

Singular Appearance: Tracking Character in the Nineteenth Century

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“With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance.”

- Arendt, *The Human Condition*

“There are various ways of getting at a knowledge of character—by looks, words, actions. The first of these, which seems the most superficial, is perhaps the safest, and least liable to deceive...”

- Hazlitt, “On the Knowledge of Character”

“The repetition of a work of art is like a singularity without concept, and it is not by chance that a poem must be learned by heart.”

- Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*

## Introduction

### Foray

In a keynote address at the 2018 International Conference for the Study of Romanticism, Professor Sara Guyer challenged those assembled to reconsider the riddle of Mary Shelley’s creature. More than an homage to Frankenstein’s 200th year anniversary and the conference’s corresponding theme, “Assembly,” Guyer’s address presented the monster as a figure whose over-determined multiplicity could be useful in yet another way. How, Guyer wondered aloud, does the creature hang together? And, given that this question remains (in the novel) unanswered, how might the mysterious cohesion of his parts model an inquiry that, already haunting the humanities, should be taken up? Guyer’s ultimate claim that humanities departments should be asking how they and other disciplines might hang together in new, productive configurations distills an exigent concern with the value—and potential value—of reading in our current moment. How, where, and to what purpose should readers and readings be assembled, and to what type, or types, of “public” should they be contributing?

This project takes up an interest in how certain British Romantic texts assemble their “publics” through a counterintuitive approach to character. More specifically, I examine how

these texts assemble characters whose unique way of seeing and describing each other generates and sustains a vibrant public space. In this project, I define “public space” as the reality we construe as communities by inheriting, propagating, and generating the linguistic and socio-political categories through which we filter and divide the world. Rather than plumbing each other’s psychological depths—as friends, or lovers, or close readers—might do, and rather than glossing each other as stereotypes, I argue that “Romantic” characters perceive—or read—appearance in ways that mutually capture each other’s particularity—not, however, as psychologically developed interiors, but as rich, weird experiences, moments that are singular because they only occur once. Rather than deriving from original insight or expression, this “once-ness” or singularity arises as a distinct combination of shared categories arranged by a perceiver. While these appearances might strike the inattentive eye as repeated iterations of the same features, the Romantic characters I study draw out the infinite webbing of associations—personal, social, linguistic, historical—stuck in the amber of a moment that is publicly seen. I develop this concept of public space through readings of Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition* (1985). As Arendt illustrates, a public and the individuals that compose it exist in a kind of tension: while the acting and speaking together of individuals produces a public, their particular words and actions only become perceptible within the social categories of shared narratives.<sup>1</sup>

The Romantic characters I track complicate this relation between public space and visibility by, first, presenting appearances that exceed categorization, and, second, managing to see this idiosyncrasy on each other’s behalf. What is most remarkable, however, is how they perceive and help define each other’s singularity. They do so by discovering particularity at the level of appearance, or by weaving a distinct cloth from the mesh of socially defined traits. This is not a process of negation, a subtraction of the strange from what is familiar, nor a delineation

of particularity in relief against type. Instead, a character's socialized recognition of what is categorizable undergirds—rather than works against—a susceptibility to the singularity of familiar appearance. Significantly, then, these Romantic perceivers refract particularity through type, and then elide this binary altogether. Looking around, rather than through this normative opposition, these perceivers capture familiar features in moments of singular assembly—or, put another way, as gesticulations that both communicate and resist interpretation.

I identify this unique perception as a function of “character”—rather than of literary “person” or “identity”—in order to emphasize its public nature. As a cursory scan of the *Oxford English Dictionary* will show, “character” can refer to an iterable mark or sign; the “moral or mental” qualities that define a person or group of persons; someone's social role or function; the reputation of a person or institution; or the force of someone's personality (“character, n.”). Denoting a private or a public identity, and descriptive of either an individual or a group, the multiple senses of “character” wobble between internal and external modes of self, and so suggest a continuity of the “personal” with the “persona.” Taking up positions between these poles, the fictional individuals studied in this project perceive each other by publicly crafting, or “characterizing,” the other's singularity. As suggested above, this paradoxical characterization is partly an effect of the social narratives that literary figures bring to bear on each other, the shared categories and public “types” that inform their approach to the world around them. But how, exactly, does drawing the image of another's recognizable, public character coincide with perceiving their singularity, the particular “self” that remains uncategorizable?

I argue in this dissertation that the public space through which Romantic characters are able to view each other has two opposing faces: the milieu of categories and narratives shared by its individual members, on the one hand, and the mixed selection of these elements that each

individual contains as their idiosyncratic experience. These fictional characters display “partial” perspectives that are especially obvious—both in the sense of affective bias and in the sense of operating as part of a larger whole. Shaped to various degrees by different social forces; coloring shared categories with personal associations and predilections; and breaking up and recombining bits of public narratives in odd assemblages, they perceive the world and each other from viewing points scattered across their shared, social domain. Arendt argues that this public space is necessary precisely because it makes different viewpoints possible: Like a “common table” around which we each sit, our shared narratives condition our individual perspectives (52). In the Romantic relationships I study, however, this table gets chopped up, re-serviced, made into a new table, or chairs, maybe; there is, in other words, no steady opposition between what one might consider a “public” category and what one would describe as a “personal” improvisation on that category. Public space and the individuals that inhabit it are constantly coming into being alongside each other, their partial perspectives becoming the new, public vistas that shape and ground future perspectives.

In considering how the characters of certain British Romantic texts perceive each other, this dissertation studies “character” not as a function of form, but, rather, as a concept at work in the tangible world. The ways in which “seeing” and “being seen” unfold between the literary characters I track explicate how we as living, breathing humans also see and be seen—or, rather, the potential we have for this mutual recognition. In treating fictional characters as human analogues, I take up the brand lit by Toril Moi, Rita Felski, and Amanda Anderson in their recent work, *Character: Three Inquiries into Literary Studies* (U of Chicago P, 2019). First providing a roadmap of the historical relationship between “character,” literary theory, and how the latter has attempted to define itself over the course of the twentieth century, Moi, Felski, and Anderson call

for a new openness to the variety of ways in which fictional persons help us think through human experiences such as identification, emotional response, and moral reflection (22). In doing so, they not only expose the ideological origins of the “taboo” against reading characters as persons, but seek to think outside the binary, most recently instantiated by Alex Woloch and John Frow, between thinking of characters as structural elements of a text and human-esque entities.<sup>2</sup>

While similarly using characters to think phenomenologically about human experience, I approach this relation from the opposite direction: rather than understanding fictional persons as helpful illuminations or illustrations of real persons, I view literary characters as figures whose textual status throws into relief our potential emergence as individual, or perceived, beings. Arendt argues that to actualize the specifically human capacity for utter distinctness is to become visible—to become *appearance*—through speech and action. This conceptualization of the individual-as-agent arises alongside Arendt’s counterintuitive claim that “[f]or us, appearance—something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves—constitutes reality” (HC 50). Unlike the “uncertain, shadowy kind of existence” that defines the realm of the private (HC 51), the incontestable fact of a person only “shine[s]” forth in its inexpressible “glory” as a publicly viewed phenomenon (HC 180).<sup>3</sup> Because literary characters are explicitly constructed from the social and linguistic milieu of a text’s context and content, they figure, in my argument, the ways in which we perceive another’s individuality by recognizing them as unique and momentary assemblies of our shared categories.

In reading literary characters as exemplary of individual distinctness, I seek to build upon Arendt’s political theory by thinking through “difference” as communal—not because my existence differs *in relation* to yours, but because singularity always arises *in character*. This emergence has three facets. First, one’s singular “who-ness” manifests not in qualities, which are

shared human traits subject to gloss, but as a moment of action or speech supported and captured by a perceiving, listening community (*HC* 179, 186). Second, this moment—eloquently described by Jerome Kohn as a “fully articulate gesture, one that cannot be copied or repeated” (124)—is essentially aesthetic.<sup>4</sup> If Kohn argues that such gestures can only be “imitated poetically” (124), George Kateb identifies this aesthetic quality in Arendt’s political concept of the “mask” or “persona.”<sup>5</sup> In order to be replete, action cannot be motivated by willing or thinking, as these are both interior activities ruled by external ends. Instead, the agent is moved by principles, or by consistent commitment to a role that, while personally chosen, is only made available by the existence of the public space: “In filling one’s role, one fills out oneself, and, at the same time, partly shapes the role...One tries to make sure that everything one says is, however, in character...one enacts one’s commitment and thereby shows who one is” (138).

Singularity, then, becomes visible as an image impressing itself upon a public audience whose existence, in turn, has provided the grist—the shared categories—for the individual’s honing of this image. The third facet of the individual’s characterization as singular consists in its delineation from a correlatively singular angle, or the partial viewpoints from which idiosyncratic observers mutually capture each other’s singularity. If partiality often induces an anxiety of limitation, it serves in the texts I study to *delimit*: to frame what or whom an individual is perceiving. In some cases, this frame works like a camera lens, “snapping” the concrete, particular details of a moment. Like atoms—a term that originally referred to the smallest, indivisible bits of matter—these details are not less real or true for being caught from a particular angle and at a particular time.<sup>6</sup> In fact, this spatio-temporal delimitation produces an assembly of features—a mosaic—that cannot be reproduced outside the singular viewpoint from which it was captured. The resulting image, then, presents an irreducible rendition of the person

or event or thing being “shot”: not by virtue of the perceiver’s imaginative power, but because their partial inhabitation of a public—their peering outward from and through a host of shared categories—makes them impressionable to this singular moment.

I use “character” in this project, then, on two levels. First, to refer to literary persons whose modes of interaction model potential, real-world interactions. Second, I do so to assert one of the central stakes of this project: that singularity occurs not as a spontaneous expression of interiority, but as the communal crafting of a public appearance. *Character*, moreover, bridges genre in a way that supports the exploration of text—the words, associations, and references of a lyric poem or of a novel—as the visible distillation of the kinds of shared, narrative categories at play in our perception of and through the world. I consider character in this project not only as presented by fictional personages—such as the cast members of Walter Scott’s historical dramas—but also as presented by lyric voices, such as the speakers of Robert Burns’ poems. Both kinds of characters are such in that they take up viewpoints in a public space from which they perceive, or characterize, the world by which they are themselves characterized.

As a chiasmus of the internal and the external, *character*, in this project, thus provides an arena for the dialogue between self and world that recurs in Romantic writing. At the same time, the texts I read in this project cannot be subsumed into a critical narrative that delimits Romanticism to an “expressive” theory of poetics.<sup>7</sup> Exemplifying a canonical view of Romantic literature as concerned “not [with] the external people and events represented but the inner feelings of the author, or external objects only after these have been transformed by the author’s feelings” (Greenblatt 8-9), M.H. Abrams famously argued that “romantic predications about poetry...turn on a metaphor which...signifies the internal made external. The most frequent of these terms was ‘expression,’ used in contexts indicating a revival of the root meaning ex-

pressus, from ex-premere, “to press out” (48). Whereas Abrams goes on to delineate a Romanticism dedicated to the transformative powers of the poetic mind, my project departs from this historical focus by tracking a Romanticism invested, alternatively, in perceiving the outside world. Rather than expressing, or “pressing out,” the characters I track are impressed upon by the singular appearances around them.

I have chosen to write about these characters as “Romantic”—and to think about *character* through Romantic texts—not in a spirit of contrariety, nor to track a Romanticism defined solely by its negation of a canonically accepted definition. Instead, the authors I read are still centrally concerned with the claims—articulated by Wordsworth in *The Prelude* to *Lyrical Ballads*—through which Romanticism has traditionally been read: “to look steadily at...[one’s] subject,” on the one hand, and to “adopt the very language of men,” on the other (Coleridge 178, 177). The authors I read, however, turn these narrative actions inside out. Rather than “looking” with the intention to absorb with feeling and recreate through reflection, their seeing crafts, or characterizes, the world in a way that, first, distinguishes between self and other, and second, rewrites the public horizon against which this dialogic distinction occurs. The “language of men” in these instances is not a natural dialect of the heart opposed to artifice, then, but the shared categories whose reassembly by mutual perceivers kaleidoscopically rearrange the appearances by which we each become distinguishable. To see another is to characterize them—and, as this perception involves the habitation of a public ledge, involves being seen and made “character” in turn.

In exploring how Romantic literary characters become “characters” in the sense of distinct, public appearances, this project joins other, recent work in Romantic studies that both challenges a canonical emphasis on the period’s preoccupation with interiority while, however,

going beyond the impulse to unmask or deconstruct this preoccupation.<sup>8</sup> Evan Gottlieb claims that Romantic texts attend seriously to “things”—that is, rather than conflating imaginative power with the assumption that the world is inaccessible outside our subjective relation to it, such texts transcend “subject/object dualism” by excavating the formative dialogue between perceiver and perceived (8). Theo Davis similarly argues that a certain Romanticism seeks to “notice” things in a way that substitutes a simply representational mode of approach with a phenomenological investment in the substantive nature of experience.<sup>9</sup> Lily Gurton-Wachter notes that “by paying attention to the divergent ways that attention can be paid, Romantic aesthetics pivots on the possibility that *how* we watch might alter *what* we notice” (11).<sup>10</sup> For these scholars, Romantic perception is neither reducible to the creative authority of the subject, nor to the ontological independence of the object; indeed, what Romantic perception—and perceptibility—have in view unravels this familiar but unsatisfying binary. In place of the latter, I argue that we find a powerful plasticity—a bewitchment of perceiver by perceived in a dance that is shared but embodied singularly by each.

Even as I consider the concerns of this project to be “Romantic,” however, I embrace the portability that this designation increasingly holds for scholars in the field. In his encapsulation of the conference theme, “Romantic Elements,” for the 2019 meeting of the North American Study for the Study of Romanticism, Timothy Campbell remarks that while “Romanticism signals a period,” it is “also a disposition (or complex set of them) that, by its own account and many of ours, is not narrowly bound to its own ostensible historical-chronological or cultural-geographical origins and centers” (244).<sup>11</sup> Acknowledging the paradox that the existing and potential capaciousness of Romanticism “is the consequence of highly transmissible core elements, coming before and after the canonical center, that are susceptible to many kinds of

receptions and responses” (245), this project treats “Romantic character” as a phenomenon that distills within and yet exceeds this particular time period. On the one hand, this attention to appearance picks up on an eighteenth-century aesthetics that sought to either assemble “ideal” or “typical” forms through the collation of observable facts (Abrams 38, 42). On the other, it anticipates a realism in which actual persons and their relations are brought before our eyes (Norton 995); not through the autobiographical recounting of historical personages, but through the imitation of character as the “unity of a milieu”: a mingling of the “physical, moral, and historical elements of a portrait” (Auerbach 472).<sup>12</sup>

In addition to providing a new way to think through the dialogue between the internal and the external, the idea of character explored here tackles the relation between particular and type. Accessed via type, the characters I present in this project are, nonetheless, composed of idiosyncratic elements that resist subsumption by normative categories. The effect is one of pause, and magnification: a zooming up that renders a particular feature or gesture overlarge, outsized. This kind of viewing may, at first, seem to resonate with something like Romantic caricature, which Ian Haywood claims involves a “hyperbolic re-enactment” of socio-political tropes and events (9). I argue that the uneasy set of relations between artist, print, and audience that Haywood identifies in Roman caricature parallels the disruptive reassembling of phenomena present in Romantic character. While Haywood argues that this destabilization of cultural narratives is grounded in the imaginative excess of the author and the ensuing proliferation of possible interpretations, however, I argue that Romantic perceivers register other Romantic characters as objects of minute attention, rather than of artistic creation.<sup>13</sup> In doing so, they model a mode of delineating, rather than exceeding, reality.

At stake in studying this idea of character in Romanticism is the opportunity to reconsider how to understand aesthetic subjects. In shifting to think about the perception of the other, this project contributes to such conversations, however, by exploring the potential for *singularity*—for the distinct visibility of the perceiving individual—that this attention to appearance provides. In prizing apart the mutual perception that occurs at the locus of *character* and cultivates emergence of alterity, I join other scholars who find within Romantic texts a dialogic formation grounded in difference. Mina Gorji, for example, demonstrates how John Clare’s aural attunement to natural phenomena eschews a human perspective for the mediation of the external world, while Amanda Goldstein reads Blake and Arendt alongside each other in order to uncover a Romantic attitude delimited by, rather than transformative of, earthly appearances.<sup>14</sup> Gorji and Goldstein thus separately showcase a Romantic aesthetic that approaches the world not as an “object of knowledge or desire” (Goldstein 144), nor as an alien environment to be understood and possessed via representation (Gorji 153), but as a context inextricable from our own methods of seeing and knowing.

In what follows, I move between readings of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition* to delineate the musculature at work in this dissertation.<sup>15</sup> The “who-ness” that, Arendt claims, emanates from each individual as an appearance oversaturated for our conceptual palette electrifies the image of the creature: neither human nor nonhuman, he exemplifies the utter distinctness that, for Arendt, defines the individual, simultaneously riveting and resisting the perception of others.<sup>16</sup> *Frankenstein*, conversely, enacts the singularity of perspective that is the obverse of singular appearance: the frame that shapes—even as it is bent out of shape—by the phenomena it seeks to confine. Coming at once into each other’s view,

creator and creature demonstrate the reciprocity of seeing that distills perceiver and perceived into more and more potent versions of themselves.

### 1: Singular Appearance

There is, perhaps, no more outsized character in Romantic literature than Frankenstein's creature. A non-human made from human parts, he captures the dual *recognizability* at the heart of this project: an appearance that is visible because it is both already known, a repeated occurrence, and utterly distinct. Frankenstein draws our attention to this juxtaposition of the typical and the particular when he first brings the creature before our eyes. He is the epitome of youthful strength, with hair "lustrous black and flowing," and teeth of new, "pearly whiteness," even as his "shriveled complexion and straight black lips" render him corpselike (Shelley 60). None of these features in and of themselves are odd or uncategorizable; instead, it is their combination—the characteristics of human life combined with those of human death—that render his appearance so singular as to overwhelm perception. The creature, in other words, overwhelms the other characters in the novel because he is *too* human, rather than not human enough. Rather than being so particular that he exceeds or slips through our categories, his externalization of the mortality typical of humans is the quality that renders him too singular for comprehension.

Consider the creature's exaggerated surface, an appearance whose elision of the internal and the external further conveys his elision of particular and type. With "yellow skin [that] scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath," the apparent decay of his papery skin reveals and contributes to the impression of powerful vitality—even, conversely, as these exposed motors, isolated in our perception as moments not normally seen, conjure an image of skeletal exposure that disrupts our normal associations of human death and mortality with a

close-up view of human life's minute operations (60). The seemingly unending extension of his surface not only disrupts the normative binaries of inner and outer, internal and external, but further disrupts the distinction between particular and type by deriving an utterly singular appearance from a generalizable human anatomy.

The creature is, then, neither a monstrous departure from the human, nor a monstrous excess of the human. Instead, his remarkable vivacity of appearance manifests what Hannah Arendt pleads for as the human's definitive trait: a capacity for the "new." The members of other species, she argues, are rendered immortal by their capacity to procreate and reproduce perfectly replicable members, consequently generating a never-ending cycle of predictable and harmonious life. Humans, in contrast, cut across this cycle by producing "works and deeds and words," consequently creating a world that exceeds and outlasts their biological life. (Arendt 19)

Of these three abilities—making, acting, and speaking—Arendt argues that the capacity for action, of "beginning something anew," defines our general, shared humanity by, paradoxically, setting us each utterly apart from one another (9). Unlike psychological traits or physical features, an action is not generalizable. Occurring in what Arendt calls the "web of human relationships," each action becomes the catalyst of boundless consequences, mingling and interacting with other actions and so producing myriad, untraceable effects (184).<sup>17</sup> Because an act can never be fully delimited, its performance is irreproducible: a singular gesture that vanishes into—even as it exceeds—the moment of its doing. The individual, by extension, only ever discloses their singular identity in action. Though we may describe others, our attempts to capture "who" they are ultimately only resolves "what" they are, the confluence of categorizable "qualities he necessarily shares with others" (Arendt 181).

For Arendt, then, one's "who-ness" discloses itself in action, or in moments of appearance that resist categorization. Arendt links this capacity for newness to natality, or to the fact that with each human birth a unique individual disrupts the world with the power to "perform what is infinitely improbable" (178). And yet, though an agent enacts her own newness, the latter also depends upon the existence of a surrounding public: the spatial and temporal relations that resonate with the innumerable echoes of any given act, and so undergird its boundlessness. Unbound to any one consequence, action "exhausts its full meaning in the performance itself" (Arendt 206). Arendt's conclusion is that we can only perform—rather than express—"who" we are: in other words, newness or singularity manifests as appearance. Correlatively, then, we depend on others to observe and capture our inimitable singularities—or, as I interpret and build upon these claims, each individual must become the "hero" of a story rewritten by an outside community.<sup>18</sup>

As suggested by the metaphors of drama and story that Arendt uses to argue that the potential distinctness of each individual must be seen to be actualized, singular appearance emerges through the reconstruction achieved with narrative. Given the irreproducible nature of action in Arendt's argument, the role of narrative, which necessarily subsumes particulars into the shared categories of language, seems, at first, implausible and contradictory. The authors I study create characters, however, that demonstrate the necessity of type to appearance by wielding these public narratives less like lenses and more like kaleidoscopes. Breaking up and reassembling the types through which they see the world, these perceivers delineate particulars from an angle whose partiality supports the singularity of the perceived image. I use the term "singularity," then, not as a synonym with "particularity," but to denote appearance that arises when type and particular meld through the interaction between perceivers.

Frankenstein initially exemplifies the kind of partial perspective that contributes to the living singularity of another. Describing the “supernatural enthusiasm” that drove his search for the “principle of life” (Shelley 56), Frankenstein dwells emphatically on his own sight, or upon his idiosyncratic mode of reading the world:

My attention was fixed upon every object the most insupportable to the delicacy of the human feelings. I saw how the fine form of man was degraded and wasted; I beheld the corruption of death succeed to the blooming cheek of life; I saw how the worm inherited the wonders of the eye and brain. I paused, examining and analyzing all the minutiae of causation, as exemplified in the change from life to death, and death to life... (56)

Frankenstein, here, “fixes” upon the tiniest, organic movements of the outside world with an “attention” that combines microscopic and telescopic vision. Drawing close to things with his anaphora of “seeing” verbs (“saw,” “beheld,” “examining”), he describes a perception that dilates upon “minutiae”—the movement of the worm, the disintegration of flesh—with a rigor that magnifies phenomena and, consequently, recognizes their encapsulation of larger narratives (“the change from life to death, and death to life”).

Frankenstein models how the other Romantic characters in this project discover singularity by developing, rather than transcending, their own particular perspectives: though the viewpoints of these Romantic perceivers are undergirded by public narratives, they comprise distinct, piecemeal jumbles of the categories at play in such narratives. Frankenstein is able to create the monster by drawing on scientific categories to produce a working—a typical—human body. The creature’s derivation from the fragments of other, organic beings recreates a known, familiar narrative—the movement from death to life, and vice versa—in a profoundly distinct

way: the mortality evident in his physical, corpse-like features particularizes a shared, human story, even as this categorization of the “human” is shattered by his existence as a living composite of the dead. In his singularity, then, “particularity” and “typicality” become flipsides of each other, interchangeable.

The central claim I wish to pursue in this project, then, is that singular appearance—contrary to normative distinctions between narrative and reality, perception and fact—is always already *character*: a phenomenon that emerges through its perception and public reconstruction from the outside. The Romantic characters who model this social perception preclude such binaries by exercising idiosyncratic perspectives that generate a public space of appearance: Frankenstein assembles old categories of knowledge into a being whose new appearance further expands their shared field of vision.

## 2: Public Space

The space of acting and speaking together that conditions singular appearance does not always exist, and Arendt laments a modern society that has increasingly replaced a “public” with the “social”: a space that not only privileges necessary “life processes” over words and deeds, and so replaces “action” with “behavior” as the “foremost mode of human relationship,” but that also subjects behavior to uniform rules (41, 46). This “unnatural growth...of the natural,” in which “the fact of mutual dependence for the sake of life and nothing else assumes public significance,” banishes individual “distinction and difference” to the private realm (41, 47). Although Arendt acknowledges that this turn to normalizing behavior constitutes, in part, an attempt to instantiate equality, she argues that stifling the human capacity to strive towards new individuality diminishes our appearance and, consequently, obscures and restrains reality.

The diminishing appearance of Frankenstein's creature is attributable to such asphyxiation: the clinging of its characters to a homogeneous society backed by the solipsism of its members. Frankenstein and his creature, then, provide both example and counterexample of the reading of Romantic character I track here. Rejected by community, the creature never fully enters the public space of appearance that would develop his singularity; instead, his relegation to the realm of the natural—to the “desert mountains and dreary glaciers,” to the icy peaks and their “bleak skies”—ultimately render his human, yet particular, features invisible (Shelley 94). Pursued by his creator into the blank and icy north, he is last seen in Frankenstein's narrative as a “ghastly and distorted shape” glimpsed in the moonlight; dwindling after that to a just “audible whisper”; then to “the print of his huge step on the white plain,” and finally to the inscriptions—“the marks in writing on the barks of the trees, or cut in stone”—that he leaves as traces of his route (Shelley 173, 175).

The creature's gradual erasure corresponds with his ultimate lapse into non-existence and ends, fittingly, in his encounter with Walton, who voices the novel's initial and outermost frame narrative. Though “touched by the expressions of...[the creature's] misery,” Walton allows his imagination to be overwhelmed, not by the being before him, but by the memory of Frankenstein. Withdrawing his gaze, Walton “cast[s]...[his] eyes on the lifeless form of...[his] friend” before ousting the creature from the space of debate and refusing to engage his “powers of eloquence and persuasion.” Thus interrupted in the “series of his being,” the creature gives himself up to utter obliteration: claiming that “[s]oon these burning miseries will be extinct” and “no longer felt,” he morphs into a nexus of feeling with no assignable subject nor recognizably human attributes. His loss of identification with a public becomes a death that thus precedes his literal end: already “consume[d]” by “agonies,” the funeral pyre whose flames will soon

“consume to ashes...[his] miserable frame” seems redundant—a fact confirmed by the absence of this occurrence from the narrative altogether. “[L]ost in darkness and distance,” the creature disappears from sight in the novel’s final words, not even afforded the spectacle of a death that would have at least established his individual end. (Shelley 187-89)

And yet, the creature’s conclusive invisibility challenges a reading that would confirm his monstrosity. The final chapters of the novel zoom out from Frankenstein’s narrative back to Walton’s, and are divided into journal entries given in the personal tone of address (to his sister). The novel’s abrupt end disrupts this pattern: beginning with the creature’s lengthy response to Walton’s accusations, the latter’s voice disappears from the narrative until the concluding short paragraph (two sentences), which, rather than re-establishing him as speaker, merely describes the creature’s final departure. That Walton disappears as a subject from the narrative as the creature also dissolves into “darkness and distance” is evidence of the latter’s central contribution to the public of the novel itself, the structure of frame narratives that support a litany of individual voices. Suddenly, the creature’s “series of being” takes on new meaning: as the act that motivates Frankenstein’s account, his creation jumpstarts the subsequent narrative chain.

Because Frankenstein and the rest of the novel’s cast register the creature as a deviation from their normative homogeneity, the latter never fully manifests as singular appearance. As is the case with Walton at the novel’s end, these other figures suffer from their refusal to perceive the creature. Unperceived, ultimately, by those around him, he is, correlatively, denied the viewpoint that would position him to help others appear in the fullness of their actuality. This, I argue, is why the creature, ironically, often seems more “human” than the other characters he encounters. His excessive humanity takes on a potent vividness, for example, in contrast with the De Lacey family (chapters 11-15), whose members constitute the flat types one might expect

from a tale or ballad of the period: the disingenuous Turk; his virtuous daughter; her would-be lover, the virtuous young nobleman; and the young nobleman's blind, wise old father.

Because the creature is ousted from the public to the natural realm, he becomes bound, tragically, to his intent: loosed from the web of human interrelations, unchallenged by the perception and actions of others, the creature becomes defined by the achievement of his predictable and generalizable aims. The deaths of Clerval, William, and Elizabeth literalize the destruction of the public that accompanies the annihilation of the individual perspectives that bring the common world into view. As the mutual perception of the novel's characters continues to break down, the creature is more and more frozen within a private realm of intention: reduced by his shrinking community to an impoverished view of the individual and her potential, he becomes more, not less, of a type: a "monster," rather than "singular."

Reading *Frankenstein* through this lens challenges a reading focused on a contemporaneous concern with "friendship" and "sympathy" as the influences most positively formative of one's *moral* character.<sup>19</sup> In his reading of the novel, James Chandler argues that the creature's monstrosity indexes a cultural binary between "moral beauty" and "moral deformity" that became prominent with the third Earl of Shaftesbury's writings at the turn of the sixteenth century (234). For Shaftesbury, Chandler claims, "[b]eauty is expressed in sensually apprehended regularity, deformity in its absence. The ladder of moral ascent...is the ladder of generality" (236). Chandler tracks this train of thought in Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759): like Shaftesbury, Smith theorizes that the most beautiful individual "conforms most fully to the general traits of the species to which it belongs," while the "deformed object deviates from those traits" (243). As a result, to sympathize with an idiosyncratic—supposedly monstrous—individual is to indulge a distorted perspective, while,

conversely, to sympathize with a beautiful, more “typical” individual is to access well-regulated judgment. Noting that Mary Shelley’s creature is, at first, physically—rather than internally—deformed and atypical, Chandler claims that the novel explores whether his monstrosity incurs his rejection by community, or if it derives from this rejection.<sup>20</sup>

While Chandler reads *Frankenstein* as a narrative that helps make up the “archaeology of sympathy” he traces, I would like to suggest that the atypicality of the creature falls in line with a strand of Romanticism that privileges the perception of singularity over a communal impetus towards sympathetic conformity. If there is a tendency to read the narrative as a critique of Frankenstein’s initial act of creation, I think there is a counter-reading in which it is not his act, but his inability to perceive the singularity of the being he creates, and to translate his private workings into public spectacle, that is under critique. Evidence that the sympathy exercised by the novel’s cast moves towards exclusivity, rather than genuine recognition, arises when Frankenstein rejects Walton’s desire for friendship: “...think you that any can replace those who are gone? Can any man be to me as Clerval was; or any woman another Elizabeth?” (180) Strangely, and ungenerously, Frankenstein mistakes Walton’s offer of friendship for an attempt to displace the beings he already holds dear. I further argue that the novel poses a kind of appearance that, rather than being a register of morality or value, contributes to and arises from the human capacity for narrative reconstruction. This capacity is shared, but depends upon a public space: a community grounded in the striving of multiple, singular perspectives, rather than sympathy.

### 3: Seeing versus Acting

At stake in this view of Romantic character, then, is a perception set apart from a toleration of difference. Rather than accepting the viewpoints of others as valuable but impenetrable—

perspectives to be left untouched, cherished as tributes to individuality in the abstract—these characters engage, in an unapologetically partial manner, with the singularities opposed to them. This perceptual combat shapes, reconstructs, rather than destroys or projects, because the public categories Romantic characters draw upon function as a kind of bridge: their reliance on type and narrative brings their own perspective into view alongside what they see and so provides a “third perspective,” the audience or public space that shares this milieu of public categories. This public space, in turn illuminates the perceived as a new assembly that, though it didn’t exist as such before, existed in pieces. Frankenstein’s creature models how, though already existing, we each require reassembly by another to be seen in our diverse moments of singularity, and to become a new series of being.

The critique of sympathy which ended my reading of *Frankenstein*, then, is not tangential to the interpretation of character— and of Romanticism—that I attempt in this project. Arendt also critiques a sympathy that she identifies as emerging with Rousseau and the French Revolution, and her opposition to Romantic-era thought may cast her centrality to this project in a doubtful light—especially since her critique revolves around the enervating effects of spectatorship. In *On Revolution*, Arendt traces the new metaphors that began to accrue to the word “revolution”: originally referring to the cyclical movement of the heavens, the emphasis shifts, with the political language of the late eighteenth century, to an invocation of “irresistibility,” or the notion that “a force greater than man had interfered when men begin to assert their grandeur and to vindicate their honour” (*OR* 38, 39). Eventually evolving with Hegel, and then with Marx, into the “idea of historical necessity,” this shift becomes a dominating ideology that Arendt finds dangerous because it divests political actors of the power, the singularity, of new action; believing themselves to be “agents of history”—spectators to the

drama of time and pattern—those who followed in the footsteps of the French Revolution took up necessity rather than freedom as their ruling political category (*OR* 43, 48).

This giving way to spectatorship—and giving up of action—begins, however, with a more fundamental capitulation: a surrendering of the public realm to the necessities of daily existence suffered by those without resource. In my reading of Arendt, this turn away from freedom—or the public opportunity to speak, act, and thus manifest one’s distinct reality—towards the liberation from necessity—a liberation which belongs, by no power of government, already to the pre-political, natural human—has three dire consequences (*OR* 99). First, this constitutes a turn toward sympathy, or pity, which Arendt defines within an eighteenth-century context as the capacity to suffer at the spectacle of suffering. This requires, however, the generalization of individuals to a suffering mass, a spectacle, and the reduction of the spectator to a selflessness that is neither heroic nor virtuous. Explicating Rousseau’s notion of the general will, Arendt demonstrates how one’s selfless capacity to oppose their “particular interest or the particular will of each man” invokes within himself this shared, “common enemy”—which, in turn will invoke “the general interest which the common enemy brings into existence” (*OR* 68, 69). Second, because this sympathy or selflessness manifests itself as the glossing of the individual, its adoption as political strategy results not only in the cruel ability to sacrifice others for abstract principles, but also in a cyclical pursuit of pity—and the misfortune it requires—as a kind of power and end in itself (*OR* 79-80).

Finally, I link this glossing of the individual as spectator and spectacle to Arendt’s critique of the Heideggerian “Self” she traces back to German Romanticism and its precursors (“What is Existenz,” 281). Noting how Heidegger’s existential Self is the absolute from which it cannot escape, Arendt interprets this ineluctability as a negation: the self is defined by the

nothingness that delimits his factuality. Just as the ideology inspired by the French Revolution reduced individuals to a general will grounded in the experience of self as necessitated by a preceding and future death, this more recent iteration rediscovers the individual as an isolated, general entity; “one’s fellow men,” if experienced as such, “destroy” authentic selfhood (“WIE,” 285).

At stake, then, for Arendt in adhering to a Romantic or post-Romantic aesthetics is the inflation of the individual to a general self—whether that universality stems from a shared, existential necessity, on the one hand, or from the substitution of self for the absolute, on the other. Both views replace the human-as-actor with the human-as-spectator: a self cut off from the new or particular by a perception turned backwards. And yet, as Arendt herself admits:

[T]his fallacy is relatively difficult to detect because of the truth inherent in it, which is that all stories begun and enacted by men unfold their true meaning only when they have come to their end, so that it may indeed appear as though only the spectator, and not the agent, can hope to understand what actually happened in any given chain of deeds and events. (*OR* 43)

The key to this paradox is, I argue, to be found in Arendt’s explication of “judgment,” which, in my reading, she defines as the combination of acting and spectating. Sifting through Kant’s constellation of taste, judgment, freedom, Arendt argues that the use of one’s reason is always already public: thinking involves a kind of “imaginary visiting,” in which one doesn’t so much exchange one particular viewpoint for another but, rather, “aims at a general thinking” (*Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, 44). Rather than aspiring to the “generality of a concept,” however, this general thinking “is closely connected with particulars, with the particular conditions of the standpoints one has to go through in order to arrive at one’s own ‘general standpoint’” (*LOK* 44).

This capacity to create a plurality—a kind of public space—within one’s mind is common to the actor, the fabricator, and the spectator, as the “the very originality of the artist (or the very novelty of the actor) depends on his making himself understood by those who are not artists (or actors)” (*LOK* 65). Thus, for Arendt, to act, perceive, or represent is always, via the interior but public work of judgment, to turn outwards; spectatorship becomes action, or an *active seeing*, when it is grounded in communicability: the attempt to take into account the other particular viewpoints that make up the common table around which appearances emerge.<sup>21</sup>

Arendt concludes towards the end of her Kant lectures that “[h]e chief difficulty in judgment is that it is ‘the faculty of thinking the particular;’ but to think means to generalize, hence it is the faculty of mysteriously combining the particular and the general” (*LOK* 76). This articulation explicitly captures the paradoxical relation between spectatorship—which captures the meaning of finished action—and action, whose singularity resists comprehension. In thinking through the same binaries posed by Romanticism and taken up by Arendt, I hope in this project to imagine an active spectatorship, or a seeing *as* action: a perception that eschews a universal image of self by registering the diverse media—the multiple viewpoints—that condition appearance altogether. Such a perception does not so much evade the “general” or the “typical” as discover it as the obverse of the particular: singularity redounds off the surface of shared, public type as its clearest note—or, in Arendt’s own eloquent expression, “the exemplar is and remains a particular that in its very particularity reveals the generality that otherwise could not be defined” (*LOK* 77). Rather than opposing an ostensible Arendtian hierarchy between “action” and “perception,” then, I argue, with other scholars before me, that this combative relation requires our careful unraveling.<sup>22</sup>

## Conclusion

What this project calls Romantic character marks a relation of person to public appearance that is useful for thinking about this modern moment, when the negotiation of individuals with their publics has become, if anything, more difficult. The claim that individual difference is more than relative—that it does not merely exist in relational binaries—points to a socio-political ethics in which singular points-of-view are neither tolerated nor ignored, as both modes of (im)perception contribute to a space that is homogeneous, rather than plural. The problem with a liberality of relativism is that it assumes the preserved consistency of a self and their values; judgment never alters nor can be altered. Though such selves may exist in diversity, this variety is meaningless where it is taken for granted that each person is different independently: on the one hand, your distinctness is totally alien, irrelevant, to mine; and on the other—but, paradoxically, as a result—it is wholly dependent on this *mutual* isolation, this relative difference.

Arendt identifies this notion of individuality with a traditional valorization of sovereignty, and contends that it opposes the potential for freedom that distinguishes us as humans.<sup>23</sup> The assumption of self-rule—applied to a person or a society—counters the newness of action by imposing pre-established ends on socio-political processes. While this successfully eliminates the uncertainty threatened by the boundlessness of action—its unpredictability and irreversibility—it also stamps out the plurality that makes us each distinct: “No man can be sovereign because not one man, but men, inhabit the earth,” Arendt claims (234). As a result, a “public” grounded in sovereignty either involves the domination of others, or involves a retreat by the individual into an imaginary world where others do not exist. The solution, for Arendt, resides in action itself: first, in the power to forgive, which stops the process of an action with its

utter reversal and is constitutive, then, of another new act; and second, in the power to make promises, to create contracts that oppose boundlessness with shared purpose (237, 241, 244-45).

Arendt's conception of the public is valuable, I argue, precisely because it discovers the inextricability of individual freedom from mutual dependence on others. Another way of saying this is that "plurality" is sustained only where it exists, simultaneously, at the level of the individual and at the level of the public. The new actions that constitute my humanity—in other words, my capacity for utter individuality—can only occur in a space where others are also free to act outside of pre-existing, dominating narratives. Such a public is not grounded in relativism or toleration, but in a space of conflict where actions redound off each other and singularities clash, mingle, and shape. Arendt turns to forgiveness and promising because both these acts not only acknowledge the distinctness of the other, but permit it with a permission that seeks to sustain, rather than halt or assuage, the sharpening of singularity.

Romantic characters model a mode of *inter*-action that enacts this same form of recognition through a mutual seeing. Shifting from Arendt's emphasis on *action* to *perception* encourages us to think of publics in terms of "reading," or how shared narratives undergird, or obscure, individual distinctness. Romantic characters are, moreover, readers only in so far as they are also writers: if they rely on type to perceive particularity, they rewrite the latter as a singular assembly of these shared categories. This rewriting, however, should be a mutual act—otherwise, engaging another through type slips into the realm of caricature or stereotype, a one-directional projection. The mutuality is assured by taking in one's appearance as a new viewpoint: an opposing stance from which you are simultaneously being registered. Listening and responding to how others see you continues the process by which you can continue to see

them. Eyes become words, and through such mutual perception, appearance becomes character: a singularity caught from another, singular angle before a public.

I argue for this reading of Romantic character across four chapters. In the first chapter, “Idiosyncratic Character,” I argue that Charles Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65) creates a public space in which actuality occurs *as* appearance. Shaped, on the one hand, by their notable idiosyncrasies, and, on the other, by their naïve dependence on social types and narratives, his characters inhabit viewpoints from which they frame—bring into focus—the singularities of others. Dickens’s characters thus manifest as thick, or dense, surfaces: persons turned inside-out by their construal from an external perspective.

Dickens’s dense characters provide a blueprint for how singular appearance breaks down the normative binary between interior and exterior. By extension, they demonstrate the claim at the core of this project: that appearance must be “characterized”—perceived from the outside, and rewritten by a public—in order to be both visible *and* utterly distinct. Finally, by starting, rather than ending, with Dickens, I hope to suggest that “Romantic” character models a relation of perception and appearance applicable to thinking about “public” and “assembly” outside fixed historical parameters.

In chapter two, “Rhetorical Character,” I argue that Sir Walter Scott allows us to consider how shared, public discourses shape “character.” Situating my argument within a specifically Scottish context, I argue that Scott’s fictional figures reflect the period’s concern with forming moral, civic, and national character through the teaching and application of rhetoric, precisely because his characters draw on the public types of Scotland’s cultural institutions and historical heritage in order to delineate each other. They do so within the genre of legal debate and rhetorical combat: rather than attempting to persuade or cultivate the other’s character, they

recreate each other with an aggressive force that—ironically—sharply visualizes the other’s point-of-view. Because they never abandon their own, idiosyncratic perspectives, their mutual characterization diverges drastically from the contemporaneous concern (propagated most popularly by Adam Smith) with sympathetically inhabiting another’s case.<sup>24</sup> Instead, their ventriloquizing of each other exposes their own partiality, construing the other as an appearance so singular it speaks back.

In the third character, “Dramatic Character,” I consider how Blake’s dual defense of “Poetic vision” as both individualized perception and a shared potential speaks to the imbrication of particular and type I explore as “singularity.” I argue that the “inwardness” prioritized by Blake involves not just the capacity to perceive, but, further, the capacity to be perceived. Appearing simultaneously as bodies, worlds, and landscapes, Blake’s characters manifest as “visions”—both in the sense of seeing and being seen—that become horizons for the perception of others. I explore this process through a rereading of *The [First] Book of Urizen*, and discuss how Los and Urizen’s mutual perception entails a reenactment that casts the other as dramatic character: an appearance whose performance by another’s features generates both new particularity and shared commonality. Thus remaking each other as new worlds, Los and Urizen demonstrate a “translucency” of appearance and point-of-view that enables each to shift, expand, and sharpen their horizons of perception.

If the Romantic characters of Dickens, Scott, and Burns reassemble each other, in different ways, from public types, Robert Burns inverts this perception by discovering singularity at the level of social narrative. I consider his lyric concentration of public time and space in chapter four, “Communal Character.” Participating in the mundane occurrences shared by a community, Burns’s lyric speakers capture singular appearance from a distance: pausing in such

moments, they distill the social associations of time and space—like notes in a chord of music—to a particular, embodied experience. The effect, I argue, is a perception that re-discovers character, the looming types of a local community, as portraits or tableaux made irreducible by their repetition within a delimited line-of-sight. This chapter looks ahead to the conclusion, in which I return to Charles Dickens and *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-37) to trace the possibility of a social, because public-facing, phenomenology of character.

Each of these authors write characters who model a perception that is also “assembly”: they—authors and characters—revive the fact that *assembly* is both a noun and a verb, a public space and an active putting-together. By characterizing the world around them, these Romantic figures model a description that finds generative power in the dependence on others that is already a condition of our existence. That we are each already made up of biases, traditions, associations, tropes, and discourses is not revelatory. However, the view that this individual plurality, this monstrous make-up, might constitute a perspective capable of accessing reality challenges the acceptance of an outside world only half-seen. Romantic characters demonstrate that “reading” the world involves an attention to, rather than an eschewal of, appearance. At the same time, they illustrate how reassembling these apparent elements should delineate another as one of the singular viewpoints casting the horizon of a bounding, but ever-changing, public.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Most of my discussion of Arendt’s *The Human Condition*, both in this introduction and in the subsequent chapters, is centered on chapter five, “Action.”

<sup>2</sup> See *The One vs. the Many* (Princeton UP, 2003) and *Character and Person* (Oxford UP, 2014), respectively.

<sup>3</sup> I am using Arendt’s language, here: “Because of its inherent tendency to disclose the agent together with the act, action needs for its full appearance the shining brightness we once called glory, and which is possible only in the public realm.” (*HC* 180)

<sup>4</sup> Kohn, Jerome. “Freedom: the Priority of the Political.” *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, edited by Dana Villa, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, pp. 113–129. *Cambridge Companions to Philosophy*.

<sup>5</sup> Kateb, George. “Political Action: Its Nature and Advantages.” *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, edited by Dana Villa, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, pp. 130–148. *Cambridge Companions to Philosophy*.

<sup>6</sup> The fifth-century BCE Greek philosophers, Leucippus and his (more famous) pupil, Democritus, are credited with originating the atomist doctrine, which claims that atoms constitute the smallest, indivisible units of matter, and that their different arrangements comprise the changes in the world of appearance. (Berryman)

<sup>7</sup> See Abrams, Chapter I, Part IV.

<sup>8</sup> Evan Gottlieb succinctly sums up this critical division: following the interest of critics like Northrop Frye, M.H. Abrams, Earl Wasserman, and Harold Bloom in the “Romantic fascination with the absolute,” there was a subsequent and varied movement away from this concern in the rise of “so-called ‘French theory’”; the “historicist identification of what Jerome J. McGann called ‘the Romantic ideology’”; and the the feminist “hermeneutics of suspicion” pioneered by Anne K. Mellor and Elizabeth Fay. Gottlieb concludes that finally, “as Marc Redfield has recently shown, no twentieth-century theoretical movement was more associated with Romanticism—and more skeptical of all metaphysical claims—than deconstruction.” (6-7)

<sup>9</sup> See Davis, Introduction.

<sup>10</sup> Lily Gurton-Wachter, *Watchwords: Romanticism and the Poetics of Attention* (Stanford UP, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Timothy Campbell, “Romantic Elements: An Introduction,” *European Romantic Review*, 31:3 (2020), 243-252.

<sup>12</sup> Of course, “imitation” and “mimesis” are fraught terms, as demonstrated by Erich Auerbach’s seminal study of the topic. The difference between this definition of mimesis and the form of description explored here is that the former still relies on the distinction between “internal” meaning and “external” appearance: the realism that, Auerbach, claims, is exemplified by Balzac, exercises an imagination capable of presenting “a total concept of a demonic-organic nature and presented entirely by suggestive and sensory means” (472). Auerbach thus thinks of realism in terms of the “serious” and the “tragic,” whereas the aim of this project is to set forth the possibility that literary depictions often analyzed in terms of exaggeration, melodrama, or comedy are, in fact, capturing perceptible actualities.

<sup>13</sup> See Heywood, especially “Introduction: The Recording Angel.”

<sup>14</sup> See “Goldstein, Reluctant Ecology in Blake and Arendt: A Response to Robert Mitchell and Richard Sha,” *Wordsworth Circle*, Vol. 46, No. 3, Romanticism and Experiment (Summer 2015), pp. 143-155; Mina Gorji, “John Clare and the Language of Listening,” *Romanticism* 26.2 (2020): 153–167.

<sup>15</sup> My readings of *Frankenstein* derive from Mary Shelley’s third and last edition of the novel (1831).

<sup>16</sup> See Arendt, 176-79.

<sup>17</sup> See Arendt, Ch.5, p. 184.

<sup>18</sup> For Arendt’s discussion of the individual as a “hero” caught through “story,” see p. 183-86.

<sup>19</sup> David Marshall reads *Frankenstein* as Shelley’s exploration of sympathy in the tradition of Rousseau (178-227). More recently, Kirsten Martin argues that the unsympathetic creature is rendered sympathetic by his aesthetic refraction through and management by the novel’s frame narrative (601-2). Similarly locating sympathetic engagement at the level of the text—and

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similarly arguing that the monster's physicality is what precludes normal modes of sympathy—Jeanne M. Britton situates the novel in relation to Adam Smith's moral theory to argue that while the characters fail at sympathy in their encounters, their narrative descriptions of each other substitute for this failure (3).

<sup>20</sup> See Chandler, chapter seven.

<sup>21</sup> Arendt makes this same point in her critique of Existenz philosophy: "Existenz itself is never essentially isolated; it exists only in communication and in the knowledge of the Existenz of others. One's fellow men are not (as in Heidegger) an element which, though structurally necessary, nevertheless destroys Existenz; but, on the contrary, Existenz can develop only in the togetherness of men in the common given world. In the concept of communication there lies embedded, though not fully developed, a new concept of humanity as the condition for man's Existenz. In any case, men move together within this surrounding Being; and they hunt neither the phantom of the Self nor do they live in the arrogant illusion that they can be Being generally." 286

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Ian Storey, "The Reckless Unsaid: Arendt on Political Poetics," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Summer 2015), pp. 869-892.

<sup>23</sup> The following discussion especially considers the last sections of chapter in *The Human Condition* (see Arendt, 230-247).

<sup>24</sup> See Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), esp. Part I, Section I, Ch. IV: "...[T]he spectator must, first of all, endeavour, as much as he can, to put himself in the situation of the other...He must adopt the whole case of his companion with all its minutest incidents; and strive to render as perfect as possible, that imaginary change of situation upon which his sympathy is founded." (21)

### Charles Dickens: Idiosyncratic Character

In this chapter, I consider the idiosyncratic appearances of Dickens's characters.

Ultimately, I aim to show that their absurd features—their physical quirks, their implausible manners of movement and speech—catch, rather than exaggerate, reality. They do so, moreover, without reference to a substratum of meaning, or without operating as signs or symbols. Instead, their distinct individuality lies at the level of appearance: challenging the normative binary between interior self and exterior aspect, Dickens's characters derive their actuality from how they are perceived by others, and especially from how they are perceived to vary upon shared, social types. Oddly, this perception manages to draw—in the double sense of drawing *out* and delineating—the particularity of the person being perceived. The idiosyncrasies that *physically* shape a character's stance towards the world enable them to capture, to make visible, a potential appearance of those they see. This singularity then, emerges through a mutual perception that depends on the shared categories of a public space in order to mark, vividly, the recognizable. Rather than making the “mundane” new, however, Dickens's characters appear as new familiars: particular instances cast from and through type.

Critics have long debated whether Dickens's characters are “realist” or something other.<sup>25</sup> Dickens's near contemporaries wrote on the subject with particular vigor, often betraying an intriguingly undecided mix of acerbic critique and hyperbolic adulation. George Henry Lewes, for example, claims that Dickens's “glorious energy of imagination” animates otherwise “unreal” “types”—“caricatures and distortions of human nature” (Ford 61). Anthony Trollope expresses similar perplexity when he argues that Dickens invests characters completely lacking in “human nature” with a “charm” that renders them “household words in every house” (Ford 75). Echoing Trollope's claim that Dickens gets away with his fantastic characters because he knows how to

color “their lines broadly,” George Gissing identifies in Dickens a “lack of proportion” and “one-sidedness” (Ford 77).

It is precisely this weird combination—of vivid life, on the one hand, and a flattening artificiality, on the other—that I wish to examine.<sup>26</sup> Some critics have identified this counterpoint in terms of “particular” and “type.” Henry James complained that Dickens presents characters who, as utterly distinct “oddities,” have no referent in “existing types” and consequently lack the common, psychological depths—the “generalizations”—that link humans together (Ford and Lane, 50, 53). E.M. Forster takes the opposite tack, however, by claiming that even Dickens’s most “rounded” characters embody, like “types and caricatures,” single “ideas or qualities” (104, 109). And yet, both James and Forster describe Dickensian characterization as two-dimensional: If James points out that Dickens never “sees beneath the surface of things,” Forster muses that while his characters exude an “air of weight,” they are really “no thicker than a gramophone record” (Ford 52; Forster 109).

I want to pick up on the threads of this critical consensus by looking more closely at what constitutes this *density* of character. I use this word because it seems to communicate the dual sense of indubitable reality, on the one hand, and of impenetrable experience, on the other, that Dickens’s characters impose upon his readers.<sup>27</sup> What Dickens’s characters show, I think, is how the opaque, particularity of experience can be the flipside of shared, typical experience—not in the obvious sense that the “literary” embodies the “abstract,” but because the social categories through which his characters peer refract, like a prism, the distinct colors of a communal light. Ultimately, then, while I also build on the commonplace that Dickens was a “great observer,” I revise this claim to suggest that the unique perception modeled in his novels arises *between* seeing characters—rather than resulting *in* them as authorial visions or creations.<sup>28</sup>

This approach builds upon but departs from recent critical approaches to Dickens by offering a new interpretation of his role as a “Romantic,” rather than a “realist,” author. John Reed exemplifies this school of thought by claiming Dickens as an “heir” of the Romantic concern—identified and explicated by M.H. Abrams—with “magically transforming” the “everyday world” (4, 2).<sup>29</sup> Specifically, he argues that Dickens, like Wordsworth and Coleridge, recreates experience as the symbolic manifestation of “internal reality,” whether that comprises the creative processes of the narrator or the psychological interiorities of the characters.<sup>30</sup> Reed thus continues a train of critique that reinterprets Dickens’s self-proclaimed desire to show the “romantic side of familiar things” as a distinct kind of *insight*.<sup>31</sup> Countering the negative accusations of “caricature” that permeated contemporaneous reviews of Dickens’s work, this recent conversation tends to discuss Dickens’s characters along a spectrum between two poles: his characterization of scenes and persons either reveals their underlying truth by means of a style that “enhances” (Reed 9)—rather than distorts, perception—or it demonstrates the already discursive nature of reality.<sup>32</sup>

In what follows, I argue that Dickens treats appearance as neither emblematic—a kind of mask or transparency—nor as relative, portable. Reed’s claim that Dickens’s description creates a space in which author and reader work to notice and transform everyday, social material propels much of my own interest in Dickens’s attention to appearances. However, I am interested in Dickens’s propensity to stop at surfaces, to invest this appearance with a significance independent of symbolic depths and reliant upon the communal perception of phenomena. Consequently, I read his novels as continuing an “alternate” strain of Romanticism that resists its own critical genealogy by attending to, rather than moving past, appearance, dwelling with the latter as opposed to “imbu[ing] [it] with a significance beyond itself” (Greenblatt 12).<sup>33</sup> Counter

to privileging the perceiver's imagination or emotional mindscape, these "atypical" Romantic texts create unique publics: communities of characters who each direct a distinct gaze that absorbs, correspondingly, the singular moments presented by others. I align Dickens with this literary inheritance, then, because I think that, like these Romantic texts, his writing does not so much depart from "realism" or "reality" as it questions our definition of it.

Other critics have also theorized Dickens's characterization as a new, more incisive mode of perception, even emphasizing, specifically, its capacity to render the slippery singularities of individuals. George Santayana claimed, in his *Soliloquys in England*, that Dickens cuts through the conventional brocade laid over the actual, potent eccentricities of persons and things; more recently, Brian Rosenberg argues that Dickens's refusal to provide an extensive script (in the manner of Henry James) of his characters' inner lives reflects our inability to truly know others (148).<sup>34</sup> G.K. Chesterton, especially, precedes my argument with his claim that Dickens's characters—and his minor characters, in particular—each evince an irreducible self; if they emerge as "grotesque," paradoxically, it is because they more and more fill out this extremity of self by defying the social conventions that round out persons as functioning, recognized citizens (258-60). This line of critique, however, finds the vivid reality of Dickens's characters to lie concealed within them—even if such reality breaks out into the visible world as a "mockery" of society's pretense, or as a truth that outgrows the mask of convention like a grotesque enormity.<sup>35</sup> I argue, conversely, that this singularity occurs *as* appearance: as the particular, embodied forms we inhabit *as well as* the conventional trappings from which our bodies and psyches are, at least partially, constituted. As implied by this last claim, I thus read singularity as surface because, as I think is discoverable through a certain reading of Romantic characters, "convention" or "social type" need not be illusory or artificial. Instead, I argue that these shared

narratives constitute the stage upon which persons can emerge as irreducible moments. In Dickens's variation on this mode, characters appear because they take in, with help from their naïve knowledge of types, the way in which they are seen, and perform this *as* "character"—a dramatic, overlarge instance. At the same time, their perception of how they are being seen depends upon their own, distinct stance. This dialogic relation, then, rather than being a simple, two-way interdependence, starts from and increasingly develops as apotheosis: an assembly of singular perspectives that, like rocks shaken in a tumbler, shape each other's existence.

### The Romantic Side: Dense Surfaces

Felicitously described as a "one-sided old fellow," Mr. Boffin serves as a preliminary example of how Dickens's interest in the "romantic side" of things performs a preference for surfaces, or for the features of things as they appear. We are looking in this scene through the eyes of Silas Wegg, who initiates Boffin's appearance with an exclamation of recognition:

'Oh! Here you are again!' The words referred to a broad, round-shouldered, one-sided old fellow in mourning, coming comically ambling towards the corner... Both as to his dress and to himself, he was of an overlapping rhinoceros build... but with bright, eager, childishly-inquiring grey ones, under his ragged eyebrows and broad-brimmed hat. A very odd-looking old fellow altogether. (OMF 46)

It is difficult to say whether Boffin's odd, one-sidedness is either real—a permanent feature—or as an effect of perspective, perhaps taking in his profile from our borrowed stance on Silas's corner. The fact that we notice his breadth (his broad, round shoulders) as he advances encourages the growing sense that Boffin is essentially one-sided, and the attempt to imagine a one-sided man approaching us head-on correlates with the narrator's reference to his "comical," crab-like kind of "ambling" (47). The subsequent lines confirm this strange image: stopping

“one-sided, before the stall” (OMF 47) to inquire whether Wegg “remembers” him, Boffin draws forth a narrative in which the former makes sense of his appearance as a kind of flatness:

“...[A]nd there was you, Mr. Boffin...your wery same back towards us...’ looking a little round Mr. Boffin, to take him in the rear, and identify this last extraordinary coincidence, ‘your wery self-same back!’” (OMF 49) Recalled by virtue of his backside, Boffin’s “one-sidedness” takes on new resonance as a lack of depth—a two-dimensional extension of surface we might experience in viewing illustrations or characters on a page, and which Mr. Boffin explicitly performs by situating himself between Wegg’s screens of street-ballads: “...a pleasant place, this! And then to be shut in on each side, with these ballads, like so many book-leaf blinkers! Why, it’s delightful!” (OMF 49)

Boffin’s two-dimensionality becomes troubled, however. If he dramatizes his seeming flatness by staging his fictional characterization between “book-leaf blinkers,” his continuation of this analogy turns round on itself to suggest depth. Inverting the normal relation between a book and a person, Boffin imagines a reading process in which he—rather than the text—is plumbed: intending to hire Wegg as a reader, he hopes to enjoy “a splendid book...as’ll reach right down your pint of view, and take time to go by you” (OMF 50). In addition to referencing *character* as a literal element of words and pages, then, Boffin also taps into it as a meaningful “roundness”—something to be analyzed. And yet, because the book that he imagines to plumb him as a depth simultaneously passes him by as a surface, he also continues to sustain this fictional characterization as a flatness. Further developing a one-sidedness that is neither surface nor depth, the two-dimensional Boffin is weighted by his “thick shoes, and thick leather gaiters, and thick gloves like a hedger’s” (OMF 47). This invocation of density fleshes Boffin out, granting him a materiality that is, however, counterbalanced by a simultaneous thickening of the

text: the triple use of the adjective (“thick”) suggests that Boffin’s appearance accrues weight in correspondence with the words on the page. By performing Boffin’s own thickness, the text enhances his actuality while also foregrounding his status as a character, disassociating density from the narrative development of psychological interiority and recreating, at a figurative level, the literalness with which Boffin places himself as a character between two “book-leaf blinkers” (OMF 49).

The description emerging here constitutes a specific kind of characterization—not simply in the sense of ascribing features to a phenomenon, but in the more literal (and literary) sense of discursive construction. The foregrounded one-sidedness Boffin presents, however, is different from the flatness that Alex Woloch identifies with minor characters.<sup>36</sup> Woloch argues that flatter characters register the tension between reference and structure: though always implying the presence of a real, complex human behind it, the “character-space” is limited by its role within the structure of a plot that only has so much room (17-8). As a result—and reflecting the paradox inherent to a democratic insistence on bourgeois individuality—minor characters are flattened, or forced out of mimetic representation by the space take up by the protagonist (Woloch 17-8). I argue, however, without contesting the socioeconomic principles that Woloch’s theory brings to light, that “flatness” in characters may indicate a counterintuitive, but valuable, mode of perception. In fact, the potency of the moments that Dickens’s “minor” characters inhabit—their vivid idiosyncrasies—often seem to outweigh, in the experience of the reader, the comparatively smooth and continuous contours of his protagonists. Patrick Chappell, for example, argues that the minor characters in *Bleak House* literally outlive and ultimately raise their own value by continuing to “haunt” the narrative after their deaths, consequently contributing to a productive “narrative open-endedness” (Chappell 794).

Whereas Chappell emphasizes the influence that characters exert as lingering, “present” absences, I am concerned here with how minor characters appear as dense moments, however few or brief. Boffin’s surface registers a simultaneity of torqued appearance and weighted actuality: a folding and refolding of surface that recreates itself as depth and confuses not only an opposition of the internal to the external, but questions the discontinuity of person and object. Like the oddity of his one-sidedness, the combination of Boffin’s thick garments with the tough, overlapping folds of his body challenges us with the difficult image of a man whose skin and clothes fold over and into each other. Further complicating this image however, is the narrator’s refusal to let the visual implications of his description stand: equated yet distinguished by the use of “both,” Boffin’s person and clothes sustain a syntactical difference that precludes one imaginative possibility—the fusion of clothes and body—and so prevents a reading in which his character represents internal principles. Neither a symbolic whole made up of necessary and interdependent parts, nor an allegorical difference between image and meaning, Boffin comprises components that are simultaneously layered and distinct.

Rather than constituting a set of features specific to Boffin, this collapse of the categories we often use to define and evaluate character—round versus flat, interiority versus exteriority, authenticity versus artificiality—recurs with vehemence in Wegg’s own delineation, suggesting a mode of characterization rather than a singular instance. Described as a “knotty man, and a close-grained, with a face carved out of very hard material,” Silas Wegg appears as an opaque density, “so wooden a man that he seemed to have taken his wooden leg naturally, and...might be expected...to be completely set up with a pair of wooden legs in about six months” (OMF 46). Like Boffin, Wegg is a complex combination—or elision—of surface and depth, a “wooden” man whose impermeable image is upset by his simultaneous “knottiness,” a

characteristic suggestive of more diverse materiality. The narrator's supposition that Wegg has and might continue to grow into the woodenness of his peg leg demonstrates a reversal in which artificiality becomes continuous with the natural—parallel to the way in which Boffin's clothes become continuous with himself. Both characters illustrate an incorporation of their external accouterments at the point where our expectation of flatness is troubled by density: Wegg becomes an outgrowth of his wooden “knots,” while Boffin's one-sided breadth is troubled by wrinkles. Initially appearing as extensions of flat surfaces, they subsequently manifest a three-dimensionality that cannot quite denote material depth because it is only a folding over or redundancy of matter.

Finally, the density that Wegg and Boffin share not only confounds surface and depth, but also challenges normative assumptions about the relation between “mere” physical appearance and individual interiority. Just as Boffin's flatness coincides and contributes to his performance of self as a fictional character between pages, Wegg's natural woodenness construes him as a creature of artifice, a carved doll or puppet. By virtue of their dense appearances, their persons seem constructed from the outside-in, rather than supported by a psyche that emanates from the inside-out. As a result, Boffin and Wegg are already *characters*—like literary figures or public personae, they appear through discursive categories. At the same time, however, they revolutionize this mode of character by existing, not as mask, artifice, or empty signifier, but as weighty, singular realities.

Wegg's woodenness, however, takes the implications of Boffin's thickness a step further. More than a folding over of inner and outer substance, his own, particular density of surface suggests a lack of differentiation between the external and internal person. The hard materiality of his face reflects the “hard reserve of manner” he uses to intimidate Boffin into a hasty

acceptance of terms; moreover, the hard, calculating greed of his profit-driven mind recoils back on his own woodenness through the hardness of his stall (“the hardest little stall of all the sterile little stalls in London”) and his hard wares (which give you the “face-ache,” the “stomach-ache,” and the “tooth-ache” to look at them) (OMF 45). This elision of surface and depth seems to manifest a symbolic transparency in which his hard, dense surface extends his lack of human empathy into the physical dimension. Steven Connor identifies this tendency of Dickens’s descriptions to transform details into symbolic repetitions of a character as “metaphoricized metonymy,” and Ayse Çelikkol specifically applies the concept to Wegg as a character whose bodily whole is “defined” by its metonymic representation, his wooden leg (Connor 16; Çelikkol 5-6).

Rethinking the surfaces of Dickens’s characters as more than facile exaggeration, then, follows a prevalent strand of criticism that imagines Dickens was working against a realist agenda by appropriating its techniques, employing vivid descriptions of appearances to represent “inner conditions” (Reed 61). Combatting the preference of his contemporaries for organic characters who enact interior essences, Çelikkol claims that Dickens creates “itinerant forms” or “shells” capable of incorporating “any content,” revealing—in the circulation of their “recurrent utterances and gestures”—“that characters consist only of words” (2-3, 11). Unlike his contemporaries, who often identified “form” with some version of Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s claim that the “symbol” comprised an organic, unified whole, Dickens explored the capacity of form to impress itself on any content, rejecting claims for “essence” and “unsettl[ing] the bourgeois comfort with stability and individuation” (2).<sup>37</sup> While denying that symbolism occurs in Dickens, however, Çelikkol still arrives at a conclusion parallel to those who read Dickens as creating descriptions that transcend the everyday. If Reed argues that Dickens counters the

realism of his contemporaries by manifesting the world as a symbolic series of “inner conditions” (61), Çelikkol similarly concludes that *Our Mutual Friend* “gestures toward a metaphysical beyond that is irreconcilable with worldly pursuits,” and so reveals a mechanical “sublime” that “dwarfs the human subject” (12-14).

While I agree with the motivating claim at work in these arguments—that Dickens’s characters do not behave as realist characters ought—I do so for opposite reasons. Rather than shedding appearances or imbuing them with deeper significance, these characters, in my reading, *are*—and do not exceed—their own visages. A character like Wegg presents a depthless depth by performing the woodenness one might be tempted to interpret as figure. Already an extension of his natural surface (his peg leg), Wegg’s woodenness is a feature in the most literal sense; if it seems to indicate a lack of sensibility, this signification relies, in turn, upon Wegg’s actual, wooden constitution—his stiff, even predictable performance of qualities that are also, however, created in the course of their enactment. Fully noting Boffin’s naïve perception of him as a “literary man,” Wegg proceeds to incorporate this role: “[h]is wooden conceit and craft,” the narrator tells us, “kept exact pace with the delighted expectation of his victim” (OMF 57). Though hoodwinking Boffin into thinking that he is, in fact, a man of scholarly knowledge, his “wooden conceit and craft” actually denotes, rather than conceals, his intent to secretly take advantage of him—not, however, by symbolizing the hard heartlessness of his scheme, but by staging a performance whose mechanical (wooden) nature exposes its own fictionality. His “close-grained,” wood-carved face “had just as much play of expression as a watchman’s rattle,” implying that his deceptive theatrics are legible as such; as a result, his “conceit” is just as much in line with the sense of artistic “craft” as it is with intentional deception.

Wegg's disingenuousness, then, proceeds from outside him as well as from within: his "woodenness" is neither essence nor mask, depth nor surface, but an elision of both these categories. By extension, this peculiarity of Wegg's—his inside-outness—contributes to his predictability, and so also breaks down the binary between typicality—normatively associated with external surface—and particularity, usually considered a quality of inner self. Constituting both his hardness of heart and his transparent performance of this heartlessness, Wegg's "wooden conceit" enables the narrator to identify him as a specific *type* of person whose external features both *mark* and *obscure* his "class" (OMF 53): "The visions rising before his mercenary mind...never obscured the foremost idea natural to a dull overreaching man, that he must not make himself too cheap" (OMF 57). In order to emphasize the correlation between Wegg's type—as a dull overreaching man—and his particularity—as a wooden man—the narrator reduces him by synecdoche to his peg leg when he first begins to consider Boffin's proposal: "The wooden leg looked at him with a meditative eye, and also with a softened air as describing possibility of profit" (OMF 48). Ruled by the mercenary inclinations "natural" to his type, Wegg's wooden conceit is imaged by the leg that is—like his wooden performance—both an artificial appendage and a natural extension of his dense surface. In accord, then, with the narrator's initial prediction that his natural acclimation to one wooden leg indicates the probable development of another, Wegg incorporates and naturalizes the artifice of his own deceptions. Indeed, the "softened air" with which Wegg approaches Boffin implies that this woodenness is liable to change and growth—a fact not so surprising given its origins in performance.

If Wegg's incorporation of his own dissembling limits him to the foreseeable performances of a certain "class" of people, then his naturalization of the mechanical processes necessary to achieve his predictable goals seems to align him with a method of caricature that

Alfie Bown claims is particular to Dickens. Suggesting that Dickens turned against caricature as it was practiced and theorized by his contemporaries (such as Thackeray or, a bit later, Baudelaire), Bown argues that his characters “force identity to perform to the point where identity mocks itself,” thus challenging the comprehensible existence assumed by a caricature that purports to distort antecedent unities (Bown 78). By embracing an allegorical structure in which representation reveals “a life resisting unified interpretation,” Dickens’s caricature, Bown claims, shows that “to symbolize identity directly is only to imprison it” (81).

I agree with Bown that the performance of Dickens’s characters—a retroactive extension or construction of self—is neither a symbolic continuity with, nor an allegorical difference from, an antecedent interior. I depart, however, from Bown’s reading of Dickens’s characterization as caricature, or, to use the former’s definition, as the eschewal of a particular identity altogether. Like Boffin situating himself between ballad-screens, or, later, immersing himself in the “print” that Wegg “opens up to him,” Wegg deconstructs the difference between artificial performance and authentic self—not by demonstrating the emptiness of all signs, but by articulating a surface whose singularity depends upon its recognizable appearance (OMF 53). Wegg and Boffin both reconstruct themselves as characters, or as identities made up of shared, communal categories: Boffin, through a unique process of reading that levels the difference between books and persons, between literary plots and one’s experience of them; and Wegg, by performing and believing in the talents he perceives others to expect of him.

These performances become more than fictional or discursive in that they extend a chain reaction anchored in mutual perception. Boffin perceives Wegg not only as a “literary man”—a social type, a purveyor of street ballads—but as ““a literary man—*with* a wooden leg”” (OMF 49). This modifying observation particularizes Wegg, singling him out from among other street

vendors by noticing one of his actual features. At the same time, Boffin's attention to Wegg's particularity derives from a stance framed by his own concrete features: "carrying his knotted stick in his left arm as if it were a baby" and continuing to "hug" and "nurse" it throughout their conversation, Boffin's consistent, idiosyncratic attachment throughout the novel to this "peg" of his own biases him towards noticing Wegg as an extension of his wooden leg (46-47). As if he were drawing a caricature, Boffin brings to the fore one of countless combinations of characteristics that could be used to portray Wegg; this perception departs from caricature, however, by magnifying, rather than distorting, Wegg's actuality. Though perceiving and responding to Boffin's perception of him as a literary man, Wegg's particular woodenness arises from a latent potentiality that develops, via the performance initiated by Boffin, into a moment unto itself.

Wegg and Boffin's characterization of each other is grounded, then, in a naïve, unaware exertion of their particular perspectives. At the same time, however, the naïveté with which they incorporate the expectations of the other proves to be the flipside of a capacity for acute perception. Initially described as an "observant person, or, as he himself said, [one who] 'took a powerful sight of notice'" (OMF 46), Wegg performs the neighborly "salutes" that, based on his reading of their type, correspond to the presumed expectations of his different audiences (his "passer-by[s]"): "Thus, to the rector, he addressed a bow, compounded of lay deference, and a slight touch of the shady preliminary meditation at church; to the doctor, a confidential bow, as to a gentleman whose acquaintance with his inside he begged respectfully to acknowledge," and so forth (46). Regarding himself from Boffin's perspective "as an official expounder of mysteries," Wegg assumes a "gravity...unusual, portentous, and immeasurable"—and yet, this performance is only half-willed, as the visible affect, "a certain loftiness," "took possession" of

him, and “sat enthroned on...[his] countenance” (53). The appearance that Wegg half assumes, half gives way to is ultimately a performance of his ability to perform; becoming portentously grave and expressing an image all the more wooden, he reveals that the role he is pretending to—that of a “literary man”—is, on one level, an accurate rendering of his tendency to reproduce himself as fiction. Like the defunct wooden measure he uses to deal out his wares, Wegg lacks “a discernible inside” (45); he is “immeasurable” and “unusual” because, in this moment, he sustains a dense appearance that defies categories of surface and depth, superficiality and authenticity (53).

George Orwell famously declared that “[t]he outstanding, unmistakable mark of Dickens’s writing is the *unnecessary detail*” (Ford 159). Though this style produces “wonderful gargoyles,” or “parts...greater than...wholes,” the “fragments” that make up Dickens’s characters do not provide the consistent development that, Orwell contends, more accurately portrays the human condition (164). I argue instead that the arbitrary details of such characters constitute moments that are whole, new, in themselves. The dense appearances that perceivers like Boffin and Wegg mutually draw out are idiosyncratic, rather than monstrous. Recalling Samuel Johnson’s eighteenth-century definition of “idiosyncrasy,” such characters present uncommon “dispositions”—a term that denotes not only the “temper” or personality that Johnson was getting at, but connotes a sense of being turned a certain way, of taking up a distinct stance or view.<sup>38</sup> I argue that Dickens’s characters are idiosyncratic because they inhabit particular perspectives—viewpoints that, conversely, condition them to notice and magnify the singular appearances of others. These dispositions are neither permanent nor shifting; instead, just as “disposition” in the eighteenth century could refer to either a temporary “mood” or a more permanent “constitution,” I argue that the idiosyncrasy of these characters arises as singular

appearance: a moment framed by the familiar categories of a perceiver whose recognition starts, like a key in ignition, a particular performance of those categories (OED, “disposition,” defs. 6 and 7b).

Speculating as Spectating, or the Interplay of “Particular” and “Type”

Because their dense appearances upset normative binaries between surface and depth, internal and external, these idiosyncratic characters model a way of perceiving and being perceived that challenges the ways in which we often approach and close read texts. In their account of “surface reading” (2009), Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus promote the treatment of text as an immediacy, an extension of surface that “reveal[s]...[its] own truths,” rather than as a mine to be delved or veil to be torn (11). Contending that we should learn to “look at” rather than “see through” text (9), they ultimately argue that “depth is not to be found outside the text or beneath its surface...rather, depth is continuous with surface and is thus an effect of immanence” (11).

Though describing texts as wholes rather than their elements, this theorization begins, I think, to capture the nature of the characters at play in Dickens’s novels. As dense appearances, Boffin and Wegg present surfaces to be reckoned with, rather than decoded or dismissed. At the same time, Marcus and Best, as well as the scholars they introduce, assign an independence to texts that, by making them their own mediators, downplays the mutually shaping perception of text and reader.<sup>39</sup> Dickens’s characters, in contrast, model a seeing—a reading of each other’s idiosyncrasies—in which appearance, though not projected or deformed, arises in response to the call of a particular perspective. Their persons are composed of “speculation”: attitudes of observation that take in the actuality of appearance and invest in its potential.

I use this word, speculation, because its many resonances begin to delineate the issues at stake in thinking of observation as an elision of surface and depth, and because Wegg uses it to describe his own method of reading Boffin: “‘Here you are again,’ repeated Mr. Wegg, musing. ‘And what are you now? Are you in the Funns, or where are you? ...is it wasting the motions of a bow on you? Come! I’ll speculate! I’ll invest a bow in you’” (47). Aside from demonstrating his mercenary motives, Wegg’s speculation regarding Boffin’s repeated appearance involves the multi-faceted process indicated by the various, nineteenth-century implications of the word. Originally used to designate the faculty of sight—either in a sense that incorporated the figurative sense of comprehension, or that more directly referred to acts of observation and examination—“speculation” could also signify both the “conjectural consideration” used to “ascertain...something by probable reasoning,” or the “conclusion, opinion, [or] view” afforded by this “abstract or hypothetical reasoning.”<sup>40</sup>

Wegg’s own “musing” incorporates this mixture, including observation (his recognition is predicated on having seen Mr. Boffin pass his corner repeatedly over the past week), abstract reasoning (his hypotheses regarding Boffin’s circumstances), and a construal of probability (Boffin’s repeated locomotions suggest he is not tied to a shop or office). Finally, Wegg’s decision to “invest” a bow in Boffin denotes the primary sense in which he uses the word, to undertake a “commercial venture, esp[ecially] [o]ne involving considerable financial risk on the chance of unusual profit” (“speculation, n.”). Wegg’s speculation thus takes into account Boffin’s appearance as both particular and type: an appearance made recognizable, on the one hand, by its distinct qualities (his “wery self-same stick” and “wery self-same back”), and, on the other, by Wegg’s imaginative capacity to set forth these distinctions in social categories.

Wegg's observation of Boffin engenders a characterization more resonant with social discourses of the early and mid-eighteenth century—and particularly with a Lockean understanding of cognition—than with the gradual “rounding” of character that emerged with Romanticism and gained prominence in the Victorian period. In her seminal reconstruction of the cultural history of “character,” Deidre Lynch argues:

[I]n the line of thinking opened up by the new, print-based understanding of the social activities of knowing and writing and copying, the character is located—optimally—at the interface of what is particular and what is general...the individual specimen of character is meant to refer to an overarching standard of impersonal uniformity. (47)

Because the proliferating social discourses of exchange “in which people articulated their personal particularities was also conceptualized as a system geared to semantic coherence and social homogeneity,” the object of exchange—be it the character on a coin, the characters within a letter, or the character of a face—subsumed any internal/external binary with an investment in legibility (Lynch 42).

Encountering Boffin in the public street, made by Wegg (and others of his type) into a commercial space, Wegg's own investment in classifying the “odd-looking fellow” echoes this prioritization of reading surfaces—and, with the dual resonance of speculation as both observation and aggrandizement, recalls Locke's formative alignment of “the acquisition of knowledge with the acquisition of property” (Lynch 85). The translation of singular phenomena into exchangeable characters that, however, also constitute the private property of a spectator—the observing, investing individual—depends upon the presentation of a surface at once apparent, categorizable, and particular. Wegg's speculation performs this complex process, simultaneously

recognizing Boffin as both a repeated appearance and—as may at first trouble a reader—not *really* recognizing him until he recalls a singular instance of Boffin: “...and there was you, Mr. Boffin, as you identically are!” (OMF 48). Wegg endeavors to possess Boffin by locating his appearance within a social order constituted by geographical space (speculating on Boffin’s “neighborhood”); class structure (wagering on Boffin’s “independent circumstances”); and occupation (“Are you in the Funns?”) (46).

This attempt, on the one hand, to make sense of Boffin as a categorizable feature of his socio-economic landscape, and, on the other, to acquire him as a personally observed phenomenon, aligns Wegg with the gentlemen-observers of mid-eighteenth-century narratives. Lynch claims that the capacity to collect the “knowledge stockpiled within the physiognomic digest” as “symbolic capital” required an observer-protagonist who was himself “characterless”: manifesting a regularity or blankness of features, he could successively assume the various, distinct aspects of those he encountered throughout the course of the narrative. Through this reflection of those around him, the gentleman-observer could digest the multiplicity of society and present it to his readers as ordered and comprehensible—a catalogue. (82)

Lynch’s account is helpful, here, because it traces a genealogy of narrative whose concern with appearance and perception challenges the primacy gained by notions of *character* as either the development or concealment of interiority. My point, however, is not to establish a seamless (and implausible) continuity between Dickensian characterization and eighteenth-century modes of representation. Instead, noticing their shared investment in appearance and, just as importantly, in the observation of appearance, draws critical attention to the different, unique way in which the Romantic characters I track register singularity. For Dickens—and for the other authors studied in this project—the typical observer is *not* the bland or faceless

“everyman,” capable of “reading” others because he is able to draw forth their features through his reflection of them. As Wegg and Boffin (both caught in the act of watching each other) exemplify, the Dickensian spectator is definitely a marked body: an idiosyncratic appearance whose distinct, even odd, perspective supports his capacity to observe particularity in others. This kind of characterization, then, not only breaks down the value-laden opposition between “round” and “flat” on an aesthetic, and even an ontological, level, but also challenges the use of these categories in defining the elements of different literary periods.

Boffin and Wegg’s characterization consists in their development as dense or extended surfaces, and in the dependence of this idiosyncrasy on their reciprocal observation. Idiosyncratic perception and idiosyncratic appearance are, in other words, flipsides of each other. Moreover, and paradoxically, this idiosyncrasy relies on a recognition of social type. If Wegg is eventually able to observe Boffin from the odd, particularized vantage point of a “wooden leg,” it is because his own appearance on the street corner as a recognizable social category, a ballad-seller, has caught Boffin’s notice and generated his own identification of Wegg as a “literary man.” Boffin’s unique improvisation on Wegg’s type is evident from the surprise with which the latter initially perceives Boffin’s perception of him. Recounting the first time he overheard Wegg teaching a customer a ballad, Boffin begins:

“...I listened with admiration amounting to awe. I thought to myself, ‘Here’s a man with a wooden leg—a literary man with—’”

“N—not exactly so, sir,” said Mr. Wegg.

“Why, you know every one of these songs by name and by tune, and if you want to read or to sing any one on ‘em off straight, you’ve only to whip on your spectacles and do it!” cried Mr. Boffin. “I see you at it!”

“Well, sir,” returned Mr. Wegg, with a conscious inclination of the head; “we’ll say literary, then.” (OMF 49)

Having “‘seen’ [Wegg]...at it,” Boffin fervently persuades Wegg that he is a “literary man”: not by showing how the evidence satisfies the phrase, but, conversely, by building off appearances to create a new definition of this idea. In contrast to his initial, hesitant stuttering—expressed by the dash and double “n”—Wegg is persuaded by Boffin’s excited recounting and reframing of his past actions. Not only does Wegg see and accept Boffin’s perception (“*we’ll say literary, then*”), but he begins dramatically performing the role that Boffin had already picked up on, vesting himself with scholarly seriousness by the “conscious inclination” of his head. As intimated by the quick exchange of dialogue, as well as by Wegg’s final transformation and decree of consensus, the mutual seeing—not simply of each other, but of each other’s seeing of each other—exerted by these two characters creates a singular moment. Wegg’s potential as a “literary man” derives not from a change in career or personality, but from an actuality already apparent and, from a certain perspective, recognizable.

Finally, the combination of type and particular that Boffin uses to see Wegg manifests, again, as a kind of naiveté—or, at least, as a perspective that falls outside normative realms of “sophisticated” discourse. To call Wegg, a street-vendor, a “literary” man moves from and through social categories to arrive at a definition that may, at first, seem childish, fanciful; and yet, the singularity it delineates cannot, in light of Wegg’s subsequent performance, be dismantled. Boffin’s naïve reading of the world is emphasized by the unconventional way he “reads” in general: he defines books by their physical covers, refers to them with personal pronouns, and substitutes their titles with particular (incorrect) names.<sup>41</sup> Just as when he positioned himself between the “book-leaf blinkers” of Wegg’s stall, Boffin perceives those

around him from a particularly embodied stance without an active awareness of this bias. And yet, this lack of self-awareness makes him impressionable to a previously unseen appearance—and even Wegg, the perceived, begins to “regard himself in quite a new light” (OMF 50).

Boffin displays this paradoxical perception—naïve and penetrating, unconscious and performing—upon first entering the narrative, described, like Wegg, as an observer, “...with folds in his cheeks, and his forehead, and his eyelids...but with bright, eager, childishly-inquiring grey ones, under his ragged eyebrows...” (OMF 46). The ambiguous use of “grey ones” as another referent of “with” aligns Boffin’s eyes with “folds,” suggesting a covering or blinkering of sight that works together with the idea of “childishness” to figure a naïveté of perspective; like Wegg’s own dual-sided performance of penetration and unawareness, however, Boffin’s perception is inquiring as well as childish, and his remarkable ability to absorb and articulate a certain appearance emerges most explicitly in his reproduction of the miserly “character.”

Originating in the artless enjoyment of the “variety and fancy and beauty of the display in...[shop] windows,” Boffin’s innocent delight in the city streets as “a great theatre” whose “play...[was] childishly new” gives way to an apparent obsession with “one exceptional kind of book” (OMF 466): ““ a Life of a Miser, or any book of that sort; any Lives of odd characters who may have been Misers”” (467). Accumulating these texts without ever appearing to open them, Boffin continues an odd mode of reading. Just as he enjoys “window shopping” for its rich spectacles, and just as he names books based on their covers, his close attention discovers singular experience at the level of surface, and the books he collects accrue a density that shapes his subsequent perception: somehow imprinted by the characters between their covers, “he seemed to save up his Misers as they had saved up their money” (467).

Though we learn later that Boffin was hearing Wegg read these books aloud (OMF, Book IV, Ch.XIII), the former's aural incorporation of texts connotes the same vivid visualization defining his first textual encounter, where he "sat intently staring with his eyes and mind at the confounding enormities of the Romans," overcome by the "stunning" quality of the characters (59). The visual nature of Boffin's "reading" seems to enable his own "stunning" articulation of the character or type that forms its subject matter, and he registers the miser so completely that Bella perceives an actual change in his appearance, shocked by the "crooked lines of suspicion, avarice, and distrust, that twisted his visage" (768).

Boffin's corporeal manifestation of the miser defies simple notions of performance or artifice, however, as the alteration also registers in his independent appearances and spoken thoughts. After an enigmatic meeting with Venus, Boffin speculates on "a cunning and suspicious idea, quite in the way of his school of Misers," that he suspects may be motivating the former; refracting his observation of Venus through his literary perception of the miserly type, Boffin subsequently displays this thickening point-of-view by absorbing it, appearing himself very "cunning and suspicious as he went jogging through the streets" (OMF 586). Finally confirming the relation between this unique observation and the dramatic construction of character, Boffin visualizes Wegg, the most notable miser of his acquaintance, in the same scene, rapping with his stick at the "wooden countenance of Mr. Silas Wegg...incorporeally before him" (586). Boffin thus produces a deepening or sharpening of type that goes beyond improvisation, as he observes, repeats, but also vehemently counters the appearance of "the miser." This mode of reading—people as well as books—constitutes a perception and performance of character that defies, then, our own tendency to read through the bifocals of surface and depth, appearance and interiority.

### The Actuality of Appearance

The irrelevance of Boffin's intentions leaves us, finally, with the actuality of appearance—an articulation of surface exemplified by Wegg's wooden density and Boffin's thickness. This concealment is a habit of the novel and defines the narrative voice—in a way that, strangely, implies even more strongly the opinion of the narrator. Consistently using conjectural words and phrases like “as if,” “perhaps,” “seems,” and “possibly,” often in conjunction with the subjunctive mood, the narrator foregrounds an uncertainty of interpretation that, paradoxically, casts us back on appearance itself.<sup>42</sup> To give an example in which “intent” plays an explicit role, Eugene Wrayburn features in a scene that foregrounds the text's consistent questioning of his motives regarding Lizzie Hexam. In this moment, he turned his eyes upon the building” where she was: “He could see the light of the fire shining through the window. Perhaps it drew him on to look in. Perhaps he had come out with the express intention...he came up to the window...” (OMF 163). Unsavory as Eugene's movements might first appear, the use of “perhaps” shields him from the assignation of intent, foiling the interpretation of his action by already laying both possible readings—that he moves with purpose, and that he doesn't—on the surface; the narrator's implicit shrug throws his readers upon the scene with the sense that motive, here, is irrelevant. The subsequent, detailed recounting of Eugene's seemingly trivial mechanics—his means of getting to the window by scrambling up a bank, and then his decision to look in one window rather than another—continues to present appearance as overwhelming, a kind of white noise that cancels out other, more expected conveyances of meaning.

If his final act of voyeurism invites criticism, the supposed agent (Eugene) is not a continuity of premeditated crime, but merely the actor of this thickening moment. He becomes a new character, irreducible to qualities, intentions, or other normative categories of psychological

interiority. Subsequently engaging in a nonsensical conversation with a pub-hand at the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters, Eugene responds to the laughter of his best friend, Mortimer, with an acknowledgment of his own dense surface, or his distillation from the person we've "known" in earlier scenes to the extended, expanded spectacle of his actions: "I am in a ridiculous humour," quoth Eugene; 'I am a ridiculous fellow. Everything is ridiculous. Come along!'" (166).

Eugene's novelty renders him ridiculous because he has outstripped the pattern of personality, explicitly released from intent by the narrator's rhetoric of uncertainty and vivid presentation of action. Mortimer notes this "change" directly: "Thoroughly used to him [Eugene] as he was, he found something new and strained in him that was for the moment perplexing" (166).

By allowing Eugene to manifest, without qualification, as action, the narrator creates the "space of appearance" that Hannah Arendt argues is necessary for the disclosure of a person. Arendt's argument is grounded in the claim that the "human condition" necessarily includes the potential for "newness." As conditioned, and figured, by "natality"—the act of entering the world as a new being—each person is defined by a capacity for action, or "beginning something anew" (Arendt 9). Arendt claims, then, that a person only truly appears as a distinguishable identity in a moment of action. These moments, I would add, are not "new" because they constitute an autonomously original act; instead, they are new by virtue of their "boundlessness," or by their social nature. As Arendt argues, "...the smallest act in the most limited circumstances bears the seed of the same boundlessness, because one deed, and sometimes one word, suffices to change every constellation" (190). As opposed, then, to an action delineating the "unique" personality traits of an agent, it registers newness at the level of its singular, public ramifications.

Thinking about distinctness as a function of sociality, rather than individuality, crops up often in Dickens criticism. Anna Gibson, for example, argues that "Dickens's characters never exist all at

once, autonomously, but only as parts of an open, interactive, and distributive network” (66).

Focusing specifically on *Our Mutual Friend*, she suggests that the formative interactions between characters are spurred by “social and physiological factors” that engulf individual intention and, consequently, delegitimize questions of “agency” as an applicable lens (69-70). If I agree with Gibson that Dickens’s characters resist the easy attribution of motive or intent, it does not necessarily follow that they merely “react” to external “impulses” (66, 70). In my reading of Dickens, his characters always *act*, rather than *interact*; their existence is not amorphous or contingent. Their action is not bound to a psychological viewing of agency because its singularity, the “human” element, derives from its capacity to be perceived. Arendt argues that “action” comprises words spoken and deeds performed: that is, action occurs between persons, or within a public space. Moreover, this public only occurs “where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds...establish relations and create new realities” (200). In other words, Arendt is redefining “action” as gestures that are seen, and whose appearances are replete—that is, they are not grounded in a preceding possession of self. So, while a perceiver may draw the singular appearance of another from her specific angle, this validates, rather than invalidates, the reality of that moment by making it visible.

Arendt fully acknowledges the objection that a world in which “words...disclose realities” is difficult to manifest or sustain. This kind of reality—constituted by the appearances of a truly public space—is not only ephemeral, but also only ever a “potential”;<sup>43</sup> the “power” that generates acting and speaking “springs up” between persons, but cannot be possessed or preserved because its particularity threatens to exceed conventional categories of communication and narrative. Paradoxically, however, this limitation also constitutes power’s “boundlessness”:

unlimited by “human nature” or “bodily existence,” power exceeds “material factors” (Arendt 200-201). In my mapping of Arendt’s thought, this “power potential” lies, like a kernel, within appearance, or seen action. Eugene’s movements are new and definitive because they are caught by a narrator who perceives and communicates their uncertainty—not *uncertain* in the sense of vague or half-finished, but in the sense that the singularity of their implications exceeds normative categories of knowledge. On the one hand, the rippling effects of Eugene’s actions vanish into the future, and, on the other, they reside wholly within the irreplicable moment of their occurrence.

Because Eugene’s actions are caught as a seen present, a public spectacle, they accrue a density of surface: like the textured brushwork of a painting, the vividness of the moment thickens with the residue of the past and future—what is held and yet unseen. The description of the scene’s climax, Eugene’s act of watching Lizzie, highlights the odd publicity at play: though a quiet moment involving only two people, it is described twice as a “sad and solitary spectacle” (OMF 164). The use of “spectacle” implies an audience exceeding one—and, indeed, if Eugene peeks in at Lizzie, the narrator peeks in, too, not only watching Lizzie but watching Eugene’s watching of her. The narrator, in fact, seems to permeate Eugene and take up a controlling stance behind the latter’s vision, as demonstrated by his privileged view of Eugene’s shift in perception: the narrator informs us that if Eugene first interpreted a “kind of film or flicker on her [Lizzie’s] face...to be the fitful firelight,” he saw “on a second look...that she was weeping” (163). And yet, this insight breaks down in the sentence immediately subsequent: “A sad and solitary spectacle, as shown him by the rising and the falling of the fire” (163). If the opening phrase seems to stand in for Eugene’s actual thought, the second undermines this notion by returning our gaze to the “fitful firelight,” and to the uncertainty of a wavering image. And though the

image sharpens by the end of the next paragraph, it does so by retaining—in fact, enhancing—the indefinable vividness of its elements:

It was a little window of but four pieces of glass...It showed him the room, and the bills upon the wall respecting the drowned people starting out and receding by turns. But he glanced slightly at them, though he looked long and steadily at her. A deep rich piece of colour, with the brown flush of her cheek, and the shining lustre of her hair, though sad and solitary, weeping by the rising and the falling of the fire. (164)

As presaged by the four-paned window, the final image is fragmented—not, however, as a conglomerate of disparate shards, but as a scene whose elements quiver without changing, like the rippling of water or the shifting of embers. The dead scripts that appear only to fade from view draw attention to the role of perception in delineating the scene. The “But” preceding the description of Eugene’s perception suggests that *because* he only “glanced slightly at them,” the bills lose distinctness—and not only them, but the “drowned people” they catalogue in detail. In contrast, Lizzie, the subject of his attention, emerges with a vividness utterly at odds with these holistic images. “A deep rich piece of color” that, nonetheless, weeps, Lizzie becomes a moment both new—an utterly distinct being—but also familiar, an outgrowth of her surroundings. Like the density that Boffin and Wegg accrue from their mutual perception, and like Eugene’s thickening as an accumulation of actions, Lizzie gathers and distills, like condensation on glass, the elements of the moment. Her “flush[ing]” and “shining” take in and exude the characteristics of the fitful fire by which she is seen, and just as flames or coals are sometimes said to sob, she becomes a weeping flame, a colorful “piece.”

The unpredictability and boundlessness of action, then, color in the distinctness of an actor because it releases her from those “psychological qualities” that, Arendt suggests, are typical of humans *in general* (192). As a result, someone’s “distinct identity” must appear as narration, a spectacle reconstructed by a storyteller for a public: only a narrating spectator can perceive the “specific meaning of each deed,” which lies “in the performance itself and neither in its motivation nor its achievement” (Arendt 206). Dickens’s foregrounded narrator, the voice that stages itself throughout the novel by means of explicitly rhetorical devices, enables the distinct appearances of the characters by visualizing them as action. Arendt claims that “the implicit manifestation of the agent and speaker, is so indissolubly tied to the living flux of acting and speaking that it can be represented and ‘reified’ only through a kind of repetition, the imitation or mimesis...which...is actually appropriate only to drama” (187). As exemplified by the use of literal text to simultaneously materialize and reconstruct a character through repetition—Boffin’s “thickness,” for example—Dickens’s style creates the stage for this dramatic representation. I further argue that the mode of characterization prevalent in *Our Mutual Friend* goes beyond the features that Arendt claims are descriptive of narration in general. By crafting a narrative voice that reflects upon its own act of narration, the novel draws attention to its characters as dramatic constructs—and, simultaneously, to the “intangible identities” represented by their overdeveloped, non-categorizable surfaces (Arendt 187). Rather than presenting caricatures or hyperrealist images, however, Dickens’s texts reproduce actuality by dwelling with the appearances that reside in action. On the one hand, his characterizations delineate our typifying, human capacity for boundless effect, and, on the other, they capture the particular distinctness of action. Moreover, this mode of characterization relinquishes claims to describing a reality (or lack thereof) beyond appearances by admitting its performance. The seeming artificiality of

ridiculous persons like Wegg, Boffin, or Eugene arises from their explicit reconstruction as *characters*: dramatic representations that catch immediacy as a redundant density of surface. Character, in my reading of Dickens, discovers actual reality *through* and *as* “artifice,” asking us to rethink “appearance” as true depiction.

Eugene’s own unconsciousness of identity, then—or his sense of himself as “ridiculous”—is the natural consequence of action, an admission of the “boundlessness” that both constitutes power, the human capacity for distinctness, as well as human “frailty,” untethered as this power is from individual intent (Arendt 191). It is in this sense that Dickens’s texts do not displace or deny agency so much as redefine it. Seen and consequently manifested as action by the narrator, Eugene takes up—as the moment of this action—a line of sight that subtends the point-of-view from which he is caught. Taking up this singular stance, Eugene does not simply channel the narrator’s point of view, but, rather, contributes his own perspective as an analogous and independent impressionability. Rendered susceptible to distinctness by his own, Eugene construes Lizzie as a mosaic of independent elements whose vividness resists holistic interpretation. Supporting each other’s distinct viewpoints, Eugene and the narrator allow appearance—in the final case, here, Lizzie—to manifest as singular: the actuality that, because it occurs as the focalization of public perception, always appears *in character*.

### The Space of Appearance

The larger argument that informs this chapter is concerned with the reciprocal relationship between public perception and singular appearance. Dickens is unique among the other “Romantic” authors discussed here, however, in that his work highlights the space of appearance not simply as an abstract structure—consisting in shared social and linguistic categories—but as a *peopled* environment. Dickens’s foregrounded style of narration, especially

potent in *Our Mutual Friend*, triangulates perception, stretching the tent pegs of public space from two—a mere, hanging sheet—to three. Without a witness to mutual, formative perception, appearance falls flat: Wegg’s woodenness, Boffin’s thickness, and Eugene’s ridiculousness gain actuality because their appearances not only register how they are seen from another’s distinct perspective, but also perform and, consequently, further particularize this identity. In order to do so, however, they require the support of shared, recognizable categories provided by a public stage—a third pair of eyes. Dickens’s characters are idiosyncratic because their particular dispositions, on the one hand, and familiarity with social types, on the other, enable them to take in and perform how they are seen—an appearance already particularized, and publicized, by the other’s own idiosyncrasy.

James Chandler has argued that the triangulated viewing pervading Dickens’s novels is the culmination of a literary structure that begins to evolve in the eighteenth century (Chandler xviii). Explicating the nuances of Adam Smith’s “impartial spectator” and its relation to the emerging notion of sensibility, Chandler claims that the eighteenth-century novel incorporated Smith’s concept by staging the imaginative means by which a reader could engage in critical self-reflection, primarily through the observation of two characters’ mutual seeing:

To sympathize... is not to feel what another person feels but rather to feel what we ourselves should feel in the same situation...Smith repeatedly refers to this capacity as the ability to put ourselves in another person’s case, to bring his or her case home to our own bosom. To do so is to create a point of view external to our own conduct and character...(173)

In order to create this external viewpoint, novelists like Laurence Sterne produced characters who, on the one hand, would act as embodied “vehicles” of sensibility and, on the other, would

render this “particularized and mobile sensorium virtual, so that a given character’s world becomes imaginable by someone else” (169). By availing one’s self of fiction to move into the situation of another (a character), a reader can simultaneously imagine their own feelings in such a case and evaluate the encounter from the outside. More complex than this self-recognition, however, is the movement of “identity” stimulated by “these exercises in vicariousness”: not only do we as reader-spectators imagine the cases of others, but “we make ourselves spectators to the actions we undertake by virtue of imagining those actions from a point of view not our own” (204). Our own self is changed by the transportation into someone else’s case, resulting in a triangulation of reader, character, and the observer floating somewhere between the two.

This “vehicularity” suggests a distribution of feeling that breaks down the distinction between self and other, as well as between passivity and agency. Drawing heavily on the eighteenth-century conceit of the “sentimental traveler,” and on Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey*, in particular, as evidence (204-214), Chandler shows how the “ability to be moved” was conflated more and more in eighteenth-century discourses with the “sympathetic movement beyond ourselves”(184). Yorick’s sentimental journey, consequently, is a “paradoxical play between, on the one hand, the virtual representation of sentiments occasioned by actual travel and, on the other, the actual exercise of virtual travel in sentiment” (185). Stopping with the Romantics en route to Dickens in his tracking of sympathy, Chandler argues that Wordsworth furthers the conflation of feeling with narrative: rather than being directly, vulgarly stimulated by the “moving accidents” of a story, poetic imagery triggers a reader’s broader network of associations (208). The medium, rather than the content, invites a reader’s sensibility.

Chandler’s examination of the triangulation of reader, character, and observer—the moving vehicle of sentiment—resonates with Lynch’s conception of the eighteenth-century

gentleman-traveler, capable of embodying many perspectives and emotions. While also exploring a triangulated perception, however, my reading of Dickens departs from a critical narrative in which his characterization of appearance promotes sympathy, or even self-recognition. In fact, the characters tracked in this project repel each other: their singularity enhances, rather than dissolves, through their mutual perception. I am interested in how this idiosyncrasy resists close reading—by another character, or by an actual reader. Boffin and Wegg *do* access each other's perspective in that they register how they are perceived. And yet, neither loses their subjective stance; though they become new moments, or singular appearances, they do so not through a sympathetic distribution of feeling that challenges identity altogether, but by performing, in their own way, how they perceive that they are seen. What makes this productive, rather than solipsistic, is that the particular stances Dickens's characters take up make them impressionable to the particularities of others. This respective particularity is bridged, not by a sympathetic recognition of self in other and vice versa, but by the space of appearance: a public stage made possible by the shared, social categories that, on the one hand, undergird recognition, and, on the other, are transformed by the individual ways in which mutual perceivers view and perform them.

The distinction between a structure of sympathy and the schema of perception I attempt to outline here, is subtle, but significant. The triangulation I parse occurs between two observers and a public audience, rather than between a self divided or dispersed by its transportation into another. Consequently, Dickens's characterization, in many cases, eschews, rather than invites sympathy, encouraging a more distant approach to reality. And yet, this perception that stops at appearance supports and enhances, rather than veils or pushes away, the particularity of others: the narrative voice of *Our Mutual Friend* does move behind and around selves, but this mode

highlights distinct appearances rather than mobilizing the powerful creativity of a single self-consciousness. This is especially evident in two features of the narrative voice: the idiosyncrasy of the voice itself, which attends to the details of a scene; and the element of reticence that discloses dense appearances not ruled by categories of depth. One such moment occurs in the scene in which we first meet Silas Wegg:

All weathers saw the man at the post...When the weather was wet, he put up his umbrella over his stock-in-trade...when the weather was dry, he furled that faded article, tied it round with a piece of yarn, and laid it cross-wise under the trestles: Where it looked like an unwholesomely-forced lettuce that had lost in color and crispness what it had gained in size...A howling corner in the winter time, a dusty corner in the summer time, an undesirable corner at the best of times. Shelterless fragments of straw and paper got up revolving storms there, when the main street was at peace; and the water-cart, as if it were drunk or short-sighted, came blundering and jolting round it, making it muddy when all else was clean. (OMF 44)

The perspective experienced here does not align with the critical act of de-familiarisation as described by Victor Shklovsky, a technique that often shapes discussions of artistic vision. While Shklovsky values the capacity of art to make “objects ‘unfamiliar’” in order to escape “habitualization” and “recover the sensation of life,” the narrator here invokes habit—even its ritualization, as Wegg’s precisely repeated motions indicate—as a stage for detail. The geographically consistent space of Wegg’s habitual corner makes evident the particularity of each of its moments, providing a forum for the changing assemblies of its objects. On the flipside, even as these singular juxtapositions generate a difference between Wegg’s corner and the surrounding world—rendering it turbulent in the midst of “peace,” and “muddy when all else

was clean”—we are made familiar with the corner’s particularity by its persistence as a recognizable category throughout the cycle of the seasons: “a howling corner...a dusty corner...an undesirable corner.” The individual features of the corner take on this simultaneity of typicality and particularity as well. The water-cart, introduced by a definitive article and uniquely personified as either a drunkard or someone visually impaired, appears as an object specific to this neighborhood or corner—even, however, as this same definitive article assumes that water-carts are common and familiar things.

The scene that results is both particular and typical, distinct and general. Our habituated experience of Wegg’s corner provides the space for its irreplicable moments—and, in this respect, this description resonates with Shkovsky’s goals for art by generating the new. Bringing Wegg before our eyes as a habitual sight in “all weathers,” the variations upon this consistency produce a bizarre and arresting image in the umbrella-turned-lettuce: “furl[ing] that faded article” in “dry weather” causes its aspect to change dramatically, the umbrella’s transformation into vegetable surprising us by a fantastic arbitrariness that, however, borders on the precise negation of the original object. Not only does the umbrella collapse our typical categories by shifting from the man-made to the natural, it hyperbolizes this change by flipping from inorganic matter to organic produce. Exacerbating this polarization, the lettuce image could not emanate from less favorable conditions. The umbrella-lettuce finds seed in a wooden man whose natural goods inspire a sensory experience of hardness merely through their appearance, and whose very artificial goods—such as his soggy gingerbread—droop as if once alive:

Assuredly, this stall of Silas Wegg’s was the hardest little stall of all the sterile little stalls in London. It gave you the face-ache to look at his apples, the stomach-ache to look at his oranges, the tooth-ache to look at his nuts. . . .The only article in

which Silas dealt, that was not hard, was gingerbread. On a certain day, some wretched infant having purchased the damp gingerbread-horse (fearfully out of condition), and the adhesive bird-cage, which had been exposed for the day's sale, he had taken a tin box from under his stool to produce a relay of those dreadful specimens...(OMF 45)

As this last example suggests, however, the process by which things become their opposites entails not so much a reversal as a reconstruction of phenomena that—though figurative, artificial, narrativizing—manifests realities as their own, vivid appearances. The “damp gingerbread-horse...and adhesive bird-cage” become, through narrative retrospection, the lifelike shapes, the “specimens,” they are intended to imitate. Their imperfect (soggy) manifestation as gingerbread (which is, ideally, hard!) recalls that, as gingerbread creations, they are already “dreadful specimens”—non-dead and non-living mimicry of real beings. The radical particularity of this gingerbread, then—so contrary as to reverse what is typical, expected—discovers a new rendition of form *in* immediate, accidental appearance. As suggested by the “relay” with which Wegg is able to repeatedly present it, the soggy gingerbread’s particular improvisation reveals its type—a crude, culinary representation of the world—more distinctly.

The apples and oranges are similarly reconstructed, their narrative description manifesting an actual trait: if they *look* too hard to eat, the hyperbole of a figurative, synesthetic description in which textured depth is perceived at the level of surface replicates the impossibility of eating these particular produce, a fact otherwise inaccessible by our knowledge of fruits as edible substances. The umbrella, too, participates in an “unwholesomely-forced” existence whose imperfect variation on vegetable qualities (freshness, crispness, wholesomeness) is accurately recreated by the “forced,” or arbitrary, mode of its appearance as a lettuce.

At stake in figuring out what the narrator accomplishes with a mode of description that tricks negation into manifesting a reality always already available as appearance is a different kind of perception: one that attends to the object, as opposed to one's own self-consciousness or mode of perception. This is an act aligned with reconstructive rather than with deconstructive thinking; the narrator here is able to reconstruct phenomena in a way that, as this chapter aims to explore, restores a forgotten appearance—only, however, because phenomena first appear as variations upon the public categories of comprehension. Returning to Arendt's theorization of actuality, this relation—between perceiver, perceived, and public space, or, in literary terms, between character, narrator, and the audience implied by the latter—enacts the communal “acting and speaking together” that both initiates and relies upon shared perception (198). Paradoxically, then, the singularity of appearance becomes a function of its subsumption into a communal narrative, retroactively rendered within the categories of a publicly manufactured knowledge and sustained by what Arendt calls “organized remembrance” (198).

If, as Arendt implies, actual appearance incorporates both the perception of immediacy and the social laws governing perception, then actuality becomes a dramatization: phenomena are simultaneously preserved and discovered by narration, captured by the repeated performance of their immediacy within the public space, or social categories, generated by the coming together of distinct persons in the first place. Arendt identifies this reverberating, feedback loop as potentiality (*dynamis*), the “power” that “keeps people together after the fleeting moment of action has passed...and what, at the same time, they keep alive through remaining together” (201). As I interpret Arendt, this power is the potential that rises, like dust, from the concrete clay of phenomena collapsed to their immediate moment: “the end (*telos*) is not pursued but lies in the activity itself...the performance is the work, is energy” (206). Reinstating Aristotle's claim

that this intangible immediacy of action is “sheer actuality”—neither individual qualities nor shared nature—Arendt recasts potentiality as a phenomenon that is both, on the one hand, ephemerally present in the moment of appearance and, on the other, always delayed to the act of narration staging this public perception (201).

### Conclusion

Arendt’s formulation of actuality as an effect of public perception encourages us to rethink the significance of narration and reading in a way that is, I think, already evident in Dickens’ unique mode of characterization, or in his rendering of persons and moments as unique configurations generated by the relation between perceiver and perceived. If Dickens’s characterization has often been described in terms of exaggeration,<sup>44</sup> I argue that the attention of his perceivers—his narrators and characters—to details of appearance suggests the discovery of density, a word I have been using to describe the two-pronged investment of his texts in surfaces: actualities that are retroactively comprehended through their dramatic subsumption into social categories; and the resistance to “reading” that such phenomena present as singular immediacies that cannot be demarcated by an external end. These appearances are dense, then, because they are both visible and impenetrable, a vivacity of impression that registers social type with the stony sheerness of particularity.

The narrator signals this vividness—which can be thought of, perhaps, as a stark or staring brightness—when he first approaches that most mundane of places, Wegg’s corner: “He had established his right to the corner, by imperceptible prescription. He had never varied his ground an inch, but had in the beginning diffidently taken the corner upon which the side of the house gave” (OMF 46). The “prescription” by which Wegg lays claim to his corner is “imperceptible”—a term that not only applies to things that elude seeing or conception, but to

things that might be such because they are too “fleeting,” “minute” (“imperceptible, adj. and n.”) This temporal dimension collides creatively with the possible meanings of “prescription”: though colloquially used to indicate the implementation of a right, “prescription” is also a legal term, specifically describing the “uninterrupted use or possession from time immemorial, or for a period fixed by law” (“prescription, n.”) The narrator’s pun both suggests—in keeping with the satirical tone advanced by “diffidently”—that Wegg’s prescription is inconceivable because it is unjustified, and, alternatively, that it is imperceptible because it has emerged, without origin, in the public consciousness as an unspoken convention.

Wegg’s habitation, then, combines two elements. On the one hand, it comprises a vanishing point, a minute detail whose utter particularity—at play in Wegg’s complete lack of legal or communal right to the corner—resists standard conventions and, consequently, flees comprehension. On the other, this particular event has taken an irrevocable hold upon reality. Wegg’s “right” is “established”—to the extent that his very physical placement has not “varied an inch.” The past perfect tense of the sentence suggests that Wegg’s unconventional set-up has been visible for a significant length of time; and, in fact, this impression is confirmed, rather than deconstructed, by the connotations of ephemerality bound up in the key descriptor, Wegg’s “imperceptible prescription.” The very unconventionality that defies common standards establishes it as a monument, a fixed point whose foundation is so deep as to be inaccessible. Rather than rendering Wegg’s corner invisible, however, this particularity renders it not just visible, but vivid. The narrator describes his corner as that “upon which the side of the house gave,” a location that is both specific and opaque: the house, presumably, has more than one side, and so occupies more than one corner—and, even in the case of just one locatable side, occupies two corners. Just as Boffin’s one-sidedness presents a surface that engages our attention

by eluding normative expectations, Wegg's corner juxtaposes the particular and the typical to create a new, dense appearance.

In conclusion, Dickens's characters perpetuate a perception that this project locates within an alternative strand of "Romantic" thought: a turning outwards that not only captures the particularity of phenomena, but does so by conjuring the shared, narrative categories—the types—that constitute a public. The appearances that emerge are neither mimetic nor fantastic; nor are they divisible into plausible or implausible, likely or unlikely, occurrences. Instead, these characters recognize each other by reversing the emphasis with which we normally read Dickens's claim that he has "purposely dwelt upon the romantic side of familiar things." The perception they undertake is unique not because it glimpses the hidden (romantic) significance of things, but because it captures the twofold nature of how things become recognizable (familiar): as moments that are simultaneously typical—consisting of iterable, social elements—and particular, displayed through performances that register and impress upon us the distinct stance from which they are seen. Appearance, then, emerges as actuality—a singular moment—when it also emerges as character, a public figure whose perceptibility is the flipside of perception. Occurring within a space composed of mutual perceivers, as well as the virtual audience at play wherever narratives are shared, Romantic character accrues its dense, seemingly overwrought, appearance by turning inside-out: exposing a self whose definitive feature is its ability to see and be seen.

#### Notes

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<sup>25</sup> Recently claiming that Dickens's view of aesthetic perception was likely influenced by contemporaneous debates in the art world, Dehn Gilmore makes a stunning case for reading Dickens's characters as flipping the binary between "distorted" and "large-as-life": those characters who seem exaggerated, she claims, may capture what his contemporaries considered to be the "real" or "lived" experience of perspective, while his seemingly more plausible

characters may incorporate an artistic manipulation in order to compensate for the shifts and relativity of subjective perception (684-5). Sambudha Sen, alternatively, argues that Dickens's scenes and characters—in contrast with the psychological realism exemplified and theorized by Thackeray, for example—draw on methods of contemporaneous satire and caricature in order to represent how social forces, emblems, and rhetorics of power were perceived by those dominated by and excluded from them (see chapter one, “Dickens, Thackeray, and ‘The Language of Radicalism’”).

<sup>26</sup> Lewes attributes the persuasive, “coercive force of realities” of Dickens's “unreal figures” to the “vividness of their presentation” (Ford 61-62).

<sup>27</sup> As Lewes again puts it, Dickens's “creations [were] universally intelligible, no matter how fantastic and unreal,” because his “types established themselves in the public mind like personal experiences” (Ford 61).

<sup>28</sup> Though claiming that Dickens is “nothing of a philosopher,” Henry James does admit to him being “a great observer and a great humorist” (Ford 53).

<sup>29</sup> As an early example of this critical opinion, David Masson, in his comparison of Thackeray and Dickens, argues that while the former “represent[s] life as it is actually and historically,” the latter, as a “novelist of the Ideal, or Romantic school,” “may take hints from Nature in her extremest moods, and make these hints the germs of creations fitted for a world projected imaginatively beyond the real one” (Ford 37).

<sup>30</sup> Reed aligns Dickens with a genre, the “metaphysical novel,” that Edward Eigner identifies as the staged dispensation of “preconceived visions or truths,” employing for this purpose an “intrusive” narrator and “idealized or simplified character[s]” (9-10). Demonstrating how Dickens authoritatively crafts new worlds, but, by exposing and exaggerating the effects of his style, also invites readers into this imaginative process, Reed interprets the Dickensian text as both “writerly” and “readerly,” productive of scenes that operate within the intentional, symbolic structure of a story while simultaneously reporting upon the outside world (20). While I am also interested in the unique vision of the world offered up by Dickens's novels, I argue, in contrast, that they present reality as it appears, rather than as a visible rendering of hidden truth.

<sup>31</sup> In his preface to *Bleak House* (1853), Dickens concludes with the claim that he has “purposely dwelt upon the romantic side of familiar things.”

<sup>32</sup> Aside from the critics and authors cited in the preceding paragraphs as describing Dickens—even if they don't use the word—as a caricaturist, or a creator of disproportionate characters, Alexander Bove provides a useful summary of the rationale linking such commentary: “The common claim that Dickens's characters are caricatures derives from his ability to capture the essence of a character in a few strokes as it were, a few overcharged characteristics, such as verbal tics, physical gestures, physiological traits, or even objects” (Bove 667). Bove also illustrates one end of this critical spectrum by claiming that Dickens's overcharged characters reveal the disruptive “real” that challenges a nineteenth-century, bourgeois obsession with subjects as unified totalities. Similarly drawing on psychoanalytic conceptions of reality, Jeremy Tambling suggests that Dickensian caricature “avoids an idealizing humanism in its fascination with the anamorphic, that which proceeds or resists or evades being framed within realist forms or will not allow itself to be symbolised” (Tambling 61). Though still concerned with the mimetic failure of the signifier, critics on the other side of the conversation I have identified read Dickens's characterization as a retreat from the “human” altogether into a mechanized universe. Bruce Beiderwell, for example, argues that the “network of associations”—of repeated imagery

and allusions—in *Our Mutual Friend* links “seemingly separate characters” via abstract concepts (Beiderwell 240), and so depicts a “decaying,” increasingly dehumanized world (235).

<sup>33</sup> The Norton Anthology summarizes Romantic poetry—and its dominant, historical interpretation—as a revolutionary turn towards the imagination, drawing primarily on the Wordsworthian attempt to pass through external objects to the infinite; “striving for the unattainable,” Romantic poetry of this ilk was composed by “what was absent”: “a fragmentary trace of an original conception that was too grand ever to be fully realized” (Greenblatt 15).

<sup>34</sup> Santayana argues that Dickens—on account of his unforgiving humor—captures the “living grimaces that play from moment to moment upon the countenance of the world,” and so sees through the “conventional world, a world of masks, [that] is superimposed on the reality, and passes in every sphere of human interest for the reality itself.” (Santayana ) Rosenberg further sums up and builds upon a critical conversation in which Dickens’s characters are not flat, but fragmented, and consequently reveal a real-world difficulty with perceiving unified, coherent personalities (Rosenberg 154).

<sup>35</sup> Respectively, Santayana argues that “[t]he world is a perpetual caricature of itself; at every moment it is the mockery and the contradiction of what it is pretending to be,” while Chesterton claims that the “enormous contours” of the true individual takes on the “colours of caricature” because they bust out of society’s generalizing requirements (Santayana 66; Ford 265).

<sup>36</sup> Woloch, Alex. *The One v. the Many*. Princeton UP, 2003.

<sup>37</sup> Pointing to authors like Walter Pater, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and George Eliot, Çelikkol shows how Coleridge’s explication of an “organic ideal,” in which variety harmonizes into a natural unity of form and matter, influenced a typical Victorian aesthetic. (Çelikkol 9, 120-21)

<sup>38</sup> As discussed in the “Introduction” to this project, Samuel Johnson defined “idiosyncrasy” as “a peculiar temper or disposition not common to another” (1755). “Disposition” is defined by the OED as a “natural tendency or bent of the mind... a turn of mind” (definition 6); as is especially pertinent here, it was also used in the 17th and 18th centuries to describe the “relative position” or “situation” of something (definition 1b).

<sup>39</sup> Marcus and Best define surface reading as “attention to surface as a practice of critical description. This focus assumes that texts can reveal their own truths because texts mediate themselves...” (11)

<sup>40</sup> The OED gives the following definitions of “speculation”:

5.a An act of speculating, or the result of this; a conclusion, opinion, view, or series of these, reached by abstract or hypothetical reasoning.

5.c A conjectural consideration or meditation; an attempt to ascertain or anticipate something by probable reasoning.

6.a Without article: Contemplation of a profound, far-reaching, or subtle character; abstract or hypothetical reasoning on subjects of a deep, abstruse, or conjectural nature.

8.a The action or practice of buying and selling goods, land, stocks and shares, etc., in order to profit by the rise or fall in the market value, as distinct from regular trading or investment; engagement in any business enterprise or transaction of a venturesome or risky nature, but offering the chance of great or unusual gain.

9 An act or instance of speculating; a commercial venture or undertaking of an enterprising nature, esp. one involving considerable financial risk on the chance of unusual profit.

<sup>41</sup> For example, when Wegg inquires as to whether Boffin has acquired material for their reading session, the latter speaks of a book as if it were a particular individual:

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“Bought him at a sale,” said Mr. Boffin. “Eight wollumes. Red and gold. Purple ribbon in every wollume, to keep the place where you leave off. Do you know him?”

“The book’s name, sir?” inquired Silas.

“I thought you might have know’d him without it,” said Mr. Boffin, slightly disappointed. “His name is Decline-and-Fall-Off-The-Rooshan-Empire . . . . You know him, Wegg?” OMF 52

<sup>42</sup> Dickens’s prolific use of conjectural phrases and qualifiers has become one of his most famous (or notorious) features of style. In parsing the effects of this technique, James R. Kincaid argues that Dickens’s narrators “blur” our vision by casting the comprehensible visibility of things and persons into doubt. While Kincaid concludes that Dickens’s style impresses upon us the relativity of perspective and an absence of “essence,” I claim that the particular vision his narrators inhabit contributes to actuality by delineating a singular appearance or by initiating a certain performance. (Kincaid 99-101)

<sup>43</sup> “The space of appearance comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action. . . Its peculiarity is that, unlike the spaces which are the work of our hands, it does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being. . . Wherever people gather together, it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever.” (Arendt 199)

<sup>44</sup> Freya Johnston, for example, provides an enlightening, critical account of the different ways in which Dickens’s characters can be—and have been—thought of in terms of “exaggeration.” Pointing out that “to exaggerate” can describe the accumulation of details as well as rhetorical excess (139), Freya Johnston notes that Dickens’s prodigality of minute observations may overwhelm us without straying from what is observed, or, by focusing on one feature, produce an inflated figure of fantasy” (148).

## Sir Walter Scott: Rhetorical Character

### Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that the epistolary exchange between the protagonists of Sir Walter Scott's *Redgauntlet* (1824) creates a narrative space in which interlocutors emerge more clearly on account of being recipients and conveyors of critique. The friends involved in this verbal combat, Alan Fairford and Darsie Latimer, do so not by exposing flaws in each other, but by recognizing—with ironic perspicacity—each other's viewpoints. Engaging each other in the arena of argument and figure, these characters perform a unique species of rhetoric that doesn't so much *persuade* as *conjure*: rather than altering each other's opinions, they depict the other so thoroughly that both sides appear, emerge, with renewed force. Establishing premises, making claims, and drawing conclusions, they ultimately undo—or overdo—the trappings of argument by invoking, rather than undermining, the witness of the other.

Alan and Darsie, then, take rhetoric to new heights. If Aristotle defines rhetoric as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion,” they improvise upon this perception in two ways (Roberts 1). First, they break down the distinction between invented argument and given evidence.<sup>45</sup> Visualizing, through witty diatribe, the other's personal and professional character, the two friends condense oratory and testimony, rhetoric and fact, to produce a vivid hologram that simultaneously sustains and resists accusation. Acting the part of both orator and witness—or, more significantly, of both prosecution and defense—Alan and Darsie exemplify the “use” of rhetoric by showing, too clearly, the viewpoints of both sides.<sup>46</sup>

Second, Alan and Darsie's combative construction of each other's characters recasts the classical conception of rhetoric by inverting it. Wendy Olmsted points out that Aristotle defended rhetoric as a kind of “intellectual agency” that, if it did not satisfy the requirements of

certain “knowledge,” sharpened perception by dwelling with possibility (12). Deliberating the particular—and so, changeful—circumstances of a specific situation, rhetoric eschews “universal principles” in the cut and thrust, the “attack” and “defense,” of debate (Olmstead 11).<sup>47</sup> The successful orator, then, is the one who shows herself most adroit, the lightest on her feet—not through wordplay or demagoguery, but through the expression of the most “trustworthy character” (Olmstead 8, 14): in a situation where “certainty” is impossible, an audience turns to the “credibility” of those speaking.<sup>48</sup> Aristotle complicates this intuitive claim, however, by stipulating that we should judge “character” as a function of speech, rather than as an entity preexisting the current argument. The well-known threat lurking in Aristotle’s argument—in the possible fissure between verbal presentation and unseen intent—is heightened by Darsie and Alan’s flagrant (and mocking) ventriloquization of each other. If they refrain from manipulating the appearance of their own characters, they orchestrate, even perform, each other’s.

I argue that Alan and Darsie’s construal of each other’s appearances for the purpose of evaluation and judgment speaks to the social concern, prominent in the Scottish metropolitan culture of the long eighteenth century, with crafting moral and civic character. Alex Benchimol has recently illustrated how Scottish cultural institutions—still independent of English domination after the political Union of 1707—advanced both “individual and national improvement” by encouraging the public dissemination of knowledge and its application in the arts, sciences, and manufacturing (92).<sup>49</sup> Deriving from and thriving upon “an intensely moral conception of public reason,” Edinburgh’s intellectual societies, student forums, and burgeoning periodicals gradually formed a “liberal public sphere” in which inquiry, debate, and practical innovation, as well as a concern with the unifying power of rhetoric and language, sought to

reconcile Scotland's desire for cultural autonomy and material progress with its assimilation to Greater Britain (99, 87, 88).<sup>50</sup>

Of special importance to this project is metropolitan Scotland's attention to rhetoric as a means of delineating individual, national, and even a universal (human) "character" as a function of civic and moral virtue.<sup>51</sup> Scott's Romantic characters, I argue, playfully engage and improvise upon two prominent themes emerging in the long eighteenth century: the scholarly discussion of language as comprising *observable* signs of "character," on the one hand, and on the other, the agonistic rhetoric used by periodicals in "characterizing" the different strata of Scottish society as well as individual public figures. As Rosaleen Keefe argues in her introduction to a collection of primary texts on the topic, Scottish thinkers like Thomas Reid drew on the new science of induction (formulated by Francis Bacon) to rethink language as a way to empirically observe the "faculties of the mind"; this, in turn, led to the consideration of rhetoric not simply as the art of speaking or of persuading, but as the tool by which proper "taste" and sentiments are formed (10-11). If thinkers like Frances Hutcheson and Hugh Blair went on to emphasize the importance of proper language as speaking from and to a universal, moral sense (18, 13), Adam Smith shifted focus from collective character to the particular, arguing that rhetoric, while formative, should also fit or express the personality of the speaker (22).

This particularly "Scottish" interest in the relationship between rhetoric and the various modes, or strata, of "character" emerges with special force in the combative periodical culture of the long eighteenth century.<sup>52</sup> At its initial founding in the 1750s, the *EdinBURgh Review* sought to propagate the inheritance of the Scottish Enlightenment, including interdisciplinary discussion, a standardization of language, and a joint movement towards Scottish cultural autonomy and political collaboration with England.<sup>53</sup> Reemerging in the nineteenth century

under the influence of a metropolitan debate culture, and catering to the “elite” tastes of Whig professionals trained in Scotland’s culturally independent legal and educational institutions, the *Review* successfully established itself as a “disciplinary court of judgment and evaluation” (*Scott’s Shadow* 24, 26).<sup>54</sup> Though countering the *EdinBURgh Review* with its cultural nationalism and Tory stance, *Blackwood’s EdinBURgh Magazine* similarly created a space for rhetorical combat, becoming notorious for its scathing depictions of public figures and writers.<sup>55</sup>

Contributing at different points of his career to both the *Review* and *Blackwood’s*, Scott straddles, in his person and in his work, the ideological battleground they throw into relief. A Whig professional of progressive outlook, Scott “personif[ies] the ‘moderate’ Enlightenment ethos” of the *Review*; at the same time, his literary renderings of a national past incorporate the antiquarian and popular interests disdained by the *Review* and energetically taken up by *Blackwood’s* (*Scott’s Shadow* 28).<sup>56</sup> However, if *Blackwood’s* has been credited with establishing a Scottish “Romantic” aesthetic in opposition to the *Review’s* “neo-Enlightenment liberalism” (*Scott’s Shadow* 27), its combative creation of what Angela Esterhammer has recently termed “pseudo-persons” also points toward the alternative romanticism generated by Scott’s use of character (*Print* 40-41). Arguing that *Blackwood’s* translates the “collection of physical, behavioural, and legal attributes” that make a person recognizable into “iterable,” “linguistic” signs, Esterhammer demonstrates how a *Blackwood’s* “personality”— a character sketch amounting to a “personal attack”— reproduces real people as fictional personae and vice versa (*Print* 40).<sup>57</sup> If, for Esterhammer, this elision of the actual and the textual produces a space of critique set apart by its “performative and improvisational mode” (*Print* 40), I argue that Scott’s literary figures similarly recreate each other as *characters* by using the rhetoric of argument to visualize images so vivid they speak back.

In what follows, I argue that Scott's characters riff on the period's use of "personality" as a locus of critical debate. While building on scholarship that sets Scott apart from his English Romantic contemporaries,<sup>58</sup> however, I ultimately argue that the characters in *Redgauntlet* also diverge from the values of nineteenth-century Scottish discourses. Though displaying the same fascination with familiar types, Scott's hypervisualized characters take the "pseudo-person" to the extreme. Rather than cataloguing characteristics, Alan and Darsie playfully figure each other's appearances and alleged thoughts through terms and images explicitly borrowed from the public realms of Edinburgh's educational, legal, and literary institutions. Delineating each other from both without and within, crafting a discourse that limns the private and the public, they consequently reproduce each other as vocal opposition by successfully rendering their embodied perspective. Scott's characters thus speak *for* and *through* others—even, however, as they stop short of complete immersion in the other's perspective. The strange result stands between sophistic "declamation"—to borrow David Manderson's term for a conversational style that emphasized "flourish" over veracity—and the sympathetic habitation of another's viewpoint espoused by Smith's popular moral theory (Manderson 89).<sup>59</sup>

Scott's literary figures, then, turn this project's focus on singular appearance toward the way in which rhetoric construes another's character. While channeling the concerns of Scottish Romanticism with the relation between public discourse, civic identity, and critique, Scott's characters perform a perception that eschews both negative and positive judgment for the delineation of opposing perspectives. If, for classical rhetoricians, rhetoric was the art of bringing realities more clearly into view, then Scott's characters direct the full force of their partiality—their idiosyncratic biases, language, and thoughts—towards making the other appear: not, as one

might think, as a projection or caricature, but as a full-fledged combatant armed with a partial perspective of their own.

This chapter contributes to recent, critical conversation that seeks to locate Scott's work in a "rhetorical tradition of persuasive writing" by taking into account what Katrin Berndt describes as one of Scott's most definitive features, "his depiction of characters as agents actively involved in the affairs of their culture" (Adams 945; Berndt 119). Turning their attention to Scott's development of these "citizen-agents"—to borrow Anne Frey's term—critics like Berndt, Maeve Adams, Juliet Shields, and Catherine Packham have explored his participation in the period's pervasive concern with preserving humanizing traits and virtues in the face of an increasingly commercial and self-interested society. In addition, they illustrate how contemporaneous interest in developing a coherent, national "Union" contributed to the conception of a moral citizenry by defining the ways in which Britain's Scottish and English citizens should relate to each other.<sup>60</sup>

In what follows, I work from this recent body of scholarship to consider how Scott's civic characters function as more than registers of historical and national consciousness. I argue that Scott produces individual voices who accrue a singularity beyond or beneath normative structures of identity. Ultimately, then, this chapter explores the relation between individual perception and convention located at the crux of "character": not as the sentimental formation of an ideal citizen, but as the discrete intersection of what is crafted—drawn out by an interlocutor—and idiosyncratic. Scott's figures innovate upon their contemporary relevance as characters in this way, I argue, by substituting sympathy, a rhetorical appeal to shared, general feeling, with combative engagement, a rhetoric of argumentation that delineates rather than subsumes singularity. While Dickens's characters offer naïve perspectives, Scott's characters

wield their idiosyncrasy as a lens—one whose sharp edge, however, cuts both ways. In doing so, these characters move us from a reliance on Arendt’s theorization of the interdependent relation between communal, communicative perceivers and distinct appearance to her Aristotelian roots, reflecting the shared interest that Scott’s contemporaries and intellectual predecessors expressed in classical theories of rhetoric and virtue while altering their more typical channeling.

#### From Combat to Character

“Cur me exanimas querelis tuis?—In plain English, Why do you deafen me with your croaking? The disconsolate tone in which you bade me farewell at Noble-House, and mounted your miserable hack to return to your law drudgery, still sounds in my ears” (RG 13). So begins the opening letter of Scott’s *Redgauntlet*, the first volume of which is written as an epistolary correspondence between its two protagonists Darsie Latimer and Alan Fairford.<sup>61</sup> The Latin citation foregrounds the intimacy we expect of a letter, creating a moment of privately shared reference; at the same time, the use of quotation assumes a public realm by acknowledging the specific community of Edinburgh’s classically trained elite.<sup>62</sup> Darsie further complicates the marshy intermesh of private and public when, in his transition to a more accessible medium, “plain English,” he reproduces a translation whose originality balks general understanding. Literally meaning, “Why do you kill me with your complainings?,”<sup>63</sup> Darsie’s creative interpretation of a canonical text improvises upon its terms to invoke immediate presence. While “complainings” can be registered by diverse means and media, Alan’s alleged “croaking” must be heard—vocalized—to take its “deafening” effect. Paradoxically, then, the figurative rendering of his human speech implies his immediate, literal presence. Darsie shares his private recollection as a present moment sensibly felt—to the degree that, even as the fiction of this

“present” is acknowledged by the intrusion of past description, its remembrance still takes visceral manifestation (Alan’s croaking still rings in his friend’s ears).

At first recalling his friend with volatile (if facetious) force, Darsie continues with questions that sound more honest—at least until they give way to Darsie’s imaginative vivacity: “And why should this be so, Alan? Why the deuce should you not be sitting precisely opposite to me at this moment, in the same comfortable George Inn; thy heels on the fender, and thy juridical brow expanding its plications as a pun rose in your fancy?” (RG 13) If Darsie’s straightforward question seems to invite a response, this testimony to Alan’s integrity as an (albeit absent) agent dissolves in the latter’s sudden, hypothetical appearance. Rather than gesturing towards Alan by way of memory, Darsie bypasses trace for perceptible presence, channeling and doubling his friend by means of a vivid, present-tense description. In fact, Darsie’s query arises under already presumptuous conditions. The referent, the “this” that he questions (“why should this be so”), is a scenario of his own imagining, the hypothetical case arising from how he “interpret[s] the terms” of Alan’s “melancholy adieu,” his croaking: “It seemed to say, ‘Happy dog! You can ramble at pleasure...pursue every object of curiosity...while I, your senior and your better, must...return to my narrow chamber and my musty books’” (RG 13). By directing a question in response to his own ventriloquization of Alan’s voice, Darsie cheekily conjures Alan’s perception rather than Alan himself—even, however, as this act of imagining Alan’s intent reconstructs his person in the most vivid way.

The deftness with which Darsie both interprets his friend’s interiority and conjures his appearance (“at the same comfortable George Inn”) suggests a continuity between the two processes that begins to limn the boundary between inner and outer, private and public—what is thought or conjectured versus what is seen or heard. Darsie’s confident interpretation of his

friend's motivation, the purpose that drives him homeward, spills over into an image that defends this assumption of intimacy: Alan's supposed priorities manifest visibly in his "juridical brow," the odd figure turning him inside out by tracing his intentions *as* appearance. More than effecting an inversion, however, Darsie's use of a civic category ("juridical") to manifest his friend suggests that Alan's interiority—his private purpose—is already socially configured.

So perceived, Alan might seem to invite claims about the subject's discursive constitution—and yet, his delivery to us also occurs through the medium of his materiality. Extending his implementation of professional reference from the legal to the scientific, Darsie configures Alan's brow as an expanding formation of organic "folds" (plica) that elaborate upon the "juridical" as biological.<sup>64</sup> While the definitions at play invoke the interiority of Alan's brain stretching itself in the formation of a pun, however, the description works from the outside-in as well as from the inside-out. On the one hand, "plications" recall the folds of a furrowed brow, locating Darsie's description at the surface of skin; by means of this "outside," however, we can also move to the interior of Alan's mind, deducing the latter from the former even as the furrowing/unfurrowing brow echoes the figurative scrunching of a working brain. Finally, the image of unfolding plications casts Alan in yet another register. Capturing the tension between the literary condensation and referential expansion endemic to pun-making, Darsie's wit situates us again in the boggy realm of social discourse as equal parts convention and intuition.

Darsie's disjointed, inverted, yet vivid visualization of Alan aligns with the theories of mind and language set forth by philosophers of the Scottish Common Sense school, and especially those popularized by the nineteenth-century thinker and pedagogue, Dugald Stewart.<sup>65</sup> Drawing on the distinction proposed by Thomas Reid—one of the "founders" of the Common Sense school, as well as Stewart's teacher and paramount influence—Stewart argues that

language can be divided into “natural” and “artificial” signs:<sup>66</sup> the latter consist of the spoken and written signs established by social convention, while the former comprise “expressions of the countenance,” “gestures of the body,” and “tones of voice” (Mortera 191). Though artificial signs supplement the “imperfections” of the natural by enabling more complex communication, Stewart argues that the recovery of natural language is “the foundation of the arts of both the Actor and the Orator” (192-93). Ultimately, however, Stewart blurs the line between the two linguistic categories: it is “abundantly obvious,” he claims, that “our interpretation of natural signs is, in no case, the result of *pure* or *unmixed* instinct” (202); instead, like artificial signs, their understanding requires the accumulation of experience.

This deconstruction between the natural and the artificial continues with Stewart’s counterintuitive exploration of experience as a function of “abstraction.” In contrast to “generalization,” he argues, “abstraction” is the ability to *separate out* qualities from combinations of phenomena; so, for example, we call a rose a “rose” in order to distinguish it—not, initially, from other roses—but from things that aren’t roses. And yet, this ability requires the repeated, experiential recognition and distillation of those qualities that we associate with all roses. Artificial signs, in turn, make such abstraction possible as the “appellatives” we use to signify the combinations—the groups of qualities, individuals, etc.—brought to light by this process. (135-37)

The wavering line that Stewart walks between the role of instinct and experience and between the use of natural and artificial signs makes possible the perception that weaves together what is socially conceived with what is individually crafted. The poet, Stewart argues, relies upon abstraction because it allows her to observe, not individuals, but “combinations,” which she can then “decompose” and recombine in “new wholes” (137). At the same time, these artificial

signs—by definition, social categories or names of types, rather than individuals—only provide “hints,” analogous to “an outline or a shadow, exhibiting the profile of a countenance familiar to the Eye” (207). In consequence,

[t]he most minute narratives...are by no means, in every instance, the most intelligible and satisfactory; as the most faithful copies after nature do not always form the best portraits. In both cases, the skill of the artist consists in a happy selection of particulars, which are *expressive* or *significant*. (207)

This unique mode of perception redefines knowledge and its communication as the decomposition and recombination of particulars, rather than the attempt to either generalize or copy. Made up of words that only make sense in relation to each other (208), dialogue doesn’t so much “convey knowledge” as “bring two minds into the *same train of thinking*” (209-210). Stewart thus suggests that to communicate is to bring someone into your point of view—not, however, through the transparent mediation of ideas, but by engaging them in the same performance, the “steps” of a certain dance of thought (209).

Stewart’s description of communication as a shared participation in a “train of thought” implies a dependence on expression, or the audio-visual persuasion of gestures, and he particularly locates this negotiation between the individual and the social in the “study of Character” (193).<sup>67</sup> Darsie’s construal of Alan’s character, in turn, aligns with the two-fold perception proposed by Stewart: first, as the recomposition of “particulars” rather than a comprehensive “portrait”; and, second, as the creation of an audio-visual, a debate that “confines” two minds to the same “track” rather than creating a transparent conduit of pure, inalterable ideas (210). Scott’s characters, however, take to the extreme the tensions at play in Stewart’s philosophy. Scholars like Gavin Budge demonstrate how thinkers of the Common

Sense school, Stewart included, appealed to social convention as an arbiter of the “common sense” cast by intuitive, universal associations; the characters of individuals could then, be pedagogically trained into habits of reasoning most helpful to creating a progressive democracy (Budge 26-27; Mortera 15-16). Scott’s friends, in contrast, channel their associations into vivid characterizations whose idiosyncrasy redounds back upon and challenges this formation, presenting distinct, combative viewpoints rather than establishing conformity. By depicting each other as “character studies” that elide the distinction between the natural and the artificial, as well as the internal and the external, Alan and Darsie perceive, delineate, and miss each other simultaneously.

Darsie’s opening characterization of Alan combines a rhetoric pitched to improve civic and moral character with a mixture of artificial and natural language: the “expressiveness” of tone, countenance, and motion added to conventional meanings. Darsie conjures Alan in order to judge and sentence his character, and, in order to do so persuasively, manifests Alan-in-action as testimony, rather than providing a “minute narrative.” However, by visualizing *Alan’s* tone, gestures, and countenance, Darsie reverses the role of orator and topic, transferring the force of natural signs to his opponent. Of course, by imaginatively abstracting and recomposing Alan’s characteristics, Darsie also stands in the poetic role: his ventriloquization and visual manipulation of Alan forcefully reconstructs the latter’s character from his perspective. Darsie effects the idiosyncrasy of his perception by commandeering public terms to articulate Alan’s appearance. If natural signs were considered universal, the shared, pre-linguistic strata that grounded all subsequent development of human communication, Darsie’s visualization of Alan challenges this generalization by, paradoxically, painting his features and action with metaphors drawn from the public sphere.

Stewart's definition of abstraction—a synthesis of Adam Smith's thought as well as Reid's—suggests that conventional language perceives individuals by grouping and classifying them.<sup>68</sup> Scott's characters illustrate this perception with a twist: reasoning aloud, their arguments recreate those around them as the conventional characters produced by certain social narratives; at the same time, those characters become more, not less, distinct as individuals who continue to escape this very attempt at classification. Darsie's abstraction of and dilation upon Alan's "juridical brow" renders this quality more individual by virtue of being shared: unlike other shared categories we use to identify traits, "juridical" is not easily applicable, in either a literal or a figurative sense, as a personal quality. As a result, Darsie translates Alan's physical being from a private recollection to a vivid manifestation by using a term whose normal (public) frame of reference renders its present application singular. This singularity, in turn, anticipates Alan's appearance not just as an image, but as an elision of inside and out: moving from the working of the "juridical brow" to the promise of its oral manifestation, the pun, Darsie invokes Alan's voice. The sudden intrusion of the past tense upon the hypothetical present ("as the pun rose in your fancy") grounds this promise in fact, and confirms Alan's presence in time and space ("precisely opposite" to Darsie "at this moment, in the same comfortable George Inn").

If Darsie recreates Alan as a character drawn from a certain social narrative, however, he ultimately takes Alan's individuality to the next level by rendering him a social outsider. Questioning Alan's "true sense of friendship," Darsie betrays the stakes of his rhetoric as evaluative judgment, and his representation of Alan as another kind of character: a subject with moral, ethical, and political value. Darsie invokes Alan explicitly as a person who, were he more social, would be able to help generate the dialogic friendship conditioned by the environs of the public-house: "Above all," Darsie opines with the rhetorical force accumulated from his

preceding queries, “why, when I fill this very glass of wine, cannot I push the bottle to you, and say, ‘Fairford, you are chased!’” (13) Again drawing us into an immediate reality by gesturing towards “this very glass,” Darsie further captures this ontological promise through performative language; “to chase” in this sense means “to call upon (a person) to fill up his glass; to push his bottle towards” (OED). Darsie’s performative rendering of the present—acting out the scenario he poses through the meaning of his words—joins with the vividly framed ritual of social drinking to support his call to public participation.

And yet, Alan’s lack of moderation—his obsessive return to musty books and narrow chambers—is nonetheless a mode, albeit distanced, of social participation: he returns home in order to work out a promise oriented towards the social good, the fruits of studying law. Darsie, in contrast, confesses that he is “alone in the world,” lacking even the dependence on labor that would recast him in a socially recognizable role as an employee (13, 16). Refracting Mr. Fairford’s (Alan’s father) critique of him as a “reed shaken by the wind” because he “will not, or cannot, be a lawyer” (15), Darsie, though ironically, anticipates Alan’s accusatory configuration of him as a romantic, given to exaggerated fancy and “Quixotical expectations” (25, 24). In doing so, he unconsciously hints at the unique perception enacted by his letter: Darsie’s vivid imagination of Alan not only gives force to his argument (that Alan is a bad friend), but also, conversely, casts doubt upon his reliability as an unbiased, reasoning judge. His litany of “nots”—“Why the deuce should you not be sitting opposite to me... Why... cannot I push the bottle to you... Why, I say, should not all this be...”—creates a series of rhetorical questions that pose the conditions of a public while also demonstrating their oversight. Without his friend, Darsie is left alone, friendless, and so not “a friend” himself. The results of Darsie’s eloquence,

his ventriloquization of Alan, reproduce his solitariness as an individual without familial or economic connections, and so substitutes excessive representation for sympathetic dialogue.

Critics have often read Scott as promoting a project of sympathy—and specifically by innovating upon various modes of rhetoric to model and create community. Ina Ferris and Maeve Adams separately explore how Scott creates “living pictures” of emotion in order to “move” the reader (Adams 957), effectively undermining the cultural stereotypes and narratives of his day through the “unprecedented mobilization of reading’s powers of visualization” (Ferris 61). Citing Scott’s desire to “trace the evanescent manners’ of his ‘own country’” and “procure sympathy for their virtues,” Ferris foregrounds the innovative “vivacity” for which Scott was recognized and highlights the “cultural difference” his work effects (Ferris 61,188). Fiona Price expounds on this latter point by arguing that Scott solicits sympathy for characters who counter normative, national categories. Similarly explicating the tendency of Scott’s literary figures to break accepted molds, Caroline McCracken-Flesher claims that Scott’s work—like that of “Locke, Hume, Hartley, and Scott’s own professor, Dugald Stewart”—illustrates how “character is formed” and challenged by the “unpredictable associations” accrued through experience (55).

By arguing that Scott’s novels cultivate a sympathy towards difference, this scholarship examines how Scott’s characters recover rhetoric as a positive force that overturns normative binaries and rethinks “revolution” as neither cyclical nor disruptive.<sup>69</sup> Katrin Berndt, for example, persuasively argues that *Redgauntlet* depicts a turn from “dualistic thinking” to an incorporation of Scottish identity within a growing cosmopolitan sense of Britishness (122), while Rivka Swenson argues that Scott revises eighteenth-century narratives of essentialism through characters who simultaneously manifest a pre-formed, Scottish nationality and, however, manage to “choose” this “destiny,” “leaving its futurity open to negotiation” (243). I agree, then,

with the critical consensus that Scott's novels—contributing to contemporaneous accounts that recognized rhetoric's significant role in shaping the individual—utilized persuasion as a way to upset monolithic standards in favor of difference. My argument tacks away, however, in pursuing how Scott's characters model a community grounded in rhetorical combat, rather than in sympathy. Scott's figures, in my reading, do not “promote” or “recognize” difference so much as help bring it into vivid, sustained existence: rather than letting these appearances fade away into an open future or be absorbed (“accepted”) into a system, they engage in a rigorous characterization of each other that rhetorically stages the partial, particular perceptions at play.

Darsie and Alan's initial epistolary engagement acts as a blueprint for the way in which the novel's characters continue to reconstruct each other through argument, an exchange in which vivid representation occurs as rhetorical excess, on the one hand, and, on the other, as a delineation of particularity generated by the exposure of one's own partial perspective. Darsie's apparently biased description of Alan, his rhetorical reframing of Alan's point of view, “fails” to deliver the comprehensive characterization implicitly promised by his vivid manifestation precisely because Darsie invokes him as an argumentative force; in doing so, Darsie generates a dialogue that exceeds both his and Alan's intent.

This failure to capture a “purely” historical act or situation gives way to a vivid determination of the present, recreating what Shoshana Felman has described as “referential excess”: a moment of performative utterance in which the “referent is no longer simply a preexisting substance, but an act...a dynamic movement or modification of reality” (51). For Felman, this slippage between the constative and the performative—between a claim to know reality and a claim to create it—discloses the structure of language as “promise.” Like the act of promising, language assumes a self-referentiality, an immediate fulfillment, conditioned by its

future actualization. Consequently, and distinguishing this temporality from the deferral of Derrida's *différance*, the failure of language to keep the aim of intent breaks this circle and succumbs to the unforeseen, unintended influence of the real. Making up for a narrative power that presumes to constitute what it describes, then, the force of utterances—especially those intended to exert force via persuasion—exceed, or fail, actuality, only to be marked by it, producing “an excess on the basis of which the real leaves its trace on meaning” (52).

In what follows, I consider how the combative, rhetorical performance of Scott's characters gives way to singularity, and especially through a dependence on public categories and social conventions. Darsie and Alan's rhetoric is unique because it highlights the performative, artficed nature of “professional” discourse and “romance” alike: though intimate friends, they continuously craft each other's perspectives through the social types and narratives of their world. If critical conversation has focused on how Scott's persuasive writing affectively moves readers, the perceptions vocalized by his characters confound the binary between the internal—one's personality, difference, and emotions—and the external, one's imbrication in the types that make up a public. This elision of the internal and external in how Scott's figures characterize each other provides a space of partial perspectives whose combat in this public involves—not self-correction—but the sustainment of multiple, singular appearances.

This mutual perception of singularity depends, counterintuitively, on the partiality exhibited by Scott's characters because the excessive rhetoric that delivers this partiality invites critique—it creates the opponent who can, and will, challenge it. Who, after all, is more credible by Darsie's account—the devoted law student (Alan), or the hedonistic wanderer (himself)? Even if Darsie presents these roles in a hierarchy that reverses their more common connotations, his exaggerated descriptions—his own pursuit of “every object of curiosity”; the “brilliant”

season Alan ignores; Alan's retreat to a solitary study both "narrow" and "musty"— paints a black-and-white picture of their opposed situations that calls attention to its own bias. Darsie's rhetoric spills over into a visualization, rather than a narrative, and so manifests too strongly the perspective he judges. As a result, Darsie's rhetorical performance breaks open its self-referentiality and, in the act of creating a present opponent, succeeds by failing: his vivid characterization of Alan exceeds its intended purpose by creating a combative, singular appearance—rather than an absent difference.

Felman describes the "misfiring" of linguistic intention as an opening up, the enactment of an "impossible reality" invoked "not because something is missing, but because something else is done" (55). In this case, Darsie's manifestation of Alan is more than what may be critiqued as a linguistic sleight of hand—a referentiality achieved solely by virtue of an abstract structure. More than including its own counter-critique, Darsie's explicitly visual representation of Alan's presence as a singular appearance stimulates the back-and-forth of argument. If, on the one hand, Alan's imagined words confirm Darsie's presentation of him as jealous and stodgy, these same words, accidentally painting Alan's dedicated pursuit of law, reveal Alan's potential for perspicacity—and, conversely, refract Darsie back to us as posing a useful perspective.

The characterization that Darsie begins, then, extends into an argumentation that, by figuring his friend's perspective, invites Alan's literal voice as well. The rhetoric of Scott's characters may backfire, but it does so not by recoiling on itself as a self-referential performance, but by inciting an actual response. *Invoked* and *provoked*, Alan emerges to continue this combative and dialogic formation of character: "NEGATURE, my dear Darsie—you have logic and law enough to understand the word of denial. I deny your conclusion. The premises, I admit..." (19). Beginning his letter with a retaliation that signals the rhetoric of argument, Alan

proceeds to imitate Darsie's method by co-opting his friend's assumed perceptions in order to critique them:

...I prithee—beware! See not a Dulcinea in every slipshod girl, who, with blue eyes, fair hair, a tattered plaid, and a willow-wand in her gripe, drives out the village cows to the loaning. Do not think you will meet a gallant Valentine in every English rider, or an Orson in every Highland drover. View things as they are, and not as they may be magnified through thy teeming fancy. I have seen thee look at an old gravel pit, till thou madest out capes, and bays, and inlets, crags, and precipices, and the whole stupendous scenery of the isle of Feroe, in what was to all ordinary eyes a mere horsepond. Besides, did I not once find thee gazing with respect at a lizard, in the attitude of one who looks upon a crocodile? (23)

Full of colorful images and dramatic narrative, the letter perceives the world it claims to critique. Mediating Darsie's vision, Alan paints a landscape of vivid types—and, by performing a double vision meant to contrast “true” with “false” appearance, even proliferates them. He teases Darsie by peopling his alleged worldview with literary characters, but then fleshes out their associations, mapping them onto “real” or “mundane” figures whose typicality actually highlights the particularity of such characters. If Darsie's rhetoric undoes itself through hyperbole, then, Alan's does so through the excessive application of type: the various, “romantic” categories that Alan sees from Darsie's alleged point-of-view overlap and resound within each other, multiplying the possible combinations of associations they accrue and, consequently, eliding the distinction between particularity and type altogether.

More than simply exerting himself to imagine his friend's imagination, Alan reveals that he deduces this “in”sight from observing Darsie's appearance—the way the latter “looks” at a

humdrum scene (an “old gravel pit” or “mere horsepond”), and the “attitude” in which he “looks upon” a lizard. Though he entreats Darsie to “view things as they are,” then, Alan betrays the slippage between “ordinary eyes” and “imagination” by capturing an opposing viewpoint from the outside. The dramatic visualization that ensues types Darsie as a hopeless romantic caught up in the “wildfire chase...of adventure”—just as Darsie’s performance of Alan had typed him as a narrow-minded pedantic (27). Alan, however, explores the extent of this mutual and combative formation by fully reconstructing—but not inhabiting—the viewpoint he intends to admonish. This critical depiction of Darsie’s viewpoint hints at its usefulness by challenging the distinction between particularity and type; while this accidentally generous performance perhaps “misses” Darsie, then (who is indeed a hopeless romantic), his intended critique misses its mark by delineating the full of potential of such a viewpoint. Like the vivid appearances that Alan imagines dominate Darsie’s point of view, Darsie emerges as a singular appearance himself—a type brimming with the promise of particularity.

Alan conducts this equitable critique by constructing a combative relation between himself and Darsie that continues the formation of character so fondly recounted by the latter in his first letter. Playfully describing how Alan trained him in the schoolyard community of sports and shenanigans, Darsie dramatically exclaims that, “In a word, before I knew thee, I knew nothing” (14). While describing the “intellectual enjoyment” to which Alan later exhorts him, Darsie represents this cultivation in visual types rather than in terms of knowledge disciplines: “You made me an historian, a metaphysician...Nay, by Heaven! You had almost made an advocate of me, as well as of yourself” (14-15). In doing so, Darsie implicitly delineates the mutual characterization that defines their friendship. As prefigured by their boyish combats, Darsie and Alan recreate the other’s distinctness by casting each other in opposing roles that then

fail their intended construction. Alan, as Darsie admits above, fails to make a lawyer of him, and Alan wishes in his own letter that he had more successfully “thumped these Quixotical expectations out of thee” (24). And yet, just as the friends, now grown-up correspondents, attempt to “type” each other while, in fact, manifesting each other’s singular appearances, Alan and Darsie respond to each other’s failed characterizations by becoming more distinct—not, however, as simple negations of each other’s perceptions, but as their excess. Each becomes the implausible or extreme type they critique each other for imagining to be their destinies: Darsie *is*, it turns out, the romantic offspring of a “mysterious” and prominent lineage, and Alan spends the majority of the novel unraveling Darsie’s idiosyncratic legal situation.

Alan and Darsie’s particular performances of these roles, then, stand out starkly against the frames through which they project each other. While given the plot structure to “be the hero of some romantic history” (24), Darsie spends the majority of the novel being carted about against his will—carried like a sack on horseback; imprisoned as a mentally infirm invalid; and forced to disguise himself as a woman (not great within the male rhetoric of heroism). As a heroic figure tempered by quasi-comical situations, Darsie instantiates the romantic type Alan claims is impossible while inhabiting a sequence of events whose absurdity—or seriousness—conveys the critique of such a type as implausible. Darsie doesn’t become a distinct type of hero merely by confirming Alan’s perception, however; the “ridicule” that Alan predicts and that Darsie incurs derives less from his romantic bent and more from the idiosyncrasy of events that fail to fit any prescribed mold—of either realism or romance. As a result, Alan’s representation of his friend’s over-imaginative perception meets resistance in the disclosure of Darsie as a character whose predictable inability to become a certain, implausible type doesn’t return him to

the realm of “ordinary eyes,” but develops him as something uncategorizable, a person whose singularity supports the same, vivid recognizability of a type.

Alan, too, both confirms and outstrips the Darsie’s perception of him by failing to practice law in the conventional or “typical” sense. Called away in the middle of a case by a letter disclosing his friend’s dangerous situation, Alan proceeds to track Darsie’s abductors through a sequence of scenarios more appropriate to the hero than the advocate: he consorts with potential revolutionaries, takes a voyage with bootleggers, and is the first character we see interact with the disguised prince-in-exile, Charles Stewart.<sup>70</sup> Not that Alan sacrifices the capacity for law so thoroughly definitive of his character; instead, he carries legal precedents into taverns, drawing rooms, and ships in order to liberate Darsie from his captors, and so becomes more essentially a lawyer than one confined to the context of a courtroom.

The perceptual exchange begun by Alan and Darsie has a rippling effect. In remaking each other as singular appearances, they also reshape each other’s stance or point-of-view: exceeding and so changing social categories, they seem charged with new ways of seeing. This dynamism occurs, appropriately, in how they continue to characterize others. Finally arriving on the English bank of the Solway with a letter of access to Redgauntlet, Alan first finds himself closeted with an unknown “priest,” called Fr. Buonaventure, who claims a position of influence. Commanding Alan to remain in captivity for a brief period of time before seeking out Redgauntlet and Darsie, the priest informs the impatient friend that he “is young and inexperienced—bred to a profession also which sharpens suspicion, and gives false views of human nature” (303). And yet, Alan unintentionally determines the priest’s character through his dependence on this supposedly deluding profession—not through an orthodox dependence on its

regulatory strictures, however, but by submitting these to the evidence of appearance and its potential reconstruction as proof:

A qualm, indeed, came across him, when he considered, as a lawyer, that this Father was probably, in the eye of law, a traitor; and that there was an ugly crime on the Statue Book, called Misprision of Treason. On the other hand, whatever he might think or suspect, he could not take upon him to say that the man was a priest, whom he had never seen in the dress of his order, or in the act of celebrating mass; so that he felt himself at liberty to doubt that, respecting which he possessed no legal proof. (303)

The “eye of law” that encourages Alan not to assume the priest’s projected character aligns with and privileges Fr. Buonaventure’s visual and aural manifestation: Alan’s affirmation of the situation’s lack of evidence translates into a clear perception of Fr. Buonaventure’s particular “manner and words,” a regal and defeated bearing that Alan cannot reconcile with “those preconceived opinions which imputed subtlety and fraud to his sect and order” (303). Alan thus adopts a legal method that nuances the perception of type or category by simultaneously attending to its features and suspending its application; he will not assume that the nominal priest is such without the definitive acts and vestments, and so falls back from the lack of certain appearances into a dependence on the distinct moment. Alan’s judicious reconstruction of the priest’s character, grounded in the opinion that he has no “legal proof,” proves true: as marked by the priest’s physical actions and appearance, Fr. Buonaventure turns out to be, not a priest, but “the Pretender” himself, the royal Charles Stewart returned to lead a new revolt.

Alan’s failure to class Fr. Buonaventure delineates the potential newness at play in the latter’s appearance. Experienced during their encounter as a superior personage accustomed to authority, the disguised Prince Charles fills out the strong impression of these contours by both

exceeding and failing type. As a royal, his particularity extends to the degree that, disinherited of his crown, he is no longer such *except* outside an individual striving and performance. As an appearance that also breaks out of categories, Alan's singular point-of-view captures the character of the Pretender by failing to. Sharpening his "eye" with the strategies of legal convention, Alan blinkers himself to the tired light of socialized assumptions by taking them into account, re-framing the "priest" within the present and, consequently, perceiving his singularity. Not only does he grasp the princely character of Charles, but, in failing to apply the unnuanced, political category of "traitor" attached to the latter by British governance, he turns his improvisatory legalese to account by apprehending the disguised royal without judging him.

The points of view that that Alan and Darsie help each other take up, then, open upon an expanding world: not by discovering new matter, but by bringing new combinations of categories—which, in turn, delineate new perspectives—to light. As suggested by the novel's focalization on a fictive revolution, this world is a political one; however, as suggested by the abortive failure of this revolution, it is "political" on account of the public space it envisions, not because it supports one partisan viewpoint. Tracing Scott's unique "representations of...civic virtue" to the political philosophy of Adam Ferguson, Berndt argues that the latter's emphasis on the necessity of conflict to the "formation of individual character and...civil society" surfaces in *Redgauntlet's* distinct model of the "ideal polity," one in which citizens serve the interests of their specific communities (122). Ferguson's ideal citizens also generate equality, however, by "taking into account, [but] concomitantly reach[ing] beyond, the demands and conditions of its age" (122). This circumspect channeling of particular energies towards a common goal capitalizes on our natural disposition towards action and community by requiring contentious

debate and conflict—“an essential and constructive means of civil participation because it necessarily precedes the formation of (public) opinion” (120).

Berndt does not directly identify Ferguson’s idealization of conflict with Darsie and Alan’s friendship, but discusses the latter as conflict’s complement, a mutual affection untroubled by differences in opinion or national background (127). As a result, the agonism structuring a fruitfully turbulent state seems to occur in the abstract, gradually arising from the tolerant sensibilities of friends able to look past their differences towards the promise of a more diverse future. While building on the idea that Scott and his intellectual predecessors were exploring the role of debate and rhetoric in forming new civic categories, I argue that, rather than suspending their differences in letters designed to “please and enthrall each other” (Berndt 125), Alan and Darsie highlight and sustain these differences. Their combative rhetoric is not cute, nor merely tongue-in-cheek. Darsie elucidates this species of intimacy when, at the beginning of his second letter, he responds with some umbrage to Alan’s claim that he lacks a constancy of courage:

I have received thine absurd and most conceited epistle. It is well for thee that, Lovelace and Belford like, we came under a convention to pardon every species of liberty which we may take with each other; since, upon my word, there are some reflections in your last, which would otherwise have obliged me to return forthwith to Edinburgh, merely to show you I was not what you took me for. (26)

Darsie’s pugilistic threat is not mere humor, and his criticism of Alan’s critical epistle not mere bombast, which he hastens to affirm: “Seriously, Alan, this imputed poverty of spirit is a shabby charge to bring against your friend. I have examined myself as closely as I can, being, in very truth, a little hurt at your having such hard thoughts of me...” (27) Even as he repudiates Alan,

however, Darsie admits that this radical freedom of speech is the condition of their intimacy, the “convention” that rules their particular mode of friendship. This dependence of liberty upon regulations anticipates Alan’s reliance on legal convention to set him free from associations unproved in his encounter with the prince, but highlights the paradox at play. As different as Lovelace and Belford,<sup>71</sup> the two friends attend to these distinctions by grappling with them, mutually encouraging a critical perception. Rather than entering a relation of sympathy that acknowledges and assuages difference, Alan and Darsie establish a contract within which they accentuate distinction to the point of new particularity. By turning each other inside out, making the other’s viewpoint “more” singular by dramatically reproducing it, difference is deepened, delimited to an actual, present appearance rather than disseminated into an amalgamous future.

#### From Character to Judgment

By engaging in a mutual characterization that advances via partial, subjective viewpoints, Alan and Darsie begin to form what Arendt calls “the common world”: a shared, meaningful reality supported by a public space, or the freedom to speak and act before others (Zerilli 31). Their combative deepening of difference consequently addresses the problem that, according to Linda Zerilli’s original rereading of Arendt’s political thought, continues to erode conditions for democratic deliberation. Because, for Arendt, meaningful reality comprises what we see and, critically, how that perception is corroborated by those around us, she considers the search for a neutral (“objective”) standard of judgment to be grounded in the faulty assumption that perspectives are necessarily empty—lacking in “objects” to perceive—as well as incorrigible, impervious to other perspectives. As a result, Zerilli claims:

... [I]t is not adjudication but pluralization and the expansion of the common world that should concern us. This expansion of the common world can be

achieved only through the expansion of the public space, for it is in that space that genuine differences of perspective can be expressed and judged—that is, corrected by other perspectives...without them, the individual perspective from which I now see the world (I.e. Partially) could never be revealed to me as *my* perspective at all; it will more likely be taken as the whole of what is real.” 38

The problem faced by democratic society, then, is not having too many perspectives, but in not having enough (38). The world we share grows, diversifies, and comes into view as a result of having more perspectives to shift between, more points-of-view from which to catch the nuances of its topography (32). Consequently, Zerilli argues, the “ability...to imagine how the world looks” from the viewpoints of others—what Arendt calls “representative thinking”—as well as the ability to hold down one’s own point-of-view precedes any other kind of “quest” or mode of “human flourishing” (1, 33).

How Scott’s characters perceive, and perceive each other’s viewpoints, I argue, gives us new ways of thinking about Arendt and Zerilli’s theorization of democratic judgment: by engaging in combative rhetoric, they highlight the role we play in helping each other’s perspectives come to light—not as a function of sympathy, moreover, but as a practice of individual, partial perception that, though it critiques, ultimately *depicts* rather than *evaluates*. In drawing each other’s perspectives from the outside—from their own external stances, and through social categories—Alan and Darsie reproduce each other’s individualities as characters, personalities-made-public, for testimony. This unexpected relation between individual partiality and equitable evaluation may explore what Zerilli interprets as Arendt’s “political kind of seeing,” which “concerns not what we would call the ethical practice of recognition (of the other) but the shared political practice of getting the world in view” (33).

While Arendt shifts focus from “the other” to “the world,” the Romantic characters in this project see the world through and in each other: construing each other’s particularity with public terms, they manifest new, singular dimensions from which to view that public. Lilius, Darsie’s sister, practices this “political seeing” in her description of Redgauntlet, their uncle as well as an active Jacobite. Though holding Darsie against his will and keeping him the dark regarding their relationship and his own purpose, Redgauntlet does have some legal claim to his nephew’s guardianship; moreover, if he has technically kidnapped Darsie, he has also (in their very first encounter) saved his life. Neither trustworthy nor utterly villainous, the moral quality of Redgauntlet’s character is shrouded, as Lilius’s characterization begins to unfold:

...[I]t is the leading feature in my uncle’s character that he has applied every energy of his powerful mind to the service of the exiled family of Stewart. The death of his brother, the dilapidation of his own fortunes, have only added to his hereditary zeal for the House of Stewart, a deep and almost personal hatred against the present reigning family. He is, in short, a political enthusiast of the most dangerous character, and proceeds in his agency with as much confidence, as if he felt himself the very Atlas, who is alone capable of supporting a sinking cause.

(323)

Lilius details the combination of heritage, personal affect, and individual talent that generates the “dangerous character,” the problematic “agency” of Redgauntlet. Despite its final assertion, her description is characterized by a consistent and culminating ambivalence: it is not clear, ultimately, how Lilius is defining “dangerous,” because the inflammatory combination of the “personal” and the “political” she invokes is undermined by the “almost” qualifying Redgauntlet’s “hatred.” When we alternatively attribute Redgauntlet’s threatening force to his

“confidence,” the conditional “as if” weakens the comparison between this force and that of Atlas. Though this ambivalence is typical of analogy, the preceding “as much” already roots “confidence” in an unreal comparison, consequently preempting its referential significance with the inverse of a dangling modifier. The cadence of Lilius’ speech further conveys this impression of partial representation. The second sentence starts and stops unexpectedly: the use of a comma instead of a conjunction between Redgauntlet’s misfortunes anticipates a third item that never comes, and the pause after “Stewart” implies that a new thought—rather than an object of “added”—will follow. Finally, Lilius acknowledges this fragmenting rhythm by referencing the pointillist nature of her characterization, claiming to pull out Redgauntlet’s “leading feature” in the sketch or shorthand that then follows as an index to his character.

The disjointed quality of Lilius’s description—the lurking uncertainty of its assertions, the contrasting mix of hyperbole with weakening modifiers, its seeming abruptness—produces a potent image by conveying Redgauntlet’s “dangerous” radicalism through the formal accumulation of opposites and superlatives. Even as Lilius appears to condemn her uncle’s political enthusiasm, however, the very image she uses to portray its dangerous force—the broad shoulders of the heavens-upholding Titan—is broken up, punctured, by the pointed articulations of extremes that suggest a giving way to, rather than a strength of, will: “*every* energy,” “*deep*...hatred,” “political *enthusiast*,” “*alone* capable.” Combined with the pathetic description of a “sinking” cause and the tragic figure of Atlas’s never-ending task, the strange way in which Lilius defines a “feature” as a governing intent (as opposed to a physical or psychological attribute) produces the impression that Redgauntlet is both a powerful agent and a victim of fate.

Lilius’s rhetoric characterizes Redgauntlet in a way that reproduces the force of his actions while also mitigating their effects. Though eloquently depicting his dangerous zeal, her

recounting of the tragic events behind his hatred—his brother’s death, the loss of his position and power—contribute to the pathetic image of a man whose power is not necessarily bad, but, rather, wasted. Redgauntlet’s dedication to a sinking cause may be deluded (and unlawful), but its passion is also unselfish. The redundancy of description in the opening sentence, where Redgauntlet’s already “leading feature” is to sacrifice not some, but “*every* energy,” suggests a stricture made all the more poignant by its attachment to an “exiled House”: a lost entity, whose translation from an already sunk to a merely “sinking” cause by the end of the image seems attributable to Redgauntlet’s efforts, solely.

In her attempt to make sense of Redgauntlet’s actions for her wronged and confused brother, Lilius crafts the equitable narrative that, Kathy Eden suggests, comprises the intersection of forensic oratory and fiction. Reinterpreting Aristotle’s claim that both tragic drama and the legal case should imitate human action, Eden argues that the two genres are joined by their aiming at “equity,” that “gentle, corrective measure against the rigors of the law” (42). Because human action is subject to the vicissitudes of circumstance, it is the legal rhetor’s job to mediate between the particular case of the accused and the universalizing mandates of civic rules: first, equity takes into account someone’s “general” character, and then, on the basis of this analysis, attempts to reconstruct their plausible intent in light of the circumstances to which they were subject. The poet, analogously, gives meaning to action by locating it at the crux of character—a person’s general conduct and choices—and situation. Both the poet and the lawyer, then, attempt to make up for the failure of character by illustrating how the randomness of particular events foils probable intent.<sup>72</sup>

Aristotle privileges equitable narrative, then, because it approaches “the privileged position between generality and particularity,” redeeming the probable intent of the agent by

reconstructing her “character” (32). Liliias constructs such an equitable case for her uncle by suggesting that though Redgauntlet is guilty of being a “political enthusiast,” he is excused by the tragic circumstances of his political context: as figured by his comparison to Atlas, his fallen cause, the House of Stewart, is his world—but not by choice. The powerful force of single-mindedness and energy that defines his general character—the zeal that is first in-born and then imposed upon him—is not so much to blame for his dangerous effects as its unfortunate channeling by the arbitrary nature of political history. And, indeed, Redgauntlet’s allegiance is not his own, but the result of an ancestral curse that forever binds the family to a failing cause. Destined to uphold a cosmos doomed to failure, Redgauntlet’s intentions, good or bad, are rendered meaningless by context.

Liliias, then, “misses” Redgauntlet by producing him as an appearance that cannot be submitted to normative categories of evaluative judgment. If Darsie and Alan fail in their critiques by virtue of their antagonistic rhetoric, Liliias transfers this failure of judgment: she conjures her uncle’s appearance not by invoking it as an opposing viewpoint to her own, but by depicting the opposition of particular to type held within “character” itself. Delineated, by Liliias’s rhetorical movement between extremes and her invocation of Titan power, as larger-than-life, Redgauntlet appears as a constellation—a static revolution of features that transposes worldly (political) type into something particular, otherworldly. Redgauntlet’s singular appearance derives, on the one hand, from his identification with the Stewart cause, and, on the other, from the way in which the potency of his actions overwhelms this identification: their figured force—the doomed efforts of an Atlas—become Titanic moments irreducible to narrative.

If Lilius's narrative performs the mediation between particular and type that Aristotle lauds as the goal of *mimesis*, her rhetorical excess calls attention to the knot that complicates this theory of narrative: by turning towards character, as Eden argues, Aristotle's poets and rhetors hope to rescue one kind of particularity—the particularity of the human individual—from another kind of particularity, the confluence of random circumstances at play in an event. Lilius, however, like Alan and Darsie, considers the individual, or internal, as imbricated in the public, or external; far from taking a deterministic stance, this form of “equity” considers particular action as dynamic, dialogic. The fact of Redgauntlet's dangerous political enthusiasm cannot, as figured by the fate he shares with his family, be reduced to interior personality or external circumstances. The character Lilius constructs, then, derives not from a general recounting of tendencies, but from the dilation of one typical, leading feature and an exploration of the particular, extreme perspectives it incorporates.

As discussed in the first chapter of this project, Arendt considers a person's action to constitute their “who-ness,” the doing and speaking whose “curious intangibility” resists descriptive categories (Arendt 181). This failure of narration resonates with Eden's theorization of an Aristotelian drama that, like an equitable jury, seeks to reconstruct a fiction of the probable in the face of an agent's, the hero's, irrecoverable particularity. I argue, however, that Scott's characters make perceiving others possible because their failure to accurately describe or enumerate each other's qualities leads them to miss this “reality” in favor of reproducing the other's point of view. Lilius's excessive rhetoric captures the corresponding excess of Redgauntlet, the force of intent whose partiality includes its own opposition. Gesturing towards this elision of agency, power, and excess, Arendt claims that action generates a power whose effects within the “web of human affairs” cannot be predicted or controlled, and so flashes forth

in a moment of “glory” (180). Liliias depicts this blinding singularity of Redgauntlet by delineating the unique constellation of extreme characteristics that cannot, ultimately, be contained. This excess, in turn, opens up a new avenue of perspective and expands the common world of the novel’s characters. If Redgauntlet’s relentless devotion to the Stewarts is constantly foiled within the novel, his forceful action still indirectly draws the entire cast of characters to the same geographical location at the end—a moment, we will see, in which the power produced by the accumulation of various, singular motivations generates a new civil space.

#### Conclusion: From Judgment to Perception

Unlike Alan, Darsie, and Liliias, Redgauntlet is consumed utterly with one perspective. This self-absorption so blinds him to others that he even fails to recognize the features of his driving goal, the Pretender. In contrast, Darsie, during his separation from Alan, envisions a “consanguinity” consisting in combative difference rather than sympathetic likeness, and wishes that he could share Alan’s father, “though he should scold me for my idleness,” and call Alan “brother, though a brother whose merits would throw my own so completely into the shade” (16). Alan and Darsie, then, follow up on their critical characterizations of each other by sharpening the multiplicity of their public space: wielding the categories of public discourse to visualize, rather than recount, each other, they perceive singular appearance by missing it. Without this excess of rhetoric, we substitute general qualities for the irreducibility of the other’s perspective and, by extension, erase the world we dialogically bring into view. “Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position,” writes Arendt, because “[o]nly where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects...so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality truly and reliably appear” (57).

It is apt, then, that Darsie desires Alan not as “family”—which, for Arendt, often instantiates the same conformity as “mass society”—but as his lawyer.<sup>73</sup> Their initial difference—Darsie’s distaste for study in contrast with Alan’s inclination towards it—promises to ground their ensuing, productive relationship:

Then will I step forth, Alan, and in a character which even your father will allow may be more useful to you than had I shared this splendid termination of your legal studies. In a word, if I cannot be a counsel, I am determined to be a client, a sort of person without whom a lawsuit would be as dull as a supposed case. (15)

Darsie dreams of gaining community by entering into a relation that, while it incurs Alan’s defense of him, also signals and sustains their distinctness as characters in opposing roles. Darsie gestures towards this imbrication of defense and opposition, preservation and antagonism, when he explicitly requests Alan to reconstruct a history—his bringing up and mysterious origins—that they both, he admits, already know:

Turn, then, thy sharp, wire-drawing, lawyer-like ingenuity to the same task—make up my history as though thou wert shaping the blundering allegations of some blue-bonneted, hard-headed client, into a condescendence of facts and circumstances... (17)

Defined by the OED as a “specification of particulars,” a “condescendence” is also (in Scottish law) the legal statement that includes both the accuser’s “grounds of action” and the “answers of the defender.” Entreating Alan to craft—to shape, or “make up”—his history, Darsie invokes the language of fictional narrative to describe the legal articulation of an argument’s opposing sides, suggesting that “lawyer-like ingenuity” is capable of a circumspection that comprises artifice as well as perspicacity. Recalling the pun-making plications of Alan’s brow, his “wire-drawing”

implies a perception made acute, paradoxically, by its talent for reshaping: defined as the ability “to protract excessively” or “to force or stretch...by subtle argument,” Alan’s attention to “particulars” is bound up with his ability to dilate upon them.

Alan’s critical eyeing of Darsie’s “little history” involves, then, a magnification, a stretching and reshaping. This defiance of normative measurement, of scale, finds fruition in Darsie’s next letter. “Why, what a pair of prigs has thou made us!” Darsie exclaims, again in response to his friend’s previous character sketchings of them both:

...Thou a portrait-painter!—I tell thee, Alan, I have seen a better seated on the fourth round of a ladder, and painting a bare-breeched Highlander, holding a pint-stoup as big as himself, and a booted Lowlander, in a bobwig, supporting a glass of like dimensions; the whole being designed to represent the sign of the Salutation.

(26)

“Prig” in Darsie’s context most likely refers to an “excessively precise or particular person,” a “dandy” or “fop” who is “offensively punctilious” in “speech or behavior” (OED). To be “excessively precise” seems like an impossible challenge, and yet, it captures the rhetorical performance that the friends use to characterize each other. If Darsie is complaining about Alan’s gross reduction of their persons to stereotypical renderings on a tavern sign, his own construal of such figures as prigs suggests that the Highlander and Lowlander, a pairing already shot through with antagonism, are consequently engaged in excessive attention to the other. Though magnified into oppositional types, the two images salute each other with glasses as large themselves, suggesting to the viewer a microscopic perspective that is attuned to detail rather than productive of gloss.

While the salutation reproduces Darsie and Alan's sharp perception and acknowledgment of each other, the national and political significance of the Highlander and the Lowlander suggest the significant implications that such combative friendship has for the larger world. Just as Lilius and Darsie, in their recognition of Redgauntlet's distinct manifestation of the private and the public, the internal and the external, re-craft his failure of perception as yet another viewpoint opening upon others, the gross social types that Darsie paints onto Alan's alleged sign point toward the public that emerges through the forceful partiality of perspective. This final image of the "portraiture" at play in the novel sums up the unique characterization that generates the novel's dynamic assembly: excessive and myopic, critical and precise, these Romantic perceivers draw up fact in a way that goes beyond equitable narrative, the tidy subsumption of particulars to categories or probabilities. Alan, Darsie, and Lilius thus model the multiplication of viewpoints that expands a common world by starting with appearance, visualizing each other from the outside with a combative rhetoric that, rather than evaluating, brings both sides—accuser and accused—vividly into view.

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<sup>45</sup> Wendy Olmsted interprets this as the "distinction between 'artistic' and 'non-artistic' proof," respectively (13): the latter refers to "such things as are not supplied by the speaker but are there at the outset—witnesses, evidence given under torture, written contracts, and so on," while the former comprises the "modes of persuasion...we can ourselves construct by means of the principles of rhetoric" (Roberts 2).

<sup>46</sup> Aristotle claims that the use of rhetoric is its revelation of the persuasive elements on both sides of an argument, "not in order that we may in practice employ it in both ways (for we must not make people believe what is wrong), but in order that we may see clearly what the facts are" (Roberts 3).

<sup>47</sup> Rhetoric, Aristotle points out, is a skill necessitated by mundane life, as everyone must, at some point, both "defend themselves and attack others" in order to "discuss statements and maintain them" (Roberts 1).

<sup>48</sup> For Aristotle's claim that one's "character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses," see *Rhetoric*, Book 1, Part 1 (Roberts 4).

<sup>49</sup> Benchimol's research efficiently condenses and illuminates the literary and historiographic work of notable scholars like Ian Duncan, Murray Pittock, Nicholas Phillipson, Fiona Stafford, Richard Sher, and Alexander Broadie.

<sup>50</sup> Building on Ian Duncan's in *Scott's Shadow* (2007), Benchimol expands upon the idea that, in the wake of the 1707 Union and the loss of an independent Scottish parliament, Scottish cultural institutions began to form what Jürgen Habermas has since theorized as a "public sphere," or a space of cultural production differentiated from that of the state (84). Influenced heavily by the association of virtue, polite conversation, and civic duty promoted by Addison and Steele's *Spectator*, the Scottish public sphere developed new venues for "cultural politics" in the establishment of various literary clubs and intellectual societies (*Edinburgh Companion*, 88). The Select Society was exemplary of this impetus: founded in 1754 by the artist Allan Ramsay and consisting of such prominent intellectuals as David Hume, Adam Ferguson, Hugh Blair, Lord Kames, and Adam Smith, the latter defined their mission as the "pursuit of philosophical inquiry and the improvement of the members in the art of public speaking" (91). Alongside other Scottish centers of cultural production and debate—the universities of Aberdeen, Glasgow, and Edinburgh, as well as the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland—these bastions of Scottish Enlightenment ideals shaped the intellectual landscape of a distinctly Scottish Romanticism (84, 99).

<sup>51</sup> In her introduction to *Scottish Philosophy of Rhetoric*, Rosaleen Keefe argues that the " 'new rhetoric' " emerging in the course of the Scottish Enlightenment—a term she borrows from Wilbur Samuel Howell—was distinguished by its movement away from a sole concern with the means of persuasion (9-10). Though classically grounded in the thought of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, eighteenth-century Scottish theorists and philosophers not only pursued rhetoric as a means of "analysing the faculties of the mind in the processes of knowing," but as a means to understanding how, based on these observations, "taste," "civic and...personal virtue, and the creation of bonds of sympathy and mutual understanding" could be formed as a basis for a healthy society (11, 13). Finally, though this project is thinking about the relation between rhetoric and *Romantic* character, specifically, I subscribe to the scholarly opinion, advanced by Murray Pittock, Ian Duncan, Alex Benchimol, Philip Flynn, and others, that Scottish Enlightenment culture and thought formed a "dialogue" with rather than "opposition" to Scottish Romanticism (Benchimol 84).

<sup>52</sup> Claiming that the periodical press of the long eighteenth century created a "new kind of national public sphere in Scotland—one splintered by competing claims and interests," Ian Duncan concludes that "[i]deological contest took the form of an antagonism between literary genres and discourses that would frame the British debate about modernity well into the twentieth century" (*Scott's Shadow*, 27).

<sup>53</sup> See Benchimol, 93-95, for a discussion of how the *Edinburgh Review* reflected "the wider national public sphere in Scotland, where critical debates about literature, politics, the natural sciences, history, economics, and philosophy were often promiscuously mixed in the service of a discussion about how knowledge can serve social ends for a larger national good" (98-99). See also the "Preface" in the first issue of the *Edinburgh Review* (July 1955). In outlining its goals, the *Review* makes clear its intention to propagate a unified language. Describing the "difficulty of a proper expression in a country where there is either no standard of language, or at least one very remote," the "Preface" concludes that, as shown by "late instances," "a serious

endeavor...may acquire, to one born on the north side of the Tweed, a correct and even an elegant stile" (iii).

<sup>54</sup> For a discussion of the impact that debating society had on *The Edinburgh Review*, see Benchimol, 95-96.

<sup>55</sup> For a thorough discussion of the ways in which *Blackwood's* sought to disrupt the genealogy of ideas endorsed by the *Review*—the eighteenth century's "skepticism, arid rationalism, reckless anglicization, and Hume"—see Flynn, 43-56.

<sup>56</sup> See Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, 28. For an in-depth look at how the *Review* sought to ridicule more "popular" forms of knowledge and culture, see Butler 137-38.

<sup>57</sup> Esterhammer points out that *Blackwood's* turned real persons into targets of critique by producing them as the same kind of characters that make up their pseudonymous authorship: Christopher North, for example, or the Ettrick Shepherd, who, if they were typically associated with specific authors (John Wilson and James Hogg, respectively), were written by various members of the *Blackwood's* staff (*Print* 40-41, 39).

<sup>58</sup> Matt Salyer, for example, argues that *Blackwood's* opposed a collective "self"—the communal voice enabled by the periodical's pseudonymous, and so flexible, authorship—to the "individual genius" espoused by the lyric personae of popular Romantic poets like Lord Byron (93-96). Modeling an authorship in which individual voices were held together by "the dialogic, corporate, and inherited nature of cultural tradition," *Blackwood's* turned to Scott as a writer who exemplified this distinctly Scottish, or "Tory," Romanticism (93). Not only does Scott subject the individual psychologies of his characters in the *Waverly* novels to the shared imagination of a common past, but his own lack of perceived, individual style—"his transparency as a literary 'personality'"—channeled, for *Blackwood's* contributors like John Gibson Lockhart, a healthy eschewal of Byronic self-absorption for possession by the world, history, and tradition (102).

<sup>59</sup> Adam Smith succinctly summarizes his definition of sympathy as a taking up of someone's situation and point of view in Chapter 1 ("Of Sympathy"), Part 1, of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759): "As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation...Neither can that faculty [the imagination] help us to this any other way, than by representing to us what would be our own, if we were in his case...By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations..." 9

<sup>60</sup> Frey argues that Scott's characters supplement structures of governance by practicing sympathy and eloquence to incorporate particular identities into national categories (see Frey, chapter 3). Catherine Packham suggests that rhetorical politeness held special significance for post-Union Scotland, where the deprivation of political participation and increasing commerciality raised questions about how "virtue might be possible" (503). Maeve Adams claims that "Scott's formal bilingualism" teaches readers to sympathetically engage with and reproduce national union (952), while Juliet Shields argues that "Scottish national tales" idealized the posited, racial purity of the Highlanders as a condition of their ability to embody "all the social virtues most cherished by so-called civilized Britons" (922).

<sup>61</sup> All text quoted from the novel is taken from the Magnum Opus edition (1832), in which *Redgauntlet*, having undergone revisions in February 1831, was published as volumes 35 and 36. References to the narrative breaks within *Redgauntlet* itself thus refer those made in the original, 1829 edition, published in three volumes.

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<sup>62</sup> The Edinburgh High school that Darsie references later in the letter was a real institution attended by Scott himself (as well as other intellectual luminaries) in 1779, and, “[a]ccording to Hugo Arnot, its reputation for Latin scholarship was excellent’ (*The History of Edinburgh, 1779*, p. 421)” (Editor’s note 14, RG 422).

<sup>63</sup> See Editor’s note 13, RG 422.

<sup>64</sup> The OED defines “plication” as “[t]he action or an act of folding; the state or condition of being folded or having plicae.” A “plica,” in turn, is “[a] fold or ridge in an organ or structure.”

<sup>65</sup> Dugald Stewart (1753-1828) was one of Edinburgh’s foremost intellectual luminaries. He was tutored by Adam Ferguson and attended the lectures of formative thinkers like Hugh Blair and Thomas Reid. After a brief period as a mathematics professor, he succeeded Ferguson as chair of moral philosophy at Edinburgh University and, over the course of 35 years, established his reputation as an innovative and eloquent teacher. Sir Walter Scott was one of his students, and wrote a paper for him entitled “On the Manners and Customs of the Northern Nations.” (“Dugald Stewart,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Michael P. Brown, 24 May 2008)

<sup>66</sup> As Emanuele Levi Mortera repeatedly demonstrates in his Introduction, Stewart built and improvised heavily upon Reid’s thought.

<sup>67</sup> As the external effects of interior motion—such as the “quick eye” we associate with “a lively fancy or busy mind”—signs of character are “natural” in that they play a certain meaning upon the “human frame”(194, 193). And yet, without the inductive reasoning supplied by experiential data, such performances remain opaque: instinct alone cannot support the communication of feeling to an observer who has not yet experienced that feeling herself (202).

<sup>68</sup> In his discussion of “abstraction” as one of the “intellectual powers” of the mind, Stewart quotes a lengthy passage from Adam Smith’s *Dissertation on the Origin of Languages* (1761).

<sup>69</sup> Such scholarship thus updates and develops Kenneth McNeil’s seminal claim that eighteenth and nineteenth century “Highland discourse reflects the desire to constitute a recognizable Self as a subject of sameness that is different, but not quite” (7).

<sup>70</sup> Throughout this chapter I use the spelling of “Stewart” given in the novel.

<sup>71</sup> Robert Lovelace and John Belford from Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady* (1748). Lovelace, the libertine who attempts to seduce and eventually rapes Clarissa, is close friends with Belford, who becomes a trusted correspondent of the former while repudiating the actions of the latter.

<sup>72</sup> See Eden, chapters 1-2.

<sup>73</sup> For Arendt, “mass society” is opposed to a genuine public space because it entails the culmination of perspectives emptied of a common world, and, consequently, of the communal narratives that both “relate and separate” us (HC 55-57).



## William Blake: Dramatic Character

### Introduction

With this chapter, I turn towards thinking about Romantic *character* in terms of performance, or the dramatic representation of life. I argue that William Blake's characters capture each other's singularity by performing the gestures they observe: perceiving each other with an attentiveness and emotional investment that motivates their reciprocal action, they reenact the movement of the other. Rather than simply repeating or mirroring each other, however, Blake's characters each appear more distinctly through this performance, emerging in roles that intensify their difference. I turn in this chapter from thinking about *speech* to thinking about *action*, the second term of the dyad that, for Arendt, constitutes a person's irreducible "who-ness." In doing so, I also return to the idea, explored in light of Dickens's characters, that singularity appears in the immediacy of action: first, through the depiction of an irreducible moment, and second, with an appearance made dense by its boundless, unseen effects. Blake's characters, however, take this emphasis on action in a new direction.

First, they shift our attention from "newness" and "boundlessness" to what Hannah Arendt terms "mortality": the "rectilinear" movement of human life that "cuts" through the cyclical nature of biological life (19). While other species are rendered "immortal" by their consistent, predictable replication, human lives are demarcated as recognizable "life-stories," linear histories with recognizable beginnings and ends (19). Previously, I explored Arendt's claim that such stories arise out of the human capacity for distinction: the individual's "words and deeds" that, in contributing to a public space, generate the narratives through which they become perceptible. By *reenacting*, rather than merely acting, however, Blake's characters throw into relief the "artifice"—the "fabrication" or "making"—that *sustains* character. For Arendt,

the “human artifice” is the “sum total” of the “sheer unending variety of things” we produce (HC 136). As the material residue of our speech and action, the human artifice constitutes the other half of the public realm, the common world where human “affairs,” on the one hand, and “the fabrication of human hands,” on the other, “relat[e] and separate[e] men at the same time” (52). If, as Arendt claims, “the presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear” “constitutes reality,” then the human artifice provides the “in-between,” the medium, through which this appearance can emerge (50).

The “mortal” distinctness that figures like Los and Urizen gain arises from their mutual crafting of each other: perceiving, reenacting, and literally remaking each other as new worlds and bodies, they create the “community of things” whose permanence, Arendt argues, outlasts and so sustains human, individuated life (55):

If the world is to contain a public space, it cannot be erected for one generation and planned for the living only; it must transcend the life-span of mortal men... The common world is what we enter when we are born and what we leave behind when we die. It transcends our lifespan into past and future alike... It is what we have in common not only with those who live with us, but also with those who were here before and with those who will come after us. (55)

Arendt, here, describes “the human artifice” as the (literally) made “world” that, as opposed to earth or nature, “houses” and so protects our words and actions from the “ruin of time” (204, 55). Curiously, the “immortality” that humans lack must be created: with the work of our hands, we preserve what we have “seen and heard” as material “artifact” (95, 204). The “objectivity” of such things, writes Arendt, not only relates people across time but also distinguishes them: “...men, their ever-changing nature notwithstanding, can retrieve their sameness, that is, their

identity, by being related to the same chair and the same table” (137). The temporality of singular appearance—its immediacy as action—means that the individual’s subjectivity is always in flux; as a result, we require material objects to “pin” down such moments, to lend them permanent objectivity—like the paperweight or bookmark that checks the movement of things and gestures in physical space.

In what follows, I argue that Blake’s mythological “makers,” Los and Urizen, recreate each other as “mortals,” once-eternal beings now bound by time. In doing so, however, they also, I claim, recreate each other as “immortal” worlds: handmade artifacts whose “objectivity” further shapes their distinction from each other. For Arendt, “immortality” entails a prolonged existence within time and space, a stability that outlasts and so distinguishes the mortal life that produced it; without materialization in “works and deeds and words,” the individual’s inborn capacity for appearance and disappearance—for a distinguishable story—loses significance and simply becomes a biological function of life and death (19).<sup>74</sup> Perceiving and reenacting each other, Los and Urizen thus creates the immortal stage—complete with props—upon which they can continue to appear.

Reading Blake’s prophetic books as exemplifying a unique kind of perception departs from the normative systemization of Blake’s thought: as Blake’s parodic depiction of the biblical Creation, *The [First] Book of Urizen* and *The Book of Los* are meant to allegorize the fall of “Eternal intellect” into the rigid systems of thought that flout the mortal world (Erdman 906).<sup>75</sup> Though readers tend to note the painful enclosure of Urizen’s senses in overlarge, detached body parts, I aim, conversely, to delineate the impressive, dialogic *seeing* that conditions Los and Urizen’s reshaping of each other as singular appearances.<sup>76</sup> Delimiting Urizen to moments in time, Los is able to perceive Urizen so astutely that the latter appears, not as a cohesive form, but

as an appearance whose features overwhelm each plate of the narrative. Urizen thus resists the description—the enumeration of personal qualities and features necessarily shared with others—that, Arendt claims, describes *what* someone is as opposed to *who* they are, and so misses their “specific uniqueness” (HC 181).<sup>77</sup> Instead, Urizen appears as the singularity with which this project is concerned: a moment irreducible to generality.

At the same time, there is nothing more shared, generalizable, or common among humans than Urizen’s monstrous moments, the internal organs and external parts that he grows beneath Los’s gaze. If, as Arendt claims, the great paradox undergirding the human condition is our shared capacity to be radically distinct from each other, then the mortality—the falling into time—that Los and Urizen come to share casts new light on this concept of “plurality”:<sup>78</sup> they exercise a perception that captures the particularity of the typical. They do so, as do Dickens’s characters, by registering the immediacy of action—but from the opposite end of the spyglass. Rather than discovering the *density* of action in its unforeseeable, but irreducible, effects, Blake’s characters discover the sheer *transparency* of appearance. Urizen’s body is uncategorizable, singular, because it is externalized, literally turned inside-out, and groundless—who else can boast a spine that twists in the wind, or nostrils that hang over the deep (*BoU* 10.35, 13.1)? Perceiving and moving in response to each other, Los and Urizen dramatically reenact each other in a way that delineates their shared features—and, consequently, crafts the singular ways in which they each produce these mortal motions.

Los and Urizen thus seem to enact the mimesis that, Arendt reminds us, Aristotle praised in drama: the imitation of action that outstrips narrative by capturing, through repetition, the “revelatory quality of action and speech” (187). Blake’s characters do more, however, than provide a helpful illustration—an allegorical rendering—of how singularity is perceived in

action. They instead, I argue, tackle the problem at the heart of “the human condition” that Arendt articulates: the “burden” of action, and, correlatively, the profound difficulty in *being human*.<sup>79</sup> One of Arendt’s most interesting claims is that a shared, human nature does not exist. The fact that we are mortal, as opposed to immortal, means that we are each born into unique being, rather than into an iterable, recyclable species life; that is, while all living beings possess distinctness as discrete, variable manifestations of a shared biological existence, only humans, by virtue of what Arendt calls “natality,” are born as “somebody”: as a new beginning, “a beginner himself” (176, 177). For Arendt, then, to be “somebody” is to go beyond distinction to the *expression* and *actualization* of this distinction:

With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance...this insertion...springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative. 177

To be human is to be unified by this condition of plurality—or, in other words, to follow through on one’s potential to be utterly individual. This self-actualization, in turn—the beginning something new with word and deed—*is*, for Arendt, the definition of human freedom.

The unsettling implication of Arendt’s argument is that the definitive uniqueness simultaneously constituting one’s humanity and one’s individuality is not a constant. In order to escape reduction to her generalizable qualities, a person must disclose themselves directly through speech and action before a public.<sup>80</sup> As Arendt depicts the history of Western thought, however, it is this very notion of public action that has been uprooted. The effects of action in a public sphere are both “unpredictable” and “irreversible” (233); no agent can control how her act

will mingle with those of others, nor can she retract its infinite ripples. Western culture has reacted to this perceived danger by valorizing sovereignty: a system of self-rule in which one first conceives ends, and then acts towards their achievement. Arendt sums up this ideology as a harmful reversal of priorities in which “making”—fabricating a preconceived product—replaces action as the human activity *par excellence*. Harnessed to preexisting goals, individuals are stifled, their potential uniqueness preempted.<sup>81</sup>

I argue that Blake’s Romantic characters help us understand Arendt’s claim that one must *enact* their humanity. By illuminating the constellation of her thought, they also pry open one of the problems that this mapping brings into view. The very weakness at the core of agency constitutes its strength by enacting processes that are “independent of the perishability of material and the mortality of men” (233).<sup>82</sup> Though suggesting that action and speech create their own “remembrance” (208), however, Arendt also claims that this remembrance only finds “fulfillment” in “reification”: the “transformation of the intangible into the tangibility of things” (95). The “common world”—the objects we make, be they tables or books or paintings—counteract human mortality by materializing “the living activities of action, speech, and thought”: without this alternate mode of existence, these activities “would lose their reality at the end of each process and disappear as though they never had been” (95).

This chapter explores the relation between “acting” and “making” that, for Arendt, undergirds the space of appearance. Blake’s figures demonstrate that to “be human” is also “to be character”: *to be made*, fabricated, out of mutual perception with another. Los and Urizen break down the binary between “acting” and “making” by helping each other become mortal: not simply, within Blake’s mythology, as fallen eternal, but by reenacting each other in a mode that also reifies them as story. This reworking of the other as art casts new light on Arendt’s attempts

to resolve the problematic interdependence of appearance and artifice. Arendt claims that art work, because it evades everyday use and resists summary, is the most durable of things that make up the human artifice; though confirming, however, that appearance would vanish without art, Arendt maintains that this materialization entails an embalming of the “living spirit,” and so emerges at the cost of “life itself” (169).

Identifying artifice with “deadness” links making, art, and narrative to the “law of mortality” that, Arendt claims, would “carry everything human to ruin and destruction if it were not for the faculty of interrupting it and beginning something new,” or the faculty of action (169, 246). And yet, the limited “lifespan” that Arendt opposes to action and natality also makes perceiving singularity possible:

This unchangeable identity of the person, though disclosing itself intangibly in act and speech, becomes tangible only in the story of the actor’s and speaker’s life; but as such it can be known, that is, grasped as a palpable entity only after it has come to its end. In other words, human essence—not human nature in general (which does not exist) nor the sum total of qualities and shortcomings in the individual, but the essence of who somebody is—can come into being only when life departs, leaving behind nothing but a story. (193)

Despite her ultimate claim that we, as humans, “are not born to die but in order to begin” (246), Arendt describes death here as the necessary condition for being seen. Death releases a person from the “continuation of what he began” and renders him an act replete (193-4): no longer dispersed among the words and actions of others, the agent who dies can be succinctly narrated.

If the agent is only truly seen as a tangible work, then conversely, the perceiver only truly sees through making representations; the dependence of singular appearance upon “the

storyteller, poet, or historian,” in other words, suggests an *interdependence* between author and agent, or between making and acting. If Arendt describes action as interruption—the disruption of biological cycles and of mundane, “automated” life—she depicts art work in revealingly equivalent imagery by grounding it in “thought,” rather than “cognition.” While the latter always has a “definite aim” which directs its course and determines failure or success, the former “has neither an end nor an aim outside itself” (170). Because this binary is yet another variation on the evaluative distinction between making and acting, or between pursuing ends and beginning appearance, thinking about “making” in terms of “thought” actually begins to break down this difference:

...it is precisely the thought process which the artist or writing philosopher must interrupt and transform for the materializing reification of his work. The activity of thinking is as relentless and repetitive as life itself...Thought, therefore, although it inspires the highest worldly productivity of *homo faber*, begins to assert itself as his source of inspiration only where he overreaches himself, as it were, and begins to produce useless things, objects which are unrelated to material or intellectual wants, to man’s physical needs no less than to his thirst for knowledge. (170-71)

The “interruption” that defines action because it releases the agent from the “ever-recurring cycle of becoming” emerges, here, as also grounding the work of the maker or producer (*homo faber*). Moreover, just as action defines the agent by outstripping the intentions and personal qualities that make her generalizable, the art of the maker doesn’t so much *express* his thought as outrun it. Both (art) work and action, then, emerge as a double-sided coin or currency that purchases immediacy—the freedom or spontaneity of appearance—as the flipside of being seen: contained from the outside. I use “contained” to emphasize the “pause” at play. Just as the artist’s “useless”

products interrupt rather than continue his consciousness or intention, the agent stopped in action by narrative is, in some way, rendered dysfunctional, or at least superfluous: his appearance becomes irreducible, or singular, because it is fully delimited, an end in itself.

Arendt admits that this way of attributing meaning to action is “highly individualistic”—a “death” that consummates the singularity of a person by extracting them from human affairs (194). I argue, however, that this mortal temporality coincides with the political enactment of natality—beginning something anew in the public realm—when agents perceive each other, or when acting involves making. I am using “make” to signify narration, here, or remaking another as story. In the co-making whereby Los and Urizen become *characters*, being seen depends on their moving in concert: in acting out their commonalities in a way that ultimately distinguishes them. This commonality, however, arises from their falling into mortality, or into the dimension that makes them seeable in the first place. “Becoming human,” in my reading of Blake, requires “becoming character” because it involves—not a repetition, nor a novel expression—but a renovation, a wrinkling of time. Seeing and reenacting their shared, external features, Los and Urizen grasp each other as transparencies: stories whose perceptibility make their events common, portable, without being ambiguous. As I hope to show, Urizen develops as a world whose external, visible changes become, through the lens of Los, more than the solipsistic system, the “self-closed, all-repelling” entity to which he is often reduced (BU 3.3). Rather, they become horizons—the distinct landscapes—within which the stories of other agents can also be seen and reenacted.

Foray

Blake's characters present an opportunity to rethink the Romantic divide between individual insight and the shared, perceivable world.<sup>83</sup> Northrop Frye argues that the existence of "General Nature," for Blake, does not make sense because it projects an atomistic ontology in which "form" or "image" would have to somehow derive from a "chaos" of homogenous, material units. Instead, as Frye explains, Blake posits (most explicitly in his aphorisms and annotations) that the world is made up of particulars which require our *active* perception to create their forms; otherwise, we merely engage in passively reflecting on the outlines of things, accepting their abstractions rather than activating their potential for distinctness. Blake thus refers to man in his definitive role as "the Poetic Genius," or the "mind" whose imaginative vision constitutes the only true reality. (Frye 21-28)

Frye's insight is particularly helpful for this project in that he gestures toward the interdependence between perceiver and perceived at play in Blake's ontology. Those who engage in reflecting on abstract ideas—rather than working through the perceptible images of things towards *vision*—become enthralled to consensus, the commonality of "facts" presumably independent of subjective perception and visible to everyone (Frye 27). The damning result is that such "perceivers" become themselves abstractions: minds made general, indistinct, by virtue of their uniformity (27). They thus forfeit the absolute freedom of the imagination which, for Blake, constitutes both our highest potential and conditions our truest reality.

What Frye's reading of Blake overlooks, however, is the reciprocity or dialogism at play in his poetic accounts—and acts—of perception. Frye contends that Blake's human paragon is the artist, or man of vision, whose active, creative seeing transforms experience into meaning by "pointing to his own mind" (29). For example, in *Jerusalem* Blake writes, that "...in your own Bosom you bear your Heaven / and Earth, & all you behold, tho it appears Without it is Within /

In your Imagination of which this World of Mortality is but a Shadow” (71.17-19, E 225). Just a line earlier, Blake inverts this imagery: “Rivers Mountains Cities Villages, / All are Human & when you enter into their Bosoms you walk / In Heavens & Earths” (71.15-17, E 225). This reciprocal reality, however, ultimately challenges a straightforward mirroring in which one contains the world without. Blake’s description of places as humans through which we can traverse motions towards an accessible plurality of perspectives—a reality of multiple, permeable imaginations—as opposed to a unified, self-originating reflection. Moreover, the ordering of the analogy—places being as humans, rather than humans being as places—suggests that these physical, spatial features of the world exist as nested dimensions or horizons, rather than as separate, lateral imaginations. At the same time, Blake’s use of individual elements (rivers, mountains), rather than whole landscapes, to figure other imaginations suggests that their ultimate unfolding as *whole* universes—other heavens and earths—is not wholly contained by the perceiver in question.

The Blakean definition of “vision” emerging here goes beyond a pointing towards “one’s own mind.” Instead, individual imaginations exist within and around one another in a way that suggests an interdependence through which one’s reality observes and supports, but does not coopt, another’s. In making this argument, I hope to help articulate what John Beer calls “Blake’s humanism”: an insistence that “the key to understanding ‘humanity’ can only be found by an exacting look at the individual” (Beer 20). The paradox—which recalls Arendt’s definition of the “human”—is that every person’s uniqueness derives from the “eternal and universal” genius common to all (21). Jeanne Moskal specifically recasts this “tension” within Arendtian terms, claiming that the balance Blake strives for between the self as distinct and as replicated by the other undergirds his prioritization of both “contrariety” and “forgiveness” (71, 72).

While these claims illuminate the intersection of particular and type at play in Blake's conception of the human, I trace its emergence at the level of Blake's characters in order to throw into relief its *intersubjective* nature: the mutual, public seeing that undergirds singularity. This Romantic perception extends outwards and away from the existential experience of alterity and alienation that, Laura Quinney argues, follows from the Blakean self's intuition of its own transcendence; at the same time, I build on Quinney's claim that Blake desired to rescue the sensing subject from the empirical injunction that its "experiences...[are] unreal, shadowy epiphenomena of a 'real' physical world" (11, 17-8).

The typicality of Blake's "Divine Vision" challenges normative definitions of a general category that can be repeated, improvised upon.<sup>84</sup> Instead, I argue that this shared capacity exists *between* Blake's characters as the non-homogeneous, multi-planed landscape that—like the earth—erupts, slides, settles, and shifts, generating new points of view. Like Arendt's notion of power, it exists between people acting and speaking together, and supports the public space in which they can appear as singular.<sup>85</sup> Unlike Arendt's notion of power, however, Blake's Divine Vision exists through, rather than in spite of, artifice. The "making" that Arendt separates from "action" emerges as that through which Blake's figures perceive each other: their perception is shaped, from the outside, by the horizons that their mutual seeing, and reenactment of this seeing, generate.

If, in previous chapters, I focused on the naïve (with Dickens) and the combative (with Scott and Burns) partiality of Romantic characters, here I intend to explore what Blake calls "the Eternal Great Humanity," the shared mode of perception that is synonymous with each person's capacity for free, creative vision.<sup>86</sup>

...Lo the Eternal Great Humanity

To whom be Glory & Dominion Evermore Amen  
 Walks among all his awful Family seen in every face  
 As the breath of the Almighty, such are the words of man to man  
 In the great Wars of Eternity, in fury of Poetic Inspiration,  
 To build the Universe stupendous: Mental forms Creating (*Milton* II.30.15-20)

The shared divinity Blake describes here is not engaged in seeing, but *in being seen*. After stacking up Blake's equivalencies, the image that emerges is a human community in which individual, creative vision becomes itself an appearance apprehended through dialogue—the “words of man *to* man.” Conjured by this phrasing as hand-to-hand combat, especially in light of the eternal wars and poetic fury of the next line, vision becomes an exchange between opponents—even, however, as it generates the surrounding world. This imagery, then, suggests a clash of particularities, a combat in which the back and forth of seeing and being seen successfully marks—not one person's creative vision—but the interlocking horizons of multiple perceivers.

The wielding of one's particular words or Poetic Genius is undergirded, then, by a commonality that is not so much a shared nature as a shared media through which individual visions emerge. I intend to explore this “eternal Great Humanity” in terms of mortality, or the falling into mortal time that, as demonstrated by Blake's characters, supports making (“mental forms creating”). I use this term, “mortality,” not only because (as discussed above) it is a fraught term for Arendt, but because it is also fraught for Blake. If the “World of Mortality is but a Shadow” of the eternal Imagination, this makes it synonymous with the “Vegetable Glass of Nature,” in which the “Permanent Realities of Every Thing” are only “reflected”(71.17-19, E 225; *VLJ* 69). And yet, the “mortal” is also necessary for Blake's perceiver—as Frye helpfully

articulates when he claims that “the world of sight” houses the particular forms activated, potentially, by vision (31).

I take a different tack by arguing that the horizons which bound and delineate these particularities are drawn by Blake’s perceivers when they perform the other’s perception: reenacting each other as players on a stage, the other is seen when their vision is delimited, remade as the discrete movements, and moments, of another. The mortality I explore is conveyed by the narrative bounds Blake’s characters use to capture each other as action, rather than the Vegetative world of generality and abstraction. In thinking of mortality and the perception it entails as performance—an reenactment of singularity—I follow in the train of Angela Esterhammer, who argues that Blake’s texts issue speech acts in lieu of narratives.<sup>87</sup> Distinct in my reading of *The [First] Book of Urizen*, however, is the identification of action, rather than speech, as the performative mode. Seeing and responding to how the other is seeing, Los and Urizen appear to each other as visions rather than persons, or as the imaginative perception that, for Blake, creates worlds. Together they thus manage to build the “Universe stupendous”—even, however, as the transparency of their visions enables them to move through the other’s performance of imagination into a new, more distinct articulation of their own.

Blake’s characters demonstrate a creative vision—or, what we might describe in Arendtian terms as the enactment of freedom, newness—that makes rather than expresses: it turns neither inward, nor outward, but challenges this binary by skating a figure eight between the two. The problem that Arendt identifies in our capacity for singular appearance, the ability to sustain newness, is thus taken up here as a function of seeing another and reenacting, or making, them as story: not literally, as the hero of a biography or the subject of a painting, but as a certain vision of the world. And yet, recognition of another requires an awareness of shared mortality, or

an awareness, first, of one's own capacity for vision, and second, the fact that this capacity is evidence of another's. This is why, for Blake, turning outward *also* requires turning inward—a characteristic that might, at first, seem to make him antithetical to the concerns of this project:

What is Above is Within, for every-thing in Eternity is translucent:

The Circumference is Within: Without, is formed the Selfish Center

And the Circumference still expands going forward to Eternity.

(*Jerusalem* 71.6-8, E 225)

What I have been terming “transparency” Blake here calls “translucence,” and it is the better term: indicating appearance that comprises a distinct combination of light and altered form, rather than generalizable images, it captures the combination of independent vision and dependent appearance demonstrated by Blake's characters. As suggested by the hyphen dividing it into a phrase connoting multiplicity rather than a homogeneous mass, “every-thing in Eternity” refers to the “minute particulars” which, for Blake, constitute “Permanent Realities” (*VLS* 69, E 555). The “Circumference” continuing within and throughout these eternal individualities on account of their translucence thus seems to demarcate the horizon they share on account of being perceptible, and perceiving, of each other.

What is further striking about this passage, however, is the perspective from which it is narrated. Noting first what is “Above,” the speaker suggests, with the use of “for,” that he knows this is also “Within” because each eternal thing is translucent. Because he can see both the Above and the Within, however, his own position seems located “Without”—a position of questionable value, as it places him in the “Selfish Center,” a phrase that would seem, especially in juxtaposition with the image of an expanding circumference, to connote a kind of limited opacity (never a good term for Blake).<sup>88</sup> And yet, the Circumference that the speaker sees in

every eternal thing is inverted, bent back upon itself, by virtue of this displacement: the emergence of a center outside its own horizon. If the movement of the Circumference towards eternity seems to happen in opposition to this gravitational pull—implied by the speaker’s assurance that it “still” expands towards eternity—then, conversely, the passive mood of “form’d,” as well as its detachment from any other, visible actor, suggests that the Center also arises as a result of this tension. The colon following “Without” supports this sense of a logical relation, and the immediate juxtaposition of “Without: Within” visually and aurally connotes the idea of their simultaneous generation. The Center and the Circumference thus seem to arise as a pair of Blake’s “Contraries,” without which, we learn in “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,” there is “no progress” (plate 3).

This impossible formation suggests, I argue, that perspective and positionality are constitutive of reality—not, however, as individuated vision, the “Poetic Genius” finding creative and independent expression, but as an interdependence between such vision and the visions of others. As has been amply demonstrated, Blake was deeply invested in a vision that could transform the “Without”—or, in Jerome McGann’s words, a vision that could produce “social and psychic overthrow” (*Towards a Literature of Knowledge* 25). While the success of Blake’s work—and of poetry itself—lies, for McGann, in the accidental demystification of its own ideology and the invitation of readerly response, Morton D. Paley shows how Blake’s creative vision intentionally transforms and comments upon socio-political events by “compressing time, rearranging locations, and inventing characters” (45); E.P. Thompson, in turn, thoroughly unfolds Blake’s forceful appropriation of and innovation upon antinomian terminology in order to unmask and critique the tyrannical “Moral Law” imposed by institutional structures.<sup>89</sup>

Blake's own poetic dialoguing with the events and ideologies of his day is figured, I argue, by the energetic, perceptual encounters of his characters. If W.J.T. *Mitchell* suggests that the opaque, often antagonistic interplay between Blake's texts and illustrations "embodies the drama of a divided, polarized consciousness seeking reunification," I argue that his characters present an external view of this process (*Blake's Composite Art* 52). Working beneath and out of Blake's mythology, they enact, at an abstract level, *not* only how such systems are created, but how the horizons that encompass and make space for new visions break forth from the clash of individual imaginations. The speaker of *Jerusalem* claims that "[i]n Great Eternity, every particular Form gives forth or Emanates / Its own peculiar Light, & the Form is the Divine Vision" (*J*54.1-2). Here, the "Divine Vision," or what I have been thinking of in terms of the individual's (shared) capacity for perception, constitutes its "particular Form." The surprising implication is that something's particularity *is* its perception—the "peculiar Light" it shines upon reality. However: if each individuality is also translucent, then their particularity or perception is constantly being penetrated, or illumined, by the lights of others. The resulting image suggests that, in order to be particular, one must have something else to perceive. Translucence would be impossible if there were not other lights, or other acts of perception, to which one was exposed; and, without translucence, one could not take in the particularity—the perceiving light—of others.

My object in this foray is to extend the critical conversation indexed above against claims that tend to interpret Blake's notion of poetic perception solely as an internal performance of solitary creativity. Michael O'Sullivan argues, for example, that Blake rejected the idea of "vision" as a function of either "sensory" or "psychological" faculties, and instead defined it in "pre-modern" terms as an emanation of the "divine" or the "satanic" (324-25). Andrew Cooper

claims, on the other hand, that Blake's ubiquitous image of the "vortex" recreates perception as a function of creative mobility: in order to escape the illusion that one's worldview is more than imprisonment in one's internal realm of Lockean representations, one must employ the imaginative freedom that moves them across the "lip of an object's vortex" to recognize such horizons as discrete, temporal events (190-91).

I want to extend Cooper's reading to suggest that the act of perception, of seeing from within and beyond a vortex, is not the work of a solitary character. As suggested by the ambiguity of "vision," which can either denote a seeing or something seen, the "Divine Vision" that constitutes one's particularity is both perception and appearance. The Circumference or horizon of one's perception recreates you, Blake's Poetic Genius, as the center, looking within from without; simultaneously, however, the translucence of the other that draws your sight renders you a part of this horizon, as the "peculiar light" you cast penetrates the other. The vision or individuality you see, then, becomes another center. This mutual shifting and forming implies that perceiving or vision is not so much an expression of free or spontaneous genius as it is a dialogue between actors: "actor" not solely in the sense of agent, however, but in the sense of one who acts, or performs. S. Foster Damon suggests that, for Blake, the Biblical story of humanity's rise and fall (and rising again) is lived out by each individual: the movement through Creation, Redemption, and Judgment, to use Blake's terms, constitutes each individual's journey within Eternity, rather than a universal world history (45). Each individual, then, *performs* her own variation on this divine score. I further argue that Blake's characters, by seeing and reenacting each other, are constantly involved in making new stories: shifting and opening a horizon that, like the Circumference bounding towards Eternity, retroactively displaces and slings forth its own Center.

### Failed Vision

Hailed in the opening lines of *The [First] Book of Urizen* as a “shadow of horror.../...Unknown, unprolific!,” resisting perception and “spurn’d back” by his own community, the Eternals, Urizen is an unlikely candidate for demonstrating something new about appearance, and much less about a mutual “seeing” (BU 3.1-2; 2.2). Amanda Jo Goldstein succinctly summarizes his assigned role in the Romantic canon when she claims that he is Blake’s parody of “autonomous self-organization”—even, however, as she deftly points out that the “fate and merit” of the “organicist ideal” he embodies, “the Kantian ideal of living form as autonomous ‘cause and effect of itself,’” has always already framed the field of Romantic studies (173, 164-65). And, indeed, Urizen’s creation of an abstracted, “self-closed” world easily assimilates to a negative caricature of the Romantic subject. Reproducing his body as its own, alienated landscape, the subsequent growth and exaggeration of his features seems to instantiate a parody of self-originating consciousness, while his odd enclosure as an actor within this world suggests the imprisonment of his perspective and the sad, tyrannical, irrelevance of the laws he writes.

And yet, as Tilottama Rajan has pointed out, the figure of Urizen may be more than a “body of error” consistently representing one term in a strict binary between “reason” and “imagination or energy” (365). For Rajan, the simultaneity of Urizen’s self-gestation and his creation by Los generates a non-sequential temporality of “feedback loops” and “involution,” as well as a blurring of the distinction between subject and object, cause and effect. Rather than proceeding as a linear narrative undergirded by a comprehensible structure, *The [First] Book of Urizen*, Rajan suggests, figures Blake’s unworking of his symbolic system in the “very process of its genesis” (361). This “autoimmunity”—a term Rajan borrows from Derrida to signify the

way in which “an organic system turns back upon itself” (358)—is productive in that it resists the naturalization of a hegemonic discourse; instead, Urizen’s “grotesque” body figures the “unsettling” of the relationship between form and content, and so produces “symbol” as its own restless critique.<sup>90</sup>

In what follows, I will build on Rajan’s claim that Blake’s system is a “tangled” one, made up of parts—and characters, specifically—that “reciprocally affect each other, producing risks and possibilities for knowledge” (360). Rather than thinking in terms of self-reflexivity and auto-genesis, however, I consider how Blake’s characters create shifting horizons for each other in ways that substitute the singularity of perspective for static, symbolic meaning. I proceed in this section by examining the mutual perception between Urizen and the Eternals that falters because they are unable to recognize each other as type; blind to their own existence as vision, they are unable to see the actions of others. In the next, I examine how, in contrast, the mutual perception of Los and Urizen supports their reenactment of each other—not simply as characters, but as whole narratives: worlds made from the outside. In focusing on bodily performance, I depart from the “common assumption that Blake necessarily privileges the mental realm” (Piccitto 102). Reading *The [First] Book of Urizen* within the tradition of the “melodrama,” Diane Piccitto has recently argued that the action of the poem revolves around perception—between Urizen and the Eternals—and thus explores the relationship between the social, the body, and identity. Countering “the validation of the solitary self and its interiorization associated with a traditional view of Romanticism,” *The Book of Urizen*, Piccitto claims, “celebrates the creative force of the imagination and the energy of public action to recreate the paradise that was lost as a lived experience...and as a communal endeavour” (120).

In the end Piccitto agrees with the critical consensus that Urizen, Los, and the Eternals demonstrate a fall from community into “limited perception”: as Los and Urizen morph into body parts and gestures expressive of extreme affect, they become both objects and subjects of a gaze that is brought up short, alienated, by the “mysterious interiority of the other” (119). I offer a different, if parallel account in which Los and Urizen shed their past, “Eternal” identities for the creation of a new landscape: a new perceptual horizon. If, in chapter three, the Eternals stand on the “shore of the infinite ocean” watching the “vast world of Urizen” appear, this relation between outside and inside—between the presumably objective position of eternity and the new, delimited space of mortality—is inverted by the concluding line of the poem: “And the salt Ocean rolled englobed.” The intervening events—the growth of a pitiable race, Urizen’s “eternal children, “ground down...by their narrowing perceptions” and overshadowed by the “Net of Religion”—are undeniably bleak caricatures of human existence. And yet, Fuzon leads a contingent of these away from the “pendulous earth,” calling it “Egypt” and so relegating it to a mere corner of possible reality. Los and Urizen’s initial perception, then, still manages to recreate what it means to be Eternal by expanding the horizons of vision.

This remaking begins, I think, from the very outset of the poem—or rather, from even *before* the poem’s beginning. Despite the claim in the opening stanza that Urizen is “Unknown, unprolific!,” he is, in fact, always already a palpable presence: dividing and measuring time and space, “changes appeard / In his desolate mountains rifted furious” (3.10-11). The existence of Urizen’s mountains before he becomes a world in the sequence of the narrative is curious—and this perplexity is compounded by the fact that what appears are “changes,” rather than origins. Evidence of Urizen’s preexisting world is also given in the next stanza, where he strives “in battles dire / In unseen conflictions with shapes / Bred from his forsaken wilderness” (3.13-15).

The ambiguous, non-linear sequence of the poem's events has been well-established. Suggesting that "Urizen's rebellion and the Eternals' reaction" are "different modifications of the same event" (91), Mitchell claims that the poem parodies the "Urizenic tendency" of both parties "to assume the superiority of one's own perspective" ("Poetic and Pictorial Imagination" 100). Mollyanne Marks argues that different stanzas present the same action from contrasting viewpoints in order to depict the fragmentation of fallen, human perception, while Annika Mann reads the poem's lack of "narrative progress" and jumbling up of events from Genesis as a political critique of government and law grounded in inheritance.<sup>91</sup> Such readings often argue that this synchronicity reveals a mirroring of action between Urizen, Los, and the Eternals: a mistaken, circular recreation of self in the image of what one perceives.<sup>92</sup>

Though building on this critical consensus, I argue that the shifts in perspective demonstrate a productive remaking of events. As I read Urizen's combat with the seven deadly sins, his presumed self-creation is actually an attempt to distinguish and articulate what has already existed, homogenously, in Eternity. If his mountains are "desolate" and his wilderness "forsaken," it is because, prior to the actual opening of the poem but described in the "Preludium," he is "spurn'd back," expelled to "a place in the north" by the Eternals. These opening scenes are often read as moments where Urizen's "autonomous self-organization" is "achieved at the expense of lives that take another form," thus confirming his harmful hegemony (Goldstein 174).<sup>93</sup> And yet, the "shapes" with which Urizen contends acquire, rather than lose, definition. Revealing in Chapter II that these are the "terrible monsters Sin-bred: / Which the bosoms of all inhabit; / Seven deadly Sins of the soul," Urizen's struggle with this general, ubiquitous "species" breaks them into particulars so various that they include animals, elements, and chemical reactions (BU 4.27-30): "beast, bird, fish, serpent & element / Combustion, blast,

vapour and cloud” (BU 3.16-17). The creatures that are both “Sin-bred” and “bred from his forsaken wilderness” thus appear to be shapes that, previously existing as the same seven sins in all bosoms, gain new, singular forms as a result of Urizen’s grappling.

Urizen’s “dark revolving in silent activity: / Unseen in tormenting passions” takes on new meaning when seen as an attempt to expose, rather than contain, these internal elements.

Equating these “conflicts dire” with his authorship of “books formd of metals,” Urizen extends, rather than contracts:

7. Lo! I unfold my darkness: and on  
This rock, place with strong hand the Book  
of eternal brass, written in my solitude.

8. Laws of peace, of love, of unity:  
Of pity, compassion, forgiveness.  
Let each chuse one habitation:  
His ancient infinite mansion:  
One command, one joy, one desire,  
One curse, one weight, one measure  
One King, one God, one Law.

*Unfolding* his darkness, Urizen counters accusations of being “unseen” and “self-contemplating” by leaving this “solitude”. Although this scene is often considered to be the ultimate expression of Urizen’s solipsism, I argue that such a reading overlooks the plurality of his injunctions.<sup>94</sup> As Moskal points out, the laws that Urizen initially enjoins “presuppose a relationship between two or more persons” (27); though she still reads his speech as lapsing from a vision of “unity-in-diversity” to a monolithic conformity, I propose that this transition to singular standards—one

habitation, one command, one joy, etc.—follows the call for “each” to do so. Following his grappling with the sin-bred creatures inhabiting the breasts of all, Urizen’s desire that each being choose their own dwelling suggests an attempt to turn himself inside out—“to unfold”—and so to externalize and release the general traits he shares with the Eternals.

This rereading of Urizen suggests that the Eternals’ perception of him as “unprolific” and “unseen” is just one perspective bringing this new world into view. “Unclasping / The Book of brass” as the disclosure of his darkness—the externalization of “terrible monsters Sin-bred”—Urizen appears, not as a discrete, self-closed entity, but as vision, or as the unfolding of new perception. The Eternals confirm, participate in, and even extend this new vision with actions that take their cue from Urizen’s—and, significantly, they respond not to his alleged invisibility or secretiveness, but to his stark visibility: “the pale visage” that “emerge[s] from the darkness” in the opening lines of this chapter. The Eternals’ perception of and response to Urizen’s appearance as vision proceed to remake the actions of the former. If, in the first chapter, Urizen’s “changes” appear like “like desolate mountains, rifted furious,” the Eternals respond in chapter three with a similar disruption of space, a rending of the present field of perception that literally, and dramatically, shifts the horizon that Urizen’s own vision has set in place: “Sund’ring, dark’ning, thund’ring! Rent away with a terrible crash / Eternity roll’d wide apart / Wide asunder rolling” (BU 5.3-6). The Eternals thus begin to contribute to the new world—or, rather, dimension—of the poem, even reproducing variations of the seven deadly sins as “living creations” and “ruinous fragments of life” (BU 5.1, 9). The fact that Urizen reproduces whole creatures while the Eternals disseminate fragments confirms the sense that their dialogic perception shifts, rather than changes, the field of focus: rather than providing different

perspectives on one, unchanging event, the shifting positionality of the poem's characters recreate old action as new.

The poem's temporal looping comprises, then, a dialogic perception in which Urizen and the Eternals begin to reenact what they perceive—or rather, they respond to the vision, what is being seen, by the other. So, Urizen responds to being seen as an arbiter of systems—the seven deadly sins of the soul—by breaking these categories up into new particulars: the various creatures of his world whom he encourages to become habitations unto themselves. If he himself is perceived as “unseen” in certain moments, I argue that this is a consequence of his externalization of type: striving to articulate the shared qualities of Eternity, he becomes landscape, the background for the vision he hopes to depict more particularly. The Eternals thus behold him as “vast forests” in chapter 1, while Los perceives him, in chapter 4, as “a lake, bright and shining clear.” More than describing a repetition or synchronicity of events, the narrative of the poem reveals a movement generated, not by “action” in a normative sense, but by a reenactment through which its characters open up new appearances of the present.

Although both parties—Urizen and the Eternals—begin to reenact each other in a way that would confirm the translucence of particular events and visions, the Eternals never come to understand their existence as vision, or that they share this quality with Urizen. Specifically, they lack the self-awareness to recognize that their staunch homogeneity recreates Urizen as an abject externality: rather than recognizing the potential for new appearances at play in his mortality, they construe his varied landscape as arid, unproductive—“a clod of clay.” This inability to perceive “within” thus hinders their ability to turn outward, to take in Urizen's activity as a new horizon for their perception. In Blakean terms, their lack of imaginative vision shrinks the circumference—their perceptual horizon—within, and so obliterates the center—the appearance

of others—without. Correspondingly, Urizen, too, grows opaque, hiding himself beneath his mountains in the “shadows of death” (5.27). Finally, in the last stanza before Los appears on the scene, the Eternals and Urizen complete their mutual “blotting” out: Urizen becomes a “black globe,” encompassing himself within a “womb,” while the Eternals envelop him from without in flames that emit darkness rather than light (5.30-34, 17-8). Both circumference and center are lost and, as a result, the dialogic vision that constitutes real, singular appearance comes to a halt.

### Performing Character

In the section of chapter III directly following the climactic, mutual darkening of Urizen and the Eternals, Los comes on the scene, promisingly, as a perceiver—meant to keep “watch” over “the obscure separation alone” (BU 5.39-40). Though allegedly working for the Eternals, Los, from the moment of his appearance, takes a different tack. “[H]owling around the dark Demon: / And cursing his lot,” Los distinguishes himself from his community by acknowledging his commonality with Urizen, bemoaning the fact that the latter “was rent from his side” (BU 6.42-4). Casting literal light on the situation, Los responds to Urizen’s darkening by rousing “his fires” (BU 3.7). “[S]mitten with astonishment,” watching in “shuddring fear,” Los perceives Urizen with a vigor that renders it action (BU 8.1, 9): forming “nets & gins” to throw “round about” Urizen’s “hurtling bones,” he begins to remake, to contain, the “formless unmeasurable death” (BU 8.7-8; 8.8). And yet, this combined seeing and making is not a recreating or projecting, but a reenacting. Binding the “dark changes” of Urizen with “rivets of iron & brass,” he appears, in this moment, to be participating in the scene or horizon of chapter II, where Urizen “unfold[s]” his “darkness” by writing the “Book / Of eternal brass” (8.10-11, 4.31-3). This is further suggested by his perception of Urizen as bones hurtling in “whirlwinds & pitch & nitre,” “surging sulphureous / Perturbed,” an image that recalls Urizen’s description of himself (also in

chapter II) as “stretch’d o’er the void. . . the winds merciless / Bound” (4.18-20). Los, then, binds the changes of Urizen with metal even as Urizen unclasps his metal changes. This clasping and unclasping, folding and unfolding, conveys the shifting of horizons caused by reciprocal visions that both penetrate and are penetrated.

Los’s acute perception is formally conveyed by the unique chapter headings of the two relevant plates. Entitled “Chap: IV: [a]” and consisting of relatively few lines, Los’s attention occurs as a brief preface to the subsequent description, entitled “Chap: IV: [b],” of Urizen’s body-making. McGann persuasively argues that the existence of two chapters four (in all but one copy of the poem) speaks to Blake’s influence by the radical Biblical criticism of Dr. Alexander Geddes, who demonstrated that the Bible was a disorderly collection of ancient fragments. McGann suggests that Blake included such redundancies in his own “Bible of Hell” in order to strengthen the punch of his satire.<sup>95</sup> Though agreeing that Blake intended to keep both chapter versions, I claim that there is an overlap between the two that goes beyond repetition. “Chap: IV: [a]” specifically frames Los as perceiver with its opening line—“Los, smitten with astonishment”—before describing the manner of his watching. The concluding line, “And these were the changes of Urizen:—,” then prepares us for the action of “Chap:IV:[b],” in which Urizen begins to emerge as a series of new appearances. By dividing this moment shared by perceiver and perceived into two, identically named chapters, Blake suggests the simultaneity of their action. Urizen emerges *as* Los’s vision, and Los, as we shall see, is retroactively remade by this seeing:

...The Eternal Prophet heavd the dark bellows,  
 And turn’d restless the tongs; and the hammer  
 Incessant beat; forging chains new & new  
 Numb’ring with links. Hours, days & years

3. The eternal mind bounded began to roll  
 Eddies of wrath ceaseless round & round...  
 BU 10.11-23

Thinking of Los's re-crafting of Urizen as smitten by and perceptive of rather than merely containing him opens up another complexity of the text: Los's craftsmanship is not, upon closer inspection, necessarily directed at Urizen. If the bellows and tongs have no visible fire or material, the ambiguity of who is working on what or whom continues in the opening line of section 3: though the "eternal mind" being "bounded" could refer to Urizen, he is consistently distinguished from the "Eternals" as "the immortal," and, having just been "rent from Eternity," his contradistinction from the Eternals is particularly crucial to this moment. Los, on the other hand, is repeatedly referred to as "The Eternal Prophet," and in the very next section (Chap: IV: [b].4) appears to beat on fetters that are his own: "Disorganiz'd, rent from Eternity, / Los beat on his fetters of iron; / And heated his furnaces & pour'd / Iron sodor and sodor of brass" (U10.27-30). The initial ambiguity of the first possessive pronoun gains clarity by its repetition in the "his" of furnaces—referring almost certainly to Los, the blacksmith of the forge. "Howl[ing]" around Urizen in "whirlwinds / of darkness . . . Beating still on his rivets of iron," and "dividing / The horrible night into watches," Los appears to be binding himself in order to bind Urizen, forging time so that he can continue the "smitten" observation he began when he first "watch'd in shuddring fear" (U10.6-10; 8.1). "Numb'ring with links. [the] Hours, days & years" (U10.18), Los delimits his attention, binds his eternal mind, to the temporal moments in which Urizen emerges with new distinctness.

Los's re-making arises from an interdependence in which Urizen, first impressing upon Los with a "death image" that overwhelms the latter with its vividness, emerges as a distinct,

identifiable character through his perceiver's subsequent craftsmanship (U15.2). The motion by which Los's temporally-bound mind begins "to roll" imitates the relentless, repetitive rolling of the ages over Urizen: instantiating these periods of time, Los, developing his initial role as an impressionable perceiver, now impresses upon Urizen's sleeping, inert form: "I. Ages on ages roll'd over him! / In stony sleep ages roll'd over him! / Like a dark waste stretching chang'able / By earthquakes riv'n, belching sullen fires / On ages roll'd ages..." (U10.1-5). Performing this dynamic interchange of roles, Urizen reappears shortly after Los's own binding also bound, caught in motion strikingly similar to Los's restless, turning tongs and heaving billows: "5. Restless turnd the immortal inchain'd / Heaving dolorous!" (U10.31-2).

Urizen's emergence as a character identifiable by name (U10.11) occurs, then, when his own form moves in semblance to his perceiver's—Los's reenactment of the death image through the crafting of mortal time instantiates Urizen as a particularity that stages its own perceiving. And yet, in becoming this reconstruction or character, Urizen gains rather than loses singularity; both Los and Urizen come to appear more vividly delineated in the light of new roles, retaining distinctness rather than becoming a porous incorporation. This is most evident in the potency with which Urizen becomes mortal: if the links that create and bind Los as time now also "capture" Urizen in temporal segments, the "chains new & new" radically recreate him in the minute detail afforded by discrete frames (U10.17): appearing, sequentially, as gigantic human parts "hanging upon the wind," Urizen's division in and through Los's moments of perception distills his appearance into the different spatial facets afforded by every new moment, each of his parts corresponding to another passing Age (U12.26). Urizen is caught within a sequence, but a sequence made up of immediate actions, each new part striving and grappling with itself as it comes into being.

Becoming mortal and gaining the recognizable identity we associate with being “human,” then, does not incur the delimitation as the plausible reality we might expect; instead, Urizen emerges from abstraction into mortality by being remade as *character*, an appearance that emerges through its reenactment. Other critics have noted the imitative re-production that dominates the poem: Paul Mann reads the action as demonstrating the circular, self-production at play in the textuality represented by Urizen’s book, while, more recently, Sarah Eron argues that Los projects himself onto Urizen in a critique of the “Smithian theory of sympathy” (14).<sup>96</sup> I argue, conversely, that Los and Urizen *each* become more distinct through their reenactment of each other. Los dynamically manifests this paradox by capturing Urizen’s changes through his own performance of them, dramatically remaking an actuality that cannot be reduced to categories. Forging himself as the time that now defines Urizen, he creates the links—the short, numbered segments of the text—that reproduce a form whose incontrovertible humanity is rendered particular by virtue of its dramatized recognizability, the array of body parts rendered irreducible by virtue of their inimitable proportion. Los’s remaking of Urizen’s particular features, in turn, stages his definitive craft—that of a blacksmith—more distinctly.

Taking in Urizen’s appearance through the chinks of time he forges, Los’s translucent vision is penetrated by the latter: “[D]ivided / before the death-image of Urizen,” he re-enacts, in “visions remote,” the “dark separation” by which Urizen was “rent from his side” in “Chap. III” (U15.1-2, 7-8, 6.4): just as a “fathomless void” opened there alongside the “clouds, darkness & waters” of Urizen’s strange new world, the “Abyss of Los” now stretches beneath “changeable clouds and darkness” (U6.5; U4.2; U15.5). Los thus conditions Urizen’s distinction—their initial rending—by, in a wrinkling of time, reenacting the latter’s scene of creation. Subject to mortal temporality—“[a]ges on ages” now rolling over “them”—Los and Urizen continue to remake

each other as facets, overlapping moments, that refract reality in new, singular appearances. If Urizen appears in “Chap: I” dividing time and measuring space, Los reconstructs the latter’s features within his own links of time before, finally, giving way to this performance, dividing into entities that are similar, in type, but particular in manifestation: he manifests cliffs like Urizen’s mountains, as well as oversized, independent human organs: “Nerves”; a “round globe of blood” (BU 13.56, 59).

In conclusion, Urizen and Los model a dynamic *intrap*ception that remakes the other as vision in both senses of the word: as both a world perceived and a world perceiving. The extensive scale along which they extend and collapse, fold and unfold, figures this interpenetration of perspective by suggesting that the “minute particulars” of another—these momentous centers caught as moments of time—can open up on new, shared horizons. This joint remaking of each other as translucent landscapes suggests that natality—the capacity for newness—resides at the heart, rather than beyond, the mortality of the human individual. Recognizing each other as vision, a potential for story, Los and Urizen don’t succumb to these bounds as to dead ends but, rather treat them as circumferences within which to better see each other and each other’s seeing. Sharing and shifting these horizons, Los and Urizen reenact each other’s mortal perception, and so frame, *characterize*, the other’s singularity. In so doing, they throw into relief the fact that one’s center—or “who-ness,” as Arendt calls it— could be another’s circumference, and that this mutual habitation of vision reveals one’s distinct appearance to be a vivid character in another’s story.

#### Notes

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<sup>74</sup> Arendt first discusses her distinction between “mortality,” “immortality,” and “the eternal”—which resides outside the “plurality” of men and so is not relevant to considering “the human condition”—in chapter 1 (see especially p. 18-19).

<sup>75</sup> Blake's critical heritage usually builds on this interpretation of these poems, which fits the characters and their props into the larger symbolic system of his thought. David Erdman describes Urizen as the "fallen psyche that marks boundaries, defines the horizon, separates and divides, and in general limits and reduces" (906). Los, on the other hand, Blake's characterization of the divine, human imagination, represents "the impossibility of being a poet in a thoroughly fallen world" (907). S. Foster Damon similarly describes Urizen as analogous to a "traditional Satan" in that his error is "the desire for dominion" (420). He thus creates a world whose inhabitants are perceptually crippled by the "net of Religion," cast by Urizen along with his other, fallen, intellectual attempts to measure and constrict the world (Damon 423, Erdman 907).

<sup>76</sup> For example, consider Saree Makdisi's definitive argument that Blake's prophetic books, and Urizen's bodily organization, specifically, critique human confinement to the "psychobiological modes of existence" which, rather than being natural, arise in correlation with "the discourse of the law." (83, 81; see especially Ch. 3).

<sup>77</sup> "The manifestation of who the speaker and doer unexchangeably is, though it is plainly visible, retains a curious intangibility that confounds all efforts toward unequivocal verbal expression. The moment we want to say *who* somebody is, our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying *what* he is; we get entangled in a description of qualities he necessarily shares with others like him; we begin to describe a type or a "character" in the old meaning of the word, with the result that his specific uniqueness escapes us." (HC 181)

<sup>78</sup> "Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live." (HC 8)

<sup>79</sup> "That deeds possess such an enormous capacity for endurance superior to every other man-made product, could be a matter of pride if men were able to bear its burden, the burden or irreversibility and unpredictability, from which the action process draws its very strength." 233

<sup>80</sup> "The revelatory quality of speech and action comes to the fore where people are *with* others and neither for nor against them—that is, in sheer human togetherness." 180

<sup>81</sup> See Arendt, 220 -230; 233-35.

<sup>82</sup> "The root of the ancient estimation of politics is the conviction that man *qua* man, each individual in his unique distinctness, appears and confirms himself in speech and action, and that these activities, despite their material futility, possess an enduring quality of their own because they create their own remembrance." 208

<sup>83</sup> M.H. Abrams illuminates this particular conception of poetic genius in his explication of Hazlitt's famous image of the "mirror and the lamp," which suggests "that art is a joint product of the objective and the projected" (52).

<sup>84</sup> This is the "Divine Vision" that, we learn in *Milton*, each person potentially enacts as both "the Human Existence itself" and one's "Individual Identit[y]" (*Milton* II.32.19, 23, 32).

<sup>85</sup> See Arendt, p.199-204.

<sup>86</sup> As Damon sums it up, "the Imagination...[is] the central faculty of both God and Man; indeed, here the two become indistinguishable." (195) See, for example, *Milton* II. 32.19-20 (Erdman 132): "...the Human Imagination: which is the Divine Vision & Fruition / In which Man liveth eternally..."

<sup>87</sup> See Esterhammer, *Creating States: Studies in the Performative Language of John Milton and William Blake* (U of Toronto P, 1994).

<sup>88</sup> See, for example, *Milton*, where Satan's "Opacity" cuts him off from the Divine Vision: "Thus Satan rag'd amidst the Assembly! and his bosom grew / Opake against the Divine Vision: the

paved terraces of / His bosom inwards shone with fires, but the stones becoming opake! / hid him from sight..." (MB1 9.30-33; E 103); also, "The Divine hand found the Two Limits: first of Opacity, then of Contraction / Opacity was named Satan, Contraction was named Adam" (MB1 13.20-21, E 107).

<sup>89</sup> See E.P. Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (1993. New Press, 2017).

<sup>90</sup> Rajan draws on the Jena Romantics' conception of the "Romantic work of art" as "containing at once its genesis, its criticism, and itself," but goes on to argue that Blake's Lambeth books produce this "auto-gestation" not as harmony but as ferment: a dis-figuration of the "Idea" struggling to come into being (363).

<sup>91</sup> See Marks, "Structure and Irony in Blake's 'The Book of Urizen'" (*Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, vol. 15, no. 4, 1975, pp. 579-590), and Mann, "Writing Generation: Revolutionary Bodies and the Poetics of Political Economy" (*Systems of Life: Biopolitics, Economics, and Literature on the Cusp of Modernity*, ed. Warren Montag and Richard A. Barney, Fordham UP, 2018).

<sup>92</sup> See Mitchell, 91; Mann argues in the last pages of her chapter in Barney and Montag's collection that Los's replication of Urizen demonstrates how the "generative powers of the poet are delimited by his creation of 'visible forms' that rebound, generating the poet's own body as another isolating prison."

<sup>93</sup> In his delineation of "Blake's ideology," Michael Ferber argues that *The [First] Book of Urizen* allegorically illustrates how reason separates from the "totality of the psyche," forming an unhealthy sense of self that develops the "will to control" (32). Leo Damrosch analogously notes that, unlike the God of Genesis who sees his creation as "Good," Urizen counters his fear of "energy and disorder" by establishing a "rigid stability," "at the cost of pain without joy" (242).

<sup>94</sup> See, for example, Lucy Cogan's chapter, "William Blake's Monstrous Progeny: Anatomy and Horror in *The [First] Book of Urizen*" (in *William Blake's Gothic Imagination: Bodies of Horror*, Manchester University Press, 2018; 129-49). Reading the poem generally as a critique of the "Enlightenment impulse to categorize, quantify, and define," and especially of the disturbing methods of the newly emergent science of vivisection, Cogan interprets this scene in particular as Urizen's absurd attempt to preserve Eternal life in his book—an attempt that undermines itself by equating the "immortal" with the "mortal" and so condemning it to "unending death."

<sup>95</sup> See McGann, "The Idea of an Indeterminate Text: Blake's Bible of Hell and Dr. Alexander Geddes" (*Studies in Romanticism* 25:3, 1986; pp. 303-24).

<sup>96</sup> See Mann, "The Book of Urizen and the Horizon of the Book" (*Unnam'd Forms: Blake and Textuality*, ed. Hilton and Vogler, U of California P, 1986; pp. 49-68).

### Robert Burns: Communal Character

In this article, I argue that Robert Burns not only disrupts, but also transforms, the British Romantic archive by recasting poetic vision as social perception. In the last several decades of his reclamation as a noteworthy poet, Burns's value has been primarily linked to his "Scottishness": to the way in which he performs a poetics that distinguishes the Scottish public sphere from the English.<sup>97</sup> I argue here that Burns's Scottishness marks a way of seeing the world that marks an unmarked mode exhibited by Romantic writers across national boundaries. If Romanticism is, as M.H. Abrams claimed, an "expressive poetics"—defined by the artistic intention to imbue one's surroundings with their personal feelings—I argue that some Romantic authors, among them Burns, create characters who appear as they recognize others.<sup>98</sup> The mode of seeing modeled by these characters, as well as by the authors who attend to them, pursues a vector between "imagination" and "mimesis." Rather than, on the one hand, "recollecting emotions in tranquility,"<sup>99</sup> or, on the other, processing empirical facts, these Romantic writers reassemble things as new, singular configurations of the shared categories we use to filter and comprehend the world.

The weird, but enticing, paradox structuring this perception allies individual, or partial, perspective with the actuality of appearance. Shaped by a unique mix of social conventions, personal preferences, and life experiences, the literary characters and lyric voices that populate this Romantic landscape inhabit particular viewpoints; counterintuitively, this delimited perception enables them to capture, like a movie frame, the distinct assembly of particles that constitutes a moment. In that frame, one character's individuality contributes to another's—not, however, by realizing a difference grounded in relativity, but by capturing the singularity afforded by immediate appearance.

Hannah Arendt's political theory provides a helpful approach to this dynamic between immediate, or singular, reality and the social nature of its appearance.<sup>100</sup> Claiming that humans are defined by their capacity for action, or the ability to manifest something new, Arendt further argues that such actualities can only be seen within a public (178). Without the shared narratives we use to make sense of the world, our actions would resist comprehension, and remain imperceptible. Conversely, however, this "public space of appearance" is shaken into existence by the jumbling of particular perspectives (198-99): Like a "common table" around which each character sits, their shared reality emerges with the multiple viewpoints that delineate its contours (52).

The dynamic relation that Arendt identifies between immediacy and spectatorship, actuality and social narratives, suggests that appearance always occurs "in character," or as the public inscription of a singular moment. At the same time, as Arendt acknowledges, the "story-telling" or "web" of social narratives that comes to constitute a public is threatened by the narrative reification it seeks to prevent (182-3). The Romantic characters I track step outside this essentially temporal contradiction, or the inability to narrate immediacy: Rather than scrutinizing appearances as discrete, present entities, they reassemble moments as unique configurations of shared, narrative categories.

Burns exemplifies this mode of characterization by inverting it. Rather than refracting "particularity" through "type," his poetry discovers the singularity of typical events. Describing the everyday occurrences, social gatherings, and traditional holidays that structure the agricultural life of his Ayrshire community, his voices distill the various associations of communal time and space—like a chord of music—to a singular moment. As a result, the seeming types that populate his poetry actually embody felt experiences—not, however, through

individual expression, but through the magnification, and, consequently, revivification, of familiar appearances. This perceptual depth of field works like a camera lens, bringing objects closer by instantiating distance. Chipping away at events to deliver their associations, he cuts out the looming types easy to treat as mawkish or caricatured. Far from sloughing off the particular, however, such perception sounds, bell-like, the elements of a moment that gain—rather than lose—vivacity because they are shared. Consequently, Burns’s distillation of public space and time minimizes the angle of his images so that their subjects appear larger, dilating on an everyday incident or traditional ritual as a singular performance of the communal types woven through it.

Other scholars have also noted how Burns’s poetry elides the difference between subjective and objective experience in its portrayal of communal experiences.<sup>101</sup> Murray Pittock, for example, argues that the approach of Burns’s lyric voice—a mediation between participation and spectatorship—enacts an “inward outwardness,” or the capacity to shift viewpoints from being the narrator to being the subject of narration, and vice versa (151). And yet, one of Burns’s acclaimed means to this end, his “synthetic Scots”—or his masterful switching between dialects—is described as a poetics that improvises, first, on Wordsworth’s desire to speak “the language of men,”<sup>102</sup> and second, Adam Smith’s conceptualization of the “external spectator” (151-2). Though scholars turn to the “social” nature of Burns’s language as one example of a Scottish Romanticism unconcerned with “authentic utterance” or the “inner processes of the interior mind” (Pittock 4-5), they also continue to read this sociality through the categories—expression and sympathy, respectively—of English Romanticism.

I argue instead that Burns’s distance of perspective eschews both the “impartiality” of a Smithian spectator and the imaginative power of a Wordsworthian vision. Instead, Burns creates

a lyric voice that brings common worlds into view by *characterizing* familiar places, persons, and events: that is, by attending to the public nature of their reality. This perceptual work is aided, rather than defined, by the communal elements of his poetry that are often the subject of such commentary (his virtuosic mastery of various dialects and philosophical discourses, or his canny use of traditional verse forms).<sup>103</sup> Paradoxically, what defines this uniquely social perception is the partiality of his voices: Though “partiality” typically carries connotations of uncritical and biased thinking, Burns turns this commonplace on its head by producing speakers whose delimitation by communal knowledge and social conventions sharpens, rather than blunders, their perception. What might be mistaken for a distance from “authenticity” or “individuality” is, in fact, a distancing from isolated interiority, on the one hand, and blind conformity, on the other. Made up of unique assemblies of social associations, his speakers confront the world with distinct perspectives that capture moments only visible from that angle. Individual perception and common reality are, in Burns’s poetry, flipsides of the same coin: the character—of a person, thing, or event—that appears when one discovers singularity, like a constellation of stars, as a typical gathering of particular elements.

In what follows, I examine the nature and stakes of this claim. First, Burns’s poetry, specifically, explores a new kind of temporality—new because its sociality steps outside the linear configuration of past, present, and future. Because his speakers distill the social associations invoked by a distinct moment, they seem to focus perception by pausing. Rather than stopping to gather one’s own thoughts or memories, however, they catch and weave together the elements of social space, time, and language that occur in their particular experience of a common occurrence. This distillation of historical generalities to a singular moment upsets, in Deleuze’s words, “the alternatives temporal/non-temporal, historical/eternal and

particular/universal” that tend to structure the way we see the world (xxi). For Deleuze, the events that we perform, like holiday rituals, exemplify this break-through by repeating a “non-substitutable” occurrence and, consequently, recasting what is particular as universal (1-3). If participation within communal categories undergirds an ability to perceive what is singular—actual, or irreducible—then it is necessary to think in terms of “character,” a term that captures the complex relation between particular personhood and public type.<sup>104</sup> Performing, or characterizing, reality becomes a way of seeing it.

Second, reading Burns’s poetry through the lens of “character” highlights what is specific to Scottish Romanticism, while also challenging this categorization. If Scottish Romantic writers are often identified by their working towards a national literature, then Burns, I argue, takes this one step further. By focusing on the particularity of everyday occurrences and shared traditions, he redefines the “national” as each—rather than the sum—of a nation’s parts.

### **Social Perception**

“Hae ye a leisure-moment’s time / To hear what’s comin?” Burns asks in his *Epistle to James Smith*, and this paradoxical motion, the “fit o’ rhyme” that simultaneously pauses and catapults us “down-hill, scievin, / Wi’ ratllin glee,” captures the new, social temporality undergirding his unique perception (*EJS* 23-24, 19; *Scotch Drink* 15).<sup>105</sup> This last verse describes the effect of whisky, the eponymous subject and addressee of *Scotch Drink*:

Let other Poets raise a frácas  
 ‘Bout vines, an’ wines, an’ drucken *Bacchus*,  
 An’ crabbed names an’ stories wrack us,  
 An’ grate our lug:

I sing the juice *Scotch bear* can mak us,  
                   In glass or jug.

O thou, my MUSE! Guid auld SCOTCH DRINK!

Whether thro' wimplin worms thou jink,  
 Or, richly brown, ream owre the brink,

                  In glorious faem,

Inspire me, till I *lisp* an' *wink*,

                  To sing thy name! (1-12)

The speaker's claim to "sing the juice" that "*bear*" (barley) can create presents a syntax in which the "us" could, grammatically, occur as the direct (rather than indirect) object of "mak" (make), and this idea gains precedence with the speaker's transformation into the lispng, winking singer of the poem. Combined with his preceding reference to the revels of Bacchus and his inspired coterie of poets, the stanzas initially read as a cheeky suggestion that "scotch drink"—and the cultural associations it accrues—be "imbibed" as a literary resource, rather than wine and the classical tradition it represents. The source of the speaker's poetic vision, however, becomes less clear with a second glance. He is induced to heady inspiration merely upon *watching* the process by which the fermented barley is distilled through the "wimplin worms," the condensing tubes of a still ("Wimple, *n.*, *v.*"), and the subsequent image of scotch drink's rich color and "glorious faem" further describes a visual, rather than ingestible, experience. The speaker, then, is inspired by what he *sees*, rather than what he drinks, and, consequently, initiated into a new kind of seeing and singing: to "*lisp* an' *wink*."

Though sometimes synonymous with "blinking"—the involuntary shutting and opening of the eye—"winking" is also a mode of communication. These mixed connotations of agency,

involuntariness, and sociality complicate the normative, circular process in which “inspiration” (the Muse) and the “inspired” (the poet) engage in a private act of creativity. Rather than depending upon or his pleading with his muse, the speaker of these epistles writes *in spite* of her, a reversal of expectation that continues in his irreverent depictions of a muse he must combat. Tired and “sair” from a long day’s work of “[r]attlin the corn out-owre the rigs,” the bedraggled Muse figured in the *Second Epistle to J. Lapraik* begs the poet-speaker not to write, and it’s only in a fervor of frustration—a spin on the poet’s inspired ravings—with her effective absence that he begins his letter (11, 8, 13). Made “mad” by the “dowf excuses” of his “awkart Muse” (19, 11), he sits down in a moment of sudden energy that, though perhaps recalling the spontaneity of inspired genius, ultimately disavows it:

Sae I gat paper in a blink,  
 An’ down gaed *stumpie* in the ink:  
 Quoth I, “Before I sleep a wink,  
       I vow I’ll close it:  
 An’ if ye winna mak it clink,  
       By Jove I’ll prose it!”

Sae I’ve begun to scrawl, but whether  
 In rhyme, or prose, or baith thegither,  
 Or some hotch-potch that’s rightly neither,  
       Let time mak proof;  
 But I shall scribble down some blether  
       Just clean aff-loof.

(*Second Epistle to J. Lapraik*, 31-42)

The speaker's oath to complete his letter whether it manifests as poetry or not speaks to a motivation other than individual creativity: his desire to return a friend's correspondence. Just as the speaker watches, rather than imbibes, the eponymous muse of *Scotch Drink*, the source of poetic inspirations comes from without, rather than within. Correlatively, his "madness," his decision to "scribble down some blether / Just clean aff-loof" (off the cuff),<sup>106</sup> echoes without repeating the image of the involuntarily creative writer. If the hurried "scrawl" that even he can't decipher—rhyme, prose, or a "hotch-potch"—seems too undermine his intention (explicit in the epistle form) to communicate, I argue instead that it demonstrates an attempt to avoid merely personal expression. Paradoxically, his letter originates in the same exhaustion, the "dizziness," of which his muse so poignantly complains (*SEJL* 17)—or, rather, it originates in his combatting this sleeping inspiration: Gathering together his materials in a "blink," he successfully pre-empts his own "winking" (here denoting sleep). And yet, while his blinking and winking seem at odds, their joint rhyming with "ink" draws our attention to a material existence that generates the act of writing. Putting off sleep and disobeying his muse, the poet-speaker eschews a notion of inspiration as detached from real-world activity and consequences. Combatting the weariness of his own internal vision—or, perhaps, ridiculing the kind of self-oriented writing that depends upon freedom from needs and circumstance—the speaker turns to the outside world, his community, for poetic motivation.

With that turn, the speaker attends to the singularity of moments—a time that goes beyond the "present" as normatively understood. The stark rhyming of "blink," "ink," "wink," and "clink" (1-3 and 5), while typical of the Standard Habbie, is especially blatant in the *Second Epistle*, and effects this temporal immediacy. Struck by the repetition of equivalent sound, we are drawn, despite the necessary progression of lines, into a space that resists normative temporal

differentiation—even, however, as the sharp “ee” sound of the repeated vowel imposes a sense of precise location or identification. This collapse of the speaker’s past and present incorporates the linguistic associations of the concluding word in this rhyme: Because the “clinking” that, in English and Scots, often denotes the noise made by the links of a chain, its meaning encapsulates the performance of sound—the chain of aggressively rhyming words—in the preceding stanza. This poetic present thickens, moreover, with its Scots connotation to “strike” or “beat” sharply, as if the stanza had broken down the barrier between sound and meaning to create a material moment that exceeds, or combines, both empirical and metaphysical reality (“Clink *n.*<sup>1</sup> and *v.*<sup>1</sup>”). Finally, the speaker’s past fear that he “winna mak it clink” elides the future with a moment already created through this poetic clinking.

This identification and expansion of a particular moment is captured by the poet-speaker’s claim to move within the space of a “blink,” and returns us to the “lisp[ing] and wink[ing]” definitive of the poetic process in *Scotch Drink*. If the poet’s “winking” moves us toward the flash-like perception of writing “just clean aff-loof,” the repetitive sibilants connoted by “lisp[ing]” suggest the clinking—the intensely repetitive rhyming—that makes this temporal condensation possible. In another Standard Habbie of especial clarity, the poet-speaker again thanks whisky for verse, implying more specifically this time the aurality at stake: “When wanting thee, what tuneless cranks, / Are my poor Verses! / Thou comes—they rattle I’ their ranks / At ither’s arses!” (*SD* 105-108). The “rattl[ing]..ranks” of the poet’s more successful verses suggest repetitive sound while also emphasizing the nuanced differentiation of such noise; unlike the monotonous homogeneity of droning or humming, clinking and rattling give an impression of several miniscule, discrete but similar sounds in quick succession (“At ither’s arses!”) The speaker favorably opposes this rattling to the “crabbed names an’ stories” of the

poets who, in the opening stanza, sing “[b]out vines, an’ wines, an’ drucken *Bacchus*” (*SD* 3, 2). Like the “cranks,” the “harsh, grating sounds” that the poet-speaker creates when uninspired (“Crank *n.*<sup>3</sup>, *adj.*<sup>1</sup>, *v.*<sup>1</sup>,” Entry 3), he complains that these songs “wrack us, / an grate our lug” (“ear”) (*SD* 3-4).

The unique temporality of Burns’s poetics—the gathering of time to a point—works in correlation with a distinct mode of lyric address: a perception that elides past, present, and future to capture moments composed from the social categories that make appearance visible. Exemplified by the winking and blinking in *Scotch Drink*, Burns’s speakers direct an oblique, sidelong focus that illumines, in a lightning flash, the singular experience of a public terrain. Clinking these shared, narrative categories together, the bleary-eyed speaker is, paradoxically, energized by the exhausting accumulation of social work and play, as if his communal existence sharpens his impressionability to a keen edge. At the same time, the speaker’s reliance on convention is different from the crabbed conformity of the Bachanalian poets. The satirical image of the classical Muse in the *Second Epistle* gives way to a new force—symbolized by scotch drink—that is not an end in itself but a stage for the combined appearance of the public and the private, the typical and the particular. “Thou art the life of public haunts,” the speaker of *Scotch Drink* effuses, and moves into a descriptive catalogue of communal moments fueled by whisky (43), one of which is the gathering of ploughmen in the blacksmith’s forge (*SD* 43-78):

When Vulcan gies his bellys breath,  
An’ Ploughmen gather wi’ their graith,  
O rare! To see thee fizz an’ fraeth  
I’ the lugget caup!  
Then BUrnwin comes on like Death

At ev'ry chap. (*SD* 55-60)

While the foaming action in the “lugget caup” (“two-handled jug”) succeeds the dramatic preparation of the forge and seems to overtake the speaker’s senses (“O rare!”), the whisky itself is never explicitly named. This oblique address demonstrates a “winking” perception that figuratively transposes the effects of “guid auld SCOTCH DRINK” into a simultaneous missing and capturing of “reality”: that is, he catches the present as it emerges through the aura of its associations (*SD* 7). Addressing the contents of the lugget caup in the above stanza without naming it, the speaker implies a situation that is both particular and categorizeable—a moment of personal and social knowledge, respectively, as if the beer inside is already a hybrid object of personal taste and conventional expectation (a juxtaposition crystallized by the definite article that both identifies and universalizes, points to and gestures away from the physical “caup”). In the context of a communal, mundane task—“the Ploughmen gather[ing] wi’ their graith”—the recognizable singularity of the jug conveys a two-fold sociality: the repeated commonality of a past and anticipated convention, and the specificity of *this* particular jug, shared among friends and colleagues.

*Scotch Drink* provides a blue print for Burns’s oblique address by externalizing his muse as addressee. Treating “whisky” as a framework upon which to hang the particular elements of public moments, the speaker’s seemingly limited perception of his subject instead frames a scene in which other realities can more clearly appear; he perceives immediate phenomena by accumulating the social associations they invoke. The typical inhabitant of the forge (the blacksmith) first appears in the guise of his mythical counterpart, Vulcan, the Roman god of fire. Being called “Vulcan” has a paradoxical effect: On the one hand, it hones the blacksmith’s image with a specific name and set of associations; on the other, by identifying a specific time

(“when”) and pairing it immediately with a proper name, the speaker implies our complicit familiarity with the context about to be described. This effect is retroactively confirmed by Vulcan’s incorporation of his tools. Though “bellys” is a Scots term for “bellows,” the image of Vulcan giving (“gieing”) it breath playfully gestures towards the English word “belly,” their similar orthography recalling and gaining additional resonance with the Scots meaning of the latter word (“to eat or drink voraciously”). Inflating the bellows as he might expand his own gut suggests a hardy embodiment, a visceral entwinement with immediate circumstances that confirms the impression he is known and near, just around the corner—even, however, as this tangibility echoes, in another register, the mythical incorporation of the elements he also represents as a god.

The invisibility of the contents of the “lugget caup” generates the next immediacy of the stanza by manipulating the shift in gaze from Vulcan to his new rendition, “Burnewin.” The “then” implies this causal relationship between the speaker’s blinking perception and the moment’s thickening specificity: Adjusting focus, “Burnewin,” as yet another name for blacksmith, reconfigures the allusive properties and social signification of “Vulcan” in a new portrayal of immediacy, the idiomatic abbreviation (in Scots) of “Burn-the-Wind” (“Burn-the-wind, *n. phr.*”). While seeming to encapsulate the “metaphorical code-switching” that, for Alex Broadhead, “undermines the generic, social, and linguistic borders by which eighteenth-century reality was ordered” and “recreates the world,” this varying imagery belies a revivification—not a dismissal—of the social categories through which the blacksmith is perceived (34). Both configurations of the blacksmith are defined by a vigorous immediacy that relies upon the difference in their social allusions. If Vulcan, as a neo-classical reference, glances back to Bacchus in the poem’s opening lines, Burnewin and his stunning “chap[s]” (strokes) look ahead

to the next stanza, in which the blacksmith makes his “block an’ studdie [anvil] ring an’ reel” (65). Together with the “clink[ing]” of the Standard Habbie, this allusiveness consolidates time within the space of a “blink,” generating a sound that captures the clanging of the smithy and, like the speaker of the epistles, reproduces the particularity of the present moment. Addressing but ultimately ignoring the contents of the convivial cup, the speaker’s staged inattention to his muse figures a dependence on social signification that, rather than languishing in crabbed conventions, gives way to the vivid elements of that communal space: “[C]om[ing] on like Death / At ev’ry chap,” the blacksmith emerges through his familiar context with a sonority echoed by the ringing of his strokes.<sup>107</sup>

The gathering of ploughmen in *Scotch Drink* exemplifies a scene where, against normative assumptions regarding reality and representation, the narrative accumulation of communal types delineates particularity. This compelling force of impression rings out in the speaker’s bodily dispersal throughout the perceived moment, as if his physicality trembles with the “dinsome clamour” of the forge (*SD* 66). Flowing directly from the description of Burnewin’s mighty strokes into the next stanza, the fulcrum of sensation shifts from an imagined, first-person “I” to the surrounding elements: “Nae mercy, then, for airn *or* steel: / The brawnie, bainie, Ploughman-chiel, / Brings hard owrehip, wi’ sturdy wheel, / The strong forehammer” (61-64). Set up by the preceding image of Burnewin “com[ing] on like Death,” the iron and steel beneath his ensuing strokes are partially personified as victims deprived of “mercy” and subject to mortal consequences. The glancing slightness of this empathy anticipates the fluctuating origin of perspective. “Mercy” is a term that, though not technical, can hardly function outside an implicit reference to religious or juridical contexts, and this foregrounded sociality also surfaces in the dialogic structure of its meaning. Aided by the colon bridging the

two images, “mercy” easily transfers us from potential recipient to dispenser, and, engaged by and locked into the motion with the use of “hard,” we shift from feeling the force of the blacksmith’s blows to experiencing the exertion behind them.

Like our ephemeral alignment with his metals, however, we don’t completely internalize the blacksmith’s movements. “Owerhip,” while describing exactly the bodily motion and parts (the hip) included in the word, also refers to a specific smithing technique (“Owerhip, *adv.*”); as a result, we inhabit a perspective externalized by its social signification. And yet, even as the shared conventionality of the description casts us from the blacksmith’s individual experience into a distant stance of observation, the specificity of the term cuts, in sharp relief, the details of our present context; the same term that recasts us within a larger community also draws upon the blacksmith’s embodied expertise. Both inside and outside the immediate experience, our perception more explicitly bifurcates in the transitional line that moves us from materials to maker. Though we flit between the different viewpoints inhabiting the scene, the description of the blacksmith as “brawnie” (sturdy) and “bainie” (boney) sustains the external perspective of an outside viewer—even as this perspective is also honed by its inversion. Though complementing “brawnie” as a description of appearance, “bainie” doubles as an image of the internal with a signification that limns the boundary of skin; neither fully literal nor fully figurative, to be “boney” implies an appearance revelatory of the inside and vice versa.

This dispersal of perception captures the speaker’s felt relation to the types he brings before us. Unlike the crabbed *frácas* slurred out by classicist wine-bibbers, Burns’s speakers pick out, in stark relief, the notes assembled in a single moment. We enter the immediacy of the forge through the social categories that extend time via cultural inheritance and, captured by the rhyming of our speaker, collapse this temporality to a new, immediate present. The tight,

repetitive rhyme scheme of the Standard Habbie echoes and redounds with the synonyms, cultural references, and technical terms that, like musical chords, thicken the moment with a synchrony of rich associations. The blacksmith's final denomination as a "ploughman-chiel" joins this ringing temporality with its blink-like perception. If our focus on the blacksmith seems to dim, zooming out to lose him as one among many ploughmen, this very distancing settles us in the present moment. Glancing again towards the "[p]loughmen gather[ing] wi' their graith" ("gear"), the "ploughman-chiel," formerly specified by names with broader contexts, now becomes a minute figure within a communal but particular setting.

The adjusting and readjusting of focus within the poem breaks down, then, any facile distinction between generality and specificity. First singled out by names that, though specific to his trade and person, draw on large networks of idiom and myth, before being finally settled as one general participant in the particularizing context of a concrete community, the blacksmith makes an appearance in which immediacy and categorization are flip sides of the other. He becomes *character*, a figure recognized on account of its dramatization, or through a minute attention to the moving, singular configurations of its iterable features.

As correlative to the ever-adjusting focus of our speaker's lens, the characterization unique to Burns is a discovery of particularity at the broader level of the moment, a reversal of the general/particular hierarchy that moves away from, rather than closer to, appearance. Turning perception inside out, his refraction of types through each other along the axes of communal time and space catches the sudden, particular sound of their assembly. In a reading of "To a Mouse," I explore how this alternate, Romantic characterization leads to a unique relation between perceivers, a combative sociality that delineates singularity and challenges a critical focus on eighteenth-century narratives of sympathy.

### **Coda: Seeing Character**

Burns's distinct, blinking attentiveness comes to the fore in a poem like "To a Mouse," where, as in "To a Mountain Daisy" and "To a Louse," the speaker pauses in the middle of his daily activity to address a single, minute subject. While critical discussions of these poems usually emphasize their morally suasive character,<sup>108</sup> I argue that Burns is interested in the social temporality of the moment being described: in this case, an accidental encounter with a mouse. Addressing the field animal he has nearly destroyed in the process of his farm labor, the speaker translates this unintended yet typical imposition of labor into an impression of immediacy, catching the mouse by dwelling on the relations of a particular moment.

The poem's structure of address both draws the speaker to the mouse, violently "crash[ing]" through its nest with his "coulter" (plough blade), and draws out the distance between them ("TAM" 29). The full title of the poem, "To a Mouse: On Turning Her up in Her Nest with the Plough; November 1785," initiates this oblique approach: If the framing salutation signals that the matter will be spoken "to a mouse," the subsequent summary of the subtitle shifts this addressee into the third person, re-positioning "her" as a listener now strangely outside and haunting her own presence. In light of the gloss's details—the date, the sex of the mouse, the specificity of "the" (rather than just any) plough—the first title's indefinite modifier strikes us as an abstract gesture, a convention of genre. And yet, the typifying categorization at work in the phrase, "to a mouse," conditions the subtitle's more particular rendition of this occurrence: The gloss catches its feel of immediacy from the preceding intimation that such "typical" moments happen often. The two title parts, then, work together as an adjusting and readjusting of focus. If the gloss initially displaces the addressee in the opening title, its specificity draws us closer to a

particular mouse—just as, conversely, the typifying title produces the resonance of an embodied encounter by anticipating it.

This interdependence of convention and immediate experience continues to structure the way in which both speaker (“Man”) and addressee (“Mouse”) see and characterize each other. They creatively refract their encounter through given categories, springing through their expected roles into singular action:

I'm truly sorry Man's dominion  
 Has broken Nature's social union,  
 An' justifies that ill opinion  
       Which makes thee startle  
 At me, thy poor, earth-born companion  
       An' *fellow mortal!* (7-12)

The mouse's “startling” is an act of simultaneous recognition and surprise; at once mundane and jarring, the paradoxical relationship between farmer and rodent is captured by its combination of convention—the violent “dominion” of humanity—and the transgression of a more natural state (“Nature's social union”). If these alternative realities, artificial hierarchy and organic harmony, seem opposed, the involvement of “Nature” and the mouse in social structures indicates their reversal and collaboration. The mouse asserts a public perspective (“opinion”); Nature comprises a “social union”; and the human speaker, in a witty echo of the addressee's turning up out of the soil, is “earth-born.” Recognizing, leveling, and conveying the structures of meaning through which the world appears, the speaker obliquely perceives and produces a particular yet portable rendition of a common experience.

The speaker's address, however, goes beyond both a description of interior experience and a registering of empirical facts. Opening with a lengthy list of adjectives, the speaker conveys the immediacy of the mouse by seeming to stumble over her. "Wee, sleekit, cowrin, tim'rous beastie," he begins, and the substitution of "beastie"—an affectionate, yet general, term—for her specific denomination hones the sense that the speaker (like the exhausted speaker in the verse epistles) is blethering, so outdone by the encounter that he can only list his impressions. This amnesic elision, however, makes room for the intimacy flagged by the nickname: If the speaker's rambling exuberance delays the recognition of the mouse (not explicitly named until the seventh stanza), the catalogue's protraction fixes upon and dilates a particular moment. Exclaiming that his addressee "need na start awa sae hasty not / Wi' bickering brattle" (3-4), the speaker captures the mouse in the immediacy of her action, referencing her departure even as he describes her present appearance in detail. As suggested by the subsequent seven stanzas which, though continuing to address the mouse, move on from her appearance to others, it is unlikely that the startled creature has stopped to hear the ploughman's discourse; and yet, the latter's soft, imperative address ("Thou need na") generates an oblique description whose uncertain ontological status is further fissured by the stanza's end. Claiming that he "wad be laith to rin an' chase" the mouse (5), the speaker invokes alternate, potential realities with the conditional mood, leaving us in doubt as to whether his own foibles or the stillness of the mouse preempt his pursuit.

The speaker's address to the mouse, then, is precisely that: a close attention to the phenomena at hand that, however, achieves clarity of focus from a distance. The speaker captures this tension by addressing the mouse with a holding action, an approach that is indirect not because he looks through her towards a reader, but because he pauses the mouse in the

moment of her departure. Imagining the “bickering brattle” with which the mouse runs—or could, or would, or will run—away, the speaker attends from his relative height to the tremulousness of the mouse with a minuteness that magnifies this particular motion: A “brattle” is a “loud, clattering noise of any kind,” exemplified by such dynamic instances as the sound “made by the feet of horses, when prancing, or moving rapidly,” or by “a peal of thunder” (“Brattle *n.*, *v.*”). The speaker thus glimpses the mouse with an acuity that outstrips the normative, spatio-temporal ways we parcel out reality by defying distinctions between actuality and potentiality, present and future, internal motives and external motions.

The speaker’s simultaneous halting and freeing of the mouse captures a gesture so minute that it inscribes the usually unseen segment of a familiar movement as singular action. This paradox drives the entirety of the poem, which continues to amplify the present by refracting it through conventional narratives. In perceiving the mouse, the speaker resists the latter’s negative categorization of himself as dangerous, opening up an interpersonal relation outside general binaries (assumed in the nature *v.* society narrative, for example). Just as the conventional narrative of the mouse’s running away, her “bickering brattle,” is turned back on itself to amplify the current moment, the image of the farmer’s hypothetical pursuit with “murdering pattle”—formally aligned with the preceding narrative via rhyme—opens up the speaker’s particularity. Startled, like the mouse, into his discourse, the speaker seems exhausted by his subsequent fall through the catalogue that attempts to capture the event’s particularity, reaching for images that, while plausible from a conventional standpoint, also betray his own, distinct configuration.

The speaker, then, may be unable to chase the mouse because he is cowed by its singularity. Paired with “brattle,” “bickering” confirms the grappling of their immediate

encounter by meaning “to move quickly,” to “gleam” or “flicker,” and to “fight” (“Bicker, *v.*<sup>1</sup> and *n.*<sup>1</sup>”). Paired with “brattle,” the semantic and alliterative redundancy of the phrase aurally performs the mouse’s purported panic as the speaker’s own, frantic impression of elemental danger. The speaker doesn’t simply imagine and re-create the mouse’s fear in a narrative of sympathy or shared experience, however—he feels his own. Falling out of the first line into the opening exclamation, the “O” of the second, the speaker’s familiar, rhetorical noise invokes the mouse’s affect while also articulating his parallel reaction. Burns’s use of “O” in the other poems of the *Kilmarnock* edition is never followed, as it is here, by a comma, and the pause gives the impression of expiration, a pulling up short that continues the hurried, startled stuttering of the first line’s catalogue and imitates the speaker’s imagined pulling up of the plough. Stopping for breath, the speaker addresses the mouse with a sound that viscerally registers the impact of its immediacy. If the “O” also denotes a moving forward, an introduction as well as an expiration, this two-toned expenditure of energy neatly captures the unique characterization perpetrated by Burns’s lyric speakers, the channeling of communal work, ritual, and convention into an impressionability that transforms exhausted blinking into creative winking, a vigorous giving way before equally vivid appearance.

The odd relation emerging between the “fellow mortal[s]” in “To a Mouse,” then, is an unconventional “sympathy” because it is an interpersonal antagonism conditioned by a perceptual distance in which mouse and man fail the humdrum gloss of categorizing narratives by fulfilling them in a vivacious, singular way. The comically overlarge types held up as a lens to the present—the loud, horse-like motions of the wee mouse, and the farmer’s warlike wielding of his ploughing implement—both expose the absurdity of conventional expectations and distill the moment’s minute immediacies. As exemplified by the vigorous, threatening tremor of the

mouse and the cultivating destruction of the gentle ploughman, this unique address distills socio-historical types as intractable appearances that elide the internal and the external, the particular and the conventional, the unfamiliar and the familiar, by glimpsing and magnifying a minute action.

The temporal underpinnings of Burns's unique address crystallize in the last stanza of "To a Mouse," where the speaker seems to articulate a moral built up by his preceding reflections on the mouse's balked foresight: "Still thou are blest, compared wi' me! / The *present* only toucheth thee: / But Och! I backward cast my e'e, / On prospects drear! / An' *forward*, tho' I canna see, / I *guess* an' *fear*!" (43-48) If critics have disparaged the speaker's disingenuous departure from considering the mouse his equal,<sup>109</sup> I argue that he continues to perform a present *with* the mouse by forgetting himself: the "och," like the "O" in the first stanza, denotes an immediate reaction that folds his "backward" and "forward" peering into the current moment. Because "prospects" usually denote the potentiality of future time, their surfacing in his *backward* gaze further suggests a physical dimension, an implicit reference to the fields just ploughed that is confirmed by his directional modifiers. His inability to see *forward*, then, doesn't connote a lack of foresight so much as an acknowledgement, in light of the central action and title of the poem, to know what other surprises—of mice, or crops—his labor might "turn up," an ignorance that conditions his productive ability to *address* actuality: to confront embodied phenomena rather than reduce them to exposition.

The significance of Burns's characterization emerges in a juxtaposition of particular and type that generates a new, social temporality. Arendt argues that effective action can only occur in a public space, the social narratives in which the immediacy of others is recognized and caught by virtue of its dramatic reenactment. The problem of how to narrate the singularity of

appearance without glossing over it, however, is a paradox that Burns's lyric mode of perception more clearly resolves. Rather than projecting categories onto reality, Burns's lyric speakers break down the binary between particularity and type by assembling the associations of social time and space as the features of a distinct moment. The immediate action definitive of a singular being emerges, then, through a social combativeness that delineates, rather than reconciles, a convergence of multiple viewpoints. Practicing a keen impressionability supported by this milieu of social narratives, Burns's lyric voices sustain a perspective of distance that brings immediacy into focus: cutting out the singularity of communal instances and performing mundane minutiae in characters writ large.

#### Notes

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<sup>97</sup> In distinguishing a “distinctively Scottish and Irish Romanticism,” Pittock seeks to define “national literatures in dialogue with but distinct from England’s.” He adopts the term “altermentality” to describe the “inflection of genre towards a distinctively national agenda of selfhood.” (Pittock 7)

<sup>98</sup> In the dissertation from which this chapter is excerpted, I argue that certain literary figures and lyric voices in Romantic literature demonstrate a unique mode of perception. Rather than reading each other as social types or as hidden mentalities, they elide categories of “surface” and “depth” by capturing appearances that are also singular. Inhabiting viewpoints that are shaped by individual mixes of public narratives and personal experiences, they are able to perceive each other as unique assemblies of social categories. As a result, these literary figures recast each other as public appearances—or “characters —by refracting “particularity” through “type.” The stakes of this Romantic theory of character are threefold. First, providing evidence of a Romantic interest in appearance counters a traditional account of Romanticism as preoccupied with subjective expression. Second, reading appearance as identity steps outside a critical genealogy that thinks of character in terms of “flat” and “round,” “interior” and “exterior.” Finally, by demonstrating that individual perception undergirds the appearances of others, this project argues that difference is necessary to constructing a common world.

<sup>99</sup> A paraphrase of Wordsworth's definitive claim in the Preface to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems*: “I have said that Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, similar to that which was before the subject of contemplation is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind.” (Coleridge and Wordsworth, 183)

<sup>100</sup> I turn especially to “Chapter V: Action,” from *The Human Condition* (1998).

<sup>101</sup> Leo Damrosch argues that Burns’s lyric performs an “impersonal subjectivity” that distinguishes him from the earlier expressivist poets of the “Age of Sensibility” as well as the English Romantics: Capturing his own experiences in melodies and lyrics that, like folk ballads, make their emotions actionable by a reader, Burns creates a collective experience that goes beyond the subject while remaining subjective (639, 643). This impersonal subjectivity of Burns resonates with much more recent accounts of the Romantic lyric. Fiona Stafford, for example, argues that the lyric overcomes generality and abstraction by inviting readers’ participation in the irreducible truth of the poet’s felt experience. Jonathan Culler similarly argues, but from a structuralist stance, that the shared experience of the poem—the portable tangibility of its formal elements—performs rather than describes an actual event.

<sup>102</sup> A paraphrase of Wordsworth’s desire to “bring my language near to the language of men” (Coleridge and Wordsworth, 178).

<sup>103</sup> My argument, for example, takes up the chain of critique forged by critics like John C. Weston and Alan Riach, who argue that Burns’s use of certain verse forms produces a poetics grounded in local reality. Weston claims that the Scottish verse-epistle employs a “communal tone” that both participates in a specific genealogy—the verse letters between Allan Ramsay and William Hamilton of Gilbertfield—and addresses living members of his own social circle, the “real world of Ayrshire.” Commenting on Burns’s use of the Standard Habbie in his verse-epistles, Riach further argues that this particularly “musical” meter draws the reader into the dance step of the verse, consequently eliding the chasm between observer and observed that haunts the “solitary act[s] of perception” indulged by more standard lyrical personae (56, 58).

<sup>104</sup> I identify this unique perception as a function of “character”—rather than of literary “person” or “identity”—in order to emphasize its social nature. As a cursory scan of the OED will show, “character” can refer to an iterable mark or sign; the “moral or mental” qualities that define a person or group of persons; someone’s social role or function; the reputation of a person or institution; and a general term to indicate a force of personality. Denoting a private or a public identity, and descriptive of either an individual or a group, the multiple senses of “character” wobble between internal and external modes of self, and so suggest a continuity of the “personal” with the “persona.” Taking up positions between these poles, the fictional individuals studied in this project perceive each other by publicly crafting, or “characterizing,” the other’s singularity.

<sup>105</sup> The poems cited in this chapter are taken from *The Canongate Burns* (ed. Noble and Hogg, 2001) and are abbreviated as follows: *Epistle to James Smith (EJS)*; *Scotch Drink (SD)*; *Second Epistle to J. Lapraik (SEJL)*; and “To a Mouse” (“TAM”).

<sup>106</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, translations and explications of phrases are taken from the margin notes of *The Canongate Burns* (2001).

<sup>107</sup> The “blinking” of Burns’s poetry is not, then, the “looking away” that Rei Terada argues is characteristic of a certain Romantic poetics. Terada is concerned with a perception whose ephemerality releases us from the binding consensus effected by Kant’s epistemological categories. Burns’s winking and blinking is, in contrast, an attentiveness that depends on the distance afforded by social narratives to sound the associations constituting immediate appearance. (See Rei Terada, *Looking Away: Phenomenality and Dissatisfaction*, Harvard UP, 2009; especially 6-7 and 98.)

<sup>108</sup> Kenneth Simpson focuses on Burns’s ability to generate layers of meaning that “play to a wide range of levels of reader responsiveness, from the naively literalist to a sophisticated

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alertness to levels of irony” (39). David Perkins claims that “To a Mouse” demonstrates a quintessential Romantic sympathy that diverges from other Romantic animal poems by combining affectionate sensibility with “objective perception” (10). While Perkins ultimately criticizes the poem’s turn from sympathy to self-pity, Nigel Leask argues that this “fall” from natural harmony figures the poet-speaker as both the “agent” of agricultural improvement and its “victim” (161-2). Liam McIlvanney also discusses the political import of the poem by claiming that its descriptions of poverty ultimately struggle to privilege sociality and friendship over the self-centered independence of the rich (110, 119). Such criticism productively situates Burns at the intersection of a cultivated sensibility—the heritage of the early to mid-eighteenth-century—and a proto-typically “Romantic” sensitivity to nature, and the political implications of Burns’s allusions to poverty should not be ignored. However, solely reading the subject of the poem—the mouse—as an analogy for the human condition perpetuates a reading in which Burns’s attention to the world “outside” is supplanted by the imaginative power of a poetic vocation—a power that his speakers demonstrate to be best employed in helping communities publically appear.

<sup>109</sup> Perkins 12; McGuirk 7.

“As soon as we see other seers, we no longer have before us only the look without a pupil, the plate glass of the things with that feeble reflection, that phantom of ourselves...henceforth, through other eyes we are for ourselves fully visible...”

- Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The Intertwining—The Chiasm”

“That the Corresponding Society of the Pickwick Club is hereby constituted...and that they be requested to forward...accounts of their journeys and investigations, of their observations of character and manners, and of the whole of their adventures, together with all tales and papers to which local scenery or associations may give rise...”

- Charles Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*

## Epilogue

In this project, I have explored Romantic character as a new way of thinking about the importance of *appearance*: how might it outstrip expectations—challenge inherited assumptions about what is real, or valuable? Appearances, and especially how we appear to each other, are the currency of everyday life; to ignore this is to invite the same lack of awareness, the same rejection of self and others as singular “vision,” that incites the homogeneity of Blake’s Eternals, the myopism of Scott’s Redgauntlet, and the cyclical behavior structuring Arendt’s notion of the static society. The characters in this project register appearance as another way of seeing—not by miraculously accessing an objective, neutral stance, but by inhabiting a viewpoint whose partiality requires, as its foil, the distinct perspective of the other.

The mutual perception of nineteenth-century characters is structured, then, by a phenomenological approach to the world: a seeing that takes in appearance as the corollary to its own. Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes this mode of being as a “reversibility,” an experience in which “to see” is “to be seen,” and vice versa. As a “visible” among visibles, we encounter in appearance a reciprocal folding back: a recognition of the same, shaping horizon within which we all emerge. Rather than marking a stifling unity or subsuming oneness, however, this shared media—Merleau-Ponty refers to it as “flesh”—sustains a distance that more sharply

distinguishes perceiver and perceived. To see is to be “turned inside out”: to recognize that you are not simply being seen in return, but that this perception is just as constitutive of your being as your vision is constitutive of another’s. As a result, one is simultaneously imbricated with the outside, the surrounding milieu, even as this imbrication constitutes the vision or viewpoint that distances you from this outside.<sup>110</sup>

The characters I track generate this perceptual dynamic as social, rather than dialogic. They practice an “inside-outness” that inverts the “boomerang” effect by which—in Merleau-Ponty’s formulation—the self is cast out and reeled back in. Instead, their mutual perception comprises an “outside-inness,” or a process by which their assembly from public categories continues to mingle with and reassemble the appearances and viewpoints of others. In this brief concluding segment, I turn to Dickens’s earliest novel, *Pickwick Papers* (1837), as exemplary of the public phenomenology towards which this theory of character points. Consider the remarkable outside-inness of the “immortal Pickwick,” eponymous founder and General Chairman of the Pickwick Club (23):

What a study for an artist did that exciting scene present! The eloquent Pickwick, with one hand gracefully concealed behind his coat-tails and the other waving in air to assist his glowing declamation; his elevated position revealing those tights and gaiters which, had they clothed an ordinary man, might have passed without observation, but which when Pickwick clothed them—if we may use the expression—inspired voluntary awe and respect... (25)

The “exciting scene” displayed before us is of such (ostensible) intrigue as to arrest our studious attention—commanding, even, artistic interpretation, as the narrator himself shows by resorting to an “expression” for which he must beg pardon. Strangely, however, the spectacle detains

through deflection: the “tights and gaiters...which inspired voluntary awe” are not, of themselves, spectacular. Rather, their demands upon our respectful “observation” are conditioned by their addition to Pickwick’s person—delimited to those moments “when Pickwick clothe[s] them.” The vivacity of their appearance, then, involves our foreknowledge that Pickwick is not an “ordinary man.” At the same time, the grammatical inversion that divests Pickwick’s tights and gaiters of their expected, typical role—their active clothing of persons—grants them new singularity: first, by suggesting momentary and, so, irreducible appearances; and, in contrast, by reconfiguring them as articles whose permanence counters the vicissitudes of time—those circumstances “when Pickwick clothed them.” Nondescript as they are, Pickwick’s tights and gaiters overwhelm the scene, extending beyond its edges with an appearance at once bland, typical, and—as we, the entertained readers, can attest—distinctly remarkable.

The singularity of Pickwick’s tights and gaiters derives from the public nature of their appearance—or, more specifically, they are refabricated from the known category of “Pickwick” himself. “A casual observer,” our introductory image of Pickwick begins, “might possibly have remarked nothing extraordinary in the bald head and circular spectacles...[but] to those who knew that the gigantic brain of Pickwick was working beneath that forehead, and that the beaming eyes of Pickwick were twinkling behind those glasses, the sight was indeed an interesting one” (25). Essentially, even hyperbolically, bland, Pickwick’s typical features—his bald head and spectacles—only stimulate something more than “casual” notice in an observer already aware of his achievements; a prior impression of Pickwick’s particularity conditions our ability to craft the scene as “an interesting one.” And yet, Pickwick becomes “interesting,” and a few lines later, “much more interesting,” through his identification as a type native to the *present* public space. He emerges with the scene, or as an immediate appearance dependent upon the

space of viewing constructed by the narrative—specifically by the passage’s dramatic staging of observation. The narrator, the “editor of these papers,” initiates his narrative by providing excerpts from an “entry in the Transactions of the Pickwick Club.” He becomes so invested in the experience of the spectacle, however, that he quickly abandons direct quotation in favor of paraphrase:

A casual observer, adds the secretary, to whose notes we are indebted for the following account—a casual observer might possibly have remarked nothing extraordinary in the bald head and circular spectacles which were intently turned towards his (the secretary’s) face during the reading of the above resolutions. (25).

More than summary, the narrator seems, at first, to usurp the perspective of the secretary: he moves from staging the latter’s voice (“adds the secretary”) to the appropriation of his vantage point, marking, from the secretary’s place, the observations of the hypothetical, casual observer. Almost immediately, however, the narrator is brusquely extracted from this cozy inner circle of perception by the parenthetical reference differentiating the secretary’s face from that of the casual observer and, simultaneously, reminding us that the secretary, not the narrator, is the recipient of Pickwick’s gaze. The narrator’s increased involvement in the scene moves *away* from a simple habitation of viewpoint—a single-dimensional seeing better accomplished by his initial use of direct quotation—to a perch on the periphery: a seeing of another’s seeing. Even our primary observer, the secretary, engages in this roundabout perception: rather than describing the scene directly from his own perspective, he invokes a hypothetical observer who expands the stage of viewing by taking in both himself and Pickwick.

The secretary’s imagined observer conditions more than an enhanced sense of spatial dimensionality. The ignorance of this fictional onlooker provides the secretary with an excuse to

provide the categories through which Pickwick can shine most clearly. As if turning to whisper in the ear of his confused creation, the secretary—as paraphrased by the narrator—explains that

...to those who knew that the gigantic brain of Pickwick was working beneath that forehead, and that the beaming eyes of Pickwick were twinkling behind those glasses, the sight was indeed an interesting one. There sat the man who had traced to their source the mighty ponds of Hampstead and agitated the scientific world with his Theory of Tittlebats, as calm and unmoved as the deep waters of the one on a frosty day or as a solitary specimen of the other in the inmost recesses of an earthen jar. (25)

Pickwick's eminence arises alongside the awareness of his intellectual achievements within a specific community; indeed, the notes, or “resolutions,” which open the chapter quote the Club's “unqualified approval” in having just heard the “paper communicated by Samuel Pickwick, Esq., G.C.M.P.C., entitled, ‘Speculations on the Source of the Hampstead Ponds, with Some Observations on the Theory of Tittlebats.’” This awareness does more than alter the opinion of an observer by assuring him of Pickwick's unseen but “gigantic brain”; instead, as anticipated by the surfacing of the secretary's sight from “beneath” Pickwick's forehead to the “twinkling” of his eyes, Pickwick's appearance itself is altered, and he himself becomes an “interesting sight.”

Pickwick's transformation from a mundane to a noteworthy appearance continues with the movement of the secretary from a position of awareness, among “those who knew,” of Pickwick's “Speculations” and “Observations” to his coopting of this very viewpoint: he points out Pickwick from afar (“there sat the man”) by, paradoxically, situating himself behind the latter's spectacles and bringing into view the “mighty ponds” and “specimen[s]” they had discovered. And yet, like the narrator, the secretary also sustains his external stance; that is, he

sees Pickwick's seeing rather than simply seeing *as* Pickwick. His viewpoint remains in force with his creative improvisation on the categories of discourse—ponds and tittlebats—that Pickwick has added to the club's "scientific" knowledge: rather than abstractly summarizing Pickwick's findings, he colors each observation—the "deep waters" of the one on a "frosty day," and a "solitary specimen" of the other—as if he were capturing the latter's discoveries in action.

The force of this figuration—the vivid detail in which he sees what Pickwick saw—creates a momentum in which the secretary might seem to swing between his own viewpoint and Pickwick's. Rather than revealing an oscillation or ambiguity of stance, however, this doubled vision reveals a perception that delineates another's—but from the outside. The secretary derives his seeing of Pickwick's seeing from the latter's actual, present appearance: Pickwick's "calm and unmoved" countenance supplies the grist for perceiving his viewpoint in both vivid and imaginative detail. And yet, as suggested by the ordering of the secretary's analogy, in which Pickwick is compared to a pond and a tittlebat, rather than vice versa, the categories of Pickwick's discourse also precede and ground the secretary's observation of this appearance. Gazing at each other from across the room—Pickwick's head turned towards the secretary, and the secretary intercepting the beaming of his eyes—they generate a dimensionality in which to see from another's point-of-view is the obverse of a public space: the invocation of the "casual observer" as an outside audience conditions the secretary's recreation of Pickwick's unremarkable exterior as remarkable. Catering to the ignorance of this imagined audience, the secretary recasts Pickwick by inverting him, plunging from his appearance into his viewpoint and back again, and so improvising on Pickwick's own categories of perception in order to remake him as a new appearance. Seeing Pickwick's seeing from his own, external viewpoint, the secretary presents these observations of Pickwick's to his imagined viewers as appearance.

The secretary's perception works less like straightforward inversion, then, and more like torsion, revealing singularity as a kind of Möbius strip. Rather than turning him inside-out, the secretary remakes Pickwick from the outside: he rediscovers Pickwick as a visible type, but as a type that is both endemic to and generative of a unique, delimited context. This simultaneity of appearance and public space, of typicality and particularity, becomes evident in the lines directly following the secretary's double seeing of Pickwick and Pickwick's observations:

And how much more interesting did the spectacle become when, starting into full life and animation, as a simultaneous call for "Pickwick" burst from his followers, that illustrious man slowly mounted into the Windsor chair, on which he had been previously seated, and addressed the club himself had founded. What a study for an artist did that exciting scene present! (23)

"Starting" up from stillness just as his audience "bursts" out of silence, Pickwick emerges not in response to, nor in anticipation of, his audience, but in synchrony with their audible recognition. This simultaneity is conveyed by a sentence that manages to both collapse and extend time. Suddenly "starting into full life and animation," Pickwick's start is just as suddenly stopped by the dependent clause immediately subsequent, in which our senses are redirected from Pickwick's animation to the excitement of his followers. Pickwick "starts" again in the subsequent clause, but his movement has slowed—as if the intervening syntax has paused his "full life and animation" in order to unfold it. Not only is Pickwick's action—mounting his chair—described as slow, but the sentence becomes cluttered with details and prepositional phrases that further hinder the initial rush of action in order to describe. This clutter originates in the secretary's weird combination of focus and distraction, as if his perception pulls together distinct elements scattered across space and time. Slightly shifting his gaze from Pickwick's

laborious climb, the secretary refocuses on the chair he mounts, pausing to remark on its type (a Windsor); this pause further stalls the action with the secretary's backwards foray into history: his seemingly insignificant reminder that Pickwick had previously been sitting on the Windsor. Even the completion of Pickwick's movement, his securing of and address from the chair, is flung backwards on itself by a reflexive grammar. Eliding the "he" that is understood to be the subject of the verb "founded," the secretary instead retains and relies upon the emphatic (but unnecessary) pronoun "himself," and then ends the sentence with a clause that, again, extricates us from the immediate action with "historical" explication.

The tide-like rhythms of the sentence—the slight movement backwards and forward in time, the minute sidestepping in space—explicitly foreground the formative reciprocity between perceiver (Pickwick's followers) and perceived (Pickwick). Pickwick's address to an audience he has himself created seems strangely reflexive, at least as foregrounded by the structure and content of the sentence. And yet, if the public context for Pickwick's speaking and appearance can be traced to "himself," the substitution of this object pronoun for the subject pronoun subtly reverses this relationship with the reminder that he is still also the object, the phenomenon invoked, by this public. This interdependence emerges with the modifiers that first interrupt the sentence's main action. The reduced relative clause describing Pickwick ("starting into full life and animation") juxtaposes the descriptive clause introducing his audience ("as a...call...burst from his followers"), and together they separate the independent clause from the main dependent clause, chopping the sentence in half after the subordinating conjunction "when." Thus leveled and coordinated in the same syntactical role and position, the simultaneity of Pickwick's emergence and his audience's invocation suggests an equal hand in—and subordination to—the creation of the "spectacle" that is the subject of the sentence.

The “scene” that grows more and more “exciting,” then, is not the sight of Pickwick himself, but the culmination—the “spectacle”—knit together by this back and forth between perceivers and perceived, public and phenomenon. Rather than appearing through a dialogic, mutual perception between Pickwick and his followers, or between Pickwick and the secretary, however, these appearances emerge through their constant re-triangulation; the scene occurs through its construction as a public space, or a space in which perspectives accumulate as “spectacle”: “the specially prepared or arranged display of a more or less public nature...forming an impressive or interesting show or entertainment for those viewing it” (OED). This “display” is “arranged,” most obviously, by the secretary—a fact foregrounded by the narrator’s toggling between paraphrasing and directly quoting the latter—but it is also arranged by Pickwick and his Pickwickians, each party taking up, from their own viewpoint and from a distance, the perspective of the other and using it to recast appearance.

The spectacle of the Pickwick club, then, arises not from the literary triangulation of narrator, reader, and fictive events, but *within* the universe of the novel itself. As suggested by the title and framing of these collected stories, *Pickwick Papers*, the cast emerge through their reconstruction as a type—the Pickwickian—that is also particular, specific to a public in which perceptions shine through new categories. These categories arise from the creative interaction of perceivers who improvise upon each other’s seeing. If the secretary uses his perception of Pickwick’s observations to color in the scene at hand, he does so in light of the gaze of his fellow Pickwickians, who support and justify the club’s discursive categories, as well as beneath the inquiring eye of the casual observer, whose lack of familiarity keeps in view the particularity of these categories. These shifting horizons, obversely, refract appearances *in* character: idiosyncratic persons and events that are simultaneously particular and typical.

This bouncing proliferation of gazes culminates in the debate, directly quoted from the secretary's notes, which ends the meeting of the Pickwick Club, and which exemplifies the social phenomenology engendered by such a public space. Having gained his chair, Pickwick gives a rousing speech about the honor incurred by being allowed to form, with a small group of loyal companions, the Corresponding Society of the Pickwick Club; he expounds, finally, upon the dangers that will likely beset their travels: the “unsettled” “minds of coachmen,” the upsetting of stagecoaches, the bolting of horses, the overturning of boats, and the bursting of boilers. Defied, amongst the cheering, by an anonymous ““No,”” Pickwick demands that the dissenting Pickwickian—a “haberdasher” likely “smarting under the censure which had been heaped upon his own feeble attempts at rivalry”—come forth, at which point a Mr. Blotton rises to condemn the “false and scurrilous accusation,” and to name the “hon. gent....a humbug.” (PP 27) The verbal scuffling and general uproar is settled when the presiding Chairman demands to know whether Blotton had used the expression “in a common sense”:

‘Mr. Blotton had no hesitation in saying that he had not—he had used the word in its Pickwickian sense (Hear, hear.) He was bound to acknowledge that, personally, he entertained the highest regard and esteem for the honourable gentleman; he had merely considered him a humbug in a Pickwickian point of view. (Hear, hear.)

Mr. Pickwick felt much gratified by the fair, candid and full explanation of his honourable friend. He begged it to be at once understood that his own observations had been merely intended to bear a Pickwickian construction.

(Cheers.)’ PP 27-28

This redefinition of words—and, notably, words used to describe the *characters* of others—generates the shared categories that refract new appearances by virtue of arising within a public but specific space. Falling somewhere between “the common sense” of the outside world and personal perspective, the discursive terms engaged by Pickwick and his opponent constitute a “Pickwickian point of view”: a point-of-view that encompasses and supports mutual comprehension while also activating the distinct positions of individuals. The above conflict and its harmonious conclusion map out this movement between perceivers and public by illustrating the dissolution of “particular” and “type” that occurs within such a space. If Pickwick is a “humbug” and Blotson is a “haberdasher,” these appearances only surface through their dialogue: a conversation undergirded, on the one hand, by the clashing of their particular observations and personal traits, and on the other, by the structure of the club. The latter—the “Pickwickian construction”—is made explicit by the call-and-response pattern required by a formal meeting, an “arranged display” whose design as public spectacle is foregrounded by the secretary’s formal note-keeping.

This opening gambit—the “first ray of light which illumines the gloom, and converts into a dazzling brilliancy that obscures in which the earlier history of the public career of the immortal Pickwick would appear to be involved”—elicits a narrative less concerned with a protagonist or even a sequence of events than with a mode of viewing *and* manifesting the world (23). That the two things cannot be separated is affectionately and humorously noted with the opening of chapter two, in which “...Mr. Samuel Pickwick burst like another sun from his slumbers, threw open his chamber window, and looked out upon the world beneath” (28). The “first ray of light” provided by the narrator through his “perusal of the...Transactions of the Pickwick Club” is eclipsed by the dawn, the horizon he discovers, when he dispels the

“obscurity” of the Pickwickian point-of-view. That the “world beneath” is merely Goswell Street, and that Pickwick’s sun has been preceded by “[t]hat punctual servant of all work,” the actual sun (28), is of little consequence; as evidenced by the bumbling misadventures of the Pickwickian league of observers, the tales of their “observations” are valuable for something other than philosophical insight. Rather, their portability as a type—the Pickwickian—together with their uncategorizable distinctness—as Pickwickians—render them catalysts, seers whose seeing casts into relief a variety of public spaces.

This novel, then, takes to its pole the stakes of this project. Presenting singular yet publicly constructed appearances, the Pickwickians not only craft each other, but bring new horizons of perception into existence. They do so, too, without offering ends beyond themselves; that is, there are arguably no moral or philosophical insights to be gained from the perusal of their absurd shenanigans; neither, however, are they aesthetic ends in themselves. Rather, it is as agents of *ex-sight* that they become significant: they exercise a seeing profound in that it engages the seeing of others, and that consequently illuminates the human yet unwilling delimitation of the world around us.

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<sup>110</sup> This discussion centers on Merleau-Ponty’s essay, “The Intertwining—The Chiasm,” in *The Visible and the Invisible*, edited by Claude Lefort, translated by Alphonso Lingis, Northwestern UP 1968.

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