

The Anatomy of Suspense:
Rethinking the Victorian Bildungsroman

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION. Suspense and Its Discontents	1
CHAPTER 1. Transformation of Suspense to Surprise in Charles Dickens	36
CHAPTER 2. Causality and Contingency of Suspense in Charlotte Brontë	71
CHAPTER 3. Wilkie Collins and Converting Youth to Debt	109
CHAPTER 4. George Eliot and Bildung as Gambling	146
CODA. Reading Suspense, Suspiciously.	182
WORKS CITED	189

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1-1. Pip casts his players.

Figure 1-2. Pip attempts to substitute the players, keeping the structure intact.

Figure 1-3. The whole structure fails.

Figure 2-1. The title pages of *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* in their first editions.

Figure 3-1. The first 50 pages of *Armada* summarized.

INTRODUCTION

Suspense and Its Discontents

“And yet...and yet.”

—Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* vol. 2, p. 28

As far as the readers see, the last action taken by Little Nell—the angelic protagonist of Charles Dickens’s *The Old Curiosity Shop*—is that of looking into a well that “looks like the grave itself” (418). Can you guess what happens to her? Despite the tight grip she has had on the readers’ hearts, Little Nell disappears from the narrative at the end of Chapter 55, only to reappear several installments later, at the beginning of Chapter 71. During this long detour, the narration covers the rather tedious movements of other characters in this busy tale, mostly those of Dick Swiveller (truly one of Dickens’s best nominal inventions).¹ Finally, after many less important plot points take place, Kit is on his way from London to the countryside where Little Nell is purportedly to be found. Dickens shamelessly builds up suspense in these last few chapters before Kit reaches Nell’s cottage: the last paragraph before the end of Chapter 70 shows Kit knocking several times on the door of the cottage to no answer, and then deciding to lay “his hand softly upon the latch, and put

¹ The detour also contains the death of Quilp, one of Dickens’s most unforgettable villains, and a rather heartening story of growth for the little Marchioness, who breaks out of her shell to resist her abusive kin and pursue a romance of her own (with no other than Dick). However, it is nonetheless still the case that the primary driver of the plot’s engine is to reach Nell. The text in fact keeps speeding up, as Kit reaches closer and closer to the cottage where Little Nell lies. It endows the narrative with a breathless, and yet delayed, feeling as we inch closer to Nell.

his knee against the door,” which “yielded to the pressure, and turned upon its hinges.” Then, Kit “saw the glimmering of a fire upon the old walls, and entered” (*The Old Curiosity Shop* 533). The miniscule scale of his movements, and the delicate imagery as Kit advances step by step, build up the tension, until the chapter ends without revealing to us what Kit sees just inside the door.

As many modern readers will attest, it is quite predictable that Little Nell’s narrative journey is toward her grave. Critical history of the novel has not looked kindly on Dickens’s handling of her death; Ruskin claimed that Dickens killed Little Nell “as a butcher slaughters a lamb for the market” (Page xi). Indeed, it seems that if there is any telos to the story, it is towards a sinking, certain death. As Norman Page writes, although Nell and her grandfather “pass, like the characters in picaresque, through a variety of scenes and encounter a diversity of characters[...] it becomes clear before long that it can end only in death—that the destination, in fact, is not a place in this world, but one of eternal rest” (xv). So before long, the shock wore off and it was no longer fashionable to be surprised by Little Nell’s death. Critics declared it quite clear—despite Kit’s breathless dash towards finding Little Nell—that she could only be found dead on arrival.

Initially, however, the cliffhanger was indeed effective. The suspense was built up to its maximum: it is quite a famous story² that the contemporary American readers of the serialized novel stormed the Philadelphia harbor in 1847 to ask the sailors transporting the next installment

² Though numerous cited by academic and non-academic readings of the novel (such as in Hilary Schor’s *Curious Subjects*, Megan Garber’s article in *The Atlantic*, or even the Introduction to the 1972 Penguin Classics edition of the novel written by Malcolm Andrews), the anecdote itself is probably not true; see Nathan Murray on more extensive historical research of the origin of this anecdote. However, the novel was indeed a financial success unlike any of Dickens’s previous works, reaching the circulation of 100,000 at its peak, and was indeed widely popular in both Britain and in the States (Page xiv). Thus, while the specific anecdote might not be true, its reach was truly a cultural phenomenon, especially when it came to the withholding of Little Nell’s fate.

to the States: “Is Little Nell dead?” (Murray 375). Of course, Little Nell was dead.³ It was a great shock and sadness to the readers, many of whom wrote of their own tearful responses to Nell’s fate. Margaret Oliphant wrote in 1855, “Poor little Nell! who has ever been able to read the last chapter of her history with an even voice or a clear eye?” (Collins 331, cited in Walsh 151); Lord Jeffrey, one of Britain’s leading judges at the time, cried, “I’m a great goose to have given way so, but I couldn’t help it. You’ll be sorry to hear that little Nelly, Boz’s little Nelly, is dead” (Young 111, cited in Walsh 150); the great Victorian actor William C. Macready wrote in his diary that “I never read printed words that gave me so much pain” (Collins 99, cited in Walsh 150). No doubt the buildup of suspense had much to do with the sensational and sentimental intensity that Nell’s death offered to the readers. Even Oscar Wilde’s infamous quote—which directly opposes Oliphant’s sentiments—that “one must have a heart of stone to read the death of little Nell without laughing,” denotes a sense of suspense that leads to the explosion of a pent-up emotion. The way that his comment builds up an expectation for a remark on the tragedy of Nell’s fate, only to switch into a tone of mockery, precisely mirrors the sense of expectation leading up to the moment of emotional revelation, whether it be of sentimentality or disdain.

So how can the contemporary reader’s experience of Nell’s death be suspenseful? Does the suspense still have purchase, even when 1) modern sensibilities bar much uncertainty in Nell’s fate, and 2) the delay seems to take so long, even to the point of missing the crucial moment of Nell’s death? This is of course not to sidestep another question: even if one did feel suspense in rushing towards Nell’s death the first time, would one feel that same suspense in re-reading the text? The question of suspense must then grapple with more than its generic and stylistic contexts.

³ Dickens repeats that “she was dead” three times with great sentimental effect (*The Old Curiosity Shop* 538-40).

It has to encompass the inherent paradox of suspense's afterlife: can suspense repeat itself in re-reading? Before defining the parameters of suspense's power, I think we must begin with another question: What is suspense?

This, surprisingly, is a mighty query, and one with no definitive answer in current scholarly work. In the next section, I will first identify two different camps of reading suspense in narrative and situate my definition through their synthesis. The first, marked by its focus on the liberatory power of suspense, characterizes the reading experience of suspense as that which unlocks narrative possibilities and allows fiction to model ethical and moral ways of reading for the readers. The second places more weight on the effects of closure on suspense, where despite the narrative possibilities that flourish during suspenseful periods in the plot, they must all be extinguished when suspense ends.

Defining Suspense

What does suspense actually entail? Is it a feeling? A genre? A narrative feature? Most commonly, people tend to associate suspense with the mystery or thriller genres, where one is held in suspense until a secret, or even sometimes a "twist," is revealed to the readers. In fact, in cultural consciousness, suspense is often mired in the idea of an uncertainty that is hard to guess: Netflix introduces its "suspenseful movies" section as including both "tense thrillers" and "unpredictable dramas," and the widespread cultural etiquette of "no spoilers" for shows and cinematic experiences seems to point to the importance of not knowing for the upkeep for suspense. The OED states (after a few obsolete definitions) that suspense is "the state of being suspended or kept undetermined (chiefly *to hold, keep in suspense*); hence, the action of suspending one's judgement," or "a state of mental uncertainty, with expectation of or desire for decision, and usually some apprehension or anxiety; the condition of waiting, esp. of being kept waiting, for an expected

decision, assurance, or issue; less commonly, a state of uncertainty what to do, indecision.” Hans J. Wulff, a German film and media theorist, would agree that suspense is this mental *state* of uncertainty in which one waits for some upcoming affirmation (or disappointment). As he defines it, the “experience of suspense essentially lies in equally calculating, expecting, and evaluating a coming event,” such that “there is no experience of suspense without anticipation” (Wulff 1).

But suspense, it should be said, is not *just* waiting; theorists have also pointed out that during that period of anticipation, narrative possibilities spawn, redoubling the readerly interest in the narrative progression. In particular, the feeling of expectation that creates new narrative possibilities in the readers’ minds has been expertly examined from a reader-response perspective by Hans Georg Gadamer, who introduces the notion of “the horizon of expectation.” Wolfgang Iser, Gadamer’s student, argues helpfully that a horizon is not a set of expectations, but is rather “continually interweaving and interacting,” as “it is not possible for the reader to embrace all perspectives at once...it is made up of all those segments which had supplied the themes of previous phases of reading” (97).⁴ Suspense, using Iser’s openness to the interaction between the reader and the text, would not just be a narrative space-time of waiting for what might happen, but also includes the duration in which the reader gets to ideate and incur desire for what the text merely gestures toward. Influenced by the reader-response account of narrative possibilities, there has been a more recent boom of thinking about narrative as a site of chance and probability, especially in relation to scientific thinking. Karin Kukkonen in *Probability Designs* argues that predictive processing is a crucial part of reading activity, constantly calibrating as the reader gauges information and author intentionality. In a similar vein of thought, Vera Tobin examines

⁴ As my first chapter on Charles Dickens will show, the expectation that the text sows in the reader in the case of *David Copperfield* might be categorized as the “passive synthesis of the image” that Iser identifies in cases where the text encourages the attempt to “ideate that which one can never see as such” (136, 137).

surprise as a plot device that interacts with the predictive work of reading (*Elements of Surprise*), and Paul Armstrong emphasizes the plasticity of “play” in the reading process and how that reinforces (or even recreates!) brain functionality (*How Literature Plays with the Brain*).⁵ These accounts marry more modern scientific fields (cognitive science in particular) with the phenomenological accounts of reader-response theories, and, in doing so, bring welcome critical attention to elements of suspense in narrative, since suspense allows such probabilities to spawn in the story, and formally demarcates the duration in which the reading process takes place.

I would generally characterize these accounts as responding to the Sartrean interrogative of “What is literature?” with a Habermasian answer of opening up a “public sphere” through the technology of literary fiction—a sphere that allows the negotiation of social and political discourse.⁶ As Kukkonen asserts, “the notion of the public sphere as a development that comes out of the lifeworld technology of the novel is exactly right” (180). Taking pleasure *and* social use in the freedom that suspense allows in imagining alternate possibilities that deviate from the norm, and orienting readers in marginalized positions in the plot, these critical readings see the process

⁵ Other accounts also touch on this freedom of suspense, in which unled lives can proliferate. Andrew H. Miller’s *On Not Being Someone Else* provides a personal take on the phenomenon, and Michael Tondre, in *Physics of Possibility*, asks “what did it mean to be more than an isolated self?” through the negotiations of statistics and chance (4).

⁶ Habermas, taking Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*, thinks of novels (alongside published journals) as a dynamic site of social negotiation of the individual and the communal: “The privatised individuals coming together to form a public also reflected critically and in public on what they had read, thus contributing to the process of enlightenment which they together promoted” (51). And each of the aforementioned accounts of suspense is, I think, more attentive than Habermas to the ways that reading, as reflected in mind and society, is an unfinished process and changes the way that it is processed through the form of the text. For instance, Kukkonen notes that Habermas flattens generic and formal distinctions among many varieties of fiction: borrowing her words, “As far as Habermas and his argument about the public sphere are concerned, there is no substantial difference between a literary, fictional novella and nonfiction writing” (180). Paul Armstrong also voices skepticism about both Sartre and Habermas in *Play and the Politics of Reading* (4-5). My point here is not to subsume these variegated accounts of narrative under a Habermasian rule, but rather to label, for convenience’s sake, their tendency to locate freedom and readerly processes of meaning-making in the dialectic duration of reading suspense.

of reading as a social, moral, and inclusive activity that rewires social and political discourses. Caroline Levine's monograph on suspense in Victorian literature reads like a direct application of this philosophy: she argues that suspense opens up a time during which characters can suspend their judgment and set up alternative hypotheses, and ultimately "perform[s] a critical cultural role" of "foster[ing] habits of hesitation and uncertainty" (2, 3). Levine also claims that suspense is ultimately *useful* because it teaches the readers to "learn the alterity of the real from these fictional plots and then transfer the practice of skeptical, anti-conventional doubt to the mysteries of our lives" (Levine 96). In other words, suspense is "there to teach us to face the fact that time's unfolding might not offer what we expect," and that readers should remain open to doubts as long as possible in both fiction-reading and living real life (Levine 98).

This pedagogical function of transferring suspenseful attitudes of reading from the text to the reader is also a common characteristic in scholarship on suspense: for instance, Kukkonen claims that "literature, with its scaffolded learning processes, teaching readers different ways of reading it, is a fundamentally inclusive cultural practice" (180, n3); Armstrong contends that "a particular practice of reading" that promotes "a productive exchange of differences" could prove "socially useful in the current climate by promoting the paradoxical and therefore precarious behaviors required for the ongoing negotiation of difference" (*Play* 9-10). Narrative possibilities, enabled to arise in the process of reading by suspense, demonstrate an inclusive, democratic negotiation of difference that ideally should be emulated by the reader. These accounts, in grappling with such a forward-thinking imperative that puts value in the democratic process of reading and writing, are highly applicable to contemporary pedagogy and thinking about reading as a social phenomenon.

Each of these accounts of the reader's experience is paired with a function of that activity—whether it be political, ethical, or cognitive. However, while I certainly agree that suspense opens up the narrative in order to let the readers explore potential threads of the plot and provides useful models of cognitive processing and ethical reading practices, I cannot help but wonder what suspense looks like in the narrative as an independent form. For the present, I am concerned only with the definition of suspense, and not its benefits. In other words, what does suspense look like when not bound to the rhetoric of value for the readers, whether it be modeling brain activity, emulating reading practices, or providing pleasure for us? What does suspense do for the narrative itself? One way of thinking outside of these considerations is to conceive of suspense without uncertainty; if we were to think of uncertainty as an integral part of suspense, then we must concede that suspense is a form that only comes into being when read by a first-time reader. Indeed, the aforementioned accounts rely greatly on the value of cognitive processing based on uncertainty. Surprise, chance, and cognitive processing of narrative possibilities arise most saliently when the reader is encountering the narrative for the first time. It seems one wouldn't necessarily entertain other possible alternate routes that the narrative might take, if 1) it is very clear where the narrative is going, or 2) the reader has read the text before and knows what will happen in advance. But is this true?

This question, more commonly labeled “the paradox of suspense,” is an oft-referenced problematic in analytic philosophy and film studies, a question that Noël Carroll ignited in his 1984 article “Toward a Theory of Film Suspense.” According to Aaron Smuts, the above accounts of suspense and narrative anticipation would be categorized as the “standard account of suspense,” where “suspense is composed of three things: fear, hope, and the ‘cognitive state of uncertainty’” (281). He argues that these “standard” accounts of suspense (he cites the psychological accounts

of suspense defined by Andrew Ortony, Gerald L. Clore, and Allan Collins as examples) are helpful in thinking about the affective responses to narrative possibilities, as they hinge upon the anticipation of waiting for something uncertain to arrive. I would claim that the OED definition, Wulff, and the phenomenological accounts I've mentioned above operate in much the same way. If Gadamer and Iser were to theorize on suspense, I think they would also find uncertainty to be requisite for the readers to calibrate their horizons of expectation as the given information changes while reading the narrative. In contrast to the focus on uncertainty found in these accounts, Smuts advances a "desire-frustration theory of suspense," where "the frustration of a strong desire to affect the outcome of an imminent event is necessary and sufficient for suspense" (281). By defining the cause of suspense this way, he is thus able to argue that "uncertainty is not necessary for suspense" (281). I agree with Smuts that suspense does not require uncertainty to take place, and I think that what is so important about his theory of suspense is that it centers desire. However, as with the "standard" theories of suspense with which he disagrees, Smuts centers the reader's response in defining suspense—thus, the desire that he speaks of is strictly the *reader's* desire to interfere with the narrative, one that is of course frustrated by the non-interactive nature of a film or a literary text. But what does the *text* desire?

This brings us to thinking about how desire is built into the architecture of the text and used *by* the text to make its political and aesthetic commitments more transparent. In thinking about desire as grounded in the text itself, we can conceive of suspense without uncertainty by addressing the desire of the text as the telos. Because desire exists within a text, outside of the reader's desire to control the narrative (they cannot), uncertainty is not part of the question. Leo Bersani points to desire as "a threat to the form of realistic fiction" itself (66), where the progress of narrative is marked by its "frantic pull towards order" (72). Here, for Bersani, desire already exists within the

text and is recognized as such. I believe that the “frantic pull towards order” that the desire in fiction inspires in its narrative rhythm also counts as suspense. For Bersani, suspense would be the delay in the text until the desiring threat is properly excised from the novel’s world. He describes this logic of the realist plot to be akin to “ceremonies of expulsion”—the novels admit desire to their heroes, just to scapegoat them by the end (67). This is the same scapegoating logic that D. A. Miller uses in formulating the notion of the “narratable” in *Narrative and Its Discontents*. Like Bersani’s model of desire in realist fiction that is both threatening in its power to upset order but comforting in its ultimate expulsion, “the narratable is a paradoxical, ambivalent phenomenon. Much as the lunatic both affronts and reassures our own sense of mental health, the transgressions of routine both scandalize and ultimately confirm its normativeness” (*Narrative* 111). Echoing Bersani’s discussion of “ceremonies of expulsion,” Miller describes the closure in the nineteenth-century novel as “a straightforward exorcism rather than the culmination of a dialectic development” (*Narrative* 122). Suspense seems to work similarly. As Bersani’s textual desire or Miller’s narratable work to first flare up the illicit, or non-normative desires so that they can be cleanly snuffed, suspense works to dedicate precious narrative time to what will ultimately be excised and controlled. Further, the suspenseful duration before its closure becomes the time in which narrative possibilities seemingly proliferate out of control, until the moment in which the suspense ends, and the answer to “what will happen?” is revealed.

Thus, to talk about suspense is to also talk of its own extinction—suspense, and the ensuing closure, need to be discussed in tandem with each other in this branch of thought. So what use is suspense, especially in novels? Its use-value is to be rendered a narrative waste: to be contained and then expelled. Bersani, and particularly Miller, seem to find meaning in the “bad dream” aspect of suspense taking itself out by the end of the narrative—Miller powerfully argues in his later

project *The Novel and the Police* that the scapegoating of what incites suspense has a disciplinary function, in which a liberal subject is formed to desire the closure that extinguishes the narratable, to long for the status quo. In other words, this scapegoating of suspense sows what Bersani called the “frantic pull towards order” in the minds of readers as a Foucauldian disciplinary mechanism in the novel (72).⁷

In these arguments, suspense is more sinister. Suspense denatures the narrative once it ends. Narrative loses its delectable possibilities once suspense touches and later leaves it. Unlike suspense that opens the space-time of imagined alterities, suspense *as scapegoat* is more pessimistic in nature; it tantalizes, only to be taken away. In doing so, the reader is disciplined, straightened out of his or her desire for that which tantalizes. Thus, rather than the socio-pedagogical use of suspense that we gleaned from the accounts mentioned earlier, this way of thinking about suspense is more Foucauldian in nature, insofar as power justifies itself through the disciplining of (and by) suspense by the end of the narrative. Rather than focusing on the duration

⁷ The excision of something threatening—the “bad dream” logic of narrative suspense also applies to other influential readings of narrative. Nicholas Dames echoes this line of thought when he claims that memory, and scenes of retrospection, serve as “an act primarily of consolidation,” where “pure memory” (the bursting, eventful, and even traumatic, raw experience) is “forgotten so thoroughly” to yield to a pleasurable, passive state of nostalgia. This kind of self-indulgent forgetting, nostalgia, has the “distinct cultural purpose” the amelioration or the cancellation of the past” (*Amnesiac* 5-6). Like the self-disciplining function of self-extinguished desire (Bersani), the narratable (Miller), or suspense, Dames’s “pure memory,” or the past, is forgotten and sealed off, yielding to “the perfections of the future” (*Amnesiac* 6). This nostalgia thus becomes a “cultural habit,” a “method of self-control and regulation” (*Amnesiac* 6). By killing the ‘real’ past and opting to glaze over the threatening parts of pure memory with nostalgia, the characters in Victorian fiction are able to promote in their act of storytelling “a certain kind of life—life no longer burdened by the past, a life lived as a coherent tale, summarizable, pointed, and finally moralizable” (*Amnesiac* 7). While Dames explicitly uses history of science to conceptualize how Victorians conceived of memory and self-identity in his study, the structure of the “bad dream” is the same here as well—the traumatic memories, like bad dreams, are forgotten in order to conceive a retrospectively coherent (and morally ideal) self. Peter Brooks offers a psychoanalytic version of the “bad dream” logic in narrative in *Reading for the Plot*, where he reads the “All-Kinds-of-Fur” story by the Grimm Brothers as a sequence of events in which the tale offers “a kind of minimum satisfactory process that works through the problem of desire gone wrong and brings it to its cure” (9). In other words, the threatening aspects of the incestuous desire in the story are removed through repetition with a difference.

of suspense (and the proliferation of possibilities during it), these accounts underscore what makes it end; the goal of suspense is *for it to be rendered useless*, for it to be excised from the narrative to restore order. This differs substantially from earlier accounts, which find value in the active negotiation that takes place during suspense. Unlike the forward-looking attitude of the earlier theories of suspense and narrative time, these Foucauldian accounts are backward-looking; they point out that as much as suspense allows alterity, when it ends, it also has the effect of *retroactively* subsuming the events of the plot under a causal logic—that it happened this way for a reason. Through suspense, narrative justifies its own existence. For the phenomenologists, suspense allows openness, whereas for Bersani and Miller, that openness is an illusion, and made in bad faith. If the earlier accounts stress the freedom in random chance and the fluctuation of probabilities during the time of suspense, these accounts assert that suspense turns that chance into fate. Telling in this difference is the focus on delight and pleasure that the open-ended accounts often allude to, as opposed to the *end* of such pleasure that the Foucauldian readings stress. To be clear, I am not making the value judgment that the openness is “good,” and the bad faith illusion of such is “bad”—I am trying to account for both the duration and the closure of suspense in thinking about the phenomenon.

However, the Foucauldian account is not without its limitations. The determinist nature of this account flattens all kinds of suspense, and flattens desire to that which is successfully expelled by the end of the narrative. There are differences between suspense that involves genuine surprises, and suspense that simply fuels itself by dangling an expectant outcome at an arm’s length. In other words, this account is not as sensitive to the ways in which uncertainty *interacts* with suspense, and takes for granted that uncertainty is not part of the equation (when it can be, and many times is). On this front, phenomenological accounts of suspense are more sensitive to the ways that

suspense and expectations transform with small differences in its buildup or payoff. Moreover, the Foucauldian accounts also seem to forget that the “bad dream” aspect of suspense, at times, overwhelms the affirmative satisfaction that the normative closure offers. For instance, it would be difficult to deny that the “bad dream” parts of the plot are in many instances the most satisfying, and that the nightmarish, othered characters that the novel’s hero deals with are the delicacy of the readerly feast.⁸ In a way, a characterization of normative closure of suspense that defines itself against narrative desire parallels the structure of homophobic modern heterosexuality that defines itself “*as against* the homosexual,” resulting in “an endemic and ineradicable state of what I am calling male homosexual panic” (Sedgwick 185). Like homophobic modern heterosexuality in Sedgwick, closure in these accounts becomes anemic, a mere placeholder that can only define itself against desire by negation. It can only insist on what it is *not*.

But these accounts of suspense are not mutually exclusive. To a certain degree, there is a way of thinking about these conflicting accounts of narrative suspense together. I propose that suspense is a crack in the narrative—a distention of the distance between what Seymour Chatman called story (events in order) and discourse (how those events are told). Because suspense dilates narrative space-time and withholds events of the story through discourse, it makes much more palpable the difference between them. However, it is also true that once suspense concludes, it has the opposite effect of uniting story and discourse—death of suspense consolidates the narrative into a coherent whole. Here, it acts not like a crack but the glue in the narrative. Suspense is a process of structuring, where it transforms its function from its buildup to its payoff. Barthes sums up the dual effect of suspense succinctly in *Image Music Text*:

⁸ Quilp, for instance, provides some of the most suspenseful moments in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and one of the most memorable villains in Dickens’s career.

“Suspense” is clearly only a privileged—or “exacerbated”—form of distortion: on the one hand, by keeping a sequence open (through emphatic procedures of delay and renewal), it reinforces the contact with the reader (the listener), has a manifestly phatic function; while on the other, it offers the threat of an uncompleted sequence, of an open paradigm (if, as we believe, every sequence has two poles), that is to say, of a logical disturbance, it being this disturbance which is consumed with anxiety and pleasure (all the more so because it is always made right in the end). “Suspense,” therefore, is a game with structure, designed to endanger and glorify it...(*Image* 119)

What I’ve laid out here are the dual functions inherent in suspense, and how criticism has (whether it addressed suspense directly or not) thought of its narrative context. Suspense not only signifies the narrative time during which alternative narrative possibilities arise, and the readerly expectation and anticipation that are triggered by them, but also the structure in which those possibilities are allowed to be entertained, until they are snuffed out. Thus, uncertainty *helps* suspense more effectively lead readers to alternate possibilities which will not ultimately take place. However, uncertainty is *not requisite* in the structure of suspense. In this way, Little Nell’s death, predetermined and promised to modern readers or repeat readers, would still inspire suspense. This is how Jerome Meckier reads the form of suspense in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, where “the novel was originally suspenseful, not in the sense that the outcome is ever really a mystery, but in that an apparently foregone conclusion is purposely delayed as a series of false alternatives almost obscures the inevitable” (199). This is an important distinction; the “sadistic” delay that Dickens exercises before revealing what will take place *almost* lets the readers get distracted enough from the approaching closure of the suspense, but it does not fully render the ending a true surprise. Suspense as a purposeful delay from some telos *through* alternatives (whether they be pleasurable or painful) demonstrates it as a form of play⁹—both enabling of other possibilities, distracting from

⁹ The sense of play in suspense is not unlike the (literal) play of *fort//da!* that Freud’s grandson plays, wherein there is a balancing act of the anxiety of disappearance of the object of desire, and the satisfaction of its return. But when the child throws his object of choice away from him, he gives “vent to a loud, long-drawn out ‘o-o-o-o,’ accompanied by an expression of interest and satisfaction” (Freud 8). This “long-

the telos, and yet solidifying it once the narrative reaches the end. Now, these alternatives, depending on the text, can either be a hopeful gesture to what Andrew H. Miller calls “lives unled” (“Lives Unled” 118), or a bad-faith expulsion of what D.A. Miller labeled “excessive energies and deficient figures” (*Narrative* 50). It is not *just* delay, and not *just* uncertainty, but a sliding scale of both. Extracting the suspense in Little Nell’s death this way allows us to answer the questions that I asked before this section. First, it indicates how we can think of suspense independent of changing stylistic sensibilities: suspense is not simply a readerly feeling, it is part of the narrative. Thus, despite generic contexts and changing readerly tastes, suspense remains as part of the narrative architecture. Second, knowing the ending, or being able to guess the ending “correctly,” does not matter in the formation of suspense.

Indeed, suspense, as I understand in its literary form, is a distention—or stretching—of time through alternate possibilities before the arrival of something that was already signaled to be expected, which amplifies the causal relationship between the setup and payoff in retrospect. While I side with the phenomenological accounts insofar as suspense does inspire radical possibilities and is able to emulate an ethical reading practice of being sensible to those potentialities, I also claim, alongside the more disciplinary accounts, that suspense must be considered with its closure, and the retrospective glance it forces on the text and the readers. Suspense, upon concluding, allows the text to disguise itself as a progression of sorts—a causal chain of events that accumulate upon each other. Yet, I do not necessarily think that suspense serves a disciplinary measure in concluding; in fact, it might serve to emphasize the desire that was not granted, inverting the closural power. Suspense works as a deviation before the satisfaction of what has been already

drawn out” cry would be the physical manifestation of suspense in the interval that the object is gone—it may perhaps transform to something else, or never return—until it is restored to the child.

promised—the techne running wild, but still with the telos in sight.¹⁰ Suspense is a process, a sequence, a structure in which a point A and point B is identified, and the journey from A to B is not a straight line, but is felt as if so once B is reached.

Three Examples of Suspense

Now, I will use three specific examples to illustrate important characteristics of suspense that I've laid out thus far. The first instance, Thomas Hardy's cliffhanger from *A Pair of Blue Eyes* will demonstrate the way in which suspense not only dilates narrative time and distorts the narrative progression from being a straight line, but also creates a retrospective sense of causality. The second example, the recognition scene of Odysseus's scar in Homer's *The Odyssey*, will show how suspense functions in the same way as it does in Hardy, even when uncertainty is absent from the imminent outcome. Finally, I will use a brief snippet from Alfred Hitchcock's interview with François Truffaut to further argue that narrative surprise works diametrically opposite to suspense, which will further characterize suspense as a delicate time-space that does not rely on just the bombastic effect of closure.

An installment of Thomas Hardy's 1873 novel *A Pair of Blue Eyes* ends with our protagonist, Henry Knight, hanging off a cliff, while Elfride, a woman being courted by Knight, leaves him to get help. Left alone in precarity, Knight "[feels] himself in the presence of a personalized loneliness" (T. Hardy 198). With these words, the reader is also left with the

¹⁰ Because it is, ultimately, a deviation, it can go awry when dilated too long—this is why suspense, while commonly associated with feelings of gripping tension, can actually be "boring." While suspense is the delay of telos, suspense still needs a telos to look towards; thus, narratives that are simply collages of delays and distractions from a larger framework of narrative without a certain expected end, such as the picaresque novel or novels like *Tristram Shandy*, do not exhibit suspense. It is not too uncommon to have been gripped by suspense, only to lose the thread of that interest once the diversion away from the fulfillment of expectation takes too long.

loneliness of waiting for the next installment a month later. Such cliffhangers—in Knight’s case, a literal one—force readers, and characters, to *wait*—but not only to wait, but wait with a desire for otherwise.¹¹ But even after the cliffhanger, Hardy demonstrates in the long-awaited next installment a more transparent example of suspense. While still hanging for his life, Knight sees a trilobite fossil lodged in the soil of the cliff and imagines “time clos[ing] up like a fan before him. He s[ees] himself at one extremity of the years, face to face with the beginning and all the intermediate centuries simultaneously” (T. Hardy 200). Once the reader’s time comes to finally match Knight’s as the reader opens the next installment, Hardy’s narration stretches the real time in which Knight would have spent hanging on the cliff for six agonizing pages of thoughts rushing through him. Those pages certainly feel like more than six pages; we see not only “Fierce men, clothed in the hides of beasts, and carrying, for defence and attack, huge clubs and pointed spears,” but also “Huge elephantine forms, the mastodon, the hippopotamus, the tapir, antelopes of monstrous size, the megatherium, and the myledon—... still underneath were fishy beings of lower development; and so on, till the lifetime scenes of the fossil confronting him were a present and modern condition of things” (T. Hardy 200-201). In one fell swoop, the duration of suspense creates a time-space in which Knight is able to feel geological stretches of time within those six pages, and yet summons those past times to the present, leading back to the moment of precarity that started this deviation to begin with. It’s as if Knight’s thoughts are spiraling, distending the moment beyond what was deemed possible, and yet at the same time, reminding him (and the

¹¹ Coincidentally—or perhaps I should say, fatefully—this instance of the literal cliffhanger used as how we think of the concept now in Hardy is recognized as many to be the very example that inspired the vocabulary. Though the word “cliffhanger” itself does not enter popular vocabulary until the twentieth century, David Lodge notes in *The Art of Fiction* that Hardy’s scene in the novel is a quintessential example of suspense (14). For a more in-depth coverage on the origins and characteristics of cliffhangers, see Poot 51, Henchman 129.

reader) of how insignificant and short his entire life is in comparison to the geological time of history. However, what is interesting is that in his own spiraling panic, Knight is also constructing an order of history: he is, in this pocket of suspense, creating order out of disorder: from the “fierce men” with “pointed spears” to “huge elephantine forms” like the mastodon, to “perched huge-billed birds,” to iguanodons, to “clouds of flying reptiles,” and finally to “fishy beings of lower development.” As the final word, “development,” suggests, unfathomable geological time is rendered into a linear, progressive order of development told backwards. Suspense, therefore, serves an equivocal function in this narrative: on one hand, it serves as an interval during which the present moment is stretched, losing sight of the desired outcome, but on the other hand, it also functions as a time during which a *sense* of progression or development can arise. Further, the manner in which Knight is ultimately saved by Elfride is suspenseful as well—once Knight reaches safety, he realizes that the rope that Elfride used to pull him up is made out of her own clothes:

Behind the bank, whilst Knight reclined upon the dizzy slope waiting for death, she had taken off her whole clothing, and replaced only her outer bodice and skirt. Every thread of the remainder lay upon the ground in the form of a woollen and cotton rope. (T. Hardy 250)

Like Barthes’ assertion that suspense is like the “final moments of a striptease,” Elfride demonstrates suspense by literally performing a striptease herself (*S/Z* 88). Even on a larger scale than just this moment of suspense, this scene serves the dual function of helping narrative possibilities flourish but also consolidating the outcome as inevitable in retrospect. On one hand, the passage serves as an important moment of instability for the possibilities within the novel in terms of the courtship plot. The larger plot of the novel involves three different suitors vying for the hand of the charming heroine, Elfride. Knight is one of the possible suitors, and thus as he is under threat of being killed off from the novel in this sequence. The narrative possibilities fluctuate—does this mean that Elfride will return to marry Stephen Smith, who courted her before

Knight entered the plot? What about Lord Luxellian, the third suitor? Will his chance increase or decrease if Knight is taken out of the equation? The possible narrative branches become more palpable or fade away, as the suspenseful sequence threatens the chances of Henry Knight becoming the ultimate man to win Elfride's heart. On the other hand, the striptease that takes place in order to save Henry Knight consolidates the image of Elfride as a physical, and sexually available woman in Knight's mind. As a precursor to *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*'s Angel Clare, Henry Knight ultimately rejects Elfride when he finds out that she has been courted by another man—even the suspenseful striptease serves a purpose in the larger scale of the novel, where it signifies the tragic rejection of that which was meant to happen.

But suspense can take place even without uncertainty. In the above example, Hardy is able to amplify the narrative possibilities by making the readers hang on until he reveals whether Knight survives the ordeal or not. In contrast, *The Odyssey* will demonstrate that suspense still serves the same function even without a shred of uncertainty, and the readers only return to the original point at which they began after suspense is concluded. When Odysseus returns to Ithaca, he is in disguise, only for the old maid Eurykleia to recognize a scar on his leg, almost allowing Penelope to catch on as well. When Homer reveals that Odysseus's scar will be recognized by the maid, the narration takes a long detour to tell the readers how Odysseus has obtained the scar in his past. Once the detour is over, the story resumes, beginning at the moment of recognition. Returning to the scene of recognition, the detour that we have just taken consolidates the fatefulness of this scar being seen by Eurykleia—it is as if it was all meant to be.¹² I argue that this is in the form of suspense,

¹² In fact, once the truth is revealed, earlier speeches gain more fateful meaning in retrospect. Peter Green notes that "It is not immediately apparent—though the realization, when it comes, is very effective—that Eurykleia begins what one would expect to be a speech to the beggar (or possibly Penelopē) by apostrophizing the supposedly absent Odysseus" (Homer 300n12).

though utterly lacking in uncertainty. The reader might notice that this is quite opposite of Erich Auerbach's notion of suspense. Auerbach characterizes the very same scene in *The Odyssey* as not suspenseful because all is known, and all is externalized, and directed to one end, whereas Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac in the Bible is vague and internalized, open to interpretation. While I do not wholly disagree with his foundational reading of these scenes, I would like to object to certain ways that he situates suspense as the opposite of disclosure. Auerbach claims that

Goethe and Schiller, who, though not referring to this particular episode, exchanged letters in April 1797 on the subject of "the retarding element" in the Homeric poems in general, put it in direct opposition to the element of suspense—the latter word is not used, but is clearly implied when the "retarding" procedure is opposed, as something proper to epic, to tragic procedure. The "retarding element," the "going back and forth" by means of episodes, seems to me, too, in the Homeric poems, to be opposed to any tensional and suspensive striving toward a goal. (Auerbach 5)

First, while Auerbach does correctly identify the "retarding element" of the Homeric poem, he characterizes it as "opposed to...suspensive striving toward a goal." In other words, he characterizes the retarding element in Homer to be the opposite of suspense. My corrective to this is that suspense *is* the retarding element that gets in the way of striving toward a goal. Second, in characterizing *The Odyssey*'s scene as such, Auerbach assumes that disclosure kills suspense, but suspense as I understand it actually *requires* at least a bit of disclosure, in exactly the way that *The Odyssey* signals the expectation that the scar will be an identifying mark for Eurykleia:

Odysseus sat down by the hearth,
and at once turned away toward the darker side, because
he'd suddenly realized that when she was handling him
she would notice the scar, and the truth would be revealed. (Homer 301; bk. 19, ll.
388–393)

Indeed, Eurykleia does see the scar—the truth will out—and yet, and yet, the story takes a sudden detour into how the scar has come to be. Although Auerbach argues that because this deviation is far too illuminating, far too detailed— "only a foreground, uniformly objective present" —to be

suspensive (7), I would say that it is still suspense, though perhaps depending on the reader, the detour might be a little too long to hold the thread of suspensive tension most effectively.

Framed this way, it becomes clear that suspense is in fact a separate and, in a way, opposite to phenomenon of narrative surprise, since surprise does not build up and is a bombastic severance to the gentle, coaxing dilation of suspense. Surprise, which Vera Tobin defines as “to point in one direction, then turn around and point in another, while also producing the impression that the whole has been coherent and even inevitable” (2), also produces the impression of coherence in retrospect, but it requires a garden-path like misdirection in order to be achieved, which suspense does not.

In a now iconic interview, Alfred Hitchcock defines suspense against surprise:

Let's suppose that there is a bomb underneath this table between us. Nothing happens, and then all of a sudden, “Boom!” There is an explosion. The public is surprised, but prior to this surprise, it has seen an absolutely ordinary scene, of no special consequence. Now, let us take a suspense situation. The bomb is underneath the table and the public knows it, probably because they have seen the anarchist place it there. The public is aware the bomb is going to explode at one o'clock and there is a clock in the decor. The public can see that it is a quarter to one...The audience is longing to warn the characters on the screen: ‘You shouldn't be talking about such trivial matters. There is a bomb beneath you and it is about to explode!’ In the first case we have given the public fifteen seconds of surprise at the moment of the explosion. In the second we have provided them with fifteen minutes of suspense. (Truffaut)

For Hitchcock, surprise is an event—what is more explosive and evanescent than a bomb exploding?—whereas suspense is a process, a dilation of the time during which the audience feels pulled towards its end. He points out an important distinction here, in that suspense does not *require* surprise. The foregrounded expectation that something will happen (a bomb will explode in fifteen minutes) fuels the tenacious grip that those fifteen minutes have on the audience, rather than the shock of the explosion at the end. Surprise here is destructive, whereas suspense is seeping, slow, and steady in its temporal and spatial progression. Rather than the process that is suspense, surprise is thoroughly an event. This idea of surprise is actually what many associate with suspense,

and to be clear, suspense *can* be followed by surprise; the dialectic of suspense and surprise is, in fact, what we see in many thrilling pieces of media around us. For instance, Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* is a classic example of this dialectic: "the murder of Marion in the shower comes as a complete surprise (for 'innocent' viewers), leading to a new build-up of suspense once her lover and sister start investigating her disappearance, and yet another drastic shock at the film's climax" (Lütticken 97). However, suspense is a more expansive term than surprise, in that suspense points to the structure that *can* include surprise, but can also deliver the impression of coherence in retrospect on its own.

Thinking about suspense in this way allows us to look at the phenomenon of narrative progression in a different light. Narrative progression, James Phelan claims, is framing the narrative as "developing wholes" that complete their own plotting when we reach the end (*Reading People* 15). Comparable to how Peter Brooks thinks of plot in narrative (except with a more reader-interaction inflected model in mind), Phelan argues that progression is also a temporal form—not simply a spatial expanse where things can be experienced all at once or haphazardly, but rather a process of linearizing with the telos in mind. Particularly, Brooks and Phelan negate spatial accounts that are "atemporal" of narrative plot, emphasizing that these structural accounts of narrative, driven to read "deep" structures in texts that contain anthropological truths, spatialize plot as static points to be reached (Brooks 10; *Nature of Narrative* 303). Instead, plot for Brooks and progression for Phelan serve to consolidate and develop throughout the course of the narrative on a temporal plane. Needless to say, suspense plays a key role in this temporal progression of narrative. It is not the equivalent to progression or plot, but rather the form that guides it, because it is, as I have hopefully made clear so far, the dilation of the *techne* before reaching the telos of

the story (but which helps the telos feel earned by the end). It is precisely the kind of temporal development that allows, by the end, complete consolidation of the narrative.

But here, I'd like to expand this strictly temporal notion of the plot progression to involve some spatial imagination, considering how suspense can work without uncertainty.¹³ If we were to think of plot progression as a temporal development that achieves its own storytelling form through the very act of it, it is as if we start at point A, and move to point B. Suspense ensures that the line connecting the two is not straight, but makes it feel so once we reach point B. This we have already explored, in the sense of difference that readers acquire when a revelation of something new is involved with the closure of suspense. However, seeing that there is the option of completely knowing what will be the telos (as in *The Odyssey* and in Hitchcock), there is another option in which we travel from Point A, to Point A; the final destination, as we have always known, is what we started with, but it *feels* as if it is not Point A but, say Point A*, due to the journey that we have taken to reach back to it. The key here is that *even if* the "journey" only reminds us what we have already known all along, because in that there is no uncertainty to the telos, suspense still functions to consolidate the journey as that which brings a *sense* of difference.¹⁴ As Barthes claims, the suspenseful design of a narrative brings the story very close to a "rite of initiation (a long path

¹³ While I am using the language of spatial "points" that plots reach, I am not trying to make an atemporal anthropological argument of the Levi-Strauss sort; rather, I am using the spatial language to think about suspense as not only a temporal development but that which may or may not yield actual difference in the world of the novel when the story is concluded. This is of particular importance, as the form of the Bildungsroman aspires to (but rarely does) convince its readers of an image of individual formation of its hero. Thus, rather than a spatial essence that each narrative simply, ontologically, *is*, I am arguing for a spatial metaphor of the narrative reaching somewhere different than where it started. Put differently, thinking about suspense as both temporal (in progression) and spatial (in whether it returns to its starting point or reaches a meaningful difference) helps to think about the Bildungsroman as both of those things as well.

¹⁴ This we have seen when we examined how Eurykleia's earlier comments are endowed with a different sense of fateful meaning once the discourse takes the readers to the history of the scar and back to the scene of recognition.

marked with pitfalls, obscurities, stops, suddenly comes out into the light)” (S/Z 76). In serving its dual function, suspense becomes particularly interesting in thinking about the rite of initiation manifest in the fictional realm: The Bildungsroman.

The Suspenseful Crisis of the Bildungsroman

Although suspense is most often associated with television serials, detective novels, or sensation fiction, the Bildungsroman is a uniquely productive form through which to examine suspense, because its symbolic structure (youth-to-maturity) mirrors that of suspense (setup-to-payoff). While the critical conversation surrounding the Bildungsroman is itself extensive, the scholarly treatment of the Bildungsroman is largely based on Bakhtin’s description of the novel as the “assimilation of real historical time” into the form of the novel (24). The world is “an experience, a school,” in this kind of a novel, and as in *Wilhelm Meister*, the protagonist “emerges *along with the world* and he reflects the historical emergence of the world itself” (Bakhtin 23, original emphasis).¹⁵ Though Bakhtin divides the Bildungsroman by means of many different subcategories, his major contribution is bringing Goethe’s notion of narrative process of self-formation (a Humboldtian ideal) to a specific form of the novel in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Put differently, the novel’s hero emerges to his or her “final form” in the closure of the novel, during which time the novel is able to reflect the evolutionary and historical development of the world itself. The novel form, the hero, and the world emerge at once through the form of the Bildungsroman. But what makes the Bildungsroman special, according to Franco Moretti, is that it centers, and uses as its narrative fuel, the hero’s *youth*. He points out that “Achilles, Hector,

¹⁵ One could say that Gillian Beer’s theory of the novel in *Darwin’s Plots* also follows this logic, where Darwin’s theory that individual fetal development mirrors the evolutionary development of the species is applied to the narrative logic of the novel form.

Ulysses: the hero of the classical epic is a mature man, an adult”—in contrast, Goethe codifies a new paradigm in his novel “and sees youth as the most meaningful part of life: *Wilhelm Meister*” (Moretti 3). This new hero, the youth, is “modernity’s ‘essence,’ the sign of a world that seeks its meaning in the future rather than in the past” (Moretti 5). The youth of this new, modern genre of the Bildungsroman is the paradigm upon which the speculative, protean future that the bourgeoisie fantasized for itself can manifest—it signifies “mobility” and “inner restlessness” that allows new possible futures (Moretti 5). The centering of youth in the Bildungsroman is an aesthetic vehicle for the form to imagine new and alternate ways of historical and individual development. More important, because youth does not last forever (and the novel promises in its premise a *development* of the hero into maturity), the precious time of youth emphasizes the demarcated temporal boundary during which the novel hero can explore his options. Moretti specifically cites a shift from the spatial determination, “as in the case of the Renaissance perspective,” to “a *temporal* one” in nineteenth-century literature (10, emphasis original). The shift in emphasis to a temporally unfolding, and yet temporally limited, site of possible development mirrors almost exactly the way that Phelan and Brooks think of narrative progression, or plot, as I have explicated above. In this way, the Bildungsroman and suspense share a temporal structure during which new possibilities can manifest; youth is figured as the “interlude” before maturity can be reached (Moretti 191). This figuring of youth’s status in the form of the Bildungsroman is parallel to the emphasis in phenomenological accounts of suspense on the ways in which suspense opens up narrative possibilities to tantalize readers and vary the chances of what could happen in the course of the plot. Like suspense that allows a myriad of possibilities for the narrative and then allows the story to develop through the experiences of some of those possibilities, youth in this framing of the

Bildungsroman allows the hero to experience different aspects of life during the course of the novel and emerge as a different, mature being at the end.

But, as alluring and delightful as these potentialities of youth seem, like that of suspense, they are mostly unrealized in the end. At first glance, this figuration of youth as a time during which the hero is “schooled,” accumulating experiences to become another person, seems to require uncertainty as to how the “mature” form of the youthful protagonist will look. After all, don’t the readers want to find out *who* the hero becomes? What would be the point of the genre if the readers already know who the hero will end up being? How can one visualize what the hero’s mature self will look like, when he has yet to go through youth? Shouldn’t the protean futurity of the Bildungsroman hero’s youth be undecided, as that of the European middle-class that is using the aesthetics of youth to re-mythologize itself? This is the case, in fact, in the continental Bildungsroman, as Moretti claims. In the continental tradition of the form, Moretti argues that the hero’s “journey, and the mobility that comes with it,” is the “ideal opportunity to *try out new identities*” (203, emphasis in the original). However, in the British tradition, “it is just the opposite, a long and bewildering *detour* in which the roles they play in the course of time are merely disguises” (203, emphasis mine). Moretti asserts that unlike the continental Bildungsroman where the hero’s telos is truly undecided and created by accumulation of experiences throughout the plot, for the British Bildungsroman the end is always already in sight, and youth becomes “a haphazard and dangerous interlude” (204). This interlude, I suggest, is suspenseful. Youth is the time of vulnerability, where one encounters threatening desires and paths that one must negate; as Moretti puts it, youth “will not teach what one could be, but always and only what one is not, does not want to be, and should not be” (204). This, then, mirrors the “bad dream” logic of suspense in Bersani and Miller. Further, the goal in this version of the Bildungsroman is “to be finally

recognized for what he has always been” (Moretti 204). Thus, compared to the continental tradition of the Bildungsroman, Moretti argues, the British Bildungsroman signifies revolution not as in upheaval and change, but as in a discursive movement.¹⁶ This movement that returns to the starting position, then, can be compared to how I earlier characterized the kind of suspense that which figures the plot progression from Point A to Point A. While the hero has stayed the same—defended his original state from the temptations of youth/suspense—now he has the recognition that what he has been all along *is* the ideal form that he can be. This recognition is the element that endows the ending with the sense of having gone through *something*—like suspense, which makes the closure of narrative feel “earned,” a *feeling* of difference (regardless of whether meaningful difference has actually been obtained). Further, this is why “recognition” is a particular narrative phenomenon that holds such pivotal status in the English Bildungsroman: it allows a sense of difference without any real becoming-different. Youth, as the pervasive thematic element in the form of the Bildungsroman, functions equivalent to how suspense functions in a narrative. They share the same kind of instability and contradiction that form their marked feature: they are both at once threatening yet alluring; both necessary for the larger form they exist within, yet systematically removed by the ending. This difference also supplies us with the reason why the English Bildungsromane read much more suspensefully than their continental counterparts (compare *Jane Eyre* to *Sentimental Education*, for instance)—suspense has to do so much *more*

¹⁶ He further makes a Bakhtinian argument that these different spirits of ‘revolution’ in each version of the Bildungsroman reflect the political and social realities of the world itself. On one hand, the continental Bildungsroman is compared to the French Revolution, which is “legitimized by its forcing the future open: whence the boundless historical vista which animates its dynamic enthusiasm, but which is also haunted by the pangs of uncertainty, of opportunism, of betrayal” (Moretti 206). On the other hand, the British Bildungsroman is comparable to the English Revolution, signifying “a return back, ‘full circle’, to the original spot. The politico-institutional break is not legitimated as a break” (Moretti 207).

work to give the ending a sense of difference in the English Bildungsroman than in their continental counterparts.

Thus far, I have outlined how I read suspense in the context of the Bildungsroman. To sum up, in this dissertation, I aim to think of suspense as 1) not requiring uncertainty or surprise (because it limits the interesting contradictions in suspense), 2) serving a dual purpose of both dilation and consolidation with respect to the sense of temporal progression in literature, which 3) allows possibilities/threats of desire to be introduced into the plot and ultimately extinguished by the end. These characteristics make suspense, I argue, an important factor in examining the Bildungsroman, because the contradictory function of suspense in narrative mirrors the way in which youth functions in the English Bildungsroman. Suspense, in other words, is the form that youth—as a symbolic theme—manifests in the Bildungsroman. Using Franco Moretti’s categorization of the continental and the British Bildungsroman, I’ve also compared the continental form to the kind of suspense that amplifies uncertainty, and the British form to the kind of suspense that brings a sense of difference to closure, despite the lack of uncertainty in the telos. While this categorization is very neatly organized, it would be misguided to insist that Moretti’s division of the kinds of Bildungsroman holds until the end of the Victorian era. Rather, the kind of British Bildungsroman that Moretti characterizes is only true of some examples of the genre, such as *David Copperfield* and *Jane Eyre*.¹⁷ In the brief period of time in the late 1840s until 1850, the

¹⁷ And even though I agree with his general notion of the structure of these Bildungsromane as demonstrating not a true development but rather a “return,” wherein the protagonist realizes that he has been his ideal self all along, I do not agree that the British Bildungsromane all aim to “reduce the rate of adventure in our lives while expanding the jurisdiction—so inert in narrative terms—of security” (Moretti 192). In fact, in using suspense to entertain the alternatives to the main plot that digress from the telos, the Bildungsroman does not simply support order but rather grapples with its contradictory nature, and how subjectivity itself must create its own sense of difference in order for the protagonist to be distinguished from other characters.

kind of Bildungsroman that involves no real uncertainty, and signifies youth as a treacherous time, not unlike the “bad dream” aspect of suspense, was achieved—only to be largely (if not fully) abandoned in the following decades. Moreover, to claim that these two novels were successful in depicting Bildung is not to say that they truly depict a meaningful formation of the self; rather, I am saying that these novels produce the guise of a successful formation. That is, while the earlier examples of the British Bildungsromane, like *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield*, successfully maintain the illusion of individual formation, the later examples that I study in this project will demonstrate that such success is the exception, not the rule. In those later novels, the Bildungsroman is a form that constantly reframes its ways of coping with the idea of identity itself, and redefines what the individual signifies in the larger history and culture. This constant struggle with the concept of, and the act of forming an individual subject, I argue, is represented in the ways that suspense is used throughout the Victorian period. That is, *suspense is increasingly used in more experimental and distorted ways to represent the difficulty of achieving a sense of progressive development*. Across the following chapters, I hope to show the degree to which suspense can disguise the lack of meaningful difference in the protagonist that is achieved throughout the course of the British Bildung plot. In other words, successful self-formation has always already been an illusion. The intense manipulation of suspense in, say, *David Copperfield* or *Jane Eyre* (texts that I will address in my first two chapters) aims to maintain that illusion, whereas ways of disrupting the structure of suspense reveal the limits and fragility of that illusion. There is a difficulty of formation that novels by Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, Wilkie Collins, and George Eliot all grapple with through different ways of narrating suspense.

In fact, all the other novels that I examine in my dissertation—*Villette* (1853), *Great Expectations* (1861), four of Wilkie Collins’s novels written in the 1860s, and *Daniel Deronda*

(1876)—all demonstrate disruptions in the neat recursive structure of suspense and youth towards which *David Copperfield* and *Jane Eyre* most closely aspire. In disrupting that formula of setup (youth) and payoff (“seeming” maturity) of suspense in the Bildungsroman, these novels interrogate, in their own ways, what it means to be a subject of formation, and what kind of progression, if at all, is possible. Therefore, in thinking about the Victorian Bildungsroman through the history of how suspense has been used, I concur with Alexander Stević that “what is truly at stake is that the process of socialization—the Bildungsroman’s main thematic concern—is itself a site of uncertainty, contestation, and crisis”—in other words, it is a genre of instability, rather than upholding the standard of stability (8).

Thinking about the Bildungsroman as an unstable form also opens up the Victorian period as a particularly charged site of such instability. There is a tendency in Anglophone literary studies to take for granted the Modernist stance that the Victorian period was a hegemonic, monolithic period in which successful individual development and its naïve depiction were possible. Using the Victorian period as a springboard to contrast the purported disruptive forms of the Modernist period, Jed Esty argues that novels in modernist colonial contact zones, “in open and sustained violation of the developmental paradigm that seemed to govern nineteenth-century historical and fictional forms, ...present youthful protagonists who die young, remain suspended in time, eschew vocational and sexual closure, refuse social adjustment, or establish themselves as evergreen souls...” (3). Gregory Castle, likewise, claims that “in modernist hands, the Bildungsroman is critiqued from the standpoint of its tendency towards dialectical harmony, toward reconciliation of the self and the external social world that is preserved as utopian vision in Goethe and that is mourned as a lost paradisiacal dispensation in the French and English Bildungsromane throughout most of the nineteenth century” (26). Similarly, Leland Monk traces an increase in the ways that

self-identity becomes more “up to chance” through the course of the late Victorian period and the modernist era: unlike how “in the Victorian period, it is the novelistic character that has the status of an individual and indissoluble atom in the operations of the narrative,” in the modern period, “this sense of character...is gradually supplanted by a self-conscious preoccupation with the proper name,” where that solidity of that individual identity is more up to chance circumstances (5). But as I will show in my examinations of Victorian Bildungsroman (and, in the case of Collins’s novels, the structure of the Bildungsroman but with a different telos), a successful social integration, or the achievement of a full individual subjectivity, is only ever an aspiration to begin with in the nineteenth-century British Bildungsroman, and the individual novels that are examples of the genre vary in how convincingly they can pull off this aspiration into a narrative reality. As Marc Redfield notes, it is a “phantom formation” (230). Thus, the Victorian era itself is already reflexive and flexible regarding what self-formation can signify in the form of the novel.¹⁸ Going a step further than claiming that the novel “works to imagine the possibility of an ultimate synthesis of two apparently incommensurate concepts of “how things are and how they ought to be,” I am arguing that narrative suspense provides a deceptive bridge between those two junctures, and its illusory power becomes more transparent throughout the Victorian period (Puckett 75). In doing so I hope to turn our attention to the changes that are happening *within* the Victorian era, and suspense is crucial to what makes the Victorian Bildungsroman read as one.

¹⁸ A similar rhetoric of fallenness appears in *The Theory of the Novel*—as a Christian might assume a Garden of Eden before the fall, Lukács assumes an epic world in which such religious elevation of the soul matched the aesthetic qualities of the art of literature. Rather, it is the reuptake of the Greek and Roman culture by the later European thought that characterizes epicness as such—there is no original state in which such aesthetic and ideological harmony existed in a stable form. Yet it is, after all, quite novelistic to long for what seems to have been lost but that which was never ours to begin.

In my first chapter, “Transformation of Suspense into Surprise in Charles Dickens,” I examine *David Copperfield* as the prime example that demonstrates the anemic way that suspense gets fulfilled in the more traditionally “successful” English Bildungsroman. All desire is externalized and expelled from the protagonist, David, into more minor figures in the plot, who systematically are abolished from the narrative. As a result, although it is unclear (and, frankly, impossible to find out) whether David has developed meaningfully by the end of the narrative, the suspenseful setup and payoff in thoroughly expelling these characters (and any possible threatening desire) enable David to successfully establish a guise of progressive formation. The complete lack of uncertainty at all parts of the narration (in David’s and other characters’ telos) in fact allows this kind of suspense to be more effective in creating a sense of a formation. In contrast, in *Great Expectations*, the plot refuses to fulfill the suspenseful setup of Pip’s expectations; instead, the novel offers surprise, rendering the prior suspense useless. This rejection of fulfilling the expected closure of suspense lays bare the fragility of the Bildung form, and the consistent state of ignorance and fantasy required to sustain the vision of proper subject formation. In short, *Great Expectations*, with its replacement of suspense with surprise, cracks open the machinery of suspense that *David Copperfield* uses to create its emergence of a Bildungsroman hero.

While the case study of *David Copperfield* contrasted with *Great Expectations* encapsulates, in a Bakhtinian rhetoric, the kind of historical shift that many critics of modernist literature have read in the disillusionment of British economic mobility and its cultural empire, the history it mirrors is thoroughly masculine. In “Causality and Contingency of Suspense in Charlotte Brontë,” I argue that *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* resist, in different ways, the masculine assumptions in the form of the Bildungsroman, which can be seen through their varying uses of suspense. Although the two novels contain very similar plot points—such as childhood abandonment,

finding employment, gothic threats, and romance—they present them by using suspense in fundamentally different ways. *Jane Eyre* is a triumph of suspenseful plotting on the part of its titular heroine. Jane, the narrator, magnifies suspense in moments when the past Jane is at risk of falling into the “bad” outcomes of homelessness and unemployment, to contrast with her secure, narrating voice of the present. This contrast emphasizes the sense of how far she had come along since those threatening times, legitimizing herself as a proper Bildungsroman hero. What is important about this is that just as the earlier examples of the novel genre (*Wilhelm Meister* for instance) brought the ordinary details of life to the level of narrative importance of, say, grand battles in Greek epics, Jane (rightfully) brings the material circumstances of a single woman without aristocratic wealth at risk of forced emigration or homelessness to the same level of attention as that which is granted to the typically masculine concerns of the Bildungsroman. In *Villette*, by contrast, Brontë demonstrates a shell of a Bildungsroman by making her narrator-heroine allergic to suspense. Lucy Snowe abhors suspense, and purposefully snuffs out any suspense whenever she can, precisely because she cannot—and will not—be included in the structure of pleasurable suspense and its payoff in the way that proper subjects of the Bildungsromane can. Lucy not only refuses suspense at most fronts, but when forced to be held in suspense, characterizes the experience as not an opening of possibilities but rather a duration of suffering until the inevitable tragedy arrives. Figuring suspense this way, Lucy demonstrates her lack of available choice and the contingent status of her circumstances, questioning the entire conceit of progress itself in doing so—how can one be expected to progress, or even imagine proper formation, when no suspense can be entertained?

My first two chapters address the ways in which suspense is used differently by the same authors, demonstrating a decrease in the sustainability of the illusion of Bildung. The following

two chapters will trace how this failed illusion of Bildung is taken up through different thematics (debt and gambling, respectively) by sensation fiction and the last of what could be categorized as a novel of formation. The third chapter, “Wilkie Collins and Converting Youth to Debt,” takes the form of the “successful” British Bildungsroman—where youth/suspense entertains delightful vagaries only to be abolished by the end to bring order—and replaces *youth* with *debt*. Figuring the time of suspense, or what is “youth” in the Bildungsroman, as a marked time of incurring debt, the sensation novels of Wilkie Collins convert the telos of the novel from *maturity* to *solvency*. Indeed, these novels—*The Woman in White*, *Armada*, *No Name*, and *The Moonstone*—operate on the same suspenseful logic of the Bildungsroman as *David Copperfield* or *Jane Eyre*, except that the plot of self-making is turned into the plot of money-making. They achieve this by supplanting the closural scenes of recognition in the English Bildungsroman tradition with scenes of receipt-comparison; instead of reaching a sense of having successfully formed a self at the end of suspense, these novels offer the comfort of having paid off outstanding debt. Insofar as Collins’s novels share the same structure of suspense as a traditional English Bildungsroman, but with a different thematic of debt, they provide an outlook onto how self-formation comes to escape the concern of the popular Victorian novel form, and economic formation supersedes its place of importance. Put differently, the shimmering ontological lack in the novel of formation—what Georg Lukács calls “transcendental homelessness” (*Theory* 41)—becomes realized in its economic form in the sensation novel genre: the lack of money.

In the final chapter, “George Eliot and Bildung as Gambling,” I consider Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda*—one of the last examples of the English Bildungsroman—as a game of roulette that decides who gets to occupy the status of a successful Bildungsroman hero. *Daniel Deronda* is so titled because fortune aligns with Daniel’s process of development, while the same fortune works

to disqualify other viable characters of the Bildung plot: namely, Gwendolen, whose experiences throughout the novel achieve nothing, despite the various bouts of narrative suspense that sets her up as a close contender for a Bildung protagonist. Suspense, thematized as gambling, *must* involve uncertainty, and in fact is almost all uncertainty. Unlike the kind of certain return to a newly recognized—but unchanged—self that the Victorian Bildungsroman promises, suspense in gambling offers no such return, no such certainty. In this way, suspense becomes too threatening even for the Bildungsroman, to the point that closure cannot curb it back to its comforting safety. Of course, Daniel's plot is also not a conventional Bildung plot, as his recognition is specifically that which excludes him from leading a future in England as an English subject. Still, in his plot a kind of return is promised, expected, and ultimately delivered, in the form of his return to his spiritual homeland, Israel. Despite the shift in the locale and nationality of the successfully formed self, Daniel is able to abolish uncertainty and suspense in his plot to reach a stable state of difference. Gwendolen's plot in contrast begins like a Bildungsroman and entertains much suspense and possibilities while she expects a certain outcome (that she will ultimately end up with Daniel). However, suspense thematized as gambling in Gwendolen's plot is too powerful, too uncertain: as a result, there is an unsuccessful expulsion of suspense, where the "bad dream" becomes reality and no comforting closure becomes possible for Gwendolen. Eliot constructs a novel that demonstrates the resistances and instabilities in the expectations of a Bildung plot by letting different characters demonstrate varying scales of uncertainty and suspense in their progression.

Now that I have revealed what is to come, let us read onward.

CHAPTER 1.

Transformation of Suspense to Surprise in Charles Dickens

Borrowing Audrey Jaffe's words, "the subject of autobiography who attempts to construct his or her narrative as a suspenseful one—refusing to tell the end of the story—is in the peculiar position of knowing and not knowing at once, or, more precisely, of knowing but attempting to appear not to know" (124). Indeed, the autobiographical Bildungsroman has the particular problem of mediating the past self as character, and the older self as narrator. As the narrative progresses, the narrating protagonist must manipulate the distance between his younger self and his narrative voice to ensure that his experience of his youth is relayed in its fresh significance and that it has led him to become who he is at the time of narrating. In other words, he must create suspense in order to communicate the significance of the difference between his younger and older self. Thus, the crack—and the glue—between the two protagonists, is suspense. The payoff to this suspense is the self-proclamation of the mature protagonist having gone through his process of formation. In this chapter, I argue that the formula of suspense and its payoff changes significantly between *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, in which the fruits of suspense are superseded by surprise. While *David Copperfield* is able to successfully create a sense of self-formation through the satisfying fulfillment of suspense that ejects undesirable (or even threatening) presences to David's progress, *Great Expectations* seems at first to follow the same pattern, only to pull out the rug below Pip's feet and offer only surprise. This comparison sheds a light on the fragility of the

sense of progress in the Bildungsroman due to its requirement that the buildup of suspenseful expectation is fulfilled in the end. When this structure is disrupted by surprise in *Great Expectations*, Pip is all but disqualified from being a proper subject of the Bildungsroman.

David Copperfield: Repetitions That Build Suspense

“‘*David Copperfield all over!*’ cried Miss Betsey.”
— *David Copperfield*, p.18¹

In the criticism that surrounds *David Copperfield*, we cannot overlook the impact of D.A. Miller’s reading of the novel on what we perceive as the project of the novel. As one of the most influential Foucauldian accounts of the novel, Miller’s reading argues that David’s subjectivity is an “open secret,” where “the experience of the novel provides David’s subjectivity with a secret refuge: a free, liberalizing space in which he comes into his own, a critical space in which he takes his distance from the world’s carceral oppressions” (D. Miller, *Novel* 215). The central conceit of the novel is self-contradictory, where David comes into his own, despite being “ultimately no different from the boxed-in characters he seeks to transcend,” by becoming an agent of that carceral oppression himself, on his own psyche and narration. David’s “subject constitutes himself ‘against’ discipline by assuming that discipline in his own name” (D. Miller, *Novel* 220). Miller’s argument is twofold. One, formally, the novel demonstrates the self-justifying process of the autobiographical Bildungsroman, whereby the protagonist’s development is made legible by his distance from the other characters who fail to escape the oppression of regulatory power; however, the narratorial techniques of that very protagonist mirror the logic of that power which it claims to evade. Two, socially, the novel creates the figure of the liberal individual that the readers of the

¹ From now on, *David Copperfield* will be denoted as *DC*, and *Great Expectations* as *GE*.

novel themselves come to emulate, thus propagating the disciplinary impulses of institutional power that exist both in and outside the fictional realm. Mary Poovey, focusing primarily on the second argument, argues similarly that *Copperfield* is “a narrative of individual development, which both provided individual readers with an imaginative image of what identity was and created a subject position that reproduced this kind of identity in the individual reader” (Poovey 89). In contrast, more recent accounts of the novel seem to take issue with those two main arguments in Miller’s foundational study. One camp disagrees with Miller’s first claim—that David’s narration is an exercise of regulatory narratorial control—by claiming that the repetitions in the novel, unlike the reifying insistence of disciplinary power, are remnants of an uncontrollable trauma at the heart of the novel. A second camp takes issue with Miller’s second claim, arguing that the novel is not primarily creating a sense of an individual, but pertaining instead to the popular sensibilities of a community, and what constitutes the “outside” of the individual.

The first camp, arguing that the repetitions in the novel are traumatic, rather than progressive, reads the regressive characteristics of minor characters in the novel to advance its point. For instance, James Buzard takes a direct opposite stance to what he considers to be the disciplinary logic of the demarcation of the public/private boundary in Miller: he sums it up as the “sinister open secret of liberal self-governmentability” (Buzard, “Thresholds” 226). He instead focuses on the impossibility of such a compartmentalization. In so doing, Buzard argues that critics should be more “doubt[ful] about treatments of the Victorian Bildungsroman that overstress stability and resolution in the achievement of personal maturity and national modernity” (Buzard, “Thresholds” 228). Likening his argument to how Nathan Hensley reads Wilkie Collins’s *Armadale* as a narrative in which “the traces of the violent past ‘live on, unassuaged,’” Buzard emphasizes that characters like “Mr. Dick [keep] alive the possibility that the dead might not have

departed, time might move in reverse, and our victimized childhood might still be lurking nearby” (Buzard, “Thresholds” 228, 239). In other words, despite the “traffic control” of information at David’s hands, there are certain details that seep through the narratorial membrane, pointing to an unsaid, and nonaddressable, trauma at the heart of the novel. In this way, Buzard paints a picture, not of a self-narrated, self-justified liberal individual, but rather a figure of a split, and fragmented, self. Similarly, Cathy Caruth reads *David Copperfield* as a Bildungsroman which still contains an unutterable trauma at its autobiographical core, through the character of Mr. Dick: “Where David’s autobiographical narrative emerges as the final conquest of his orphaned past, Mr. Dick’s memorial appears to be the site of an endless return to a past he has not simply survived” (3). Likewise, Melissa McLeod applies Caruth’s notions of literary trauma to argue that the aural repetitions and gothic elements in the novel serve implicitly to never let go of David’s childhood trauma. Suggesting that “ghosts help account for the many instances of repetition and doubling in the novel,” McLeod reads a “gothic logic” in the distance between child David and narrating David, claiming that the gap between the two contain the unutterable trauma of loss and abandonment in David (394). Some, like Kathryn Ford, even argue that the novel as a whole is Charles Dickens’s own psycho-therapeutic exercise in “grappl[ing] with his own life-story” of a failed romance with Maria Beadnell (47).

Against these trauma-centered accounts, I concur with Nicholas Dames that in all of “David’s predictive memories...we find not trauma but *work*”—narrative work, at that (165, original emphasis). As I will go on to show, the insistent repetitions in David’s narrative not only set up clear expectations for the tragedies that will befall many characters around him, but also fulfill those expectations exactly, thereby banishing them from his narrative. These narrative setups and payoffs are the evidence of his hard work at justifying his own difference from the other

colorful characters in the novel. As a matter of fact, I will go on to argue that, if anything, *Great Expectations* is formally superior to *David Copperfield* in terms of grappling with the notion of trauma as an event because its plot structure hinges on the surprise (of the origins of Pip's fortune) that upsets the previously figured expectations of suspense. Furthermore, I would like to point out that to assume that D.A. Miller's reading of *David Copperfield* relies on the solidity of the liberal individual and the disciplinary power of the plot is to elide the nuances of his argument. Miller emphasizes that despite the sense that the novel lets us "witness an abstracted, all-embracing subjectivity telling the story of its own genesis, of how, and against what odds and with what at stake, it came to be," the subjectivity in question is paradoxically emptied out: "the Novel protects subjectivity not by locking it in, in the manner of a box, but by locking it out, since the story always determines the destiny of *somebody else*" (D. Miller, *Novel* 211, 215). In short, the subjectivity that allows the entire novelistic world of *David Copperfield* to exist, is itself anemic, in that it can only be defined against what is depicted in the story. It can only find itself "between the lines, in the margins, outside the covers" (D. Miller, *Novel* 215). Thus, it is misguided to characterize David's narration as "traffic control at the frontier," as Buzard does. Following Miller's logic, there is no "frontier" in the novel where the reader can see David negotiate what to let into his story and what to keep out: all that is there, is David narrating stories of characters that he defines himself against (except Agnes). Indeed, the regressive characters around David are characterized as such deliberately, and not because he cannot help but displace his secret trauma unto other figures in the narrative.

The second camp of critics, which argues against Miller's second point—that the reader comes to reproduce the figure of the individual demonstrated by the novel's voice—focuses more on the specter of community in the novel, rather than on the act of reading that becomes a private

disciplinary lesson for the reader. Andrew Sanders has argued that the humor in *David Copperfield* comes to “temper accounts of social and moral depravity and...holds out hope for a reform in both society as a whole and in the individual” (55). Comedy in Dickens, in other words, causes the reader to not simply emulate the subjective position of the protagonist, but hope for a better sense of community. Likewise, Lanya Lamouria argues, paradoxically, that in trying to “locate his origins,” David is led to a “murky space outside or beyond individual history” (63). Further, she claims that the narrator’s status becomes “radically anti-individualist,” casting personal memory as slipping into a recording of collective history, as it is barred from the act of forgetting (Lamouria 74). Similarly, Jesse Rosenthal takes issue with D.A. Miller’s characterization of the reader who would identify (and would wish to emulate) David; instead of the insular, private reader that Miller imagines, Rosenthal points out that reading *David Copperfield* during the Victorian era would have been an “experience in partaking in a cultural experience that was *popular*” (87, original emphasis). In arguing that the novel’s “narrative structure relies on” a kind of “intersubjective affect,” Rosenthal, like Buzard, argues against the solidity (and the replicability) of the liberal individual created according to the disciplinary reading practice of *David Copperfield*. Moreover, Rosenthal suggests, like Sanders, that the novel does not create a figure of the individual in its novelistic project, but rather a sense of community, through humor²:

Unlike a good number of Dickens’s other novels—the narratives of which, as Viktor Schklovsky points out, tend toward suspense—*David Copperfield* maintains a level of openness with its readers—no unexpected familial connections, no unexplained plot twists later explained by a secret plan, no mysterious benefactors, not even a false name...Humor, in other words, plays the role in *David Copperfield* that suspense plays in *Oliver Twist*. While suspense is the formal technique that

² Here, Rosenthal specifically reads *David Copperfield* as an opposite phenomenon to the plot machinations in *Great Expectations*, in that there are no “unexpected,” “unexplained,” “secret,” or “mysterious” elements in the former. However, I would directly argue against this formation of *David Copperfield* as humorous and *Great Expectations* as suspenseful: rather, it is that *David Copperfield* offers suspense without uncertainty, and *Great Expectations* offers surprise.

produces an affective response to withheld knowledge, humor produces an implicit shared knowledge. (Rosenthal 79)

The sense of community in Rosenthal is thus the sense of shared knowledge, which can theoretically propel the ethical sense of community reform (as in Sanders) or an anti-individualist impulse that encompasses the historical knowledge of the community (as in Lamouria).

Unlike Rosenthal, I don't think that the novel as a whole is capable of imagining the "outside of self." As I have explained above, in arguing that there is no "frontier" in which David is seen controlling the influx of information, I find it more important to the form of the novel, the ways in which David treats, as a narrator, the characters that surround the narrated David. Specifically, he treats them in ways that demonstrate how his sense of self relies on the negation of others. The way that Sanders and Rosenthal in particular characterize the novel as that which abolishes suspense to opt for humor, which allows its characters and the readers the sense of "getting it," I believe is not an entirely correct way of describing the how the novel works. In fact, *David Copperfield* is a tearful novel—David himself sheds many a tear throughout the plot, and the repetitions of his anguish and misery tend to confirm the worst of his expectations. Rather than humor, it is the suspenseful narration of tragic events in David's life that establish the formula of setup and payoff of suspense. In a way, I follow D. A. Miller's argument about the novel, in that I also suggest that David's subjectivity is not that of a positive reclamation of positive values, but rather a result of negation of bad alterities (represented by minor characters whom he disavows). He can only come to create a sense of self-formation by ejecting other characters out of his life—mirroring the way in which these stunted characters are banished from mainland of Britain, to the colonies in Australia by the end of the novel.

I propose that David's narratorial voice uses suspense to characterize other characters (such as Steerforth or Dora) as tragically static and *therefore* disqualified from the plot. Their *negation*

affirms his own sense of progression and development. However, I am not quite on board with the way that Miller characterizes the reader as the figure who is inspired to follow the reading (and living) practices of *David Copperfield*, or the supposed disciplinary institutions of the fictional plot that seem to exert its power into the readers' realities. Indeed, rather than focusing on the "carceral" structures that shape the reader as well as the character of *David Copperfield*, I focus on how David is able to give rise the impression of such solidity of himself as a formed individual by the end of the story, despite the palpable threats to that sense of self that exist throughout the plot. He does this through repetitions that affirm his own memory of events, and in the way that he distances himself away precisely in moments of suspenseful depictions of others' downfalls. In this vein, my reading of the novel falls most closely in line with Amanda Anderson's reading of fallenness in Dickens; she argues that "David achieves a consolidation and recovery of self largely by defining himself against (but also more self-consciously through) versions of fallenness" (*Tainted Souls* 94). Anderson also sees that David marks fallen women in his story ("what are so many fallen women doing *David Copperfield*'s 'personal history'?" Anderson rightly asks) in order to show that his "biggest error" is "allowing his heart to wander from Agnes before he even know that it belonged to her" (*Tainted Souls* 96). The fallen women in the novel—Emily, Annie Strong (at least mistakenly so)—represent but also contain the missteps in the hero's trajectory, until he finally reaches his true telos: Agnes. I fully agree with Anderson that David's true telos is to reach, and recognize, Agnes as his true beloved. Still, my argument focuses more on how the narratorial voice in *David Copperfield* uses suspense to negate such characters, and attends to the characters of Steerforth and Dora, who are not necessarily fallen women but certainly represent the missteps in David's journey towards Agnes.

The first two chapters of *David Copperfield* are riddled with repetitions that constantly remind us that the narrating David and the narrated David have shared visions. The very opening of the novel announces: “Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show” (DC 13). And so it shall. But as soon as it is announced that Little David is born, he narrates away from himself to his caul “which was advertised for sale. In the newspapers, at the low price of fifteen guineas” (DC 13). Only after chronicling the intricacies of the caul’s sale for a page does David return to the original thread of his story: “Not to meander, myself, at present, I will go back to my birth” (DC 14). Already, the structure is that of a suspensive stretching of time, parallel to the structure of Homer’s episode of Odysseus’s scar. Repetitions abound, even outside of these little pockets of dilations—David’s narration cements reality through them, stamping affirmations and confirmations of every small detail of his memory.

Quickly, we see another expectation being sown. David’s mother’s death is already apparent before it happens—this is precisely the kind of suspense that holds the readers’ attention while completely giving away what is to come. Slippages of the tongue such as “she was afraid she was but a childish widow, and would be but a childish mother *if* she lived” give away her perpetual immaturity as well as her fragility (DC 17, emphasis mine). Once she gives birth to David’s short-lived brother, she looks “too delicate,” while “her hand was so thin and white that it seemed to me almost transparent” (DC 122). One might say that this is merely foreshadowing, but there is yet again a “deviation” that comes in the way before her death can finally take place—David’s going away due to Murdstone’s machinations. By putting scheduled stretches of time during which David loses contact with her, we see Clara growing worse and worse. No longer the chatty, girlish character that we saw in the first chapter of the novel, by the last time we see her,

her speech has been taken away from her by the Murdstones' cruelty. Her last conversation with Mr. Murdstone (at least the last one narrated by David) is concluded when her "lips moved, as if she answered 'Yes, my dear Edward,' but she said nothing aloud" (*DC* 130). Murdstone literally cuts her sentences short throughout this conversation, as he cuts her life short—he is not only the villain in David's childhood, but also the anathema to the work of suspense itself in cutting any meanderings short.³ When David leaves for the final time, Clara and David's little brother are as good as dead. And the way that her death is revealed to David almost seems to make palpable the stretching of time before the known confirmation of her death is finally revealed. Consider this exchange:

It was after breakfast, and we had been summoned in from the playground, when Mr. Sharp entered and said:

'David Copperfield is to go into the parlour.'

I expected a hamper from Peggotty, and brightened at the order. Some of the boys about me put in their claim not to be forgotten in the distribution of the good things, as I got out of my seat with great alacrity.

'Don't hurry, David,' said Mr. Sharp. 'There's time enough, my boy, don't hurry.'

I might have been surprised by the feeling tone in which he spoke, if I had given it a thought; but I gave it none until afterwards. I hurried away to the parlour; and there I found Mr. Creakle, sitting at his breakfast with the cane and a newspaper before him, and Mrs. Creakle with an opened letter in her hand. But no hamper.

'David Copperfield,' said Mrs. Creakle, leading me to a sofa, and sitting down beside me. 'I want to speak to you very particularly. I have something to tell you, my child.'

Mr. Creakle, at whom of course I looked, shook his head without looking at me, and stopped up a sigh with a very large piece of buttered toast.

'You are too young to know how the world changes every day,' said Mrs. Creakle, 'and how the people in it pass away. But we all have to learn it, David; some of us when we are young, some of us when we are old, some of us at all times of our lives.'

I looked at her earnestly.

'When you came away from home at the end of the vacation,' said Mrs. Creakle, after a pause, 'were they all well?' After another pause, 'Was your mama well?'

I trembled without distinctly knowing why, and still looked at her earnestly, making no attempt to answer.

³ Perhaps this is also why that he must exit from David's story much earlier on.

‘Because,’ said she, ‘I grieve to tell you that I hear this morning your mama is very ill.’

A mist rose between Mrs. Creakle and me, and her figure seemed to move in it for an instant. Then I felt the burning tears run down my face, and it was steady again.

‘She is very dangerously ill,’ she added.

I knew all now.

‘She is dead.’

There was no need to tell me so. I had already broken out into a desolate cry, and felt an orphan in the wide world. (*DC* 134)

The dilation of time is so distinct at every step—David being called to the parlor, his misgivings at Mr. Sharp’s words—“there’s time enough, my boy, don’t hurry”—the entire back and forth with Mrs. Creakle, all seem to mock the known outcome. Moreover, consider that David narrates, “I knew all now” right before the declaration “she is dead.” There is no surprise, literally, as he knew what was to come. However, the scene slowly speeds up, and one might find that there is a tragic race towards the inevitable affirmation of our expectations by the time David, and the readers, learn that “she is dead.” In the logic of the novel we have already been given an overwhelmingly clear case of an expectation and its delayed, but sure, fulfillment. This pattern will continue for the rest of the novel.

Another example of this structure of suspense is the narrative vision of Steerforth’s death that creates suspense but still precludes surprise. When David first befriends Steerforth and adores him with boyish delight, the narrative strangely flags Steerforth’s sleeping face:

I thought of him very much after I went to bed, and raised myself, I recollect, to look at him where he lay in the moonlight, with his handsome face turned up, and his head reclining easily on his arm. He was a person of great power in my eyes; that was, of course, the reason of my mind running on him. No veiled future dimly glanced upon him in the moonbeams. There was no shadowy picture of his footsteps, in the garden that I dreamed of walking in all night. (*DC* 99)

How apt, that this omen of a dark future for Steerforth is immediately paired with an image of David literally meandering in a garden path. This imagery literalizes the meandering, the deviation,

that suspense provides before delivering the affirmation to its expectation. Of course, Steerforth does not immediately die: Steerforth is a stage of David's life that he must pass through, and even implicitly denounce.⁴ When Steerforth sees David for the first time since school, he not only confirms his own progress—"I am what they call an Oxford man"—but also reiterates David's lack thereof: "Just what you used to be, now look at you! Not altered in the least!" (*DC* 297). He is able to call out David's stagnancy, despite what the narration would have you believe; he, at this point, comes very close to lifting the veil of suspense and its affirmation that David has so carefully sown in the logic of his narrative world. Thus, in order for the plot to successfully convince the readers and itself of David's socialization, he must not only die but also regress—and regress he does, by being breaking both Ham and Little Em'ly's future, and dying in the image of his boyhood self.

When Steerforth's illicit relationship with Little Em'ly implodes and he is discovered dead from drowning, David relives a similar experience to what he had with Mrs. Creakle when Clara died.

As I sat beside the bed, when hope was abandoned and all was done, a fisherman, who had known me when Emily and I were children, and ever since, whispered my name at the door.

'Sir,' said he, with tears starting to his weather-beaten face, which, with his trembling lips, was ashy pale, 'will you come over yonder?'

The old remembrance that had been recalled to me, was in his look. I asked him, terror-stricken, leaning on the arm he held out to support me:

'Has a body come ashore?'

He said, 'Yes.'

⁴ He is also an older model of a literary hero—James Armstrong has recently argued that Steerforth's ambiguous characterization mirrors that of Byron, who codified a hero-villain figure in late 1700s to early 1800s. He specifically claims that "the ambiguous portrayal of Steerforth, constantly viewed through the worshipful eyes of David, thus reflects a broader coming to terms with the past that Victorian Britain sought to undertake through reevaluating the heroic but problematic legacy of the Romantic era" (J. Armstrong 30). Needless to say, this is a figure that cannot exist in David's world. Strikingly, Armstrong, as I did, also notices how this ambivalent stance that the novel takes to Steerforth is foregrounded by David's foreboding description of Steerforth "as soon as the character first appears" (J. Armstrong 31).

‘Do I know it?’ I asked then.

He answered nothing.

But he led me to the shore. And on that part of it where she and I had looked for shells, two children—on that part of it where some lighter fragments of the old boat, blown down last night, had been scattered by the wind—among the ruins of the home he had wronged—I saw him lying with his head upon his arm, as I had often seen him lie at school. (*DC* 801)

Again, note the same structure of question and answer as the narration inches closer to the reveal. The last sentence of the excerpt, where David’s vision meanders all over the shore, registers unrelated details connected by em-dashes until he finally confirms Steerforth’s death. One might even say that the em-dash is the privileged punctuation mark of suspense.⁵ Formally, the sentence stretches time as long as it can until delivering its expected blow. And most strikingly, we see Steerforth in the same position in his boyhood when David flagged him with a “veiled future” that dimly glanced at him back in school. David can be said to almost punish Steerforth by forever freezing him in that moment of boyhood—despite Steerforth’s deviations in his own life that are worthy of their own novel, Steerforth is locked in that image of his boyhood to have never matured, and in the tragic mirroring of David’s rosy adoration for young Steerforth, even condemned to degeneration of character. In one fell swoop of connecting the two images of young Steerforth sleeping and the fallen Steerforth dead, David is able to not only sum up Steerforth’s entire life in one pocket of suspense within his own larger narrative of progress, but also erase the potentials and adventures that Steerforth had in his own right. David, in contrast, steadily but surely builds his narrative of progress, convincing the readers and himself by affirming his developmental expectations every step of his narrative. He uses a pattern of suspense and its payoff to build narrative necessity: the events in his life, though they might be tragic, are ultimately fateful and necessary to the forward movement of his own life-story.

⁵ I also read the same pattern of suspense in the level of punctuation in *Daniel Deronda* in my fourth chapter.

Moreover, another character who is locked in David's narrative, frozen in her childlike status, is David's first wife Dora. Although it is easy to think of her arc (if it could be called that) as a distinctly unsuspenseful one, the path to her unsurprising demise also shares the structure of suspense and its payoff that we have seen in Clara and Steerforth. As with Steerforth, Dora emerges in the novel to have her first conversation with David when David is wandering in the garden. David "walk[s] about, wondering what [his] feelings of happiness would be, if [he] could, ever become engaged to this dear wonder" that is Dora (401). In this meandering of his steps and his thoughts, David specifically characterizes the idea of getting engaged to her as "innocently undesigning" of "marriage and fortune," exclaiming that simply "to be allowed to call her 'Dora,'" would be to him "the summit of human ambition" (401). Dora is distinctly being characterized as overshadowing the larger telos of a novelistic plot—"marriage and fortune"—and thematically being associated with David's wandering aimlessly in the garden. Moreover, Dora is associated with a particular word from the get-go: "distraction." When David sees her for the first time, he "loved Dora Spenlow to distraction!" (397). When he becomes engaged to her, he "loved her at that minute to distraction. [He] should always love her, every minute, to distraction" (494). But distraction from what? Clearly, distraction from Agnes. Dora signifies a delay, a distraction as a means of being the wrong alternative to David's true mate. Dora, as a character, functions as a suspenseful delay from David reaching Agnes. Indeed, David's time with Dora emerges as "idle time" during which he is not quite progressing towards his ultimate telos (495).

A peculiar trait emerges whenever Dora is mentioned in the story: there is very little dialogue, and David almost rushes through the experience, despite being unable to quite skip through the sequence. Even when he gets engaged to Dora, the exchange does not include any

word from Dora—in fact, not a single spoken dialogue, but rather David’s summary of what took place:

I don’t know how I did it. I did it in a moment. I intercepted Jip. I had Dora in my arms I was full of eloquence. I never stopped for a word. I told her how I loved her. I told her I should die without her. I told her that I idolized and worshipped her. Jip barked madly all the time. When Dora hung her head and cried, and trembled, my eloquence increased so much the more...The more I raved, the more Jip barked. Each of us, in his own way, got more mad every moment. Well, well! Dora and I were sitting on the sofa by-the-by, quiet enough, and Jip was lying in her lap, winking peacefully at me. It was off my mind, I was in a state of perfect rapture. Dora and I were engaged. (DC 494)

The scene reads like a summary, but also a filmic montage. The back and forth of Dora crying, to David’s “eloquence”—ironic, in that we get to hear none of it—to Jip’s barking, all create a sense of continuity and an impression of the emotional intensity, rather than what actually went on. The montage in film, defined as the “explosion of a shot” by Sergei Eisenstein,⁶ achieves efficient delivery of meaning and progression of time by allowing doubleness of the image (216). The constant distraction from the couple to Jip is itself a formal representation—cruel as it is—of the distraction this engagement signifies for David’s larger plot. Dora, in this aspect, becomes the garden path in David’s life before he reaches his true destiny—a distraction that he needs to get over with in order to reach his telos. This aspect of David’s narration reaches its peak when he marries Dora. Claiming that the wedding day is “all a more or less incoherent dream,” David paints a scene with a series of paragraphs all beginning with “of,” to move very fast from one image to another: the effect is one of constantly reaching to the next image, next description, next impression, and yet noting a sense that none of this really matters.⁷

⁶ Eisenstein also notes that Dickens in particular is able to achieve such a filmic effect (216-7).

⁷ Dickens has used this exact technique in narrating Carker’s death in *Dombey and Son*, who also goes through a digressive train trip to run away from his sins committed against Edith Dombey, before slipping off the platform and being hit by a train. Strikingly, at the end of the hurried description, Dickens’s narrator concludes that “it was a fevered vision of things past and present all confounded together; of his life and

The montage-like quality in David's interactions with Dora only intensifies as Dora proves to be an inept wife throughout the chapter following their wedding. It only pauses to record Dora asking David to call her a "child-wife" to justify her own ineptitude (*DC* 651). In that same scene, Dora speaks as if to utter David's ultimate desire, that Agnes "might have improved [her]" (*DC* 651). It is at this turning point—only a chapter after his wedding—that David "wished [his] wife had been [his] counsellor; had had more character and purpose, to sustain [him] and improve [him] by; had been endowed with power to fill up the void which somewhere seemed to be about [him]" (*DC* 653). The lack that he feels is lack of Agnes—Dora, as defined against the lack which is clearly Agnes, is able to both signal David's telos with certainty, and yet also delay it. The temporal delay from David's reaching his true goal that Dora signifies is further emphasized with Dora's lack of timeliness. Dora purportedly owns a watch, though she never wears it. The watch has "no particular place" and Dora always loses track of time. In the chapter after her wedding, time is what causes Dora and David's "first little quarrel":

'My dearest life,' I said one day to Dora, 'do you think Mary Anne has any idea of time?'
'Why, Doady?' inquired Dora, looking up, innocently, from her drawing.
'My love, because it's five, and we were to have dined at four.'
Dora glanced wistfully at the clock, and hinted that she thought it was too fast.
'On the contrary, my love,' said I, referring to my watch, 'it's a few minutes too slow.' (*DC* 642)

As Jennifer Ruth observes, "unlike Dora, David never loses track of time, never falls behind on his newspaper deadlines" (57). The delay that Dora signifies is directly in contrast to the force of progressive movement forward with which Agnes is associated, especially through the image of

journey blended into one. Of being madly hurried somewhere, wither he must go" (*Dombey and Son* 836). It also has a dreamy, exhaustive feeling of both rushing towards something (his death) but also being delayed from reaching it; the "feeling of being madly hurried somewhere" precisely gets at the feeling of rushing through the less important parts of a story to reach the fulfillment of suspense.

her finger pointing upward. Moreover, paradoxically, Dora, and David's relationship to her, occupy more of the narrative space than do Agnes, and her relationship with David; it is through Dora's ineptitude and childishness that Agnes shines as David's true mate. Like David, who defines himself *against* other bad doubles of himself (Steerforth, and particularly Uriah), Dora defines Agnes by serving as Agnes's bad double. Dora is the "bad dream" that David needs to dream, in order to awake to his true pairing with Agnes. In the novel as a whole, it seems as if, borrowing Kelly Hager's words, that "Dora dies for David's convenience" (1000). Therefore, Dora's character as a whole becomes a deviation, or a distraction, from David's path to Agnes, one which affirms his eventual destination. Dora is a suspenseful delay through and through.

Finally, Dora's death comes to symbolize the final step that David takes in the narrative towards his best self, that of recognizing Agnes as his one true love, and marrying her, to accept her as his guiding principle. Indeed, as Maia McAleavy notes, "Agnes visits their home for the first time only when Dora is dying" (89), which underscores the notion that Agnes will replace Dora after her death. When David exclaims in the penultimate paragraph of the novel that he sees Agnes as a "dear presence, without which [he was] nothing," he is truer than he can express. He *is* in fact nothing, except for the sheer narrative work that he has put into signifying the forward movement that is crystalized in the image of Agnes "pointing upward!" (DC 882). Notice also that the "payoff" of much suspense in the novel is the death of the characters that have meant greatly to David. These characters, like suspense itself, are systematically eliminated in the narrative in order to define David against what they stand for: David's childhood abuse (Clara), unruly desire (Steerforth), and childish ineptitude in domestic and professional work (Dora).

Great Expectations: Surprise instead of Suspense

“I resented the sort of bright and gratified recognition that still shone in his face.”
—*Great Expectations*, p. 287

In *David Copperfield*, as we have examined thus far, once a promise or an expectation is set up, there is a very conscious effort on the part of the narration to fulfill it exactly. For that earlier and more optimistic novel, the process of disclosure of what has been promised constitutes its suspenseful plot. However, despite sharing the same first-person narrative voice as its predecessor, *Great Expectations* employs its narrative voice to set snares⁸ for both Pip and the readers—snares that *upset* expectation with surprise. I argue that *Great Expectations*⁹ is particular in the history of the nineteenth-century British novel because it represents the struggle to locate individual subjecthood in the form of the Bildungsroman through a plot and narration that specifically refuses payoff to its suspense. This struggle and its ultimate failure are the fuel to the novel’s plot.

The title of this later novel already marks the departure of the project of Bildung from its counterpart in *David Copperfield*. The title itself is an expectation; like Pip, the readers of the novel are led to harbor generic expectation of the Bildungsroman in reading the novel. However, as the recognition scene of the novel will show, that the greatness of such expectation is rejected is the central conceit of the novel. What’s more, the novel takes the readers on the same deceptive ride as the one that Pip is on throughout the novel, until the infamous recognition scene. The younger Pip, specifically, shares the “surprise” of recognition with the readers; his, and the readers’,

⁸ Roland Barthes defines a “snare” as “a decoy,” or “an obstacle (or a delay) in the solving” of a narrative uncertainty (*S/Z* 38). As Pip’s narration before the recognition scene creates an entirely different plot expectation (that Estella is meant for Pip, and that his fortune is from Miss Havisham) than what actually comes to pass in the story (that he is a product of Magwitch’s colonial labor, and that he has no real connection to Estella), the novel is a prime example of “the discourse...misleading the reader” (Barthes, *S/Z* 41).

⁹ And *Villette*, as I will go on to argue in my second chapter.

expectations are upset by the replacement of its fulfillment with the surprise advent of the unexpected plot. He, unlike David who signals his distance from his younger self through suspense, demonstrates his lack of development from his younger version. Rather than offering the pleasurable gratification of prior expectations after suspense, those expectations are turned moot due to an unforeseen surprise. This way, the form of *Great Expectations* exchanges the fulfillment of suspense with surprise, in a way that cancels out the buildup of both Pip's expectation of his life and the readers' expectation of the plot. This is specifically done in a way that deflates the prior anticipations of what Peter Brooks calls the "official" plot of the novel through the aesthetics of gimmick and foreignness, which probes into how limiting Pip's narration is, even now, in depicting the "repressed" plot of the novel (17). In other words, the aesthetics of surprise that severs suspense in *Great Expectations* demonstrate Pip's inadequacy as not only a subject of formation, but also as the narrator of one.

Pip's recognition scene, where he realizes "how wrecked [he] was, and how the ship in which [he] had sailed in was gone to pieces," (*GE* 295), is the pivot, and the punchline to the novel, paralleled in its intensity of misery only by the bright hope we see when David realizes the Agnes has always been meant for him. Unlike the constant repetition of tableaux that would signal what is to come in *David Copperfield*, the recognition scene in *Great Expectations* falls rather quickly and without much fanfare, with the exception of this curious passage:

And now that I have given the one chapter to the theme that so filled my heart, and so often made it ache and ache again, I pass on unhindered, to the event that had impended over me longer yet; the event that had begun to be prepared for, before I knew that the world held Estella, and in the days when her baby intelligence was receiving its first distortions from Miss Havisham's wasting hands.

In the Eastern story, the heavy slab that was to fall on the bed of state in the flush of conquest was slowly wrought out of the quarry, the tunnel for the rope to hold it in its place was slowly carried through the leagues of rock, the slab was slowly raised and fitted in the roof, the rope was rove to it and slowly taken through the miles of hollow to the great iron ring. All being made ready with much labour,

and the hour come, the sultan was aroused in the dead of the night, and the sharpened axe that was to sever the rope from the great iron ring was put into his hand, and he struck with it, and the rope parted and rushed away, and the ceiling fell. So, in my case; all the work, near and afar, that tended to the end, had been accomplished; and in an instant the blow was struck, and the roof of my stronghold dropped upon me. (*GE* 285)

In this passage, Pip claims that he is now passing onto “the event” that has been a long time coming; so much so, that it had been prepared for “before the...world held Estella.” This event, in a Charlotte Brontë-like fashion, is only given a different story that stands in for what it actually would be: that of an Eastern sultan, who is given an axe to sever a rope that causes the “roof of [Pip’s] stronghold” drop upon him. In the original story that Dickens is referencing—“The Continuation of the Tale of the Inchanters; or, Misnar, the Sultan of the East”—the Sultan’s vizier “builds a palace that is designed to cave in an crush a pair of evil enchanters who have seized the Sultan’s throne” (Douglas-Fairhurst 476). However, Dickens leaves out critical details from this story that he is referencing and transforms it into a very different one. Taking out any mention of the pair of evil enchanters who have already usurped the throne, Dickens’s version of the story dictates that “the heavy slab that was to fall on the bed of state in the flush of conquest” was wrought out of the quarry, dragged, and lifted, by an unnamed agent (the vizier is not mentioned). Although the scene is set “in the flush of conquest,” Dickens specifies that the location that the slab is designed to fall on is the “bed of state,” and that the Sultan is suddenly disturbed from his sleep “in the dead of night” to cut the rope that drops the slab. Because of the lack of any other figures in the story, and the connection between “bed” and the Sultan being “aroused in the dead of the night,” the story seems to suggest that it is the Sultan himself that experiences the misfortune of being crushed under the slab that he cuts loose. Strikingly, it is at this moment that Dickens changes the pronoun to first person, pointing to Pip as the one that was crushed under the slab that

dropped on the “bed of state.” The Sultan who sets off an intricate trap for himself is likened to Pip who sets himself up to fail with his snares and expectations.

This short scene is suspenseful—not because it is sudden or surprising, but because it sets up finally an expectation of something bad to come in the larger context of the novel. Reading this ominous little tale finally lets the readers know that there must be a horrible turn of events, which takes place immediately in the next chapter. Contrast this immediacy with the dilated repetitions in *David Copperfield*, which are far apart, and only make sense much later. Moreover, the Eastern Story itself functions like a suspenseful scene, with a proper setup and payoff of expectations. In the very first line, the scene announces that there is to a heavy slab to be dropped on “the bed of state.” Now that the scene has declared what will happen, it fills the gap between the planning stages and when the slab is finally dropped, “slowly.” It traces the making of the slab, how it was raised and fitted, and how the sharpened axe is given to the Sultan himself, who cuts the rope and the ceiling falls upon him. Throughout this explanation, there is a creeping stretching of time and distance—the slab, wrought and dragged through the “quarry” and the “leagues of rock” finally reach the palace, and the time finally approaches in the dead of the night. The intricate labor required to make the magical drop of the ceiling happen is shown only to the reader reading the scene, as the cutting of the rope, presumably, was not what the Sultan would have expected to have the ceiling dropped on him. For him, the ceiling collapses upon him, triggered by a completely unrelated action of him cutting a rope with his axe. The unrelated, and quick, nature of the trick in the story is of course contrasted by the slow, and meticulous, labor that was behind these seemingly unrelated events. This is the crux of how suspense works in the novel, as opposed to how it works in *David Copperfield*—the buildup is hidden, like the labor that it took to set the trap for the Sultan. And the surprise of its unexpected outcome is triggered by the Sultan himself, or Pip.

This short interjection of the Eastern Story compares the whole conceit of the recognition scene that follows with the metaphor of a gimmick. Gimmick, defined by Sianne Ngai as a contradictory aesthetic category that “irritates because it abbreviates work and time,” is helpful in thinking about the consequences of this particular scene in the larger form of the plot (52). The form of the gimmick contains multitudes—it has “the appearance [of] concealing the essence, [which is] part of that essence,” and yet its seeming concealment of its ‘method’ in magical erasure of labor ironically questions the “interlinking variables that make capitalist exploitation *measurable*, even if, as an aesthetic rather than cognitive judgement, [the gimmick] leaves its own estimations blank” (38). Ngai points out that the gimmick does not successfully keep its “technique” hidden—it is only the appearance of concealment that matters, and in fact ultimate “self-exposure is essential to [its] form” as well (84). The gimmick, in other words, is an engineering, or a technique, that shortens the labor and time that *ought to be* spent in achieving a spectacle; this erasure of labor and time causes wonder and delight like a magic trick, but there is an irritating quality of its technicality that also instills suspicion and reminds the audience that the gimmick is too good to be true. Thus, Ngai sums up, there is an “equivocal charm of the gimmick, which compels fascination in spite of its transparency” (86). The episode of the Eastern story fits Ngai’s description of the gimmick in many ways; as I’ve shown above, the labor and time that built the trap was hidden from the Sultan himself, achieving a sense that his cutting of the rope magically caused the ceiling to fall, demonstrating the essence of concealment of the technique. In contrast, the mechanical engineering that it took to forge the slab, tie it to the rope, drag it for miles, and hook it through the iron ring, is the “self-exposure” that is made privy to the reader. This relationship between concealment and exposure of labor in the Eastern Story as a gimmick is made even clearer when we consider for what the Eastern Story stands.

What Pip's narration is implicitly positioning as a gimmick through the guise of this metaphor is Magwitch's labor in the colonies. The "extraction of surplus value from living labour" becomes the snare that crushes the Sultan—Pip, and his expectations—in the climax of the novel (Ngai 38). The metaphor itself works like a gimmick, where the unspeakable toils that Magwitch must have gone through are summed up in a fairy-tale like manner. The appearance of the labor to make the trap, which is ultimately concealed from the Sultan, is parallel to the essence of the plot, in which the labor of Magwitch is hidden from Pip until the recognition scene. In doing so, true to being a gimmick, it draws our attention to "interlinking variables that make capitalist exploitation *measurable*"—in other words, what the cost of Pip's British bourgeoisie fantasy truly is (Ngai 38). Moreover, the oriental aesthetic of the Eastern story itself points to the blind spot in Pip's entire narration—he fails to account for the external, colonial sources of capitalist production and exploitation throughout his construction of the "official" plot. Thus, in order for him to finally depict his recognition of the "repressed" plot, he has no choice but to bring in aesthetics of foreignness and orientalism, since the source of his "unofficial" plot cannot be properly figured in the myopic way that subject formation is made possible in the British novel. There is an unsaid crisis in the novel's plot and its form—and in order to get out of facing the realities of exploited labor overseas, the novel has no way but to turn to a gimmick of surprise, specifically under the aesthetics of foreignness, in both form and content.

In a way, the recognition scene in *Great Expectations* is the recognition of actual labor, one that never comes in *David Copperfield*. Critics have already pointed out the strange missing component of *David Copperfield*'s progress of formation: as Stević puts it, "the scandal of *David Copperfield* is precisely that the profession has a name but no content" (68). Labor is, seemingly, a missing link in the novel. However, I suggest that there is an immense amount of labor on display,

literally: rather like the arduous descriptions of the forging of the slab and its transportation in the Eastern Story, the repetitions and meticulous dilations of time in *David Copperfield* precisely *are* labor in narrative form. David is working, working, working to make sure that his fantasy of progress is held up—though small cracks (like Steerforth’s offhand comment) exist, he builds up an illusion of constant progress in his own subjecthood at the cost of others’ tragedy—in a way, no one who gets wound up with David ends up well. His narrative of progress seems to be fueled by the downfall of characters surrounding him, and he shines forth as one of the few professionalized, married, and socially consolidated people in his world, very much so due to the contrast of the characters who don’t achieve the same around him. The fact that so many downfalls and deaths are narrated in that meticulous way of suspense and its fulfillment also suggests the extent of David’s narrative labor. *David Copperfield*, and David Copperfield, manage to create a self-sufficient economy of progress: David, through his narrative labor, is able to generate his own identity and his success. He designates his prowess of storytelling to be his generator of value and capital, and since we are reading his book, he is successful. The technique through which he achieves this self-value-generating machine is through suspense and its fulfillment.

In contrast, *Great Expectations* puts the generator of wealth and value in the world squarely outside Pip’s narrative. Thus, Pip’s narrative, like Miss Havisham’s defunct and abandoned brewery, cannot generate real value or real stories; it is, ultimately, Magwitch’s labor and the value produced from his labor that fuels the entire plot, unbeknownst to Pip. Pip builds expectations and suspense, and in doing so, figures his form of narrative control, only to be defeated by surprise at every turn, because he is not the producer of his own story. It is yet another twist of the knife that even when he exercises the most authorial control—when he narrates the recognition scene—he can only muster up a gimmicky Eastern fairy tale.

Here, a possible question arises: Does Pip not grow/change/gain experience from having his expectations unfulfilled? Does his experience of achieving the recognition add anything towards his personhood? Does this matter in achieving the “recognition” to which the Bildungsroman aspires? Now that surprise has superseded suspense to lay open the crisis of colonized labor and the gimmicky formation of the Bildungsroman itself, how do we think of the various interpretations that Pip’s failure *is* the point of the novel, an essence of tragic formation? Perhaps Pip is “not to be discovered but produced,” through the error of his ways (Taft 1977)? I think not. I read a psychic formation in Pip that persists beyond the infamous recognition scene. Indeed, once even the very possibility of such formation is proven to be impossible to entertain, Pip disqualifies himself as a viable subject of the Bildungsroman by 1) leaving Britain, and 2) acknowledging that even his place in the novel is to be passed on to a different character. These two consequences of Pip’s recognitions are direct results of surprise superseding suspense: rather than an expected payoff, having lost all footing with the surprise of his “snares,” Pip can only continue to futilely attempt again to sow the seeds of expectation, which are even more quickly turned down than his initial ones.

The “psychic formation” of which I speak is Pip’s insistence in each of the novel’s plots (official and repressed) on containing certain players that occupy a specific role in his narrative of personal progress. As if he is applying Vladimir Propp’s theory of actors and actions in a story in *The Morphology of the Folktale*¹⁰, Pip relentlessly reiterates to himself and to his readers in the first half of the novel that Miss Havisham is his benefactor, Magwitch his oppressive past, and

¹⁰ Propp argues that folktales have superstructures to them, where certain actors such as the “donor” or the “hero” perform a set of actions within a plot, these features are static depending on the genre of the folktale. His study is a formal one that examines plots “according to the functions of its dramatis personae” (20). See Propp 48-50 for further discussion of the “donor” in particular.

Estella his future object of desire. In the “official” plot of the novel that Pip and the readers are led to believe before the rude awakening, this structure is relentlessly upheld by Pip, which is most plainly seen in his language of describing Miss Havisham in fairy godmother-like metaphors, and Estella as the inevitable object of desire meant for him. For instance, when Miss Havisham waddles her crutch stick around Pip after his receiving his fortune, Pip compares that action to “the fairy godmother who had changed me...bestowing the finishing gift” (*GE* 143), and Pip repeatedly narrates that each insult that Estella throws at him “would have rankled in [him] more than it did, if [he] had not regarded [himself] as eliciting it by being so set apart for her and assigned to her” (*GE* 217). Magwitch, when mentioned at all, is always reduced to the rude instruments that remind him of his chains and criminal associations (the file, the shackles) Perhaps put into a diagram, it might look thus:

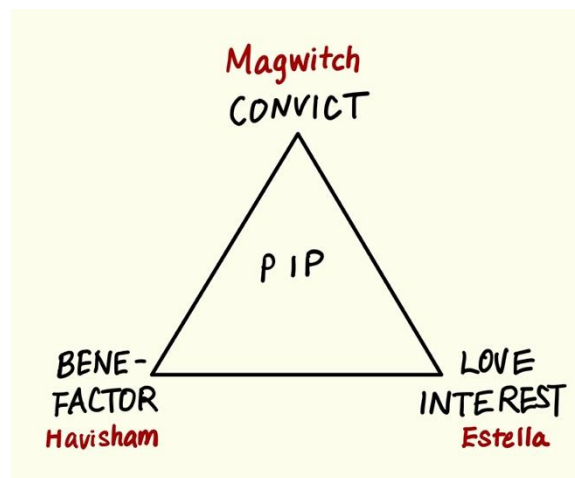


Figure 1-1: Pip casts his players.

However, once the recognition scene takes place, Pip tries again to fit his changed circumstance into his triangulated psyche; Havisham now occupies the convict’s place, Magwitch that of the benefactor, and Biddy that of the love interest. In suggesting so, I am arguing that the novel neither allows Pip to “learn” in his mistakes nor fail to progress; his experiences do bring

about a recognition, but it is not enough to actually change his path of life in a meaningfully productive manner. As soon as he recovers from the psychosomatic shock that visits him after the recognition scene, the narrative voices begin to shift the imagery of crude chains from Magwitch to Miss Havisham. Moreover, when Pip visits Miss Havisham once she starts to repent, not only is she seen wringing her hands frequently (*GE* 364-5), but Pip also “held her forcibly down with all [his] strength, like a *prisoner* who might escape” when she catches on fire inadvertently (*GE* 368, emphasis mine). This shift of Miss Havisham from the benefactor into a convict-like figure is consolidated further when Pip saves Miss Havisham from burning to death; just as Pip helped Magwitch in the opening scene, Pip helps Havisham, which further solidifies her new role as the downtrodden “convict” of Pip’s life. It only serves to make his unled life more vivid, and the lived life paler, than ever. In his revised psychic formation of characters as actors in his life, Pip might draw it thus:

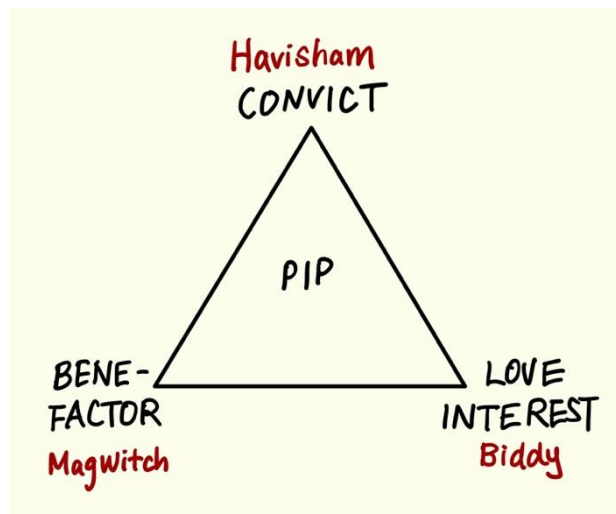


Figure 1-2: Pip attempts to substitute the players, keeping the structure intact.

What is significant is that each of these substitutions fail once again, and this time even faster than the first set of his designated psychic structures. *And each time these psychic structures fail are the*

moments that give us great surprise in the novel. The recognition scene that causes Pip to recast his players the first time is imbued with great shock and terror, but even then, the substituted psychic formation still does not work, to Pip's great surprise, yet again. For instance, recall how shocking and deflationary it was to see Biddy married to Joe, after Pip's expectation to propose to her, and be accepted! It seems that any psychic structure that Pip creates, any promise that he can organize into this triangulated sense of self, is meant to fail, and fail surprisingly. Notably, after these substitutions fail, Pip takes an extended trip outside the country. To their own detriment, and also to my chagrin, many accounts of the novel—most famously Peter Brooks's—treat the novel's plot to be virtually over once the recognition scene takes place. Despite the countless critical readings of the novel, not many of them address Pip's eleven-year exodus to "the East" after Magwitch's death and the loss of his fortune (*GE* 439). Even when the very last few pages of the novel are discussed, critics conveniently leave out this crucial element of the plot.¹¹

The significance of this trip is twofold. First, Pip physically and temporally removes himself from the realm of the British Bildungsroman. While the trope of traveling abroad and gaining experiences is one of the generic tics of the Bildungsroman (as in *Robinson Crusoe*), Pip's travels are entirely passed through, unremarked. In fact, his trip is summed up in one sentence, one that highlights the feelings that rush through him as he returns to Joe's home after the eleven unnarrated years abroad. Second, the experience of his travels does not make him a more distinguished, or even a more identifiable individual; in fact, the prodigal son returns to the realm of the British Bildungsroman, just to demonstrate that he has become the most commonplace, replaceable, anonymous kind of laborer in the London economy: a clerk. The significance of this

¹¹ For instance, many major critics who have dedicated entire chapters to thinking about *Great Expectations* do not acknowledge his travels at the very end of the novel. See e.g., Peter Brooks 138, Franco Moretti 184, D. A. Miller *Narrative* 273-5, Caroline Levine 94-8, and Andrew H. Miller *Burdens* 190.

exodus is that it makes him less remarkable, less viable to be a subject of the novel of formation. Even in this choice of vocation we see a vast gap between Pip and David Copperfield. While they both reach reasonable levels of financial comfort in the end, David is a creative laborer, a writer of fiction, whereas Pip becomes a third partner in a firm that *he himself had funded*. The circularity of the funds that allows Herbert to hire Pip emphasizes the lack of any genuine creation of labor or value; while David's labor is also occluded from his narration, there is no doubt that it is different from the sort that simply regurgitates existing value. In fact, David's labor is remarkably distinguished from another kind of labor that does not require creative energy—that of copying, a job that the novel's villain, Uriah Heep, holds in the office. In fact, Heep's labor of copying as writing seems to parallel an earlier description of how Pip mistakes the busywork of writing "Memorandum of Pip's debts" on a piece of paper with the act of "actually paying the money" (*GE* 252). Like Dora, Pip finds "something very comfortable in having plenty of stationery," and the mere "sound of [his] pens going, refreshed [him] exceedingly" (*GE* 252). Here, we can see that Pip, while physically writing as David does in his vocation, actually resembles Dora or even Uriah more than he does David, in that Pip's labor is unnecessary and uncreative, and his mistake is to consider the act of simply writing the memorandum of his debts "about equal" as actually generating value to dissolve the debt. However, while Uriah might be distinguished as an individual subject by his dramatic villainy, Pip is even more under threat of losing his position as a central character in his own story.¹² While I agree that the colorful minor characters of the novel

¹² For a further analysis of how *Great Expectations* organizes labor and character-space, see Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many*, particularly 217-224.

are always threatening to invade Pip's "protagonicity" of the novel, I would take a step further and suggest that his position does get overtaken.¹³

That is, there is a final surprising transformation of Pip's triangulated desire that takes place after his return from the East. Indeed, the central place that Pip took in the middle of the structure—that of the protagonist—seems to be displaced by the new, young Pip, Biddy and Joe's son. The paragraph that sums up his travels and his return to England reads thus:

For eleven years, I had not seen Joe nor Biddy with my bodily eyes—though they had both been often before my fancy in the East—when, upon an evening in December, an hour or two after dark, I laid my hand softly on the latch of the old kitchen door. I touched it so softly that I was not heard, and looked in unseen. There, smoking his pipe in the old place by the kitchen firelight, as hale and as strong as ever though a little grey, sat Joe; and there, fenced into the corner with Joe's leg, and sitting on my own little stool looking at the fire, was—I again! (*GE* 439)

What is ironic is that unlike any of the other expectations of Pip's life that the novel refused to fulfill, the image of small Pip "fenced into the corner with Joe's leg" is the single expectation that is swiftly fulfilled by the narrative. Although the younger Pip is in every way a doppelgänger of the older Pip that we as readers have followed, the fact that the younger Pip is *not* Pip's son (though he is mistaken as such in the original ending of the novel) is another twist of the knife that severs Pip's futurity and any hope of progress. This is particularly remarkable, when seeing that in other plots of formation, such as that in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, the presentation of the same-named heir is a triumphant seal of futurity of the now-upwardly settled protagonist in his new aristocratic class and its solidity. Now, the diagram is completely changed:

¹³ Frederic Jameson reads what he calls a "deterioration of protagonicity" in Perez Galdos, which he defines as "a movement of the putative heroes and heroines to the background, whose foreground is increasingly occupied by minor or secondary characters whose stories (and 'destinies') might once have been digressions but now colonize and appropriate the novel for themselves" (96). I am suggesting here that in *David Copperfield*, those minor characters' destinies are in "the background," but in *Great Expectations*, they turn out to be the foreground.

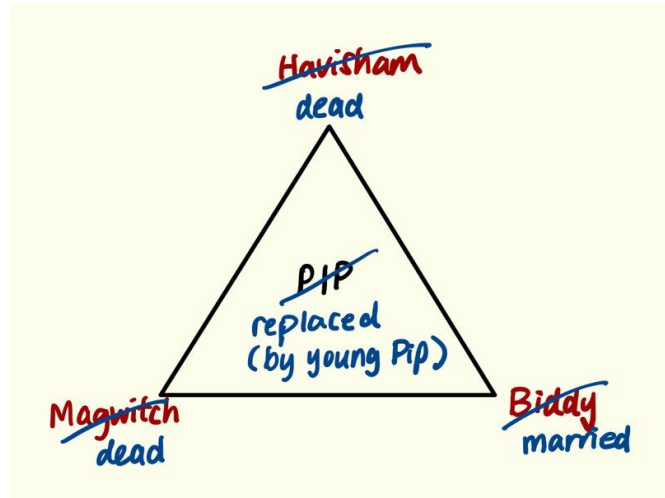


Figure 1-3: the whole structure fails.

After finding out that all viable actors that could have fit into his schema of self are exhausted through surprising turns of the cruel plot, Pip finds himself displaced from its center. His expectations of both marriage and vocation are upset—he is not even allowed a dramatic failure of sorts (that will come in Hardy), and merely keeps to a clerkship and a lack of a family to call his own. His place in the domestic space of Herbert and Clara also is explicitly that of extra personnel in an otherwise a heterosexual nuclear family, and his lack of a domestic partner is made relatively more palpable in his living with them. Through this exchange, it becomes clear that it does not even matter whether Pip changes or not; he has recognized his failure, and that is, seemingly, the end of his arc, with no further chance of redemption.

Despite the contemporary and critical controversy regarding the different endings of the novel, in my reading there can only be the original ending, not that it matters for Pip. The loop has already been closed—Estella has been displaced from the slot of the “love interest” at this point—and Pip himself requires that he be always under threat of direct replacement by the young Pip, who accompanies him in the original ending but not in the rewritten one. I read the new ending to be Dickens softening the blow of Pip’s utter disqualification from being the subject of the

Bildungsroman, and perhaps evidence that the larger reading public of the Victorian period was still thirsting after suspense rather than surprise.

The Actual Fulfillment of Suspense in *Great Expectations*

“We gi’ him the name of Pip for your sake, dear old chap...and we hoped he might grow a little bit like you, and we think he do.”

—*Great Expectations*, p. 439

Despite Pip’s repeated disappointments, *Great Expectations* does grant us the fulfillment of suspense in other ways. In fact, the one true suspenseful payoff that the novel fulfills to us is that of Estella’s parentage. Noted in the narration several times is Pip noticing something unutterable about Estella, a “suggestion” in her looks that makes him question to himself “What was it?” (*GE* 217). The “dim suggestion that [he] could not possibly grasp” (*GE* 218) is that of her resemblance to Molly, a female servant of Mr. Jaggers’s, who turns out to be Estella’s birth mother. Molly, a character marked by her action of “hesitatingly” waiting on Jaggers, who seems to be conscious of “always holding her in suspense,” is endowed with the only instance of a suspenseful setup and its fulfillment in the novel. When she enters the novel, Pip enters a narrative mode that is most like that in *David Copperfield*:

I always saw in [Molly’s] face, a face rising out of the caldron. Years afterwards, I made a dreadful likeness of that woman, by causing a face that had no other natural resemblance to it than it derived from flowing hair, to pass behind a bowl of flaming spirits in a dark room. (*GE* 195)

This mode of projecting a certain expectation to be fulfilled about Molly’s character and her “likeness” is quite like the mode of narrating Steerforth’s later death in *David Copperfield*. While this is a commonly used technique in *David Copperfield* it is not as present in *Great Expectations*, and thus it is remarkable that it is used on an event that does not directly concerns Pip.

Pip's language of constructing his great expectations, his 'official' plot, is that of metaphors.¹⁴ He represents Miss Havisham as a fairy godmother, Estella a princess, and he a designated suitor; however, we see in the moment that the most suspenseful expectation of the novel is actually fulfilled, that the novel's world operates on a metonymic logic.

The action of her fingers was like the action of knitting. She stood looking at her master, not understanding whether she was free to go...Surely, I had seen exactly such eyes and such hands, on a memorable occasion very lately! [Jaggers] dismissed her, and she glided out of the room. But she remained before me, as plainly as if she were still there. I looked at those hands, I looked at those eyes, I looked at that flowing hair; and I compared them with other hands, other eyes, other hair, that I knew of, and with what those might be after twenty years of a brutal husband and a stormy life. I looked again at those hands and eyes of the housekeeper, and thought of the inexplicable feeling that had come over me when I last walked—not alone—in the ruined garden, and through the deserted brewery. I thought how the same feeling had come back when I saw a face looking at me, and a hand waving to me, from a stage-coach window; and how it had come back again and had flashed about me like lightning, when I had passed in a carriage—not alone—through a sudden glare of light in a dark street. I thought how one link of association had helped that identification in the theatre, and how such a link, wanting before, had been riveted for me now, when I had passed by a chance, swift from Estella's name to the fingers with their knitting action, and the attentive eyes. And I felt absolutely certain that this woman was Estella's mother. (*GE* 357)

The penultimate sentence on the linguistic level is formed of seven clauses linked by commas, quite literally forging a chain of associations out of the clauses, links that lead him to the declarative final sentence. It also brings "the fingers" with the "knitting action" and "the attentive eyes" in a single clause, putting the chain of metonymic images that lead Pip to his discovery literally right next to each other. This is the moment that unlocks the underlying plots in the novel, airing the hidden familial ties amongst all the minor characters; the metonymic mode of meaning-making governs all from the margins of the novel, while Pip tries his best (albeit futilely) to make sense of the world around him through metaphoric language.

¹⁴ Also recall that the entire *Eastern Story* works like a metaphor, where Pip is comparing his being misled into a snare with the trap that is set in the *Eastern story*.

In other words, *Pip speaks in a different language than the world around him*. His narrative mode tries to put metaphoric meaning to the world around him, and yet that very world is governed by strictly metonymic logic.¹⁵ In fact, the recognition that Magwitch has been his benefactor all along initially makes Pip worry about “the stain of prison” emanating from Magwitch before seeing Estella, marking a fear of metonymic power (*GE* 323). Pip cannot allow such metonymy to stain him and touch Estella through him.¹⁶ And yet, the fulfillment of suspense regarding Molly being Estella’s birth mother actually reveals that Estella has already been inextricably associated with Magwitch; Pip’s aversion to metonymy has been to no avail, as the novel’s world reiterates to him yet again that there will always be connections that are forged out of Pip’s control. Moreover, it is notable that in this revelation, Pip is not special; the only reason that he was able to make such a connection has been his chance metonymic proximity to the players in the grander plot that did not concern him. The fact that the one fulfillment of suspenseful expectation that the novel grants is not that of Pip’s parentage or his future fortune, but an entirely unrelated convolution of plots in the novel, further displaces Pip from his centrality in the novel, and undermines his narrative control as a narrator of metaphoric language.

As with the title, the final scenes of *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* pair as opposites. While *David Copperfield* ends on the shining image of Agnes, the angel of the house, “pointing upward” (*DC* 882), in the revised ending of *Great Expectations*, Pip famously looks

¹⁵ This is, interestingly, also true in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*. But a vast difference between Dickens’s and Eliot’s novels is that while Pip’s metaphoric narration is condemned to live *within* the metonymic world, Eliot’s omniscient narrator is able to exist above and beyond the metonymic bustle of the characters in *Middlemarch*. Thus, again, this comparison shows that in *Great Expectations*, Pip is fundamentally unfit for the world surrounding him.

¹⁶ This shrinking from metonymic associations between persons has been Pip’s motivation to avoid Joe since receiving his fortune as well.

down to see “the shadow of no parting from [Estella]” (*GE* 442). Not only do these endings point literally in different directions (up for David, down for Pip), but also the “*shadows* which [David] now dismiss[es]” seem to linger with Pip. Another point of contrast between the two novels is that *David Copperfield* is what Maia McAleavy would call a “bigamy plot,” in which the superfluous spouse... operates as a narrative engine, generating further plot—quite clearly *too much* plot” (1, emphasis original). In contrast to David, Pip is left without a marriage, and his two objects of desire disqualify themselves, unbeknownst to Pip, leaving him with no match. His plot is taken away with each turn of surprise. The novels work on opposite logics when it comes to how they use suspense. If we take them as two case studies in which Charles Dickens employed suspense in the form of the Bildungsroman, it is clear that *David Copperfield* shows the narrative labor of suspense on its surface, showcasing its self-sufficient economy of value by confirming its own expectations, while squashing other characters’ futurity, fueling his own progress with their misery. The affirming payoffs to his narrative mode of suspense produce the guise of his progress at the cost of others and their worlds. By contrast, *Great Expectations* does not deliver the payoff to its suspense but rather a deflationary surprise at each turn, producing the effect of a character who is out of depth in his own story, unable to locate the proper center of its value. In the next chapter, I will show how unlike *Jane Eyre*, *Villette* uses much more metonymic logic in Lucy Snowe’s narration, to bring the sense of chance (instead of causality). There, Lucy does not try to wrest back power from circumstances that are out of her control—she lets her narrative voice also follow that metonymic logic. The more the structure of suspense is fulfilled to its expectation, the more seamless the protagonist’s progress reads. It might be said that the Bildungsroman *needs* suspense to keep up the guise of progress.

CHAPTER 2.

Causality and Contingency of Suspense in Charlotte Brontë

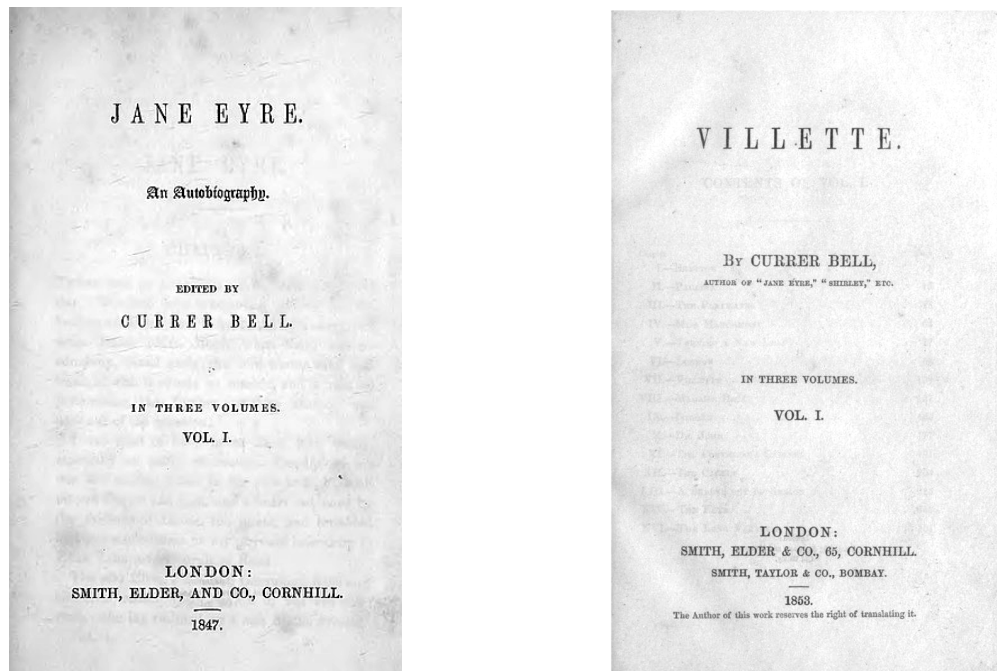


Figure 2-1. The title pages of *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* in their first editions.

The largest name printed on the title page of *Jane Eyre* is that of Jane Eyre. It also famously identifies the novel as “An Autobiography” that is “edited by Currer Bell.” The word “edited” lays the foundation for the novel’s pretense of being a true autobiography written by the titular heroine, thereby lending implicit authority to Jane Eyre over Currer Bell. That *Jane Eyre* was published before the identity of Charlotte Brontë was known to Victorian readers lends even greater authorial power to the largest name printed on the page. In contrast, the cover of the first print of *Villette*

simply states the novel's title and that it is written "by Currer Bell, author of *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, etc." Not only does the phrase "author of..." endow sole narrative authority to Currer Bell in the most literal way, but her name is also bolder and more centrally placed than that of the previous novel's title page. In fact, one effect of the layout is that the name "Currer Bell" catches the eye more than it did on the title page of *Jane Eyre*. And of course, unlike *Jane Eyre*, *Villette* is not a name. It is significant that the novel was not titled, for example, *Lucy Snowe*; Lucy, quite unlike Jane, erases her presence in the form of the Bildung plot as much as she can.¹

In the previous chapter, I laid out the ways in which *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* demonstrate a marked shift in the use of suspense in the Bildung plot. *David Copperfield* creates a satisfying image of development through the fulfillment of suspense; *Great Expectations* actively resists such a notion. The second novel undermines the plot of formation by ensuring that each suspenseful thread of the plot is met not by the fulfillment of expectations, but rather by surprise. In this chapter, I will argue for a similar progression with respect to Brontë's two novels. *Jane Eyre* recuperates the limits that gender can put upon the Bildungsroman genre by giving the female narrator full control of the suspenseful demonstration of the protagonist's progress. *Villette* then questions the value of such a narrative of progress for female subjects by radically shifting narrative focus away from telos and towards a techne of suspense. Jane, as master of her own plot, usurps various literary and theatrical genres in order to take utmost advantage of the progress that the narrating Jane has gained over the young Jane in the story. So too does she apply the Bildung plot of self-formation to the heroine's story of rightfully earning her own

¹ In fact, we learn her name not on the title page, nor on the first page of the text. Lucy Snowe only really comes into being by being named in the second chapter—the first chapter, titled "Bretton," is an introduction of not Lucy but rather Polly Home. One might even think that Polly could be the actual heroine of the story, which I suggest is a garden path that Brontë very intentionally leads the readers down.

domestic space. Her forlorn status as a precarious single woman in danger of homelessness and forced emigration looms as the “bad” outcome that she was seemingly able to avoid by progressing and developing through her story. As we see, Jane wields suspense expertly in moments in which these possibilities were perhaps most palpable to her, heightening the contrast between these alternate bad outcomes and her secure status as a successful Bildungsroman hero.

Lucy Snowe, in contrast, is shoved into her own story with little, if any, control of its narrative. In *Villette*, suspense and its duration can only occur where happiness is not even remotely possible: expectations regarding the future will only bring about a negative outcome that Lucy has foreseen and dreaded all along. Though Lucy’s story also borrows elements from the literary genres that Jane uses in her own story, such as the melodrama and the gothic, Lucy is instead thrust into these genres, unable to wield control over their narrative techniques in the way that Jane does so skillfully. She goes through these generic tropes as-is, in-the-moment, as if the older narrating Lucy still shares the shock and doubts that the younger Lucy had in the moment of direct experience. Lucy’s narrative is the ultimate resistance against progress despite sharing an autobiographical form with its predecessor. In this way, *Villette* provides a critique of the form of the narrative of progress itself, in that a single female protagonist is excluded from participation in the structure of expectation and its suspenseful payoff. This allows the novel to question whether novelistic closure is even possible in a world in which one must not only work, but keep on working indefinitely to stave off homelessness: novelistic closure is only possible for some characters, a category that does not include Lucy Snowe; and yet, the acute awareness of that fact revealed by her narrative voice complicates the matter.

Reading these two texts in light of their differing narrative strategies, I argue that the usual impression that Jane is the ardent yet humble narrator and Lucy the manipulative one should be

switched. *Jane Eyre* demonstrates narrative calculation to the fullest—that’s why it’s so satisfying—whereas *Villette* presents to us a more raw, unprocessed affective response to the constraints of the novel form. One could say that *Jane Eyre* is the ultimate marriage of form and content, while *Villette* is the paramount example of their frustration. In the following reading of the two novels, I will show how *Jane Eyre* unites the progression of plot with the progression of the self by separating the narrating and the narrated Janes through suspense. In contrast, *Villette* decouples the progression of plot from the formation of the self by keeping all the narrative hallmarks of a Bildungsroman, but emptying them of the suspenseful satisfaction or disappointment that imbue them with developmental value.

Reading *Jane Eyre*

“To prolong doubt was to prolong hope.”
—*Jane Eyre*, p. 489

Reading *Jane Eyre* is a rewarding experience. Who has not sighed with relief and fulfillment when Jane announces “Reader, I married him”? Critics have rightfully read this moment, and by extension the novel’s closure, as a superlative exercise in narrative control that proves Jane’s project of self-formation to have “worked,” so to speak. Mary Poovey declares this moment to be Jane’s ultimate “expression of her desire, not...the self-sacrifice St. John advocates” (147); comparing *Jane Eyre* to *The Beth Book*, John Kucich sums up the ending as the heroine “tend[ing] to her lover and prov[ing] herself capable of giving him up, only to be rewarded later with his chastened love” (270); Charles Hatten likens the ending as “the dramatic moral conversion” of Rochester into a viable husband for Jane (227). What repeatedly appears in the existing literature on *Jane Eyre*’s narration and its closure is the recognition that the triumph of her narration mirrors the triumph of her life, especially in “winning” Rochester—and his estate—in a legitimate

marriage. Because the form and the content, the narrative and its plot, climax so cohesively, there is utmost satisfaction to be gleaned from their unification. Of course, I do not mean to say that *Jane Eyre*'s narrative voice admits no cracks or ideological narrative manipulations. Following Gayatri Spivak's foundational critique of *Jane Eyre* as a text in which Bertha, as "that fictive Other" who must die "so that Jane Eyre can become the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction," many have read the undercurrents of colonial and capitalist assumptions that peak through Jane's seemingly perfect narrative authority (251). For instance, Kevin Stevens reads Bertha's incoherent murmurs in Jane's narration as exposing Jane's narrative manipulation (for it is Jane, in writing as such, who deprives Bertha of human speech), but also as empowering Bertha's destabilizing effect on the narrative as a whole (in that Bertha's sounds are un-narratable to Jane). In addition, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the fictional counterpart to *Jane Eyre* that specifically centers Bertha's alienation as a colonial and female subject under Rochester's rule that manifests these readings in the form of the novel.

These Spivak-inflected readings of Bertha echo through Sally Shuttleworth's characterization of Bertha as "the upswell of madness outside the dominant patriarchal sphere of the symbolic" (164), Nicole Plyer Fisk's argument that Jane disqualifies Bertha from Creole sisterhood, and Thorell Porter Tsomondo's observation that Jane spares not even "a moment of reflection" for Bertha's sounds (82). Notably, many of these readings also acknowledge the sheer power and authority of Jane's narration—to characterize Bertha as a subversion or a disruption assumes that there is an oppressive presence at the baseline to be overcome: Jane's voice. I will be emphasizing the muscular ways in which Jane's voice narrates, and therefore develops, her own selfhood throughout the novel, especially through her control of narrative suspense. In this way, I interpret *Jane Eyre* in the same vein as *David Copperfield*, as discussed in my previous chapter,

though Jane finds much more value in her vocation and her place in the domestic environment than David ever could.

Jane Eyre roughly follows the plot progression of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, except that the final destination for Jane is not the world “which is to come,”² but finding her own home. Symbolically, the plot domesticates and secularizes the Christian journey towards the Celestial City, transforming it into a journey towards self-formation that highlights the thematics of home and interiors. To narrate Jane's ordeals in finding her true “home,” her narrative makes use of visual metaphors that dilate time before every major plot point in order to mark the distance between her younger self and narrating self, emphasizing her development (even when there might be none). Jane is a paragon of what Wayne Booth calls a “self-conscious narrator,” belonging to a class of literary speakers who are “aware of themselves as writers” (155). The endlessly reiterated distance that the narrative “I” of *Jane Eyre* insists upon is also noted by James Buzard, who argues that “*Jane Eyre* cultivates considerable suspicion about the powers and tendencies of the voice, holding apart Jane the speaker and Jane the retrospective narrator and deeming the latter to possess advantages of perspective that the former was too young, too degraded, too enraged, too narrow-sighted to have access to” (196). Anna Gibson similarly reads such narrative distancing between the young Jane and the narrating Jane, writing that “the novel carefully dramatizes the evasions and excesses of youth—the tumultuous, passionate mind of a ‘heterogeneous thing’—in order to stage strategies of discipline and containment. The exclamations signal an evaluative distance from the character's feelings, and they are abruptly followed by a contextual explanation of Jane's

² John Bunyan's Christian allegory is titled *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come*, and also makes the move of spatializing a narrative of progression into a physical journey into a new world. One might even suggest that a novel like *Jane Eyre* secularizes, but still upholds, the Christian values of self-regulation and subjection to a progressive devotion through its Bildung plot.

mental turmoil by way of an ignorance she *once* had, but has since overcome” (211). As noted in the introduction, “the evasions and excesses of youth” that are ultimately entertained in order to be subsumed under narrative “containment” follows the “bad dream” logic in the Foucauldian readings of suspense and logic of the English Bildungsroman that ultimately figures a “return” to the ideal self that was always there. In other words, the narrative voice of Jane insists upon her own development and imparts much narrative value from declaring so: and that is what makes this novel a Bildungsroman. Karen Chase summarizes this aspect of the novel persuasively:

Jane Eyre begins in the furthest depths of female victimage. The reversal is important. It breaks the stasis of early romance, and opens the possibility for development, for *Bildung*: Jane is weak, so that she may later be strong...Throughout the novel, such interventions provide tacit reminders of a *terminus ad quem*, and in this way, a thread of implied development is established between the Jane that suffers and the Jane that tells. Long before we can guess how she changes, the sound of her voice alerts us *that* she has changed. Jane declines to reveal at how many years ‘distance’ she is recording her story. The number of years does not matter, but the distance as such is important: it builds development into the structure of the novel. (K. Chase 50-1)

However, I would go a step further to argue that what allows Jane to have such a high degree of control over her own narrative voice is her use of suspense. Suspense dilates time and literally and metaphorically furthers the distance between the tumultuous feelings of young Jane and the cool, retrospective commentary that the older Jane provides after the bout of suspense. Suspense, in other words, is what Jane uses to keep up her guise of development successfully. This puts *Jane Eyre* in line with *David Copperfield*, where David, as the narrator of his own life-story, also uses moments of suspense and temporal dilation to emphasize the “wrong” life path that he might have otherwise taken.

This account differs from how Caroline Levine reads *Jane Eyre* (and for that matter, *David Copperfield* and suspense in general), as she sees Jane and the reader as being on the same page in playing the roles of investigator and detective in this mystery plot. Likening Jane’s suspicions

regarding the fire blazing on Rochester's bed to the spirit of experimentation in "nineteenth century science," Levine argues that "Jane speculates and tests her conjectures about gender and sexuality repeatedly against the evidence, only to find that the truth lies beyond her conventional guesses" (81, 14). I suggest that Jane's frequent speculations are merely red herrings, since they stretch time before the actual answer to the mystery is delivered. In other words, they simply amplify the sense of suspense, rather than being taken as legitimate hypotheses that in all cases warrant full consideration. Rather, in focusing on how Jane imbues her narrative voice with power, I suggest that there is a palpable sense throughout the novel that everything Jane considers worthy of mention is important and has been invaluable to her formation—that her experiences seemingly make her *who she is* at the end of the novel, the speaker who is narrating to us. All has been smoothed over—in Nicholas Dames's words, "those texts, those *names* that cluster around the middle years of the nineteenth century—Jane Eyre, Arthur Pendennis, and of course, David Copperfield—work to reduce the threat (a threat to narrative clarity, a threat to psychic sanity)" by making their narrative voice "progressive in the extreme," and "sternly dividing the data of memory into the useful (that which retains crucial and predictive 'associations') and the useless" (166).³ In other words, a novel like *Jane Eyre* never lets its readers forget that experiencing Jane will ultimately progress to become the narrating Jane.

³ My reading of how *Jane Eyre* creates this illusion of progress is in many ways inspired by Dames's larger argument regarding the Bildungsroman: "acts of memory in the Victorian novel must be *necessary*—must *signify*—and must signify by standing in a directly causal relation, or an obviously symbolic relation, to the present, to the moment of narrating and beyond" (6). However, Dames reads *Villette* and by extension, Brontë's oeuvre, as framed by a narrative voice that "avoids the 'interior' of memory in preference for the 'exterior' of visible behavior through legible bodies" (85), which I believe is less true of *Jane Eyre*. I suggest in contrast that in *Jane Eyre*, the visual metaphors and manipulation of time and space that characterize her narration allow Jane to set up certain expectations that are satisfyingly fulfilled, imparting a clear sense of causality, rather than contingency, to her experiences when told in retrospect. In contrast, Dames's reading of *Villette* as being, in particular, a novel of bodies speaking for memory is instructive to my reading of *Villette*, as it assumes that there is no deeper layer of personhood covered by a manipulated surface; this flattening does indeed occur in *Villette*, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

This is evident in addresses to the reader where Jane directly acknowledges that she skips years at times because she is “only bound to invoke memory where [she] know[s] her responses will possess some degree of interest” (*JE* 99). But in addition to these direct addresses, I suggest here that suspense, with its satisfying payoff, is one of the main techniques that the narrator Jane uses to bring about this effect. Immediately, even on the level of the whole novel, the title suggests that this text *is indeed* Jane Eyre herself—the autobiographical voice unites the subject and narrative into one, as with *David Copperfield*. In reading the novel, the reader expects to learn about the titular protagonist, an anticipation that is then fulfilled in the act of reading the novel itself. On the level of the plot, Brontë demonstrates through Jane’s narration a particularly masterful control of suspense and its payoff, making sure that each moment of turbulence in the plot is defined against Jane, and every triumph with Jane. Through this, the novel ensures that development is implied every time the older Jane separates herself from the younger Jane, creating a world in which only Jane’s retrospective, perfect view of her world can be articulated.

For instance, in that most famous chapter—Chapter 25—that reveals Bertha Mason’s presence in the plot, Jane has already established such a strong atmosphere of suspenseful foreboding surrounding the wedding day that, even though Bertha’s existence is a legitimate shock to both the younger Jane and to the plot, the reader and the older Jane have alike been “cushioned” against this surprise. This is one major difference between *Jane Eyre* and *Great Expectations*, which otherwise might seem not so different at first glance. In a first reading of this fateful chapter, it appears to the reader that Jane Eyre also falls into snares not unlike those of Pip. For instance, when Bertha is revealed, Mr. Mason is also discovered to have known Jane’s uncle, Mr. Eyre, who knew of Rochester’s previous marriage before Jane discovers it. He was, unfortunately, in a state of “decline” that prevented him from “extricat[ing] [Jane] from the *snare* into which [she] had

fallen” (*Jane Eyre* 339, 340, emphasis mine). The mention of a “snare” and the way that surprise comes after the suspenseful scene of Jane waiting for the wedding (wholly contingent circumstances unknown to the protagonist), might pair *Jane Eyre* with *Great Expectation* quite well. However, what distinguishes *Great Expectations* from *Jane Eyre* is the fact that Jane construes her wedding day as a dreadful expectation, matched in its ominous overtone by the horrible revelation of Bertha Mason. I do not mean to deny without qualification that Bertha’s sudden appearance in the narrative is surprising—however, I am arguing that Jane’s narration does a good deal of legwork before Bertha is even revealed, insisting that something bad will happen on the wedding day. Jane awaits this vague threat to her security in dreadful suspense. Thus, while the details surrounding the “reveal” of Bertha might be surprising, the fact that Jane’s wedding day does not turn out well has been heavily foreshadowed.⁴ Consider the opening of the chapter in which Jane is expecting her fast-approaching wedding with an “anticipation of the great change”:

The month of courtship had wasted: its very last hours were being numbered. There was no putting off the day that advanced—the bridal day; and all preparations for its arrival were complete. *I*, at least, had nothing more to do: there were my trunks, packed, locked, corded, ranged in a row along the wall of my little chamber; to-morrow, at this time, they would be far on their road to London: and so should I (D.V.),—or rather, not I, but one Jane Rochester, a person whom as yet I knew not. The cards of address alone remained to nail on: they lay, four little squares, in the drawer. Mr. Rochester had himself written the direction, “Mrs. Rochester, —— Hotel, London,” on each: I could not persuade myself to affix them, or to have them affixed. Mrs. Rochester! She did not exist: she would not be born till to-morrow, some time after eight o’clock A.M.; and I would wait to be assured she had come into the world alive before I assigned to her all that property. It was enough that in yonder closet, opposite my dressing-table, garments said to be hers had already displaced my black stuff Lowood frock and straw bonnet: for not to me appertained that suit of wedding raiment; the pearl-coloured robe, the vapoury veil pendent from the usurped portmanteau. I shut the closet to conceal the strange, wraith-like apparel it contained; which, at this evening hour—nine o’clock—gave out certainly a most

⁴ This is in stark contrast to how *Great Expectations* frames its snare, which falls not only on Pip unawares, but *also* on the reader—Jane sows plenty of suspenseful expectation before the snare is revealed, demarcating the knowledge that she, as the narrator, is withholding from the reader, unlike the narrating Pip, who somehow seems to relive the trauma of his terrible recognition along with his younger self.

ghostly shimmer through the shadow of my apartment. “I will leave you by yourself, white dream,” I said. “I am feverish: I hear the wind blowing: I will go out of doors and feel it.” (*Jane Eyre* 317)

The very first sentence figures the suspense preceding the wedding as a *countdown*—the words “wasting” and “numbered” do not denote a hopeful expectation but a formidable apprehension. The bridal day approaches inevitably, without halt, and Jane is insistent that she cannot see “Mrs. Rochester” (as in, herself in the future after the wedding takes place) existing just then—“she did not exist,” Jane exclaims, and Jane “would *wait* to be assured she had come in the world alive before [Jane] assigned to her all that property” (emphasis mine). She even construes the wedding dress as “garments said to be hers”—the white gown displaces Jane’s black clothes, and at the evening hour, does not look much like a uniform of a prosperous, future-oriented event but rather a ghostly, Miss Havisham-like figure.

The various ways in which Jane marks time in the passage are also worthy of notice. It is the very last day of courtship, and Mrs. Rochester will not arrive until “sometime after eight o’clock A.M.,” while it is currently nine o’clock in the evening. Jane’s hyper-acute observations of time, and in particular her impulse to count down the minutes until an expected future’s arrival, suggest a desperate desire to calculate—and therefore take possession of—the remaining time before some certain, dreadful coming.⁵ This persists in Jane’s interaction with Rochester: she famously characterizes him as “phantom-like,” “a mere dream,” and even states clearly that she “cannot see [her] prospects clearly tonight” (*Jane Eyre* 321). This is also apparent when she recounts that she had heard a “mournful undersound” that was probably let out by the madwoman in the attic just about to burst into the plot (*Jane Eyre* 324). In fact, Jane also gives an account of

⁵ Just as someone might count down the days to a deadline, or the hours to until one might need to wake up, the act of trying to both count and account *for* the amount of time that remains denotes a sense of dread.

a dream that sounds like an omen, which is followed, of course, by the most transparent of suspenseful omens in the novel: “a woman, tall and large, with thick and dark hair hanging low down her back” with “a discoloured face” standing right by Jane’s bedside (*Jane Eyre* 326, 327). Instead of reading Bertha as a dark psychic double of Jane who secretly does not want the wedding to take place, as Gilbert and Gubar do, I suggest that Bertha’s intrusion into the story attests to Jane’s mastery in framing the wedding as a dreadful event before it even occurs. Unlike Pip, who can only supply a curious little Eastern tale, Jane instead offers a chapter full of ominous foreboding, setting up the “surprise” that Bertha’s reveal will then deliver.⁶

Moreover, the way that Jane reveals this important episode with Bertha is considerably delayed, and the narrating Jane exclusively marks that it has been withheld from the reader. She says:

I had at heart a strange and anxious thought. Something had happened which I could not comprehend; no one knew of or had seen the event but myself: it had taken place the preceding night. Mr. Rochester that night was absent from home; nor was he yet returned: business had called him to a small estate of two or three farms he possessed thirty miles off—business it was requisite he should settle in person, previous to his meditated departure from England. I waited now his return; eager to disburthen my mind, and to seek of him the solution of the enigma that perplexed me. *Stay till he comes, reader; and, when I disclose my secret to him, you shall share the confidence.* (*Jane Eyre* 318, emphasis mine)

Here, the narrating Jane holds the reader at bay, but hints that something has taken place that is *worth* knowing. This classic setup of suspense closely resembles that which Hitchcock outlines in the Truffaut interview I examined in the introduction; by stating in advance that there is something to come, the sense of suspense is created while that event approaches. The narrating Jane makes the readers wait for Rochester with the younger Jane, while holding the crucial information away

⁶ Even with the “surprise” that Bertha provides, the narratorial cushioning that Jane provides beforehand makes sure that she still retains the control of the rhythm of narrative during this incursion.

from our knowledge. This technique instantly distances the narrator from the diegesis of the plot and the character. The direct address imploring the “reader” to “stay till [Rochester] comes” only reiterates the presence of the knowing narrator *before* the information is revealed.

When Rochester does at long last arrive, Jane continues to pull the reader along for several more pages; within that time, the clock strikes twelve, and Jane even takes care to narrate that duration *of the marker of time itself*, by detailing that she “waited till the timepiece had concluded its silver chime, and the clock its hoarse, vibrating stroke, and then I proceeded” (*Jane Eyre* 323). Only then does she finally reveal what has for so long bothered her: her dreams from the night before. The first dream introduces an infant figure that burdens Jane, and the second shows Thornfield Hall in ruins, and Jane, with the infant, climbing the ruined Hall to see Rochester at a distance. The second dream ends with the infant “rolling off” Jane’s lap as it crumbles, and Jane herself falls (*Jane Eyre* 326). The premonitory effect of these inauspicious images is redoubled by the fact that the second dream is an illustration of what will in fact happen towards the end of the novel, when Jane returns to Thornfield Hall after hearing Rochester’s voice calling for her.⁷ When Jane tells Rochester of these visions, she sows expectations of misfortune in the mind of the reader—and the fact that the dream is so vividly narrated, at the end of a bout of suspense, stamps its significance in the fabric of the novel’s plot. Thus, when this vision of Thornfield’s ruin is repeated with a difference at the end of the novel, the narratorial authority of *Jane Eyre* is bolstered, as it signifies her distance and development from the moment in which she herself had to learn the secrets of the mysteries presented in the plot. It *mattered* that Jane had that earlier dream—it was

⁷ The effect produced is similar to that of what I have read above in *David Copperfield*: David introduces images of the future and flags the reader of their significance without disclosing specifically how those images will come to be in the plot.

worth telling, and thus it has been relayed to us by Jane. This circularity, a repetition with a difference, creates causality.

Furthermore, it is important that Jane gives such a vivid description of her counting down the hours, her ominous dream of an infant, and her encounter with Bertha. The viscosity of Jane's narration gives the sense of a filmic flashback, or even a story-within-a-story, in which the readers/audience can be transported to the moment of the experience, while keeping the distance of the narrator intact. This is the primary technique by which Jane both asserts the totality of her narrative voice, and imbues her experiences with meaning, contributing to the sense of development. They are cataphoras that, while adding more information, still hold back that which is actually expected to come to pass and therefore dilate narrative time while simultaneously asserting the power of the narrator. Examine, for instance, the passage in which Jane discovers Thornfield Hall as a burnt ruin:

The crows sailing overhead perhaps watched me while I took this survey. I wonder what they thought. They must have considered I was very careful and timid at first, and that gradually I grew very bold and reckless. A peep, and then a long stare; and then a departure from my niche and a straying out into the meadow; and a sudden stop full in front of the great mansion, and a protracted, hardy gaze towards it. "What affectation of diffidence was this at first?" they might have demanded; "what stupid regardlessness now?"

Hear an illustration, reader.

A lover finds his mistress asleep on a mossy bank; he wishes to catch a glimpse of her fair face without waking her. He steals softly over the grass, careful to make no sound; he pauses—fancying she has stirred: he withdraws: not for worlds would he be seen. All is still: he again advances: he bends above her; a light veil rests on her features: he lifts it, bends lower; now his eyes anticipate the vision of beauty—warm, and blooming, and lovely, in rest. How hurried was their first glance! But how they fix! How he starts! How he suddenly and vehemently clasps in both arms the form he dared not, a moment since, touch with his finger! How he calls aloud a name, and drops his burden, and gazes on it wildly! He thus grasps and cries, and gazes, because he no longer fears to waken by any sound he can utter—by any movement he can make. He thought his love slept sweetly: he finds she is stone dead.

I looked with timorous joy towards a stately house: I saw a blackened ruin.
(*Jane Eyre* 489)

Jane controls her narration to dilate time before disclosing the ruin of Thornfield Hall for as long as possible, especially through the direct address of the reader. When she asks—demands?—that the reader “hear an illustration,” she acknowledges the reader who faithfully awaits her description of what the younger Jane has just witnessed, information that the older, narrating Jane, has fully processed into an extended visual metaphor. Thus her instruction for us to “hear” her visual metaphor is a formal reminder of the distance between the younger Jane and the older narrator Jane. In fact, the text directly compares the two in their differing reactions to the ruin of Thornfield Hall by placing them next to each other. The initial response from the younger Jane is marked by a distanced view: the “crows sailing overhead” would have reported how she “was very careful and timid at first, and that gradually [she] grew very bold and reckless...” This is how the young Jane physically responds to the sight of the ruins in the moment, but this impression is still mediated by the external viewpoint of the crows. It seems that the younger Jane’s affective response, and her presumably rushing thoughts, are no longer accessible to older Jane—or were they ever? Of course, doing so has the effect of further distancing the two Janes.

Further, this habit of externalizing whatever younger Jane would have felt renders even that original experience into the outwardly visible signs of her body; here, the younger Jane is implied to be only a figment of what is narratable through the older Jane’s voice, again pushing the immediacy of the younger Jane’s experience away from the measured voice of the narrating Jane. In contrast, in the next paragraph, the older narrating Jane supplies the readers with the extended visual metaphor that borrows the language of romance novels in order to convey the assumed devastation and shock that she experienced all those years ago. The layers of literary devices in the narration further emphasizes the temporal and ontological distance that the narrating Jane puts between her and her younger self. Moreover, the distance between the two accounts of

Jane's reaction to seeing the ruined building emphasizes the difference between the two Janes, but also heightens the suspense of this moment, delaying the point at which the readers are explicitly told what Jane witnessed.

In this scene (and many other scenes in which she pauses the forward momentum of the plot in order to develop or enlarge a visual metaphor) Jane uses ekphrasis to demonstrate her narrative mastery. Gotthold Lessing claims that the friction between visual sensation and textual description causes "still moments" in narrative, and in accord with this, Jane arrests the plot by the sheer fact that the reader cannot see what she is describing (18). Moreover, in redoubling the suspense by repeating the entire process of approaching the house through the visual metaphor of a lover approaching his dead beloved, mistaking her for being asleep when she is actually dead, Jane marries the effects of suspense to the revelation of her symbolic return to Thornfield Hall. The repetition of this dilation, clothed in a language of romance, describes a man lifting the veil off his lover's face (language suggestive of a wedding, in fact), which implies a queer match between Jane and Thornfield Hall rather than Rochester. Following this line of thought, we also see that Jane brings about a recognition scene not quite of herself but with her surroundings and specifically the house—in her visual metaphor, Jane is, after all, the male lover, and therefore Thornfield Hall must be the beloved. This casts Jane's progress as a journey of returning to and making a home, not of finding a vocation or entering a marriage.⁸ The penultimate chapter ends in Jane leading blind Rochester "homeward" (*Jane Eyre* 516)—the very next sentence is the famous declaration of her marriage to Rochester, and additionally a scene in which she announces the news to Mary, the housekeeper, and her husband John, marking Jane's shift in status from their equal to

⁸ This indicates how Jane's sense of progress is marked by her gains and losses in domestic spaces; a point that has been made convincingly by James Buzard, who reads the novel's plot as a path that stretches "from homelessness to home" (200).

their employer. Thus, for Jane, the elaborate visual ekphrasis and figurative language establish not only her narrative power, but also a clear sense that there has been a meaningful progression in Jane's journey towards a home, towards a newfound status in life, but most of all, towards the formation of the individual subjecthood of Jane Eyre. Some might contend that if Jane does indeed make it thus far, then that might mean that Jane's Bildung plot has brought Jane to a different place, and perhaps that it has meaningfully changed her. However, Jane's narratorial manipulation of suspense demonstrates that it does not actually *matter* whether Jane has actually progressed or transformed: the achievement of the novel is the *appearance* of Jane having done so, and making it feel as fateful and satisfying as it does.

Much like the ending of *David Copperfield*, in which Agnes points ever upwards, the conclusion of *Jane Eyre* is marked by St. John's pledge to inch ever closer to God:

‘My Master,’ he says, ‘has forewarned me. Daily He announces more distinctly,—‘Surely I come quickly!’ and hourly I more eagerly respond,—‘Amen; even so come, Lord Jesus!’” (*Jane Eyre* 521)

Not only does this closure represent a movement upwards and beyond, like Agnes's finger, it also affirms that the narrative has been one of progression. This closure cleverly allows St. John's spiritual journey towards God to be made parallel to Jane's own successful quest of gaining a home by their proximity to each other. So too does this ending consolidate the forward movement of the plot, wherein Jane's progress is not at least primarily towards God (like that of St. John) but towards finding a home, and finding a self. The sense of progression, of always moving forward, of always in the process of development, is the final and ultimate achievement of the novel.

(Mis) Reading *Villette*

“Even to look forward was not to hope.”
—*Villette*, p. 156

Villette is still a problem for scholars. The critical agreement is that 1) *Villette* contains echoes of Jane’s narratorial tics, but employs them to a very different, more alienating effect, and 2) the novel, like *Jane Eyre*, is grouped in the nebulous tradition of the “female Bildungsroman,” though it works very differently than *Jane Eyre* or *Shirley*. However, I find that *Villette* has been misread in a few different ways over and over again. First, much scholarly work seems to see *Villette* as a depressive portrait of a psychic response to social and economic alienation. Talia Schaffer claims that because “Lucy is a female migrant caregiver,” sociological factors surrounding her status cause Lucy’s psyche to “[conform] to well-known conditions among this vulnerable population” (84). She goes so far as to say that Lucy “recovers” from her ailments and psychic depression “because M. Paul makes it possible for her to leave a bad job” and that “she achieves mental health through founding a new business and acclimating to Labassecourien culture. Her complaint is situational, based in an unbearably stressful care environment, so she recovers when she leaves it” (Schaffer 101). Similarly, Hannah Bury examines “the symbiotic relationship between Lucy Snowe’s madness and isolation,” where madness not only designates mental illness but deviance from the socioeconomic ideal of femininity during the nineteenth century (159). Bury further concludes that “in drawing attention to Lucy’s limited opportunities for self-exploration due to enforced isolation, I posit that her madness is sustained through prolonged physical seclusion and emotional loneliness” (160). Perhaps most extremely, Susan Anne Carlson argues that “Charlotte wrote a novel about depression because she had no choice,” and that the novel demonstrates its author’s psychic state through Lucy’s voice and psyche: the reader “is trapped in

Lucy's mind from the first page and must suffer as the heroine suffers, fighting off mental illness only to face a life of isolation and hardship" (16, 17).

This is a line of argument that centers on a structural critique of the sexist and capitalist economy that was coming into full bloom during the Victorian era, which I find not only necessary but important especially in our current climate. However, it is also true that this line of thinking as applied to *Villette* tends to reduce Lucy's character to a proxy figure of the author, or any female figure under duress of the unjust labor economy at the time. Moreover, to perform such a reading often has the surprising effect of stripping Lucy of any agency—she is a mere victim of circumstance, no more and no less. Such arguments also shift the methodology of novel studies away from its formal concerns to focus only on its material concerns; and, if that is the goal, why read novels for such endeavors at all? I bring up these methodological concerns because this line of thinking is especially plagued by the tendency to conflate Lucy Snowe with Charlotte Brontë, often citing the author's extra-diegetic letters and comments surrounding the novel as a necessary evidence for the continuity between the two figures.⁹ It goes without saying that this reading negates the point of Lucy's opacity in relaying her unknown trauma to her readers; bringing Charlotte Brontë's biographical information to bear upon Lucy Snowe's trauma within the

⁹ Schaffer, Bury, and Carlson all ground their arguments on Charlotte Brontë's letters and her other writings. Further, Natalie Brown dives deep into the Hawthorne Parsonage as "Brontë's precarious refuge" that informs the dire emphasis on homelessness in *Villette* (238); Charlotte Mathieson also conflates Charlotte Brontë's historical status with Lucy's, in that she "place[s] Brontë and Lucy Snowe within a growing canon of strolling city women," setting up a parallel textual elision of Lucy Snowe the character and Brontë the author (522). My point is not that these works are reading *Villette* "wrong"—rather, I want to suggest that the specific methodology of foregrounding the actual material circumstances of the author and thereby eliding the ambiguities that Lucy Snowe's narrative so intentionally offers to us is precisely the kind of reading that Lucy would have discouraged.

narrative is an impulse that should be resisted at all costs in reading the novel.¹⁰ In fact, this camp of criticism seems almost to echo Ginevra's (wrong) assessment of Lucy: "you have no relations; you can't call yourself young at twenty-three; you have no attractive accomplishments—no beauty...I believe you never were in love, and never will be; you don't know the feeling" (*V* 146). What Ginevra does here, as Kristen Pond insightfully points out, is to use "the circumstantial evidence of Lucy's life...to speculate about her inner life," which is parallel to the act of reading into Lucy's trauma using the circumstantial evidence regarding the author of the text (780). It thus makes no sense to "read all of *Villette* as a long thank-you letter to Paul"—such entanglement is exactly what Lucy resists (Schaffer 102). In fact, I might suggest that the effect of such readings is that of reductively limiting the radical feminist ideals that Lucy Snowe offers in her narration.

Second, many critics, including some of those who conflate the form of the novel with its author's circumstance, tend to hang their arguments on a hopeful illusion that, despite everything, Lucy could be read as standing triumphant against her unfortunate life by the end of her narrative. Starting from Gilbert and Gubar's foundational reading of the text as "Charlotte Brontë's most overtly despairingly feminist novel," many critics, while attentive to the equivocations of the text, conclude that it is Lucy's "story of becoming the author of her own life" (399, 439). While this is a more recuperative reading of Lucy's agency, it is also an elision of what Lucy demands from the reader: not to be spoken over. In this line of thought, Lucy Snowe's narration is understood as championing female suffering. For Carol Margaret Davidson, for example, "Lucy describes the devastating costs exacted by the patriarchy on women's lives," and she is ultimately able to "win" in the end by pursuing her own way of living in the world, perhaps even "ultimately experienc[ing]

¹⁰ This is particularly a problem, it seems, for women's fiction: many critics and readers cannot help but read, for instance, *The Wide Sargasso Sea* as a direct reflection of Jean Rhys' material circumstances and the social alienation she experienced.

a reciprocal loving relationship with her fellow teacher, Paul Emanuel” (149). Praising Lucy Snowe for “pursuing her own way of living in the word,” Davidson claims that Lucy is able to recover from her illness by virtue of “the healing powers of love,” which she extricates by “seduc[ing] a more suitable, available lover” (149). This triumphant tone is echoed in many other readings of *Villette*, especially regarding Lucy’s schoolhouse that she governs by the end of the plot. Charlotte Mathieson lauds “Lucy’s final movement to the schoolhouse of her own, [which ends] the novel with the settledness of home” (534). Monica Feinberg argues that Lucy is able to, in the end, “[make] it so” that her “command of domestic rhetoric designates her true home,” which is, according to Feinberg, La Terrasse¹¹ (183). Feinberg even goes on to say that “Lucy uses domestic metaphor as a compass by which she locates what she wants—what is like Graham, what is like the Brettons, what is like England, what is truly home” (183). In Feinberg’s framing, Lucy ends up in a true home at the end of the novel, with or without M. Paul. To a lesser extent, Karen Chase echoes this optimism, in comparing Jane’s settled closure to Lucy’s, where despite the fact that “Paul’s withdrawal” in *Villette* is “a crushing blow...it has the virtue of enlarging Lucy’s view” (K. Chase 90). In trying to recuperate the abjection in Lucy’s experiences as a feminist struggle, these critics defend Lucy’s detachment and cynicism as modeling an alternative mode of self-making. Thus, such readings argue for *Villette* as a female Bildungsroman, in which she *does* develop into a different person by the end of her journey, though through different methods than are used in *Jane Eyre* or *Shirley*. (But *does* Lucy change? I contend that Lucy does not.¹²) To sum

¹¹ This is a claim with which I cannot agree even slightly: La Terrasse is where Lucy feels happy to be included, but from which she is ultimately banished, especially in those seven weeks without a word from the Brettons.

¹² It isn’t quite the question of whether Lucy Snowe “develops” or not—I would argue that even in a more straightforward Bildungsroman like *Jane Eyre*, the question is not whether the protagonist is actually

up, there is a tendency to read the novel and Lucy's narration as something akin to an inevitable coping mechanism of external factors that cannot be controlled, or a laudable attempt at recuperating authority and the ambivalent complexity of Lucy's identity in the face of gendered oppression. Neither are fully convincing. The first account reads Lucy too much against the novel's formal grain, coming dangerously close to diagnosing the character—or even the author—of a depressive reaction to historical circumstances that we, as modern readers, will never have unbiased access to. The second, while imaginative and in general much more attentive to the novel's form, can at times feel like a futile exercise in reading what is ultimately, incorrigibly, tragic—scraping for any hopeful interpretation when the point is to accept the uncertainty and unknowability of what Lucy chooses not to narrate.

Of course, there are other readings that do escape this binary. Amanda Anderson precisely sidesteps this double bind by reading Lucy's attempts at observation, surveillance, and moral distancing as a careful process of calibrating both her shifting commitments and her external circumstances. Anderson also gestures away from reading the novel as a movement towards happiness or a feminist recuperation of Lucy's circumstance. She argues that “the famous elusiveness of the narrator, [bespeaks] less complicity in English conventions of femininity than a countermove of pure negation...for this reason, it does not fully make sense to read this novel, as many have done, as the narrative of Lucy's hard-earned bid for independence” (*Powers* 52). And she is right to say so: the earlier accounts that read Lucy's narration as a progressive journey towards self-liberation indeed elide the complexities of Lucy's negations. Rachel Ablow also centers her argument on that grey area between the two modes of criticism that I have outlined,

changing and going through a certain formation; rather, it is whether the novel form successfully achieves the sense that he or she has, through suspense.

focusing on the unknowability and unsharability of Lucy's pain *except* to simply know that "someone or something was there" (91). The key, it seems, is to think of the novel not as a static statement but an open question—something that the ending of the novel, forever held in suspense, consciously demands. Lucy's ending cannot be spoken over, since her closure denies any final say. Elisha Cohn also dwells with the silences and the reveries into which Lucy slips, arguing that rather than barely coping with her surroundings, or asserting a new, unconventional way of exerting narrative authority, Lucy Snowe's varied modes of attention allow her to be both "thornily critical," and yet in other moments, "dreamy, abandoning herself to passive divergences that suspend the pressures of the Bildungsroman's plot" (34-5). In particular, Cohn allows Lucy's lapses in narration and her elusive closure to signify not only the truth that "unelaborated elements of mental life shelter a kind of value *by virtue of being excluded and marked as failure*," but also that its form "raises the question of what is lost in the exercise of closure" (49, 63, emphasis original).

One thread uniting these readings is that they grant Lucy the ability of equivocation in her own modes of self-fashioning; rather than being suspicious of Lucy's narration, or trying to define who Lucy *truly* is, Anderson, Ablow, and Cohn all let Lucy be her several selves, and mark Lucy's ability to contain multitudes as her distinguishing characteristic. Another link between these readings is that, in letting Lucy occupy that equivocal stance in her narration, these critics read the novel in a vastly different mode of narrative temporality, especially in relation to plot progression. For Anderson, Lucy's equivocation allows her to characterize Lucy's reactions as being "wary of the perpetual threat of failed intimacy and the acute potential of misrecognition" (Powers 48). Indeed, this reading allows Anderson's characterization of Lucy, and *Villette* as a whole, to be seen as resisting the more naïve aspiration towards recognition in a plot of development. Similarly, Ablow shifts her critical attention not to the progression of the plot but to its repetitiveness in

insisting on the presentism of *Villette*'s narrative pain, where for M. Paul, "so long as he is dying, he has not yet actually died," and for Lucy, her suffocating pressure "attest[s] not just to the existence of the other but to the existence of the one who feels, as well" (90, 91). Cohn, while acknowledging that "the development plot...is explicitly embraced," also argues that the text's "disjunctive ending intimates that the intensity of affective response has no necessary or sufficient relationship with social transformation," as in, *Bildung* (31, 63). These three accounts of the novel insist on the narrative progress as an ongoing process that nevertheless has no aim other than the fact of its taking place—*Villette*, despite its plot elements and the general form taking the guise of a Bildungsroman, actively hollows out the content of such expected development.

In accord with these critical accounts, I argue that Lucy is equivocal about suspense in a way that fundamentally frustrates the nature of closure and retrospective narration. This equivocation reveals the extent to which the value of progress is bound to the self that is formed throughout the narrative of a Bildungsroman. Expectations in *Villette*—unlike Pip's great expectations of becoming a gentleman, or *Jane Eyre*'s expectations that she sets up for her readers—becomes more like an opening, an exposure, a chance for disappointment. Suspenseful moments in *Villette* therefore signify, on one level, a further reminder of what is out of reach of the poor single female protagonist of Brontë's novel. However, on another level, these moments become a significant formal element that denatures the entire conceit of the Bildungsroman and its aspiration for self-formation. What does it mean that Lucy can only catch glimpses of freedom and hopes of evading certain pain in these moments that derail the course of a Bildung plot? How does Lucy, without accommodating herself through a feminist project of self-empowerment or becoming a case study in depressive abjection in the face of gendered oppression, still allow herself and the reader to find pause in the relentless demands of the form of the novel itself? She decouples

suspense from *both* fulfillment and disappointment by rendering it as simultaneously a dreadful stretching out of time before the certain arrival of cruelty, and the only respite before such. In doing so, she undermines closure itself, and questions one of the most basic assumptions of a Bildungsroman: that past experiences gain value *in retrospect*. David Copperfield and Jane Eyre construct their stories of formation (aptly titled after themselves) through the act of retrospective narration that insists on the distance between the past and present, the experiencing self of the plot and the narrating older self. In contrast, Lucy's suspense is at once more threatening and more comforting, in that it allows Lucy to be both her past and current self at the same time. By decoupling this expansive suspense from any kind of pleasurable fulfillment (as in *David Copperfield* or *Jane Eyre*) or upsetting disappointment (as in *Great Expectations*), Lucy's narration in *Villette* aspires to a completely different kind of a novelistic project: experience that simply *is*, without being justified by its *value*. This emphasis on the "now-ness" of experiences without a value judgement that is so necessary for the plot of self-formation is represented through the open questions of emigration, homelessness, salary, and labor in the novel.

Lucy Snowe and Contingency Over Causality

Lucy's tale of emigration to Labassecouer and finding a job at Madame Beck's pensionnat is a story of snap decisions, metonymic meaning-making, and also a case in presentist thought. When Miss Marchmont dies and Lucy is left to her own resources, she decides to "see and consult an old servant of our family; once my nurse, now house-keeper at a grand mansion not far from Miss Marchmont's" (*Villette* 43). She clings to social and physical proximity, however threadbare it might be, to ask for help; this failing, she walks home in twilight, and sees the Aurora Borealis. The natural spectacle, itself a rare and chance encounter, seems to bring a "new power" to Lucy that sends a "bold thought" to her mind: to go to London. She "mentally" sees "within reach what

[she] had never yet beheld with [her] bodily eyes: [she] saw London” (*Villette* 44). Her mental vision brings London metonymically closer to her due to her encountering the “moving mystery” of the Aurora Borealis (43). The metonymic nature of chance and contingency is amplified the next day, when Lucy returns to the mansion:

The housekeeper was slowly propounding some difficulties, while she prepared orange-rind for marmalade, when a child ran past the window and came bounding into the room. It was a pretty child, and as it danced, laughing, up to me—for we were not strangers (nor, indeed, was its mother—a young married daughter of the house—a stranger)—I took it on my knee.

Different as were our social positions now, this child’s mother and I had been schoolfellows, when I was a girl of ten and she a young lady of sixteen; and I remembered her, good-looking, but dull, in a lower class than mine. (*Villette* 44)

Notice the compounding of em-dashes and additions of clauses upon clauses in those last two sentences. Lucy has previously neglected to mention her familiarity with the child and its mother; the reader learns of this connection for the first time, and thus the chain from Lucy to the housekeeper (named Mrs. Barrett) seems to extend itself, to the child, and now to the orthographic mother. Lucy’s final phrase “and I remembered her” could also be read as her recognizing this mother in that instant of running into her, as Lucy goes on to exclaim “What a beautiful and kind-looking woman was the good-natured and comely, but unintellectual, girl become!” (*Villette* 44). The exclamation seems to rise organically, as the chains of connections are forged in the moment. This all gives the sense that while this is a retrospectively narrated event, the recognitions are taking place in real time. This chance encounter, and recognition, yields “casual information” (*Villette* 45) that will greatly change the course of Lucy’s life:

Mrs. Barrett remarked that her young lady had brought that foreign nurse home with her two years ago, on her return from a Continental excursion; that she was treated almost as well as a governess, and had nothing to do but walk out with the baby and chatter French with Master Charles; “and,” added Mrs. Barrett, “she says there are many Englishwomen in foreign families as well placed as she.” (*Villette* 44)

Again, the grammar continues to accumulate clauses that elongate each sentence. The last piece of information and clause, hanging by the quoted (and thus emphasized) “and,” happens to be the most relevant information for Lucy. But the chance, casual addition of information does not stop there. Mrs. Barrett then supplies Lucy with the “address of a respectable old-fashioned inn in the city” which Lucy’s “uncles used to frequent in former days” (*Villette* 45), which allows Lucy to pinpoint a location at which to stay when she reaches London, a city to which she has no other connection. The sequence of events is grounded in incidental linkages that Lucy forges in the moment. This trend persists even when she reaches London and travels onwards to Labassecoeur. In London, she questions the trajectory of her life and her place in the world: “All at once my position rose on me like a ghost. Anomalous, desolate, almost blank of hope it stood. What was I doing here alone in great London? What should I do on the morrow? What prospects had I in life? What friends had I on earth? Whence did I come? Whither should I go? What should I do?” (*Villette* 46). The urgent tone of these questions makes palpable the panic that Lucy feels by the form of its openness itself. Because she is “blank of hope,” she is nevertheless able to gather a sense of moving on forward without any expectations, “a strong, vague persuasion, that it was better to go forward than backward” (*Villette* 47).¹³ In this forward-moving impulse, shorn of any particular

¹³ One might say that Jane also falls into a presentist and metonymic mode of traveling once she leaves Thornfield Hall. She does in fact narrate a similar passage in which she questions her state of loss and alienation like Lucy—“What was I to do? Where to go? Oh, intolerable questions, when I could do nothing and go nowhere!” (*Jane Eyre* 372). However, Jane’s authorial control, and sense of causality seem to overpower these questions once more. She cuts short her description of roaming around a new town by declaring, “Reader, it is not pleasant to dwell on these details. Some say there is enjoyment in looking back to painful experience past; but at this day I can scarcely bear to review the times to which I allude: the moral degradation, blent with the physical suffering, form too distressing a recollection ever to be willingly dwelt on” (*Jane Eyre* 378). By censoring her own suffering and discussing the act of reflection in her narrative voice, Jane resists the kind of in-the-moment-impression that Lucy makes of her aimlessness. Moreover, after this bout of suffering, Jane ends up being directed to a kind of a return to home, when she is united with St. John and his sisters, who turn out to be her distant cousins, unlike Lucy who leaves her nation to find herself an ultimate foreigner for the rest of the novel.

expectations, comes one of the most delightful moments in Lucy's narrative, where she "mixe[s] with the life passing along," experiencing an "irrational, but a real pleasure" (*Villette* 49). Lucy walks through the crowded city, wherein spaces and bodies meld together in formations and assemblages unthinkable in *Jane Eyre*. This confusion of space and bodies also obscures the boundaries between the temporality of narrating voice and the narrated event. As Jungah Kim points out, *Villette* "is an unconventional travel narrative (or more precisely, nomadic narrative), since it has no fixed return" (3).

As we see here, Lucy's journey to finding employment is not only a testament to the difficulty of being an individual female without her family's support, but also to the novel's refusal of a certain sense of causality. None of the links in the chain that leads Lucy to Madame Beck's are preconditioned, like events in *Jane Eyre*. Instead, they simply appear as metonymic connections that pass Lucy through time and space. There are no pre-established expectations, and thus when Lucy keeps on moving to the next location, feeling, or impression, they are experienced by the young Lucy and the readers simultaneously. This is distinctly *unsuspenseful*.¹⁴ Moreover, unlike Jane, who in moments like these would have distanced herself from that anguished younger self through suspense and direct addresses to the reader, Lucy seems to be feeling that which she is narrating too, in the moment, without suspense's retrospective glance. Compare Jane's apostrophe when she sees Rochester again after the revelation of his bigamy: "Reader, I forgave him at the moment and on the spot...yet not in words" (*Jane Eyre* 344). The processing of her emotions has already taken place, and is narrated after-the-fact. This tendency is also evident when Rochester's past emerges into the narrative, creating a story-within-a-story in an attempt to impart

¹⁴ In fact, this portion of *Villette* seems to almost mirror a picaresque form, wherein the narrative is simply a sequence of delays and digressions, which I've pointed to in my Introduction as an example of a narrative form without suspense.

a sense of causality upon the events of Jane and Rochester's wedding day. Before Jane decides that she will leave, Jane expertly utilizes suspense: "A pause" is declared, and then the "one dreary word...—'Depart!'" (*Jane Eyre* 363). When Jane does leave, she beseeches: "Gentle reader, may you never feel what I then felt!" (*Jane Eyre* 370).

As is the case in other passages that I have examined earlier in this chapter, Jane's direct addresses and manipulation of suspenseful plot revelations contribute to the overall sense that these events were experienced, and consequently narrated, for a reason. In contrast, Lucy's mode of narration in her search for a lodging and a job lacks such premonitions and expectations, rather processing information and making decisions on-the-go. The consummate effect of all these elements—the presentist mode of voice, metonymic links that propel Lucy, and sheer contingency of her decisions (not causality)—is that of stretching the narrative experience of time *without suspense*. This is because there are no expectations set—since there is no assumed hope, there can be no suspense. What makes this lack of suspense so salient to the project of this novel is that usually, many of these plot points—being rendered homeless, choosing a vocation, journeying to a new home—would all be endowed with utmost expectation and suspense in a different kind of a Bildungsroman. These are all elements that are so fundamental to Bildung plots, and yet here they are hollowed out of their suspense; thus, they do not build a sense of development or progression in Lucy that they would otherwise in *Jane Eyre*.

Causality as Tragedy, Contingency as Pleasure

So what does suspense look like in *Villette*, when it is present? The answer is that suspense is almost always bad in *Villette*. In fact, suspense is mentioned seven times in the entirety of the novel, each time negatively. It is dreadful, terrifying, and most of all, hopeless for Lucy. The only

time that she is able to successfully evade it occurs immediately before the novel concludes, when she narrates that she “was not tried with suspense” when M. Paul kept in frequent touch with her through letters, but of course even that is soon rendered tragic by the ambiguous fate of M. Paul (*Villette* 494).

First, Lucy’s suspense, unlike Jane’s, is not just a sowing of expectations that are later fulfilled or met with the same intensity as a surprise (like Bertha), but a painful interval during which she must come to terms with the approaching disappointment which does and will arrive. There is nothing worth knowing about what is to come. While one might think that this form of suspense seems to fit in with the “Point A to Point A” kind of suspenseful structure that I have read in *David Copperfield*, it is not so. Indeed, although there is no uncertainty involved in Lucy’s bad suspense, it also refuses to consolidate the journey taken into one that gives a sense of coherence and progression. This radical refusal to grant suspense its closural power is illustrated clearly in the episode in which she says farewell to John Graham, after a small, delightful vacation with the Brettons. Lucy laments, in a similar fashion to that of Jane:

Yet three days, and then I must go back to the *pensionnat*. I almost numbered the moments of these days upon the clock; fain would I have retarded their flight; but they glided by while I watched them: they were already gone while I yet feared their departure. (*Villette* 227)

Initially, like Jane, Lucy “numbers the moments of these days upon the clock,” waiting for something to come. But instead of it setting up an expectation that will be fulfilled later in a way that advances the plot, and rushing the readers forward to that future development, Lucy Snowe seems to describe it as having already happened, at least psychically. The good parts are the moments that remain, not the outcome that follows. Unlike Jane, who counts down the hour half in uncertain dread and half in hope, there is no hope nor uncertainty for Lucy Snowe: the closure seems to have already taken place, though the time before its arrival was precious. And once the

vacation is over, she insists on its being over—even when the Brettons ask her to stay another night, which technically would “retard” the passage of time until Lucy needs to return to Madame Beck’s, Lucy cannot and indeed does not accept the invitation because it would mean that she would have to be again held in suspense until the moment that this extension comes to its end. Thus, Lucy wishes the vacation to not end, and yet also wishes it were done quickly. Her suspense is equivocal: the moment of saying goodbye to the Brettons was “already gone” while she still “feared” it. And yet, it cannot come any sooner—although she fears it, cruelly, the moment of departure keeps getting delayed, both for Lucy and the readers.

It appeared; however, that my going depended upon Graham; he had said he would accompany me, and it so fell out that he was engaged all day, and only returned home at dusk. Then ensued a little combat of words. Mrs. Bretton and her son pressed me to remain one night more. I could have cried, so irritated and eager was I to be gone. I longed to leave them as the criminal on the scaffold longs for the axe to descend: that is, I wished the pang over...

...My trunk was now brought in. We had shaken hands; he had turned to go, but he was not satisfied: he had not done or said enough to content his generous impulses.

“Lucy,”—stepping after me—“shall you feel very solitary here?”

“At first I shall.”

“Well, my mother will soon call to see you; and, meantime, I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll write—just any cheerful nonsense that comes into my head—shall I?”

“Good, gallant heart!” thought I to myself; but I shook my head, smiling, and said, “Never think of it: impose on yourself no such task. *You* write to *me*!—you’ll not have time.”

“Oh! I will find or make time. Good-by!”

He was gone. The heavy door crashed to: the axe had fallen—the pang was experienced. (*Villette* 227-8)

The sense of suspense is strongly marked in this sequence. Every step until Lucy is left alone back at Madame Beck’s is delayed and stretched—even in this little snippet, there are many em-dashes (the hallmark of suspenseful passages) that seem to prolong the painful goodbye. Here, unlike in the passage that opened the chapter, which counted down the time until she had to leave but also insisted on it being already come and gone, Lucy dreads any more delay of the inevitable goodbye.

This is exactly the opposite to how suspense is used in *Jane Eyre* as a way to usher the readers forward with an ominous expectation, and yet it also demonstrates narrative control by boasting of the narrator's knowledge of what is to come. Lucy, unlike Jane, is also tortured in the same interval of time in which the reader is made to wait, and she almost seems frustrated by the fact that she has to narrate it herself, re-experiencing the interval before a metaphoric execution. It seems that there is no distance between the Lucy that is experiencing the "pang" and the Lucy that is narrating it, which negates the power of distance between the younger and older protagonists that we see in *Jane Eyre*. Furthermore, in these moments, Lucy foregrounds that sensation of pain rather than her own subjectivity; even in that last sentence, "the pang was experienced"—by whom? By Lucy, we assume, but she deliberately seems to put the "pang" as the subject of the sentence rather than stating, for example, "I experienced the pang." In doing so, Lucy is able to also negate her sense of self having progressed at all since that time of trauma—only pain reverberates through time, and there is no moving on from it.

Also important is the fact that this episode occurs immediately after the horrid vacation in which Lucy is left with "a servant, and a poor deformed and imbecile pupil, a sort of cretin whom her stepmother in a distant province would not allow to return home" (*Villette* 156). This vacation, if we were to follow the logic of *Jane Eyre*, should show the arrival of something significant in Lucy's life, since it would foreshadow Lucy almost betraying her belief by going to a Catholic confession, and making her first contact with one of her enemies who will go on to hinder Lucy's relationship with M. Paul, and ultimately send him away on the fateful trip that (presumably) takes his life. However, like her snap decision to emigrate to Labassecour, she is driven to surprising behavior that creates more disappointment for herself ultimately, because she has nothing to look forward to or give herself hope:

My heart almost died within me; miserable longings strained its chords. How long were the September days! How silent, how lifeless! How vast and void seemed the desolate premises! How gloomy the forsaken garden—grey now with the dust of a town summer departed. Looking forward at the commencement of those eight weeks, I hardly knew how I was to live to the end. My spirits had long been gradually sinking; now that the prop of employment was withdrawn, they went down fast. Even to look forward was not to hope: the dumb future spoke no comfort, offered no promise, gave no inducement to bear present evil in reliance on future good. A sorrowful indifference to existence often pressed on me—a despairing resignation to reach betimes the end of all things earthly. Alas! When I had full leisure to look on life as life must be looked on by such as me, I found it but a hopeless desert: tawny sands, with no green fields, no palm-tree, no well in view. The hopes which are dear to youth, which bear it up and lead it on, I knew not and dared not know. If they knocked at my heart sometimes, an inhospitable bar to admission must be inwardly drawn. When they turned away thus rejected, tears sad enough sometimes flowed: but it could not be helped: I dared not give such guests lodging. So mortally did I fear the sin and weakness of presumption.

Religious reader, you will preach to me a long sermon about what I have just written, and so will you, moralist: and you, stern sage: you, stoic, will frown; you, cynic, sneer; you, epicure, laugh. Well, each and all, take it your own way. I accept the sermon, frown, sneer, and laugh; perhaps you are all right: and perhaps, circumstanced like me, you would have been, like me, wrong. (*Villette* 156)

In this passage, Lucy smothers any hope of the act of having hope. The “prop of employment” is the mere facade that has been keeping Lucy afloat; now that there is actual free time, Lucy suffers during it, as a figure on a “hopeless desert.” She fears the “sin and weakness of presumption” so much that she cannot entertain any prior expectation. In hoping or expecting, one opens oneself up to the possibility of disappointment; while the barren state of no hope is suffering, Lucy cannot commit to any hope as doing so would sow the seeds for future disappointment, a worse fate for her. Her suspense does open her, and the narrative, up to threats—but no hopes.

Even when revelations are available, they are disappointments at most, and painful discoveries at worst. Take, for instance, the gothic subplot of the nun. Although critics are right to point out that the nun appears at pivotal moments that either elevate the romantic subplot with M.

Paul with a Catholic seriousness or highlight Lucy's fractured sense of self,¹⁵ we must take into account the extremely deflationary discovery of the nun as a disguise that helps Ginevra sneak her lover into the pensionnat. Especially in comparison to the bombastic "surprise" of Bertha's reveal in *Jane Eyre*, the revelation of the nun as a mere costume for a foolish subplot that actually has nothing to do with Lucy in *Villette* operates as yet another reminder for Lucy that she is not included in a meaningful structure of suspense and its payoff that would center her subjectivity and allow her to progress.

Reading Lucy's Non-Closure

Considering how suspense in *Villette* is always already a decided disappointment, the ending of the novel might seem curious, as it is at this crucial point that Lucy decides to linger forever in suspense. If suspense is so painful to her, and she wishes for quick closure at each instance of it, why does she famously leave the fate of her and M. Paul's relationship in an indefinite state of suspense? My examination of suspense in *Villette* reaches this conclusion: suspense, as Lucy names it, is always bad, but ultimately, she uses it to avoid being *condemned* to a narrative of progression.

Lucy equivocates on how to wield suspense; as much as she hates it, it is her only salvation. The fact that Lucy sides with equivocation, pausing in defiance of any sort of finality, should be clear in reading the two very last sentence of her novel; they focus not on herself, nor on anyone for whom she holds any regard or affection, but rather, on her enemies.

Madame Beck prospered all the days of her life; so did Père Silas; Madame Walravens fulfilled her ninetieth year before she died. Farewell. (*Villette* 496)

¹⁵ For instance, Elisha Cohn points out that the "gothic subplot defers the stabilizing act of identification," and that it is critically often associated with "Lucy's status on the verge of collapse" (45).

Consider the leaden finality of this conclusion, as opposed to the lofty, abstract manner in which Ginevra and Polly's fates were described. Ginevra, we are told, "was pretty sure to obtain her will, and so she got on—fighting the battle of life by proxy, and, on the whole, suffering as little as any human being I have ever known" (*Villette* 478). I find it significant that Ginevra "got on—" the em-dash emphasizes the way that she kept going on in her life, unchanged and unashamed.¹⁶ In a way, Ginevra is also offered a suspended closure like that of Lucy and M. Paul.

The fact that closure (especially when it affirms one "prosper[ing] all the days of [one's] life"), ostensibly a reward to be earned and deserved through the course of the plot, is granted not to the narrator nor those for whom Lucy cares (at least more than she does Madame Beck & co.) should signal that something different is happening here—neither Agnes's ever-upwards pointing finger, nor St. John River's Christian progress towards God, but an irrevocable closure, a goodbye in the form of an epistolary ending as well (a "farewell"). Lucy "gifts" her enemies the finality and closure from which she saves herself and M. Paul. She abandons her enemies in the form of the novel, while seeking refuge in the spaces between novelistic closure and its narrative form. Lucy neither champions nor resists the pressures of the form of the novel of formation successfully, but rather, remains deliberately in a state of thrownness and unending suspense because she *must*, and can only, do so. That is the point.

There is something in Lucy's equivocation—in dwelling in suspense as just that—and the difficulty of articulating or conceiving of suspense without evaluating it in the larger narrative

¹⁶ Ginevra is in a league of the beautiful, gossipy, shallow, yet surprisingly utilitarian characters who are optimally suited to their world in Victorian fiction of this period: Arabella of *Jude the Obscure*, and Rosamond Vincy of *Middlemarch* might also be included in this category. I find it significant that they are all women with strong monetary instincts, who are concerned, for example, with how much value Jude would have lost by spilling the pig's blood, how much Lydgate's connections are worth, and of course, for Ginevra, how "she got her portion" (*Villette* 476).

context that testifies to the novel's radicality. By having Lucy choose to "pause," and to asking us to "pause" alongside her, her narration rejects *both* suspense's fulfillment and disappointment; through this Brontë reveals how the duration of suspense is not only crucial to any narrative formation of the self and but also, though difficult to imagine, the only respite from the process of retrospective valuation that is necessary in creating a cohesive self. *Villette* does not give an answer to the question "Who is Lucy Snowe?" but asks it over and over again. The silence which follows the question is devastating, but a question is a question nonetheless in its demand of an answer. It is easy at this point to argue that there is *value* in the openness of an unanswered question, and the freedom from the bind of stable interpretation that this openness grants to Lucy; however, following Lucy's own example, I want to resist such hopeful thinking. Rather, Lucy's equivocation detaches her story from the concept of "valuation" or retrospective manipulation upon which *Jane Eyre* hinges its novelistic project. The retrospective valuation of experience—the question of whether something *mattered* or not—which is so readily available in many other novels of formation, is completely negated in the light of Lucy's non-closure in *Villette*. Considering that such retrospective valuation of experience is a fundamental part of negating threatening desires and/or treacherous possibilities that the Bildung protagonist might fall into, Lucy's narration becomes a negation of that negation. Kristen Pond similarly argues that rather than narrative failure, Lucy's refusal to offer a more conventional ending is "an ethical attempt...to invite the reader to identify with her even when her story does not fit conventional paradigms" (789-90).

However, I want to push this even further than Pond—Lucy, I suggest, does not invite the reader to identify with her. All she asks of the reader is to "pause"—which, as readers so close to an ending, we simply cannot seem to do successfully. And yet, to "pause" while "sunny imaginations" run wild is precisely what Lucy has been made to do at so many points in the novel.

She doesn't invite us to identify with her, she simply puts us in the same position. In doing so, Lucy asks a formal question—did anything matter? And when such a question is posed within the formal confines of a Bildungsroman (for as I have argued thus far, the novel shares many of the characteristic genre tropes and formal elements with *Jane Eyre*), it becomes a formal negation to its own form. Though other critics have raised the possibility that Lucy “resists the pressures of the Bildung plot” (Cohn 35), I contend that the way that Lucy's narration negates both the fulfillment, and the disappointment, of its suspense not only thwarts the project of Bildung, but also questions the entire conceit of progression and development as constructed by the first-person narrative.

In *Jane Eyre* suspense is central to the resolution of the promise of development, and in *Villette* it is the obstacle to its fulfillment. The shift from *Jane Eyre* to *Villette* demonstrates one sense in which the “satisfying” novel of formation has already begun to decline by the time that *Villette* is written in 1853. This is significant in two ways. First, it challenges the assumption that the 1860s and 70s might be thought of as the genre's “heyday.” There really were only a few years in the late 1840s that produced what we now regard as the definitive examples of the genre—by the time *David Copperfield* is published in 1850, the way that suspense is employed to the reader's delight is already old news. I suggest that novels such as *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield* are so memorable, and so widely read, because they are the most satisfying versions of the novel of development, in which form and content match, and in which the use of suspense and its payoff successfully signal development. Indeed, *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield* have become synecdoche of the Victorian novel, even though their illusion of development fades almost immediately after, as we see in *Villette* and *Great Expectations*. Second, thinking about the history of the Bildungsroman through the lens of suspense allows us to think clearly about the ways in

which development is represented through differences in narrative. As *Villette* shows, repetition that does not inherently yield a value judgement in retrospect, in other words, repetitions *without* difference, are narratively frustrating, marring the desired sense of development or progression. Suspense, when allowed to take the place of a closure as it does in *Villette*, interrogates the conceit of allowing the difference between expectation and its fulfillment to create a sense of development that we might evaluate and judge.

CHAPTER 3.

Wilkie Collins and Converting Youth to Debt

“We increase in poverty...as we increase in wealth.”

—Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, vol. 2, p. 320

Gabriel Betteredge, the amenable House-Steward of *The Moonstone*,¹ treats *Robinson Crusoe* as his secular Bible. Claiming that “such a book as *Robinson Crusoe* never was written, and never will be written again” (MS 22)—the alpha and omega of his narrative faith—Betteredge turns to the novel as his moral and spiritual antidote, randomly selecting decontextualized passages from the good book as his daily guidance. If I were to follow Betteredge’s advice, and take a turn at *Robinson Crusoe*, it might have said thus:

I drew up the state of my affairs in writing, not so much to leave them to any that were to come after me—for I was likely to have but few heirs—as to deliver my thoughts from daily poring over them, and afflicting my mind; and as my reason began now to master my despondency, I began to comfort myself as well as I could, and to set the good against the evil, that I might have something to distinguish my case from worse; and I stated very impartially, like debtor and creditor, the comforts I enjoyed against the miseries I suffered, thus:—

<i>Evil.</i>	<i>Good.</i>
I am cast upon a horrible, desolate island, void of all hope of recovery.	But I am alive; and not drowned, as all my ship’s company were.
I am singled out and separated, as it were, from all the world, to be miserable.	But I am singled out, too, from all the ship’s crew, to be spared from death; and He that miraculously saved me from death can deliver me from this condition.

¹ Hereon, the four novels will be cited with following acronyms: *The Woman in White* (WW), *No Name* (NN), *Armada* (AD), and *The Moonstone* (MS).

I am divided from mankind—a solitaire; one banished from human society.	But I am not starved, and perishing on a barren place, affording no sustenance.
I have no clothes to cover me.	But I am in a hot climate, where, if I had clothes, I could hardly wear them.
I am without any defence, or means to resist any violence of man or beast.	But I am cast on an island where I see no wild beasts to hurt me, as I saw on the coast of Africa; and what if I had been shipwrecked there?
I have no soul to speak to or relieve me.	But God wonderfully sent the ship in near enough to the shore, that I have got out as many necessary things as will either supply my wants or enable me to supply myself, even as long as I live.

Upon the whole, here was an undoubted testimony that there was scarce any condition in the world so miserable but there was something negative or something positive to be thankful for in it; and let this stand as a direction from the experience of the most miserable of all conditions in this world: that we may always find in it something to comfort ourselves from, and to set, in the description of good and evil, on the credit side of the account. (Defoe 57-8)

Rather than writing down his name, or specifically contributing towards the reproductive posterity of his story by expecting his children as his readers, Crusoe opts to write, severely, “like debtor and creditor.” While the table itself labels the two sides “Evil” and “Good,” the last sentence of the passage reaffirms that by “good” he really means “credit”—which, as logic follows, would mean that by “evil” he really means “debt.” Indeed, to be in debt, as Collins, through Betteredge, suggests, was truly to be evil in Victorian England.

Debt—this evil in both fiction and society in Victorian England—is ironically what comes to signify the time of protean youth that was so celebrated in the earlier cases of Bildungsroman in the previous chapters. In this chapter, I will argue that the youth-to-maturity formation in the Bildungsroman, which was mirrored in the setup-to-payoff structure of suspense, is converted into a debt-to-solvency formation in the sensation novels of Wilkie Collins. The architecture remains the same; and yet, the formation of a successful self, which was the Bildungsroman’s primary telos,

is no longer the primary concern of the novel form. Rather, the telos of solvency, and good credit, is equated to the status of a successfully formed self. Collins's novels also usher in the exchange of money as the more important event to be represented in the novel, rather than the formation and the recognition of self-identity. The identities of major characters in Collins's fiction throughout the 1860s increasingly become more unstable, taking more of a backseat to the money and objects of value that are changing hands. The novel does this through the conversion of "recognition" of an ideal self into "receipt" of debt or payment. The switch signifies the financial conversion of selfhood in Victorian England, and thematizes suspense in narrative as debt itself.

Debt and Credit in Victorian England

Self-help books for men written during the Victorian period, such as *Self-Help; with Illustrations of Character and Conduct* by Samuel Smiles, caution their reader not to incur any debt, for debt "renders him a slave in many respects, for he can no longer call himself his own master, nor boldly look the world in the face" (*Self-Help* 287). A man in debt is incapable of being self-possessed; for he, in borrowing more than his worth, proves himself unworthy of self-possession. This loss, unlike a simple financial expenditure, is permanent; and it relates to the idea of a man's credit in Victorian society, which not only took account of a man's wealth but his upbringing, connections, and social standing. According to Leeann Hunter, "ruin can be permanent, even after debts are paid" (149). When a man was ruined by debt, he was a failure in his finances, private family life, and public stature. In Victorian literature, the topic of debt was also frequently tied to intangible qualities of virtue or morals; for example, Mr. Dombey, in going bankrupt, also loses his family, and indeed Dickens's language focuses more on his loss of his daughter Florence Dombey, rather than the loss of his material things. To be bankrupt, and in debt, was to be bereft

of what makes a man a man. Debt, framed this way, is the ethical, moral, and social outrage that particularly chafes against Victorian masculine self-identity.

This sentiment was consolidated a few decades later by Nietzsche, who in *The Genealogy of Morals* argued that the very concept of guilt, shame, and the desire for of moral justice and punishment came specifically from the “most primitive personal relationship, that between buyer and seller, creditor and debtor” (70). He asks: “Have these genealogists of morals had even the remotest suspicion that, for example, the major moral concept *Schuld* [guilt] has its origin in the very material concept *Schulden* [debts]?” (Nietzsche 62-3). The “material” concept of debt gives rise to the “moral” concept of guilt, and we see that this logic flows in the other direction too, in the Victorian conception of debt as moral crime. Furthermore, for Nietzsche, the relationship between a sense of wrong and injury is instantly related to the sense of justice coming from the pain inflicted on the culprit: “An equivalence is provided by the creditor’s receiving, in place of a literal compensation for an injury (thus in place of money, land, possessions of any kind), a recompense in the form of a kind of pleasure—the pleasure of being allowed to vent his power freely upon who is powerless, the voluptuous pleasure ‘*de faire le mal pour le plaisir de le faire*,’ the enjoyment of violation” (Nietzsche 64-5). Nietzsche claims that “this primeval, deeply rooted, perhaps by now ineradicable idea draw[s] its power” from “the contractual relationship between *creditor and debtor*” (63; emphasis mine). Thus, there is a masochistic pain that arises from the guilt of debt, as it allows sadistic pleasure of the creditor in inflicting pain upon the debtor. Torment and misery cast upon the debtor is somehow *justified*, although that act of violence will not replenish the sheer lack that the debt attaches to the debtor, nor will it repair the original sin that caused the debt to arise. The moral balance is restored not through reparation, but the displacement of pain and suffering. In this violent reformulation of debt and credit, when considered alongside

the Victorian legal and social realities of debt and bankruptcy, debt becomes the mark of Cain—a lack that signifies one’s social relation, that is passed through generations in both physical and social ways. It not only ruins the social standing of the family and the individual identity of the carrier of debt, but also allows the creditor to collect either the material sum of the debt or the moral sum of pain from the debtor. Debt degrades not just the individual debtor but his social network and lineage. The lack is to be justified through the suffering, or one might say mortification, of the flesh. Once the lack, signified by debt, is carved into one’s family name, the flesh (whether it be the father’s or son’s) seems to be irrevocably marred by it as well. In Nietzsche, debt is a network of relation that can transfer its pain and obligation to inflict pain to different agents of its web.

Critically, debt was the underbelly of the Victorian credit economy, and in the Victorian field, the thematic significance of debt and credit have been discussed mostly in terms of the Victorian realist novel and the literary imagination of nation- and self-making. Patrick Brantlinger points out a parallel between national debt and the representational anxiety of realism, writing that “the Victorian novel simultaneously registers both the substantiality of British power and prosperity and its insubstantiality, its basis only in ‘credit’ and ‘debt,’ in part by metaphorizing its own lack of reality (its fictionality) as no different from that of money (always a form of debt)” (*Fictions of State* 7). Citing John Vernon, Brantlinger claims that “both money and the realist novel share the failure of mimesis” (“Cashing in” 11); in Brantlinger’s psychoanalytic purview, the vision of debt in realist fiction speaks to the anxiety of its ultimate “lack”—its lack of reality, the anxiety of representation itself. This mimetic lack in Victorian novels becomes the site where British national debt, fetishism, and empire are registered and transmuted. Since Brantlinger’s study, critical attention has shifted more to the idea of *personal* debt and credit, as other critics

have reflected on the connection between anxiety of representation and credit-debt economy in terms of fictional character and individual self-formation. Margot C. Finn brings a corrective to Brantlinger, categorizing public and private debt separately. She claims that as personal credit played a key role in growth of industry and trade in Victorian England, the idea of credit was applied not only to the national financial realm but also to the social and cultural ones. In fact, sometimes the flow of influence seems reversed: looking at *The Diary of Benjamin Robert Hayden*, Finn demonstrates that “where early modern debt relations had been predicated on conceptions of mutual trust, modern consumer credit was shaped most decisively by notions of personal character” (18-9). Character not only was a result of one’s conduct and economic stability but also what underwrote faith in one’s honest labor relationship to the market, as servants or governesses would be asked to provide reference of character before a successful hire.² As Finn writes, “Credit thus reflected character, but also constituted it” (19).³ Diedre Lynch has also suggested that character, with the development of novel-writing in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, provided commercialized imaginations of self-definition and individuation for the bourgeoisie. Anna Kornbluh has recently echoed this: defining “fictitious capital”—the “feigned capital that alchemically precipitated real wealth” (5)—as the basis of Victorian credit economy, she argues that the realist novel sublimates the Victorian cultural struggle with fictitious capital into its characters’ interiority. All in all, the realist novel becomes the site in which the metaphorical relationship between the credit economy and the self is represented and realized. The masculine

² *The Dictionary of Daily Wants*, published in 1859, defines the “character of servants”: “it is customary to receive testimonials of a servant's trustworthiness and ability at the time of hiring them, and also to give servants that have formerly been in a person's service what is termed a character” (Philp 262)

³ Annie McClanahan also writes that the novel constructs character types that are “believably specific but also familiar enough to be recognized as ‘that kind of person’—thus provided an emergent credit economy with both a frame for the collection of information and a heuristic for its interpretation” (35).

self, in Victorian culture, was largely defined and measured through the credit-debt standing of one's character. As Samuel Smiles puts it, "character is property...the noblest of possessions" (*Character* 180, 187). The literary imagination also utilizes this binary of credit (as a fundamental social capital) and debt (as the lack, or the utter loss, of it) through the idea of self-making. Robinson Crusoe's table of "good" and "evil" in his proto-Bildungsroman demonstrates this in a nutshell: one's character can be self-recognized, built, and even curated. In writing, one can form the self, through the formation of one's character. Credit and debt thus have an intimate relationship to the Victorian value of the self and its development through the genre of the novel.⁴

Thus, to build character was to build credit. Composing one's self-history, a narrative form most well-represented by the genre of the Bildungsroman, is inseparable from the notion of accruing private credit. In these reflections and reifications of the credit economy in the Victorian realist building of the self, debt is characterized as the shadow of such credit in characterological terms. Debt is relegated to those "type" of characters whose growths are stunted, providing foils to the protagonist, but ultimately pushed aside for the plots of the protagonists' to progress, or made into minor allegories of the novels' critique of the failures of the larger social institution. Think of *Bleak House*'s Harold Skimpole, who, like a child of bad faith in a man's body, comes to abuse the trust and wealth of those around him through his perpetual state of debt (and shamelessness). Others would include the tragic figures of William Dorrit in Dickens's *Little Dorrit*, Charley Tudor in Trollope's *The Three Clerks*, or Rawdon Crawley in Thackeray's *Vanity*

⁴ Nancy Armstrong, in both *Desire and Domestic Fiction* and *How Novels Think*, has outlined the ways in which the Bildungsroman, epitomized by *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, comes to define itself against domestic fiction and the female figure as the modern individual. Reading the narrative of progress through debt—and guilt—reveals another dimension (economic and moral) in which women are excluded from the genre of the Bildungsroman, and relegated to what Ian Duncan called "nonnovelistic, indeed antinovelistic genres and discourses" ("Against the Bildungsroman" 15).

Fair, who all demonstrate the taint that debt has on one's social status, virtue, body, and even soul through their narratives of descent. Their plots tend to end much before the main story, and are subservient to a larger secret or a revelation about the main character. In a way, debt only really touches minor characters in the Victorian Bildungsroman, complementing Alex Woloch's claim that "minor characters are the proletariat of the novel" (*The One* 27). In the "successful" Bildungsroman, such as *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield*, as I have explored in the previous chapters, "the hero's progress is facilitated through a series of interactions with delimited minor characters," who in Lukács's words, whether "guilty or not, are tragically ruined...whose life dissolves into nothingness" (Woloch, *The One* 29; Lukács, *Goethe and His Age* 55). Debt becomes one of the main techniques that the Bildungsroman uses to inflict such tragic destiny upon these minor characters, who by counterexample signal the Bildungsroman hero's correct progress.

If debt is displaced onto the minor characters in the Bildungsroman, the protagonist of the genre tends to be characterized by what I consider to be an antithesis of debt—promise. William Paley's *Natural Theology*, published only a few years before Dickens's *David Copperfield*, claims that organisms, "by a progress through different stages of life, and action, and enjoyment (and in each state provided with implements and organs appropriated to the temporary nature which they bear), arrive at last in the form and fashion of the parent animal" (Paley 238, cited in Beer, *Darwin's Plots* 122). Gillian Beer interprets this passage in conjunction with the rise of the English Bildungsroman. Paley's model of evolution illustrates the natural cycle "at the service of identity," in which "the diverse needs of diverse life phases are parts of a cycle which comes to rest in the finality of adult form" (Beer, *Darwin's Plots* 122). The individual organism goes through the time of its life, perhaps first possessing different traits, or having the potential to fall into different paths, but ultimately straightens itself into a cohesive form that identifies itself—replicates itself—after

the form of its parent. The divergent individual, in other words, assumes the parent's adult form by slicing away its disparate parts. This "finality of adult form" is reflected in the achievement of the Bildungsroman protagonist's individual development—"in *Bildungsroman* similarly the growing ego learns to accommodate itself to, and internalize, the patterns of its society" (Beer, *Darwin's Plots* 122). Thus, the plot of the English Bildungsroman can be seen as a kind of a *promise*—the individual whose life we see growing in the narrative, will one day reach its full potential, its adult form.⁵ Franco Moretti, like Beer, claims that the Bildungsroman's goal "is not to heighten the discrepancy [between pattern and contingency], but to make it disappear" (72); for him, self-development and social integration meet at the point of successful maturation (Moretti 19). Thus, narration can peacefully be fulfilled and terminated at the achievement of maturity. Considering the ever-present threat of debt that could harm such successful maturation into a cohesive adult form, the narrative must do away—in D. A. Miller's phrase, "good riddance!" (*Narrative* 66)—with the taint of debt that might endanger the protean promise of the Bildungsroman protagonist. We see, as with Mr. Micawber in Dickens's *David Copperfield* and other minor characters mentioned before, the protagonist's connection with the indebted minor character who presents the incorrect model of maturity will be severed, or at least weakened, as the protagonist grows throughout the plot. By eliminating these unsavory possibilities of debt and thus bad adult form, the hero of the Bildungsroman comes to achieve good credit, and thus good character, by the end of the novel. The Bildungsroman, in other words, aspires to reject the

⁵ Marc Redfield's valuable point comes to my mind every time a generalization of the Bildungsroman genre is made: "As soon as one takes a serious look at the notion of the Bildungsroman, it begins to unfold such extravagant aesthetic promises that few if any novels can be said to achieve the right to be so defined" (40). However, I hope to use this paradigm of promise in Bildungsroman as a way to fully articulate how the paradigm of debt operates in the genre of sensation fiction. As I have discussed in my introduction, the Bildungsroman genre should be thought of as a genre of instability, and one of the ways that this instability is thematized in the novel form is through debt.

thematics of debt to opt for the thematics of promise (and seeming development). Even the titles of these novels all point to the promise of the cohesive individual as the noteworthy focus of a narrative. With the exception of *Great Expectations*—whose title is already a comment on the expectant obligations of both the promise that Pip sees in himself and the promise that the novel makes to the readers who would expect a certain growth in Pip—*David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist*, *Jane Eyre*, *Pendennis* all point to the individual, whose progress is the progress of the novel. Once their progress ends, the narrative does too.⁶ Their youth is the story, and their achievement of maturation the discourse. The title promises the end product, for both the character and the reader. This way, the Bildungsroman can sidestep the perils of debt by dispatching those inferior forms of adulthood through the minor characters' debt plots, and instead focus on the individual promise of its protagonist who blossoms through the course of the narrative, unscathed.

The sensation novel, I argue, is in a tense relationship with the form of the Bildungsroman. Epitomized by Wilkie Collins's fabulous run of sensational hits in the 1860s, the sensation novel genre is known for its multiple voices and unrealistic plots that center around suspenseful sequences ending with revelations of mystery, as opposed to the first-person narrative that strives

⁶ A possible voice of dissent here would be Franco Moretti's, which famously points out a particular anxiety in the English Bildungsroman, as opposed to what the "continental" Bildungsroman. Moretti claims that the English counterpart is allergic to actual individual progress. His scathing critique of the form contends that the English Bildungsroman brings about "a drastic *devaluation of youth*" (184, original emphasis) in order to idealize childhood, the original lacuna of innocence—a shift that leaves youth to be transformed into "a haphazard and dangerous interlude" (Moretti 204). However, as I have suggested more strongly in my chapter on Charlotte Brontë, I argue that this critique of the English Bildungsroman overlooks the significance of self-curation that is baked into the narrative of retrospection so particular in the Bildungsroman. When Moretti claims that "contrary to *Wilhelm Meister*, in the English novel the most significant experiences are not those that alter but those which *confirm* the choices made by childhood 'innocence'" (182), the English novel confirms the innocent childhood choices *because* they mean to. The more circular the narrative seems in confirming its "innocent" initial choices, the more narrative curation the narrator is exerting—in other words, the English novel of development demonstrates its protagonist's progress by having him flex his narrative control. The "innocence" of childhood is also a construction of larger, more mature narrative frame of the Bildungsroman's hero.

for cohesive selfhood and the tight bond with realism of the Bildungsroman. Indeed, I locate the transaction of debt and collection of that debt, a pitfall to be side-stepped in the Bildungsroman, as a central drive in Collins's suspense plots of the 1860s. I contend that Nietzsche's vision of debt as a signifier of socio-economical, moral, and genealogical lack is what drives the main plot of development in sensation novels by Wilkie Collins. Debt comes to signify what the time of youth means in the larger Bildung plot. The telos of the Bildung plot—maturity—is switched to the telos of solvency in the sensation fiction plot. Like Robinson Crusoe, Collins's novels of the 1860s, namely *The Woman in White* (1860), *No Name* (1862), *Armada* (1864), and *The Moonstone* (1868), keep an account of the evils and goods structuring the suspense plot through the thematics of debt and credit. Unlike the realist novels of the mid-century, Collins's novels of sensation and suspense show a world in which the contractual relationship of debtor and creditor, and the always-already condition of debt marking a character as ontologically lacking, is *a necessary element* in the governing system of a community. The genre tackles the representative problem of debt and selfhood head-on, unlike the Bildungsroman's allergic separation of debt and sense of self. The law, or even the private detective, might fail—but the account of debt and credit will always balance out through personal intuitions, unexpected recognitions, and even pure chance in the sensation novel. Forces of chance, fate, and probability in Collins are all in fact *determined* to restore the balance that starts out askew in each of the novels. By inquiring into the ways in which Collins's sensation novels of the 1860s bring about system of balancing of debt and credit in the narrative form, I will demonstrate that these novels, while having a progressive structure like that of the Bildungsroman, switch their telos from the protagonist's maturity or recognition, into mere solvency, or the stabilization of personal finance.

Specifically, some of the most suspenseful sequences in each novel end with a recognition scene gone awry: rather than a recognition of one's place in society or one's true identity, Collins's sensation novels entail "comparing of receipts" scenes that reveal the debt of the character deemed evil, and vouch for the collection of that debt by the character deemed good. The duration of suspense is the narrative time during which the "evil" characters try to hide or dissolve their debt through fraud; the suspense is only resolved when the fruition of the efforts of these "evil" characters are collected by the "good" characters, sublimated to a settlement of that debt. By making such account-keeping a central structure that governs the plots of suspense, Collins configures novelistic closure as a balancing of checks. In doing so, he not only reshapes the way in which the Bildungsroman of the previous decades formulated the closure of the novel from a *deliverance of promise* to a *payment of debt*, but also literalizes the experience of reading that modern readers of mystery genre are familiar with: reading for payoff.⁷

Narrative Closure as Collection of Debt

Consider: the 1976 film *Killing of a Chinese Bookie* opens with a scene in which Cosmo, the protagonist, finally pays the last installment of his long-standing debt. Having fulfilled his debt, a small talk starts between the once-debtor and once-creditor. Marty, the once-creditor, as a final

⁷ William Flesch argues that we are able to invest ourselves in a narrative through what he calls "altruistic punishment"—a punishment that prosocial members of a community inflicts on the more destructive members. Characters like Mr. Grimwig in *Oliver Twist*, who bets on Oliver stealing Mr. Brownlow's money, are "defectors from our point of view, a point of view we take to be correct" (Flesch 157). These defectors are expected, throughout the course of the narrative, to receive their comeuppance; and "we take pleasure in anticipating the confutation of such characters in a story, perhaps more pleasure than their actual confutation yields" (Flesch 157). This is the kind of pleasure that I am also locating in reading the suspense plots of Wilkie Collins; the vindication that the readers are made to desire and expect is heightened through the themes of debt and credit, compelling the readers to always look forward to a settlement of debt by the end of the plot. Thus, in Collins's sensation fiction, debt and its settlement come to etch the form of suspense and its payoff on the surface of the plot.

gesture of seeming good will attempts to extend their relationship: “Cosmo...anytime you need some help, come to me.” Cosmo smiles, and replies: “I don’t ever want to see you again.” The exchange emphasizes a particular souring in the relation between debtor and creditor. Debt, when paid off, unlike a promise duly kept, ends the relationship between the two parties, like a math problem that finally balances both sides of the equation, concluding the chain of transformations. Debt, unlike promise, lacks futurity; the connection between the debtor and creditor is an arduous duration that is better severed sooner than later. Payment of debt, in other words, induces the *amnesia* of the debtor-creditor relationship. Moreover, the individual is also put out of focus—debt does not require a specificity of the person and can transfer to entirely different individuals through blood-relationship, marriage, and even friendship. The individual matters less than the relational value of the indebted identity; debt slips through people, spreads like disease, and incurs more and more negative value as time passes. Whereas a promise does not necessarily gain interest, debt certainly does. The duration of debt, in other words, is itself *borrowed time*. Unlike the promise of the Bildungsroman protagonist that calls attention to the individual progress and the heroic elevation of the ordinary entity, the debt of the sensation novel, I will argue, only highlights relationships, specifically binaries or doubles, like debtor and creditor. These characteristics of debt—fulfilment as dissolution of relationship, devaluation of the individual for the emphasis of binary relationship, and the corruption of one’s character during the time of debt—are made most salient in periods of heightened suspense in Collins’s sensation fiction.

At first glance, Collins’s sensation novels of the 1860s, which were his most popular and canonically established examples of the genre, all involve a progress of sorts in their protagonists that is achieved specifically through the telling of their suspense plots. The individual who was dramatized as the narrative hero in the Bildungsroman is now sensationalized. *The Woman in White*

(1860) stars Walter Hartright, who begins as a lowly art instructor, but by the end of the novel marries the aristocratic Laura Fairlie and has a son who will inherit the estate. Magdalen and Norah Vanstone of *No Name* (1862) fall quickly from their upper middle-class status to orphans of no inheritance with the onset of the suspense plot, but are both married to upstanding men by the end of the novel, with Norah's marriage having restored their lost fortune and even more income than before. The two Allan Armadales of *Armadales* (1864) begin as tragically as one could: one born racially marked, abused by both his parents, the other born without a father, without inheritance, without society. However, by the last page of the novel they together provide both senses of social progress in men: the lighter Allan Armadale, having inherited the Armadale fortune, marries the love of his life, and in that same moment the darker Allan Armadale has "a career before [him]," with the "first light of the new day...rest[ing] tenderly on his face" (*AD* 677). Thus, one Armadale signifies the marriage plot and the inheritance plot having arrived safely at their destination, while the other Armadale comes to mirror what Agnes's upward-pointing finger signified in *David Copperfield*—endless futurity, through his promise in vocation. Franklin Blake in *The Moonstone* (1868) begins as a man of not only many debts and a low reputation,⁸ but also a "universal genius" who dabbles in everything, but cannot settle on anything (*TM* 29); in the end, he is married to the affluent Rachel Verinder, and manages to bring together witness accounts of various characters into a coherent story of recovering the secret of the diamond's theft. In these basic outlines, these novels seem to deliver a satisfying ending of the protagonists having reached personal, social, and

⁸ Betteredge describes that as a child, Franklin "had a transaction" with Betteredge, in which he borrowed "a ball of string, a four bladed knife, and seven-and sixpence in money—the colour of which last [Betteredge has] not seen, and never expect to see again" (*MM* 28). He also testifies that "the more money [Franklin] had, the more he wanted: there was a hole in Mr Franklin's pocket that nothing would sew up" (*MM* 29). Here, Franklin is no better than, say, Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice*, in his penchant for accruing debt.

economic development. *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* in particular, demonstrate their protagonists' established authority by their being the editor and narrator of the novels. Their narrative control even seems to mimic that in *David Copperfield* and *Jane Eyre*. However, these changes are *not* brought upon by the steady signaling of the "adult form" that is promised the hero of Bildungsroman. In fact, the characters' progress only comes about as a byproduct of collecting the injurious debt of another character, which happens with the resolution of suspense. What Moretti called the "interlude" of youth that becomes excised by the end of the plot to give rise to the image of a formed identity in the Bildungsroman now has been converted into debt that is paid off by the ending of the novel.

Receipt or Recognition?

In *The Woman in White*, the central sleight-of-hand that confirms the Secret of Sir Percival Glyde involves a textual magic trick; Sir Glyde had forged the marriage of his parents for his inheritance of Blackwater Park on the church's wedding registry, but there existed a copy of the original before those alterations were made. Like *The Moonstone*, at the heart of the plot is not only the villain's debt (which spurs on Sir Glyde's need to marry Laura, and switch her place with Anne Catherick), but also his Secret (capitalized in the book constantly), which is that he accepted Blackwater Park as his legacy, when he was in fact a bastard child. The central pivot of changing places takes place when Walter compares the two documents as if comparing two receipts: one could say that wedding registries are receipts of marriages. What is revealed in the comparison of receipts is what Ian Duncan calls, in reference to *The Moonstone*, an "ontological lack" ("The Moonstone" 307). Fittingly, Sir Percival Glyde's real status as a bastard who took the estate that he did not deserve, his ontological lack, is signified by a literal lack on the bottom of the page of

the unadulterated wedding registry—the “blank space,” indeed, “tells the whole story,” as Walter cries. He then goes on to imagine a sadistic tear-down of Sir Percival’s whole personage:

The idea that he was not Sir Percival Glyde at all, that he had no more claim to the baronetcy and to Blackwater Park than the poorest labourer who worked on the estate, had never once occurred to my mind...The disclosure of that secret might, in past years, have hanged him—might now transport him for life. The disclosure of that secret, even if the sufferers by his deception spared him the penalties of the law, would deprive him, at one blow, of the name, the rank, the estate, the whole social existence that he had usurped. This was the Secret, and it was mine! A word from me; and house, lands, baronetcy, were gone from him for ever—a word from me, and he was driven out into the world, and nameless, penniless, friendless outcast! (*WW* 521)

The crime of forgery that Sir Glyde had committed is the utmost robbery and concealment of debt in Walter’s eyes, as it is what has provided him his “name, the rank, the estate, the whole social existence.” The magic trick of turning someone no different from “the poorest labourer” to “Sir Percival Glyde” was accomplished by his borrowing a social existence and identity he did not possess to begin with. This act of magical thinking—the thought that filling in the gap on the page would fill the void of his illegitimacy—is parallel to the basic logic of taking a loan: of owing, of being in debt, of spending what you don’t have. While Sir Glyde and Walter Hartright do not meet until much later, and Walter does not seem like the direct creditor to Sir Glyde’s debt, Sir Glyde’s ontological lack is what allowed him to usurp Laura’s estate through his marriage to her; by uncovering Sir Glyde’s debt, Walter collects the benefit, as it lets him render null the marriage between Laura and Sir Glyde, so that Walter may step into Sir Glyde’s position. Compare this to the last moment of the novel, in which Walter, after having delivered the entire narrative as a part of his legal evidence of Laura Fairlie’s legitimacy, is presented with not only her legacy (Limmeridge House) but also his reproductive, upper-class futurity. Marian Halcombe presents Walter’s son who shares his father’s name to Walter himself in a dramatic gesture of their reclamation of inheritance from Sir Glyde’s magic trick:

“Do you talk in that familiar manner of one of the landed gentry of England? Are you aware, when I present this illustrious baby to your notice, in whose presence you stand? Evidently not! Let me make two eminent personages known to one another: Mr. Walter Hartright—the *Heir of Limmeridge*.” (*WW* 643)

In proving Laura’s legitimacy, Walter in fact proves the illegitimacy of her first husband, Sir Percival Glyde, revealing his magic trick of forgery, and airing his debt.⁹ Moreover, Walter seems to collect the debt by unveiling its concealment, thereby gaining legitimacy as the self-making narrator who accumulates various voices and converts them into a coherent story of Sir Glyde’s illegitimacy. The keystone to this smoothed narrative of many voices is precisely this scene of receipt comparison: this scene specifically comes right at the dissolution of a suspenseful sequence in which Walter approaches Sir Glyde’s Secret in incremental steps, and the recognition of Sir Glyde’s debt comes as the payoff of this suspense. As Mario Ortiz-Robles points out, “each of the individual narratives functions as a kind of deposition or affidavit” (848), forming a quasi-legal document that proves Sir Glyde’s debt and guilt (which are indistinguishable) and Walter’s credit and trustworthiness (again, same difference). Replacing Sir Glyde by exposing his debt while raising his own credibility, Walter as Laura’s husband reaps not only the sweet recompense of her aristocratic status but is even paid interest for his authorly troubles: “the Heir of Limmeridge,” who by bearing Walter’s name redoubles his value. Taken as a whole, the novel at first glance seems to revolve around the spectacle of switching the two women, but it actually centers around the real changelings of collection and debt:¹⁰ Walter Hartright and Sir Percival Glyde.

⁹ Ann Cvetkovich argues that the bodily sensation, and Walter’s susceptibility, works to give rise to the sensational plot that “makes it possible for the bourgeois hero magically to ascend to the status of the aristocracy” (27).

¹⁰ Note, also, that the idea of “collecting” debt also requires the collection of disparate narratives, and the ultimately the collection of a cohesive selfhood, as one would in a Bildungsroman, except strictly through a dynamic of an already-incurred debt being balanced out. Rather than building the credit of character as

The form of the recognition scene, which Ben Parker describes in his reading of Dickens's novels as "the series of revelations that illuminates all of these [past] questions, retroactively aligning all pertinent information and producing a coherent image of the past" (140), maps neatly onto the function of the scene of receipt in Collins's *The Woman in White*. By revealing Sir Percival Glyde's ontological lack and answering all the questions of Sir Glyde's suspicious mysteries, Walter Hartright improves his own image by counterexample, as the bringer of light to this sordid plot of Sir Glyde's debt. In other words, Collins's sensation novel, by shifting the game of youthful promise into a game of debt, also distorts a conventional feature of the Bildungsroman, the scene of recognition, into a scene of receipt. What this shift does in the form of the recognition scene is that it makes it strictly relational—no longer an event of the individual's "own historical dissolution" (Parker 138), in which the hero of the Bildungsroman recognizes his or her own secret, the sensational scene of receipt comparison shows one individual rupturing the other's history into pieces, revealing the secret that lets one gain narrative authority and credit. Put differently, the self-development that we see in the Bildungsroman mutates in the sensation novel into a financial development *that can only come at the cost of another's descent*. While this was already somewhat of a case in *David Copperfield*, in that David was only able to define his selfhood by negating others', the thematics of debt and credit make this much more transparent, and more causally related to each other. The debt of another is the credit of the protagonist; the economy of good and evil is clearly that of a zero-sum game.

Collins's most famous novel, *The Moonstone*, has been theorized most frequently in terms of colonial guilt and exchange. Ilana Blumberg reads a system of gift-giving in *The Moonstone*,

one would in a Bildungsroman, the sensation novel fills back up a lack that is already in place, through the idea of collecting what is already broken to pieces.

claiming that “*The Moonstone*’s representation of ethically flawed exchange unfolds against the unattainable measure of the *free* gift, the gift that exacts no recompense from its recipient and thus affirms its giver’s generosity rather than his or her rapacity” (166). Ian Duncan also reads a fundamental narrative flow of colonial debt in the novel, pointing out that “debt is the foreign agent (‘a strange gentleman, speaking English with a foreign accent’ [91]) that invades the house alongside the Moonstone to undermine Blake’s character, and debt drives Ablewhite to pocket the jewel” (“The Moonstone” 307). *The Moonstone*, a darker, colonial reflection of *The Woman in White*, indeed revolves around the same structure of borrowing and returning, debt and credit. The opening and the closing of the novel signify the whole plot as the British domestic space being lent the Indian Diamond, until it is finally returned to its original place, as if the narrative debt—signified by the colonial guilt of the British empire raiding India—was paid by its return.¹¹ The novel’s entire mystery plot is sandwiched between two eyewitness accounts that take place completely outside the British domestic space: the Prologue, which details the Storming of Seringapatam in which the Moonstone is looted out of its original place, and then the Epilogue, the return of the diamond to its resting place. The ominous, and yet thrilling, last lines of the novel declare: “So the years pass, and repeat each other; so the same events revolve in the cycles of time. What will be the next adventure of the Moonstone? Who can tell!” (TM 472).

Although the introduction to the Penguin edition claims that “*The Moonstone* is then as much about a quest for a self as it is about finding the lost gem through salvaging the past” (TM xxvii), one could argue that Franklin’s real progress is that he has better credit by the end of the novel; he begins with debts and thus bad credit, and yet as he aids in exposing the true debtor of

¹¹ See Ilana Blumberg 169-174, Ian Duncan “The Moonstone” 300-301, Caroline Reitz 100, Monica M. Young-Zook 236-237, Lauren Goodlad 405-406, and Nathan Hensley 103-126 for colonial histories and narrative guilt in Wilkie Collins.

the plot, Godfrey Ablewhite, his credit is cleansed—the dissolution of the suspense, as with *The Woman in White*, delivers and erases the debt of Franklin as it did the low-class origins of Walter Hartright. The novel reveals the true identity of Godfrey Ablewhite in the most transparent case of the literary magic trick yet: Sergeant Cuff’s way of revealing the true criminal behind the plot of *The Moonstone*. He writes down the name of the thief of the diamond in a sealed envelope, and asks Franklin to “wait to open the envelope... till you have got at the truth, and then compare the name of the guilty person, with the name that I have written in that sealed letter” (TM 438). After a suspenseful chapter of meticulously tracking down the disguised Godfrey Ablewhite, losing him once, finding him again, waiting until the morning to knock on the door of his lodging, discovering his dead body still in disguise, and even taking the time to stretch out the suspense by describing in detail how Cuff is pulling off Godfrey’s wig, beard, and finally even washing off his complexion, Cuff finally completes his textual magic trick:

‘Open the sealed letter first--the letter I gave you this morning.’
I opened the letter.
‘Read the name, Mr. Blake, that I have written inside.’
I read the name that he had written, it was--*Godfrey Ablewhite*.
‘Now,’ said the Sergeant, ‘come with me, and look at the man on the bed.’
I went with him, and looked at the man on the bed.
GODFREY ABLEWHITE! (TM 447-8).

The (perhaps overly) transparent device of suspense—planting and payoff—bears a resemblance to comparing receipts. Like *Woman in White*, the binary relationship is clear; Godfrey’s debt is collected by Walter.

But what *The Moonstone*’s ending really signals to us is the cyclical nature of the balancing of checks, and how the narrative of personal progress matters little in the question of debt. The above mentioned comparing of receipts scene with Sergeant Cuff is in fact the very last time that we hear from Franklin—his last words are specifically “GODFREY ABLEWHITE!” (MS 448).

His last words are the literal acknowledgment of receipt of debt in the form of comparing Godfrey's name on Cuff's note and the dead man's identity; moreover, the narrative itself seems to dismiss Franklin's character from then on. As if the settlement of debt was all that was required of the character, Franklin is only half-heartedly mentioned once more, by Gabriel Betteredge:

My purpose, in this place, is to state a fact in the history of the family, which has been passed over by everybody, and which I won't allow to be disrespectfully smothered up in that way. The fact to which I allude is—the marriage of Miss Rachel and Mr. Franklin Blake. This interesting event took place at our house in Yorkshire, on Tuesday, October ninth, eighteen hundred and forty-nine. I had a new suit of clothes on the occasion. And the married couple went to spend the honeymoon in Scotland. (*TM* 462)

Franklin's marriage is reduced to a mere "interesting event," one that is also somehow prone to be "passed over by everybody;" the event that should have been one of the crowning jewels of Franklin's journey is overshadowed by Gabriel Betteredge's "new suit of clothes" for the occasion. Even more damning is the way in which the news of Rachel's pregnancy is announced. Betteredge *knows* in advance of even Franklin that Rachel might be pregnant, because he reads the phrase "one Child born" in "a domestic bit concerning Robinson Crusoe's marriage" in his endlessly consulted proto-Bildungsroman. Betteredge interrupts Franklin before he announces the news, in fact, and announces that he "needn't say a word more"—and thus goes Franklin's chance to even articulate the conception of his own child, displaced by the words of one Robinson Crusoe (*TM* 462, 463). Franklin's progress is not noteworthy; it is interchangeable with Robinson Crusoe's, as it is textually demonstrated. In comparison to the soaring buildup, and the grand emphasis lent to Walter Hartright's recognition of his son as "Mr. Walter Hartright—the *Heir of Limmeridge*," Franklin's payoff to his *Bildung* is constantly made feeble, brushed off like a mere narrative necessity (*WW* 643, original emphasis).

Franklin's personal triumph is given up, I argue, because of two reasons: one, that as Franklin has collected the debt of Godfrey Ablewhite, thereby settling the "lack" that the narrative began with, he is of no use to a narrative that is concerned not with individuals but rather with transactions between them; two, *The Moonstone* will need to make use of its remaining narrative space not to honor the fruits of individual progress, but rather the unending exchange of wealth and value. The ending of the novel atomizes the course of Franklin's development, and with it the idea of individual development itself. As we get closer to the inevitable close of the novel, the story that Franklin so painstakingly weaved and compiled (as his own character consolidated into the role of the good English husband and father), starts to unravel once more. The various testimonials from different characters breathlessly diverge, and in the final eyewitness account that Mr. Murthwaite provides of the Hindu ritual in which the Moonstone is restored to its temple once more, the three Indians that shadowed the narrative thus far as one unit separate, "in three separate directions...never more were they to look on each other's faces," never to be reunited (*MS* 471). They are seen walking through the crowd in different directions, quite literally diverging: Murthwaite makes special note that "in three different directions, [he] saw the crows pat, at one and the same moment" (*MS* 471). Then of course, the last page of the novel triumphantly, and yet also ominously, signals the inconsequence of all that the readers have read so far:

Yes! after the lapse of eight centuries, the Moonstone looks forth once more, over the walls of the sacred city in which its story first began. How it has found its way back to its wild native land—by what accident, or by what crime, the Indians regained possession of their sacred gem, may be in your knowledge, but is not in mine. You have lost sight of it in England, and (if I know anything of this people) you have lost sight of it for ever. So the years pass, and repeat each other; so the same events revolve in the cycles of time. What will be the next adventures of the Moonstone? Who can tell? (*TM* 472)

"The same events?" one might ask here. The allusion to repetition is significant: it calls attention to the uselessness of being so held in suspense throughout the novel. The same, complicated events

of *The Moonstone* are to be repeated all over again after years pass—Franklin’s puny plot of self-cohesion was to no avail, after all. Even the form of the text emphasizes this “outside” of the narrative progression that Franklin’s, and the suspense plot’s, take part in. The prologue and the epilogue take place outside the British national boundary, focusing solely on the Moonstone and its “exotic” surroundings; they both also are distinctly written by people who are not involved in the suspense plot at all. Regardless, they mark the first and last words of the novel. By sandwiching the main suspense plot of Franklin’s *Bildung*, the prologue and the epilogue come to formally atomize the plot as an episode contained within a seemingly larger universe, an unfathomable narrative time. This signals a shift in Collins’s formulation of the national, masculine *Bildung*—the individual narrative of progress does not matter in the larger context of debt and credit that we see in the colonial history of the diamond. The narrative opts to grant more significance and intrigue to the colonial exchange and futurity of the diamond, and not the subject-formation of Franklin Blake. The substitution of the novel’s interest—from subject-formation to colonial marker of wealth and exchange—is most transparently felt in the title, *The Moonstone*, the way that novels discussed in the previous chapters were titled after their protagonists, like *David Copperfield* or *Jane Eyre*.

In marking this shift, Collins’s fiction beckons the eventual arrival of Hardy’s bleak Naturalism epitomized in *Jude the Obscure*, where each organism’s (Jude’s, in this case) potential for development does not matter at all in the grand scale of the narrative, and will most likely be thwarted if observed long enough. As Emily Steinlight had argued, “individuality and statistical aggregation cease to be opposed; the very traits that define the protagonists’ identities render them both generalizable and redundant” (200-201). Here, the Victorian *Bildung* comes to die: Steinlight’s reading positions the novel’s protagonist as a feeble singular organism “at the limit of

nonbeing” precisely because it is an individual, and the individual’s life “comes to signify a peculiar error in the singular organism’s growth process: a failure to die” (Steinlight 202, 203). In a broad scale, one could contend that the genre of sensation fiction functions as a bridge in cultural formulation of literary Bildung: between the mid-nineteenth century autobiographical novels of individual development and the Naturalist novels of individual descent at the end of the nineteenth century. But unlike *Jude the Obscure*, where the individual life is subsumed under the aggregate as an interchangeable, redundant, and insignificant germ, *The Moonstone* emphasizes that the individual life is subsumed by the debt-credit relationship that is episodically created and resolved, in an infinite cycle of credit economy. Collins’s suspense plot, which started more as a spectacular ruse to bring Walter Hartright’s Bildung to completion, is finally atomized and contained within a larger cosmic time in *The Moonstone*. In this shift, the structure of suspense and its payoff is utilized in the plot as a time during which this transformation takes place like a magic trick of balancing checks.

This pattern of borrowing and collecting through sequences of suspense can be observed in two other novels written by Collins in the 1860s. In *No Name* and in *Armadale*, Collins pushes the binary relationship of debt and credit further to the point that all kinds of individual character, not just the protagonist, lose meaning against the sheer weight of the financial relationship. We see that marriage plots and inheritance plots, both common gimmicks of the Bildungsroman and sensation novel genres, are now completely subsumed under thematics of debt in Collins. Through the purview of debt and credit, marriage plots and inheritance plots are distilled in a language of contact and deferral that pushes the social action (and reward) corresponding to the speech act to a later time. It might be said that the duration of suspense turns the promise of each social contract to a debt to be collected.

No Name, which was published two years after the huge success of *The Woman in White*, opens like what could be a Jane Austen novel, with scenes of the happy Vanstone household interacting with other families, staging a play for a domestic performance; Magdalen, one of the two Vanstone daughters, even falls in love with her acting partner and family friend Frank Clare, culminating in his proposal. Sundeep Bisla comments that the “ideal Victorian country home” of *No Name*’s opening is “directly parodying (or impersonating) in the First Scene the ‘homely’ style of the domestic novel,” only to disclose its artifice with the suspense plot later on (2). I wholeheartedly agree—the painstaking details to the small domestic drama of who gets to play which role in a neighborhood play, and how Frank and Magdalen slowly develop a courtship, would read very familiarly to a reader of any Austen novel. However, the tragic magic takes place soon after. Mr. and Mrs. Vanstone were in secret not legally married until very recently, right after Mr. Vanstone’s real, estranged wife died abroad; thus, the will that Mr. Vanstone had written before his recent marriage to the current Mrs. Vanstone holds no legal power, as “it destroys the validity of any will which he may have made as a single man” (*NN* 107). When Mr. and Mrs. Vanstone both die in an unfortunate coincidence of events before Mr. Vanstone could change his will and reassert “his testamentary intentions in the character of a husband,” his entire fortune is transferred to his brother (and later his brother’s son), and the Vanstone daughters are magically turned “Nobody’s Children,” with no inheritance or home (*NN* 107, 109). Mr. Vanstone’s sham marriage, his ontological debt, comes to nullify his will, and transfer his sins to the children, while his long-estranged brother, who was deprived of the Vanstone fortune earlier in his life (when it was given to Mr. Vanstone), receives it finally. Mr. Vanstone’s brother soon dies, denying any share to the Vanstone sisters, and his son, Noel, inherits the fortune. The generation has changed, but the

relationship of debt and credit still exists, except flipped, between the two Vanstone households.¹² Similarly to the way that the disclosure of Sir Glyde's Secret gave Walter the chance to re-narrate the mysteries that came before and appropriate it to his cause, the revelation of Mr. Vanstone's secret (also an illegitimate marriage) makes the sisters see "for the first time...the whole sequence of events...as plainly as the cloudless blue of the sky" (*NN* 112). The Vanstone sisters' ontological lack inherited from their father is revealed from the get-go, and Noel Vanstone becomes the lucky recipient who collects their debt.

But the real sleight of hand comes at the end of the suspense plot as a whole, which further cements the paradigm of debt and credit in characters' progress through the narrative. The plot is set up to be Magdalen's tortuous progress to regain her family name and estate, with her using the acting skills she proved earlier (in the Austen-like domestic plot) to feign a false identity to marry Noel Vanstone, the man who received the estate that was to be hers. However, all her efforts turn up empty. She marries Noel Vanstone, to the degradation of her virtue and character, only to be found out in her true identity by the evidence of a piece of cloth from a dress she was wearing while in disguise, and effaced from Noel Vanstone's will just before his sudden death, receiving nothing. Why does this happen to our protagonist? I contend that Magdalen cannot balance out the original debt of her father's illegitimate marriage throughout the novel, because she only *borrow*s further. Magdalen's efforts to refill her lack of family name and money are all acts of disguise, achieved through her borrowing tropes of the earlier domestic drama: specifically citing her acting

¹² The legal machinations and loopholes that allow this unrealistic series of events to happen is a hallmark of a sensation novel. However, in the context of debt-credit relationship, we can see how this plot contrivance serves not just the extension of readers' interest but also the sheer relational structure of the credit economy (where there is credit, there is debt) over the individual agents. In other words, such interest-suspending plotlines of the sensation novels were the genre's gimmick, borrowing Sianne Ngai's words, which "reflects nothing less than the basic laws of capitalist production and its abstractions as these saturate everyday life" (3).

experience in the domestic play, she dons several different identities to get information on Noel Vanstone and approach him under a false name. In other words, she borrows from her previous plotlines—staging performances, courtship, and even proposal—to be repurposed in the suspense plot of seducing the inheritor of her fortune. Already in a state of lack, she borrows further, beholding herself to higher stakes. By placing the heroine of the suspense plot, rather than the villain, in the status of a debtor, *No Name* further demonstrates that being in debt subjects one to a degeneration of one's moral and physical health; Magdalen increasingly becomes weak, ill, and loses the brimming vivacity that she possessed in the beginning of the novel, as if she is paying her debt that way.

Magdalen's penchant to borrow earlier plotlines and disguises, while already in a state of debt, is further consolidated when Magdalen and Captain Wragge peruse a book that Wragge has phenomenally named "Skins to Jump Into": a book containing "a list of individuals retired from this mortal scene," whose identities Wragge and Magdalen can slip into (*NN* 263). Identities are to be borrowed—by depicting this ledger that indexes possible husks of persons to wear, *No Name* reinforces its genre's divergence from the Bildungsroman, putting into question the integrity between one's name and subjecthood. While the prime examples of the British Bildungsroman, such as *David Copperfield* or *Jane Eyre*, show the suspenseful progression in which one's subjecthood is made to smoothly match one's name, the sensation novel shows the two unraveling in and through the suspense plot. Magdalen's descent continues even further after her failure with Noel Vanstone; but she again misguidedly thinks to disguise herself as a servant, and steal Noel's Secret Trust written to his friend, George Bartram, which she believes holds the key to regaining her fortune. One cannot help but note the degradation even in her disguise: she starts by impersonating a governess, then a young Miss Bygrave, and finally a female servant. Yet again,

she is found out, and this time cast away, reduced to the worst of borrowers—the kind that doesn’t even enter a contractual relationship—a thief.

In the final Scene of the novel,¹³ Magdalen is “hidden in the squalid by-ways of London, under a false name; cast, friendless and helpless, on the mercy of strangers, by illness which had struck her prostrate, mind and body alike” (578). In the same Scene, the readers will be shocked to learn that Norah has been on a self-making journey of her own all this time without borrowing any guises or lowering her reputation, and has built a true courtship plot of her own, falling in love with her employer as a governess. As a result, she inadvertently marries the exact man who allows her to regain the full Vanstone inheritance, George Bartram, the man that Magdalen tried to steal Noel’s Secret Trust from. Norah, who steadily builds the self, rather than borrowing quick guises as Magdalen does, is able to absolve herself her parents’ debt, although Magdalen is given the space of the protagonist. The narration sums up this bait-and-switch transparently:

Norah, whose courage under undeserved calamity, had been the courage of resignation—Norah, who had patiently accepted her hard lot; who, from first to last, had meditated no vengeance, and stooped to no deceit—Norah had reached the end which all her sister’s ingenuity, all her sister’s resolution and all her sister’s daring, had failed to achieve. Openly and honorably, with love on one side and love on the other, Norah had married the man who possessed the Combe-Raven money—and Magdalen’s own scheme to recover it, had opened the way to the event which had brought husband and wife together! (NN 598)

The reveal that Norah is the one to resolve the debt, and not Magdalen, already undermines the status of the narrative protagonist, which is a pattern that we saw in *The Moonstone*, and will be pushed to its limit in *Armada*. The devaluation of the status of the protagonist, coupled with the slipperiness of identity, further emphasizes the importance of the debt-credit relationship over an individual’s progress. What also highlights the debt-credit relationship between Magdalen and

¹³ Collins organizes the novel in seven “scenes”—within those scenes are multiple chapters, and between those scenes are progressions in plot through letters and notes from disparate characters.

Norah is the fact that it was due to Magdalen's incurring of debt that Norah was able to collect: as it was briefly noted in the last line of the previous excerpt, Norah clarifies in her letter that:

You ought to be especially interested, my love, in this marriage, for you are the cause of it. If I had not gone to Aldborough to search for the lost trace of you—if George had not been brought there at the same time by circumstances in which you were concerned, my husband and I might never have met. When we look back to our first impressions of each other, we look back to you (*NN* 597).

This link between the debt that Magdalen incurs and the credit that Norah collects strengthens the relationship of exchange in the novel, rather than the individual progress that Magdalen or Norah makes or fails to make. This bait-and switch forms a binary similar to that we already observed in *The Woman in White*. However, unlike Walter Hartright and Sir Glyde in *The Woman in White*, Magdalen and Norah are not in an opposing relationship where one directly profits off of the other's loss; what makes them debtor and creditor from the readers' perspective is that they are part of a system in which when one reaches the lowest point, the other is able to achieve their highest, through various chances and narrative machinations in the causal links. By putting the sisters not in a direct oppositional relationship with each other but still showing that through chance, one's debt—Crusoe's entry in the "Evil" column—is balanced out in the end by the other's credit—Crusoe's entry in the "Good" column—Collins further shifts the focus of his suspense plot to the magical balancing act of moral value. Of course, it is also important that this balancing act is what concludes the narrative, like a debt resolved. When the sisters are united, Norah is able to hand Magdalen the document that reduced her to a thief—the Secret Trust. The revelation of the Secret Trust has had a profound "legally binding, as well as morally binding," effect—it allows the sham marriage between Magdalen and Noel Vanstone to finally register, and allow Magdalen to take the half of the original fortune, just as she had planned from the onset of the suspense plot. In other words, Magdalen's gamble finally pays off, and she would be able to claim the prize, should she

use this Secret Trust as the receipt. However, this will again obligate Magdalen, as it comes from the effects of her disguising under a false name, loaning identities and plotlines. Thus, Magdalen chooses this time, *correctly*, not to incur any more narrative debt. She tears the Secret Trust apart, giving up her half of the fortune that was already collected by Norah in her honest marriage, and cries: “I will owe nothing to my past life...I have parted with it, as I have parted with those torn morsels of paper...I will take from *you*, what I would never have taken, if that letter had given it to me. The end I dreamed of has come” (NN 607). Magdalen’s virtuous and correct choice in the narrative rule of debt as evil and credit as good, demonstrates how a debtor who has paid off his or her debt will be averse to incur any more—Magdalen’s refusal to further “owe” anything, or “take” anything, testifies for this impulse that we initially felt in Cosmo’s line, “I never want to see you again.” Put differently, rather than building up to the fulfillment of the promise as Bildungsroman, these sensation novels use suspense plots like a mystery box, into which askew debt-credit relationships go at the beginning of the novel, and are pulled out at the end transformed, balanced, and finished.

Thus far, I have tried to show how *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* twist the notion of individual progress as that which cannot come without profiting off of another’s loss by setting up the suspense plot’s revelation as a dissolution of debt. *No Name* shifts that relationship from the notion of individual progress even further, by representing such a debt-credit relationship working even beyond a simple protagonist-villain relationship; the system of the novel, through its use of chance and coincidence, reinforces that act of balancing the check through the narrative plot. Rather like the debt-credit binaries that these novels are toying with, Collins himself seems to work through binaries of narrative structures. On one hand, *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* both show a clear switching of places between the male protagonist who organizes the

narrative and the villainous male foil who falls from grace through the revelation of their debt. On the other hand, *Armada* and *No Name* involve two protagonists who share a last name, and form a less causal credit-debt relationship. In these cases, one disguises their identity to repay a debt that the other collects in the form of a successful marriage/inheritance plot. In fact, in the case of *Armada*, the two protagonists share their first name too.

Armada is a novel distinctly about debt. Every relationship—kinship, friendship, even marriage—is construed with the shadow of debt cast over it.¹⁴ The novel’s opening twists of fate, the two protagonists’ care for each other, various employments throughout the novel, and the only honest marriage in the story are all dipped in language of contract and liability. In this way, the novel effaces all meaning and value attributed to the individual. The novel opens with a stunning sequence of events, in which one Allan Wrentmore takes the “fatal Armada name” from his father’s cousin, Allan Armada, who bequeaths the younger Allan his name and great fortune from the West Indies when his own son disgraces himself and becomes an outlaw (*AD* 27).¹⁵ However, the outlawed son (also named Allan Armada), disguises himself under the name Fergus Ingleby, and first befriends Allan Armada (originally Wrentmore), only to impersonate his friend so as to snatch away his beautiful betrothed, Miss Blanchard. Allan Armada finds this out, and chases Ingleby: the two men meet again on board *La Grace de Dieu*, and Allan Armada murders the other Allan Armada (Ingleby). The wheel of fortune turns, and years later the sons of the two Allan Armadas meet, only one of them knowing the sins of his father, and become the best of

¹⁴ See Noa Reich for legacy and inheritance as “not only capital but also liabilities” (31).

¹⁵ The novel is in fact *filled* with generational repetition. Mr. Pedgift and Mr. Pedgift junior are both lawyers, and marked by the same professionalism that seems to have been only amplified in the younger. In Mr. Bashwood and his son James Bashwood’s case, we even see that the taint of debt can even travel *up* the bloodline—his “boy turned out badly,” causing Mr. Bashwood to spend all his savings to cover his son’s debt, and even borrow further (*AD* 235).

friends. Both of these sons are named—of course—Allan Armadale (See Figure 1 for a visualization of this intentionally obfuscating network of connections). We see that the sins and the guilt of the fathers trickle down through two generational boundaries, signified by the cursed name of Allan Armadale and the Armadale colonial fortune. Note here the origin of the colonial guilt that shadows over the novel in subtle ways: the entire fund that the plot relies on comes from the West Indies, just as the entire mystery plot of *The Moonstone* is lifted from the foreign diamond. The guilt of theft (first of fortune, then of life) rests on Allan Wrentmore, but the guilt of disguise and forgery lies on Fergus Ingleby. In the next generation they switch places: Allan Wrentmore's son is in disguise, while Fergus Ingleby's son ends up receiving the fortune. Put differently, the markers of guilt and debt weave themselves through the bloodlines like strands of braids.



Figure 3-1. The first 50 pages of *Armadale* summarized.

The constant back-and-forth reversals of who is paying whom and who is indebted to whom resembles the reversal of fortunes that we saw in *No Name* (as Noel Vanstone received the fortune that his father lost, and the sisters lost the fortune that their father gained). *Armadale* seems to push it even further, and effaces all individual value that a name could have: there are five Allan Armadales introduced in the first fifty pages of the novel, and with the introduction of Lydia Gwilt (who dons at least three different identities throughout the novel), *names mean nothing to signify*

the individual behind them.¹⁶ What distinguishes each Allan Armadale is merely his contractual relationship to his indebted or credited other Allan Armadale, or the debt or fortune that he inherits from his father. Kinship is certainly contractual; the perverted inheritance plot in the opening of the novel suggests so.

But even outside blood relations, the feeling of care that the darker Allan Armadale (Ozias Midwinter) feels towards the lighter Allan Armadale as his best friend is expressed in contractual language. *Armadale*'s primal scene is that of the lighter Allan Armadale's dreaming aboard the ship that his father was killed by Ozias's father—the sons, already best friends, enter the space that marked their fathers as mortal enemies and complete “the fatal parallel between past and present” (*AD* 125). The dream, like the three visions that the witches offer Macbeth, consists of three tableaux that are successively fulfilled throughout the course of the novel, while Ozias struggles with the secret guilt of knowing that his father has killed the lighter Allan's father. Ozias, being a superstitious man, wants to make sure that no harm will come to the lighter Allan through these premonitions, and obsesses over these speculative images. This is where the comparison of receipts enters again, in the form of the exact fulfilment of these visual tableaux. One might see these as simple forebodings; however, they are one, void of actual identities—figures are only referred to as “Shadow of a Woman,” and “Shadow of a Man” (*AD* 142)—and two, they do not come from the older protagonist narrating retrospectively as someone who has already achieved the “adult form.” These snares are dreamt up by the lighter Armadale, and fulfilled by the darker Armadale (who in fact fills the position of the “shadow of a Man”), like a debt payment plan set up and carried out. The dream is also relayed to the readers in the form of a contract: the lighter Allan

¹⁶ Nathan Hensley also writes that, “critics who have focused on *Armadale*'s apparent preference for plot over character fail to notice that its plot is *about* character—how it can be falsified, how names do or don't match it, how one individual (in disguise) might inhabit several of them in sequence” (608).

Armada is withheld from speaking of it until Ozias can write it down; he refuses mere verbal agreement, opting for a proper “manuscript,” even signed by the lighter Allan “as if it was [his] ‘last dying speech and confession’” (AD 140). Ozias confirms, before the manuscript is read with Dr. Hawbury as witness, that “nothing [was] added to it, and nothing taken away” (AD 141). How exacting this phrase seems, on both diegetic and nondiegetic levels! The manuscript first states the date, person, and place of the dream, then proceeds to a numbered list of what happened in the dream in chronological order. The three tableaux that these numbered entries illustrate work as narrative receipts throughout the plot, as each scene gets fulfilled and reenacted by Ozias stepping into the position of The Shadow of the Man, and Lydia Gwilt into the position of The Shadow of the Woman. This way, the scenes of receipt comparison come to construe not only character relationships as contracts, but reader-text relationships too.

Armada does not stop there; it must also render the marriage and courtship plot as a debt plot as well. When the lighter Allan Armada expresses his desire to marry Neelie Milroy, they sit down to “manage this” future project of theirs, through “a division of labour” (AD 455). “You shall read—and I’ll take notes,” Neelie says (AD 455).

She produced forthwith a smart little pocket-book and pencil, and opened the book in the middle, where there was a blank page on the right hand and the left. At the top of the right-hand page she wrote the word *Good*. At the top of the left-hand page she wrote the word *Bad*. “‘Good’ means where the law is on our side,” she explained; “and ‘Bad’ means where the law is against us. We will have ‘Good’ and ‘Bad’ opposite each other, all down the two pages; and when we get to the bottom, we’ll add them up, and act accordingly (AD 455).

Neelie’s “Good” and “Bad” pages mirror Robinson Crusoe’s columns of good and evil. The marriage contract is exactly that—one in which the good and evil (“bad” in Neelie’s chart) of debt and credit must add up to a net positive, or the marriage shall be null.

The comparison of receipts in *Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* is tied to a system of debt and credit in which each resolution of suspense has been for someone's credit, and someone else's debt: what these novels show is a zero-sum game of not only financial debt but narrative debt. *No Name* and *Armada* shift this turn away from the individual even more conspicuously by letting the plot of debt borrow from, and ultimately overtake, all other plots of the novelistic genre. Thematics of debt seep into not only the domestic and corporate spheres of the plot, but also the singular and aggregate notions of identity; in doing so, the suspense plot of debt renders all aspects of the novel only in their relation to the concept of credit and debt. It points to a cultish, all-encompassing rhetoric of capitalism that Walter Benjamin describes in "Capitalism as Religion": indeed, within the narrative system of debt and credit, "everything only has meaning in direct relation to the cult: it knows no special dogma, no theology. From this standpoint, utilitarianism gains its religious coloring" (Benjamin 259). Suspense, in these novels, becomes the narrative space during which this cultish credit economy can overtake not only the values of the Bildungsroman but also of narrative itself. This way, these sensation novels give rise to not only a model of narrative in which debt and credit are at play on the thematic level, but also at the level of form: the novels themselves act as a contracted debtor to the readers waiting to collect their payoff of suspense.

Unlike the true mystery of the self and self-history in the Bildungsroman, the true mystery of the sensation novel becomes the mystery of money—where it comes from, where it goes, and who can trace its movement. While even in *Great Expectations* and *Little Dorrit*, the question of money was still tangled with the sense of self and the emergence of a coherent selfhood, Collins's novels seem to directly disregard the latter for the former: with this, the ultimate virtue that these novels advocate for becomes the virtue of honesty, of money that comes from clear sources, of

legitimate origin, though it never can. The vision of the sensation novel is a vision of utopia. As a form of spending beyond the real existing value, credit comes to form a utopic vision that can never be achieved, limited by the very fact of its ontological lack (that what you spent, you did not own). Therefore, the true mystery of the sensation novel is the mystery of money: the veneer of wealth or credibility is always already implicated in gaping debt in the past. Only in correctly evaluating and interpreting personal credibility does the sensational hero grasp the secret of character, and thus the secret of the story. Once the debt is aired, and the secret of the money resolved, severing the debt relationship among the characters, the narrative ends too, thus severing the reader's connection with the text. Indeed, the end of a sensation novel has been thought as an especially amnesiac experience: "in reading sensational novels our memory has a trick of deserting us, and our attention of playing truant," writes a critic of the genre in 1870 (Austin "Our Novels" 417-8).

Such system of narrative encourages a way of reading in terms of seeking balance: when a character dies, the readers are meant to look for a rebirth; when a character rises in esteem, we are encouraged to look for a downfall. Collins's system of debt and credit reaches beyond the simple artistic decision for character doubles or dramatic irony, as the dissolution of the suspense plot specifically hinges upon the planting and payoff of debt and credit. This reading practice applies to our reading consciousness as well. When we are put in a lull of suspense, we hold on—partly because, as many scholars have suggested, of uncertainty or entertained uncertainty of future narrative events (N. Carroll, Gerrig) or frustration of desire (Smuts)—but mostly because we know that our duration of waiting will be offset by the revelatory explanation that compensates our commitment to the plot. Beyond the simple experience of feeling rewarded when we reach the end of a novel, we feel as if the text *owes* us a proper, *correct* dissolution of suspense. I suspect that

Collins's model of narrative debt and its collection explains how repeat readers of suspense can still feel the agitation and frustration during the duration of suspense: the text and the reader enter a contractual relationship, where the reader comes to expect a payoff of their loan to the text. This loan is that of time and attention, and the utilitarian balancing of checks within the system of these sensation novels has effectively formed the readers' taste for cathartic payoff preceded by a period of speculative shifts in identity.

Collins's novels are distinct in my study because they seem at first glance to be outside the tradition of the Bildungsroman. However, in this chapter I have traced how the tropes of Bildungsroman thread the four novels together, even as their debt plots shift their focus from self-making to money-making. Thematized through debt, suspense becomes decoupled from the original aspirations of Bildung—that of correct British subject formation—and instead becomes attached to aspirations of financial accumulation, *while still retaining the structure of the Bildung plot*. Thus, attending to suspense in Collins's sensation fiction opens a way to read the genre as a direct descendent of Bildungsromane, one in which the structure is maintained but the telos is switched.

CHAPTER 4.

George Eliot and Bildung as Gambling

It is hard to think of a more heartbreaking final appearance of a female character in Victorian fiction than that of Gwendolen Harleth in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*. Our heroine, once so proud, beautiful, and rich, is reduced to a sobbing mess without a vocation, a fortune, or a husband. In fact, it's not only sad—it feels “wrong,” to borrow Jesse Rosenthal's word. In her last appearance, Gwendolen, excluded from Daniel's future abroad in his promised land, is left to mutter to herself, “I shall live. I shall be better” (Eliot 680). That Gwendolen shall *merely* live, without a concrete ending to her story, is quite a shocking decision on Eliot's part. None of Gwendolen's promising plot points (talent on stage, a rich family, a loving husband, or finally, a marriage to Daniel) come to fruition by the end, and many of the contemporary reviewers of the novel made sure to point out their dismay at Gwendolen and Deronda's ultimate parting. Edwin P. Whipple comments in an 1877 review that the “unanticipated conclusion of the story...[is that] which many readers have resented as though it were a personal grievance or affront” (31). An anonymous review in *The Spectator* claimed that “it would be hardly possible to exceed the pathos of the parting interview, where Gwendolen suddenly becomes aware that Deronda is not only engaged to another woman, but preparing to leave for the East, to absorb himself in a life ...which she has no interest or concern” (“Daniel Deronda” 1132).

In the critical history of the novel, the imbalance between its Jewish and British halves has often been blamed for the sense of wrongness that the readers feel when they reached the end of

the novel. For instance, F. R. Leavis lamented that “an actual great novel” could be “extricated...for separate publication as *Gwendolen Harleth*,” if the Jewish half could be cut away (137-8). Henry James mentions in his piece discussing *Daniel Deronda* that “all the Jewish burden of the story tended to weary [him],” and that while Gwendolen was a “masterpiece,” “Deronda, Mordecai, and Mirah are hardly more than shadows. They and their fortunes are all improvisation” (686, 687). David R. Carroll makes a similar argument the novel’s divided and flawed form, and Terry Eagleton emphasizes the contrast between the idealistic Jewish plot and the crumbling modern condition of the English plot, which is, to him, beyond compromise. However, more recent criticism has argued that the ending is invested with the complex system of moral feeling (Rosenthal), models of cosmopolitan distancing from the self (Anderson, *Powers*), and anxiety over the redundancy of the category of the individual in capitalist society (Gallagher).

What these more recent readings of the novel offer is a way to read *Daniel Deronda* as a larger novelistic arena in which different characters stand for figures that the novel either endorses or condemns. For Rosenthal, for instance, Gwendolen is condemned by the novel while Juliet Fenn is endorsed because Gwendolen stands for a more conventionally novelistic attentiveness to the individual, as opposed to the more de-individuated, middling aggregate of Juliet Fenn. For Anderson, Daniel is endorsed by the novel for his reflective dialogism that provides “an even-handed appraisal of cosmopolitanism,” whereas Daniel’s mother Leonora is condemned, because “as a willfully cosmopolitan woman who has renounced her cultural heritage, Leonora represents for Eliot the more extreme dangers of modern detachment” (Anderson, *Powers* 137, 139). For Gallagher, the three major characters—Grandcourt, Gwendolen, and Daniel—are part of a “central character system” that is “insistently organized around the problem of impaired motivation,” that mirrors the different types of psychic abnormalities outlined by Alexander Bain (132). In

characterizing these different cases of maladies, Gallagher goes on to argue that Daniel, unlike Gwendolen and Grandcourt, is endorsed by the novel (and Eliot) in his power to “reshap[e] reality” when he leaves to establish a Jewish homeland (155).

These influential accounts of the novel highlight the ways in which dissimilar characters and their fates in *Daniel Deronda* in fact support a more coherent ethical project for Eliot. I also follow these accounts of the novel to suggest that different figures in the character-system of *Daniel Deronda* demonstrate varying degrees of suspense in relation to their plots of self-formation. Specifically, the sliding scale of how much each character entertains suspense seems to correlate to how their endings are figured by the end of the novel. *What arises is a relation between suspense and individual progress: suspense negotiates the uncertainty of a character's telos.* For Mordecai, no suspense can exist, as his individual and national Bildungs have already been made certain. For Gwendolen, there can be nothing but suspense without proper closure or return that signifies a whole. Although she negates bad options in order to keep alive the possibility of a better choice, her suspense, thematized as gambling, can only really confirm her worst option. For Daniel, the novel's—and Eliot's—certain favorite, suspense strikes a better balance than the other two; he is allowed to negotiate his terms of belonging to a larger telos, in control of his techne of suspense. Eliot, by playing with how suspense can interact with the delivery of Bildung plots, tests the limits of the form. Indeed, the formal problem of suspense in the Bildungsroman is rendered *characterologically* in *Daniel Deronda*, in that the characters' differing relationships to uncertainty show how they grapple with the distortions that suspense provides in their individual progress.

Victorian Discourses on Gambling, and its Mismatch to Bildung

In this short interlude before we approach the characters in *Daniel Deronda*, I would like to introduce the Victorian discourses on gambling that situate its peculiar tension with the form of

the Bildungsroman. George Levine has said that “the Bildungsroman, like most Victorian novels, implicitly or explicitly sets money at the center of the psychological and social drama” (86). But what *kind* of money? John Ruskin distinguishes between money that is earned through toil and that earned through speculation; he asserts that money begotten through speculation is dishonest and characterized by “tricks of financial terminology”; he even jokes that the “s” is “usually redundant in the spelling”¹ (87). Speculation, which includes both gambling and financial investments, is naturally suspicious to the middle-class sentiments of Victorian times, as it was not only equated to easy money, which connoted a moral compromise², but also insinuated the possibility of *anyone* gaining access to all possible opportunities of social mobility, threatening the socio-economic system that the middle class themselves climbed, and wished to keep stable now that they were not hung on the bottom rung. However, as much consternation as the Victorians gave to sights of gambling and speculation, they could not easily separate them from the technologies of self-making that they had already internalized through the Victorian novel: marriage and work.³ As I’ve mentioned previously, these are two important ways that the Bildung reaches its telos. J. Jeffrey Franklin states that “the figure of gambling is used to trace connections at a broader level between the discourse of money, [...] marriage and work. Gambling is analyzed as that which binds together and problematizes this central trinity of Victorian concerns” (“Victorian Discourse” 900). Marriage, for women especially, was risky business; in a single round of bets, women were to secure both wealth and social credit through their marriage, and we see

¹ “Peculation” as a misappropriation of (public) funds; in other words, embezzlement and/or larceny.

² “Gambling rests on *chance*, and chance is a non-ethical (even *anti-ethical*) basis for the distribution of reward” (Downes 24, cited in Franklin, *Serious Play* 45).

³ See Jeffrey Franklin’s book-length treatment on play, chance, and gambling (*Serious Play*), and John Reed for the cultural and historical discourse of gambling in Victorian times.

countless bad bets made in fiction.⁴ Work, while it might seem to mean something closer to Ruskin's Toil, was also increasingly dependent on the whims of the market and financial investments (e.g., the tragic investment by Michael Henchard in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, or Mr. Lasmann's failed speculations in *Daniel Deronda*). And financial speculations, though more condoned than simple gambling, had similarly disastrous consequences, as demonstrated by the Railway Mania stock market bubble in the 1840s.⁵ Already, the play of risks is inherent in the two most recognizable teloi of Bildung. Gambling is close at heart to the self-making narrative of the Victorian Bildungsroman.

Metaphorically speaking, the experience of reading is also a risky gamble. Gillian Beer attests that "gambling and reading are both acts of desire whose longing is to possess and settle the future, but whose pleasure is in active uncertainty" ("Reader's Wager" 111). The uncertainty here is the possible site in which the reader can imagine alternate possibilities; the readers "multiply futures, select and delay" (Beer, "Reader's Wager" 111-2). They engage in identical activities, including "interpretation, hypothesizing, and prediction," and incite similar feelings, like "intense hope, desire, and anxiety" (Beer, "Reader's Wager" 115). While Beer does not label it so, this is precisely the function of suspense, especially that which is studied by many phenomenological accounts of reading.⁶ I find Beer's point useful to think alongside the thematics

⁴ Wickham, who elopes with Lydia in *Pride and Prejudice*, comes to mind. Though he initially seemed to be a good option in marriage, even to Elizabeth, he turns out to be one of the worst men in the novel. He himself is followed by a string of debts which he incurs by being a "gamester" (Austen 282). Even in Austen, gambling marks the worst kind of man that a woman can marry in the marriage market of the novel.

⁵ And it permeated everyday life of not only the middle class (who were more likely to financially speculate in the market) but also the working class, who gambled first at gaming rooms, then at their own homes when the former was made illegal in 1845 (Beer, "Reader's Wager").

⁶ For a gloss of these studies, see above, pp. 6-10.

of gambling in *Daniel Deronda*, as the language and metaphor of gambling come to be fundamentally related to the hopes and possibilities in an unfolding narrative in different characters' decision-making process. The spontaneous spawning of different probabilities, some of them pleasurable and some of them aversive, is what constitutes the element of suspense in a narrative when uncertainty is at play. As previously stated, the ability of suspense to open up the multiple forking paths is both a threat and boon to the narrative trajectory of the Bildungsroman; it fuels the drive of the narrative progression, and yet all suspense (and the incorrect paths) must be extinguished by the time the Bildung plot reaches its telos. Gambling seems to be one way that suspense can be thematized in a Victorian novel.

However, even more than just its function to create various possibilities in plot and sustain readerly interest in the plot, suspense, and its manifestation as scenes of gambling, pose a threat to the Victorian middle-class existence. Pierre Bourdieu's description of roulette illustrates this world of "equal" opportunity of which the Victorian bourgeoisie were so phobic:

Roulette, which holds out the opportunity of winning a lot of money in a short space of time, and therefore of changing one's social status quasi-instantaneously, and in which the winning of the previous spin of the wheel can be staked and lost at every new spin, gives a fairly accurate image of this imaginary universe of perfect competition or perfect equality of opportunity, a world without inertia, without accumulation, without heredity or acquired properties, in which every moment is perfectly independent of the previous one, every soldier has a marshal's baton in his knapsack, and every prize can be attained instantaneously, by everyone, so that at each moment anyone can become anything. (Bourdieu 15)

In a sense, this kind of gambling of pure chance points to a pure form of free market that sheds all its guises and tethers to previous organizations of society, and where one person's life does not meaningfully accumulate the experiences it goes through. As each round of bets is set, the previous

round ceases to exist.⁷ Suspense is constantly renewed, but to no particular telos, except to repeat itself. Suspense, in extreme bouts of uncertain gambling like in roulette, becomes a masturbatory repetition wherein the telos disappears and the techne perpetuates. This, in the frame of techne (suspense/youth) and telos (payoff/maturity) of the Bildungsroman, won't do: the Victorian middle class is fundamentally incompatible with this kind of extreme individualizing effect of gambling, where inheritance and recognition mean nothing. Thus, suspense with this much uncertainty, applied to the model of the British Bildungsroman, can only clash with the form that contains it. Particularly, because the most "successful" cases of the Bildung plot (as in *David Copperfield* or *Jane Eyre*) contain little to no uncertainty, *Daniel Deronda* is demonstrating this mismatch in the promise of Gwendolen's plot, and the intensity of uncertainty that she surrounds herself with.

Put differently, the kind of gambling Bourdieu describes makes no causal sense, which is directly opposed to the meaning-making work of a Bildungsroman. For example, Nicholas Dames argues that the Bildungsroman's process of self-narrativization organizes disparate events into a comprehensible flow of development. He contends that nineteenth-century associative memory as theorized by Bain, Stewart, Mill, and Hamilton, "seek[s] everywhere to turn chance recollections into rule-bound ones, "trifles" into significant thematic comments, and temporal juggling into linear processes. The form that evolved around this particular self was the Victorian fictional autobiography—a form that could produce a causally bound psyche ringed by Significant Events and Pivotal moments rather than incoherent trifles" (134). Leo Bersani, in his account of the realist novel (in which *Middlemarch* and *Pride and Prejudice* are his main examples), claims that the nineteenth-century British novel form is marked by "its nature...to coerce experience into making

⁷ Both Franklin ("Victorian Discourse") and Rosenthal make the same point in their works in thinking about the form of random chance in gambling in *Daniel Deronda*.

sense” (65). As with Dames, Bersani observes that the meaning-making impulse is to self-validate that very meaning: “the realistic novelist seems spontaneously to make patterns of meaning from the most isolated and disparate details. The tour de force of realistic novelists...is to combine a superficially loose, even sprawling narrative form with an extraordinary tightness of meaning” (52). Marc Redfield has described this recursiveness in the Bildungsroman form as “signifying both *Nachbild* and *Vorbild*,” for Redfield, “*Bildung* encloses the structure of mimesis itself, which, through the temporalizing prefixes *nach* and *vor*, becomes the structure of typology: *Bildung* mirrors and prefigures its own fulfillment” (48). Likewise, Roland Barthes would also agree that narrative brings a sense of harmony and meaning to a series of what could be merely random events. In his analysis of narratives, “the second important process in the language of narrative is integration: what has been disjoined at a certain level (a sequence for example) is most often joined again at a higher level” (*Image* 121-2). For him, what makes a narrative is the process of integration that “guides the understanding of the discontinuous elements” that traverse different levels of language in the story (*Image* 122). The Bildungsroman, considering Dames’s argument alongside that of Barthes’s, is then an integration in both form and content; the narrative structure of integration parallels the content in which disparate events of individual life are smoothed into a cohesive story of development in its own recollection.

Ultimately, the Bildungsroman is a narrative that is explicitly aware of its narrativity, specifically through turning the individual (and his life’s story) into both the subject and form of narrative. In other words, *Bildung* signifies both the pre-image (*Vorbild*) and after-image (*Nachbild*) of itself, effectively promising and fulfilling itself in its course. The aspirations of *Bildung*, as my previous discussions of *David Copperfield* and *Jane Eyre* would attest, constitute the creation and maintenance of its own causality and progressive development; through the work of David and

Jane's suspenseful and yet unsurprising narrative voice, each turn of events all meaningfully accumulate towards the telos of the Bildungsroman, where the protagonist appears to have developed over the course of their experiences. However, in gambling none of this meaning-making is possible, due to its explicit lack of causality; it is only driven forth by sheer uncertainty, and therefore clashes with the accumulative aspirations of the Bildungsroman. *Daniel Deronda* demonstrates this bind by thematizing suspense through the uncertainty of gambling, and endowing characters with differing degrees of such uncertainty. Suspense, thematized as gambling in *Daniel Deronda*, becomes threatening to the developmental agenda of the Bildungsroman.

I. Bad Luck is Good for Story: Gwendolen

"Do you like uncertainty?"

"I think I do, rather," said Gwendolen, suddenly beaming on him with a playful smile.

"There is more in it."

—*Daniel Deronda*, p. 122

Returning briefly to the vision of Bourdieu's roulette table, there are two errors here that a habitual gambler can make. The first is what Rosenthal calls the "gambler's mania" (183), in which the gambler erroneously assumes that there are causal links between rounds, and that the results of one round could carry its effects to the next. This fallacy is a futile attempt at trying to restore the telos into this sheer repetition only of techne. The second error a gambler might make is mistaking the techne *for* the telos: by this, I mean that a gambler can start to enjoy these repetitive bouts of suspense as pleasure itself and abandon the desire for winning at all. This way, the gambler gambles as if to masturbate; the suspense of making the bets and *waiting* for the outcome, not the outcome itself, becomes the end goal of pleasure. In both these errors, suspense becomes *too much* of a "distortion," (Barthes, *Image* 119), and derails the systematic development towards the telos of the novel.

Sadly, Gwendolen commits both errors. She not only commits the gambler's fallacy of assuming a causal link, a promise of a return where there is none (her romance plot with Daniel), but also takes too much pleasure in suspense and works to prolong the suspense of uncertainty in her life as long as possible, until free choice is no longer accessible to her (her marriage plot with Grandcourt). Her first error is demonstrated in the intertwined form of the novel's narrative temporality, and the second error can be seen in the novel's formal features in Gwendolen's dialogue with Grandcourt.

A. Gwendolen's First Error: The Affair of the Necklace

The novel's primal scene is its opening. The novel returns to that moment twice more, creating "narrative loops" for Gwendolen and Daniel, in which their past journey is explained in suspended time until the third book, where the story resumes in "real time." It begins, initially, at Leubronn in September of 1865, where Daniel lays eyes on Gwendolen for the first time. He witnesses her lose spectacularly after a bout of great luck. Gwendolen's accusation that Daniel has cast an 'evil eye' on her starts here and will be repeated many times throughout the novel, to justify (half playfully) why she lost all her winnings in that first scene. The very notion that Daniel has cast an "evil eye" on her play demonstrates Gwendolen's fallacy as a gambler; nothing can influence the sheer chance of the roulette table, as Bourdieu has illustrated. Gwendolen's first mistake here permeates throughout her romance plot with Daniel, as she mistakenly believes until the very end of the novel that a romantic plot "began" here, at that moment. When the moment passes, Gwendolen then receives a letter about the ruin of her family fortune, and pawns the necklace only to find it returned by Daniel. She returns to Offendene with it. The narrative then jumps in time but not in space; it describes how about a year prior, Gwendolen and her family moved to Offendene which is where she begins her courtship with Rex, and then Grandcourt.

Before Grandcourt can make the final move to ask for her hand, Gwendolen finds out about Lydia Glasher, Grandcourt's mistress, and practically flees to Leubronn. We are back to the beginning (*DD* 129). Then, the story refracts to show Daniel's past in reaching that opening moment: his upbringing, his friendship with Hans Meyrick, and his rescuing of Mirah from the river. He then accompanies Sir Hugo to Leubronn, where he sees Gwendolen, back in that first scene (Eliot 189).

Two narrative loops are created here. What is significant here is that Daniel is given a proper backstory with his questions regarding his mother, his suspicions of his father's identity, and his youthful behaviors, whereas Gwendolen's backstory only reaches around a year prior to that moment at the gambling table. So although Gwendolen thinks of that moment at Leubronn as a "true" beginning of a plot, we as readers see that Daniel has his own temporal point of a "beginning" reaching far before Gwendolen's, and has already met Mirah, before meeting Gwendolen. But by arranging the narrative in this order, Eliot makes sure that the readers get to sympathize with *how* Gwendolen could perceive that moment at Leubronn as a significant moment of a romance plot starting (since we start the novel with it). Still, having the two protagonists' past contained in separate narrative pockets, Eliot demonstrates Gwendolen's fallacy as an incorrect assumption of a "beginning." As readers, we see that multiple narrative loops are at play; however, it is clear that each loop is only connected by that one moment at Leubronn, when Daniel and Gwendolen see each other for the first time. Daniel is able to gather the information about Gwendolen's narrative loop through gossip, but poor Gwendolen is truly sealed in her own small causal loop; she is ignorant of the possibility of multitudes, especially the narrative loop of Daniel that exists completely outside of hers. Though it was sheer, slim chance that Daniel saw her, and seemed to have a magical impact on her at the right time, unfortunately it was ultimately random—Gwendolen mistakes that magical moment to be a beginning of a circular formation, and expects

a certain return (marriage to Daniel) by the end of the novel. This bet, as we know sadly, turns out to be a loss.

The necklace that first links Daniel and Gwendolen in their double knotted plot is both an emblem of their connectedness and a revealing motif that links their relationship to themes of gambling and speculation. The image of the necklace first arises out of a losing bet: Mr. Lasmann's "great speculations," in which "he meant to gain," fail—"he risked too much" (Eliot 195). Gwendolen, hearing that due to Mr. Lasmann's failed speculation her family has now fallen from their previous socioeconomic position, pawns the necklace, which Daniel retrieves for her by repurchasing it. Gwendolen mistakes that the affair of the necklace between her and Daniel as signifying something akin to an ouroborian formation, like the physical form of the necklace itself that she even wraps around her wrist at one point to signal to Daniel the significance of that exchange. She expects—and gambles—that this connection and her reliance on Daniel will be returned to her, like the necklace. However, this is not the case. While she is isolated in her own little world of illusory cohesive meaning, Daniel has discovered larger worlds, which Gwendolen can take no part in because of her blindness to openness in others, which contrasts with Daniel's empathetic imagination. Daniel embraces that larger world, leaving Gwendolen behind, and the motif of the necklace vanishes, losing its meaning.

In fact, the only consistent "return" in Gwendolen's tale is the image of the death's face: the face that she sees painted in the closet of her newly-moved-in house in the beginning of the novel, which comes back to bite her psyche in the form of Grandcourt's drowning face at the end of her arc. The image, at first seen inside an opened panel of a wainscot, shows "an upturned dead face, from which an obscure figure seemed to be fleeing with outstretched arms" (Eliot 20). It singularly returns to her as "a dead face—[she] shall never get away from" after her ordeal at the

sea, which she recounts with “stretching her arms to their full length upward” (Eliot 580, 584). The fleeing figure, then, is fulfilled by Gwendolen’s anguished gesture, trying but unable to escape Grandcourt’s dead, drowned face. But unlike the necklace, the motif of the face enters and exits in harrowing immediacy that can bear no past or future relevance outside of its sheer psychic impact. Unlike the necklace, the emblem of a cohesive reciprocal “return” (at least until it is proven otherwise at the end of the novel), the face is only visited suddenly, bringing with it a horrific impact on the story and Gwendolen, rather like a device in a sensation novel plot that only serves to shock the readers.

The fallacy of mistaking her narrative “return” to be signified not by the face but the necklace upsets not only a fundamental narrative expectation in the Victorian Bildungsroman (social integration, marriage, happy ending), but also the readerly wager that “things will turn out to make sense” at the end of it all. The function of closure in *Daniel Deronda* thus shifts from that of completing a circularity to an opening into an unknown world; Daniel is able to look out the window of self and embrace new possibilities and unknown risks, as he is often seen approaching a window or a larger expanse in various scenes in the novel. For instance, Daniel gazes from an open window the night before meeting his mother for the first time, and entertains “hopefulness” and “possibilities” (Eliot 524). On the other hand, when Gwendolen move to Offendene, “her first movement was to go to the tall mirror between the windows, which reflected herself and the room completely” (Eliot 21). Gwendolen would happily look into the glass at her own reflection, until she is forced to take a good look out the window, into a wide world in which her reflection is nowhere to be found in its previous prominence. When Gwendolen looks into the glass to kiss her own image in it, she seals her ultimate singularity, divorced from the larger world around her. Here, a particular moment in *Middlemarch* comes to mind—when Dorothea looks out her own window,

to be in touch with the unfathomable world outside. Unlike the shining paragon of an individual that Dorothea is allowed to be, Gwendolen is doomed to be *only* an individual, a singularity insignificant beyond its own interpretation of the small world surrounding her.

To sum up, one mark of a habitual gambler is when one erroneously reads such a narrative of causation in one's play, suggesting, for example, that because one has lost three times in a row just now, one is *sure* to win the next round. Likewise, Gwendolen's ultimate mistake is supposing a causal, reciprocal relationship where there is none—supposing a reciprocal return between her and Deronda, signified by the necklace, when in fact she was decidedly outside the loop of causation in Deronda's plot. Her error was to assume that things will make sense eventually—and that her luck, something that she assumed before the play even began, will take effect sooner or later. Yet, in both formulations, suspense is still integral—the meat of pleasure in gambler's error is the renewed hope in each suspenseful round as bets are thrown in.

B. Gwendolen's Second Error: Masturbatory Pleasures of Suspense

Unlike Mordecai, whose beginning, end, and the trajectory of his life are so immutable, Gwendolen is refused any definite beginning or an end. The very opening, when we first see Gwendolen, includes an epigraph that seems to mock our reliance on the form of a beginning:

Men can do nothing without the make-believe of a beginning. Even Science, the strict measurer, is obliged to start with a make-believe unit, and must fix on a point in the stars' unceasing journey when his sidereal clock shall pretend that time is at Nought. His less accurate grandmother Poetry has always been understood to start in the middle; but on reflection it appears that her proceeding is not very different from his; since Science, too, reckons backwards as well as forwards, divides his unit into billions, and with his clock-finger at Nought really sets off *in medias res*. No retrospect will take us to the true beginning; and whether our prologue be in heaven or on earth, it is but a fraction of that all-presupposing fact with which our story sets out. (Eliot 3)

The epigraph by its very nature dilutes the form of a clear-cut beginning, because it precedes the actual text but still resides within the formal boundaries of the novel.⁸ But its content, as well, is suspicious of the “make-believe of a beginning.” While hard Science seems to demarcate clear beginnings, Eliot states that it is not actually that far from Poetry, which accepts its status of only being able to capture the middle of things. Despite Science’s effort to beckon backwards and forwards to construct its own beginning and end, no “true beginning” is accessible; everything can only set off “*in medias res*.” And indeed, the novel begins *in medias res*, in the scene of gambling, with a question no less. Nothing is fixed, nothing is grounded, everything is at risk of changing from one moment to the next. Gwendolen, in other words, is a character of sheer uncertainty; in the first half of the novel, she is seen to always prefer uncertainty over any kind of certainty. However, she chooses uncertainty too many times, to the point that all other possibilities are ruled out for her, and she has no choice but to choose only the wrong options left.

However, I would like to make clear that this is not necessarily a condemnation of Gwendolen’s character on Eliot’s part. While I have been describing Gwendolen’s decisions as “errors,” they are, strikingly, errors that other characters also commit without any attendant consequences. Eliot figures Gwendolen’s fate as both foreclosed and uncertain because the kind

⁸ Eirian Yem argues that in Eliot, “epigraphs are ‘a peculiar tongue’ the reader must learn to interpret, rather than a tool for the efficient communication of information...Reading epigraphs is figured both as an experience (the reader travels beyond the boundaries of the narrative) and as an experiment (the reader must speculate on the meaning of an epigraph and must readjust her expectations once she has read the chapter)” (1). Alex Woloch also comments that Eliot imposes an “over-and-under principle” in her epigraphs in the novel, “so that what appears in one context as a putatively stabilizing frame for a section of the narrative gets submerged, at another point, into the narrative proper” (“Daniel Deronda” 169). Thus, borrowing Yem’s and Woloch’s reading of Eliot’s epigraphs, the form of the epigraph itself becomes a way to instill suspense in the readers from the get-go by rendering the formal boundaries of beginnings and endings more porous.

of individual progress that is available for Daniel, and even to a certain extent Mordecai, is simply not available to Gwendolen. Gwendolen's suspense that can only result in a foreseen bad outcomes works in the exact opposite way that it has worked for David Copperfield or Jane Eyre. Rather than suspense fulfilling prior expectations that signal individual progress (as in those earlier two novels), Gwendolen's suspense forces her hand to fulfill unappealing prospects, signaling an *impossibility of progress*. The fact that Gwendolen is so intensely marked with formal and thematic markers of uncertainty allow the novel to scapegoat her as the loser of a bet that is the Bildung plot, which lights up the fact that, as in Collins, the structure of the Bildungsroman is a zero-sum game of fortune for Eliot.

In the first pages of the novel, she is reported to prefer "the excitement of play, not the winnings," which demonstrates her predilection for the suspense, not the outcome (Eliot 6). This is that second error that a habitual gambler can make; mistakenly prioritizing the *techne* of suspense over the end goal of winning the game. In other words, Gwendolen opts for the pleasure of *techne* over the determinate *telos*, because she enjoys entertaining different possibilities and promises. When she hears news of the loss of her family's fortune, she tells her mother that "I will do something. I will be something. Things will come right" (Eliot 192). Showing the first gambler's fallacy again here, she tries her hand at acting, and she is bitterly turned away from that notion when Herr Klesmer denies her potential to become a great actress and delivers a painful reality check. Even in this conversation, Gwendolen winces at Klesmer's words of discouragement, but what really turns her away from the idea of becoming an actress is Klesmer pronouncing with certainty that she will be a loser in this gamble. Klesmer even frames this judgement with the language of gambling: "You have asked my judgment on your chances of winning. I don't pretend to speak absolutely; but measuring probabilities, my judgment is:—you will hardly achieve more

than mediocrity” (Eliot 218). Of course, being allergic to such certain judgement, especially one that shines not a pretty light on her ego, Gwendolen soon ceases to pursue this option. But even her way of ending the conversation is to proclaim that “[she] can’t decide now,” and that she will let Klesmer know if she does (Eliot 220)—forever held in abeyance, this conversation is not visited again, and Gwendolen never lets Klesmer know. Again, she chooses uncertainty, a suspended judgment.⁹

Gwendolen’s penchant for gambling, and her aversion to any kind of cohesive certainty, is most clearly demonstrated in her courtship plots (especially the one with Grandcourt), which are on the surface so familiar to the form of the Bildungsroman. While romantic plots gone awry (by choosing the wrong partner) in the Victorian Bildungsroman tend to correct the protagonist’s progress, steering them in the right direction by giving them a convenient do-over (think of Wilhelm’s countless infatuations, and David Copperfield’s first marriage to Dora), Gwendolen has no choice but to marry the wrong man. Gwendolen gets stuck with Grandcourt because she hesitates; she holds herself in suspense too long, until no uncertainty is left but a dreadful certain path of future action. Gwendolen comments from the beginning of the novel that she is “not fond of what is likely; it is always dull, [she does] what is unlikely” (Eliot 56). Though it might at first sound as if she is a risky gambler, opting to bet on unlikely terms, what she espouses here is her aversion to certainty. We see Gwendolen being allergic to any kind of affirmation of passion that could lead to any romantic commitment when poor Rex tries to confess his love to her a few pages after her previous declaration. Though “the day before she had been quite aware that her cousin was in love with her—she did not mind how much, so that he said nothing about it...now the life

⁹ A tragedy here is that Gwendolen does end up becoming an actress of sorts, only in her domestic hell with Grandcourt as her most exacting audience.

of passion had begun negatively in her. She felt passionately averse to this volunteered love” (Eliot 67-8). The word choice of “volunteered” here is significant, as it implies that on Rex’s side, the choice has been made; now it is entirely up to Gwendolen to complete that reciprocity into a certain unity. However, of course, that is exactly what Gwendolen can’t stomach. We see another example of this impulse when Grandcourt begins to court Gwendolen.

Gwendolen’s courtship with Grandcourt is filled with her desire to elongate the uncertainty between her and her suitor, this time more deftly managed than her treatment of poor Rex. Gwendolen’s tactic in her interaction with Grandcourt is mostly to check his affections but not enough to turn him away. As she replies coyly, and perhaps too coldly to his advances, “she was aware that she was risking something—not her neck, but the possibility of finally checking Grandcourt’s advances, and she did not feel contented with the possibility” (Eliot 109). Even in their first meeting, Gwendolen calculates meticulously different potentials in each of her and Grandcourt’s comments to each other; she clearly enjoys the myriad ways that a conversation can be taken, and each pause that Eliot marks with parentheses eleven times during a page-long conversation. For instance, after giving a rather witty answer to one of Grandcourt’s questions, Gwendolen takes a “(Pause, during which Gwendolen made several interpretations of her own speech)” (Eliot 91). The “several interpretations” that she makes denotes the ability of pauses and parentheses to proliferate narrative possibilities. The parenthesis thus operates as a formal textual suspension, wherein Gwendolen is free to multiply possible scenarios of her courtship with Grandcourt and imagine many simulated futures and their probabilities. In fact, these pauses involve Gwendolen “imagin[ing] various degrees and modes of opinion about herself that might be entertained by Grandcourt,” or even “speculat[ing] on the probability” of Grandcourt being adventurous at heart (Eliot 91, 92). Further, she tries to put herself in imaginary positions, such as

by “reflect[ing] that the life of an unmarried woman...must be dull” (Eliot 92). Each pause entertains possible futures and stances; each pause becomes a pocket of suspense. Suspense is a narrative delicacy to Gwendolen, over which she seems to have complete control at this point. After this bout of conversational tug-a-war between Grandcourt and Gwendolen, some time passes during which Grandcourt attempts to seal the deal and push Gwendolen into the certainty of a courtship beyond flirtation, but fails to do so every time. Though Grandcourt has declared to Lush right after his first conversation with Gwendolen that he will marry the girl,

to his own surprise he had repeatedly promised himself in a morning that he would to-day give Gwendolen the opportunity of accepting him, and had found in the evening that the necessary formality was still unaccomplished. This remarkable fact served to heighten his determination on another day. He had never admitted to himself that Gwendolen might refuse him, but—heaven help us all!—we are often unable to act on our certainties; our objection to a contrary issue (were it possible) is so strong that it rises like a spectral illusion between us and our certainty... (Eliot 107)

The repetition of his attempts to make their courtship into a certain acceptance of marriage is time and time again averted. Like a gambler who has gone through an unlucky streak, this works to “heighten [Grandcourt’s] determination on another day.” Gwendolen’s aversive reaction to making any choice that leads to certainty provokes the gambling behavior previously discussed in both her and Grandcourt, renewing their courtship dance all over again each day, their bets reset each round.

When Gwendolen’s courtship with Grandcourt resumes after her family fortune’s ruin, Gwendolen has fewer options (and most of them unsavory to her, such as becoming a governess), and yet still finds herself choosing uncertainty over commitment until the choice is made up for her. When Grandcourt gives her an ultimatum, in which she must either confirm that there is hope for Grandcourt in their relationship or let him ride away, “almost to her own astonishment, Gwendolen felt a sudden alarm at the image of Grandcourt finally riding away. What would be left her then? Nothing but the former dreariness...She snatched at the subject that would defer any

decisive answer” (Eliot 252). While in the previous scene she had avoided confirming the possibility of their marriage to evade certainty in a pleasure play of possibilities, now that Grandcourt has posed the other option (him quitting her) as the certainty looming if she keeps that guard up, she does not choose that either. In fact, as she diverts her answer to his ultimatum, Gwendolen claims power for herself in the scene: “in eluding a direct appeal Gwendolen recovered some of her self-possession” (Eliot 252). Prolonging the suspense re-energizes her, as she thrives on it. However, Grandcourt delivers the final blow, making sure that there are no other options for her. Only then does she finally accept him, facing the certainty of their marriage.

‘Do you command me to go?’ No familiar spirit could have suggested to him more effective words.

‘No,’ said Gwendolen. She could not let him go: the negative was a clutch[...]

‘You accept my devotion?’ said Grandcourt, holding his hat by his side and looking straight into her eyes, without other movement. Their eyes meeting in that way seemed to allow any length of pause; but wait as long as she would, how could she contradict herself? What had she detained him for? He had shut out any explanation.

‘Yes,’ came as gravely from Gwendolen’s lips. (Eliot 254)

We see that in asking “You accept my devotion?” Grandcourt has finally trapped Gwendolen for good; because she has already refused to command him to go, she cannot refuse his devotion. But she refused his command to go, because Grandcourt had posed his riding away as the only alternative to that as well. The whole scene plays out like an elimination of options for Gwendolen; in that final moment before she says yes, Gwendolen realizes that she is caught in his trap, as despite however long she could “pause” or “detain” him, he has “shut out” all other options for her. Her powers of suspense are to no avail anymore. In other words, though ultimately Gwendolen does answer in the affirmative to Grandcourt’s offer of his hand, it is not a yes to him; it is a “no” to the other alternative, which is to sink into uncontrollable destitution where even fewer options would be available to her.

Again, a contrast can be made with the “successful” instances of Bildung in *David Copperfield* or *Jane Eyre* here: while both David and Jane negate bad doubles or options in order to keep their control over their correct path of progress, Gwendolen can only keep negating *without* reaching the correct path. The scene progresses almost like a courtroom questioning, and the graveness of her “Yes” falls like a verdict on Gwendolen. As Barbara Hardy puts it, their courtship turns from romance to a scene of mastery, as “Gwendolen’s image of mastering horses turns into Grandcourt’s vision of her as a mastered horse” (229). This is even more so, because at this point, she has been made aware of Grandcourt’s indiscretion with Lydia Glasher, and how she and her children deserve Grandcourt’s inheritance. Gwendolen, having freely chosen to delay making a certain decision in her first bout of flirting with Grandcourt, now is faced with *having* to accept him despite knowing better; her time to accept him without guilt has passed in her suspenseful pauses. Unlike the previous conversation in which Gwendolen was in perfect command of the parentheses of her suspended judgment, this exchange is riddled with em-dashes, colons, and rhetorical questions on Gwendolen’s side: sloppier, desperate attempts at delaying the inevitable “yes.” Mockingly, the very next chapter begins a new Book in the novel titled “Gwendolen Gets Her Choice.” Indeed, she does not get to *choose*, she *gets* her (singular) choice. This cruel turn of fortune underscores just how much the conceit of Bildung rely on sheer, dumb luck. Rather than carving out the correct path of progress, these negations and delays that Gwendolen employs ultimately restrict her fate to an unfavorable option. The paradoxical state that Gwendolen is put in—that of choosing uncertainty time and time again, only to have the decision predetermined for her in the end—suggests the paradox of the Bildungsroman’s aspirations for successful development. Of course not *everyone* can end up fulfilled and happy; Gwendolen’s character proves that for there to be winners, there must also be losers.

But again, as Gillian Beer proclaims, “bad luck is good for story” (“Reader’s Wager” 121). Gwendolen’s bad luck, and her mistake in being unable to recognize that it will not turn into good luck (at least in the scope of the story), is an infinite engine for the narrative. Ironically, Gwendolen’s repetitive, telos-less torment does drive the novel forward, but she herself becomes the collateral damage. The tragedy in Gwendolen’s plot is not just that it is unfinished and unresolved in novelistic terms; it is that she is not allowed to be part of any whole, barred from representing any mass or movement. She is fundamentally made to be so singular, utterly individual, that her life cannot even be summed up in any cohesive or certain way other than that she “shall live” (Eliot 680). Gwendolen, “reduced to a mere speck,” can only feel the horror of “the world...getting larger round [her], and she more solitary and helpless in the midst” (Eliot 677). It is no wonder that her story begins (and ends) so suddenly *in medias res*, as she is refused that very form of a beginning and an end that structures even the most basic plot of individual development. For Gwendolen, who unfortunately chose uncertainty time and time again, it can only be “now,” or simply the bloated “middle.”¹⁰ There can’t quite be a past (*Vorbild*) or future (*Nachbild*), only the frozen picture—the picture of the dead face.

II. Seed and Fruit: Mordecai

“You have risen within me like a thought not fully spelled: my soul is shaken before the words are all there. The rest will come—it will come.”
— *Daniel Deronda*, p. 424

Mordecai, fortunately, does not have to worry about such suspense threatening *his* Bildung plot. Mordecai’s character has been thought to be the voice of “international nationalism” of Jewishness (Brantlinger, “Nations and Novels” 272), who influences Daniel to the point of

¹⁰ See Hilary Schor for *Daniel Deronda* and narrative middles (Schor, “Make-Believe”).

subsuming the protagonist in his plot of national and personal Bildung. Others, like Anderson, have argued that Mordecai's values lie squarely outside those of Eliot and of Daniel, even at the end of the novel. I focus on Mordecai's significance in the story not as a keystone of the "Jewish half" of the novel, but rather as a figure lacking in any suspense when it comes to personal and national plot. What I mean by this is that Mordecai differs sharply from Gwendolen and Daniel in *Daniel Deronda* not only because of his predetermined Jewishness, but also because his personal plot of development overlaps almost completely with his national one, without any uncertainty or suspense. Cynthia Chase, in her deconstructive reading of the novel, argues that "Mordecai's identification of Deronda is presented as a recognition, and for this reason his assertion of a claim on him has authority and appeal...[Deronda] becomes what Mordecai claims he is" (221). Taking issue with the logic of causality in the novel, Chase suggests that, despite what the narration would like the readers to believe, the novel reads as though "it is *because* Deronda has developed a strong affinity for Judaism that he turns out to be of Jewish parentage" (217). In her reading, the novel's loop of causation is a self-serving one, in which the events (especially concerning the revelation of Daniel's heritage) are self-motivated and self-fulfilled. While I do agree with Anderson's critique that "Deronda forges an identity from out of hybrid traditions" (*Powers* 132), Chase's point about how Mordecai's *treatment* of Daniel's origin is characterized as a done deal still stands: Daniel himself doesn't buy Mordecai's recognition wholesale and constructs his own hybrid identity based on dialogical exchange of ideas, but Mordecai certainly does operate on that circular logic of recognition as identification. Mordecai begins and ends with no suspense to be found within his own little cohesive Whole of Jewish national Bildung.

In one of the more remarkable chapter transitions, Daniel longs for a confidant to whom he could open up, but also checks his desires, as "he had no expectation of meeting the friend he

imagined. Deronda's was not one of those quiveringly-poised natures that lend themselves to second-sight" (Eliot 397). Immediately on the next page opens a new chapter, in which the narrator describes precisely that "second-sight" lacking in Daniel as existing in Mordecai. The juxtaposition naturally highlights the extent of Mordecai's firm belief in his own visions, as opposed to Daniel's openness of expectations. For types such as Mordecai, imagination is creative, visionary, but ultimately, self-confirming—"the deed they would do starts up before them in complete shape, making a coercive type; the event they hunger for or dread rises into vision with a seed-like growth, feeding itself fast on unnumbered impressions" (Eliot 398). The metaphor of hunger and its satiation is repeated when Mordecai comments to Daniel, directly, that "Well, my expectation was there, and you are come. Men have died of thirst. But I was thirsty, and the water is on my lips. What are doubts to me?" (Eliot 425). Of course, some might say that his accumulating urgency to find his spiritual heir before his approaching death is the gap between his desire and fulfillment. However, the chapters are laid out so that his desire to find that heir is specifically *not* revealed until right before his recognition of Daniel as his heir takes place. Mordecai's urgency, and his vision of his presumed heir "answering to his need as one distantly approaching or turning his back towards him, darkly painted against a golden sky" (Eliot 400) is described after their meeting at the Cohens', and the very next time they meet is exactly the fulfillment of that vision, as Daniel approaches Mordecai on a boat, rowing towards him "from the golden background" (Eliot 417). In a long novel with so many time jumps and interruptions, the moments of identification (of desire in the form of Mordecai's vision) and its recognition (as fulfilled by Daniel becoming that vision) are practically read back to back. Thus, for Mordecai, there is no gap between desire and its fulfillment, or between identification and recognition; it almost turns the trope of recognition in the Victorian novel upside down. While recognitions in the

Victorian novel usually involve a hidden secret of the past, consolidating the subject of the secret into an ultimately knowable being, Mordecai's vision prefigures Daniel's future, and Daniel is no more knowable to the reader than he was before the recognition scene. There is no increased transparency of who Daniel is. All this demonstrates the utter lack of suspense, as Mordecai seems to sketch the lines of his vision of the heir and seeing Daniel, seventeen pages later, Mordecai then colors them in. The barely-there interval makes it difficult to build any suspense not only in terms of frustration of desire, but also in terms of allowing any 'alternative' path that the prophecy could have taken. Readers' desire to know the identity of Mordecai's heir has not been frustrated in that short span, and there is no time for any alternate characters that *could* have taken the place of the heir to be introduced. Moreover, taking the plot of the novel as a whole, Mordecai's unwavering insistence that Daniel is Jewish also sucks much of the suspense *out* of Daniel's plot of development. Whenever Daniel raises doubt, and gently points out that his origin is at best unknown and probably not of a Jewish bloodline, Mordecai immediately rejects these comments ("it can't be true"), "with no sign of shock" (Eliot 423). Despite Daniel's efforts in his own arc to grapple with his construction of his identity throughout the novel, *for Mordecai* the end is always in sight.

Fittingly, Mordecai's death coincides in fact with the end of narrative time; his character's determined telos, in other words, is the determined telos of the text. He dies with "Mirah's and Deronda's arms around him," and the imagery further reiterates the predetermined enclosed whole that his personal narrative signifies. For him, this circular formation is exactly the certainty that he chose for himself; he is able to expect correctly not only Daniel's true origin but also quite precisely when his own life will expire, because there is no uncertainty in his telos. Despite the novel's ultimate predilection towards Daniel (over not just Mordecai but everyone else), Mordecai's broad

expectations are reinforced and affirmed throughout. He expects correctly, through and through, with no doubt or suspense. What the earlier critics called “idealism,” or the lack of reality in Mordecai’s parts of the novel, can therefore be explained by the utter lack of suspense in those parts. Because there is no play of risks and pleasures in Mordecai’s predetermined telos, his arc lacks any narrative drive other than to simply affirm what he has already foretold. The circular rhetoric of Mordecai’s arc was already complete to begin with, unperturbed, infallible in its integrity. It completely negates the process of eliminating suspense and the irregularities of the narrative that culminates in such a circle. The “undesirable interlude” during which experience of formation takes place in a *Bildung* plot is completely cut out (Moretti 191).

I believe Eliot both endorses and condemns Mordecai in figuring him this way. After all, he *was* right about Daniel; the confirmation of his beliefs, despite the complexity of the process, does offer a level of affirmation that Gwendolen, for instance, is never granted. However, I think that the novel also acknowledges that Mordecai’s way of reading and living with no suspense is incompatible with the form of the novel; while Mordecai is a crucial character in the plot, his speech and actions often fail to register to the characters around him as properly comprehensible, except to Daniel (but even he needs to work hard at taking Mordecai seriously). Mordecai, like Pip in *Great Expectations*, might be said to be speaking in a different language than the form surrounding him; however, unlike Pip, Mordecai is able to help another person—Daniel—make true progress that was not offered to characters like Pip, by opening up an opportunity of a new futurity *outside of* British subjectivity. He offers Daniel a new mythology of self-formation, one that precisely involves leaving behind the rites of British subject formation behind. In a way, Mordecai functions like Propp’s donor, who, usually “encountered accidentally,” provides the hero with “some agent (usually magical) which permits the eventual liquidation of misfortune” (39).

The “misfortune” here seems to be the expectations of a specifically *British* subject formation, which Daniel is able to overcome to pursue a new national and spiritual identity, through the opportunity that Mordecai provides him. Thus, Mordecai is granted *some* endorsement from Eliot, certainly more than Gwendolen is given, but not as much as Daniel, whom I now turn to.

III. Gambling Transformed: Daniel Deronda

“By the necessity to answer he found out the truth for himself.”
— *Daniel Deronda*, p. 609

The model of narrative and suspense surrounding Daniel’s world differs from both Mordecai’s and Gwendolen’s in significant ways. While Daniel refuses to promise or accept Mordecai’s certain telos that is so frequently pushed upon him, opting to always involve the process of dialogical exchange of ideas, he is also not lost simply in the pleasures of the techne; he advises Gwendolen to look beyond momentary guilt and shame, and build herself towards a larger sense of self in their penultimate meeting, advice that he has already taken for himself. When the plot swerves from Gwendolen to Daniel to recount Daniel’s history before that first scene at the gambling table, the narrator gives a breakdown of Daniel’s youthful, unmolded nature. After his studies, we are told, Daniel

longed now to have the sort of apprenticeship to life which would not shape him too definitely, and rob him of the choice that might come from free growth. One sees that Deronda’s demerits were likely to be on the side of reflective hesitation, and this tendency was encouraged by his position: there was no need for him to get an immediate income, or to fit himself in haste for a profession; and his sensibility to the half-known facts of his parentage made him an excuse for lingering longer than others in a state of social neutrality. Other men, he inwardly said, had a more definite place and duties. But the project which flattered his inclination might not have gone beyond the state of ineffective brooding, if certain circumstances had not quickened it into action. (Eliot 151)

He is, at this point, at risk of sinking into a Gwendolen-like penchant for dwelling in uncertainty, as there is the danger of his staying in “ineffective brooding.” However, soon he develops a taste

and desire for the goal towards which to direct this “free growth,” when he meets Mirah and Mordecai. When Daniel describes his rescuing of Mirah at the river as his “good chance to find [her],” Mirah corrects him, saying that “is not the right way of thinking about it,” that “it was [Daniel], and not another, who found [her], and were good to [her]” (Eliot 310). Mirah negates the model of sheer chance and turns it into a model of moral action. This reframing earns her Daniel, whom Gwendolen did not get to choose.

After his conversations with Mordecai, Daniel demonstrates his usage of suspense in a productive, creative, and yet teleological way. Daniel ponders whether the “hypothetic appeal” that he is meant to join the long line of Jewish tradition has any purchase in reality (Eliot 431). Daniel then reflects how he himself “had associated the deepest experience of his affections with what was a pure supposition, namely, that Sir Hugo was his father” in the beginning of the novel. He then reasons with himself that since he had believed so firmly in what was a mere supposition—that Sir Hugo might be his father—he should allow himself to entertain Mordecai’s suppositions as well. What he is doing here is first making a connection between his past behavior and Mordecai’s current one, in order to sympathize with what seemed at first like wild supposition from Mordecai. Wendy Ann Lee defines sympathy as “the cognitive effort to reconstruct ‘like situation[s],’” which is precisely what Daniel does here between his past self and Mordecai (7). He is held in abeyance, ruminating on the assumptions and consequences of what Mordecai has said to him for the next four pages; notably, “to be in [that] *state of suspense* which was also one of emotive activity and scruple, was a familiar attitude of his conscience” (Eliot 432, emphasis mine). Ultimately, he concludes that

he could not without farther reason undertake to hasten its discovery. Nay, he was tempted now to regard his *uncertainty as a condition to be cherished* for the present...It might even be justifiable to use the uncertainty on this point in keeping

up a suspense which would induce Mordecai to accept those offices of friendship that Deronda longed to urge on him. (Eliot 435, emphasis mine)

Thus, Daniel's suspense is remarkably different from Gwendolen's suspense; whereas Gwendolen uses (or sometimes is forced to utilize) moments of suspense to delay the inevitable, Daniel is able to look into his own past, reflect on his own experiences, and project onto the future in a more creative way what he would like for himself. In this bout of meditation on his options and possibilities, the narrative voice is focalized (Eliot is not shy to mark her favorite), and readers are thus implicitly invited to adopt Daniel's point of view, doubling the sympathetic reflection that Daniel practices on Mordecai. All this is utmost *care* practiced in the form of dialogical negotiations of possibilities and suspense—unlike Mordecai, for whom such suspense cannot exist, and also unlike Gwendolen, for whom uncertainty is simply her way to temporarily avoid approaching certainty, Daniel revels in such uncertainty as a productive time and space.

Daniel is the ultimate figure of open possibilities, but he still yearns for a particular telos and believes in negotiating his own ideals with the circumstances surrounding his goal.¹¹ Although he has not set that telos yet, he differs from Gwendolen as she actively avoids choosing a telos for herself. It is clear in his desire to “compress his wandering energy” into “a definite line of action” that he longs for a goal (Eliot 304). The fact that Daniel's telos lies outside the bounds of the novel's time and location also further opens up the great possibilities that his character is able to entertain. Isobel Armstrong comments that the ending of the novel succeeds in “to persuad[ing] the reader to imagine otherwise” (178). Defining an “inquiry” as an “open form” that “starts from

¹¹ This is also the reason that Caroline Levine's model of suspense as an experimental epistemology of the realist novel does not work for *Daniel Deronda*; Daniel, even when doing suspense “right,” does not rely on “self-suppression” that is markedly feminine (Levine 124). He is not only masculine but also self-exploratory, expressing his doubts to others and working with a democratic model of dialogue to find an answer for his telos. Moreover, when Gwendolen withholds judgment, a “good” way of using suspense for Levine, it does not work favorably for her at all.

questions,” Armstrong asserts that in *Daniel Deronda*, “the *Inquiry* goes on beyond the novel itself, creating historical possibilities from the complexities of the histories in the text. The novel goes on being written” (84, 178). While taking Armstrong’s point, I would like to also emphasize that Daniel’s *Bildung* is geared towards finding an answer to such an inquiry. Daniel is made to answer the question of his vocation after finding out that he is Jewish after all. Taking in this new information, and yet not losing sight of his cosmopolitan upbringing, he answers that

I shall call myself a Jew...but I will not say that I shall profess to believe exactly as my fathers have believed. Our fathers themselves changed the horizon of their belief and learned of other races. But I think I can maintain my grandfather’s notion of separateness with communication. I hold that my first duty is to my own people, and if there is anything to be done towards restoring or perfecting their common life, I shall make that my vocation. (Eliot 609)

This is the biggest decision Daniel makes for himself within the span of the novel; he, in one fell swoop, takes on a new identity, new lineage, and new path in life. But unlike Gwendolen’s gambles, he makes this decision based on his past experiences and his conversations with others; it is a fearfully big step for him to take, and yet it seems earned.

The question-and-answer form mirrors not only the beginning of the novel, but also Gwendolen’s answer to Grandcourt’s proposal. Daniel’s reply answers for vocation, and Gwendolen’s answers for marriage. Of course, the two are in severe contrast to each other, as the former signals suspense spent well as a time of productive dialogue, and the latter demonstrates suspense as waste, spent but not used well. In Daniel’s answer for vocation, charity and responsibility become *work*. Charity, when it is given randomly, resembles gambling; it is a “domesticated form of fortune or fate,” of distributing reward based not on merit (Franklin, “Victorian Discourse” 914). However, in Daniel’s formulation of his answer, the work of “restoring or perfecting [the Jewish people’s] common life” becomes an active vocation for Daniel, and the terms of that vocation he will continue to construct, based on his own ideals of “separateness with

communication.” This is, of course, yet to come; suspense can and will continue to be imbued in Daniel’s future. Daniel’s Bildung plot, which Gwendolen both fails to achieve herself and is barred from achieving, is that of converting the suspense of gambling into the suspense of vocation. This is, at first glance, an impossible task; gambling, as Ruskin said, is speculation that is distinct from the toil of true, honest labor. The Victorian anxieties surrounding gambling specifically involve gambling’s fraught relationship to work; even *Daniel Deronda* itself condemns Lapidoth for his habit of gambling that supersedes his vocation and responsibility to his family. However, in Daniel’s plot of self-development, this Victorian dilemma can be worked out through his proper usage of suspense in his own story. Utilizing the space and time of suspense as an opening in which one can not only express one’s doubts, desires, and ideals, but also allow synthesis with others’ input, Daniel navigates the uncertainty of suspense into proper certainty of vocation.

Lapidoth, The Limit Case of Gambling

Though Gwendolen commits certain fallacies in gambling, the character system of *Daniel Deronda* supplies us with the absolute limit case that lives and breathes these fallacies: Lapidoth. As a father who has sold his daughter to fund his gambling habits, he is already turned against any kind of futurity. Though his appearance is brief, Lapidoth’s actions and descriptions during his stay in the novel establish him as an antithetical figure to reproductive futurity, or even a progress of any sort through his relationship to the language of gambling. And at the same time, his actions and thoughts are also marked by very similar techniques of suspense that Gwendolen employs, just in more extreme variations. In Lapidoth we are able to see that suspense and gambling come together as a force that decouples an individual from any social or moral obligations to another: “the gambling appetite” that has consumed Lapidoth is “more absolutely dominant than bodily hunger, which can be neutralized by an emotional or intellectual excitation, but the passion for

watching chances—the habitual *suspensive* poise of the mind in actual imaginary play—nullifies the susceptibility to other excitation” (Eliot 651, emphasis mine). Even in this sentence itself, the “suspensive” state that the gambling maniac constantly inhabits, is described within the parenthetical clause that literally suspends the larger sentence from concluding itself. Like the em-dashes and parenthetical remarks in Gwendolen’s negotiations with Grandcourt, Lapidoth’s suspensive state of mind is expressed through textual suspensions. In Lapidoth, though, the connection between such suspense and gambling shows even stronger than in Gwendolen.

Lapidoth’s final act of crime within the novel—stealing Daniel’s ring and running to gamble it away—is also riddled with such textual markers of suspense. We see in this scene that Lapidoth’s mind wanders between two possible courses of action: to steal the ring, or to ask Daniel for a gift of money. His pondering is marked by parentheticals and interruptive clauses that demonstrate the back-and-forth of his decision-making process. It also shows that Lapidoth first imagines the act of taking the ring before he actively translates it to reality, which demonstrates plainly how suspense first opens up a possibility of a course of action, and can then allow it to be taken in a narrative process. In a single page, Eliot shows how suspense creates space for forking paths with wildly different outcomes. Finally, when Lapidoth steals the ring, the sentence is full of interruptions and stops that render the sentence almost fragmentary: “However, he was resolved to go down; but—by no distinct change of resolution, rather by a dominance of desire, like the thirst of the drunkard—it so happened that in passing the table his fingers fell noiselessly on the ring, and he found himself in the passage with the ring in his hand” (Eliot 663). Needless to say, the suspense of “will he or won’t he?” is palpable in the sentence, and its composition shows the delays and trip-ups that suspense can cause in a larger narrative in a nutshell. And this suspense is not only linked to the act of gambling because Lapidoth steals it explicitly to fuel his addiction,

but also because the ring that he steals, like the smaller form of Gwendolen's necklace, symbolizes his fallacy of thinking that there is causal, reciprocal, purpose to his gambles, though they are actually random events that cannot statistically influence one another (and hence why he keeps losing). For example, when alone in his thoughts on the streets, he is seen thinking that "luck had been against him lately; he expected it to turn" (Eliot 652), precisely demonstrating this fallacy.

Moreover, the scene also demonstrates how Daniel and Mirah are able to break away from these repetitive fallacies (that the form of the ring also signifies), by deciding to get married at the discovery of its theft. Symbolically speaking, a promise of marriage between Daniel and Mirah restores the lost ring (as engagements are often signified by the gift of a ring), and it also shifts the scene of loss and betrayal of familial ties into a that of promise and futurity of a new one. The juxtaposition of the ring's theft by the gambling father and the restoration of the ring (in the form of an engagement) by the future husband demonstrates again how Daniel as a character in the novel's world functions to shift the thematics of gambling into that of moral action. In a way, Lapidoth's entrance and exit from the novel's larger currents are like those of Gwendolen's in that they both enter mid-action and exit abruptly, without any futurity or certainty as to how their lives will lead afterwards. Further, Lapidoth's appearance in the novel is practically his time between gambles, during which he has no funds, and his meeting with his long-lost children does not change him in any fundamental way. His being can only be depicted in a way that is episodic and insular, and his appearance is very limited to a few scenes towards the end of the novel. Indeed, it's rather difficult to imagine Lapidoth as a viable subject of a Bildungsroman; even in his brief appearance, he is constantly itching to leave the story. Not only does he keep calculating different scenarios in which he can go off to gamble more every time he interacts with different characters (described as his "balancing" act), but he also tends to sink into vivid imaginations of the roulette table, and all

other characters, markedly his children, fade away in the background to give way to the scene of a gambling spectacle. Notably, after the harrowing judgment that Ezra throws at him—“that such a man is our father is a brand on our flesh which will not cease smarting” (Eliot 654)—that very night, Lapidoth drifts away into his gambling dreams:

...in his usual wakefulness at night, he fell to wondering what money Mirah had by her, and went back over old Continental hours at *Roulette*, reproducing the method of his play, and the chances that had frustrated it... These were the stronger visions of the night with Lapidoth, and not the worn frame of his ireful son uttering a terrible judgment. Ezra did pass across the gambling-table, and his words were audible; but he passed like an insubstantial ghost, and his words had the heart eaten out of them by numbers and movements that seemed to make the very tissue of Lapidoth's consciousness. (Eliot 655-6)

His opportunity to take in Ezra's rebuke, and respond to it dialogically, is subsumed under the image of the roulette table, and Ezra's words are eaten away by the “numbers and movements” of the gambling mania. Lapidoth is simply incapable of forming or experiencing any dialogicality with other characters in the novel; all his familial or social ties are converted into possibilities for him to benefit financially from. He is a completely insular being, who is now gladly and blindly part of the uncaring larger movement of random events in which Gwendolen despairs to locate herself. Lapidoth, in other words, could not have existed in the story a moment longer than he already does. As a gambling maniac who can only exist in suspenseful episodes of moral failure, he disqualifies himself as a viable subject of representation in the form of the Bildungsroman. This limit case, I believe, demonstrates how the Bildungsroman reveals the extent to which it relies on a logic of progression and development in moments when it allows minor characters that are utterly at odds with its project to take the readers' attention (albeit briefly).

The novel hints through the character of Lapidoth that, despite Daniel's productive use of suspense and its beauty in being able to create dialogues that construct the self in the future, there is an “outside” of such a “self” to begin. I would contend that the project of the Bildungsroman,

its values and ideals of self-improvement through suspenseful dialogicality, cannot be offered to everyone. Its biggest flaw and feature is that because the form and the content of the Bildungsroman is one and same, that which prefigures and fulfills itself, it is not capable of imagining subjects that lie outside its project as a successful narrative. In other words, what is excluded from the Bildungsroman cannot be properly imagined or portrayed by its techniques and requires an entirely different form to accommodate it.

Interestingly, several of the noteworthy critical accounts of *Daniel Deronda* single out a minor character who encapsulates the spirit of their reading of the novel. Anderson draws our attention to Leonora Halberstam, Daniel's estranged mother, as the limit case of the novel in the sense that Eliot, as an author, does not commit herself fully to the dialogicality that she otherwise supports in Daniel. Meanwhile, Jesse Rosenthal picks Juliet Fenn, the "girl as middling as mid-day market in everything" (Eliot 93) who nevertheless wins the archery contest over two other more prominent ladies, as the "marker of the aggregate" that demonstrates the kind of even distribution of luck and fortune in the novel's character system (Rosenthal 190). While Anderson uses Leonora to point to a limit in Eliot's own project conception and Rosenthal uses his to illuminate the smallest identifiable individual character in the aggregate statistical world of the novel form, my consideration of Lapidoth instead calls attention to a limit of the form of the Bildungsroman itself—specifically, how suspense can overpower even the mere possibilities of a Bildung plot.

In fact, what Lapidoth comes to represent, other than an utterly singular being cut from all meaningful ties in life, is the narrative of degeneration. The anxiety of degeneration is always the underbelly of any narrative of growth; for if one can change for the better, it should also be possible to change for the worse. The narration constantly emphasizes that Lapidoth wasn't *always* the

gambling demon we find him in the novel. The flashback brought on by the incident with Mirah's purse depicts Lapidoth as a "bright, unblamed young fellow" (Eliot 624), his face was "once handsome" (Eliot 620), and he is described to be a man who once had winning charm, but blind to his loss of it: "it is not only women who are unaware of their diminished charm, or imagine that they can feign not to be worn out" (Eliot 652). With Lapidoth we see the ultimate limit case of a character subsumed completely under the drive of suspense and gambling, to the point that he not only disqualifies himself from the novel of progress but also the idea of any progress itself.

Ultimately, the images of water associated with each character sum up their relation to their *Bildung*. Mordecai shows affinity with bridges over water, removing himself from the unpredictable nature of water completely and opting for an immutable passage, like his spiritual inheritance that he wishes to transfer to Daniel. Daniel is constantly associated with the river—it might have its fickle turns, but it has direction, and also a possibility of connection and flow, the way that he connected with Mirah and Mordecai at riverbanks. Gwendolen is out in the vast ocean—full of random tides that will always come and go, the ebb and flow of which are constantly repeated but bear no causality to one another. Her "world-nausea" (Eliot 229) might as well be sea-sickness. She is stranded in a vast, completely unfathomable openness: uncaring and unsympathetic, like the form of the *Bildungsroman* treats her. Gwendolen is dealt the bad hand that is the result of Daniel being dealt the good hand. The form of the *Bildungsroman* is pushed to its limits and revealed of its machinations of self-fulfillment revealed in *Daniel Deronda*, because the various uses of suspense by different characters stretch them to extreme variations of the *Bildung* plot possible within a novel.

CODA.

Reading Suspense, Suspiciously.

This study has examined the shifting uses of suspense in the form of the Bildungsroman during the Victorian period and has demonstrated that there was a brief moment in the few years between 1847 and 1850 when the Bildung plot's formula of youth to maturity coincided pleasurably with its use of suspense and its payoff. In that brief cultural moment, expectations of youth were sown through suspense, and when suspense was fulfilled, so were the promises of youth. However, in the years that followed, we saw bold experiments of narrative form from novelists such as Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, Wilkie Collins, and George Eliot, who in various ways disrupted the neat parallel between the youth-to-maturity trajectory of the Bildungsroman and the suspense-to-payoff structure of the narrative in various ways. In doing so, they questioned various assumptions inherent to the form of the Bildungsroman. Thinking of the Victorian period itself as a time of experimentation with the Bildung form not only allows us to see the era as one that was less self-indulgent and more self-reflective than is typically assumed, but it also opens up ways for the form of the Bildungsroman to be studied *as a problematic*, not as a set structure. Specifically, conceiving of suspense as a formal feature of narrative lets us think about Victorian culture of self-making and self-regulation developed through the narrative form of the novel, and how such culture grappled with its own ideas of the British subject formation and the threats that it faced.

Charles Dickens demonstrates increasing pessimism with the aspirations of British narratives of self-formation when he replaces the payoff of suspense to unrelated surprise that renders all prior expectations moot from *David Copperfield* to *Great Expectations*. Unlike David, who despite briefly losing his way (represented by his scenes in gardens, where he meets both Steerforth and Dora, his two fallen negations), ultimately corrects his missteps to arrive at his proper telos (Agnes), Pip sets and walks into his own snares unknowingly. When the recognition of this self-deception takes place, Pip's telos is revealed to be a fantasy, a mere delusion. In this way, Dickens demonstrates the dialectical relationship between suspense and surprise: while both enhance the impact on the reader, their combination is a careful balancing act that can result in surprise overtaking the effects and goals of suspense. One wins out over the other. Dickens's two novels, when paired this way, also hint at the main source of the disruption of the neat parallel between suspense and Bildung that we saw in *David Copperfield* when we read *Great Expectations*. The structure of suspense and its payoff that upkeep the youth-to-maturity form of the British Bildungsroman, also maintain the fantasy of an unsoiled, unalloyed, and concrete British identity. When that structure is disrupted, as it is in *Great Expectations*, that illusion of a progressive, self-controlled British modern subject is also dissolved.

Dickens—and as I will go on to discuss, all of the other authors to whom I have attended to in this study—showcase this disruption through the markers of foreignness or colonial territories outside the British national boundaries that impinge on the purity of homeland. For instance, in *David Copperfield*, the colonies in Australia constitute a narrative wastebin to which all of the negated and stunted characters are relegated. Just as David, the narrator, negates his bad doubles in order to bolster his own development, the British national boundary expels these characters and condemns them to colonial labor, profiting off of their removal from the homeland. David's

correctly formed subjectivity is therefore made parallel to the legitimacy of British national borders. But in *Great Expectations*, a sinister possibility emerges—that someone who has been sent to the colonies, can come *back*. Magwitch, like the return of the repressed, not only demonstrates that British national boundaries are not as solid as *David Copperfield* made them out to be (in *David*, the “bad apples” can be thrown away into the colonies), but also suggests that the *most* British figure—the gentleman—can be made with the will and wealth of someone returning from those colonies. Here, British national boundaries also signify the constitution of the British individual—Pip’s fantasy is that of narrative and cultural control of the British citizen’s and nation’s perimeter. While *David Copperfield* achieves Pip’s fantasy of the impermeable subject and nation through a successful fulfillment of suspense, it remains a fantasy in *Great Expectations*, as suspense is switched out for surprise. The colonies—the shadowy Other of the British national boundary—grow from being just a “off-stage” space that solves narrative problems for the Bildungsroman, to *the* problem for the Bildungsroman.

In fact, although Dickens tackles the problem of xenophobia and foreign contagion that upsets the domestic and national ethico-moral standards in multiple of his works—take Arthur Clennam’s poisonous foreign investments in *Little Dorrit*, similarly echoed in Mrs. Jellyby’s telescopic philanthropy that rots her own household inside out in *Bleak House*—he is at his most pessimistic about the upkeep of the individual and national border, or what is “English,” in his final unfinished novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. In it, the clear culprit of the mystery plot, John Jasper, creates for himself a narrative of progressive development in order for the quaint English townspeople to serve as his alibi. In doing so, he contrasts his British purity to the dark skin and oriental markers of a good-hearted young man from Ceylon, Neville Landless. He executes this in a way not dissimilar to David’s negation of characters like Steerforth and Dora.

Both characters use juxtaposition to vouch for their own worth and centrality in his story. However, unlike David, who does win Agnes in the end and is endorsed by the novel in his progressive narrative, Jasper is seen to be drenched in opium, lying next to “a Chinaman, a Lascar” in the very beginning of the novel, and maliciously “smoothing the way” into creating his false alibi and framing Neville (*Edwin Drood* 7, 97). In short, to narrate one’s own Bildung in *Edwin Drood* is to hide how much one is steeped in oriental influences, and to falsely lionize the centrality of Britishness in the Bildung plot at the expense of characters who bear the markers of colonialism and orientalism. With this colonial critique of the British subject formation in mind, we can also see that the other novels discussed in this study also grapple with markers of the Other, specifically by rendering the plot points that disrupt suspense as thematically *un-British*.

For Charlotte Brontë, the entire conceit of progressive development is put under interrogation when the fulfillment of suspense employed by *Jane Eyre* in 1847 is taken away in *Villette*, leaving only the endless “pause” on which Lucy ends her story. In a way, *Villette* might be the *least* novelistic novel out of all the texts examined in this dissertation. Lucy is able to simply exist in a rather poetic pause, which serves both a painful reminder of her exclusion from “proper” subject-formation and a radical freedom from any expectation *to* progress. What *Villette* does differently than any of the other novels that I discuss in the study is that it actively questions any *need* or *desire* for progressive development of an individual. What “progress” is possible, when the bare minimal requirements of constructing a narrative of development is refused by the contingent circumstances of poverty, emigration, and sexism? In this way, *Villette* raises the question of contingency that specifically interrogates the ineffectiveness of the British subject outside of its national boundary—much of the alienation and injustice that Lucy Snowe faces in the novel stems from the fact that the story of a British subject formation refuses to include her.

She is forced by contingent factors, such as her gender and lack of family and fortune, to leave Britain behind and seek another life abroad. In fact, she precisely lives out one of the “bad” options that Gwendolen Harleth refuses in *Daniel Deronda*: “I would rather emigrate than be a governess,” Gwendolen pipes, when her family loses their fortune (Eliot 196). As Lucy Snowe navigates her way through her emigration, suspense is snuffed out to make way for descriptions of Lucy’s experience as *is*, with no expectations or anticipations. The sequence of her travels is moment-to-moment, free from all expectation of development. Strikingly, the alienating foreignness of Labassecour (when Lucy arrives there) is only matched by the unfamiliarity of London itself—the novel suggests, that for those like Lucy, who are excluded from the purported narratives of proper British subject formation, their homeland is just as alien. Further, London is the center of the metropole, economically privileged and culturally distant than Brontë (poor rural North) or Lucy’s (rural east) England, exposing internal difference within the category of “British.” What kills suspense in *Villette* is precisely the feeling of being out of sync with Britishness; the disruptions to expectations and payoff of suspense enter in *Villette* as moments of contingency and alienation.

In my third and fourth chapters, I have specifically examined suspense through thematics of debt and gambling, because both Collins’s novels and Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* illuminate the exclusive and unlikely nature of the aspirations of the British Bildung form. Both debt and gambling are based on the act of speculation. To speculate is to risk—not only can you rise to success (credit or winnings) but can fall to failure (insolvency or losses). These thematics reveal that the developmental expectations of Bildung are ultimately up to chance, and not everyone is guaranteed a successful Bildung arc: not everyone can be David or Jane. There must be Pips and Lucys. Here, the payoff of suspense is never guaranteed; the formula of suspense and its fulfillment that we so plainly saw in *David Copperfield* or *Jane Eyre* are unachievable without impossibly

good luck. As Magdalen's sufferings in *No Name* are rendered moot by her sister Nora's chance encounter with the exact person who is able to restore their family fortune, or as Gwendolen's entertainment of uncertainty only pushes her to choose the remaining bad option, the experiences of characters in these novels are always already under threat of being rendered meaningless in the face of fortune and luck. A formal shift in these novels, as opposed to novels taken into consideration in the first two chapters, is that they become more of an ensemble text in order to illustrate that aspect of a zero-sum game. Rather than having a single protagonist who either succeeds in creating an image of successful development (David, Jane) or does not (Pip, Lucy), these novels show in their worlds the mechanism by which when one succeeds, another fails. Frequently, we see pairs that play on the see-saw of fortune, such as Laura Fairlie and Anne Catherick, the two pairs of Allan Armadales, Mr. Vanstone and his brother, Franklin Blake and Godfrey Ablewhite, and of course, Gwendolen Harleth and Daniel Deronda. The existence of a debtor means that there is a creditor, a loser in a gamble loses to a winner. These novels grapple with the unsaid assumption of the Bildungsroman, showing it to be a genre in which the heroes can only reach proper formation at the expense of somebody else.

Moreover, Collins's novels and *Daniel Deronda* go a step further in denouncing the solidity of the British subject and national identity, disregarding the centrality of British plot for the un-British plot. What I mean by that is that they seem to recognize that there is no more story to tell regarding proper British subject formation without further centering the possibilities that lie outside the British national boundary. Collins's novels are particularly transparent—perhaps as transparent as *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*—in conveying their suspicion of what constitutes a proper British subject. Look no further than the moment that Godfrey Ablewhite (what a name, too, that sides him squarely with white British male subjecthood) is revealed to be the thief with

hidden debts trying to profit off of the Indian Diamond. In fact, as I have outlined in my discussion of *The Moonstone*, Franklin Blake's Bildung plot is disregarded by the closure of the novel in favor of following the Moonstone itself back to India, where it lies in its sheer narrative potentiality. Indeed, the last lines of the novel exclaim: "What will be the next adventures of the Moonstone? Who can tell!" (TM 472). Particularly, in imagining the Indian diamond as the cause of the entire plot in *The Moonstone*, Collins seems to even suggest that narrative interest in the British novel itself is impossible without addressing what is fundamentally un-British. Similarly, even Daniel, who is given the best fortune in the world of *Daniel Deronda* and achieves the most balanced Bildung out of all the characters, leaves England for a radically different political and spiritual future. Even the successes of Bildung are now located beyond England.

Attending to these novels and how their formula of suspense and its payoff are figured shows that the "bad dream" endings of the Bildungsroman are much more likely than achieving a climactically happy telos. Indeed, examining the various ways in which the novels disrupt the neat formula of suspense in the Bildungsroman demonstrates just how fragile the aspiration of Bildung turns out to be. This fragility of the cultural concept is what I hoped to have demonstrated throughout these discussions of form. Some may say that my arguments are too pessimistic. I agree that they are not happy conclusions. However, reading the increasing disruption to the structures of suspense in the Victorian era ultimately lights up the various inconsistencies, tensions, and hidden injustice of what once appeared to be so pleasurable, so smooth, as the developmental paradigm of the Bildungsroman. In developing a critical eye that sees through the cracks of the fantasy of Bildung, we might begin to see the cruelty of its optimism, and imagine ways to rethink narrative, and ways of telling our stories, away from its false ideals of proper subject formation.

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