in drawing our attention back to the forgotten passages, overlooked connections, and minor characters of these novels. Better still, it is a model that has corrected many of the problems of the canon, turning us not only to forgotten passages but to neglected texts, expanding what counts as a text and, in doing so, attending to voices that have been present all along but long ignored. The case study, as an organizing form for criticism, is a model that I abandoned in spite of its obvious strengths.

Collection, it seems, obstructs criticism. The otherwise vast differences between contrary theories and methodologies collapse into rough consensus regarding the proper form and structure of literary criticism. Collection, of course, is at the same time unavoidable for literary criticism—or any other form of historical study—as demonstrated by Leah Price's study of anthology. "Extracts," she writes, "underwrite the discipline of literary criticism as we know it" (2). The part stands in for the whole or, really, any number of parts stands in metonymically for the whole. This takes place on different scales. Five novels, extracted and evaluated properly, stand in for Victorian literature. A dozen passages form the basis for a reading of a triple-decker novel, in spite of the problem that "Within a culture of the excerpt, the novel forms a test case.

Few genres have been better placed to escape the anthology's sphere of influence. Sheer scale helps define the novel" (5). Given this problem of scale, extraction is necessary, and so there must be a logic of extraction. The critic, like the anthologist, extracts, either because the example is anomalous or because it stands in for some pattern, so that "The anthologist has always been the critic's double" (145). But already, the relation between collection and criticism is beset with difficulties. The example is either absolutely common or idiosyncratic. Collection includes both contraction and expansion, reduction and profusion, extracting things and gathering them together. So, at the beginning, what must be explained are the examples themselves, collection as a method in literary studies, and the imperative to sink into the swamp rather than skirt around it.

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My method of criticism begins with widespread collection from the nineteenth-century novel. Rather than trying to reduce examples to facilitate an argument, it proliferates examples to obstruct the possibility of a system. There is no key to all the drowned, only a flood. Beginning here, in the whirlpool, it forms a catalog of drowned bodies, liquefying crowds, images of flooded cities, and property sinking into swamps. In the collection, it is progress to begin with a whirlpool and end with a swamp.

Out of the wreckage of the old, a new method emerges. Yet there is something tired in this gesture of articulating value only through novelty. After all, the great work of collection, Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* is already available as a model and is, indeed, one of the touchstones for my collection of the drowned. Never finished, Benjamin's investigation of the Paris Arcades, spans architecture and fashion, sexuality and markets, interiors and rainshowers.

It dissolves, at times, into catalogues of quotations, brief glosses on passages from obscure works, and bizarre speculations—for instance, that in evolutionary history women were once four-legged companions to two-legged men. The conjoined antagonism for Benjamin is not collector and critic, or critic and anthologist, but collector and allegorist:

> As far as the collector is concerned, his collection is never complete; for let him discover a single piece missing, and everything he's collected remains a patchwork, which is what things are for allegory from the very beginning. On the other hand, the allegorist—for whom objects represent only keywords in a secret dictionary, which will make known their meanings to the initiated—precisely the allegorist can never have enough of things. With him, one thing is so little capable of taking the place of another that no possible reflection suffices to foresee what meaning his profundity might lay claim to for each one of them. (211)

This is a difficult passage that turns on the distinction between the collection and the thing. The collector wants the collection, the profusion of examples all together; the allegorist wants individual items that, in their partial nature, contain some sort of whole. Yet, in approaching the drowned, the problem is not quite the same. Rather, the possible transposition of examples and texts is part of the point and part of the difficulty—this corpse, this liquefied crowd, and this flooded city are not unique—not at all! The deficiency of the case study is exactly that it cannot deal properly in the common, the typical, the everyday. The drowned pile up, acquiring meaning and function not through their novelty but as part of a common dream.

Collection fulfills a basic empirical drive to assemble that which exists. This is a valuable enterprise in its own right, and one important to the nineteenth century, but all the sedimentation of examples and texts creates the conditions for the real hermeneutic task of seeing something new. This task has itself an old problem, and one that arrives in conjunction with a global perspective. Already, in his *Discourse on Inequality,* Rousseau complains that Europeans travel the world to study humanity—and only find themselves. Rather than producing something new,

or a radically different understanding of humanity, “one is altogether amazed to find that these authors who describe so many things tell us only what all of them knew already, and have only learned how to see at the other end of the world what they would have been able to see without leaving their own street” (Rousseau, 159). Moretti’s version, from literary studies, appears in a discussion on whether comedy travels across the world. When he discovers an oddity in Italian cinema, what is most interesting is that “*I had found a problem for which I had absolutely no solution*. And problems without a solution are exactly what we need in a field like ours, where we are used to asking only those questions for which we already have an answer” (Moretti, 26). Collection itself can also be circular, deciding in advance what one will collect. The comfort of a single text is that, whatever one finds, an answer is already available within the functioning of that text.

Drowning in the nineteenth-century might also be a question for which there is already answer but, in practice, it has been the reverse: an answer in the form of a question, a flood in search of a form. To see the new, the method is not to stare deeply at one example, unearthing each nuance of this drowning to develop a coherent reading. Rather, it is only through collecting repetitive examples that differences may clearly emerge. But emerge in what, and in relation to what? Susan Buck-Morss notes that the arcades “were Benjamin’s central image because they were the precise material replica of the internal consciousness, or rather, the *un*consciousness of the dreaming collective” (39). What the arcades were for Benjamin, the drowned are for me. The capital of the nineteenth century moves from Paris to sunken Atlantis. In this respect, this inquiry assumes that it is a mistake to model literary criticism as a series of claims made upon a field, or arguments built upon evidence. Literary criticism here means flooding the territory and

immersing oneself in a multitude of examples to find the collective dreamworld—conscious or not—of the nineteenth century.

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This overflow of examples is the dream of a flood that destroys imbedded structures of knowledge, clearing the earth for new productions. It would be naïve, however, to say that frantically accumulating examples is sufficient to solve the problem that, gathering drowned corpses, the collector only finds what he already knows. In his preface to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel discusses this struggle in terms of an antagonism within scientific culture between those who accumulate masses of content and those who prioritize a rational form for knowledge. The primary crisis for Hegel is not the inability to organize masses of examples, but a "monochromatic formalism" that flattens the formalist's varied examples:

> They appropriate a lot of already familiar and well-ordered material; by focusing on rare and exotic instances they give the impression that they have hold of everything else which scientific knowledge has already embraced in its scope, and that they are also in command of such materials as is yet unordered.... But a closer inspection shows that this expansion has not come about through one and the same principle having spontaneously assumed different shapes, but rather through the shapeless repetition of one and the same formula, only externally applied to diverse materials, thereby obtaining merely a boring show of diversity. (Hegel 15)

Formalist thinking, for Hegel, is a problem not because it lacks an explanation but because, explaining everything, it flattens the world. The flood arrives as a trickle, and every drowned corpse is reduced to the Drowned Man. The analogous problem here is an analysis that sees, in every drowned corpse or liquefied crowd or flooded city, the same thing over and over: the all-devouring maw of capital, the long claw of the empire, the abuses of the patriarch, the cruelty of

the white race, the return of the repressed, the myth of the enclosed agent. Not that any of these readings, or the systems of thought they represent, are false. These theoretical lenses are useful objects of criticism here not because of their naivete but because of their power and productivity, the ease with which, as formulas, they might disguise themselves as principled thinking responding to new information. Each of these systems offers a global theory but, in analytic terms, that which is ubiquitous is useless for explanation, interpretation, and differentiation.

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Staring at the examples, it is not at all clear that the most important organizational patterns are chronological. It is not clear that representations of the drowned develop over the century. Waves of people are described in similar ways at the beginning of Victoria's reign and at the end. In a search for autonomous literary history—the possibility that literature has something to offer that is not merely a reflection or crude expression of political and economic realities—seems to come at the cost of having a recognizable history at all. The primary strategy for analyzing numerous texts is, after all, chronology. Raymond Williams' *Country and the City* compiles a vast array of primary texts to pursue ideas of those two forms of territory, and it is organized both nationally—an account of British literature—and chronologically. The problem is not that a chronological argument is impossible with the drowned, it is that there is no reason to turn to such an argument unless one assumes, from the beginning, that it will offer the clearest account of development. No doubt it is possible to discuss drowning in sensation novels, or flooded cities in Dickens, or the swamp from Walter Scott to Richard Jefferies. No doubt one could compile an investigation demonstrating that naturalist fiction speaks of drowning differently than domestic

novels, or picaresque chronicles, or spasmodic poetry, or travel accounts—but to do so would be to cut apart what has not even been properly collected, and to confirm what is already known. Once the examples are all together, what emerges is more of a swamp than a river. In the swamp, there are different temporalities existing within and beside each other. Things disappear only to gurgle back up again unpredictably.

The primary hermeneutic problem here is to escape the closed circuit in which we learn nothing we did not know before we began or, even worse, confuse taxonomizing ideas and memorizing facts as a replacement for the production of knowledge and disciplinary production. This is precisely Hegel's concern, saying in the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* "The knack of this kind of wisdom is as quickly learned as it is easy to practice; once familiar, the repetition of it becomes as insufferable as the repetition of a conjuring trick already seen through" (51). There is a kind of similar danger here, of repeating the same conjuring trick of finding any work of nineteenth-century literature and demonstrating that, here too, there is an unnoticed drowning, an untheorized corpse, the dream of a flooded city, a swamp destroying all property that it encounters. This is a true danger, but a lesser one than an analysis that sees in each drowned body only the Drowned Man, a victim of capital's predations or, the Drowned Woman, a victim of the patriarch. Flooding the territory is a solution to this problem, by providing so many examples that one cannot simply insist over and over on the same analytic.

Literary history, perceived as a swamp, might simply be a narrative of degeneration and monotony. Narratives of degeneration, however, are also narratives of genesis. Bones recovered from the swamp indicate the existence of a now-extinct species in some primeval age. The swamp, in this respect, seems to fit Casaubon's method of collection and his desire to produce the Key to All Mythologies, based on the instinct that "all the mythical systems or erratic

mythical fragments in the world were corruptions of a tradition originally revealed" (22). Fragmentation and corruption indicate some lost unity or life, presuming an original totality that can be reconstructed from the wreckage. The real danger of such a project, however, is knowing in advance the final myth. Consider, for instance, Ignatius Donnelly's *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World* (1882), an attempt to trace myths and legends from around the world back to the historical event of Atlantis sinking into the sea. As easy as it may be to scoff at Donnelly's contortions, they are our own when, starting from the familiar myths of capitalism and imperialism, we find its traces hidden everywhere in plain sight in the nineteenth-century novel.

Literary history, as collection, becomes a project of salvage, able to see in the swamp not merely decay and waste but preservation and transformation. But it is here that Casaubon and Benjamin's collections, which at times seem close together, split from each other. The goal for Benjamin is not to illuminate or unravel a web, not to return to an origin or put a foundation back together. He writes that the collector, at the deepest level, "takes up the struggle against dispersion. Right from the start, the great collector is struck by the confusion, by the scatter, in which the things of the world are found" (211). Of course, one can be a minor collector also to be struck by the confusion of the world that is presumed to be an organic whole. In any case, the task of the collector is to gather distant things together in order to form a whole. Assemblage in this case is precisely not about tracing the object, the example, the remnant, back to its source: "What is decisive in collecting is that the object is detached from all its original functions in order to enter into the closest conceivable relation to things of the same kind. This relation is the diametric opposite of any utility, and falls into the peculiar category of completeness" (204). Completeness is not quite totality, but even less is a return to origins. Completeness is the result of collection itself. There is no catalogue of the drowned that exists before someone begins to

collect them. That catalogue exists only from its construction here and now, a new product that emerges from excavating the old. The territory of the drowned is Atlantis, not because they float up from its ruins but because, submerged, they sink towards them.

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This is undoubtedly a Victorian project. Turning to American and European novels, it is still anchored by nineteenth-century British texts. But why the nineteenth century, and why the novel? Narratives of flood and drowning, after all, predate the Victorians by thousands of years and have continued up until the twenty-first century. A first instinct is to point to the conditions of production—capital and empire—but this merely delays arriving at a claim about patterns of representations. A second instinct is to say that drowning proliferates in the nineteenth-century novel in a way unparalleled in the periods around it. This seems true, but would require more extensive sampling to demonstrate. So the solution here seems to be, simply, the old one of realism. Yet it is not realism of mimesis, reflection, capture, or metonymy. Rather, my no doubt peculiar definition for realism is self-criticism, the self-conscious failure to capture the world that produces the flood-like excess of the nineteenth-century novel.

The difficulties of organizing the collection historically is connected to the problem of national and world literatures, and not merely by analogy. Literary history relies on literary geography, as Peter Kalliney suggests: “For the contrast of literary periods to work as an organizing principle of the discipline, literary scholars have long relied on relatively immovable temporal bookends and tight geographical boundaries” (360). As a corollary, literary history values rupture over continuity in order to draw distinctions between periods. On some level,

literary history as rupture relies on good materialist practice, assuming as it does that literary production is limited by material conditions. One version of establishing these connections would be to look at technologies of printing, networks of readers, dates of translation[1], patterns by which texts circulated, and histories of reading. These are all valuable projects of recovery, but ones that do not depend upon reading the literary texts in question. My own project is, in the end about representation of material rather than material itself, and it relies on the insights of postcolonial and Marxist scholars—the presence of the empire can be detected in the quaintest provincial towns of the nineteenth century novel, such that "the novel, as a cultural artefact of bourgeois society, and imperialism are unthinkable without each other" (Said, 71). But rather than relying on rupture, I rely as much as possible on the everyday, the common, the banality of representations that, very often, are representations of decay, corruption, spectacle, and terror.

But it is not so easy to give over the nation and enter the world, as if national boundaries are imaginary lines that change nothing. Speaking of the difficulties of conceptualizing world literature, Eric Hayot writes, "It is as though the concept itself were the problem, as though the only way to demonstrate an interest in the world were somehow to leave it behind while keeping it in place" (2011, 133). My own solution to the challenge of leaving the world behind while keeping it in place is the lost continent of Atlantis. In 1864, John Ruskin presented a speech in Bradford's town hall to reflect on the opening of a new exchange. It is a strange occasional speech, beginning with Ruskin telling his audience that he does not care about the exchange, because they themselves do not care about the exchange. He arrives at the catastrophe of the

[1] Indeed, one way to make these transnational connections would be to return to Victorian translations of each text in order to trace the material circulation of novels. But I have avoided questions of translation entirely, in part because my project is one that recovers representations. It matters little here whether those representations were read, at all, at the time of their production.

everyday by means of architectural design. Every great architecture comes from a great national religion. This is not the religion of the clergy and their institutions but of the common people. And the tragedy of Ruskin's time is that the national goddess of Great Britain is the goddess of "Getting-On," worshipped in a religion that "is very pretty indeed, seen from above; not at all so pretty, seen from below" (453). This last phrase refers, of course, to the position of Britain's poor and destitute—yet there are abyssal echoes. Ruskin turns to Atlantis at the end of his speech as a warning to the assembled people of Bradford. Continue to worship the goddess of Getting-On and "soon no more art, no more science, no more pleasure will be possible. Catastrophe will come; or, worse than catastrophe, slow mouldering and withering into Hades" (458). Atlantis is invoked often as a lost paradise or, as in Donnelly's version, a point of origin for the scattered tribes of the world and their fragmented mythologies. Ruskin's version of Atlantis is rather, Britain itself—an island empire that, subject to a process of degeneration, risks sinking. That this sinking might be figurative or literal, that Atlantis may be both an abyssal ruin and visible in everyday life, is what makes it useful here.

World literature, beginning from distinctions between borders in the world, becomes a history of representations of worlds. The problem Hayot identifies within world literature "is that no one has a very good theory of the world and that in the absence of good theories *world* comes to mean whatever one does have a good theory of (a system, a method, a field of economic development)" (135). The right solution here is not, it seems, to arrive at works of literature with a definition of the world but, rather, to see what sorts of world is constructed within and from the examples themselves. Hayot's version of this is ideology: "World-creation happens most frequently in the ideological unconscious of the work, as an expression not of what it does not know but of what it knows most deeply, and thus mentions least" (141). As productive as this

mode of reading is, able to look directly at absence, avoidance, and repression, it still leaves untouched the majority of representations within the novels. Their middles, it could be said.

If it seems that I have strayed from collecting, it has been here the whole time. Benjamin writes, “It must be kept in mind that, for the collector, the world is present, and indeed ordered, in each of his objects. Ordered, however, according to a surprising and, for the profane understanding, incomprehensible connection” (207). Perhaps Atlantis seems like another mystical system of ordering, or that seeing drowning all over the nineteenth century is merely the reflection of a perverse monomania. But there is no need yet to resort to the unconscious and esoteric. What Hayot and Benjamin are describing can, as it does throughout these pages, emerge in the ideological conscious of the novel. Drownings are not obscure to the nineteenth-century novel; they are casual, occasional, incidental. There is no need to demonstrate that crowds are unconsciously compared to forms of water; they are continually described, explicitly, as waves, tides, rivers, streams. That these phenomena have largely gone untheorized, as widespread patterns, is less a function of their obscurity than their success. The world is present in each of these objects and, if their representations are at times inconsistent and incoherent, this bears all the marks of a dreamworld.

Interpretation

Collection seems to solve the difficulties and conundrums of interpretation. One no longer needs to critique, only gather together what has been dispersed and let the objects speak for themselves. No longer is there any need to look to the unconscious and obscured. Everything is there in the open. In these respects, it might be said that nineteenth-century studies has turned away from interpretation towards collection and, as such, that my own project might be described as another

kind of surface reading. But that is not quite accurate. Collection and criticism are, yes, two aspects of the same process, but in practice these two aspects are difficult to distinguish. If criticism follows collection, then it is possible to merely delay the task of criticism, or defer to texts themselves. If collection is already criticism, as I think it is, then such deference, as courteous as it appears to be, is a hermeneutic myth.

The examples themselves already confuse one of the working distinctions in recent interpretive debates, namely that between surface and depth. The drowned corpse drifts with the current, is deposited on the banks of the river or on the beach, or is fished out of the water, or finally sinks to be eaten by fish and crabs—already, whatever the case, it obstructs the distinction between surface and depth. These terms have come to stand in for interpretive projects within literary criticism. To read for depth is to be suspicious of the text, to diagnose for symptoms of an underlying malaise or obscured ideology. "We take surface," write Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "to mean what is evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts; what is neither hidden nor hiding; what, in the geometrical sense, has length and breadth but no thickness, and therefore covers no depth. A surface is what insists on being looked *at* rather than what we must train ourselves to see *through*" (9). While surface here is a material fantasy—appearance detached from substance—it takes on its full material dimensions elsewhere through their piece, in which the depths of texts can be plumbed, where reading becomes bathing and, indeed, where "depth is not found to be found outside the text or beneath its surface (as its context, horizon, unconscious, or history); rather, depth is continuous with surface and is thus an effect of immanence" (11). Surface has no depth and, apparently, depth has no surface. The problem with Best and Marcus's account is not so much incoherence—or the fact that one is most likely to misread the goals of surface reading by applying it to its own treatise—as that, "throughout the collection, surface

reading is haunted by depths, as all purported non-theories are haunted by theory" (Brown, unpaginated). This seems right, but it is just as true to say that, throughout the collection, surface reading is haunted by surfaces.

The primary metaphors are aquatic but what they describe are fields and plains. Absent here are surfaces where nothing is smooth, flat, or apparent—swamps, jungles, mountains, forests, cities. These are thick surfaces, and nothing becomes more clear by leaving earth and turning back to the face of the waters, rippling with waves and covered in storms as they often are. Perhaps this seems unfairly literal and, at the same time, unfairly metaphorical. Emily Apter and Elaine Freedgood, in their conclusion to the special issue on surface reading, note that "Literal reading is of course a metaphor: we cannot stick to the letters of the text, even metaphorically. The aspiration to take the text as manifestly manifest is as close to the letter as we can get and still be able to see anything" (139). The trouble is that even the simplest surface reading immediately demands attention to depths, even if it conceives of depth as abyss, or vacuum, a plane under which things disappear from circulation. There is something perverse, in watching a struggling swimmer disappear into the waves, in saying that one should continue attending to the surface of the waters. But things get no easier even if the drowned wash up on shore. Nothing becomes more obvious. Stare at a drowned body for long enough and it begins to change shape, bloats, decays, transforms.

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No one wants to interpret anymore. There is something old, dusty, and vaguely theological about interpretation or—even worse—hermeneutics. The problem is historical as much as ideological,

a problem for the Victorians as much as a problem of reading them. As Suzy Anger writes, "Victorian speculation on literary interpretation is deeply indebted to nineteenth-century controversies over scriptural hermeneutics, and, indeed, current literary theory is unthinkable without nineteenth-century debates over biblical interpretation" (22). Indeed, the imperative to read the scriptures plainly and literally is a mantra familiar to me from biblical hermeneutics long before it was encountered formally in any sort of literary study. To interpret, now and in the nineteenth century, is both an epistemological and ethical problem. George Levine, in *Dying to Know,* describes the complications of interpretations for nineteenth-century naturalists, for whom allowing "the facts to speak for themselves, took priority over fullness of understanding. Even interpretation, that is to say, violated for the nineteenth-century scientists the demands of moralized objectivity" (3). There is an ethical imperative to let things speak for themselves. This extends, in Levine's reading of the Victorians, to one's own life. Autobiographies by Darwin, Trollope, and Mill become exemplary of Victorian life-writing, which often disintegrates into "collections of facts… records of books written, or, occasionally, acquaintances made" (95). The pious reader wishes to disappear into the scriptures; the naturalist into specimens; the critic into literature, which can speak for itself.

An exemplary account of the reluctance to interpret is Nathan Hensley's introduction to *Forms of Empire.* Hensley's explanation of his own methodology is chock full of attempts to evaporate the role of the critic, theorist, and historian in favor of the object of investigation: "My claim is that the critic's act of historical reading—that impious but illuminating trope-making process-has been performed by the object itself" (31). The book reads itself and, in doing so, transforms the critic into a witness: "Such emancipated objects would become agents of theoretical activity, endowed by us, their readers, with the power to perform conceptual work

that we, as later witnesses, receive and document under a dispension of care" (20). In a gesture that repeats current conditions of employment in the academy, Hensley struggles to find work for the critic, who is relieved even of the burden of thinking—an act performed now by the object itself. But the problem remains that to receive and document is simultaneously to interpret. Reception, documentation, and care all presume an interpretive theory, even if that theory is largely unconscious. Indeed, now that we have arrived back at the unconscious, consider Anna Kornbluh's comment that "Criticism is in this respect a practice and posture that might learn from the example of the clinic: there is no autointerpretation" (47). On some level, the debate looks here like a debate over care, whether to care for something is to leave it alone or, implied in Kornbluh's clinical example, it requires some sort of intervention.

When interpretation is reluctantly practiced, it is as something other than itself. Hensley understands reading—whoever does it—as illumination. To interpret a text is to light a fire, or flip on a switch, or shed light, or to orbit the text around some hot sun. Indeed, it is from a metaphorical sense that Hensley's view makes more sense: the novel is not fuel to be added to a fire, but the fire itself. Outside of metaphor, however, it seems to be the case that the taxonomic relationship—reading as a species of illumination—is inverted. Franco Moretti's *Graphs, Maps, Trees,* moves from a separate reluctance to interpret. He explains his methods at the end of the book, saying, "the models I have presented also share a clear preference for explanation over interpretation; or perhaps, better, for the explanation of general structures over the interpretation of individual texts" (91). Moretti's concern is not that critics interpret texts rather than documenting how the text reads itself. It deals, rather, with the slaughterhouse of literature in which a select few objects of investigation are read while the vast majority, in any given period, are ignored. To interpret is provincial; to explain, universal. This account has been considered "a

mistake to the degree to which it fails to see interpretation—considered in the broad sense as everything that literary scholars do—as itself a variety of explanation" (Kramnick and Nersessian, 50). But surely Kramnick and Nersessian, here, have the relationship reversed between species and genus. To explain things, to flatten them out, to illuminate, is simply one variety of interpretation. If interpretation is simply about illumination, then fire—the obvious, the surface, appearance—is exactly what it cannot approach.

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So no one wants to interpret anymore—a polemical claim that risks overstating the novelty of the present. Depending on one's point of view, we live in a utopian moment that has moved beyond the hubris of interpretation or rather in a degenerate time of analytic stupor. But the situation of interpretation is, rather, analogous to that of theory. "In truth," writes Marshall Brown, "we have never been post-theory, precisely because we have always been anti-theory" (unpaginated). If this is as true of interpretation as it is of theory, then the task is to understand the current reluctance to interpret as a contemporary inflection of a long problem, and to understand its context in the study of nineteenth-century literature. It is easy to think of the gesture—the object reading itself—merely as a conjuring trick designed to obscure both the critic and the object of investigation, or as a naïve empiricism oblivious to the real problems of hermeneutics. Friedrich Nietzsche, not often credited with his generosity of spirit, provides a better means of disagreement. One should, yes, free oneself of mysticism and theology and the superstitions of metaphysics. But while refutation and rejection may be necessary first steps, for the critic in this first moment of liberation, "*a retrograde movement* is necessary: he must

understand both the historical and the psychological justification in metaphysical ideas. He must recognize how mankind's greatest advancement came from them and how, if one did not take this retrograde step, one would rob himself of mankind's finest accomplishments to date" (20). In a likewise manner, it is not enough to speak of anti-interpretation as a hopelessly compromised endeavor or a collective lapse of judgment. Rather, what needs to be addressed are its temptations and functions, why one might try to evade the unavoidable and what can be done by doing so.

The ambition of surface reading is to transform the critics and, with them, the texts they used to critique. Critics should not be masters, whether masters are Marxist vanguards leading the masses into a new world, or psychoanalysts knowing patients better than they know themselves. Yet literal reading, as a solution to mastery, is distinguished primarily as an affective and ethical stance: "Such an embrace involves accepting texts, deferring to them instead of mastering or using them as objects, and refuses the depth model of truth, which dismisses surfaces as inessential and deceptive" (10). Surface reading in this sense sounds just as easily like a response to a type of critical cruelty encapsulated in the figure of the slave masters, who reduces humans into property, commodity, and animal. Or in the writings of Sade. His libertines are themselves masters of the world—aristocrats, politicians, and clergy—who consistently descend to tunnels, catacombs, caverns, and vaults to conduct their sports. Madame Delbene in *Juliette* is clear about her reasons why, saying, "If we thus burrow far down into the realm of the dead, it is to be at the greatest remove from the living. When one is a libertine, as depraved, as vicious as are we, one likes to be in the bowels of the earth so as the better to avoid the interference of men and their ridiculous law" (55). No doubt it seems strange to invoke Sade, but the relations of power and abuse that he describes are close to the concerns of surface reading.

The surface is for convention and custom; the underground, for violation and experiment. Whether in aquatic abyss or terrestrial underground, the depths are where violation takes place at the hands of a cruel master. Apter and Freedgood write, "thirty years of plumbing textual depths has returned us to the surface… the recalcitrant, mystified, out-of-control, and conflicted text of Marxist-psychoanalytic reading has been replaced by texts that are friendly, frank, generous, self-conscious, autocritiquing, and unguarded" (139). Yet it seems to be a mistake to say that the friendly text replaces the conflicted text when, in reality, surface reading is rather about critical cruelty or kindness.

The strange dream of surface reading is of a text that can be naked without being exposed. The text is free and unashamed, without being subject to the elements. In *Human, All Too Human,* Nietzsche encapsulates precisely the mode of reading that the literalists reject. Nietzsche's model of refutation, against various kinds of ideal and idealism, the genius, the saint, the hero, belief, conviction, pity…the critic mercilessly tracks them down into the dungeons and underground—their foundations. "One error after another is calmly put on ice; the ideal is not refuted—*it dies of exposure*" (*Human).* In these moments Nietzsche appears as a Hegelian, suggesting that the way to refute something is not to confront it antagonistically, but to continue developing the idea until it dissolves itself. This is precisely the epistemic mode that Sedgwick writes against so memorably in her account of paranoid reading, which depends so strongly on the power of exposure due to "an infinite reservoir of naivete in those who make up the audience for these unveilings" (141). The writers of surface reading take up Sedgwick's skepticism to discuss power and domination: "The assumption that domination can only do its work when veiled, which may once have sounded almost paranoid, now has a nostalgic, even utopian ring to it" (Best and Marcus, 2). Likewise, Apter and Freedgood respond specifically to it, saying,

"What does take Sedgwick beyond the symptom is her powerful argument that in a culture in which violence is ever more spectacular, the idea that it requires minute hermeneutic maneuvering to get beyond its ruses is absurd" (145). To make a text naked, then, the critic simply collects, adds together, accretes passages to demonstrate imbrications and entanglements. Indeed, collection is seen to be a method of curation. One cares for a text by tending to its surface and, in doing so, the critic avoids taking part in the violence of criticism.

Nietzsche's method emerges from a reluctance to refute; surface reading's from a reluctance to theorize, interpret, and dominate. Yet, in surface reading, what Nietzsche describes as exposure returns, rejected, under the guise of description. The practice of critical description "assumes that texts can reveal their own truths because texts mediate themselves; what we think theory brings to texts (form, structure, meaning) is already present in them. Description sees no need to translate the text into a theoretical or historical metalanguage in order to make the text meaningful. The purpose of criticism is thus a relatively modest one: to indicate what the text says about itself" (11). But this is a strange solution, proliferating a range of new problems. That the text mediates itself says little about what happens in the process of mediation. That the text says something about itself may be true, but this only evades the problem that what it says about itself must still be interpreted.

Description is supposed to solve the relation between ideology and literature. The good Hegelian Marxist would say that if the text speaks then what it says, like what anyone else says, may itself be false, obscured, evasive, mumbled. A provincial English courtship masks a relationship to the empire, and this relationship has often been explained through false consciousness and ideology. The novel knows, but refuses to recognize, the conditions of its own existence, and these omissions become occasions for critical intervention. This move itself—

exposing hidden ideology—has rightly been considered to itself be ideological, especially in the version that critiques in order to establish rupture, rather than relation, between Victorian violence and our present world. Nathan Hensley writes, for instance, that "criticism continues to cast nineteenth-century texts as violent, racist, or otherwise blinkered others to our implicitly more enlightened ideational projects: they have ideology while we have theory" (10). The contradictions and evasions within a text, as Hensley describes here, are resolved in an expose of some familiar ideology. They Victorians—hapless, oblivious—do not know it, but they are doing it nonetheless. Hensley's approach, then, "does not conceive 'theory' as knowledge to be applied to or tested on historical objects; nor yet does it construe readings as 'evidence' or support for claims external to those engagements. Instead this book's claims are crystallized in, and figured by, historical artifacts themselves, and for that reason can only emerge through a patient reading of those singular texts, a brushing along their grain" (32-33). The power of this approach is, then, the particularity of the work of literature—not an object that stands in, representatively, where any other work of literature would demonstrate the same hideous cruelties of history, but one that can produce something new.

So while much necessary work has been done to demonstrate the insidious presence of empire, capital, patriarchy, and racism within the Victorian novel, the trend has become, rather, to demonstrate the distortion—rather than pure repetition—of ideology within literature. Catherine Gallagher's starting assumption, in *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction*, is not one of correspondence between literary forms and ideology but, rather, "some sort of tension between ideology and literary forms… Literary forms often disrupt the tidy formulations and reveal the inherent paradoxes of their ostensible ideologies" (xiii). Against the initial formulation of ideology—they do not know it but they are doing it—is a transposition: literary forms know it

but, nevertheless, no matter how hard they might try, they are not doing it. It is from this point of view that one might say, along with Jesse Oak Taylor, that "I see the works I analyze as producing theory rather than as receptacles for it" (15). The function of interpretation, in this regard, is not simply to apply Foucault to a bundle of receipts, or Marx's analysis of the commodity form to *Moby Dick* but, just as much, to reverse the relationship. The bundle of receipts does not simply reproduce the disciplinary structures described by Foucault, but causes us to rethink *Discipline and Punish* itself. Dismembering a whale might be explained by the commodity fetish but, just as much, can be reversed to explain the inadequacies of the theory itself. Discussing the use of Zizek for literary criticism, Anna Kornbluh writes: "The fundamental resistance of literature to literary criticism (especially today's hegemonic historicist criticism) is its enigmatic resonance, the sounding and resounding of literary works beyond and in excess of their conditions of production, determination, and possibility" (55). Literary criticism becomes valuable not for its ability to obscure plain surfaces but, rather, for its ability to clarify moments of obscurity that are resistant to, rather than exemplary of, some mode of interpretation.

The critic betrays literary texts by applying theory, but the betrayal is just as much of theory itself. Yes, the novel and its obstructions are obscured, buried beneath the debris left in critique's wake, but the work of theory is itself obscured in such an application. Foucault's prodigious output is reduced to two chapters in *Discipline and Punish* and one idea—biopolitics—in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality.* Foucault is another case of success leading to decay. Panopticism, strangely, becomes useless as an analytic tool when it can be used as the central tower by which to analyze the surrounding cells of literature. Moretti comments in an aside, as he explains the limits of mapping, "geography is a useful tool, yes, but does not

explain *everything.* For that, we have astrology and 'Theory'" (53). Theory is able to explain everything, but only the same narrow and repetitive gestures. It is not something to be read—not something that is allowed to itself have a surface—only applied. Michael Taussig, in *Palma Africa,* despairs that his rich descriptions and enumeration, "like hoarding, may be of interest only to the collector. What is the point of my making such a list, given that the reader is always in a hurry and wants to skip over details as do graduate students in the US swamped with insanely long reading lists? No wonder they pivot to 'theory' as alchemy that through magical shorthand provides the promise of explaining most everything" (63). Theory arrives as a solution to the problem of reading, to the weight of so many triple-decker novels waiting to be reading, or even to the weight of a single novel that, in its excess, seems to be more than might be interpreted. While it is easy to equate theory and interpretation, theory often appears as an evasion of the burden of interpretation. One does not have to interpret what is made clear in the unforgiving light of the panopticon. Collection, which first seems to be preliminary or antagonistic to interpretation, appears as a form of interpretation.

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The problem of applying theory to the Victorian novel is parallel to a separate historical concern, articulated most clearly perhaps in the study of Victorian science and literature. Gillian Beer, in *Darwin's Plots,* first made the case for analyzing Victorian science writing as itself indebted to literary form, while George Levine's *Darwin and the Novelists* is dedicated to identifying the persistence of Victorian scientific thought—such as uniformitarianism and catastrophism—within the Victorian novel. The challenge, in recent years, has been for literary critics to find the

thinking within the literary object, rather than a repetition of what exists prior in some real world. The problem, as Barri Gold writes, is that "Even where readers have sought to explore the interaction between science and literature, they tend to posit a unidirectional influence, considering almost exclusively the influence of science on literature" (36). Gold, rather than seeing *In Memoriam* as a text investigating ideas circulating elsewhere in the nineteenth century understands Tennyson's text as "the brilliant work of thermodynamics that it almost certainly is. As such, it allows us to study the literary production of ideas we think of as scientific" (35). Adelene Buckland similarly takes up this challenge in geology, suggesting that, "If science *was* literature in the nineteenth century, it is the premise of this book that literature was science too. Writing was not simply a means of imagining or publicizing geology, but rather was a kind of scientific practice" (15). In turn, this allows a properly dialectic understanding of the Victorian novel, a way to recognize both the novel's divergence from some monolithic Victorian culture and its divergence from itself. Against the idea of a hegemonic idea of energy and waste, Allen MacDuffie calls us to attend to "the places where these discourses *diverge,* where the stories of energy they tell seem to paint discrepant and even conflicting pictures of the use, waste, and availability of natural resources" (13). So while Kornbluh takes on the historicists, it seems to be the case that it is precisely the historicists who have been able to recognize, parallel to the resistance of literature to criticism, the discontinuity between ideas in literature and ideas from natural history or political economy.

In a strange twist of fate, while no one wants to interpret anymore, the reluctance to interpret ends up appearing as a game in which everyone accuses everyone else of a reluctance to interpret. Novels can no longer display false consciousness but critics can, unable to recognize what they are themselves doing. Clune, for instance, writes, "Instead of interpreting ideas, the

formalist critic recognizes forms" (1196). Responding to Suzanne Daly and Elaine Freedgood, John Plotz writes, "To those committed above all to excavating 'ideas in things', a literary text requires definitive decoding, not interpretation" (528). And yet, from the very first page of *The Ideas in Things*, Freedgood frames her project explicitly in response to the imperative to not interpret. The things and objects distributed throughout Victorian novels "often overwhelm us at least in part because we have learned to understand them as largely meaningless: the protocols for reading the realist novel have long focused us on subjects and plots; they have implicitly enjoined us *not* to interpret many or most of its objects" (1). Freedgood's purpose then, is not to find a method of reading beyond interpretation, but to say that we have not yet interpreted enough. Some of this involves the historical work of recognizing what Victorian readers themselves could have recognized at the time, but more broadly it is a means of interpreting what immediately presents itself as something beyond interpretation.

Formalist analysis has been proposed as both a solution to the historicist problem of an object of analysis mirroring its moment, and also critiqued as representative of an anti-interpretive stance. Caroline Levine presents the idea of strategic formalism to address the first problem, saying that such a method of reading "develops the idea that literary forms are socially and politically forceful but concludes that they do not derive their power from their *fit* with existing or emerging patterns of social life. Instead, literary forms participate in a destabilizing relation to social formations, often colliding with social hierarchies rather than reflecting or foreshadowing them" (626). Literary forms allow the possibility of imagining a different world, of demonstrating the pernicious realities of the present, of doing something in the world rather than acting as neutral recording machines.

Levine's strategic formalism has come under assault under a number of fronts, particularly as it appears in *Forms.* Kramnick and Nersessian, making a case for form as a context-dependent and inconsistent idea, have described her account as "Levine's flat ontology of ubiquitous form" (44). Strategic formalism, in *PMLA's* "Theories and Methodologies," is further critiqued for not, actually, being about forms but about ideas, for magical thinking, for replacing causality with collision, for pirating methods from other fields while neglecting those of literary studies, for pirating methods and doing so badly, for stating the obvious, and, more generally, for participating in the projects of new materialism so that , "the good new formalism also turns away from the bad old Marxism" (Nersessian, 1221). Nersessian's point is easy to see. Marxist critique, often enough, cares little for questions of aesthetic or form, choosing instead to look past the allure of the aesthetic to the real of ideology. Yet formalism has also been championed as a pre-eminently Marxist methodology, as in Anna Kornbluh's *Order of Forms.* While Kornbluh begins by departing from Levine's model of rupture in favor of a project for building, with valuing construction over the formlessness prized by "anarcho-vitalism", she suggests that it is "Formalist close readers, those among our ranks who embrace our core proficiency rather than appropriating the knowledge protocols of history or statistics" (29). What the disagreement over formalism suggests is primarily the consensus that we need interpretive models that do not flatten the world but texture the world, whether this is Levine's formalist model of recognizing rupture, Kornbluh's formalist model of valuing construction, dialectical materialism that divides objects of inquiry over and over, or the flat ontologies that, in their very flatness, seek to investigate more objects of inquiry. The primary test of an interpretive model, then, is whether it sees more of the same or sees something new, and whether it can find, in literary texts, something besides the worlds that apparently gave them form.

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Marx, by name, drifts in and out of hermeneutical debates. He is summoned to stand in broadly for revolutionary politics, or to bludgeon capitalist ideologies, or to invoke a materialist foundation for interpretation. Materialism as such can refer to method—how to read—or to content—how to make sense of representations of the material world, and how to include such representations as examples, objects of analysis, or theory-producing artifacts. In practice, it is all too easy to claim a materialist methodology while producing treatises full of abstraction. So while the method of my own project is, often, Marx's materialism and Hegelian dialectics, nothing becomes obvious by saying so.

Marx's materialism is vulgar. One version of this vulgarity is the historicist one, demonstrating the relations between material conditions and a text. Marx is no exception to the rule, as in Peter Stallybrass's account of how Marx's coat moved in and out of London pawnshops. Pawning the coat meant that Marx could not visit the British Library to conduct his work. No coat, no work. Stallybrass concludes, "What clothes Marx wore thus shaped what he wrote. There is a level of vulgar material determination here that is hard to even contemplate. And yet vulgar material determinations were precisely what Marx contemplated" (188). Marx's materialism is vulgar, not only in the sense that it deals with common and everyday concerns, but because it deals with truly vile stuff. In the *Brumaire,* Marx describes the bourgeoisie as a vampire who, when it encounters the working class, "sucks out its blood and brains and throws them into the alchemist's cauldron of capital" (242). It is a magical conversion. The alchemists may have failed at turning mercury and lead into gold, but they succeed at transforming blood

into money. But strangely, it is in the vulgar materialist account that we arrive at an interpretive metaphor. Such is the first half of Marx's vulgarity, a mode of interpretation that suggests material conditions are best understood through vivid mediation. The second half of Marx's vulgarity is delight in drawing attention to the supremacy of small things. The success of Louis Napoleon's coup derives from his belief "that there are certain higher powers which man, and the soldier in particular, cannot withstand. Among these powers he counted above all cigars and champagne, cold poultry and sausage" (199). Yet the *Brumaire* is not, finally, about the inevitable expression of events by their material conditions. The primary problem Marx deals with there is, rather, the difficulty of distinguishing or making something new from something old. In intellectual terms, this becomes the problem of how to practice dialectics rather than producing tautologies.

There is a different version of materialism that, against Marx's occult version, looks at the world and insists, tautologically, that a body is a body, a sausage a sausage, a table a table. Elaine Freedgood describes the predicament in this way: "There is nothing particularly confusing, alarming, or notable about the presence of wooden furniture in a Victorian novel: it doesn't stand out, it just stands" (51). But if the table simply stands, it is a sign that we are not yet thinking dialectically. Marx describes a dancing table in the first volume of *Capital,* here the best example of how his materialism is able to approach things, objects, bodies, singular examples, in dialectical rather than tautological terms. "When is a table not a table?" asks John Plotz. "When it is the product of invisible human work, the essence of the social relation between its oblivious buyer and never-glimpsed maker. Because Marx refuses to take the commodity's material instantiation as a complete account of its reality, he devises a theory (not just a history

or a story) of the commodity-as-thing" (Plotz 2016, 524). Marx's materialism is dialectical not because it ends but, rather, because it begins with matter.

That the table is not a table is a materialist proposition that derives, as Anna Kornbluh suggests, through writing: "Marx keenly invents materialism not as empiricism and not as supra-ideological knowledge, but as situated *writing*… Materialism is not geology, not empiricism, not the fetish of concretude, but is rather, writing" (26). David Simpson finds himself also at Marx's table, turned on its head, and notes that the theory at work here is "theory from within: to think of the table as thinking is to think against ocular evidence, and to position oneself within the society of commodities, where the real action is. The way out is the way in. We are able to approach these secrets not in the spirit of pure, disinterested critique but only as one of the gang" (159). To be one of the gang here is not, necessarily, to be a robber baron, but to be partial. The good Marxist is not the one who calmly sits down at the upturned table to eat sausage, but the one willing to take on the absurdity of being alarmed by material things that, on the surface, simply stand. The simple commodity splits apart, even when it stands together. Marxist materialism does not insist stupidly on empirical reality. It says that the longer you look at something—a drowned corpse, a liquefying crowd, a sinking city, a swamp—the stranger it gets. Marxism does not exorcise the spirits or drive out occult forces, but locates them within matter and, more specifically, within the operations of bourgeois political economy. Spirit, or at least a legion of demons, remain in Marx's world.

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Marx's materialism, however, is not necessarily the materialism of Marxists, who have been willing to concede to the hermeneutic victory of capitalism, and for good reason.

The hermeneutic victory of capital: with each new object of investigation, the good Marxist finds another turn of the capitalist screw, another false liberation, another compromised revolution. Fredric Jameson comments, "Someone once said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism" (76). Probably here he is referring either coyly to himself or, less coyly, to Žižek, who writes, "Today we can easily imagine the extinction of the human race, but it is impossible to imagine a radical change of the social system – even if life on earth disappears, capitalism will somehow remain intact" (*Exception,* 166). Žižek diagnoses leftist pedantry and excessive moralizing as a symptom of a belief that radical change is no longer possible. Here, leftist commitment to radical change and political investment creates an imperative to never, naively, see an outside or alternative to capital. Better not to say anything at all than to risk enthusiastic attention to a local failure of capital, a lapse in the system, a dysfunction that, rather than contributing to the smooth functioning of capital, is actually a dysfunction. Mark Fisher has described this as "'capitalist realism': the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible to even *imagine* a coherent alternative to it" (2). And surely the symptom of this failure of imagination is the continual return to capitalism as a term in critical studies, a shorthand that ignores Marx's preference for describing the content of his investigation as bourgeois political economy—not capitalism—and a trend that obfuscates language and disguises the very material operations that are supposed to be exposed. Capitalism, as a heuristic, deprives analysis of both specificity and generality, in favor of an undefined abstraction.

Arguments about the function of criticism and role of interpretation– construction or deconstruction, excavation or curation – morph quickly into arguments about the function of the novel itself. But what does the hermeneutic victory of capital look like in the context of literary studies? Jameson's famous statement, above, is followed by a less famous sentence: "We can now revise that and witness the attempt to imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world" (76). Dystopian novels, speculative fiction, and post-apocalyptic narratives clarify, in the way that butter is clarified, the workings of capital. It might also be said that these narratives do not stop at imagining capitalism, but imagine something beyond it. But the "now" of which Jameson speaks actually begins at least as early as the nineteenth-century novel, with all of its interest in entropic processes, corruption, and the destruction of property, or its rearrangement of relations through natural catastrophe. My analyses will concern these processes of entropy and deformation in the novel, rather than the forms themselves.

It might be enough to simply say that the novel destabilizes itself by internalizing a series of paradoxes: proliferation leads to crisis, generation to extinction, reproduction to overpopulation, production to stagnation. These are all problems of excess within the novel, and at the same time a testament to its realism. The reality effect, as Woloch writes, is a problem of population such that "the realist novel is structurally destabilized not by too many details or colors or corners, but by *too many people*" (19). The very excessiveness of the novel, however, seems to attest something about its weakness of both form and ideology. What first looks like instability finally resolves into compromise. Moretti describes such confusion in approaching the European novel, a strange messiness that is difficult to understand until he realizes "they were not trying to shape consistent worldviews, but rather *compromise among distinct worldviews* – like Balzac's conservative-progressive hybrid, or the absurd blend of intolerance and justice of

the English novel" (xii). The disagreement among critics, then, is whether the novel depicts too little or too much, whether it repeats some ideology of cruelty or simply proliferates contradictions. At the same time, Nancy Armstrong is no doubt right when she says "that fiction did a great deal to relegate vast areas of culture to the status of aberrance and noise" (24). Look to the nineteenth-century novel and witness how much of the everyday is missing in the novels of everyday life, how little work there is in the industrial novel, how little sex there is in the narratives obsessed with sexual relations and rules, how the relations of empire to the metropole are obscene and obscure rather than on stage and explicit, how few subjects of the empire are not represented at all. Too much or too little of the real, however one looks at it.

The nineteenth-century novel is not free of the conditions in which it was born, or of the relations of dominance and cruelty so characteristic of the period. Said rightfully asserts that the novel and empire are unthinkable without each other, but their mutual construction, their mutual imagination, does not constitute a hegemonic relation. The novel thinks empire, but it does not think the same thoughts over and over again. Nasser Mufti writes, with a different set of terms than Said, "If the novel… creates the condition of possibility for the nation, then I find that it also creates the condition for the nation's *impossibility*. It is this *negative* aspect of the novel's involvement in the horizon of legibility of nationhood that will mostly concern me here" (Mufti 2018, 14). Civil war and fratricide, an internal antagonism, becomes Mufti's lens for analyzing the novel. Emily Steinlight writes, similarly, against a mode of criticism that understands the novel primarily as a disciplinary apparatus: "Instead of confirming life's fatal capture by totalizing power, the sheer excessiveness of the novel's subjects runs over the edge of any social body, state, empire, or valorizing subject that aims to encompass the species" (223). The novel disciplines, it builds the empire and the nation, but it also produces some sort of undisciplined

excess, subjects and populations that become less legible – rather than more – through the critique of empire and nation. The positive construction of the novel is a negative imagination. It may be easier to imagine the destruction of an entire continent than the end of the British Empire but, at the same time, imagining the sinking of Atlantis and London becomes a way to imagine the end of the British Empire and to clarify the everyday functions of bourgeois political economy.

I call these methods of reading, and my own, deformalism. They are less interested in tracking forms than they are in tracing processes of formation and deformation – apparently contrary processes that may often overlap. Collapse is disintegration into fragments, but it is possible that there is also a separate type of integration, incorporation, or collective that emerges in the ruins – the wreckage scattered after the floodwaters recede, absorption into the swamp, the crowd that forms a tsunami.

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A final word on interpretation and anti-interpretation. At the end of *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, Žižek compares lapsed Marxists to believers who, having lost the faith, return to the church late in life. The dissolute wish to be reconciled with God and leftists, "rebelling vainly" against what they knew to be true, wish to be reconciled to communism (157). Žižek's message to these lapsed leftists is, don't be afraid! So we might also say to the anti-interpreters: you've had your fun letting the objects interpret themselves—time to get serious again! But let me be clear for a second. There is no real antagonism between interpretation and description or between argument and description. Literary critics have insisted that there are arguments to be found in landscapes and furniture, ideologies captured within inanimate objects—and they are right.

Mutatis mutandis, as Žižek would say, description and collection are themselves practices in literary criticism that make an argument. Even those who have tried their hardest to avoid interpretation have been doing it all along. The proper antagonism, rather, is between those who believe that the first step of interpretation is making things flat—explaining, enclosing, clearing a field—and those of us who believe that the first step of interpretation is to gather things together. I often neglect to draw explicit attention to my own arguments, not as a symptom of interpretation's absence but of its ubiquity, even in the simplest descriptions, the longest catalogs of examples, the mustiest collections.

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No doubt there is something cruel about writing an introduction that intentionally conceals much of the content and argument of what will follow. In most works of criticism, the reading needs a foretelling, so that what appears at the beginning is not so much an introduction as a reduction of the argument, a process of boiling down the carcass until only the skeleton remains. To me, this is the reflection of literary criticism obsessed with beginnings and endings, including its own. Just as I want to salvage the dross of novels, their reflexive descriptions of corpses and crowds, their plateaus and dead ends, I also want to salvage the middles of literary criticism. In writing introductions as reductions, critics create the conditions by which the rest of their work does not need to actually be read. My own project shares many of the interests of distant reading and digital humanities, but it is ultimately a project about reading, and insists on reading that is excessive rather than instrumental. The writing reflects that concern—so into the whirlpool!

But there is a method here after all, and one that can be represented through the events of Edgar Allan Poe's "Descent into the Maelström." Trapped in the whirlpool, ships are taken to the

bottom of the ocean and crushed into fragments that slowly return to the surface. In this context, the narrator is just one of many objects that descends to the bottom, is altered—his hair turns white—and is then brought to the surface transformed. No doubt this dissertation operates by the logic of the whirlpool, returning over and over again to what it seems one has already seen, all with the sense that the stranded swimmer is being pulled closer to the bottom. If that were all, it would simply be a tale of escape. But for Poe's narrator, "I positively felt a *wish* to explore its depths, even at the sacrifice I was going to make; and my principal grief was that I should never be able to tell my old companions on shore about the mysteries I should see" (443). This is itself a familiar sentiment, one George Levine might describe as part of the epistemological pattern of dying to know. Yet the narrator escapes from the maelstrom, and not through random chance, or by struggle. *Moby Dick's* Ishmael escapes the vortex by clinging to a coffin. Poe's mariner returns to the surface by becoming wreckage. Watching the swirl of garbage in the maelstrom, and observing which ones ascend and descend, he discovers the "natural consequence of the forms of the floating fragments" and notes that cylindrical objects are those that rise (447). When he attaches himself to the cask that he finds, he does so because the cask is the perfect piece of garbage that will propel him back out of the whirlpool. There is an analogous impulse here: something, after all, to be gained by descending into the maelstrom (or the swamp) – if only one can return to the surface by clinging desperately to the right flotsam and jetsam.

But the passage here is from a whirlpool to a swamp. The central metaphor of literary studies is the field, and in that field we know what to do. Literary critics survey their fields, dig deep to mine texts for evidence, and make claims—important or not depending on clarifying the appropriate stakes. Metaphors of the earth, these are also metaphors of property. Stakes, and the property they define, depend upon dry ground, or at least ground stable enough to keep the half-

buried piece of wood in one spot. Swamps are no good for securing boundaries, and they are no good for stakes. It would be wrong to say that *Victorian Atlantis* is my attempt to take a field and turn it into a swamp. Like Taussig, I see the swamp as primary, appearing only as a field through a process of continual repression and drainage. In a happy dialectic, the solution to the impasses of Victorian literature is Victorian literature itself. In *Felix Holt*, Harold Transome's drunk uncle tells him, "'Why, lad, if the world was turned into a swamp, I suppose we should leave off shoes and stockings, and walk about like cranes'—whence it followed plainly enough that, in these hopeless times, nothing was left to men of sense and good family but to retard the national ruin by declaring themselves Radicals" (110). Like a typical pedant, I'm doing my best to look at the joke here and take seriously the suggestion that in a world devoted to draining swamps and planting stakes in solid ground, we should become animals, transform into cranes and declare ourselves radicals. We have enough fields. Perhaps there is nothing gained in replacing one set of metaphors with another, but it is shorthand for a method that seeks fragmentation, dissolution, and deformations as means of breaking impasses of criticism and interpretation.

Chapter One

The Dream of the Drowned

There is a growing interest in population within literary history. Weary of understanding the nineteenth-century novel as an account of the development, failure, and adventures of individuals, critics turn to the swarming masses. The multitude, in analyses of political economy, offers a corrective to the bourgeois, property-bearing subject, and relations of aggregates become assemblages that pair the human with the non-human, more than human, or even anti-human. Population, in these ways, promises an escape from the human, or at least a means of refiguring the species in a different relation to the worlds of the novel. This version of population addresses representations of crowds, mobs, and gatherings. The multitude appears as a swarm of locusts or a surging wave. Before arriving at those images, though, I want to take up a different understanding of population, as something dispersed rather than concentrated, not the crowd that can be represented in an image of a wave, but a crowd that appears as scattered individuals. There are times, of course, when the two are the same. The population of a village might be able to gather all together in one spot—but these moments are largely outside of the novel and inside the realm of Victorian natural history and travel narratives. Within the novel, population—as distinct from the crowd—is represented in moments of catastrophe, as in last man narratives in which the human population is reduced to a handful of individuals and then, finally, a lone survivor. Population, first appearing as a way of collapsing things together, re-emerges as a means of distinguishing one group from another, whether the divide is internal—the two nations of *Sybil*—or external, an invasion of outsiders. Population collapses the human into antagonistic groups: imperial subjects and rulers, the working class and the bourgeoisie, men and women.

When population appears in studies of the nineteenth century novel, whether in the context of natural history or political economy, Thomas Robert Malthus is never far away.[2] That he is usually summoned in order to be whipped is symptomatic of the fact that so many accounts of population are accounts of disaster: mass extinction, widespread inequality, settler colonialism, the condition of women, the hold of a slave ship. This is Malthus as the prophet of bourgeois political economy, defender of the cruelties of empire and capitalism. It does not help that the primary prediction of his *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798)—that population growth would outpace adequate food production—has not materialized. "Malthus was wrong about quite a lot," writes Allen MacDuffie, "and his arguments about scarcity were inflected by his commitment to a ruinous *laissez-faire* economic doctrine. In his work, the burden and the moral responsibility fall upon the backs of the poor and almost nowhere else. The argument for the scarcity of resources, as Marx and Engels saw, served to disguise the problem of the *distribution* of resources, exploitative social relations, and the question of the ownership of the means of production" (MacDuffie, 3). The problem with Malthus, then, is not that he was wrong, but that his ideas took hold throughout Britain and the British Empire in spite of being wrong. Ian Angus and Simon Butler argue that the force of Malthus stems not from his catalogue of facts and details, but that "his most important capitalist ideology… was to replace a moral argument against social change with a natural law argument, that human problems are caused by biology, by the laws of nature" (209). Malthus's account of surplus population appears as theory on the large scale of the animal kingdom, and ideology in the truncated domain of human history.

[2] Some of what follows here is derived from my article, "The Promise of Disaster: Specters of Malthus in Marxist Dreams." *Ecozon@*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2018, pp. 53-65.

The strange twist in the persistence of Malthus's ideas, which seem to return as often as they are purged, is that Malthus asserts, over and over again, the ideal's failure to conquer the material. Malthus, after all, wrote his essay on population in response to the denial of the body that he found in the political theories of William Godwin. When Godwin considers moral and physical causes, it is primarily in order to negate their influence. He writes in his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, "'Indigestion,' we are told, 'perhaps a fit of the tooth-ach, renders a man incapable of strong thinking and spirited exertion'" (33). Godwin intends this as a joke—the toothache is forgotten when good news arrives. The toothache is useful, however, inasmuch as it leads to the question of whether reason, cognition, or politics offer the capacity to overcome material conditions or produce solutions to ecological problems. "I happen," writes Malthus, "to have a very bad fit of the toothache at the time I am writing this" (152). While he sometimes forgets about the pain while writing, the pain remains in spite of his forgetfulness, until it threatens to destroy his ability to form vivid arguments. The mind may have the power of distraction, but not of overcoming pain.

The disagreement over toothaches illuminates a disagreement both over the influence of climate on the mind and the ability to scale up from particular examples. Godwin continues that "In reality, the atmosphere, instead of considerably affecting the mass of mankind, affects in an eminent degree only a small part of that mass. The majority are either above or below it; are either too gross to feel strongly these minute variations, or too busy to be at leisure to attend to them" (34). For Godwin, toothaches and weather patterns are examples of the same thing—common phenomena that, in their common occurrence, are easily overcome by the mind. For Malthus, the ability to overcome aches and pains do not "tend to prove that activity of mind will enable a man to disregard a high fever, the smallpox, or the plague" (151). As the mind is unable

to break free of its material constraints and limits, so political institutions and ideals are unable to break free of natural laws.

From this point of view political disasters become natural disasters. Malthus notes, quite simply, that "Famine seems to be the last, the most dreadful resource of nature" (118). Historians, both literary and social, have rightly found the ghost of Malthus in the British Empire's response to famine and starvation. In reference to the Great Hunger in Ireland, Patrick Brantlinger writes that Victorian liberalism failed inasmuch as "it shaped all of its actions in terms of the 'laws' of economics. In the case of Malthusianism, this meant uncritical acceptance of a pseudo-scientific dogma that identified impoverished masses as 'surplus' populations" (*Dark Vanishings,* 104). Malthus's natural laws allowed the British empire to look past, also, the millions of hungry dead in India during the nineteenth century. This connection is more direct, perhaps, than between Malthus and Ireland. From 1805 until 1834, Malthus was a professor of political economy at the East India College at Haileybury, where servants of the East India Company trained before departure (Flew 14). Pablo Mukherjee, in *Natural Disasters and Victorian Empire,* similarly summons Malthus in reference to India's famines and a doctrine of palliative imperialism. What emerges from the Victorian famine debates is "Kipling's Malthusian representation of famine as a manifestation of nature's law against human excesses," and the idea "that governments should not respond with any welfarist measures to ease the distress of the famine-struck population, since this would be an *unnatural* interference against the *natural* laws of the market" (32). Likewise, Malthus arrives in Mike Davis's *Late Victorian Holocausts* in the context of imperial India. Lord Lytton, Viceroy of India late in the century, insisted during famine that there be no interference with the market or the price of wheat, and threw the most expensive dinner party in history, in honor of Victoria, while thousands of

Indians were starving to death. Davis writes, "Lytton, to be fair, probably believed that he was in any case balancing budgets against lives that were already doomed or devalued of any civilized humane quality. The grim doctrines of Thomas Malthus… still held great sway over the white rajas" (32). This is the first Malthus, the one who, insisting on the supremacy of material conditions, became an apologist for the century's inequality, deprivation, and cruelty.

Matter itself becomes a legal affair—not only because Victorian imperial policy made use of Malthus, but also because bodies and economies follow natural laws that distribute life and death, prosperity and suffering. The centrality of the body leads, in a winding path, to the second Malthus. In a strange twist within his principle of population, natural law does not dictate that life produces life but rather that an overabundance of life produces massive death. This was a novel insight in political economy and a dialectic that critics have identified at the core of Malthus's thought. Adam Smith, writes Brantlinger, "viewed population growth as a sign of progress, but Malthus rejects this old idea. For Malthus and later economists, there are two primary forms of negative value, antithetical to national wealth: debt and overpopulation. If it represents investment in productive forces, debt can become positive. But overpopulation is sheer waste" (*Dark Vanishings,* 33*).* As Gallagher writes, "Malthus simultaneously sees the unleashed power of population, the reproducing body, as that which will eventually destroy the very prosperity that made it fecund, replacing health and innocence with misery and vice" (*Body* 37). Deanna Kreisel likewise turns to Malthus in her account of optimism and pessimism within Victorian political economy, particularly in the debate between whether economies were kept alive primarily by supply or, as Malthus argues, by demand. Against the idea that an economy could endlessly grow, "nineteenth-century economists were particularly concerned with the question of how long the young capitalist economy could continue to grow before reaching

stagnation" (*Economic Woman,* 11). An overabundance of wealth leads not to general prosperity but to decline, or at least a situation in which things coming to a halt becomes a general means of collapse. For this reason Malthus "returns throughout his work to the question of how new demands are to be created and sustained, new tastes and desires implanted, new cravings for expenditure encouraged. This multiplication of desires is absolutely necessary in order to stave off the threat of overproduction, overaccumulation, and general gluts" (Kreisel 32). The oddity of Malthus's natural law, then, is not only that it transforms growth into decline but that at the center of natural law is anarchic desire.

There is a tendency, when speaking of desire and the body, to return over and over to the individuals who have been wearily discarded, whether as protagonists of the novel or as political subjects. What Malthus's contemporaries condemned, as he insisted on the inescapable drives and limits of the body, was not the cruel implications of his principles but, rather, "his sensual materialism" (Gallagher, 10). The body, sex, and pleasure became the basis of political economy so that "Malthus strengthened the side of British radicalism that emphasized the motivating force of bodily pleasure and made the needs of desiring bodies the basis of economic thought" (10). For Gallagher and Steinlight, Malthus is in this sense particularly useful for identifying biopolitical thought in the nineteenth-century novel. For instance, Steinlight writes of Mary Shelley's *Last Man*, "Rather than mark the end of politics, Shelley's romance of pandemic explicitly narrates a transition to biopolitics" (65). The abstractions of elections, parliamentary procedures, and competing national or domestic interests are replaced by the concrete regulation of bodies and, in the extreme, life itself. What appears first as a reactionary principle consigning the destitute to death and starvation reemerges as an insight into the formation of collective identity and the revolutionary potential of the masses. There is something, "surprisingly radical

in the principle of population: Malthus's formula makes the fact of being human more consequential than the fact of being English" (Steinlight, 60). Biopolitics, here, subsumes national and ethnic difference into the category of the human. For Gallagher, the division of interest is not that between the human and the non-human, life and death, extinction and persistence of the species but, rather, between workers and capital. Capital itself comes to appear as a life form, as does the proletariat. "We might say," she writes, "that Malthus was trying to make the fundamental bioeconomic plot of political economy consistent by giving it a central protagonist whose fate would be of primary importance from the beginning to the end of the story. In his view the protagonist would be the aggregate of productive workers" (46). While Malthus's materialism may appear first as private pains, pleasures, and desires, it becomes the basic for collective desire and political revolution.

From this point of view, it is worthwhile to turn to Marx's account of Malthus. Many of Marx's criticisms of Malthus are reserved for the latter's *Principles of Political Economy.* In the *Grundrisse,* Marx describes Malthus as a baboon who, in developing a theory of value, "*senses* the contradictions, but falls flat when he himself tries to develop them" (353). In the first volume of *Capital,* most of Marx's critiques are located in the footnotes. The essay on population is, in Marx's judgment, "a schoolboyish, superficial plagiarism… declaimed in the manner of a sermon, but not containing a single original proposition of Malthus himself" (766fn). The reverend is, after all, merely a theologian whose work is a series of excerpts from James Steuart, Robert Wallace, and Joseph Townsend, among others. Marx also accuses Malthus of disguising history as nature: "It was of course far more convenient, and much more in conformity of the ruling classes, whom Malthus idolized like a true priest, to explain this 'over-population' by the eternal laws of nature, rather than the merely historical laws of the nature of capitalist

production" (666fn). In this formulation, Marx's baboon is a flunky who can do nothing but repeat the ruling ideologies of his time and, in trying to explain the world, merely apologizes for the inequalities that he finds. But Marx shared more with Malthus than he would care to admit. This has been a problem common to many of Malthus's critics who, however much they try to distance themselves from the reverend, often share certain of his ideological foundations. For instance, Emily Steinlight, looking at Byron's attacks on Malthus in *Don Juan,* writes, "For all the cleverness of this jibe, however, Byron's outspoken assertion of sexuality actually aligns him with Malthus" (42). Gallagher identifies a similar inconsistency in Percy Shelley, who proclaims, "against a putatively unsexed adversary, the necessity as well as the goodness of the passion between the sexes" (15). Likewise, in spite the of the "substantial disagreements between Malthus and Southey… there persisted a similarity of emphasis on the organic lives of the poor, on their miseries and enjoyments, as indices of the commonweal's vitality, as forces propelling its movements, and as sources of equilibrium" (13). A materialist philosophy that begins with the miseries and pleasures of the many rather than the few, a sensibility to the political power of aggregation rather than the rights of individuals—this begins to sound very much like Marx.

There should be no surprise, however, in the fact that a Victorian political economist shares some of the central assumptions of a predecessor that he nevertheless reviles. Shared territory is disagreement's basis rather than its antithesis, and the problem remaining to be addressed is the relation between Malthus and Malthus as much as it is between Malthus and Marx. It is tempting to say that the solution to the two Malthuses is that the second one corrects the first: political thought beginning with the bodies of the destitute ends necessarily with revolutionary politics or, at least, undermines the attempt to disguise history as nature. But the temptation emerges surely from criticism's current fetish for biopolitics—"anarcho-vitalism," in

Kornbluh's term—seeing within it the liberating potential of materialist politics, assemblages (human and non-human), and lived experience. Figuring one Malthus as a corrective to the other obscures that materialist politics can lead to cruelty and dispossession just as easily as it may lead to liberation and commonwealth.

The ghost of Malthus continues to haunt analyses of populations, even as he has been subject for two hundred years to the same critiques. While this indicates something, surely, about the resilience of Malthus's ideas, it indicates just as much a failure of these critiques to perform a proper exorcism. However productive it is to critique the implications and foundations of his theories of population, or to uncover the reactionary ideologies buried within, the real need is for a methodology that leads to a new understanding of population. The analysis of the drowned that follows here relies on Marx, rather than Malthus, to supply a methodology for recognizing new forms of organization. Marx's account of the method of political economy in the *Grundrisse* begins with the temptation of taking population as a starting point for understanding a country's political economy: "It seems to be correct to begin with the real and the concrete, with the real precondition, thus to begin, in economics, with e.g. the population, which is the foundation and the subject of the entire social act of production. However, on closer examination this proves false" (100). The mistake lies in beginning with population as such, with humans as human species, with society as "one single subject" (94). Malthus's essay opens, after all, with two basic claims about humans: they cannot survive without food, and sexual drives will continue to result in reproduction. The falseness of this method is, however, that "The population is an abstraction if I leave out, for example, the classes of which it is composed" (100). Class, too, is seen to be insufficient if it does not include an understanding of its elements, such as wage labor and capital, which presuppose value and prices, and on and on it goes. "Thus," Marx continues, "if I

were to begin with the population, this would be a chaotic conception of the whole, and I would then, by means of further determination, move analytically towards ever more simple concepts, from the imagined concrete towards ever thinner abstractions until I had arrived at the simplest determinations. From there the journey would have to be retraced until I had finally arrived at the population again, but this time not as the chaotic conception of a whole, but as a rich totality of many determinations and relations" (100). The faulty method, as Marx's following comments make clear, begins with an organic whole such as the nation or state, then uses concrete examples only to make them disappear and arrive back at the original abstraction; the scientifically correct method begins with the concrete, which is "concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse" (101). This method is the one that I have attempted when approaching the drowned: not to organize them with the organic whole of the nation—Victorian Britain—but to begin with the examples themselves. The challenge is to see the examples not just as abject particulars but as concentrations of relations that do not lead, necessarily, back to the familiar embrace of the nation. My own concrete unity here is the drowned.

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In 1849, Henry David Thoreau's plan to take the ferry from Boston to Cape Cod was interrupted by a massive storm. One of the casualties of that storm was the *St. John,* a brig traveling from Galway, Ireland, as well as the one hundred and forty-five passengers on board, many of them Irish emigrants. Thoreau traveled instead through Cohasset, where the dead were washing ashore. Surveying the mangled corpses on the beach, in what became the first essay of *Cape*

Cod, he notes the presence of scavengers on the beach, come with carts to collect seaweed thrown up by the storm. “Drown who might,” he says, “they did not forget that this weed was a valuable manure. This shipwreck had not produced a visible vibration in the fabric of society” (7). There is no room for the drowned in the world of commerce, only indifference. Thoreau himself is not immune from this indifference. Rather, he attributes it to a problem of scale, the distinction between one corpse and many. Thoreau concludes, “it was not so impressive a scene as I might have expected. If I had found one body cast upon the beach in some lonely place, it would have affected me more” (9). This indifference to the drowned remains in the study of nineteenth-century literature, where the drowned have been addressed as singular corpses within single texts, but not yet properly as a population.

Population here means a dispersed group united through a common condition. Often, this common condition is territory: the inhabitants of a provincial town, the denizens of a city, the citizens, residents, and aliens of a nation. But just as often population refers to divisions of humanity within a specific territory, or perhaps to diaspora in which a group of people moves from a common point of origin into different territories. So critics of the Victorian novel might speak of the urban poor, or Irish emigrants, or Indians and Africans in London. The way I speak of population is, rather, as a dispersed group in the nineteenth-century novel that is united through a shared ending. That ending is the abyss. It is the abyss even though many of the drowned are thrown back onto beaches and riverbanks, or fished out by scavengers, and in spite of the fact that many victims drown in rivers, ponds, weirs—even in mud pits and oceans of grain. Every theory of population is, in effect, a theory of populations. Returning to Thoreau’s example, it would be possible to see the important distinction as that between the Irish and the

non-Irish, the resident and immigrant, or even the living and the dead. I look to it, here and elsewhere, as the distinction between the wet and the dry.

Drowning, and the threat of submersion, are widespread in the nineteenth-century novel. This presents two separate tasks. Ubiquity is easy to invoke, and difficult to demonstrate except through a proliferation of examples. That is the work of collection. Here my muse is Benjamin in *The Arcades Project,* who writes, "As far as the collector is concerned, his collection is never complete; for let him discover a single piece missing, and everything he's collected remains a patchwork, which is what things are for allegory from the very beginning" (211). The arcade is for Benjamin what the drowned corpse is for my project: a vector of proliferation and collection. At the same time, however powerful a collection, what remains is the task of criticism and interpretation. Collections run the risk of endless repetition, baroque organization, and bloated indices. The drowned are reduced to the drowned man, in an interpretive gesture akin to Zola's artist who paints canvas after canvas but, in each case, "The result was the same: Camille, grimacing and agonized, appeared regularly on the canvas. Then he drew in turn the most varied types of heads: virgins with haloes, Roman warriors with helmets, rosy golden-haired children, old ruffians slashed with scars; but back came the drowned man always and always, whether as angel, virgin, warrior, child, or ruffian" (*Therese,* 198). That the drowned are a population is not a way of saying they are all the same, but a way of determining how, in their difference, they might function as a whole. The drowned corpses, collected, must still be interpreted. This chapter attempts to perform both tasks simultaneously, in an attempt to dialectically interpret an ever-expanding archive of the dead.

The drowned do not respect national literatures or boundaries—nor are they best explained within the strict boundaries of national literature, or by means of evolving aesthetic

forms throughout the century. In constructing the drowned as a widespread population in the nineteenth century, I take my cue from those who have most significantly theorized drowning in studies of slavery and its aftermath. Hence Glissant's insistence on relation as an "open totality evolving upon itself" (192). Two of these forms of relation are among the drowned themselves and between the drowned and the not drowned: "Experience of the abyss lies inside and outside the abyss" (7). What starts out as exception—the exceptional violence of slaves drowning in the Atlantic—becomes one condition for exchange, entanglement, relation. Consider also Christina Sharpe's insistence that the wake of drowning continues all the way into the present, whether in the experience of blackness in America or in the everyday drownings of refugees around the world. Likewise, Paul Gilroy, in *The Black Atlantic*, writes, "In opposition to both of these nationalist or ethnically absolute approaches, I want to develop the suggestion that cultural historians could take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective" (15). Like Gilroy, I write in opposition to a strictly national and ethnic approach to literature. His solution to this analytic problem is the Atlantic as territory, and the figure of the ship moving across it. Mine is the drowned themselves, moving not only through the waters of the Atlantic but through the rivers and streams that channel into it, to quagmires and swamps that hold bodies rather than circulate them. In the absence of the nation and progressive chronology, new forms of organization must be found in the maelstrom.

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Of course, the drowned are a strange population. Biopolitics, in its emphasis on the management of the living multitude, offers few resources. Agamben's concept of bare life and

homo sacer is closer to the drowned, and yet what they offer is bare death—even if often the drowned are the destitute, abused, and enslaved. But it would be a mistake to think of the drowned purely as a population of negativity. Rather, as Achille Mbembe argues in the context of necropolitics and Bataille, "death is therefore the point at which destruction, suppression, and sacrifice constitute so irreversible and radical an expenditure—an expenditure without reserve—that they can no longer be determined as negativity. Death is therefore the very principle of excess—an *anti-economy*. Hence the metaphor of luxury and the *luxurious character of death*" (15). The drowned constitute, at times, the figures of horror that Eugene Thacker uses to imagine the Planet, his term for a world in the absence of humanity. Horror "takes aim at the presuppositions of philosophical inquiry – that the world is always the world-for-us – and makes of those blind spots its central concern, expressing them not in abstract concepts but in a whole bestiary of impossible life forms – mists, ooze, blobs, slime, clouds, and muck" (9). Alongside these impossible life forms might be included the actual corpses, which often themselves become ooze, slime, and muck.

Perceiving the dead as a multitude is, if nothing else, a Victorian concern. In his recollections of walking through London at night, Dickens muses, "what enormous hosts of dead belong to one old great city, and how, if they were raised while the living slept, there would not be the space of a pin's point in all the streets and ways for the living to come out into. Not only that, but the vast armies of dead would overflow the hills and valleys beyond the city, and would stretch away all round it, God knows how far" ("Night Walks," 78). The dead here transform the city from a metropolis to a necropolis. Likewise, when Holly sleeps in Haggard's *She,* he dreams of "the huge pyramids of bones. I dreamed that they all stood up and marched past me in thousands and tens of thousands—in squadrons, companies, and armies—with the

sunlight shining through their hollow ribs" (208). The dry bones come to life, but the prophetic vision is here converted into a nightmare. The dead, in both cases, need not do anything. It is their vast presence that must be guarded against. In a sense, these are spectral manifestations of Malthusian prophecies, visions of a world limited not by endless propagation and resource scarcity, but by dead hosts that cannot be exorcised. Resurrection becomes a curse rather than a promise. The ghost of Malthus lurks in every analysis of population in Victorian literature. It is the gamble of this investigation of the drowned that other dreams, and other nightmares, are possible.

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The difficulty in speaking of the drowned as a nineteenth-century population lies in the immediately ensuing demands for distinction: the dead against the living, and the drowned against other forms of the dead. In this respect, the hermeneutic difficulties presented by the drowned are analogous to those presented by objects in the Victorian novel. John Plotz writes, in this respect, that "in order to argue that things—in theory or practice—are a *distinctively* significant problem for nineteenth-century Britons, a retrospective designation of the era as thing-obsessed is not enough" ("Materiality," 523). Likewise, it would not be enough to diagnose the Victorians as drowning-obsessed without performing the work that Plotz proposes as a solution: "Instead, we need to explore how (Greater) Britons themselves understood the tangible and intangible life of the objects that filled or overfilled their private and public realms" (523). To begin with the idea that the drowned haunt the living, then, does not properly differentiate them, either among the Victorians or among the dead. As Robert Pogue Harrison says in

Dominion of the Dead, "Certainly in most world cultures the dead are hounders, harassing the living with guilt, reminding them of their debts to the forefathers, calling on them to meet their obligations….They trouble our sleep, colonize our moods, whisper in the dark, insinuate themselves into our imagination, urge us to continue their work on behalf of the unborn" (98). If the drowned haunt, then, it must be in a way different from the other dead within the Victorian novel, the many who die of illness and poison, buried in the rubble of collapsed buildings or reduced to bones and ash in fires, beaten to death or shot in a back alley of Manchester.

Yet on first glance the drowned do not haunt the living at all. This is just as true for Thoreau's account of the bodies thrown up on Cape Cod as for maritime narratives featuring mass drownings. When the *Pequod* sinks at the end of *Moby Dick,* "the great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago" (508). That the entire crew drowns, except Ishmael, is not a matter of mass haunting but of cosmic indifference. Rather than returning, the dead disappear along with the ship that formed their world. Mass drowning at sea, however, does not have to entail a sinking ship, whether looking at the slaves thrown overboard in a typhoon in J.M.W. Turner's *Slave Ship,* or even turning to Melville's 1849 novel, *Redburn.* As the *Highlander* crosses the Atlantic from Liverpool to New York City, plague hits the destitute Irish emigrants crammed into its hold. The dead Irish, he writes, were "torn from the clasp of their wives, rolled in their own bedding, with ballast-stones, and with hurried rites, were dropped into the ocean" (332). As insured property, the captive Africans can be thrown into the abyss of the ocean and transformed into profit. As poor, faceless refugees, the Irish on the *Highlander* are compressed into the newspaper's "catalogue of passing occurrences"; "They die, like the billows that break on the shore and no more are heard or seen" (337). It is an utterly Malthusian moment of food scarcity leading to the death of the poorest passengers on the ship, a consequence of the

captain deceiving the emigrants of the length of the voyage and, as a result, the amount of food they would need to bring to feed themselves. These examples, from Turner and Melville, are a different kind of indifference, not cosmic or natural but political-economic.

The work of the dead—haunting—becomes replaced by the work of the witness in recounting the drowning or shipwreck. *Moby Dick's* epilogue begins with an epigraph from the Book of Job, the repeated line of the servants who, escaping cattle raids, fire from heaven, and collapsing houses tell Job, "and I only am escaped alone to tell thee." In some respects this seems to map cleanly onto the triad mapped out by Hans Blumenberg in *Shipwreck with Spectator*. Noting the shipwreck as a longstanding metaphor for human existence, Blumenberg says that alongside the initial dichotomy of "dry land and deep sea" comes the "emphatic configuration in which shipwreck at sea is set beside the uninvolved spectator on dry land" (10). It would be easy here to think of Melville's narrators as the spectators writing from dry land, fulfilling the work described by Steve Mentz: "Shipwrecks are wet catastrophes. Shipwreck narratives seek ways to dry them out" (1). The promise of the master trope of the shipwreck, and of shipwreck narratives, for Mentz, is replacing linear narratives of history with uneven histories of disaster followed by salvage. And yet it is not at all clear that the spectator from dry land is the narrator writing a retrospective, or that the function of Melville's narratives is to dry out the disaster of a wet catastrophe. Rather, Melville's work is first of all to take a wet account and make it even wetter. In employing oceanic metaphors for existence, Melville makes figurative what is already literal. For instance, at the beginning of *Moby Dick*, Ishmael claims in regard to the myth of Narcissus: "But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all" (3). The ocean, figurative here, becomes the medium for most of the journey. Likewise, in Melville's account from of the

Irish emigrants in *Redburn,* the immersion of the dead into the ocean is curiously doubled: literally, as corpses that disappear into the water, and figuratively as waves that crash and dissipate. The dead are absorbed into the waves and are also, themselves, like the waves. There is little need to make the Irish drowned even wetter, except that Melville writes not as an uninvolved spectator, but against the uninvolved spectators who, reading from dry land, experience the drowned as items in the newspaper's catalogue of disasters.

There is a process of mediation between the chronicler and the drowned. The witness summons the dead, who refuse to appear on their own to haunt the living. At first, this process of mediation seems to disappear when the drowned appear as disconnected individuals rather than in the aggregate. When Grandcourt drowns off the coast of Italy in *Daniel Deronda,* Gwendolen remarks that her husband will never again be seen above the water, at least "Not by any one else—only be me—a dead face—I shall never get away from me" (590). The uninvolved spectator, watching from dry land as an unknown figure sinks beneath the waves, is replaced by the passionately involved spectator, who is often in an antagonistic relationship with the one who has drowned. Drowning arrives as the solution—really, the dissolution—to an unhappy marriage. In Zola's work, this happens most memorably in two novels written decades apart, *Therese Raquin* and *Germinal*. Therese and her lover Laurent, bored of her husband, drown him on an afternoon boating excursion. But there is no freedom from the dead here. Laurent returns obsessively to the morgue, studying each mangled corpse, looking for the dead Camille, who becomes the spectral obstacle to Laurent and Therese's lovemaking and sleep: "But all the time in the reddish light showing through her closed lids she could see Camille and Laurent struggling on the edge of the boat, she could see her husband's form, ghastly white and larger than life, rising straight above the slimy water" (102). The drowned man, here haunting Parisian arcades,

returns in the flooded coal mines of *Germinal*. And here there is another curious doubling. Beaten to death, Chaval remains as a corpse floating nearby in the darkness and, at the same time, returns as a kind of specter to Etienne. “He saw him continuously,” writes Zola, “swollen and greenish, with his red moustache and smashed face. Then he forgot that he had killed him; his rival was swimming towards him and trying to bite him” (508). The drowned man is hungry here, ready to commit violence and eat the living who have cast him into the realm of the dead.

But, at other times, the drowned simply hang there, as in the disturbed nights that Dickens details in “Lying Awake”: “I wish the Morgue in Paris would not come here as I lie awake, with its ghastly beds, and the swollen saturated clothes hanging up, and the water dripping, dripping all day long, upon that other swollen saturated something in the corner, like a heap of crushed over-ripe figs that I have seen in Italy!” (28). The drowned are so horrifying here that they cannot even be described directly, reduced to vague somethings and splattered mounds of fruit. Dickens’s contribution to *The Wreck of the Golden Mary* (1856), a ‘conducted’ narrative between Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and four other minor writers, follows the captain of the *Golden Mary*, sunk after crashing into an iceberg one night. The survivors strike out in an open boat, eventually burying a child, Lucy, at sea after she perishes. The drowned, heaped before, hover here. The captain says, “I often saw the Golden Lucy in the air above the boat. I often saw her I have spoken of before, sitting before me. I saw the *Golden Mary* go down as she really had gone down, twenty times in a day” (31). Yet it is perhaps a mistake to say that these drowned ghosts from Eliot, Zola, and Dickens, are ghosts at all. Rather, in each case, the sense is that the living—Gwendolen, Therese, Laurent, Etienne, Dickens, the captain—are haunted by the images that appear in their own minds, in the pitch black of a coal mine or inside of their closed eyes. The captain introduces the floating child, after all, as an example of changes in himself that he

sees and does not like. They are accounts less of the animacy of the dead than of the otherness of one's own mind—which brings unbidden and unwanted images to consciousness—and its dependence upon bodies that, in several cases, are slowly being starved to death. So the first process of mediation, that of the witness who summons the absent drowned, is simply replaced by a second process of mediation, that of the mind haunting itself with the drowned. The one, represented as a process of recording; the other, of imagination. If the drowned do haunt, then, it may be rather as bodies than as ghosts: the corpse that might land on the river bank now or in a few weeks, far off or close by to the bridge from which it fell, untouched or mangled, bobbing to the surface or caught by a net in the Thames.

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In fact, the clue was there all along, lingering in the Malay archipelago of Conrad's *Outcast of the Islands*. Willems and Aïssa wander through a world transformed by massive storm and downpour, "And they appeared like two wandering ghosts of the drowned that, condemned to haunt the water for ever, had come up from the river to look at the world under a deluge" (*Outcast,* 219). Another metaphor, and a formulation that is as simple as it is perplexing: the ghosts of the drowned are the living.

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So far I have presented individuals, drowning far apart in distant texts. Yet in this catalogue of individuals there is an aggregate. There is nothing surprising about people drowning in maritime novels, surrounded as they are by a world of water that continually threatens to submerge the world of the ship. Indeed, the task of understanding the drowned would be easier if it was a phenomenon limited to the maritime. Rather, the strangeness of drowning is that it is widespread

even in narratives firmly rooted in the earth: from the ocean, to the coast, to the riverside cities of London and Paris, out into the provinces, in subterranean coalmines. It remains to be demonstrated here, through the proliferation of examples, that the drowned are flood into narrative throughout the nineteenth century, and that they are in fact a dispersed population. At the same time, what that torrent of bodies suggests is a general, popular—utterly common—dream of drowning in the nineteenth century.

The dream of drowning. I mean this, first off, quite literally—drowning as the substance of dreams in nineteenth-century novels. Here we can bring together George Sand's *Valentine* (1832), a novel of provincial love and tragedy, with Eugène Sue's episodic *Mysteries of Paris* (1842-1843). The first dream is one of obstruction and helplessness, as the disgraced Louise sees, in an echo of Goethe's *Elective Affinities,* a child fall into the river, "but Madame de Raimbault, the haughty countess, her stepmother, her implacable foe, appeared before her, pushed her away, and let the child die" (58). It is a brief account that echoes the concerns Louise has in waking life: the cruelty of her stepmother, her desire to care for her sister Valentine and her own child born out of wedlock. The Schoolmaster's dream in Sue is rather given an entire chapter stuffed with grotesque corpses eaten by tiny reptiles, subterranean lakes of blood turned into a lake of molten metal and fire, transformed into whirlpools in the sky—a dream inhabited by a drowning woman whose "corpse stays afloat for a moment, oscillates a little more, then sinks slowly, horizontally, with her feet lower than her head, and, immersed in the water, starts to follow the current of the canal" (344). It is an odd pairing—the disgraced but kind woman and the unrepentant murderer—but odd pairings bring to light what might otherwise go unobserved. Here, too, there are kinds of helplessness: the Schoolmaster trapped in an infernal world of punishment; the woman—whom the Schoolmaster has himself thrown in the water of the Saint-

Martin canal—struggling to swim, drowning, then carried by the current like a piece of flotsam. From this point of view, the nineteenth-century dream of drowning is one of terror and captivity, a grotesque doubling of the conditions of captivity that the dreamer experiences in waking life.

Yet these dreams of captivity are dominated by another dream of drowning: the desire to drown one's self or others. Consider here, without moving very far, Valentine's Monsieur de Lansac, who marries Valentine in order to pay his enormous debts with her estate. When a clerk is hired by Lansac's creditor to survey the estate, "He visited the woods, the fields, the meadows, estimating the value of everything, haggling over a furrow or a felled tree, decrying everything, taking notes, tormenting the count and driving him frantic, so that he was tempted twenty times to throw him into the river" (267). The vulgar real of clerical scrutiny and debt is solved by the dream of drowning—a dream not only because it resides in the count's imagination, but because drowning the miserable clerk would do nothing to erase the debts he is trying to escape. In *Little Women* Jo March lets her sister Amy fall through the ice as punishment for burning her writing or, looking to the other two March sisters and the irritations of domestic life, Meg threatens to drown "these horrid cats" if Beth cannot keep them in the cellar (36). Before Grandcourt's drowning dissolves their marriage, Gwendolen dreams it into possibility, saying, "Let us go, then…Perhaps we shall be drowned" (582). Consider also two separate girls named Emily, drowned in 1850s narratives. David Copperfield, thinking back to a moment from childhood, sitting on the edge of a wharf with little Em'ly, says, "There has been a time since — I do not say it lasted long, but it has been — when I have asked myself the question, would it have been better for little Em'ly to have had the waters close above her head that morning in my sight; and when I have answered Yes, it would have been" (48). Drowning arrives here not as solution to a cruel marriage, but as a fate better than one of sexual impropriety. Better to drown than to fall to

sexual temptation. Published three years after *David Copperfield*, Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* imagines a different Emily drowning in order to escape a life of horrors as a slave. Kidnapped in Baltimore, Northup is transferred as living cargo to New Orleans, plotting an uprising on the ship that is called off when one of his comrades, Robert, contracts smallpox and is buried at sea. On the same passage to New Orleans, their ship is beset by "a violent storm" that threatens to swamp the ship (68). Thinking back to the possibility of the ship sinking, Northup comments that rather than being a tragedy, "It would have been a happy thing for most of us—it would have saved the agony of many hundred lashes, and miserable deaths at last—had the compassionate sea snatched us that day from the clutches of remorseless men. The thought of Randall and little Emmy sinking down among the monsters of the deep, is a more pleasant contemplation than to think of them as they are now, perhaps, dragging out lives of unrequited toil" (68). These are vastly different texts from across the century and, in each, the dream of drowning is not one of captivity but a counterfactual of everyone who could have drowned and didn't, of freedom from the real cruelties and inequalities of political economy: debt, marriage, slavery. It is too early to say that drowning, as such, is a solution to the real, but it might be said here with good reason that, in the nineteenth century, the proper sphere of drowning is not the ocean, the river, the pond, the bottom of a well—it is the world of dreams, a dreamworld of freedom.

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Ubiquity presents its own problems for analysis. The drowned appear abundantly in the nineteenth century, and this fact collapses one of the primary methods of hermeneutics, which is

the careful analysis of a prized and peculiar example, rather than the simultaneous exhibition of dozens of musty and rotted specimens. This is a problem both of repetition and knowledge. David Copperfield wishing that Em'ly had drowned as a child seems like a rare specimen, a grisly desire that Dickens nevertheless expresses—until it appears as part of a long tradition of women drowning to escape disgrace. The rare specimen appears as such, but only because we have not read enough to realize how utterly common it is.

Two years after Dickens finished *David Copperfield,* Karl Marx took up the question of repetition in regard to history and political economy in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Much of his account deals precisely with the difficulty of escaping the shackles of the past, and the conjoined difficulty of recognizing something new—something actually new—once it has appeared. "The tradition of the dead generations," he writes "weighs like a nightmare on the minds of the living" (146). This phrase is itself repeated endlessly in Marxist criticism, no doubt because Marx was kind enough to place it in the second paragraph of his essay. The revolution of 1848 is realized, the final form revealed, in Louis Napoleon's coup of 1851 that inaugurated Second Empire France. But it was only "the ghost of the old revolution which walked in the years from 1848 to 1851" (148). The revolution, in the end, is merely a bourgeois revolution that appropriates the energies of the masses in order to profit a few grifters.

There is an analogous problem in regard to the drowned, a lingering suspicion, in looking at so many dreams of drowning, so many drowned corpses, so many unhappy endings, that the whole thing starts to seem like a tired joke. Irony is, after all, where Marx begins: "Hegel remarks somewhere that all the great events and characters of world history occur, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce" (146). From this point of view, it is possible to walk through a series of examples in the works of Zola, whose Rougon-

Macquart cycle is itself an account of the Second Empire of which Marx wrote. Like *Deronda's* Gwendolen, Therese Raquin comments, before drowning her husband, "I thought that one day I should throw myself into the Seine" (66). This seems tragic enough, individually, the raw sentiment of an unhappy woman in an unhappy marriage. And yet, even within Zola's work it becomes a common refrain. In *The Fortune of the Rougons* (1871), Zola's account of the 1851 coup from the point of view of a provincial town, he says of the matriarch of the family, Adélaïde, "There were nights when she would have got out of bed and thrown herself in the Viorne, if, with her weak, nervous nature, she had not felt terrified of dying" (47). Or, in *L'Assommoir* (1877), Madame Lerat lectures the young Nana, "I'm too easygoing with you, and if anything happened to you I should have to throw myself into the Seine" (346). It becomes a lecture about not talking to men and, indeed Nana's response to the whole thing is to laugh. Or, in *The Ladies' Paradise* (1883), it is a piece of casual neighborhood gossip, in a novel that repeatedly mentions corpses in subterranean structures, that "Only the other day there was a workman who threw his wife down a well" (171). Or, in *Earth* (1887), the threat of drowning oneself becomes a family affair. Jesus Christ appears, but he is the kind of Christ who takes parts in contests to eat the most coins and snuff out candles with farts. He complains, "All I'm fit for is to go and jump in the Aigre" (176). Later on his brother, Buteau, threatens the same end for himself after a series of disasters, saying, "I'm going to drown myself! I'm going to drown myself!" (326). Or, in *Money* (1891), Dejoie reflects, after losing his fortune in a stock market crash, "Ah, it's my fault! I'd have done better to throw myself in the river" (321). It is possible, then, simply to read more Zola for the tragedy to become farce. Dark reflections in the night are revealed to be simply idle thoughts and, except for Therese, these threats are utterly incidental to the main plot, a vague consideration of self-annihilation, a wish that things could be different.

The threat of drowning appears as the source for a lazy author, a commonplace of the century. Even worse, one might say that in Zola the poor and destitute cannot do anything other than utter commonplace sentimental outbursts—and then continue their lives of endless toil.

But such an analysis derives from a calculus in which to be common is to be worthless, in which pain is only real if it is unique, and in which ruptures are more valuable than patterns. This kind of calculus, perhaps more so than the trope of drowning, is surely a dead tradition weighing like a nightmare on the brains of the living. Marx, describing the problems of repetition and identifying the new, suggests a method for escaping the weight of bourgeois ideology and achieving a proletarian revolution. It is self-criticism and "repeated interruptions of their own course. They return to what has apparently already been accomplished in order to begin the task again; with merciless thoroughness they mock the inadequate, weak, and wretched aspects of their first attempts" (150). The enemy returns, stronger than ever before, until the revolutionaries find retreat impossible and must follow the imperative—dance here! This method of self-criticism might simply be described as dialectics. The temptation in Marxist criticism is of course the opposite, to conceive of one's task as marauding through the jungle, clearing a tangled path ever upwards until one has reached the vista where everything below is made plain. But Marx suggests the opposite, remaining in the tangled path, returning to what has already been undertaken and left behind. So, the same task for the drowned—to begin again!

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The dream of drowning, again. Submersion has already emerged as an act of purification and escape, perhaps particularly for women. Edna Pontellier, at the end of *The Awakening*, walks out naked into the Gulf of Mexico when it becomes clear that she will have no future with a man

other than her husband. It's a pleasant moment: "The water was deep, but she lifted her white body and reached out with a long, sweeping stroke. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace" (176). There is no image in Chopin of the corpse itself, only the promise of an abyssal end as Edna swims farther and farther, growing more and more tired. But in illustrations from the nineteenth century, the drowned remain beautiful, unblemished—white, if still wet. Millais's famous Ophelia floats serenely, face up in water that looks too shallow to even drown in, pale white. The fallen woman recovered in Abraham Solomon's *"Drowned! Drowned!"* slumps, her hair and dress dragging towards the ground, her face stark white under the light of the lantern. Aside from the title of the piece and its proximity to the bridge, she might as well be another Victorian convalescent being treated in bed. There is not even a puddle around her to stain the flagstones. George Frederic Watts also depicts, in *Found Drowned* (c. 1850), a fallen woman stretched out from the water of the Thames, pale-faced, apparently glowing from within—no light source apparent, here—and no puddle underneath, as if she had simply walked into the river and fallen back without ever even submerging. Indeed, in a strange way, the proximity of these women to bridges makes 'fallen women' sound much more like 'falling women.' The filthy water of the Thames leaves no stain upon their flesh.

But rather than say that these images are dominated by a dream or fantasy, it might be better to say that they are dominated by theologies of water. Paul Delaroche's *Young Martyr* (1855) clarifies this connection. The white face of the martyred woman, floating in the Tiber, hands bound, glows from a hovering halo. She too looks untouched by the water, another sleeping woman moved harmlessly from bed to river. Drowning joins together, through a baptism that ends the old life and ushers in the new, the prostitute and the saint. That the drowned might be untouched by the very water that kills them remains a pattern in nineteenth-

century illustrations, even when what is depicted is a multitude of bodies rather than a single dead woman. In two of Gustave Doré's 1866 illustrations of the biblical deluge, "World Destroyed by Water" and "The Deluge," the remnants of humanity compete with each other, a tiger, and a cub for the last scraps of land. The ark floats in the background over a world that has turned to darkness. Those who are about to drown are naked, for the most part—an oddity inasmuch as the inhabitants of the earth in Doré's other illustrations are fully clothed. The flood strips away clothing as it shrinks what remains of the earth. But there is also something odd about the heap of corpses in the panel that follows, "Dove Sent Forth from the Ark." After forty days of flooding, and weeks of receding water, the corpses remain pale, whole, unblemished, immune to natural processes of decay. They, like the women, are without abrasions from the bare rocks they rest on, or bruises from being battered by debris in the water. There are no fingers missing, eaten by hungry fish and crabs. The purifying flood, in exterminating the wicked, preserves and cleanses their bodies.

There is no such dream, fantasy, or theology in Turner's *Slave Ship.* Paul Gilroy writes of this painting in *The Black Atlantic*, that John Ruskin, the first owner of the painting was unable "to discuss the picture except in terms of what it revealed about the aesthetics of painting water. He relegated the information that the vessel was a slave ship to a footnote in the first volume of *Modern Painters*" (14). In place of aesthetics, Gilroy introduces the sublime, present in in the painting "in its invocation of racial terror, commerce, and England's ethico-political degeneration" (16). But it is a strange sublime in which the wicked steer their way by ship toward the edge of the canvas while the Africans thrown into the water are reduced, largely, to arms and hands thrust out of the waves, shark fins close by promising a further disintegration of the human form. And it is possible here to return to the images of the dead women and find the

edge of the dream at the point where the body disappears into the water. In each case, the bottom half of the woman melts into a mixture of fabric and river. They are the women without feet.

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It is simple enough to look at these pure corpses with missing feet, or a drowning incidental to the plot of a novel, and simply identify them as moments of naturalism. Fredric Jameson writes, for instance, that "naturalism's various and quite distinct exemplifications all share in a more general narrative paradigm, which could be described as the trajectory of decline and failure, of something like an entropy on the level of the individual destiny" (Jameson 149). Decline and failure become not simply moral but extend to the level of the body, even if only at its extremities. Naturalism, as David Baguley suggests in *Naturalist Fiction,* is defined by an entropic orientation, and particularly the undermining of "bourgeois order" by the "biological order of corruption" (211). Social order, structure, and ceremony is flooded by the natural. "At the heart of the naturalist vision," Baguley writes, "there is a poetics of disintegration, dissipation, death, with its endless repertory of wasted lives, of destructive forces, of spent energies, of crumbling moral and social structures, with its promiscuity, humiliations, degradation, its decomposing bodies, its invasive materialism" (222). Naturalism is defined by the movement from order to chaos, whether at the level of the individual or the social, the node or the network, the city or the street. One of the benefits of identifying the drowned corpse as part of a naturalist tendency, movement, or ideology would be to take up John Plotz's challenge of excavating a British naturalist tradition that has otherwise gone unnoticed. The drowned corpse serves as a reminder, in works characterized by fortuitous windfalls and improbable

inheritances, that all of this will one day come to an end—that eventually the species will extinguish and there will be no more marriages, no more inheritance, no more political economy.

The problem with this approach to the drowned, sensible as it may be, is first that it mischaracterizes the relation between political economy and population in the nineteenth-century novel. There is no reason to think, reading *Moby Dick*, that the loss of a whaling vessel and its entire crew leads to a crisis for capitalism, or that a woman with no feet exposes the baselessness of bourgeois propriety, or that Maggie and Tom's drowning in the great flood at the end of *Mill on the Floss* represents a crisis for industry at St. Olaf's. Rather, regarding this last example, though nature may not repair all its ravages, five years after the flood "the wharves and warehouses on the Floss were busy again, with echoes of eager voices, with hopeful lading and unlading… Dorlcote Mill was rebuilt" (656). These moments are less reminders of capitalism's inevitable collapse—along with human extinction—than a reminder of what Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels suggested long ago: bourgeois political economy produces a superfluous population and, indeed, depends on its existence. There will always be more boys running away from home and willing to join a whaling crew. However correct this may be, the two approaches share the same problem of assuming that the meaning of novel is best explicated in a march from the first page to the last, or that the persistence of conflicting ideologies and images within a text can be resolved simply by valuing an ending more than a middle.

The answer to this conundrum lies elsewhere or, rather, in a return to the pure corpses through the very examples that seem to be their opposite. After all, there is no need to look to disappearing feet in order to establish that drowned corpses disintegrate in the nineteenth century. Laurent's obsessive return to the Paris Morgue, searching for Camille's body, becomes a meditation on the drowned corpse. "Often the flesh of the face was coming away bit by bit, the

bones had pierced the softened skin, and the whole face was a mere flabby pulp…. But all drowned corpses are fat, and he saw enormous bellies, blown-up thighs, and great round arms" (*Therese,* 108). The corpse, it appears, is jeering at Laurent. A jet of water flakes away the nose and lips, exposing the teeth so that "The drowned head burst out laughing" (108). Here there are no bodies immune to the destructive force of water, or natural processes of decay. They rot in public, losing their form, becoming too big in some places and contracting in others. The drowned, as Doctor Griffin attests in *The Mysteries of Paris,* change color, turning blue as they take water into their lungs. The corpses in Zola's morgue do attest to Baguley and Jamesons's theses on naturalism. There is an entropic vision, both for the drowned and for Laurent himself, who spirals into the nightmare of the second half of the novel. But these lengthy descriptions of the material corruption of the drowned is not at all particular to the naturalist novel. Consider, for instance, Thoreau's description of the corpses that wash up on Cape Cod. On the beach, he writes,

> I saw many marble feet and matted heads as the cloths were raised, and one livid, swollen and mangled body of a drowned girl—who probably had intended to go out to service in some American family—to which some rags still adhered, with a string, half concealed by the flesh, about its swollen neck; the coiled-up wreck of a human hulk, gashed by the rocks or fishes, so that the bone and muscle were exposed, but quite bloodless—merely red and white—with wide-open and staring eyes, yet lusterless, dead-lights; or, like the cabin windows of a stranded vessel, filled with sand. (5-6)

In each case, there is a loss of corporeal integrity as form is deformed, subjection to the jetting streams of the morgue and ocean waves, a concern with the inside becoming outside, the concealed coming to grisly light. Likewise, there is the drowned corpse in *Almayer's Folly* (1895), "lying on the mud with covered face in a grotesquely unnatural contortion of mangled and broken limbs, one twisted and lacerated arm, with white bones protruding in many places through the torn flesh, stretched out" (62). That the face of the dead man has been smashed in

with a rock before being thrown to the flood matters little for Conrad's description. Here, too, the inside becomes outside and form deformed. All three of these are examples of the drowned body that has come to rest: in the morgue, on the beach, or in the mud. There is a sense of animation—Zola's jeering corpse, and Conrad's which reaches a dead hand towards his spectators—but this animation appears as a result of natural processes. For a scene of the drowned body tossed and turned, there is Quilp's death at the end of *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Drunk in a fog, he stumbles off the docks by his office into the filthy water of the Thames, which "toyed and sported with its ghastly freight, now bruising it against the slimy piles, now hiding it in mud or long rank grass, now dragging it heavily over rough stones and gravel, now feigning to yield it to its own element, and in the same action luring it away, until, tired of the ugly plaything, it flung it on a swamp—a dismal place where pirates had swung in chains through many a wintry night—and left it there to bleach" (620). The disfigurement here is reported rather than described. Dickens is not very concerned with the collapse of Quilp's human form, and perhaps this is simply because, as a "crafty dwarf" with monkey-like abilities, Quilp has already lost, in Dickens's estimation, a human form (129). It is instead a description of the process of drowning, the abjection of a body that has no defense against the fury of the elements—a polluted end for a polluted person. From this point of view, it seems quite simple to hold to the position that the drowned corpse signifies moments of naturalism within texts that otherwise seem distant from the naturalist tradition.

Jumping to such a position too quickly, however, ignores the spell of enchantment cast by nineteenth-century waters, the association of drowning with freedom—and even pleasure. Consider this sentiment expressed in *The Old Curiosity Ship.* As the down-and-out crowds of London cross the various bridges over the Thames, they remember "to have heard or read in some old time that drowning was not a hard death, but of all means of suicide the easiest and

best" (44). It is an odd statement, given Quilp's gruesome end but, indeed, perhaps the old time that London's pedestrians have heard or read was not so old at all, but as recently as four years earlier Dickens's own *Pickwick Papers.* The dismal man asks Pickwick, as they stare down at the Medway from the Rochester Bridge, to consider the happiness and peace of drowning. The dismal man thinks of it often: "The calm, cool water seems to me to murmur an invitation to repose and rest. A bound, a splash, a brief struggle; there is an eddy for an instant, it gradually subsides into a gentle ripple; the waters have closed above your head, and the world has closed upon your miseries and misfortunes forever" (130). There is no abjection here in death.

It would be a mistake, in this sense, to say that in drowning the social order is corrupted by the natural. Rather, drowning seems to solve the corruption of the social order. The dismal man hears an invitation. This invitation becomes properly erotic in *The Awakening,* when Edna stands on the shore looking at the glittering water of the Gulf. "The voice of the sea is seductive," writes Chopin, "never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude" (175). And there is no sense here that the seduction is a typical nineteenth century seduction, resulting in humiliation for the compromised woman and escape for some wealthy rake. Likewise, consider here the correspondent in Crane's "Open Boat," pitched into the water as the survivors of a wreck try to swim to an unpopulated area of the Florida coast: "In his struggle to reach the captain and the boat, he reflected that when one gets properly wearied drowning must really be a comfortable arrangement—a cessation of hostilities accompanied by a large degree of relief" (239). In some sense, each of these passages simply repeats an old commonplace about death as release—and yet they are not dealing generally with death but particularly with drowning as a superior way to kill oneself: gunshot to the head or the heart, a cup of poison, jumping, hanging, incineration, starvation.

That we are dealing particularly with drowning, rather than generally with death, is nowhere clearer than in the cases of those who, desiring to kill themselves, recognize the siren song of drowning and nevertheless turn away. This might, in some senses, be a Romantic tradition inaugurated by Goethe's Werther. Young, distraught, and in love, Werther wanders in the moonlight by a river. It's a sublime spectacle of wind and water and, Werther writes to his friend Wilhelm, "a shudder of horror shook me—and then longing seized me again! Ah, there I stood, arms outstretched, above the abyss, breathing: plunge! Plunge!—and was lost in the joyful prospect of ending my sufferings and sorrows by plunging, passing on with a crash like the waves! But oh!—I could not move an inch from where I stood" (111-12). Witnessing the sublime, as the following lines make clear, he wants to incorporate himself into the very forces of nature that terrify and dazzle him. But he turns away from the river. Instead, dressed in his finest clothes and with his special ribbon, he shoots himself in the head, opens a vein in his arm—and still lingers on for hours until finally dying.

But what looks to Werther like incorporation with the sublime looks to Lucien Chardon, Balzac's hero in *Lost Illusions* (1837 – 1843), simply as putrefaction. Lucien returns to the provinces after the collapse of his fortunes and literary ambitions in Paris. Walking by a river, he too considers throwing himself in, but cannot after considering how disgusting his body would be: "as he walked down the slopes of Beaulieu for the last time he could hear in advance the hubbub his suicide would arouse and visualize the appalling spectacle of his body, swollen and deformed, being dragged from the water and the inquest which would follow" (633-634). Finally, for the unnamed English teacher who narrates *Under Western Eyes* (1912), water appears as a mesmerizing force exerting a magnetic pull even for those who otherwise have no thoughts of death. He says, of Razumov in Geneva, that "He hung well over the parapet, as if

captivated by the smooth rush of the blue water under the arch. The current there is swift, extremely swift; it makes some people dizzy; I myself can never look at it for any length of time without experiencing a dread of being suddenly snatched away by its destructive force. Some brains cannot resist the suggestion of irresistible power and of headlong motion" (145). Razumov too picks a different kind of sacrifice, confessing his betrayals to revolutionaries who beat him into a life of convalescence, and throwing himself in front of vehicles in the street.

This is a long catalog with brief examples, but they are steps on the path to demonstrating the particularity of drowning against other modes of death, and particularly other paths to suicide. There is no contradiction here between the pleasure of drowning and the disgust invoked by sodden, mangled corpses. Rather, as with Lucien, the ease of drowning is foregone to avoid becoming one of those deformed bodies, subject to the prying eyes of the public. So here is the oddity of the drowned as a population: they are united, yes, by a shared ending, but that ending is itself a process of transformation. It is easy, given the abjection of drowned corpses here, to simply believe that these transformations are processes of corruption, movement from a higher order to a lower one. It is easy, also, to believe that these transformations simply amount to being overwhelmed by natural forces, and that there is real pleasure here—a dream of being smacked around in the water rather than a nightmare. But it is good to be suspicious of easy interpretations, and these theses may be considered as ports in a storm. They are adequate for survival, but the point is still to set sail.

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The drowned are a population that transform. Distending, distorting, flaking away, or resurrected. Quilp becomes an abject object, but even within Dickens this process does not apply to all of the drowned. Silas Wegg and John Rokesmith in *Our Mutual Friend* are both

resurrected after drowning, even if Wegg lives only to drown again. Alfred Russel Wallace, writing in *The Malay Archipelago* (1869), suggests a similar link in Indonesia. He relates an account heard in the Aru Island of strange visitors who "made a great net of rattans, and entangled their prisoners in it, and sunk them in the water; and the next day, when they pulled the net up on shore, they made the drowned men come to life again, and carried them away" (359). It is a story of drowning and resurrection, transformed through magic rather than Christian resurrection, raised to a new life of servitude to the very ones who have killed them.

There is a tendency to imagine that things simply disappear in underwater realms, the abyss, the seas. The *Pequod* sinks in a vortex of bodies and shattered wood and leaves no trace of its passing. The sea is a medium apparently without history, so that "From the book of Genesis to the English Romantic poets, the historicity of the ocean has been consistently denied, repressed, or erased" (Brayton 22-23). The transformation of the drowned is poised against this tradition of annihilation. Somewhere between corruption and resurrection is Charles Lyell's account in *Principles of Geology.* Particularly concerned about the power of geological forces to preserve history, namely objects of human culture, Lyell considers shipwrecks and the drowned. "Many decompose, he writes of the sunken crews, "on the floor of the ocean where no sediment is thrown down upon them, but if they fall upon a reef where corals and shells are becoming agglutinated into a solid rock, or subside where the delta of a river is advancing, they may be preserved for an incalculable series of ages in these deposits" (320). Here the drowned are preserved in muck, sludge, and rock where otherwise they might disappear completely. Lyell's account is remarkably dry, considering that he deals in a long, wet history of catastrophe, death, and dismemberment. The sea and earth possess a history, but the drowned are folded into reflections on geological transformation.

The inverse of this bloodless account is present in the writings of those who have addressed, in particular, the drowned of the Atlantic slave trade, estimated to total 1.8 million over the course of its long history (Rediker 5). Here too there are divergences in understanding the transformation of the drowned. Christina Sharpe, speaking of the difficulty of recovering the individuality of slaves drowned in the Middle Passage, says that even if any of number of Africans did not survive the passage, "they, like us, are alive in hydrogen, in oxygen; in carbon, in phosphorus, and iron; in sodium and chlorine. This is what we know about those Africans thrown, jumped, dumped overboard in Middle Passage; they are with us still, in the time of the wake, known as residence time" (19). Life leaves the human forms and enters a new, dispersed body of minerals and elements. This might at first seem like naïve solace, vitalism extending liveliness to the inanimate in order to avoid coming to grips with the trauma of genocide. But Sharpe's point is rather the opposite: it is not that the drowned are settled, but that the long history of drowning extends to the present. For Édouard Glissant, what remains of Africans drowned in the slave trade is not minerals but shackles: "Whenever a fleet of ships gave chase to slave ships, it was easiest just to lighten the boat by throwing cargo overboard, weighing it down with balls and chains. These underwater signposts mark the course between the Gold Coast and the Leeward Islands" (6). John Drabinski, glossing on the shackles from Glissant's *Poetics of Relation,* remarks, "there are not bodies—decaying or ashen, bloated or decimated—in the shackles. Only the shackles… remain" (53).

Mineral, element, shackle—these are the remainders of the drowned, and the resources of those who have tried to recover their history. Yet the dead do not simply break down into their composite parts through a long period of subjection to pressure and currents. They are consumed. Studies of whale corpses, as Sharpe mentions, have demonstrated that "within a few days the

whales' bodies are picked almost clean by benthic organisms—those organisms that live on the seafloor… it is most likely that a human body would not make it to the seafloor intact" (40). The mineral remains of the dead are indeed the results of being eaten by sea life. It is well known that sharks trailed slave ships from continent to continent, waiting for an inevitable feast. "The destruction of corpses by sharks," writes Rediker, "was a public spectacle and part of the degradation of enslavement… Slaving captains consciously used sharks to create terror throughout the voyage" as well as in port, to prevent escape from the hold and desertion by unhappy crew members" (39). In the same passage from the *Principles* where he speaks of humans preserved in coral and sludge, Lyell writes, "Many of these corpses are instantly devoured by predaceous fish, sometimes before they reach the bottom; still more frequently… they rise again to the surface and float in a state of putrefaction" (320).

That bodies continue to circulate, rather than disappearing, is apparent especially in tales of maritime adventure and catastrophe. In Hugo's *Toilers of the Sea* (1866), Gilliatt salvages a steam engine from a ship stranded off the Channel Islands. Gilliatt, who eventually drowns himself after his beloved marries someone else, first finds the drowned skeleton of the steamship captain, flesh eaten by crabs and octopus. The possibility of being eaten by marine life and monsters becomes here a terrified metaphysical argument that the existence of the octopus—known as the devilfish—proves the existence of Satan. The transformation of the corpse, for Hugo, begins with the crab: "Crabs are the burying beetles of the sea. The putrefying flesh attracts them; they make for the corpses; they eat it, and the devilfish eats them. The dead things disappear into the crab, and the crab disappears into the devilfish. We have already noted this law" (362). Indeed, it is notable here that disappearance is a form of incorporation rather than a process of metabolism and waste. The drowned are incorporated to such an extent that Gilliatt

"no longer wanted crabs: it would have been like eating human flesh" (362). Gilliatt has no need to eat the dead man here but, over and over in marine tales and accounts of shipwreck is the confrontation with cannibalism—either as the thing, above all, to be avoided, or as an action that must finally be committed in order to survive.

It may be correct to say, along with Dan Brayton, that "Romantic and Victorian poets tend to characterize the sea as a space of alterity, a source of the sublime, essentially ineffable" (28). Perhaps there is something sublime—sublimely terrifying—in Hugo's account of being eaten by a crab, but for Romantic writers such as Byron and Poe, it is difficult to see anything in cannibalism but raw hunger and absurdity. Byron's Don Juan first sacrifices his dog to be eaten by the survivors of his shipwreck, and then his tutor is killed in order to be eaten:

> Part was divided, part thrown in the sea,
> And such things as the entrails and the brain
> Regaled two sharks who followed o'er the billow.
> The sailors ate the rest of poor Pedrillo (II 77, 5-8).

Indeed, transformation in this instance is a process that begins even before drowning: divided into parts, some for the ocean, some for the sharks, some for the sailors. There is a similar division of the corpse in Poe's *Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838): some for the seagulls, some for the fish, and some for the surviving crew members. Poe writes, "Let it suffice to say that, having in some measure appeased the raging thirst which consumed us by the blood of the victim, and having by common consent taken off the hands, feet, and head, throwing them together with the entrails, into the sea, we devoured the rest of the body piecemeal' (117). As is typical in many accounts of cannibalism, it begins with a certain reluctance to speak of the act itself, only to finish with an inventory of dismemberment. If the sublime is here, it is a distinctly filthy sublime, one given to ironic reversal grotesque consumption.

Drowning in these texts determines who eats you, and which parts, rather than as a strict choice between whether one is eaten or not. This is explicit at the opening of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), which begins with a sinking ship and starvation upon a lifeboat. Prendick addresses, without naming it, the specter of cannibalism hanging over the boat: "Helmar gave voice to the thing we all had in mind. I remember our voices dry and thin, so that we bent towards one another and spared our words. I stood out against it with all my might, was rather for scuttling the boat and perishing together among the sharks that followed us" (8). Better for everyone to enter the water and be eaten by the sharks than to eat one another. Likewise in Conrad's *Falk* (1903), a steamship breaks down and drifts slowly towards the Antarctic. Food stores on the ship run out until "One day Falk came upon a man gnawing at a splinter of pine wood. Suddenly he threw the piece of wood away, tottered to the rail, and fell over" (139). This drowning man is joined the next day by another, and those who remain on board are the ones finally cannibalized by Falk. That Falk is over and over described as a born monopolist closes the strange circle between drowning, cannibalism, and political economy. The logic of monopoly is, Conrad suggests, also the logic of cannibalism, a diversion of resources from the many to the few, a willingness to consume both the living and the dead in order to survive. If this logic is not apparent in regards to the slave ship, Martin Delany's *Blake* (1859 – 1862) provides an account as a slave ship returning to Cuba from Africa is pursued to the point that the captain decides to jettison his human cargo in order to escape: "Then came a scene the most terrible. Men, women and children raging with thirst, famished, nauseated with sea sickness, stifled for want of pure air, defiled and covered with loathsomeness, one by one were brought out, till the number of six hundred were thrown into the mighty deep" (231). If the clipper is a monster, then those within its hold are effectively in the belly of the beast. In metaphorical terms, the drowned slaves have

already been eaten and pass from one belly to another, just as the survivors of oceanic passage are sold in Cuba to be eaten to death by the plantation system that awaits.

Mineral, element, shackle, and food—a population that transforms within a political economy of cannibalism.

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No doubt there is something strange about constructing a new population within Victorian literature, one that includes representatives of groups that are otherwise kept separate or, rightly, seen in antagonism to one another. Wealthy estate holders and starving slaves, poor women and abusive husbands, imperial subjects and rulers, black and white subjects. The promise and danger of these relations are present already in the nineteenth century, in the proliferation of treatises on political economy that compare the condition of women and industrial labor to slavery. Catherine Gallagher detailed these comparisons three decades ago, noting that while abolition's energies were sometimes diverted towards improving factory conditions, "The comparison was made both to defend black slavery and to condemn capitalism; it was made both to discredit the leaders of the antislavery movement and to exploit their success" (5). Victorian literature can already appear as a cascade of whiteness, both in terms of the authors who are read and the representations of humanity within their texts. To bring together the victims of a system and its profiteers risks perpetuating this flood of whiteness, patriarchy, and capitalist exploitation. Yet as often as drowning in these texts is the product of the failures of commerce and trade—sinking ships, broken engines, busted pumps, speculation, exploitation—it is also presented as the dissolution of antagonism. Slaves are cast overboard as part of a ship's rigid hierarchy, a hierarchy that dissolves when the entire ship sinks. Ham and Steerforth drown

together, as do Silas Wegg and Bradley Headstone. As Gwendolen comments early on in *Daniel Deronda,* "It seems to me a very extraordinary world if people in our position must sink in this way all at once" (226). Here she means sinking as metaphor, purely a loss of fortune. But here statement has a strangely different echo by the end of the novel, in which Grandcourt does literally sink. Yet the problem remains that while drowning can erase distinction between class, among the dead, it does not guarantee that a million drowned bodies will lead to redistribution—a new world!—rather the further concentration of wealth in the hands of the few.

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There is nothing new in the observation that nineteenth-century political economy is marked by cruelty, or that it chews up the destitute only to spit them out as waste or reduce them to commodities, or that the tendency of capitalism is to produce a monopoly system of accumulation by dispossession. If that is all, then the drowned seem to map onto one standard history of the nineteenth century: the history of commodification in which all things are absorbed into the market as part of the march of capitalism to transform all relations, subjects, and objects, to blur the lines between them or invert them entirely so that it is capital and commodities that possess freedom while the mass of humanity experiences lack and starvation, servitude and slavery. From this point of view, they offer at least a new path to an old well of criticism.

But the task is to see something new rather than to find a novel way to confirm what is already known. First, a few more words on the difficulties of finding a method of analysis. When humans—dead and alive—are property, they start to look like other forms of property. Books, for instance. In *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain,* Leah Price notes exactly the danger of a method of inquiry that collapses everything together. Writing about paper recycling

and reuse in Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, Price writes, "A third possible explanation is more reductive: you could say that paper gets resold in Mayhew's London simply because everything does" (222). So it might go for the drowned, part of a commodity circuit—like all other nineteenth-century objects. But Price continues, saying, "The question of whether books stand outside the market becomes a test case of whether anything at all stands outside the market" (223). Here is the promise of escape. Yet the Victorian debate that Price focuses on is not between circulation or stasis, between appropriation by the market or escape from it, but whether or not circulation adds or reduces value, reanimates the object or degrades it materially and economically. This might be described as the hermeneutic victory of commodification: the debate is not whether or not the object is itself a commodity, but how valuable it is.

In that sense, shipwreck does nothing to threaten the circuits of capital and even drowning offers no escape to the dead, who remain commodities. Markus Rediker notes that part of what the slave ship's captain and crew did to slaves was to "slowly transform them into commodities for the international labour market," but there are good reasons to believe that they exist in the market even after death (7). Emblematic here are the events that took place on the slave ship *Zong* in 1781. The captain, en route to Jamaica, massacred 130 slaves to collect insurance. As Ian Baucom writes, there is a good deal of truth in the suggestion "that the money forms of the trans-Atlantic slave trade could attach themselves not only to the slaves who reached the markets of the Caribbean alive but also to those drowned along the way; that a sufficiently credible imagination could see in a drowned slave a still existent, guaranteed, and exchangeable form of currency" (92). The drowned continue to exist as commodities, existing now not only in minerals and elements, or in the guts of sharks, but as paper in insurance ledgers and credit statements. Even the dead cannot escape the long clutch of capital.

After the hermeneutic victory of commodities comes the hermeneutic victory of capital, a sense that every apparent escape is false, demonstrating once again the total dominance of capitalism over life. There is no reason to reject the historicity of Baucom's account. Indeed, the value of his inquiry is that it captures so clearly the logic and mechanics by which individuals become types, material becomes abstraction, humans become commodities, and the drowned become profit. Elaine Freedgood addresses this problem in *Ideas in Things*: "we tend to become nervous about things—they all seem to be commodities" (140). Even finding what appears to be a thing, we discover that we have been duped by yet another commodity. A false escape, and then another round of appropriation and dispossession. Much of this work is devoted to excavating Victorian commodity culture and its appearance in the Victorian novel. The final part documents, alongside this commodity culture, the existence of Victorian thing culture which "in its profusion, intensity, and heedless variety, displays that appalling lack of irony, of distance, of coolness that we so often cringe at in the worst examples of Victorian middle-class taste" (148). By analogy, to see in the drowned corpse something other than a commodity risks not only being a dupe, but being a tasteless dupe. Better by far for the critic to insist that capitalism is a totalizing system of ruthless efficiency, able to capture even what it discards, rather than to characterize it as a system of profligate waste that cannot hold on to the very commodities that it produces.

It is tempting to say that how drowning works in nineteenth-century literature, the work of drowning, is to show the possibility of a world beyond commodity, property, and capital. Certainly, the narrative of slaves drowning in nineteenth century literature is a narrative of freedom and escape. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's runaway slave throws herself in the water off Pilgrim's Point, saying:

> I fall, I swoon! I look at the sky.
> The clouds are breaking on my brain;
> I am floated along, as if I should die
> of liberty's exquisite pain. (246-249)

It is a strange freedom, not only because of the old correspondence between death and liberty, but because here it is not properly drowning that kills the slave, but liberty itself. The water carries her; freedom sinks her. The scene of drowning is clearer in William Wells Brown's *Clotel* (1853), the first novel published by an African American. Clotel, one of two daughters of Thomas Jefferson, born into slavery, stares down at the Potomac, hearing her pursuers at hand, "showing how vain would be any further effort for freedom. Her resolution was taken. She clasped her *hands* convulsively, and raised *them* as she at the same time raised her *eyes* towards heaven, and begged for that mercy and compassion *there*, which had been denied her on earth; and then, with a single bound, she vaulted over the railings of the bridge, and sunk for ever beneath the waves of the river!" (185). Here it is not quite that the world beneath the waves appears as utopia. Rather, the path to heaven is through the murky waters of the abyss.

The story of population that the drowned tell is not one of masses subjected to deprivation. Liberty and freedom emerge, but the conundrum remains: freedom from what, if it is possible even for the drowned corpse to remain a commodity just as the body in life was property. Perhaps it is possible that the proper distinction is not, after all, between being property and not being property, but of being a population that labors and a population that does not. So, a tentative formulation: the drowned are a population whose labor can no longer be appropriated, who are free from the crushing burden of work—even the work of haunting. It is a population marked, yes, by a shared ending, but that shared ending is itself the first stage in a further series of transformations. They transform, but not through their own labors and, in that way, it is not a

Marxist story either. The population grows continually, in number, but through submersion rather than reproduction. They promise, in a century marred by alienation, a strange dream of incorporation. And, if they must belong to a territory, then they share one as inhabitants of the sunken world that I have called Victorian Atlantis.

Chapter Two:

The Form of the Wave: On the Political Economy of Dissolution

There is a devil haunting hermeneutics, and it is the devil of transparency – a tempting specter after the exhausting work of collecting corpses that seem to mean nothing until they are lined up together. Drowned corpses trickle together until they form a flood of bodies coursing through the nineteenth century novel. This flood is visible only through the widespread collection of examples that may then be abstracted as a multitude. Incorporation in these cases is a process of dissolution as the corpse is eaten, or rots in the elements. But the most visible waves of bodies in the nineteenth century are, rather, watery representations of crowds: laborers streaming through the streets on their way home, the surging ocean of humanity on the battlefield, a torrent of protestors roaming through the countryside. Incorporation, in these cases, is not a matter of the individual losing form but, rather, of giving form together to a new sort of creature. The temptation of a single image—a stream of people—is that it seems to solve so many interpretive difficulties posed by the flood of individual corpses. No longer, it seems, is there any need to flit across the century in order to demonstrate a relation between maritime and domestic fiction. Everything is right there, on a single street in a single scene of a single text. No need to trace endless paths of disintegration when the surge is fully formed. No need, apparently, to hunt out ideologies lurking in straightforward material descriptions, or to ponder the uncomfortable question of whether a corpse means one thing rather than another, or to poke one's fingers into a collapsing human frame to see what's inside. Everything is already here, transparent, in the metaphor itself.

The drowned are incidental to most nineteenth-century plots, but much work has been done in studies of the nineteenth-century novel to demonstrate that crowds, mobs, and multitudes are of central importance. Grappling with the fact that Zola's characters are less developed than his mobs, Naomi Schor argues against a generation of critics who assume that "the proper subject of the novel is the individual, writing about crowds is not as good (read: great) as writing about individuals, hence Zola's undisputed achievement is ultimately secondary" (xxii-xiii). Schor's analysis is authoritative, surveying Zola's output to collect a multitude of multitudes and detail their functions as primary to the workings of his novels. The crowd can be analyzed not only for how it is represented, but also how it represents. For Schor, this makes the crowd central to the novel. For John Plotz, in *The Crowd,* the relationship is rather one of competition. Crowds proliferate in nineteenth-century texts due to changes in public debate and behavior that "make crowds, variously defined, into a potent rival to the representational claims of literary texts themselves" (2). The crowd, the demonstration, the rally—all "come to seem an available medium for the working classes to articulate shared grievances" (98). Yet the stronger that crowds seem in the novel, the weaker novels seem among the crowd. More recently, Emily Steinlight claims that crowds vivify the novel. Rather than existing in competition with each other, mass population makes possible genres and modes of writing such as "the city novel, industrial realism, sensation fiction, and naturalism" (12). Indeed, the distinction between individual and society collapses, as do "all socially codified distinctions between fit and unfit organisms, productive and wasted lives. The result is a collective subject that necessarily exceeds itself" (16). These are all arguments of centrality. Drowned corpses float around as the residue of suicide, or as reminders of the horrors of everyday life, while Zola's crowds burn buildings,

trample through department stores, and jam up streets. Their actions form the plot, rather than acting as background.

The crowd is central, but in becoming central it threatens the autonomy of literature, which now seems to testify to its own weakness and, vampire-like, suck life out of the energetic world of mobs and political economy. In parallel fashion, metaphors seem to drain the very passages they are supposed to energize, inasmuch as they reduce the material world to the mirror of some particular character's psyche. Tempests and downpours come to mean that David Copperfield is feeling gloomy. A stream of people in an industrial city means that Little Nell is feeling overwhelmed. Metaphor tells readers what they already know. Meant to vivify, metaphor petrifies, and the challenge is to demonstrate the productivity of the metaphor. One version of this approach is to demonstrate the productivity of the metaphor within nineteenth-century thought. The body and communication networks, for Laura Otis, are an example of a mutually-productive exchange between physiologists and engineers: "As can be seen, by studying comparisons between organic and technological communication systems, metaphors do not 'express' scientists' ideas; they *are* the ideas… In the nineteenth century, the real 'language of communication' was metaphor itself" (47-48). This is the metaphor that, rather than merely illuminating or obscuring, produces. Metaphor loses its vehicular origins, its status as a beast of burden, and becomes a different animal entirely. Barri Gold in *ThermoPoetics* makes a similar argument about scientific language: "As *energy* began, in the mid-nineteenth century, to wend its way back into the good graces of science, it did so by building on a well-established reputation of social and metaphorical usage" (5). Metaphor, in this sense, leads to the question of whether literature actually does something or whether it merely reflects and expresses, like an oozing sore, the dominant ideologies of its time.

In a material world there is no room for metaphor, and waves of people provide a means of understanding the limits of surface reading. The metaphor itself threatens surface reading precisely because of how difficult it is to read literally. The wave, which first seems to bear criticism back to the neglected material world of the novel—furniture and weather, food and fluids—simply casts it back to the shores of the old world of humanism. But returning to the human does not have to mean a return to the same familiar human subject. The metaphor, so sensible at first, turns into a chain of confusion. Consider here, for instance, *Germinal's* miners at the fair: "All the way from Montsou there was a stream of people, pouring down the wide street with its brightly painted houses, filing out into the sunshine and down the winding road, forming one long crocodile, like a colony of ants that had lost its way crossing the flat, bare plain. The inevitable black mud had dried, giving off a black dust, floating around them like a storm cloud" (154). The crowd liquefies, coagulates again into an ancient reptile, disperses into a swarm of insects, then transcends into an atmospheric disturbance. The crowd becomes less and less transparent as the metaphors pile on in a series of transformations. That metaphor is a sign of ambiguity rather than clarity is exactly the complaint of Eugene Wrayburn in *Our Mutual Friend*, who says to the increasingly confused Mr. Boffin, "I object on principle, as a two-footed creature, to being constantly referred to insects and four-footed creatures" (93). Eugene complains about being compared to bees, dogs, spiders, and camels, for some sensible reasons: it's unfair to model human temperance after a camel when camels have additional stomachs to keep them entertained; and the bees may, perhaps, serve a lesson, but the nature of the lesson is not clear at all, particularly in relation to work and political economy. Wrayburn continues, saying, "To imitate? Or to avoid? … I am not clear, Mr Boffin, but that the hive may be satirical"

(94). Designed to illuminate, the metaphor ends up obscuring its object or, worse, becomes the justification for workers who are never allowed a day off to visit the fair.

The desire to take things literally, in recent scholarship, is a desire to take things seriously—not only to avoid descent into satire and the whirlpool of interpretive games, but as a corrective to the neglect and abuse of the natural world. I share Glissant's suspicion, however, of interpretive models designed to make the world transparent. He writes, "If we examine the process of 'understanding' people and ideas from the perspective of Western thought, we discover that its basis is this requirement for transparency" (190). Glissant's alternative to transparency is opacity, which is "not the obscure, though it is possible for it to be so and accepted as such. It is that which cannot be reduced, which is the most perennial guarantee of participation and confluence" (191). Understanding is not properly a movement from confusion to clarity, but from appearance to obstruction, and from isolation to relation. It is through approaching and confronting interpretive obstructions that the object at hand—the text, the example, the pattern—acquires thickness.

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Multitudes arrive in the form of a wave – as true in today's newspapers as in the nineteenth-century novel. Refugees flood across the border, or a tsunami of the sick and dying overwhelms the hospital. The metaphor is likewise present in literary criticism to describe population and, indeed, the difference between the first wave of the drowned and this second wave can be explained in the difference between two floods that appear, figuratively, in recent criticism. Woloch, in *The One vs. the Many,* writes in regards to *The Pickwick Papers,* "The protagonist's passivity allows a crowd of minor characters to flood into the novel, accruing attention through their compelling singularity" (143). He repeats the metaphor a page later: "Minor

characters…flood into the narrative, in transfixed and permanent states of distortion" (144). However distorted the characters, these floods are about filling up rather than destroying, about saturation through individuation rather than the disappearance of the individual in the currents of a combined force. While Woloch is concerned with the flood of characters within a single text, it applies just as much to the flood of wave of the drowned, which appear in compelling singularity and can be conceived of as a multitude only by looking between texts. The second wave, rather, is about population as a confluence that cannot be individuated. One of the effects of such a confluence is, as Jesse Oak Taylor writes, the London fog, "the product of a simpler and more profound force—population growth. It as a sign of consumption rather than production, the effluence of the ever-rising appetites of a rapidly growing social organism and inextricable from the bourgeois standard of living, to which those flooding the metropolis to seek their fortune aspired" (3). The specificity and energy of minor characters, which matters so much to Woloch, matters very little for understanding the energy system of London. Confluence produces collective effluence; flood produces a fog. Character disappears into the crowd.

The longevity of the metaphor might appear first as a sign of exhaustion. Indeed, in addressing the loss of interpretability and destruction of social meaning as time passes, Elaine Freedgood suggests that "If metaphors lose their force through overuse; metonymies lose theirs through underuse" (68). From this point of view, there is nothing noteworthy about aquatic metaphors—whether in the nineteenth or twenty-first century—except for the annihilation of meaning through repetition. Indeed, the very centrality of the images, as opposed to an irrelevant drowning, seems to dissolve central imagery into mere commonplaces. But such a reading, relying on the circular category of 'overuse', can only emerge out of hatred for the common.

Rather than a strange loss of interpretability, waves of people demonstrate the strange persistence of interpretability – the dream of an image that is immediately useful and transparent.

While streams of people offer first the promise of transparency, of meaning that rests within a single text, it is the very persistence and repetition of the image that introduces interpretive obstructions. These obstructions are best explained by looking to a few examples of liquid crowds from across the century. When plague spreads across the globe in Mary Shelley's *Last Man* (1826), "The English, whether travellers or residents, came pouring in one great revulsive stream back on their own country" (235). In a moment of global crisis, a portion of humanity becomes liquid and, a strange kind of stream, pours in reverse back to its source. While Shelley suggests a provisional principle, that humanity liquefies in response to apocalypse, such a principle erodes in the face of a second example. *Confessions of a Thug*, Philip Meadows Taylor's 1839 novel, is narrated by Ali, an imprisoned leader from the thuggee cult that was of so much interest to British colonial rulers in India. In Hyderabad, Ali's account is full of human oceans and streams jamming the streets of the city during a religious festival. As the torches are lighted, "the sea of human heads revealed itself. There were thousands. The street was so packed from side to side, that to move was impossible" (177). Shelley's example is a continuation of the narrative but here the oceanic imagery swells to the surface in a moment of tranquility amidst episodes of ritual slayings, violence, and theft. Ali's sea is a strange one, an image saturated with life and, and at the same time, a moment of stasis or stagnation. If this seems like an important clue for understanding liquefied humanity, it is only necessary to turn back to Shelley, or look ahead to Zola, to be stymied. Zola's *Debacle* (1892) ends with the formation and destruction of the Paris Commune that followed the Franco-Prussian war. It is not the French army that is ready to continue fighting but rather the civilizations who "were demanding another mass sortie, a

sortie like a flood, with the whole population, women and children, hurling themselves at the Prussians like a river in spate, carrying all before it" (461). The populous flood does not simply stagnate or jam the streets, but moves through them as an annihilating force.

This brief catalogue of examples demonstrates some of the initial problems of understanding the metaphor as a general phenomenon, specifically that the important patterns are not best explained through linear chronology, genre, or the boundaries of a national literature. Indeed, they are best explained when arranged by some other method of organization than the passage of time. But this is not a moment for despair. The dominant method of literary studies is to understand specificity through proximity: a text's relation to itself, or to another by the same author; one sensation novel next to another; one 1840s novel alongside another. The prevalence and persistence of the metaphor is exactly what allows for relation between texts that otherwise seem far apart in subject and form. The goal is neither to end in a mere catalogue of examples, or to diffuse each stream into a general flood, but to show that specificity does not arrive by staring at objects close to one another.

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Water is, in the nineteenth century, a frequent medium for describing crowds. One of the first steps in analyzing that image must be its relation to other images of aggregation, to see if human waves are distinct from human swarms or if, rather, the two metaphors are simply different ways of saying the same thing. When Wordsworth describes multitudes as bees in *The Prelude*, John Plotz notes that that formulation is as old as Homer, "and the effect is often, as here to establish a space between the narrator and the crowd" (23). Cristopher Hollingsworth echoes Plotz, saying, "Even though we know that each tiny form is a human being, from our position they are reduced

to parts of a unified, homogeneous whole" (8). It is already easy to see related effects between the swarm and the wave, even from the few examples that have been described so far. Ali in Hyderabad stands on a balcony, separate from the crowd that washes through the streets below. Lionel Verney, in *The Last Man,* recounts the revulsive English stream returning to its source, but, already being in England, Verney is separate from that stream. The obviousness of the fact that a wave is different than a swarm collapses, apparently, in Zola's irritating decision to describe *Germinal's* crowd with both terms.

Even more disappointing, swarms and waves become merely matters of perspective. Interpretation, reliant itself on metaphors of illumination, sees vision everywhere it looks. The interpreter—whether the narrator, the hero, or the critic—sees something in a new light, but the world is unchanged. The wave is not a wave at all, simply the image of a wave. The crowd is just a crowd or, worse, a group of individuals in the image of a crowd. However true it may be that these images of crowds often contain a spatial component and are hinged upon one perspective rather than another, this ignores the specific questions of the composition and function of the crowds. In regards to swarms, once again, Naomi Schor writes of the French and Prussian armies in *The Debacle.* The swarm metaphor applies to both armies so that, in the midst of an international conflict, "Blackness and animalism are qualities not specific to one nationality" (107). The swarm metaphor here does not reduce politics to war between the human and less than human. Rather, humanity is divided into two opposing swarms, or even two factions of the same swarm. There is a second type of doubling in Schor's analysis: "The initially negative valorization of the entomological analogy becomes positive, as the invading ant is replaced by the ant image familiar to the readers of La Fontaine's *Fables,* the hard-working ant" (108). Schor's analysis offers a means of moving past the fact of perspective and distance to the content

and function of the crowd, but it leads to a similar deadlock in which, depending on one's perspective or political allegiance, the swarm appears either as a disturbing threat or as a productive group of workers.

Such an interpretive deadlock requires a solution or, one not being found, at least a better means of dissolving examples. The difficulties of analyzing waves of people are found in Poe's "Man of the Crowd" (1840). A convalescent sitting in a London coffee-house watching a busy street throughout the day until it grows dark and "by the time the lamps were well lighted, two dense and continuous tides of population were rushing past the door" (388). Looking out over the "tumultuous sea of human heads," he starts a process of collection and taxonomy (389). In the crowd he conducts a kind of anthropological investigation, breaking down humanity into its various types: merchants and noblemen, clerks of all kind, pickpockets and gamblers, clergy and peddlers, beggars and invalids, drunkards and women of the town, porters and organ-grinders and artisans. If the tale were to end here, it might simply confirm the similarities between a swarm and a wave, and confirm the relation of distance between observer and crowd. But the convalescent leaves his coffee-shop and enters the stream in order to follow one old man around the streets of London through the entire night and the entirety of the next day. The convalescent's investigation ends in despair as he gives up, saying of the old man, "*He is the man of the crowd.* It will be in vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds" (396). But this only needs to be a moment of despair if it is assumed that analysis should lead to individuation. The insight of the tale is the existence of a collective subject itself, both in the old man, the man of the crowd, and of the stream itself. The very process of taxonomizing is not a testament to the separation of London's classes, but rather of their multiplication, accumulation, and existence as a population in the form of a wave. It is possible to put forward here a

provisional hypothesis, against the thesis of perspective and transparency: the wave, like the drowned corpse, is a figure of transformation.

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The crowd, however continuous it seems when it streams down the street, emerges and dissipates as part of a cycle or rhythm. Naomi Schor argues that Zola's crowds tend to pass through five stages: emptiness, swelling, saturation, discharge, and emptiness again. When the crowd becomes a wave, it is at the point of "*Saturation.* At this stage the crowd has reached its maximum density, occupied every empty square. Zola's recurrent crowd metaphor to describe this stage is oceanic. One might say that this is the stage of the crowd's naturalization" (84). The relation of the crowd to space might be one of distance, the separation between the crowd and some observer, but here the relation changes. The observer disappears, for a time, in the relation between the street and the crowd. For Schor, the multiple stages of the crowd are a distinct feature of Zola's work, inasmuch as "it could easily be demonstrated that in literature as a whole, and in the nineteenth-century French novel in particular, crowds are almost always presented only in their swelling and saturation stages" (86). The tidal waves crash and then withdraw throughout the day; the stream swells and dries following seasonal patterns. In this sense, looking at the crowd involves, as reluctant as I am to return to a figure of illumination, a strange sort of double vision. Raymond Williams suggests, in *The Country and the City*, a similar sort of double vision in the work of Marx and Engels, who, when first looking at nineteenth-century crowds, saw competition, brutal struggle, and the utter reduction of humanity to isolated individuals. But as their work continued, they identified "a different underlying condition: a new

collective proletarian consciousness and self-consciousness, which would transform the society from its bases in industry and the cities. Still what was commonly seen, in immediate experience, was a social dissolution in the very process of aggregation" (216). In terms of floods of people, it is difficult to tell whether what is happening is dissolution in the process of aggregation or, rather, aggregation in the process of dissolution. No doubt this difficulty is because the waves so often contain both and that, being processes of transformation, their logic is dialectic.

For this reason, depending on where one starts it is easy to sign the flood as a sign of either order or disorder. Streams of people quite often indicate the everyday movement of goods and people, orderly traffic, a predictable and regular phenomenon. Consider, for instance, the previous example from Poe, "two dense and continuous tides of population" (338). There is nothing that stands out here as strange, in two sections of the populace moving in two different directions. The strangeness of the image is that of two tides moving in opposite directions in a shared space. Nevertheless, what emerges is exactly a sense of continuity—not in the sense of progress from one state to another, but of repetition. Repetition may also simply mean the same cycle from day to day, as in Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor,* the great record of circulation in mid-century London. Mayhew writes in the second volume that there "are two tides as it were in the daily current of locomotion in the City—the one being at its flood at 11 o'clock A.M., after which it falls gradually till 2 o'clock, when it is at its lowest ebb, and then begins to rise, gradually till 5 o'clock, when it reaches its second flood, and then begins to decline once more" (2.280). Before rush hour was the flood hour. The decline that Mayhew mentions is not a sign of entropy, or disintegration, or crisis, but rather it's opposite—the end of work for the day, a time of rest from commerce and labor and movement. The flood is part of a process of circulation that is regular enough to the point of being—in tidal fashion—a part of

nature. Indeed, what also becomes a part of nature is work itself—the patterns of commerce and labor that set the streams into motion each day.

The aggregate becomes a natural force that, like other natural forces, follows recognizable patterns and cycles. Yet the crowd is naturalized in other ways besides following a series of predictable stages, as in the streets of Paris in Zola's *Masterpiece* (1885): "The Avenue itself was filled with a double stream of traffic, rolling on like twin rivers, with eddies and waves" (66). If the passage were to end here, it would simply be an echo of the twin streams and tidal patterns of Poe and Mayhew's London. But the eddies and waves are not properly—or at least not solely—made of humans. They consist, rather, of "moving carriages tipped like foam with the sparkle of a lamp-glass or the glint of a polished panel, down to the Place de la Concorde… crossed in every direction by the flash of wheels, peopled by black specks which were really human beings" (66). It is only at the end that the populace of Paris appears as part of the urban rivers, and not even as the most important part. They are easy to miss, overshadowed by the carriages and vehicles that have taken over the road. The crowd is a natural force, but only by its incorporation with the non-human: carriages and fountains and strange reflections.

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The crowd appears to be a wave to some distant observer, or it becomes a part of nature. These two readings, as distant as they seem from one another, are both ways of obscuring the wave at the very moment they are trying to render it transparent. This process can be explained by turning to Anna Kornbluh who, in *Realizing Capital*, "contends that 'psychic' economy emerged as the new real estate of a disconcertingly liquid financial universe. Psychic economy realized

capital" (3). Liquid, in this context of financial capital, is not at all about stability, regularity, or rhythm, but rather about evanescence and malleability. Kornbluh traces, through the second half of the nineteenth century, a tendency to understand psychic effects as economic realities. Individual psychology replaces critique of systems so that "the psychological explanations of economic phenomena have the effect of suggesting a mode of regulation that is psychological and libidinal rather than legal or infrastructural" (39). As a consequence of psychic economy, "Economic actors need 'only sit idle,' and the calamities of crashes and instabilities of finance will be smoothly controlled. This effect brings with it an obverse: economic events are not available to political determination, but rather follow their own autonomous course" (39). Political economy takes on the aspect of nature, functioning best when left to its own devices. In the context of the wave, the first tendency to explain its form as psychological—a matter of perception—is followed by a tendency to correspond the wave with nature—an autonomous force. There are no politics in this political economy.

The wave is a populace under transformation but, in practice, transformation often loses its sense of transcendence, the possibility of moving from a lower state into a higher one. In the glittering sunset of Paris, incorporation of the human and non-human into a series of rivers can sound utopian and, maybe, it is. Claude Lantier believes, watching these streams, that Paris is his for the taking. It is not necessary to look to the end of the novel—Lantier's failure as an artist, the death of his child and suicide—to say that this sense of incorporation is fleeting or false. Only a few pages before this stream of traffic that the threat of incorporation emerges: "As Claude turned to cut across the street, an omnibus came bearing down upon him; he had just time to leap on to the pavement, at that point merely a kerb, as the wheels brushed past and splashed him up to his knees" (54). The spectacle of Paris at sunset conceals the filth of dawn, still present

if Claude would simply look down at his pants. Crossing the street begins to look, in Zola, like another kind of drowning. Consider, for instance, the dangers of the street in *The Ladies' Paradise* (1883), and Zola's peculiar description of "Lhomme, the casher, a fat man who had had his right arm cut off by an omnibus" (19). There is no explanation here of the odd mechanics of losing an arm in a traffic accident, but it establishes early on in this novel the dangers of the street. As the commercial success of Octave Mouret's department store, the Paradise, crushes more and more of the small shops in the district, old Robineau is reminded of the missing arm, and tries to commit suicide by jumping in front of a bus. Surviving the attempt, he explains "I thought the people in the Paradise were making fun of me, that great bitch of a shop was crushing me… Then, when the omnibus turned round I thought about Lhomme and his arm, and threw myself under it" (380). Traffic, the lifeblood of the city's commerce and circulatory system, becomes antagonistic to those who have already been crushed by the everyday workings of the market.

Traffic flows endlessly through the streets, joined with streams of pedestrians. It would be a mistake, however, to say that these flows must, in their regularity, be a sign of nature. In *The Nether World* (1889), one of his novels documenting the struggles of the down and out in London, Gissing describes traffic not as nature but as machinery: "Down in Farringdon Street the carts, waggons, vans, cabs, omnibuses, crossed and intermingled in a steaming splash-bath of mud; human beings, reduced to their paltriness, seemed to toil in exasperation along the strips of pavement, bound on errands which were a mockery, driven automaton-like by forces they neither understood nor could resist" (180). There are echoes of Zola here, the street dominated by vehicles while the populace appear small and irrelevant next to them. But the streaming traffic of Zola's streets is a confused mud-bath in Gissing. The population here is not mindless, or even

possessed of a herd mentality. Rather, the suggestion is that their mind is elsewhere, absent from the body but propelling it nonetheless. Regularity is the mark of a mechanical world overwhelming the human. It might even be said here that the human world dominated by traffic is the natural world. Bob Hewett, one of Gissing's London poor, flees into the streets once his counterfeit operation is discovered. It is with "a bound forward like that of a stricken animal he started in blind flight. He came to a crossing, and rushed upon it regardless of the traffic. Before he could gain the farther pavement the shaft of a cart struck him on the breast and threw him down" (335). Hewett dies from the accident, a term taking on strange valence in reference to traffic that is described as regular and automatic. Looking at Zola and Gissing, the story of the wave seems to be rather about expulsion than incorporation, the ejection of the destitute and savory from some promised collective.

The nineteenth-century novel's dream of a collective subject in the wave, so promising at first, seems to shrivel when its operations are exposed to the harsh daylight of the real. The capitalist demons hidden within the novel are purged through critical exorcism, to reveal the hollowed out shell of a plot. Of course, such a hermeneutical gesture is insufficient, and not only because of the old wisdom that when a demon is purged, seven more return in fury to overcome the empty demoniac. The gesture is dependent first on a simplistic understanding that novels express some sort of sole ideology that, if traced properly, can then be exposed. Against this view of aesthetic and ideological unity, Kornbluh writes, "Disjunctive, resistant to univocity or conceptuality, literature can also be thought of as a distinct vehicle of antinomies, of aestheticizing antinomic thought without recourse to the mandates of a logical decision. Literature is not propositional; it is, rather, the aesthetic confluence and syncretism of partial, overlapping, and competing positions" (42). Indeed, in good dialectic fashion, for a novel to even

demonstrate one dominant ideology would require that it carry along, internally, the elements antagonistic to that ideology.

There is, however, a second hermeneutical danger to avoid here, which is the assumption that the only thing required to dismantle ideology is to place it into the open. The limit of such a hermeneutic is that it cannot deal with that which is already in the open. For instance, a population in the form of a wave. As Eleanor Courtemanche writes, "where a Marxist reader will see the novel's plot as determined by economic relations which are hidden by capitalist ideology, I think that novels are also linked to the economy through their engagement with the economic fantasy articulated openly in theories of free-market society" (11). The wave must be considered as one sort of economic fantasy—expressed openly in visible form. The corpses of those struck down in the street may seem to shatter the dream of a collective subject but they are, rather, the cost of its existence.

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The slippage between terms—equating a stream and a sea, for instance—might be an interpretive trick, designed to introduce relation where there is only difference, but such inconsistency is present within the examples. When Little Nell and her grandfather, crushed by debts, flee from London to a distant industrial city in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), they stand in the street like shipwrecked sailors on a desert island: "The throng of people hurried by, in two opposite streams, with no symptom of cessation or exhaustion…. undisturbed in their business speculations, by… all the noise and tumult of a crowded street in the high tide of its occupation: while the two poor strangers, stunned and bewildered by the hurry they beheld but had no part in, looked mournfully on" (413). Such an inconsistency could be explained by the pedantic note that

there are rivers, like the Thames, that are tidal rivers, but this seems to delay arriving at a more accurate conclusion: in the worlds of the nineteenth-century novel, crocodiles get to be storm clouds, and streams get to be oceans.

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If the novel is a vehicle of confluences and deltas, rather than a coherent ideological field or structure, then the contradictions of the human wave are easier to solve. Ordinary life is figured as a continuous stream but, then again, so are moments of catastrophe and war and pestilence. As with the drowned, the solution might simply be to say that the human wave, in ordinary life, is a sign of entropy that emerges just when it seems that the world is able to absorb and circulate every possible loss. Or, faced with widespread naturalistic processes, one might follow Jameson's lead and locate entropic tendencies within realism in general, rather than specifically within naturalism, so that "naturalism's various and quite distinct exemplifications all share in a more general narrative paradigm" (149). Entropy, first appearing at the level of the individual, quickly expands: "Here a fundamental contradiction is articulated in which the dynamic of capitalism is registered as progress (in urbanism, technology, business, civilization) at the same time that the deepest social anxieties take the form of an omnipresent perception of entropy on all social levels" (149). The wave could be a useful example of such a contradiction within the same image: progress combined with loss after loss as individuals are expelled from the river, crushed by traffic and market flows.

Yet it must be acknowledged that these flows are not simply market flows. For every wagon loaded down with cabbages there is a carriage bearing revelers to the theater, or bearing the hungry to dinner at the club, or aiding investigators in their pursuit of some criminal element.

What the wave represents might simply be, as it is for Tolstoy, history itself. His epilogue to *War and Peace* (1869) begins, "The ocean of history was no longer sent surging from one shore to another; it seethed in its depths. Historical figures were no longer borne by the waves from one shore to the other; now they stayed in one place" (1259). This too is a commonplace, that totality and order persists amidst the appearance of chaos and fragmentation. But history itself, not the market, dictates the flows. As Jameson writes of Tolstoy's theory of history, "this position leaves history intact, with all its cataclysmic events, merely stripping it of its actors and decision-makers" (284). The battle of Borodino and Moscow burning are still events of historical importance, though the force behind these events is oceanic rather human. For Jameson, these types of ruminations are primarily indications of the unphilosophical nature of Tolstoy's mind. It is insufficient historical thinking to offer a new explanation of causation for the same events. Rather, the task of historical thinking is a new historiography for a new history, one composed of an entirely different series of events and actors.

The threat of the wave is that, in encompassing everything—all of history!—and in dissipating back into the ocean, it becomes useless for understanding anything. Jameson is correct that Tolstoy's historical ruminations are part of "the attempt to solve a properly narratological issue… the problem of the representation of collectivity," and yet he neglects Tolstoy's common image of collective liquefaction that persists throughout *War and Peace* (280). For instance, consider Prince Nesvitsky crossing the Enns, staring first at the rapid water beneath and then turning to the troops crossing the bridge in "the same kind of formless living tidal wave of soldiers, with their covered shakos, knapsacks, bayonets, long muskets" (145). Rather than being borne by the wave of history, the Russian army becomes the wave itself, a form that includes the soldiers, their property and belongings and the mud underfoot. Tolstoy's

history may include events, but it is also a history of passages and middles, of waves that appear in the middle of the countryside.

Still, these surges signify moments of conflict and turmoil where they have previously signified integration and incorporation. The human flood, from this point of view, might sensibly be considered as an image of conflict in ordinary life—a sign of war in the midst of peace, a sign of dissolution in the middle of a stream. H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* (1898) then offers the secret key to understanding Poe or Mayhew or Dickens. Consider, for instance his lengthy description of the evacuation from London after the Martian attacks have begun.

> So you understand the roaring wave of fear that swept through the greatest city in the world just as Monday was dawning—the stream of flight rising swiftly to a torrent, lashing in a foaming tumult round the railway-stations, banked up into a horrible struggle about the shipping in the Thames, and hurrying by every available channel northward and eastward. By ten o'clock the police organization, and by mid-day even the railway organizations, were losing coherency, losing shape and efficiency, guttering, softening, running at last in that swift liquefaction of the social body. (82)

I include the whole passage, partially, to demonstrate that waves of bodies so often arrive in a wall of text. At times no more than a phrase, they often themselves gather force in a process of narrative expenditure, piling up metaphors rather than stripping them down. A wave of fear produces a stream of people; the social body includes not merely the human population but its technologies of transportation and its regulatory institutions. The truth of the regular stream of capital is revealed simply by allowing the stream to continue rather than stopping it up.

The ascent into abstraction in these last few lines should indicate a certain amount of dissatisfaction in this reading. Such a reading is possible, but so is the reverse. The truth of Wells might very well be, just as much, in Dickens: the human torrents reveal cohesion and aggregation even at the moments of utter social collapse. The attempt to bridge the two kinds of

examples—war and peace—ends with antinomy rather than a relation that can resolve the differing contexts by finding one inside the other. There is a simpler step to take by reading just a few pages further in Wells, in a passage remarkably similar in effect to Gissing's account of Bob Hewett being run down in the street. When money falls on the road, as London's inhabitants flee, a "man stopped, and looked stupidly at the heap, and the shaft of a cab struck his shoulder and sent him reeling" (90). The flight from the city continues past him as he is "left writhing in the dust among his scattered money, unable to rise, for the wheel had broken his back, and his lower limbs lay limp and dead" (90). By now, it is a familiar scene. In the disastrous transition to a new world, the one who tries to profit according to the laws of the old world is struck down in the attempt. The crushed outcast is the one who grasps onto property in the moment of crisis. Yet the act of exclusion and expulsion is more specific than this general law. The old world of commerce and profit is reduced to an abject pile of money in the dirt, while the one wanting to cling on to this old world is represented by the crushed Jewish man. The moment of anti-Semitism is a strange reminder that the torrent of humanity, which seems so inclusive when threatened by an alien force, retains the same divisions. There may be no more economy in the political economy of the end of the world, no bad actors swerving to run anyone over, but the politics of cruelty remain. If this is entropy, then it is structured expulsion disguised as accidental loss.

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The form of the wave, in moments of crisis, is a figure of flight—but it is flight towards death, collapse, and extinction. However sensible it is, at first, to describe the wave in terms of circulation, every circulation is marked by stoppage. The organic metaphors that make sense of human circulation throughout the city—the city is a body, animated by various kinds of flow—

reach their limit. Literary studies, as James Mulholland suggests, has been too quick to happily find circulation everywhere and, everywhere, to find it unblocked. But, "rather than adapt metaphors arising from the flows of blood, we might want to think about how and when flows stop. We capture circulation's more idiosyncratic paths when we consider how written and printed matter coagulates in lopsided ways" (378). The human wave, too, comes to a halt, and this offers a new way of approaching Chakrabarty's famous claim: "There was no point in history when humans were not biological agents. But we can become geological agents only historically and collectively" (206). The human wave itself appears to be a nineteenth-century version of humanity forming itself into a geological force even if it is, not quite, a geological agent.

I have already mentioned Shelley's great revulsive stream, but it is hardly a solitary image in *The Last Man*, a framed narrative recovered out of a flooded ruin and whose opening reflection, in the central narrative, is one of England sinking into the ocean. Lionel Verney looks at the last dregs of humanity and asks, "Were these miserable beings, who, worn and wretched, passed in sorrowful procession, the sole remnants of the race of man, which, like a flood, had once spread over and possessed whole earth?" (412). The image of constant flow, a fecund burst that masters the planet, becomes rather an image of exhaustion. Verney turns tuns to the old story of the flood, humanity descending from Ararat, as a possible consolation. Just as the species revived from a previous flood, so it might regenerate itself in the present disaster. Yet the fact that Verney can represent humanity as a river rather than ocean demonstrates how much the species has been reduced. It is a strange river, one that disappears after a great final surge rather than gradually trickling out. That the perennial flow is just as much a mark of waste as regular life becomes clear, at the end of the century in Schreiner's *Story of an African Farm*, which

opens with a dream of rivers. The insomniac "Saw before him a long stream of people, a great dark multitude, that moved in one direction; then they came to the dark edge of the world and went over" (3). Gone, the Greeks and Romans. Gone, millions of Chinese and Indians, even as he sleeps. One empire is replaced by another in an utter waste of human life on the path of the species towards extinction.

The wave congeals and hardens. After France's humiliating defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, Zola describes a traffic jam in Sedan. The streets are packed with people, horses, and gear in one mass so that the fugitives, "a milling throng, had submerged the town and piled up like a tidal wave that had congealed and frozen solid, in which you could not move arms or legs" (313). However much war in *The Debacle* is about violence, fragmentation, cutting things apart and tearing down stable structures, it is just as much about a multitude of things, objects, and people coming together in a coagulated force. War is just as much about stoppage, wagons and carts clogging up roads, and mud, trade stagnating and coming to a halt. But these examples have included the living, though Zola's description of Sedan in the novel also includes the mounds of dead, the streams of blood and filth that piles up in the streets—constituting not a force so much as an inanimate resistance. Adam Jeffson, the narrator of Shiel's *Purple Cloud* (1901), likewise describes a congealed wave of the dead as he roams the earth in the aftermath of an atmospheric event that has wiped out the rest of humanity. On his way to London, he is obstructed by a meat swamp: "for flesh was everywhere, on the roofs of trains, cramming the interval between them, on the platforms, splashing the pillars like spray, piled on trucks and lorries, a carnal quagmire" (93-94). Here the human wave is simultaneously flood and a blockage in the channel, naturalized as part of the environment, a distinct landscape that brings everything to a halt.

The cosmic war in *The Purple Cloud* produces a swamp of the dead, as does the war over the Chicago Commune in Jack London's *Iron Heel* (1908). In London's America, the country is controlled by oligarchs set on slaughtering socialists. The narrator, Avis, arrives in Chicago where she too encounters obstruction in the traffic. "Swinging around the shattered walls of a building, in the stockyards district, the automobile was stopped by a wave of dead. It was for all the world like a wave tossed up by the sea" (248). The wave of dead here is the sign not of impending extinction but of political oppression. It is fitting, in some ways, to see these two novels from the turn of the century, and their mounds of bodies, as two commentaries on nineteenth-century history as a whole: collective human endeavor reduced to either cosmic struggle or class struggle. The wave freezes, blocks the street, marks the end of circulation. Humanity forms itself into a geological force, but it does so as a sign of exhaustion in class struggle or total extinction. These waves do not transform their environments, but stagnate within them in a sign of collective impotence.

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One of the most confusing and frustrating aspects of the wave is its malleability. Rivers of people are a sign of the smooth passage of everyday life or, indeed, a sign of a rupture from ordinary life. Then, to make matters even more muddy, these breaks from ordinary life might mean a catastrophe such as Shelley's plague, or war, or Zola's colliers rushing off to a festival. This remarkable range is distinct from even other closely related metaphors such as shipwreck, which consistently implies disaster, isolation, and deprivation. That is, what first seems to be a commonplace phrase appears continuously in new shapes and patterns. If the lesson here is that

the same image means something different in different contexts, then this is no doubt true. But it ends interpretation at a banal impasse that is, at the same time, a series of fragments that seem to have no relation to one another.

It is my contention that the multiplicity of the image is best understood as a form of collective drowning and, as a theory of a drowned population, is still a theory of transformation. The wave congeals and meat becomes a swamp—this is already a theory of synthesis in transformation and, particularly in Shiel and London, passage from life to death even as the wave holds its shape. Even the distinction I made between the two examples—class warfare and extinction—obscures a common synthesis. Both struggles are themselves theories of transformation. Bataille clarifies the relation between class struggle and geological forms: "Without a profound complicity with natural forces such as violent death, gushing blood, sudden catastrophes and the horrible cries of pain that accompany them, terrifying ruptures of what had seemed to be immutable, the fall into stinking filth of what had been elevated—without a sadistic understanding of an incontestably thundering and torrential nature, there could be no revolutionaries, there could only be a revolting utopian sentimentality" (101). Bataille's insight is more instinctual than analytic, and perhaps he would object to being paired with analysis of sentimental Victorian novels. Yet the wave is precisely one of the natural forces of which he speaks, a figure of revolution even if the class struggle ends in the extermination of the revolutionaries. Failure is also a type of transformation. If this seems far from Victorian literature, consider Hensley's reading of *The Mill on the Floss:* "The word 'mass' is repeated four times in less than a page here, a choice that confirms the novel's association of geological flood-events with popular uprising and solidifies its metaphorical connection of death by nature with death by political revolution" (67).

Even when it ends in death, perhaps even particularly when it ends in death, the wave is an emblem of vitalism. Raymond Williams writes, in *The Country and the City,* that for Gissing, "The individual was the person who must escape, or try to escape, from this repulsive and degrading mass" (222). But individual escape is not the primary lesson of *The Nether World's* bank holiday, in which London's poor, constantly at work in the novel, stream out of the city on a break from their labor. The festival, for Gissing, is a moment of debauchery, the loss of humanity in animal behavior, and it is at this moment that Gissing proposes the annihilation of the order of the day. He suggests a total economic change and the "constant influence of music," but describes his own recommendations as "jesting in earnest. For, work as you will, there is no chance of a new and better world until the old be utterly destroyed. Destroy, sweep away, prepare the ground; then shall music the holy, music the civiliser, breathe over the renewed earth, and with Orphean magic raise in perfected beauty the towers of the City of Man" (109). Here is another instance of Jameson's adage that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism, tinged with the misanthropy necessary to look at a crowd of revelers and determine that this order of things must come to an end.

But this same impetus, to sweep away existing conditions in order to create a new world, is all over Zola's novels, and particularly in their final pages. Etienne dreams, at the end of *Germinal,* of the birth of a new order out of the wreckage of the old: "New blood would create a new society. And in his expectation of a barbarian invasion which would regenerate the decadent old nations, there reappeared his absolute faith in a forthcoming revolution, the real one, that of the workers, who would set fire to the dying century" (521). It is a double image of transformation: degenerate civilization overcome by vital barbarians, and the vital proletariats trample the bourgeoisie. Likewise, *The Debacle* ends with Jean leaving Paris as it burns, and

turning back to gaze upon it from afar. He thinks of France's series of disasters, defeats, civil war and ruin and blood, and "yet, beyond the still roaring furnace, undying hope was reviving up in that great calm sky so supremely limpid. It was the sure renewal of eternal nature, eternal humanity, the renewal promised to all who hope and toil, the tree throwing up a strong new shoot after the dead branch… had been cut away" (508). Zola's vitalism is political—the only things worth doing are worth doing badly, even at the cost of failure; and, there is no need to cling to the comfort of the present order when life can spring out of its ruins.

Zola's vitalism, tied to political collectives and orders, finds a place for humanity in the new order of things. This version of vitalism is hardly hegemonic in the nineteenth century, concerned as it with the possibility of human extinction. The consolation of vitalism is the final victory of life, its domination over all transient forms of existence, its ability to create something new out of the wreckage of humanity itself. "Mankind," Lyndall tells Waldo in *The Story of an African Farm*, "is only an ephemeral blossom on the tree of time; there were others before it opened; there will be others after it has fallen" (Schreiner 184). She describes the human species as a dream, nothing more or less than pollen carried here and there by the wind. The entropic image of a human multitude pouring into the void, which begins *Story of an African Farm,* is replaced by the end with the comfort that the part will be salvaged into the whole: "It is but the individual that perishes, the whole remains. It is the organism that vanishes, the atoms are there. It is but man that dies, the Universal Whole of which is part reworks him into its inmost self" (259). The formulation is found more simply in Haggard's *She:* "There is no such thing as death, Holly, only a change" (14). Vitalism in this sense offers three different responses to human extinction: first, that what will extinguish is an old order, replaced by a new order; second, that the death of the present will lead to the formation of a higher race; third, that humans, extinct,

will simply be absorbed into nature—life itself! The wave, even when it congeals, is still a figure of transformation, a form that stages a relation between forms of political collectives and their opposite, the collapse of politics under the burden of natural history.

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If again and again, the wave bends when subject to interpretive questions, then the solution is to see its malleability as a basic aspect, rather than necessarily a failure of interpretation. Once malleability is recognized as something there, something to be found, then it is easier to find a synthetic claim. The gap between festival and disaster, in one way, is easy to close by turning to Bakhtin, who says, "through all the stages of historic development feasts were linked to moments of crisis, of breaking points in the cycle of nature or in the life of society and man. Moments of death and revival, of change and renewal always lead to a festive perception of the world" (9). There is no contradiction, in this sense, between crisis and celebration being linked through the same image that stands, alternately, for either corporation or disintegration. It might more simply be said that the wave is, in all of these instances, a form of carnival. "All were considered equal during festival," and also in the wave, the whirlpool, the great tide of humanity (10). Equality means absolute disaster and disaster coincides with the breakdown of hierarchy and rank, of social, economic, and even political distinctions—a basic antinomy within the nineteenth-century novel.

Still, there are problems with saying that the human wave is festive or that, in it, "the utopian ideal and the realistic merged" (Bakhtin 10). How do we reconcile, in the examples from ordinary time, the savage expulsion of individuals, a practice which seems so contrary to the

utopian impulses of the carnival? One resource here is René Girard's account of sacrifice in *Violence and the Sacred,* which itself relies on diluvial metaphors: "If left unappeased, violence will accumulate until it overflows its confines and floods the surrounding area. The role of sacrifice is to stem this rising tide of indiscriminate substitutions and redirect violence into 'proper' channels" (10). From this point of view, the pedestrians who stumble into the street only to be crushed reappear as a kind of ritual sacrifice that absorbs the violent force of equality. If this seems far from the nineteenth century novel, consider here George Eliot's account of Festa from *Romola.* The holiday celebrations spread across all of Florence until "the throng with had at one time been concentrated in the lines through which the process had to pass, was now streaming out in all directions in pursuit of a new object" (153). There is nothing particularly noteworthy about this passage, at first, only another example of city streets turned into human rivers. Yet the idea that that stream has an object, some sort of goal, is at odds with the model of the wave as an incidental phenomenon, present only after absorbing a multitude of contrary desires and impulses. Eliot continues to describe this object, saying, "Such intervals of a Festa are precisely the moments when the vaguely active animal spirits of a crowd are likely to be the most petulant and most ready to sacrifice a stray individual to the greater happiness of the greater number" (153-154). Poor Tessa becomes the object of sacrifice here, subjected to a street magician's tricks and the mockery of the crowd. While there may be nothing new in another account of the stupidity and brutality of the mass of humanity, its eagerness to crush a random individual for its own amusement, this passage helps close the link between the apparent contradictions of the wave. Each day, carnival is celebrated in the streams of traffic, and each day it needs a sacrifice.

The wave is a break from the everyday, the ordinary, the common, even when it flows as a result of everyday life. It is a daily carnival, breaking down hierarchies and order, even when there is still an essential separation between those are in the wave and those who are outside of it. It is not just a form, but a force, even when it is an impotent force that crashes and then withdraws. While Glissant is right to speak of an antagonism between transparency and obscurity, the wave metaphor blurs the line between the two hermeneutic imperatives as it continually transforms under criticism. The wave thickens, but only for a moment before it dissipates entirely. Interpretation is so often concerned with that which is timeless and fixed, with deep structures that persist, with staking out boundaries and, in doing so, finding ways to fix every example that keeps moving when it should stop: somnambulists and insomniacs, zombies, ghosts, vampires, the drowned—each a symptom of persistent structures of cruelty and oppression. Very well. But the lesson of the drowned, whether individual or collective, is that they cannot be understood except through the ephemeral—through looking at corruption and transformation directly, rather than simply as passage to a destination that we already know.

Chapter Three:

Dreams of a Drowned City

The city floods, in imagination, over and over again. The nineteenth century, the age of urbanization, offers endless visions of those same cities overwhelmed in a deluge that comes from within or without. Pages and pages grapple with the possibility, or even the hope, that these new organisms could fail, come to a halt, collapse entirely. Floods, of course, are not the only catastrophe threatening the city. Every unhappy city is unhappy in its own way, it appears, but there are broad patterns: "The nineteenth-century city-dweller seems to have taken a peculiar pleasure in imagining his or her home destroyed by a variety of cataclysms: the destructive forces of floods, fires, and earthquakes were always good box office" (Daly 17). The deluge is one crisis among many and, as such, must be theorized in distinction from these other disasters. But here I will consider the deluge and drowned city in terms of continuity, part of the same dream of drowning that structures the liquefaction of humanity and, at the same participates in its liquefaction.

In some respects, this is a matter of double vision, analogous to the double vision required to look at a crowd of people and describe it as a torrent. In the context of Alfred Russel Wallace, taxidermy, and museum collections, Anna-Sophie Springer and Etienne Turpin speak of a viviscopic gaze practiced by observers trained "to see as alive what is evidently, even at times emphatically, dead" ("Necroaesthetics," unpaginated). Wandering through a museum, the British public looked at stuffed orangutans and birds of paradise, or the bones of extinct creatures, and imagined them wandering around tropic jungles. Yet surely, in the context of naturalists and specimen collection, the viviscopic gaze is preceded by a necroscopic one. The naturalist wanders around Borneo and, spotting an orangutan hiding in a tree, imagines how its

cleaned-off bones would look when exhibited in the Derby Museum. The problem the flooded city presents is, rather, necroscopic vision: a tendency to look at a thriving city and see it as evidently, emphatically, dead. The double vision, in the flooded city, looks at a dry city and imagines it as evidently, emphatically, flooded, sunken, drowned. I refer to this as hydroscopic vision.

Some of the nineteenth-century's hydroscopic vision, its interest in flooded cities, did not project forward but, rather, looked back to history, symptomatic of antiquarian collections, archaeological digs, and the ruins of the past. Lyell, in *Principles of Geology*, is obsessed with the inversion of land and water. Land sinks into the ocean while the ocean beds are raised up into mountains. Cities are submerged only to be exposed once more when the land changes. Lyell poses these inversions as a contest between two forces: "The *aqueous* agents are incessantly labouring to reduce the inequalities of the earth's surface to a level, while the *igneous*, on the other hand, are equally active in restoring the unevenness of the external crust" (103). History becomes not linear or progressive but antagonistic and cyclical, even on the level of geological events. So it is that Waldo observes in *Story of an African Farm*, "that what are dry lands now were once lakes; and what I think is this—these low hills were once the shores of a lake" (15). The hydroscopic, on this level, is less about the city than about land and geological history. Lyell is concerned, often, with earth and sea as recording devices. The seabed preserves historical records that, flung back to the surface and dried out, can make history legible.

But these inversions can just as much be read in the opposite direction, as means of erasing the past. Dickens, in *Pictures of Italy*, reflects on these geological changes as a problem of irreparable loss: "Where this lake flows, there stood, of old, a city. It was swallowed up one day; and in its stead, this water rose. There are ancient traditions (common to many parts of the

world) of the ruined city having been seen below, when the water was clear; but however that may be, form this spot of earth it vanished" (114). Continuing, Dickens compares the ruins to ghosts that have departed to the other world with no chance of return. If the flood is merely a story of inversion, then this creates an analytic deadlock. One can simply look at each flood and see in it a repetition of ancient geological events. Yet Dickens, in this same text, does begin to at least distinguish the flooded city from other kinds of destruction. When he visits Pompeii, he describes the "little familiar tokens of human habitation," preserved in the ruins (169). Marks of old ropes on the edge of the well, carriage tracks, the marks of old vessels on wine-shop counters, amphorae in cellars, "all rendering the solitude and deadly lonesomeness of the place, ten thousand times more solemn, than if the volcano, in its fury, had swept the city from the earth, and sunk it in the bottom of the sea" (169). For Dickens, watery destruction is not about preservation or residue, not about divers endlessly recovering sunken artefacts from abyssal worlds, or about old ruins being thrown back to the surface. Submersion, rather, is total annihilation that, in its totality, is less melancholy than the reminders of everyday life available in the ruins of Pompeii.

Yet the doubling of the wet and the dry is synthetic as much as it is disjunctive. The deluge offers a strange continuity between two territories that are often keep separate from each other—the imperial metropole and its colonies. There are echoes here of what Patrick Brantlinger refers to as proleptic elegy, a tendency for the empire to look to the indigenous inhabitants of its colonies and imagine them as already extinct: "Everywhere the future-perfect mode of proleptic elegy mourns the lost object before it is completely lost. They work of cultural, national mourning occurs not because the aboriginals are already extinct but because they will sooner or later become extinct" (4). Brantlinger describes this elegy as the lack of a

lack. The empire wants an absence that is not yet present, and so imagines it over and over. If proleptic elegy separates imperial subjects and rulers, it also creates continuity between the British Empire and the dead empires whose ruins its inhabitants happily visited—in flesh and spirit. It is increasingly popular to frame narrative patterns as historical anxieties. The empire is anxious about its own crimes, so it obsesses over them. Yet identifying an anxiety, even identifying its source, does little to explain how it functions. The dream of a drowned city is less about anxiety than fantasy. It is through the drowned city that the nineteenth century can imagine the end of finance and labor—utopia. The Victorians do not fear a drowned city; they desire it.

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In *Old Man Goriot* (1834-1835), Balzac connects narrative and the world, not to describe the capacity for narrative to form or capture a world, but in order to suggest that his novel can only be understood from within the city. "Will it be understood outside Paris?" he says. "There is room for doubt. The peculiarities of this scene packed with commentary and local colour may only be appreciated between the hells of Montmarte and the heights of Montrouge, in that illustrious valley of endlessly crumbling stucco and black, mud-clogged gutters; a valley full of genuine suffering and frequently counterfeit joy, where life is so frantically hectic that only the most freakish anomaly will produce any lasting sensation" (3). The space itself forms consciousness, but here it appears as a critique of the pleasures of the city and its inhabitants, who have been attuned to particular types of happiness unavailable outside of the city. It is only a few pages later that Balzac turns to water for his understanding of city, saying in the context of the lodging house that will become the scene for *Goriot*, "But then Paris is an ocean. Heave in the lead as often as you like, you'll never sound its depths. Explore it, describe it: however

exhaustive your exploration or description, however numerous and inquisitive the explorers of that sea, there will always be virgin territory, an unknown cave, flowers, pearls, monsters, something unheard of, forgotten by literary divers. The Maison Vauquer is one of these curious monstrosities" (12). Paris is an ocean, and the ocean is an epistemic problem. Paris appears as the city constantly fading away and eluding knowledge—but Balzac's point is the opposite, less about the impossibility of capture than the imperative to never ending inquiry and collection on the part of the literary diver. Divers always seem to find monsters, and the sunken cities in what follows are no exception, even when the monstrous production is not the drowned population but submerged ruins.

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It is a commonplace at this point that the nineteenth-century novel, so often concerned with scenes of domestic and national life, is nevertheless complicit in imperial appropriation and capitalist domination. "Every artifact of Victorian culture is an artifact of empire," as Nathan Hensley succinctly states (6). An artifact of empire, however, is not necessarily a tool of empire. For Hensley, the relation between British empire and the Victorian novel is more about crisis than hegemony. Liberal society continued to produce violence when it promised security so that "The disorientation generated by this implosion of bourgeois thought spurred Victorian writers to grope toward new forms of conceptuality, new genres of thought, and in so doing to generate the literary effects that might perform them" (243). This is important. From one point of view, the relation of the novel to empire, colonialism, capital, and bourgeois nationality is mere reflection. That which is produced in the empire reflects bourgeois values, the value of compromise or, even worse, naturalizes those values in a clear narrative. Hensley proposes a different

relationship. The novel is responsive to material conditions without necessarily being reflective of them, or of the ideologies of domination, cruelty, and violence that structure their worlds.

Yet Hensley does finally read the novel in terms of totality. He writes, of authors in the 1860s, for instance, that while they were preoccupied with outcasts of society, they "resolve their plots 'happily' by affirming not fragmentation, rupture, or loss but the re-completion of a social totality; they re-count their lost particulars, re-name their characters, and bring lost people back into a community" (104). So while the novel is capable of recognizing and even producing contradictions and incoherence, it finally adheres to coherence. The novel is, then, a kind of false promise or false alternative. The alternative approach is that of Kelly Hurley, who writes in regards to the abhuman, the ruination of the human subject in fin de siècle and British Gothic literature, "That the Gothic frequently concluded by checking its own movement towards innovation - its vampires staked, its beetle-women squashed, its anthropophagous trees dynamited - need not, I think, argue against its role as a fundamentally speculative, even theoretical, genre" (127). In many respects the point here is not what we make of endings but what we make of middles, the medium, the thoroughfare of the novel that is so often clogged up, jammed with monstrous populations. Indeed, drowning can be distinguished from other forms of urban destruction simply because of how often it does not appear as an end to the city but rather as a middle. My approach assumes the importance of the middle against familiar endings—marriage, inheritance, the recovery of some lost item or the revelation of some concealed fact. The contingent and in many cases absurd resolutions of Victorian novels—look no further than the end of *Our Mutual Friend*—do little to reassure doubtful investors and betrothed that their marriages will end in happiness. If fortune arrives randomly, through a trash heap, the effect is not to reassert the stability of capitalism but to point to its absurdities. Poor orphans finding a

fortune through recovering a lost identity do not strengthen hope for the hundreds of other London urchins.

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The novel presents a possibility for disintegration, rather than simply producing a coherent and familiar national identity. The novel does not just track the growth and development of individuals, the young artist turning to a path of business and order, but produces collective identities that are not total. To say this is to build off the work of scholars such as Emily Steinlight and Nasser Mufti. The latter addresses, for instance, the muddy opening of *Bleak House*. Dickens opens his description of London with fog and damp and "Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better; splashed to their very blinkers. Foot passengers… adding new deposits to the crush upon crust of mud" (13). The city transforms into a swamp. Noting that mud is as prevalent as the famous fog, Mufti argues that land is "financial through and through" and "is never solid ground upon which to walk but is slippery, mud-like, and tainted with the refuse of urban life" (66). His argument in this article is the basis of his book, *Civilizing War*, which addresses the work of narrative, poetics, and the novel in modeling the dissolution, rather than the formation, of society and nation. He writes, in reference to Jonathan Culler that while the novel "creates the condition of possibility for the nation, then… it also creates the condition for the nation's *impossibility*" (14). Let me repeat, for a second, what the reader has likely forgotten from the introduction Impossibility does not have to mean dissolution, disintegration, or civil war. Rather, as for Steinlight, it means excess. As Hensley looks to bourgeois ideology and sees aesthetic profusion, Steinlight looks to booming urban

populations as the precondition for new forms of narrative. “Instead of confirming life’s fatal capture by totalizing power,” she writes, “the sheer excessiveness of the novel’s subjects runs over the edges of any social body, state, empire, or valorizing structure” (223). The novel, as a form, is itself a flood. This is separate from the deconstructive reading of a novel whose incoherence or contradiction disintegrates itself. The novel, like a flood, attests that the best means of destroying things is by bringing them together.

Both Steinlight and Mufti, however, turn away from the novel to Friedrich Engels’s *Condition of the Working Class in England*: Steinlight, to analyze nineteenth-century theories of population; Mufti to theorize fratricide and civil war. Both readings rely on a critical absence. Mufti writes that Engels’s struggle is the attempt to represent the material, rather than abstract, condition of England. In doing so, “Engels is consistently frustrated by his inability to represent what is at its center: the social war’s manifestation in the city. Because the conflict he seeks to uncover hides behind the façade of everyday life, he must indirectly surmise its presence rather than see it directly” (38). The civil war of everyday life, of the immiserated against the wealthy, must be put together simply because, in Engels’s study of the great cities of England, the two are not seen in proximity to one another. The rich do not wander through the back alleys of Manchester, and impoverished swarms are not gathered outside the gates of its wealthy estates. “Engels,” writes Mufti, “struggles to produce a narrative of the conflict. It is everywhere but nowhere” (42). Engels senses a conflict that is absent but nevertheless exists, and this sense of absence might be explained through Steinlight’s reading: what Engels “portrays is not, in the main, a socioeconomic class of workers becoming conscious of their situation but an ecosystem in the process of destroying its mysteriously absent creatures” (89). For Steinlight, Engels wanders through cities evacuated of their population, attesting to an environment that has

extinguished its most important inhabitants, the ones who make it function. Representations of material structures and their deformation overwhelm representations of inhabitants.

Yet the flooded city is present and easily visible on Engels's account, and perhaps the inhabitants of the city have disappeared into the maelstroms and vortexes that appear in the middle of England's cities. For Engels, the worker "knows that every breeze that blows, every whim of his employer, every bad turn of trade may hurl him back into the fierce whirlpool from which he has temporarily saved himself, and in which it is hard and often impossible to keep his head above water" (70). The condition of England is flood, sucking down the poorest of the workers. At the same time, what Engels describes here is, indeed, the material of an otherwise abstract market. The caprice of a factory owner or a slump in sales creates an everyday quagmire in which the working class drowns. Engels is not entirely consistent here. First referring to the market, "the whirlpool of moral ruin" appears on the very next page (71). Here too, the experience of everyday life, its corruptions and vices, is that of a deluge. In that sense, Gissing's *Whirlpool* (1897) employs an old metaphor when it states, "I feel as if we were all being swept into a ghastly whirlpool which roars over the bottomless pit" (53). As closely related as the two usages are, Gissing is useful here to clarify Engels's point. Gissing's whirlpool is egalitarian, including the investors in a burst business venture who suddenly find themselves defrauded of their money. For Engels, the whirlpool is an environment for the working class.

The working class drowns in the whirlpool. For Engels, this is not just a metaphor; it is a genuine description of the material conditions in the streets of Victorian England. Let me briefly catalogue a series of examples. Engels writes of one of the great cities that "The mud in the streets is so deep that there is never a chance, except in the driest weather, of walking without sinking into it ankle-deep at every step" (93). Elsewhere, the streets are "without sewers or

gutters, but supplied with foul stagnant pools instead" and "the foul liquids emptied before the doors gather in stinking pools" (71). These are experience shared by Engels and whoever else walks through these streets; flood and sinking are aspects of the living spaces of the working class. Engels is particularly horrified that so many of the working class live in cellars. Of the cellars in Leeds, he writes "In consequence of the overflows of the Aire… the houses and cellars are often so full of water that they have to be pumped out. And at such times the water rises, even where there are sewers, out of them into cellars [and] engenders miasmatic vapours" (81). He adds that as the Aire is clean as it flows into Leeds but black and full of refuse as it leaves. Engels learns also from one Dr. Kay that, due to regular leakage through a clay-stuffed hole in the wall of a cellar, "its occupant, a hand-loom weaver, had to bale out the water from his dwelling every morning and pour it into the street" (98). While the mud in the street applies to anyone walking there, Engels notes that the rich pass through easily on omnibuses, able to avert their attention from the conditions around them. Flooding is both a figurative and material crisis in Engels's account, but it is limited to the working class and its districts rather than one threatening the whole city. However many the whirlpool sucks down into the abyss, there will always be a number of pleasure-boaters sailing peacefully past it.

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These images of flood, deluge, and maelstrom are easy to miss. They are familiar and commonplace, and there is a good deal of temptation to look at a flood and see something else. At the beginning of *A Study in Scarlet,* Watson comments that after sustain an injury abroad, "I naturally gravitated to London, that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the

Empire are irresistibly drained" (4). At the end of *Conceiving the City*, Nicholas Freeman writes about this passage, somewhat optimistically and in antagonism with Watson's characterization of the metropolis, "I would argue instead that London was a great palette, on which all the literary and artistic innovations of the day could be mixed to provide the precise tints needed to capture, or at least suggest with a measure of conviction, the nuances of city life" (208). Freeman, believing the city is properly conceived of by making and recognizing distinctions within it, objects to the cesspool of filth in which everything blurs together. Laura Otis, in *Membranes,* suggests about the same passage from Doyle that "In the noisome capital, the heart of the empire's communications system, the offal of the old world mingles with the refuse of the new, and the city becomes a breeding ground where ferment spreads rapidly among the disgruntled foreigners and natives. The city is most frightening because of the innumerable connections it establishes between people, making the communication of deadly diseases and seditious ideas inevitable yet difficult to trace" (104). No doubt she's right. The nineteenth-century city is, throughout the century, increasingly seen as a place of contagion. Filth does not stay in place but becomes one's neighbor's also, and disease horrifies for the way it strikes down and passes easily between the rich and the poor. Otis's reading focuses sensibly on the cesspool as filth, and yet both Otis and Freeman miss what seems to be the literal aspect of Watson's statement—the core of the empire is an entire city transformed into a shit-filled pool.

When London is a cesspool, the crisis of flooding becomes a general crisis in the city and the empire, rather than a problem local to the poorest districts. Mufti writes, in regards once again to the opening of *Bleak House,* that "what holds human beings together is not a cash nexus but a mud nexus" (72). By turning to one of his sources, Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor,* it is easy to demonstrate the transposition of cash with mud is, as in Engels, no

abstraction but almost stupidly literal. Over half of Mayhew's second volume is devoted to the streets of London. It includes inventories of the various compositions of London's roads, the price of their original production and annual maintenance costs, the different kinds of street-cleaners, including their compensation and the value of their labor compared to the cost of street-sweeping machines, and the volume of horse dung left on the streets (figured by calculating the amount a horse shits in a day divided by the number of hours it spends on the street), the volume of liquid that arrives in London's streets each day, the volumes of human waste produced in the city and the division of this waste between cesspools, streets, or sewers. Mayhew also details competing models for sewer systems, methods of cleaning the sewers, the rats living below the city, and on and on it goes. To understand the streets, he must understand liquid and drainage problems.

The street mud is also a commodity. Yes, a portion of this commodity are the horse droppings sold as fertilizer, but Mayhew includes the streets themselves, continually decaying through the year. He writes, in a classic Mayhew sentence that extends itself less through virtuosity than through breathless inventory, "Street-dust is disintegrated granite, that is, pulverised quartz and felspar, felspar being principally composed of alumina or clay, and quartz silex or sand; it is the result of the attrition, or in a word it is the *detritus*, of the stones used in pavements and in macadamization; it is further composed of the pulverization of all horse and cattle-dung, and of the almost imperceptible, but still, I am assured, existent powder which arises from the friction of the wooden pavement even when kept moist" (2.188). These various types of street dust are described with their own special costs on the market. The *mac* is then collected, sold, and subsequently replaced. Mayhew provides a vision of London ground down, crumbling away, disintegrating, and takes into account the sunk costs of the street, how much is held up in

original investment as well as in maintenance. The mud, if it is not quite compound interest, at least accumulates value as more people walk across it and more horses digest and expel into its sludge.

What emerges out of all of Mayhew's cataloguing and calculations is a vision of London as a city constantly under threat of flood. There is another kind of hydroscopic double-vision here, Mayhew looking at the streets to imagine how easily they might be completely flooded with water and waste. He writes, "If this immense volume of liquid were not immediately removed from our thoroughfares as fast as it fell, many of our streets would not only be transformed into canals at certain periods of the year, but perhaps at all times (except during drought) they would be, if not impassable, at least unpleasant and unhealthy, from the puddles or small pools of stagnant water that would be continually rotting them. Were such the case, the roads and streets that we now pride ourselves so highly upon would have their foundations soddened" (2.398). The flood is a problem that is already present, invisibly only because it is constantly mitigated. But the flood is a problem with a solution that consists of, on the one hand, engineering drainage and sewers and, on the other, continuous labor of scavenging, exchange, and construction against the forces of decay. Rather than describing a process of compound interest, what Mayhew describes might more properly be described as a strange redistribution of wealth through decaying roads, a whole economy funding itself from flood and rot, a metropolis threatened by water by kept dry through the combined efforts of the engineers and the poorest workers of the city. However much the poor here are stuck in a whirlpool, they are also those keeping the reset of the city from following them.

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No doubt it is strange that an inquiry into the dream of a drowned city has, so far, focused mostly on the reporting of two social theorists. A provisional response is that social theorists and novelists dealt with similar problems in imagining the city, and that the writing of both is dominated by realism. Fredric Jameson, writing about Zola's *Belly of Paris,* spends a great deal of time analyzing the symphony of cheeses. It is in the massive sensory descriptions and catalogs of goods found in the market that the sensory begins, in Zola, to acquire autonomy. Stalls full of fish and cheese demonstrate a "first centrifugal movement of mastery and subsumption, of the ordering of raw nameless things into their proper genetic classifications" (54). One might think here of Mayhew's taxonomy of street materials into a master document—the Key to all Streets. Yet Jameson's final point is not mastery but ambiguity, a second movement after the first, "which undermines this one and secretly discredits it—a tremendous fermenting and bubbling pullulation in which the simplicity of words and names is unsettled to the point of an ecstatic dizziness by the visual multiplicity of the things themselves" (54). Jameson's point here is the production of affect and sensation in the reader, but this second movement is also present in Mayhew when the very mastery of the streets presents a vision of a city always on the edge of flood, of collapsing under its own filth. As drawn as I am to this conjoined project of realism, the more convincing relation is a hermeneutic obstacle, a tendency to miss what is present in the attempt to see what is absent, a temptation to read metaphorically that which is literal and to miss the content of the metaphor in an attempt to hurry beyond it for the ideology lurking beneath.

When Jameson speaks of visual multiplicity here, he refers to the flood of objects all gathered together. Yet, even remaining with *The Belly of Paris,* visual multiplicity is also hydroscopic, including the dry city of Paris and, in a form of double-vision, a second, sunken

Paris that is simultaneously emerging and subsuming the first. Returned to Paris after escaping from Cayenne, and resentful of the Second Empire that wrongfully imprisoned him, Florent nevertheless takes on a government job as a fish inspector in the markets of Les Halles. Exposed to stall after stall of fish, "He half imagined that he was gazing at some bay from which the tide had receded, with seaweed streaming in the sun, the bare rocks drying, and the beach smelling of brine" (92). On one level, what is present here is the inverse of what I have said—not a vision of a flooded city but a vision of an ocean that has dried out. Yes, the city becomes an ocean, but it is an ocean without a sea. So, when Zola's markets appear like the bottom of an ocean, it might simply be part of another story of inversion, the land and sea changing places as they have for millennia.

Yet the concern throughout Zola's work is less with inversion than transformation and displacement: disgusting transpositions, an obscene moment where what was hidden is finally exposed. Yet in this early novel of the Rougon-Macquart, the image of the city as a dried-up ocean bed is overwhelmed by images of deluge and submersion. Alone in his office, Florent views the room as "a refuge from the needless din and bustle of the markets, which made him think of some surging sea spreading around him and cutting him off from the rest of the world" (119). Here the ocean of Paris is limited to the sprawl of the market, so that the office becomes an island in an inland sea. Yet the water surges to encompass more and more of the city. Florent looks out over the city, dreaming dreams as gazes "at the endless expanse of roofs! Usually he saw them as grey oceans that spoke to him of faraway countries. On moonless nights they grew darker, becoming dead black lakes, stagnant and foul… Unmarked by a single footprint, they stretched out like Arctic wastes" (248). The description continues in a series of transformations that are emblematic of the difficulties of parsing anything in Zola, simply because, in some

occult process, the longer something is observed the more it starts to look like something else. In a dizzying string of evolutions, the roofs become oceans that stagnate into putrid lakes, frozen into tundra, melted back into a stagnant, marshy sea. The dream, in the space of a page, turns quickly into a nightmare. In this sense, Florent's hydroscopic view of the city is not simply a reflection of the flood of goods and merchandise that pile up everywhere in Zola's novels, but a transformation of the urban environment itself. What first looks like a process of inversion is more precisely one of confusion, in which things do not trade places so much as they are absorbed together into a quagmire.

Within the Rougon-Macquart, the standard response to revolutionaries is disgust and laughter. There is always something ridiculous about these groups and figures. The earnest union speeches in *Germinal* are interrupted by cynical laughter and dirty jokes; the masses of utopian scribblings in *Money* stack up endlessly while their writer sickens and eventually dies without forming them into anything. Etienne's victory in *Germinal* is less about the mines than the fact that he can afford new boots. So it goes for Florent, mocked by the fish vendors whose products he must inspect, drained of all his money by grifters whom he believes to be his fellow believers committed to the overthrow of the Second Empire. He dreams of cells of revolutionaries rising throughout Paris, but what he experiences at the end, in his failure and second imprisonment, is a sense that "The mud in the streets had risen up and submerged him" (269). The agitating element is expelled from the market, and this is experienced as another type of drowning.

But mud and flood, here an image of reactionary oppression and capture, become in Zola a revolutionary image. Indeed, sabotage in the novel is a juvenile affair, demonstrated by the children of the market, two wild creatures who roam around causing havoc in the markets by opening the taps: "great drops fell with a gentle murmur, creating a maze of tiny streams that

flowed along, turning holes and ruts into miniature lakes and dividing into a thousand tributaries that disappeared down the sloping street towards the Rue Rambuteau. A moist haze rose into the air, a sort of dusty rain that blew a fresh breeze in Florent's face, reminding him again of the pungent, salty breeze of the sea" (96). The market slowly transforms into streams and lakes, here a quite material version of what Florent imagines when he looks out across the rooftops of Paris. Running the taps is ultimately an impotent prank that creates no real damage to the market and that fails to interfere with its continued operations. There is nothing final or catastrophic about the flood. Yet the childish flooding of the market, with its strangely commercial echo, prefigures what happens to the coal mines in *Germinal,* kept dry only through the constant activity of the pumps—a whole world below ground that should be underwater. Zola provides the view from above ground: "Beneath the soft azure sky of the spring morning there lay a veritable cesspool, the ruins of a city lying smashed and melting in the mud" (486). This city should be familiar by now, a city of waste and flood—and a whole city in the middle of the country! In typical Zola fashion, this flood becomes the occasion for Etienne to look at ruin and see new growth. Here, too, the flood is not permanent. One day, the pumps will drain the mines, and coal will once again be extracted. But it would be cynical to look continually at ephemeral victories and describe them only as political failures. The city floods, and that does not usher in the end of utopia but its beginning.

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The problem of circulation is not only that steady flow is assumed and blockage neglected, but that steady flows do not necessarily imply vitality, life, animation. The city functions only because of the continuous removal of decayed materials and expelled waste,

turned into profit. But even here there is productive and unproductive waste. However much Mayhew believes in a technological solution, or in a self-sustaining equilibrium that prevents flooding, he also introduces, as an engineering problem, a distinction between the great rivers of London and Paris, the Thames and the Seine. The primary difference between the two is that "the Thames has its ebbs as well as its flow, and the consequence is the sewage is *never* got rid of" (2.408). Tidal or not, Zola continuously describes the Seine as full of filth, as in *L'Assommoir,* in which it "was bearing along its patches oil, old corks, and vegetable peelings, all sorts of garbage caught and held for a moment by some eddy on it surface" (92). This description is not so different from that in *Mysteries of Paris,* decades earlier, with its own river in the Schoolmaster's dream: "filthy, thick, dead water flows slowly, slowly, carrying along with it the refuse that is incessantly vomited by the sewers of a large city: debris of all sorts, the corpses of animals" (343). In this sense, the disasters of war are the disasters of everyday life. After the French suffer a disastrous battle at Sedan, in *The Debacle,* they are confined to a prison island along the Meuse, which soon begins to fill with human and animal corpses, which "could be seen floating past every minute, with swollen bellies and already decomposing and going green. Many of them had got caught in the weeds near the banks and were filling the air with stench as they constantly bobbed up and down in the water" (370). These are rivers passing through the heart of the city, marked less by their life—the human streams flowing through the streets—their filth. They are full of unproductive waste—pollution rather than fertilizer.

No doubt it seems like a strange detour to begin speaking of unproductive streams and circulations passing through the city. I introduce them as a contrast to the productive flood of waste passing from the nineteenth-century city to the countryside. The city begins to appear not only flooded, but as a strange organism that produces a whole cascade of floods. The ocean

appears in the city, but so does the countryside. Florent, looking to the avalanche of vegetables and the wagons of produce streaming into Paris, reflects, "It was as if the countryside has come to life in the city" (26). The avalanches of food are a reminder, yes, of the enormous flows of food necessary to keep the inhabitants of the city alive and, at the same time, a reminder of the metabolic relationship between country and city. For Mayhew, the problem with sewage in the Thames is not just sensible concerns for contagion or pollution, but despair that profitable material is simply floating around, rotting, when it could be reabsorbed into the system as profit. Waste from streets and cesspools, on the other hand, is productive waste. Filth from the streets form "the staple manure of the market-gardens in the suburbs; out of the London mud comes the London cabbages… for that which is nothing but a pestiferous muck-heap in the town becomes a vivifying garden translated to the country" (2.258). It is a utopian metabolic cycle, an exchange in which all parties benefit and in which waste can be recuperated into life. The breakdown of such a cycle is seen, once again, in *The Debacle,* when Zola writes of a traffic jam in Sedan: "they were overcome by a foul stench, and a bed of filth came up to their knees. The town was disgusting, an open sewer in which the defecation and urine of a hundred thousand men had been piling up for three days" (354). Three days is all it takes, a minimal difference between clear streets and their obstruction with filth. It is not as if war instigates unprecedented bodily evacuations—though it may concentrate them in new places—but a breakdown of logistics in which a break in the persistent work of waste collection is enough to flood the city.

Zola's vitalism, here and elsewhere, obstructs as much as it illuminates if the lesson is merely that excrement, like everything else, demonstrates life emerging out of waste. The flood, which begins in the city, pours out into the country. Massive quantities of excrement, filling the streets of Sedan, when exchange breaks down, are visible also in *The Earth,* Zola's novel set in

France's breadbasket, the Beauce. One of the old farmers speaks enthusiastically of "the whole of Paris opening the floodgates of its sewers and releasing their fertilizing flood of human manure. He evoked streams of liquid dung pouring through brimming channels and covering every field" (333). Flood, beginning in the city, moves in a torrent out to the country where it creates a new ocean. Describing the wheat fields, Zola remarks, "Now it had become a glorious glowing ocean which seemed to reflect the glowing air, an ocean surging flamelike at the slightest breeze" (194). This ocean in the countryside, also, does not remain in place. Once harvested, wheat becomes part of a flood of produce that returns to the city or, as the farmers are concerned with, travels across the ocean. American wheat haunts Zola's farmers, who see it bearing down upon them in "A river, a torrent, a food! It'll swallow the whole lot of you!" (387).[3] Flood, which seems to be a local phenomenon, pours out from the city into a global phenomenon, producing a flood of floods. The hermeneutic conundrum here, as with the drowned and the liquid throng, is that staring long at the examples one wishes to understand, they change shape in front of one's eyes. Perhaps this is a generic interpretive problem—nothing can be properly understood in relation—but there is something peculiarly frustrating, analytically, about these floods, which flow and flow and flow.

What riding the wave of nineteenth-century wheat demonstrates, however, is the antagonism present throughout the century, a dispute between political economists who look at the world and see too many people, or those who look at political economy and see too much produce, a flood of commodities and goods transforming the world. Mufti may be right, referring to the costermongers and working poor in *London Labour*, that "Mayhew himself characterized

[3] In *The Octopus* (1901), Frank Norris describes American wheat in similar oceanic terms: "the great harvest of Los Muertos rolled like a flood from the Sierras to the Himalayas to feed thousands of starving scarecrows on the barren plains of India" (651).

this class as a 'parasitic' race that fed off the propertied classes" (23). But this is hardly the whole story. In fact, Mayhew turns to the question of overpopulation and free trade precisely while considering the flooded streets and sewers of London. He arrives there through the question of unemployment. "Adopt what explanation we will," he says, "of this appalling deficiency of employment, one thing at least is certain: we cannot *consistently with the facts of the country,* ascribe it to an increase of the population beyond the means of labour; for we have seen that, while the people have increased during the last fifty years at the rate of .9 per cent. per annum, the wealth and productions of the kingdom have far exceeded that amount" (2.323). More poverty cannot simply be explained by more people—population growth—when national wealth has grown in greater proportion. What looks at first like scarcity, a question of absolute quantities, reveals itself as a problem of distribution.

Mayhew is indeed fixated on the relation between the rich and the poor, but rather than obsessing over the parasitic qualities of the costermongers, he is more concerned with their power and energy. Some of this power derives purely from trade. The second volume opens with detailing the enormous amounts of exchange, the wealth passing through the hands of the poorest of the working class. Mayhew's organizing principle is often one of discovering equilibriums in the system, forces of conservation and maintenance in what appears to be a chaotic jumble of livelihoods. But when Mayhew speaks of the London poor as a political class it is, in quite the opposite fashion, to point towards the emergence of entropy out of order. He writes, "I am quite satisfied, from all I have seen, that there are thousands in this great metropolis ready to rush forth, on the least evidence of a rising of the people, to commit the most savage and revolting excesses—men who have no knowledge of the government of the country but as an armed despotism, preventing their earning their living, and who hate all law, because it is made to

appear to them merely as an organised tyranny" (2.5). In hydroscopic terms, the danger here is that the streams of people and tides of traffic that Mayhew sees will transform into a rushing flood. The whirlpool consumes the working class, but here it becomes the whirlpool that has the potential to become a rushing flood that will consume the nation.

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A flood of floods, each propelling the next, and each a sign of healthy metabolic function, fecundity, and surplus. There seems to be no distinction between the city of surplus and the deluge. Yet, the dream of a drowned city in the nineteenth century is, after all, haunted by the possibility of a deluge that brings everything to an end. The notion of expenditure permeates Georges Bataille's work, but *The Accursed Share* is his most extended meditation on expenditure and political economy. For Bataille, expenditure is reflective of the social body: you will know it by its waste, conceived of here as a form of luxury. Luxury, waste, and sacrifice become coterminous with one another, and they lose their utilitarian function. Sacrifice is made not in order to acquire something, but is committed to precisely because it does result in profit. The accursed share is that which is consumed wastefully, and for no other purpose. For Bataille, this secret is general to humanity and political economy, rather than being fixed to a particular culture or social body. Indeed, this excess of energy is as huge as the solar system—the extravagant energy given by the sun—and as small as the individual organism. Without excess of energy, growth and reproduction are not possible. Against the idea of capitalism as a system that continually subsumes the world beneath a logic of utilitarian, calculated, rational thinking, he suggests "energy, which constitutes wealth, must ultimately be spent lavishly… To affirm that it

is necessary to dissipate a substantial portion of energy produced, sending it up in smoke, is to go against judgments that form the basis of a rational economy" (22). The development of civilization here becomes a story of luxury, a commitment to more and more extravagant forms of waste which, for Bataille, is not at all in contradiction to the persistence of poverty, scarcity, and problems of distribution.

If a nation, a culture, an empire—a whole world!—can be investigated by its waste, then the flooded city must be included in this account. It is from this point of view that the future of the drowned city can be investigated. That is, the nineteenth-century's dream of the drowned cities of the future. An exemplary case here is Richard Jefferies's *After London,* in which the middle of England becomes a great lake and London a pestilential swamp in which "There are no fishes, neither can eels exist in the mud, nor even newts. It is dead" (50). Mud no longer becomes, as in Mayhew or Zola, the grounds for fertility and growth, but the muck that extinguishes life. It is easy to forget also that London, at the end of *The Time Machine,* is a desolate beachhead. Indeed, the time traveler's feeling, waking up early in Wells's scientific romance, is that he "had been restless, dreaming most disagreeably that I was drowned, and that sea-anemones were feeling over my face with their soft palps" (42). This dream of drowning turns into the reality of a flooded London when the traveler jumps thirty million years to the future. There are no humans, no Eloi or Morlocks, not even a ruin remains to mark where London once was—only nature overcoming all human endeavor and, in the process, erasing previous distinctions of distribution and political economy.

The nineteenth-century city, particularly London, is an imperial city that, each time it floods, repeats the old myth of Atlantis. However much the myth of Atlantis is about a sunken island, it is also about a submerged city, the remnants of an empire that overreached,

degenerated, and was crushed not through Athenian revenge but by a cataclysmic geological event. Atlantis, which seems to have disappeared as completely as London in *The Time Machine,* is a tourist destination in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. Arronax surveys the ruins by light of an underwater volcano: aqueducts and acropolis, a Parthenon and "a few traces of a quayside… further still, the long lines of broken-down walls and broad deserted streets: a whole Pompeii sunk beneath the waters that Captain Nemo was bringing back to life before my very eyes!" (260). This last statement is curious. The rest of Arronax's account is less about Atlantis coming to life than the emphatic deadness of what had once existed when the submerged land was dry—not just the remains of human life but also mineralized forests, the skeletons of dead animals that Arronax crushes underfoot, and the underwater volcano spewing out lava that threatens to once again destroy what life remains.

Utopia sinks and is brought back to life as the diver walks along the bottom of the ocean to witness its ruins. Life springs out of the cataclysm—but it is monstrous lifeforms that populate the drowned city. The creatures that dwell in the ruins of Atlantis are, for Arronax, perverse, frightening, and enigmatic: "I blanched when I spotted an enormous antenna blocking my route, or terrifying claws clattering shut in the darkness of a cavity!" (258). Much of *Twenty Thousand Leagues* dissolves into catalogues of sea creatures, taxonomic observations, and lessons on natural history. The horror of these sea creatures is, then, that they cannot be classified: "which order did they belong to? Where had nature developed the secret of their brutish life, and for how many centuries had they been living in these furthermost recesses of the ocean?" (259). When the city drowns, life persists in the absence of human life. So also in *The Time Machine,* when the time traveler wanders the beach of a stagnant sea where London used to be: "I cannot convey the sense of abominable desolation that hung over the world. The red eastern sky, the northward

blackness, the salt Dead Sea, the stony beach crawling with these foul, slow-stirring monsters" (79). Thirty million years in the future, what has taken place is not end of the world but the end of the human world, cities turned into perpetual sludge and stagnating tides that imply even, perhaps, the absence of the moon. Human life, extinct, is replaced by huge butterflies, green vegetation, and a monstrous crab whose "evil eyes were wriggling on their stalks, its mouth was all alive with appetite, and its vast ungainly claws, smeared with an algal slime, were descending upon me" (79). Humanity ends and, with it, all of its cruelties, to be replaced by a new species. In the abstract, this sounds like a hopeful vision of the future, a vitalist's dream in which, perhaps, humanity has been replaced because it has evolved to a higher form of being. But, in these accounts, the loss of a single species—the human—makes way for a contraction of life to only a few horrific species.

So the drowned are monsters. The drowned corpse changes shape, transformed when eaten by fish or from being dashed against rocks. The drowned are also monsters in the collective, liquefied into streams of humanity, both symptom and cause of the degeneration of the species. The flooded city, too, is monstrous, but what warning it gives remains to be seen.

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It is at this point that the collector, tearing through heavy tomes for brief passages on floods, and feeling an itch around his nostrils from the dust of old paperbacks, begins to despair that he has gone badly wrong, that all of his thinking about floods and drowning and liquefaction is not too simple but *too bourgeois*. The simplest lesson to be taken from floods is that they do not, at all, point to the end of life but to the beginning. So, once again, the collector is stuck in the loop of vitalism, in which death is always followed by life and new growth emerges from the ashes of

the past. Yet this form of thinking is precisely an imperial one, which looks to slaughtered natives and ruined country sides and sees in them the birth of a new, superior order. Adelene Buckland's *Novel Science* takes up the question of writing and Victorian geology. The relationship she describes between geology and novels is one of rupture rather than continuity, in which novels prized geology because it "offered instead a useful form for narrative breakdown" (27). Of *Dombey and Son,* she writes, "The disastrous and the spectacular, unearthed in the railway's construction, have become a feature of its ongoing progress. Progress and geological disaster are inseparable in the endlessly shifting urban world Dickens depicts" (261). No doubt she is correct about Dickens here, and the description applies as well to many of the examples I have discussed. The flood goes hand in hand with progress. Yet in these floods, what is frustrating is their continuity, that there is no breakdown in ideological narrative, only shape shifting that ends, once again, in the victory of capital and empire. A planet without capital is a world of monsters.

Destructive floods appear as the beginning of utopia, in which class divisions are erased and property is redistributed through, not through political reform or revolution or negotiation but through mass death and cataclysm. Michel Serres suggests, in *The Natural Contract,* that "Floods take the world back to disorder, to primal chaos, to time zero, right back to nature, in the sense of things about to be born, in a nascent state" (51). There is something abstract and empty about this world he describes that is being flooded, but his particular concern is one of political economy and, more specifically, property: "since the flood erased the limits and markers of tillable fields, properties disappeared at the same time" (52). Flood cleans away the stains and pollutions of property but, in this case, is a return, a backwards step to a previous state, a first moment in an old, familiar cycle rather than the first moment of a new state of being. Taussig

speaks of flood in the swamplands as a life-giving phenomenon, something to celebrate: "As regards the war within nature, the flood is what gives the island its bounteous fertility. It makes like hard and it makes life flourish" (96-97). This sense of excitement and possibility is mirrored in Roland Barthes's account of the Paris flood of 1955. Barthes writes, at length, that the flood was less of a catastrophe than a celebration: "First of all, it displaced certain objects, thereby refreshing the perception of the world… All these everyday objects suddenly seemed separated from their roots, deprived of that reasonable substance par excellence, Earth" (62). The flood disorients and, flattening the world, animates it. The angles that make up property disappear, the river itself disappears so that there is no longer a hierarchy between roads, rivers, and fields. For Barthes, the pleasure of the flood is that it does not threaten: "The rising waters overwhelmed the everyday optic without diverting it toward the fantastic; objects were partially obliterated, not deformed: the spectacle was singular but reasonable. Any rather ample rupture of the everyday introduces festivity" (62). There is real pleasure in seeing property obliterated, obscured, and wiped away.

Such is the utopian view, but there is another possibility. Rather than seeing the proliferation of monstrous life as a result of an absence—the absence of humanity, of capital, of empire—it might rather be seen as the expression of those very structures and practice that seem foreclosed in the past. The rotten swamp of London is an expression of the commodity culture of the nineteenth century. The monsters in Atlantis and London are the productions of empires even after their apparent extinctions. *Might rather* is a weak formulation, suggesting an interpretive impasse, but very well. Impasse is at the heart of struggles in Victorian political economy, where equality can only be imagined in terms of extinction, death, and the dry-rot of the world. The dream of a drowned city, the hydroscopic—they are also aspects of an impasse. The flooded city

is here and not here, a reality of everyday life and the disaster that—given the impotence of political action—might alter that reality.

Chapter Four
Swamping the World: Drainage, Property, Recovery

When the deep water begins to run canalwards, the fish will run too. Then good-bye to our trade, since the *Huzoors* allows us nothing in their waters without payment.

Flora Annie Steel, *The Hosts of the Lord*

As earth and sea decay under the global rule of capital, Marxists search for a way to synthesize critiques of capital with concern for nature. One form of synthesis is historicist, returning to Marx's writing to excavate his own thinking about labor and ecology. As part of this project, John Bellamy Foster suggests that while "there is a long history of denouncing Marx for a lack of ecological concern… Marx's notion of the alienation of human labor was connected to an understanding of the alienation of human beings from nature" (9). For Foster, the inability to recognize the synthesis that has been there all along derives from misunderstandings of Marx's materialism. Paul Burkett echoes Foster, saying that the "power of Marx's approach stems, first, from its consistent treatment of human production in terms of the mutual constitution of its social and its material content" (1). Marx's materialism, and his theory of labor, are based on natural limits, including both the limits of the human body and ecological limits. Burkett responds, in particular, to a Promethean understanding of Marx: the power of human labor, whether in capitalism or communism, allows humanity to surpass natural limits.

There are even more ambitious readings of Marx. While Foster and Burkett carefully read Marx, "their analyses sometimes gives a false impression that Marx did not deal with the topic in a systematic but only in a sporadic and marginal way" (Saito 12). Nature, rather than being incidental to Marx, is integral to the point that it is not possible to fully understand "the full scope of his critique of political economy if one ignores its ecological dimension" (14). A different type of historical approach assumes that ecology and economy were inseparable to

begin with, so that "capitalism does not *have* an ecological regime; it *is* an ecological regime" (Moore 158). Capitalism, in Jason Moore's view, has always depended on the free work of nature, which resolves the excesses and contradictions of capital. Cheap nature makes capitalism possible so that what we are witnessing now, in storms and extinction and environmental degradation, is simply the crisis that emerges when cheap nature is reaching the point of exhaustion. Others have attempted to simply discard the question of nature, saying that, shot through with human interference, it no longer exists—perhaps never existed—and has lost its use as a conceptual category. Yet problems remain. As Andreas Malm writes, "Not even its most militant detractors can dispense with the category of nature, and that must be because no one can" (41). Nature persists and, with it, the strained relation between nature and political economy. On one level, this derives from Marx's simple formulation that while philosophers have understood the world, the point is to change it. However much this is a cry for revolution, for changing existing conditions, it is also a statement of fact: human existence cannot persist without metabolizing the products of the earth; there is no ecological regime alternative to capitalism that allows human existence to persist without extraction.

This analytic problem exists too within literary history, but it is beset with the added difficulty of a third category: nature, economy, representation. Yet it is the addition of this third term that completes the circle of a materialist analysis, which is been my method from the beginning, whether investigating drowned corpses, liquefying crowds, or sunken cities. In practice, it is still difficult to bring together the three terms in a way that seems to adequately address all three. One path forward is taken by Deanna Kreisel, who analyzes *The Mill on the Floss* in reference to prevailing Victorian theories of political economy. She traces, in the political economists, "two competing narratives of capitalism: the unshakeable faith in the good

of accumulation and the limitless future of economic growth versus the apocalyptic doom of inevitable stagnation and the obsession with 'inherent' value" (81-82). The danger here would be of simply mapping these theories onto narrative, to see how what is already known corresponds to a familiar text. Kreisel instead finds a way beyond these two competing narratives. Tom does indeed represent prevailing theories, but he realizes both the optimistic and pessimistic narratives of capital while Maggie, "bound up with questions of appetite, demand, and transgressive desire, presents an uncomfortable alternative to the prevailing economic theory' (82). The archaeology of political economy provides a context by which the contributions and alternatives of the novel can be clarified. Kreisel is not particularly interested here in ecology, advancing her argument instead in regards to representations of gender. But the tools are already there in the terms themselves: stagnation and surplus, which are ecological terms as much as economic.

Marshes, bogs, mires, moors—these are places in Victorian literature where corpses disappear, wanderers get lost, obscured by mist, property decays or becomes a sunken investment, things unpredictably bubble back to the surface, and where there is indeed conjoined stagnation and surplus. In wetlands, distinction and category become difficult. Pamela Gilbert suggests, in the context of *Our Mutual Friend* and its leaky bodies, that "one might view the basis of the Victorian hierarchy of civilization not as the opposition between the raw and the cooked, but as that between the liquid and the solid" (83). Liquid and solid, the wet and the dry, become terms by which to analyze and organize Victorian literature and its various ideologies. But the trouble with swamps is that they confuse the distinction between liquid and solid, the wet and the dry, and, along with that distinction, they elude the hierarchy of civilization of which Gilbert speaks. The swamp is simultaneously wet and dry, spotted with islands that might disappear when the river shifts, full of channels that might silt up and become impassable, a zone

of strange temporality and sediment. There are pathways in the moor, but on either side are swampy pits. Here the swamp becomes a starting point for investigating two conjoined Victorian dreams: the dream of a flat earth, of transforming the whole world into property; and a dream of recovery in which drowned land can be drained, submerged property recovered, and in which lost continents can, perhaps, rise back to the surface.

Draining the Swamp

The president speaks of draining the swamp as a way of purging bureaucrats and officials from the capital. While the capital may have been built on a swamp, the statement is largely figurative, a reactionary response that displaces the political contest of ideas and vested interests with a discourse of deep suspicion for experts and professionals. Taken for granted is the idea that the proper response to a swamp is indeed to dry it out. At the same time, there is a separate discourse, in the realm of ecocritics and critics of capital, that demonstrates the devastating and widespread ecological impacts of draining wetlands. Ecological impacts, as these things go, threaten human habitation. The devastations of Hurricane Sandy were due in part to the loss of mediating wetlands: “These waterways were once lined with tidal wetlands that, had they not been largely demolished over the course of the last century, might have played a key role in absorbing these angry storms” (Dawson 71). The storm, in a sense, is not simply the catastrophic events of those few days, but started swirling a century ago.

Storms carry with them the weight of history, and bear it down upon the land that has been cleared for them. As Andreas Malm writes, “the storm of climate change draws its force from countless acts of combustion over, to be exact, the past two centuries” (5). It is in similar

terms that Amitav Ghosh discusses a massive storm in Mumbai, noting the topographical history that contributed to devastation. “The old waterways,” he writes, “have been so extensively filled in, diverted, and built over that their carrying capacity has been severely diminished; and the water bodies, swamplands, and mangrove that might have served as natural sinks have also been encroached upon to a point where they have lost much of their absorptive ability” (45). This storm is historical for Ghosh, not simply because of how the land has been altered, but because of Mumbai’s coastal location, and the historical novelty of building cities on exposed coastlines. Against tradition, “It is as if, in being adopted by the state, the bourgeois belief in the regularity of the world had been carried to the point of derangement” (36). Bourgeois belief is not limited to the chambers of parliament or the parlors of the wealthy. The novel, for Ghosh, also confirms the bourgeois regularity of the world, which includes here not only the weather but drainage and development that flattens the world to build upon it. In a strange turn of events, it is the flattening of the world that leads to chaotic extremes in planetary events. With regularity comes crisis.

The irony of draining the swamp, then, is not simply the problem of an individual—the president’s hypocrisy—but a misunderstanding of the relation between swamp and the state. This is a global problem: after New York and Mumbai comesColombia, where bogs and marshes are being drained to expand palm oil production. For Michael Taussig, this destruction is fueled by a particular attitude towards the land: “Under Western eyes, the swamp is the fetid sinkhole of pestilence and rot, frightening and worse on account of its ambiguity; a nothingness, an everythingness, neither land nor water, neither life nor death but a life-in-death bubbly purulence conflating subject with object” (90). The swamp presents not only ecological problems but epistemic ones, disrupting taxonomy and category by acting as a sinkhole that captures and mixes everything together—not flattening but confusion. Perhaps this seems far from the

Victorians, but Taussig introduces here a reading of *Bleak House*. His focus is not, like Mufti's, the mud itself, or Dedlock's obsession with floodgates, but the relationship between quagmire and the state. The state is a parasitic entity drawing out debts upon the swamp, which leads to an odd ideological problem. He muses, "Strange how much is made of land as in *terra firma* dry and hard underfoot in polemics about power when it's actually the treacherous swamp dark and brooding that sits at the heart of power" (92). Dry ground in this case is dried out ground, the dessicated remainder of a once-fertile territory, while wetlands bubble over with life that we simultaneously extract and refuse to acknowledge. The city drains the swamps that protect it from the storm; the state fills the bogs on which its existence depends.

Swamps are no good for profit, and this explains at least some of the antipathy that has, for centuries, been sunk into quagmires and boggy ground. In Wilkie Collins's *Woman in White,* Sir Percival Glyde surveys the marshes at Blackwater estate and complains that while others call them picturesque, "I call it a blot on a gentleman's property. In my great grandfather's time, the lake flowed to this place. Look at it now! It is not four feet deep anywhere, and it is all puddles and pools. I wish I could afford to drain it, and plant it all over" (230). Draining the swamp, in this case, is a matter of taking waste grounds and transforming them into sites of profitable enterprise. The inverse is that flooded land obstructs enterprise, obscuring the boundaries of property when it does not destroy it completely.

There's nothing very useful in this inquiry if it amounts to sneering at inhabitants of the nineteenth century for doing something that we, presumably, know better than to do now. It's easy, probably too easy, to pan Sir Percival as another bourgeois parasite, whose willingness to abuse women and seize property through illegitimate means mirrors exactly his vision of the earth and his estate as sites for the extraction of value. So, when Percival speaks of draining the

swamp, he becomes one of a number of other types, now embodied in our president, who is visible in *Little Dorrit's* Merdle and *The Way We Live Now's* Augustus Melmotte and their fraudulent speculations; Zola's Saccard, obsessed with real estate, or Octave, who subjects women in *The Ladies' Paradise* to his libidinous attention; or any number of rapacious landlords. This seems correct, but tells us little either about the Victorians or the president and, in the context of nineteenth-century swamps, is only half the story.

My interest is rather in the short distance between a selfish and cruel bastard like Percival Glyde and his moral opposite within Victorian literature, Dorothea Brooke. After the death of her husband, Dorothea tells her sister, "I have delightful plans. I should like to take a great deal of land, and drain it, and make it a little colony, where everybody should work, and all the work should be done well. I should know every one of the people and be their friend" (517). There are differences, of course, between the dreams of Percival and Dorothea, one of private possession and the other of communal life, one of alienated labor and the other of unalienated craft—but both relying on the necessary first step of draining the land. It seems insufficient here to speak of ideology, or to make conscious an unconscious from explicit statements about the land. Rather, the problem is the strange homology between two divergent utopias.

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Drainage is at the center of a surprising confluence of otherwise divergent nineteenth-century theories of political economy, which look to marshes, swamps, bogs, and moors as wilderness. Wilderness in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as Andreas Malm suggests, is the territory of liberation—or at least its possibility. For this reason, "The primordial capitalist impulse toward wilderness is aggression" (28). Malm looks particularly at the Great Dismal Swamp and

insular maroon communities, populated by former slaves and their descendants. Capitalism, wanting to incorporate everything and turn it to profit, cannot abide these territories of escape, and seeks to destroy them. From this point of view, the swamp may be another type of atopia alongside, as Siobhan Carrol argues, the arctic, the atmosphere, undergrounds and oceans, all spaces "perceived as challenging imperial ambitions by virtue of their intrinsic resistance to cultivation and settlement and, thus, to territorial appropriation and state control" (6). Such atopias "await neither improvement nor inevitable wide-scale settlement, nor seamless incorporation into the domestic space of the nation" (6). Indeed, Jessica Howell suggests that America is, in the work of Dickens, a great and permanent swamp: "In both *American Notes* and *Martin Chuzzlewit…* Dickens describes these unhealthy landscapes as unredeemable. They are presently swamps, and swamps they will remain, perpetual ruins representing unachievable American ambitions" (37). While there are productive similarities between the swamp and these atopias, it is this last point that makes it distinct. The swamp, over and over again, is the place that can indeed be transformed and cultivated into productive land.

Yet wetlands in the nineteenth-century novel are areas in which people and things might become lost, and where criminal or outcast elements can hide from the detective, the slave master, the army, the police. Lockwood is warned early on in *Wuthering Heights* (1847) "Do you know that you run a risk of being lost in the marshes? People familiar with these moors often miss their road on such evenings; and I can tell you there is no chance of a change at present" (12). The series of stones painted with lime to mark the path from the deep swamps of the moor disappear in the snowstorm, and even with a guide Lockwood continually finds himself straying from the disguised road. The Dismal Swamp, in Delany's *Blake* (1859), is not only a place for escaped place to hide, but is populated by conjurors such as Gamby Gholar, whose hut is full of

"articles of a mysterious character, some resembling bits of woolen yarn, onionskins, oystershells, finger and toenails, eggshells, and scales, which he declared to be from very dangerous serpents, but which closely resembled, and were believed to be, those of innocent and harmless fish" (113). It is an odd passage that, indicative of Delany's account of the swamp, is torn between suspicion of empty superstition and attraction to the real power of a black community that might threaten the plantation economy. The highland moors of Scotland are also a place for Scottish bandits and rebels to hide from England's occupying force in *Kidnapped* (1886). David Balfour, kidnapped to be sold as a slave in the Americas, runs with Alan to the moors after he is blamed for the assassination of an English officer. Looking out at the moor, Balfour reflects, "A wearier looking desert man never saw; but at least it was clear of troops, which was our point" (153). Or, for a final example, consider Watson's first impressions of the moor in *The Hound of the Baskervilles,* after hearing that a convict has recently escaped nearby: "Somewhere there, on that desolate plain, was lurking this fiendish man, hiding in a burrow like a wild beast, his heart full of malignancy against the whole race which had cast him out" (58). The moor is where people hide and get lost, where horses drown in mud pits and, of course, where the drama of the Baskervilles is finally played out. The moors are places of confusion to invading forces, but places of organization to those who know the land. The army can enter and capture a particular bandit, the detective can hunt down a murderer, but the land remains untouched and the slave uprising does not materialize.

If this were the final word, then there would be little reason to reconsider the swamp. But there are already good reasons to be suspicious of *exception* as a final formulation for the swamp. Swamps, rather, are subject to the landholder's desire to enclose, to transform the whole world into a plantation. In the Caribbean, for instance, "Marvelously complex and diverse

tropical forests were torn down to make room for the privately owned plots of land, the geometric grids of fields devoted to the cultivation of sugar, rice, coffee or cotton" (Malm 11). There is little reason to contest Malm's claims in regards to capitalism or imperialism. Yet while he is able to articulate a distinct vision of wilderness in the context of slaves escaping to the Dismal Swamp, or insular maroon communities, the swamp is not a space of liberation for Europe's socialist, communist, and anarchist theorists of political economy—both real and fictional.

The swamp is a place of confluence for otherwise contrary ideas of political economy. One of the ways to demonstrate this is not simply to oppose writers as different as Collins and Eliot, or to compare the self-sacrificing heroine of *Middlemarch* with the all-possessing villain of *The Woman in White*, but to find this shared ground in the midst of antagonism within a single novel. Consider, for example, Zola's *Money,* published between 1890 and 1891, which details a stock market crash and the spectacular rise and fall of a fraudulent company. Saccard, the owner and mastermind behind the scheme, flees at the end of the novel to Holland, where he "once again launched on a colossal enterprise, the draining of vast marshes, a little kingdom to be won from the sea, thanks to a complicated system of canals" (371). Saccard's project here is not simply continuing the longstanding Dutch practice of reclaiming land from the sea, but is a continuation of his business practice from earlier in the novel. In *Money,* drainage is the shared dream of the wealthy and the poor, capitalists and socialists, all of whom look to the marsh and see waste. The inverse of Saccard in this novel is the chronically ill Sigismond who, dying, details his vision of a socialist future. "Ah!" he says, "What new activities, the whole of humanity at work, the hands of every living being improving the world! … No more barren moors, no more marshes, no more wastelands. Inlets are filled up, obstructive mountains

disappear, deserts change into fertile valleys, with water springing out everywhere… The whole earth at least is habitable… And the whole man is now developed, fully grown, enjoying his full appetites, now the true master" (367). At first this seems like a simple process of inversion. The dry becomes wet and the wet becomes dry. But it is more accurate to say that what this vision describes is, like the global plantation that Malm describes, is a flattened earth – not wetlands made into desert or deserts turned into swamp, but both turned into fields of corn and tulips. Socialists and capitalists share a fantasy of extraction, a dream of humanity's total domination of the earth.

The desire to make the earth flat reflects a nineteenth century horror of uselessness, and one that belongs just as much to radicals as reactionaries. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's critique of property is not only his famous formulation that property is theft, it is that property is waste. He notes, "The proprietor may, if he chooses, allow his crops to rot under foot; sow his field with salt; milk his cows on the sand; change his vineyard into a desert, and use his vegetable-garden as a park… In the matter of property, use and abuse are necessarily indistinguishable" (42). The trouble with property is not only with its distribution, but that implicit within ownership is the right of abuse, the ability to take something and, through magical processes, turn it into nothing. Karl Marx devoted a whole book to skewering Proudhon, but his theory of the alienation of workers from the earth presupposes an ideal extractive relationship, rather than leaving the swamps alone. Likewise, French anarchist Élisée Reclus writes, "There is no soil that man… can not transform into fertile fields: by means of drainage, he draws off the hurtful water which chills the earth and rots the roots of plants; by means of irrigation, he brings on the land at the proper time the water necessary" for a bounteous harvest (470). It's not as if Reclus is blind to humanity's abuse of the earth. He contends in this same work that humans are geological

workers who abuse the earth, drive animals to extinction, pollute rivers or dry them up and, through the web of private property, create waste that might not exist in an organized system of common ownership. But the swamp should nevertheless be drained.

Drainage

There is an unhappy antinomy in the nineteenth century: on the one hand, terror of waste and, on the other, terror that in the final accounting everything is reabsorbed. The presence of the dust heaps in *Our Mutual Friend,* which first seem like monuments to useless rubbush, are finally "not about a surplus, left over from something else: *it is not about Waste.* Indeed, Dust is the opposite thing to Waste… It is about the circularity, the impossibility of things disappearing or going away, or being gone" (Steedman 164). Everything in the novel, down to drowned human corpses, is recuperated and transformed into value. As striking as these dust heaps may be, this lesson is hardly isolated to Dickens. The Victorian organism is everywhere metabolizing and, "There is a tendency throughout the century, and in writers as diverse as Carlyle, Spencer, William Thomson, and even Marx, to turn waste into a necessary component of some sort of overarching teleological narrative, and thus, in a sense, [it is] *not really wasted*" (MacDuffie 32). It's not clear to me that this tendency is limited to the teleological narratives that MacDuffie describes. The shorthand for these processes could simply "commodification," beginning first with the land and extending to produce, products, objects, and human bodies. Freedgood claims that critics are nervous about things in Victorian novels because they always end up being commodities, and this includes wasted space. If the transformation of waste into commodity is teleological then it is often a negative teleology when seen from below. Every wilderness and

wasteland, in the name of profit, health, and civilization, becomes the site of another round of extraction, dispossession, or accumulation. Describing material processes, these terms all risk turning into grand abstractions. Yet it is in the link between drainage and property that a new narrative is possible.

Nineteenth-century novels may not necessarily demonstrate Proudhon's cry that property is theft but, in many cases, they set up a string of equivalences in which property is filth and—at the same time—that filth is the compost of new life. The secret of transformation is not humans subjecting the earth, but money subjecting both. Even Zola's philanthropists are not immune from this realization. In *Money,* Madame Caroline conceives of Lebanon as a place of immeasurable wealth, neglected and wasted by its oriental proprietors, and now to be developed by her brother. She thinks, "Money, poisonous, destructive money, became the ferment of all social vegetation, providing the necessary compost for the accomplishment of the great works that would bring nations together and create peace on the earth" (206). Caroline's dream spins out into a vision of money tearing down mountains, filling the seas, transforming the world into a habitable territory for humanity, which is freed from labor by machines. The money itself is already filthy waste, which is the condition for new life. The abuse inherent in property is simply the cost of all the wonders it produces.

The philanthropist's dream is crushed, it seems, by capitalist realism, but it is more precisely a philanthropic dream realized through capital. It is an unhappy dialectic in which the ills of capital are best cured through more capitalism, and in which filth is solved through more filth. Nasser Mufti reads *Bleak House's* mud and sees, in it, monetized land, compound value created through pedestrian activities. "If *Bleak House* teaches us that land is a social relation, then it also helps think about what happens when England's social topography offers no solid

footing upon which to walk" (77). What's at stake for me here is the hermeneutic victory of capitalism, imagining it as an all powerful system which, swamp-like, seems to capture everything that might seek to escape, rather than imagining it for what I think it is, a system of extraction and drainage. There seems to be nothing harder than finding an outside to capitalism's property relations, and the fact that we are quick to conflate the dissolution of society with the dissolution of property shows just how closely the two things are intertwined with each other.

Drainage offers an escape from this hermeneutic difficulty. When it comes to drainage in the nineteenth-century novel, there is after all a curious doubling, a relation already present between ecology and economy. In George Eliot's work, for instance, someone who speaks of draining is just as likely to refer to wealth as to soggy ground that must be developed. Consider a brief catalogue of draining wealth from Eliot: Harold Transome accuses Jermyn, in *Felix Holt,* of having "some underhand scheme of your own, on a par with the annuities you have drained us by in the name of Johnson" (440). Elsewhere, Transome considers it best that Esther "should know how the fortune of his family had been drained by law expenses" (496). Godwin Lydgate in *Middlemarch* informs Lydgate, in response to the latter's request for money, "I can do nothing of the sort. My own family drains me to the last penny" (624). In *Daniel Deronda,* Gascoigne claims, "My boys are too great a drain on me" (26), and Vandernoodt suggests Grandcourt "must have made himself a pretty large drain of money" (370). Drainage is mostly a domestic matter in these cases, but it can also be a civil matter as in *Romola* when Tito predicts that the occupied city of Florence will be "drained by the payment of this great subsidy to the French King" (351). Degenerate family members siphon off their inheritance, or land is dried out. The examples are all casual, with little indication that we are supposed to hear any similarity between the two. In either usage of the word, there is a relation to property, but they are contrary relations. Draining,

in reference to wealth, is property lost as stockpiled wealth dissipates. It is circulation, but a bad form of circulation. Draining, in reference to land, is property gained as land becomes usable.

There is, of course, a simple response to the disjunctions inherent in drainage, and to the continuity between capitalists and socialists who both want to drain swamps. Stagnant water, in the nineteenth century, becomes a potential and real hazard to the healthy. Disease festers in the swamp. Particularly, for Howell writing about Dickens, the swamp is a mosquito-infested ground associated with malaria, indicating the wrongness of a soggy continent for "English and American subjects" (30). Mosquitoes care about blood, and not at all about ideology. In a neat reversal, capitalists and socialists move beyond ideology in their antagonism to swamps. Mosquitoes and ill-health, however, do not capture the uses and terrors of marshes in the rest of Dickens's work, particularly wetlands appearing in Britain.

The marsh may be where people go to be bit and infected, but it is also where property goes to die. Two passages will suffice here, the first a description of Millbank from *David Copperfield*: "In one part, carcases of houses, inauspiciously begun and never finished, rotted away. In another, the ground was cumbered with rusty iron monsters of steam-boilers, wheels, cranks, pipes, furnaces, paddles, anchors, diving-bells, windmill-sails, and I know not what strange objects, … sunk into the soil of their own weight in wet weather" (685). Mosquitoes are replaced by different monsters, simultaneously animated and trapped along the banks of the river. *Great Expectations*, a novel all about inheritance and the acquisition of property, begins and ends in the marshes. Indeed, wetlands are territories that draw together disparate parts of Britain. Pip says of the land outside of London, "It was like my own marsh country, flat and monotonous" (449). Like the earlier passage, this one is filled with ruins in the marsh: crippled lighthouses, slimy stakes, slimy marking stones, "and an old landing-stage and an old roofless

building slipped into the mud, and all about us was stagnation and mud" (449). For Dickens, a thermodynamic writer obsessed with circulation, there is perhaps no harsher judgment of a place that that it is stagnant, marked by monotonous repetition. Streets, streets, streets. Bricks, bricks, bricks. Mud, mud, mud. Slime, slime, slime. Here the two types of drainage in Eliot, which seem far apart, come together. The obvious lexical repetition obscures the repetition of finding, in the marsh, sunken and decaying structures. The problem with wetlands is not only that they are unhealthy, and not only that they cannot be planted, but that they actually destroy what property they touch.

There is a negative relationship, in Dickens, between the swamp and property. The swamp, in an entropic process, slowly deteriorates whatever property it encounters. Property remains—clearly visible, rather than disguised, buried, or hidden away—but is not available for recuperation. Even so, there are really two directions for entropy in the relation between the swamp and lost property, a divide that roughly mirrors the debates around energy that MacDuffie describes: "The emphasis placed on energy dissipation as a cosmic inevitability, rather than the outgrowth of wasteful human practices, helped shift the burden and the responsibility for waste away from an entropy-producing industrial order, and onto the natural world itself" (14). It's easy to see this shift of responsibility in the passages from *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations.* Property, in Dickens, is lost as a function of the swamp itself—a relationship that seems obvious until presented with its inverse in Richard Jefferies's *After London,* which describes a future England, flooded over and reduced to a feudal society. *After London* has primarily been understood in the context of evolution and natural selection so that, "The real subject of Jefferies's dark fantasy is extinction. Instead of creating abundance, the resurgence of nature has obliterated life" (Beer 134). This is the novel from an ecological point of view, in which

dissipation is not so much about energy as it is about life becoming simplified through entire species disappearing.

Yet *After London* is more properly about the relation between ecology and political economy. It is, for John Plotz, a naturalist novel that is simultaneously weird and emblematic. Plotz writes against the idea that naturalism was primarily a French and American affair, a movement that bypassed the British Isles. For Plotz, what is important is not remnant or extinction but repetition: ecological transformation and catastrophe simply continue previous property relations. The feudal dream of the novel, then, is not the idealized one of Morris and Ruskin. The world after London is not one of unalienated labor and dedicated craft. It is nothing to celebrate but rather demonstrates that "the reversion to medieval forms of accumulation would be no benefit, because the crudest tyrannical exploitation of man by man would follow. A few scraps of metal and a couple of dusty books suffice, after the deluge, to constitute a new domineering hereditary aristocracy" (48). Storm and flood are not opportunities for transformation, or for utopia, and from this point of view, the novel does not fulfill the naturalist's novel's entropic vision. Property, rather than disappearing, takes on a vital dimension, able to form around itself—as it does for Marx—a whole world. Property is animated and, in its animation, corrupts the earth. Drain the marshes, and the toxic wealth of the world would continue to pollute the exposed land beneath.

The morass seems to lead to a critical impasse: the swamp either destroys property, or property destroys the swamp. But there is a way beyond the impasse. Plotz's account seems right, when considering the populations and politics at work in the novel, as well as his account of property that forms a world around itself. Yet London—as well as the miasmic swamp that has absorbed the city—is hardly present in Plotz's account of *After London*. The relation

between swamp and property, so obvious in Dickens, is reversed in Jefferies' London, where "all the rottenness of human beings is there festering under the stagnant water, which had sunk down and penetrated the earth, and floated up to the surface of the contents of the buried cloacae" (50). Property, rather than being destroyed by the swamp, actively corrupts the earth and creations the condition for its own annihilation as property. The future the novel depicts is not one in which property no longer exists, or in which property relations are transformed, but one in which massive amounts of property are no longer available for human use or salvage. Property relations remain, but the scales of domination and extraction are transformed. This state of entropy, then, demonstrates on large scale what is already present in Dickens's marshes, and there are echoes also of *Bleak House* here. Private hoards are redistributed and re-appropriated, but by the swamp rather than by the state. Sunk costs remain sunk. The dream of draining the swamp, then, is a dream of reversing or slowing down entropic processes, of recovering that which has been irretrievably lost. Drain the swamp and, with it, the unproductive and idle outcasts of society.

Recovery

Why not simply call this a bourgeois dream, the dream of a flat earth, and be done with it? The swamp, in all its apparent repetition, is the constant obstacle to this ever-present dream. The dream of a flat earth is obvious in all of the century's hydrological projects—irrigation channels, embankments, sewage lines streaming beneath the city, weirs and dams and canals. The flat earth proliferates life, but proliferates the same forms over and over, rather than an explosion of multiplicity or speciation. To make the earth useful, it is necessary not only to drain swamps but to introduce clear channels where none exist.

The nineteenth century, after all, is the era of the Suez Canal and, at least, the vision of a Panama Canal that would open up new circuits of exchange. In Reclus's description, the Suez Canal is not simply about cutting a trench through dry ground, but about new life springing up in the desert. He writes, "In consequence of the attraction which such an immense field of labor could not fail to exercise over the population of Egypt and of Europe generally, the desert has become inhabited, and dotted over with gardens and oases; two important towns, Port-Said and Ismailia, have risen out of the sand" (502). An oasis in the desert! New life out of the dead earth, and production where there was only idleness! Only a cynic, or a Marxist, could scoff at life in the desert, pointing knowingly to the fact that these oases are built in service of a channel that eases the swift passage of crafts, goods, and armies.

And isn't it possible to see that when Saccard returns to Holland, he is simply participating in an old tradition of reclaiming ground from the sea for the good of the people? Theodor Storm's *Rider on the White Horse* (1888), published three years before *Money*, approaches directly the question of dykes and land reclamation on the North Sea. It is the legend of the dike master Hauke who, early on, stares at an unprotected pasture where the "golden sunlight of September gleamed on the naked strip of mud, a hundred feet or so across, and into the deep watercourse through which, even now, the sea was pouring. 'It could be dammed up,' Hauke murmured" (231). Hauke proposes a new dike to benefit the public, who can use the new pastures, and the treasury, which will benefit from the taxes upon a thousand acres of reclaimed land. Yet the dike encounters proletarian resistance by those who must do the actual work of construction, who object to the new taxes and additional labor, and who insist that "If this dike is to hold up, something living has got to go into it!" (256). The dike, eventually constructed, is finally compromised by the sea. According to the proletarian wisdom, its failure might be

attributed to the fact that Hauke rescues a dog that is thrown into the middle of the dike. There is too much to parse out here fully. I raise Storm's story to indicate that however much it makes sense to idealize land reclamation, here too it appears as a bourgeois dream that, to be properly implemented, still requires a foundation of blood.

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Draining land, in the nineteenth century, recovers wealth out of the flood. Dry land is new territory, rescued from the sea or the marsh for production, but so often it is production that seems to exacerbate inequalities. The wealthy estate holder, draining the swamp on his property, increases the profitability of the land. But the narrative of recovery out of the deluge changes when property changes from land to possessions. A whole other mode of extraction presupposes previous loss—sunken treasures, artifacts, whole worlds. Alongside the Victorian sense that wealth drowns in a process of entropy is the optimistic notion that drowned wealth might still be extracted. Such a tension is present in Laura Otis's reading of *The Sign of Four,* in which the stolen jewels fall, after a struggle, into the Thames. "The story thus acts out," says Otis, the complex but essentially irreversible movement of wealth under the British Empire: from the 'small' people into the Thames" (96). Here Otis means the Thames metonymically: the river stands in not for itself, or even for London, but for the British Empire. The jewels stand in for wealth brought from the imperial periphery to the heart of the empire. Otis is right in regards to the movement of wealth, but wealth appears here as something extracted only to be discarded. Wealth is not integrated into the British hoard but submerged within its territory—usable only if actually recovered. The question of whether the drowned corpse can actually be annihilated

reemerges in the question of property, whether sunken wealth and value might be re-appropriated or whether that property is lost, removed in some way from circulation.

There is good reason, for the reader of the nineteenth-century novel, to assume that sunken jewels, particularly those lost in rivers, will return to the surface. There is good reason, for the reader of the nineteenth-century novel, to assume that sunken jewels will return to the surface. George Levine, in *Darwin and the Novelists,* describes an epistemic imperative in Victorian narrative that all secrets must be finally revealed, all hidden and occult knowledge brought to light, all veils drawn back. These revelations are often not private, know only to investigators within the narratives, or formal functions in which the reader is given special knowledge unavailable to those within the world of the narrative. They are rather, often, public aspects of the narrative world. The mystery of Silas Marner's stolen gold is solved through the recovery of both the drowned man and drowned goods. Godfrey says of his brother Dunstan, the drowned man, "The Stone-pit has gone dry suddenly – from the draining, I suppose; and there he lies – has lain for sixteen years, wedged between two great stones. There's his watch and seals, and there's my gold-handled hunting-whip," along with the stolen gold (161). Yet recovery is often more partial. Rosanna Spearman, drowned in the quicksands of *The Moonstone,* is not dragged back to the surface but replaced with the body of her letter. Edwin Drood disappears, eternally missing in Dickens's unfinished final novel. Crisparkle finds Drood's gold chain and watch at the weir in the river and "dived and dived and dived, until he could bear the cold no more. His notion was, that he would find the body; he only found a shirt-pin sticking in some mud and ooze" (182). The imperative in Levine's account may exist, but it is hardly a straightforward one in which objects are recovered whole. The truth must be pieced together from the wreckage that remains. Each of these examples is a disturbing discovery. Nevertheless,

dredging and recovery, bring order to the world, filling in some missing blank, balancing the scales of justice.

Jewels might disappear, but there is a whole riverside economy built on the loss and recovery of property. Most famous, perhaps, are the rivermen of *Our Mutual Friend,* dredging bodies and lost objects from the Thames. Adjacent to the marshes, stuffed with abandoned monsters that no one cares to salvage, is the river, flowing with possibility. The Thames may seem to be a particular ecosystem, but a similar economy of the metal scavengers on the Seine is described at even greater length in *The Mysteries of Paris*. They drag the river with dredging tools, collect sand from under the sludge, then wash it for fragments of metal: "iron, copper, smelting, lead, tin, all coming from the debris of numerous tools. Often the scavengers even find fragments of jewelry, gold, or silver in the sand, carried down by the Seine, either by way of the sewers into which the streams empty or by way of the masses of snow and ice that collect in the streets over the winter and get thrown into the river" (721). What appears first as a another long catalog of items lost and found turns out, in Sue, to be the anatomy of a system: not simply items but how they circulate and where they stagnate, ready for collection.

No doubt there is a documentary element to Dickens and Sue's accounts of salvaging. They incorporate dredging into their novels simply because it was there. After all, John Binny, one of Henry Mayhew's collaborators, details the activities of mudlarks, dredgers, and smugglers on the Thames as they rip copper of the sides of ships, break into their cabins, or collect "from the bed of the river coals which are occasionally spilled in weighing when being transferred into barges" (265-266). But such an explanation stalls out, as does every account of realism that relies on a simple correspondence between life and representation. It tells us little about what the literary representations accomplish. In *Our Mutual Friend,* the constant salvaging is also marked

by competition between the rivermen, and this is repeated in Flora Annie Steel's *Hosts of the Lord* (1900) in the figures of Gu-gu and Am-ma, both Indian divers. In Steel's terms, Am-ma is not only scavenging but "stealing a log from the piles about the canal's workshops. He was now, after time-honoured precedent, towing it to the stream where, having set it adrift, he would recapture it, and, of course, claim his reward for so doing!" (161). Am-ma is the bad native, eventually drowned by Gu-gu after inciting a riot against the British. These moments, however, are important to hold on to even when they arrive, as most of them do, in the middles of the narrative. Over and over again in the nineteenth century, the story is of monopoly, of wealth streaming from the immiserated poor to the already-rich. But in these tales of scavenging the circuit of dispossession reverses. They are jubilant, even if they do not yet rise to the scale of a jubilee in which all debts are cancelled. These moments create an undercurrent, perhaps a riptide, of property moving from the wealthy to the poor in the Victorian novel.

The Swamp Plot

It is, perhaps, a procedural mistake to introduce the Victorian swamp plot in relation to texts that make the swamp so literal, the loss of property so obvious, and where dissipation is everywhere. Yet the swamp carries with it everyone that has come before. The drowned corpse is in Doyle's Grimpen Mire, where, as Stapleton says, "Only yesterday I saw one of the moor ponies wander into it. He never came out. I saw his head for quite a long time craning out of the bog-hole, but it sucked him down at last" (69). Or, as in Wells *Days of the Comet,* the operations of civilization itself are compared to sinking in a swamp: "Humanity choked amidst its products, and all its energy went in increasing its disorder, like a blind stricken thing that struggles and sinks in a

morass" (103). Or, as in *The Belly of Paris*, when Florent gazes out over the city, so often seeing it as a city of lakes but on hot summer nights it "spread before him a kind of evil-smelling marsh, the stagnant water of some accursed sea" (248). The swamp has been present all along. It is also perhaps a procedural mistake to refer what I am describing as a plot at all, as if it accounts for beginnings and endings. In the swamp, beginnings and endings dim in importance to confluence and profusion. The middle of the swamp must be attended to, to avoid becoming like the drowning moor pony. Sometimes, yes, the swamp appears at the boundaries of novels, but it often appears—or actually is—their middles: the casual threats of drowning oneself, the commonplace image of the liquefying crowd, or the double-vision of a city that is both dry and flooded, or in property that does not so much change hands as slip continuously out of one's grasp. Including apocalyptic narratives here obscures, even as they clarify, the common political economy of the nineteenth-century novel.

The swamp is a middle ground, and this allows a way of returning to the beginning question of the relation between ecology and economy. If, again and again, the distinctions between the bourgeois and the proletarian, the capitalist and the socialist, the few and the many, seem to collapse into similar ecological visions, then these are, no doubt, wrong distinctions to make. The proper terms are available, rather, in the distinction between the swamp and a flat earth, the swamp and the field, the swamp and the plantation, the swamp and the estate. Unpublished in his own lifetime, Jefferies's essay, "Absence of Design in Nature – The Prodigality of Nature and Niggardliness of Man," offers a more mundane consideration of the questions of economy and nature that appear in the swamps of *After London*. Jefferies retires from the heat to write, looks at his chair and table and painting, and is struck but the utter lack of design in nature. Initially haunted by this realization, he writes that "The very idea of a design or

a purpose has since grown repulsive to me, on account of its littleness" (228). Purpose and design become emblems of economy, and, "I dislike the word economy: I detest the word thrift; I hate the thought of saving. Maybe some scheme in the future may be devised whereby such efforts may be turned to a general end. This alone I am certain of: there is no economy, thrift, or saving, in nature; it is one splendid waste" (229). In conjunction with *After London,* there is an initial confusion. The swamps there are thrifty, becoming sinks that capture and hold on to property. They are, from this point of view, simply a version of nature after nature. Yet they continue to fulfill Jefferies's vision of nature as waste—belonging to everyone and no one at the same time, transforming the property that was there.

There is still no better warning against fields than Rousseau's in *Discourse on Inequality.* His history of property begins with the first man who encloses a piece of land, claims it as his own, and finds others stupid enough to believe him. This is the foundation of civil society, and "How many crimes, wars, murders; how much misery and horror the human race would have been spared if someone had pulled up the stakes and filled in the ditch and cried out to his fellow men: 'Beware of listening to this impostor. You are lost if you forget that the fruits of the earth belong to everyone and that the earth itself belongs to no one!'" (109). The swamp plot, among other things, is the moment of remembering that the earth indeed belongs to no one. In *Poetics of Relation,* Édouard Glissant writes of the bay of Lamentin in Martinique, "They are trying to fill in this mangrove swamp, zoning it for industry or for major centers of consumption. Yet still the swamp resists" (205). Glissant doesn't make much of the swamp here, but elsewhere talks about the import of opacity, against colonial methods that want to make the whole word transparent. We want a field, but what we get is a swamp that absorbs whatever structures we attempt to

build upon it—including the basic antagonisms with which I began this chapter, capital against nature, capitalism against Marxism.

Reading the nineteenth century, looking to the swamp, critics must find how literature resists rather than residing comfortably in the beginnings and endings that enclose the novel itself. Interpretation, I have assumed from the beginning, is a confrontation with resistance, obstacle, and confusion, a long path of self-criticism as much as criticism. In the swamp, there is no need to speak of an antagonism between the possibility of loss and a dream of recovery. They are part of the same vision.

Coda:

Atlantis Looming

Literary studies, so concerned with finding a relation between history and the objects of its investigation, has expended less energy in self-criticism. The relation between our own productions and their historical moment is so often a simplistic one of guilt—these indulgent studies distract us, in their escapism, from the realities of the present—or an equally simplistic materialist relation: literary studies, and the academy more broadly, cannot escape its own moment but repeats the same prejudices, inequalities, and cruelties.

Much of my account has been an effort in clinging on to the ephemera of history, the odd details in novels that are easy to miss and difficult to systematize. So it seems right here, at the end, to stare into the flux of the present. The world retreated, to save itself from a frightening new virus that transformed into a pandemic. Literary studies, historical inquiries, and critical inquiry more generally, so easily skewered for their distance from the challenges and struggles of everyday life, found a new justification. Finally, there was an understandable context for Žižek's repeated injunction: Don't just do something, sit there! Žižek is speaking in terms of political activity: better to do nothing than participate in false solutions that fail to interfere with the smooth functioning of capitalism. Our real responsibility to the present, as Timothy Morton writes in the context of global warming, must be met with skepticism: "we are also faced with various fantasies about 'acting now,' many of which are toxic to the kind of job humanists do. There is an ideological injunction to act 'Now!' while humanists are tasked with slowing down" (117). The promise of the pandemic was a new appreciation for slowness, for being rooted in a place rather than idly flying around the globe, for artistic productions that console us in our

isolation amidst global disaster. The ideological injunction to act now was replaced by the ethical injunction to sit around, for the good of others even if not for oneself.

The Victorians, and the Atlantis myth, seem to fulfill this promise. The last survivors of a global plague, in Shelley's *Last Man,* retreat to the palace in Milan, where they find themselves unable to read most books, finding in them experiences and emotions that were no longer to be theirs. Mostly talking, what they do manage to read is "Metaphysical disquisition; fiction, which wandering from all reality, lost itself in self-created errors; poets of times so far gone by, that to read of them was as to read of Atlantis and Utopia; or such as referred to nature only" (431). Atlantis! An example standing in for history that is meaningless enough to be of use, as distraction, at the end of the world.

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The question of Atlantis remains unanswered here, in an inquiry that has hardly been about recovering its nineteenth-century representations, or the scientific debates surrounding lost continents. A different version of this inquiry, and a useful one, would have been to start with Alfred Russel Wallace's note in *Island Life* about the possibility of a lost continent in the Atlantic. "These great depths," he says, "render it in the highest degree improbable that the Azores have ever been united with the European continent; while their being wholly volcanic is equally opposed to the view of their having formed part of an extensive Atlantis including Madeira and the Canaries" (235). While my account has not followed these debates, it is indeed interested in Atlantis as a touchstone between modes of thinking that are otherwise far apart: empiricism and mysticism, capitalism and socialism, realism and scientific romance, utopia and cataclysm. That is to say, already in the Atlantis myth is the problem I am trying to solve between everyday life and historical inquiry.

James Bramwell writes in *Lost Atlantis* that the question of the lost continent has largely been regarded as a technical debate rather than a moral tragedy. He asks, "What significance, if any, has the Atlantis theme for the present day? In a civilization which is primarily concerned with the problem of preserving itself from being destroyed in war, is it worth bothering about a sunken continent?" (244). Bramwell's present day, the nineteen-thirties, is shadowed by rising fascism and the threat of global war, yet the threat of human annihilation remains. The question of human survival is directly tied to sinking islands and rising seas that might submerge entire nations or sink the coastal cities where most of the species resides. Bramwell wants to replace the technical and empirical question of the existence of Atlantis with one of value—the value of the narrative itself.

The oldest story of Atlantis is from Plato, who discusses it in the context of debates of an ideal society and what that society would look like in action. Critias hears from the Egyptians the history of his own country, which has lost its own records in a repeating cycle of destruction and loss. Atlantis, the ideal society, is also the one that "attempted to enslave, at a single stroke, your country and ours and all the territory within the strait" (38). It is a myth of lost fertility, of deforested mountains suitable now only for insects, and a nation corrupted as it becomes more and more human: "when the divine element in them became weakened by frequent admixture with mortal stock, and their human traits became predominant, they ceased to be able to carry their prosperity with moderation" (145). The myth of Atlantis, then, is from the beginning one of imperial abuse and disintegration.

One half of Atlantis is a return to some obscured beginning. So, lost Atlantis has been located not only in the Azores and Canary Islands but in Palestine, Italy, Sweden, and Africa: "The successive nationalistic versions of Atlantis that we have examined represent but one

aspect of a widespread ideological phenomenon: the quest for Origins, which is to be found among proud and humiliated peoples alike" (Vidal-Naquet, 324). No doubt some of this quest for origins persists also in the nineteenth century, yet it is dominated by Atlantis as the recognition of a horrific present and the dream of a distant future. Consider, for instance, some final examples. Helene Blavatsky, in her occult *Secret Doctrine,* poses an analogous ending between lost continents and Britain, saying, "Lemuria was not submerged as Atlantis was, but was *sunk* under the waves, owing to the earthquakes and subterranean fires, as Great Britain and Europe will be one day" (266). That Lemuria and Atlantis might sink suggests that, however stable a continent seems, it too will one day drift into the ocean. Towards the end of his book on Atlantis, Ignatius Donnelly, seeing the myth in flood stories from around the globe, explains its profusion in reference to the end of the British Empire: "Let us suppose that Great Britain should to-morrow meet with a similar fate. What a wild consternation would fall upon her colonies and upon the whole human family! The world might relapse into barbarism deep and almost universal" (478). Jameson's famous phrase, that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism, might be retroactively applied to the nineteenth century. It is easier to imagine the destruction of an entire continent than the end of the British Empire. Or, rather, there is no end to the British Empire in sight except by means of a catastrophic geological event.

*

These are scattered reflections. Perhaps it is true, for some literary scholars, that there is a break between their work and the world. In practice, for me, it is an experience of constant intrusion, the total inability to concentrate on hermeneutical questions when the world itself is scattered. The injunction to stay at home has, in the aftermath of the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna

Taylor, and George Floyd, been replaced by an imperative to protest against police brutality. Living a block from the Seattle Police Department's East Precinct, it is impossible to separate oneself from the world. Looking out the window, I could see the explosions of flashbangs, riot police emerging out of clouds of smoke to shoot fleeing protestors with rubber bullets, and hear endless chanting. Under such circumstances, what sort of reading and writing is possible, and what is it worth?

Indeed, the content of those hermeneutical questions, in the study of Atlantis, is the same story of drowning, liquefaction, stagnation and global crisis. In the final pages of *Tristes Tropiques,* Claude Lévi-Strauss reconsiders anthropology, the study of humanity. "Anthropology," he writes, "could with advantage be changed into 'entropology,' as the name of the discipline concerned with the study of the highest manifestations of this process of disintegration" (414). Human population, from this point of view, is best thought of as disintegration, an odd thing for the scholar well known for structural anthropology. His examples are also odd, including urbanization and agriculture, more easily thought of as examples of systems that exist only through complex networks of integration. The city and the field, however, are signs of entropy inasmuch as, however much they set things in motion, they also bring circuits to a halt. Entropy, from this point of view is not chaos or disorder. Rather, the definition is visible in his own self-correction: "entropy, that is inertia" (413). Entropy is stagnation, the point at which things come to a stop, where expenditure leads to loss rather than a reinvestment. To study humanity and its creations is to observe a process of disintegration that leads to a grinding halt.

Yet, even in authors as strange and suspect as Donnelly and Blavatsky, it is through historical inquiry that a different future can be imagined. Perhaps Donnelly is right that the

collapse of an empire leads to universal barbarism. But barbarism under a different name is simply mutual aid, the world that I found walking the perimeter of the protests. It is a conservative nightmare of live music, free food and drink, free medical attention, cyclists blocking protecting protestors from oncoming cars, volunteers picking up trash and distributing face masks, ear plugs, and hand sanitizer. I'd like to write something better here but, as Lenin writes in his postscript to *The State and Revolution,* the unfinished portions "will probably have to be delayed for a long time; it is more pleasant and useful to undertake the 'experience of revolution' than to write about it" (111). A few nights ago, the police abandoned their precinct. If this is barbarism, then more of it, please!

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