On View: Museum Culture in the Victorian Novel

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DEDICATION

Para ti
mi tierra natal
Rancho Santa María de los Peñasquitos
hay una parte de ti
en cada palabra que escribo

Aqui y siempre
escribo
con la tierra de mi patria
incrustada debajo de mis uñas

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TEXT ABBREVIATIONS

CHARLOTTE BRONTË

L *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends*

V *Villette*

CHARLES DICKENS

BH *Bleak House*

L *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*

GEORGE ELIOT

M *Middlemarch*

MF *The Mill on the Floss*

HENRY JAMES

A *The American*

GB *The Golden Bowl*

SP *The Spoils of Poynton*

"W" "In Warwickshire"

"WC" "The Wallace Collection in Bethnal Green"

INTRODUCTION

Ordinary Subjects / Extraordinary Objects

When Henry James's *The American* (1876-77) opens at the Louvre Museum in Paris, readers find themselves, perhaps a bit to their surprise, gazing not upon a remarkable work of art, though one is present, but upon a curious specimen of a museum visitor. Slumped down without his hat in front of what is presumably Bartolomé Esteban Murillo's esteemed *Virgin of the Immaculate Conception* (c. 1670),[1] Christopher Newman, an American tourist in France, appears at odds with the masterpieces that surround him; that is, he seems extraordinarily ordinary.[2] On view in the center of the Salon Carré, Newman's overheated body is stretched out almost at full

[1] The preface to the fourth edition of Baedeker's *Paris and its Environs, with Routes to London and Paris, and from Paris to the Rhine and Switzerland: Handbook for Travellers* (1874) states that asterisks are used throughout the text as markers of commendation (viii). Murillo's *Conception of the Virgin* is marked with three asterisks, indicating that it was held in extremely high esteem in the Victorian period. Interestingly, Leonardo da Vinci's *Portrait of Mona Lisa* is marked with only one asterisk.

[2] The Salon Carré, the exhibition space in which James's scene is set, was said to contain "the gems of every school in the gallery" (Baedeker, *Paris and its Environs*... 97). It boasted works by da Vinci, Raphael, Titian, Rubens, van Dyck, and Rembrant, among many others (Baedeker, *Paris and its Environs*... 97-99).

length, a conspicuous, sudoriferous object in the otherwise disembodied exhibition space. With his museum-going accoutrements, a Baedeker travel guide and an opera glass, carelessly "flung down beside him" on the "commodious ottoman" upon which he reclines (James, *A* 17), Newman experiences more enjoyment from his recumbent posture than the extraordinary painting in front of him. In fact, though he stares at Murillo's Madonna, Newman does not seem to really *see* it, and therefore neither do James's readers. In lieu of a thick description of this extraordinary representation of one of the most extraordinary individuals in the history of Western civilization, James paints a detailed portrait of an ordinary American and his handful of "damning fault[s]" (*A* 19). With Newman's weaknesses on view in one of the most iconic museums in the world, James's scene is not only a dramatization of inappropriate museum-going behavior, but also a portrait of the extraordinary ordinariness that the Victorian realist novel takes as its defining focus. As such, the scene serves as the point of departure for this dissertation, in which I argue that novels written in what I call the "Age of the Museum" (c. 1830-1900) dramatize the struggle to come to terms with human ordinariness most poignantly in scenes of encounter between ordinary subjects[3] and extraordinary objects.[4]

The opening scene of *The American* may seem familiar to readers, for scenes of encounter between ordinary subjects and extraordinary objects recur in Victorian fiction. Many

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[3] I understand the ordinary subjects of realism as characters that possess moderate amounts of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital.

[4] In *Nature's Museums: Victorian Science and the Architecture of Display* (1999), Yanni argues that whereas earlier naturalists collected curious or monstrous—that is, extraordinary—specimens, Victorian naturalists collected typical or representative—that is, ordinary—specimens (14). However, this dissertation is concerned not with natural history collections, but with fine and decorative art collections. It therefore operates under the assumption that the objects selected for exhibition and preservation in museums and museal spaces in the Victorian period were characterized by extraordinariness; stated otherwise, they were valued and collected for a number of reasons, such as their age, rarity, condition, beauty, and capacity to communicate narratives and elicit emotions.

of these scenes are set in museums, architectural testaments to the tension between sameness and difference, ordinariness and extraordinariness. One such scene occurs in chapter 19 of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-72). Here, the museum emerges as a site of juxtaposition as well as comparison. When the chapter opens at the Vatican Museums in Rome, readers encounter not the celebrated *Belvedere Torso* (c. 100-1 BCE),[5] but Will Ladislaw, a disinherited, unemployed itinerant with no romantic prospects, with his back turned toward the sculpture. The ordinariness that Ladislaw embodies stands in stark contrast to the extraordinariness of the object on view. However, as the scene evolves, the narrative mode transitions from juxtapositional to comparative. Readers encounter a dispirited Dorothea Casaubon positioned in a disinterested stance near the famed *Ariadne* (n.d.). Similar to Ladislaw, Dorothea trains her vision not on the sculpture, but "on a streak of sunlight which fell across the floor" (Eliot, *M* 177). Eliot's insistence on the near invisibility of the objects on view in the museum is impossible to overlook, and it invites readers to consider the relationship between museum visitors and museum objects. Adolf Naumann draws attention to the relationship between Dorothea and *Ariadne*: "What do you think of that for a fine bit of antithesis?" he asks Ladislaw. "There lies antique beauty, not corpse-like even in death, but arrested in the complete contentment of its sensuous perfection: and there stands beauty in its breathing life, with the consciousness of Christian centuries in its bosom" (Eliot, *M* 177). Here, Eliot's scene takes a decisive turn toward explicit comparison. Despite their differences, Dorothea and *Ariadne* both embody extraordinariness; their relationship is thus far less antithetical than that between Ladislaw and

[5] The fourth edition of Baedeker's *Italy. Handbook for Travellers. Second Part: Central Italy and Rome* (1875) states that asterisks are used throughout the text as markers of commendation (xii). The Museo Pio-Clementino is marked with two asterisks and is described as "the real nucleus of the Vatican collection, containing a number of the most celebrated antiques" (262). Two of these esteemed objects are the *Torso of Hercules* and the *Sleeping Ariadne*, both of which are marked with one asterisk.

the *Belvedere Torso*. Whereas Eliot's juxtaposition of Ladislaw and the *Belvedere Torso* increases the sense of difference between the museum visitor and the museum object, her comparison of Dorothea and *Ariadne* enhances their sense of sameness. Juxtaposition and comparison thus operate in tandem in Eliot's scene to connect ordinary subjects and extraordinary objects across domains of sameness and difference.

Analyzing juxtapositional and comparative scenes such as James's and Eliot's, I argue in this dissertation that to juxtapose ordinary subjects and extraordinary objects is to elicit comparisons of them. As Mary N. Layoun explains, comparison can be understood as discernment between that which is brought together; as such, it is a response to the juxtaposition of difference (211, 215). To reverse the syntax of this notion, juxtaposition *invites* comparison. Of course, animate subjects and inanimate objects are as dissimilar as apples and oranges. But as Susan Stanford Friedman argues, apples and oranges can in fact be compared, for they share the properties of fruit: "The concept of fruitness depends upon a comparison of what apples and oranges have and do not have in common" (37). Similarly, the ordinary subjects and extraordinary objects under examination in this study share a connection to the museum, a space founded upon the notion of discernment. The concept of museum culture depends upon comparisons of what museum visitors do and do not have in common, what museum objects do and do not have in common, and what museum visitors and museum objects do and do not have in common. As a network of relations across domains of sameness and difference, museum culture necessitates comparative acts.

The comparative acts of museum culture are rooted in the Victorian period, for as Layoun argues, comparison itself is anchored to modernity:

> The massive movements and dislocations of peoples in the modern period, the radical juxtaposition—in metropolitan cities or in colonial centers, for example—of different peoples and ideas and things that were hitherto not colliding with one another in quite the same close fashion, raise an explicitly *modern* question of comparison. What is to be made of the often stark juxtaposition of disparate entities made...comparable? (212, original emphasis)

The voices of Victorian museum culture took up this question with fervor, debating what was to be thought of and done about the juxtaposition and collision of different classes of persons and objects in museums and museal spaces.[6] Dependent upon comparative acts, classification itself became the subject of heated debate, even within individuals. "[O]f all scientific processes," Henry Mayhew wrote in *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851-52), "the classification of the various phenomena, in connection with a given subject, is perhaps the most important; indeed, if we consider that the function of cognition is essentially *discriminative*, it is evident, that without distinguishing between one object and another, there can be no knowledge, nor, indeed any perception" (452, original emphasis). The theoretical importance of classification was axiomatic; however, in practice, classification posed a number of problems. "It is no easy matter...to classify," Mayhew wrote; "[t]o arrange...several varieties...into 'orders', and to group...manifold species...under a few comprehensive genera—so that the mind may grasp the whole at one effort—is a task of a most perplexing character" (452).

Nevertheless, most Victorians maintained that the task of classification must be undertaken to minimize disorder in both the material and the social world. To help him classify

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[6] The word "museal" is often associated with Adorno, who explains in "Valéry Proust Museum" (1953) that in German, the word has a negative connotation (175). However, in this dissertation, I use the word as a neutral adjective to mean museum-like.

varieties of laborers, Mayhew sought a guide in the Great Exhibition of 1851, an exigence that helped solidify the conceptualization of the museum as the "Classifying House" (P. Whitehead 50).[7] However, classification proved to be "the great stumbling block" of the Exhibition (Mayhew 453). The classificatory system divided objects into four categories: Raw Materials, Machinery, Manufactures, and Fine Arts. According to Mayhew, the result of this coarse classification scheme was an "unscientific hotch-potch" of items (456); for instance, "[g]eological maps,...medicinal tinctures,...preserved meats, portable soups, [and] glue" coexisted under the category of Raw Materials (455). Voicing a common opinion, Mayhew expressed his dissatisfaction with the Exhibition's classificatory system in no uncertain terms: "there is a jumbling and a bungling throughout the whole arrangement" (456).

Although the Great Exhibition's classification scheme lacked fine distinctions, the Crystal Palace was a monument (however temporary) to the Victorian impulse to juxtapose, compare, and classify not only objects, but also subjects. To draw upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Victorians routinely anticipated their own classification by others and classified themselves by materially and symbolically appropriating objects, behaviors, and characteristics that were themselves classified as dignified or indecorous, refined or uncouth, cultured or unsophisticated (*Distinction* 482). As an institutionalized system of classification, the Crystal Palace made explicit the tacit work of the social classificatory system (Bourdieu, *Distinction* 480).

Moreover, the Great Exhibition attested to the Victorian tendency to construct narratives about the relationships between entities in both the material and the social world. In her

[7] To paint a vivid picture of Victorian museum culture in this dissertation, I sometimes refer to events, institutions, and spaces that share some of the museum's objectives; examples include the Great Exhibition of 1851, the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857, the Royal Academy of Arts, and the British Museum Reading Room.

examination of art criticism written in response to the Exhibition, Rachel Teukolsky contends that the quadripartite classificatory system into which objects were divided encoded a narrative of how fine arts epitomized Western advancement (86). Objects occupied positions on a spectrum from most crude to most polished; raw materials anchored one end of the spectrum, fine arts the other (Teukolsky 86). Recast in the terms of this dissertation, the objects on view at the Exhibition were organized in accordance with their degree of ordinariness or extraordinariness. But as Teukolsky intimates, the spectrum on which objects were positioned could not be envisioned as a horizontal axis. Because "art objects occupied the topmost position in the Exhibition's taxonomy of goods" (Teukolsky 87), the spectrum was conceptualized as a vertical axis. At the apex stood classical Greek sculpture, which exuded extraordinariness in its delicate combination of "scientific analysis of the human body" and "abstracted, unreal smoothness proper to the representation of divinity" (Teukolsky 91). As Teukolsky explains, Grecian sculpture crowned the Exhibition's classification scheme because "it epitomized the mixture of scientific, philosophical, and artistic thought which Victorians desired to emulate" (91). Understood in the context of the Exhibition's classificatory system, the classical Greek sculptures that anchor Eliot's Vatican Museums scene epitomize extraordinariness and gesture toward Eliot's characters' desire to symbolically appropriate the sculptures' "distinctive value" (Bourdieu, *Distinction* 270). The desire to emulate the extraordinariness of museum objects and be perceived as extraordinary in the social sphere is the foundation upon which I draw comparisons between animate subjects and inanimate objects in this dissertation.

I do not wish to suggest that all characters in Victorian fiction aspire to extraordinariness; instead, I argue that most characters are ambivalent toward it. On the one hand, characters at times wish to avoid ordinariness at all costs due to the word's associations with mundane, routine

actions and concepts such as mediocrity, invisibility, and failure (Luxmoore 13, 16). On the other hand, characters are sometimes desperate to be like their peers, to be accepted, to be a little less visible. This ambivalence is evident in Charlotte Brontë's character Lucy Snowe, who resents her own ordinariness yet derives pleasure from it. In chapter 10 of *Villette* (1853), Lucy narrates a representative encounter between herself and Dr. John Graham Bretton: "He laid himself open to my observation, according to my presence in the room just that degree of notice and consequence a person of my exterior habitually expects: that is to say, about what is given to unobtrusive articles of furniture, chairs of ordinary joiner's work, and carpets of no striking pattern" (Brontë 98). Here, Lucy's frustration with her own ordinariness is clear; as she compares herself to overlooked decorative art objects, she indicates that she yearns to be seen. However, Lucy's near invisibility enables her to gaze upon Dr. John and ponder the attractive complexities of his character. "Often," Lucy narrates, "while waiting for madame, he would muse, smile, watch, or listen like a man who thinks himself alone. I, meantime, was free to puzzle over his countenance and movements" (Brontë, *V* 98). To a woman in love with a man who well outranks her in the social sphere, ordinariness can be advantageous.

Nevertheless, the desire to acquire a measure of extraordinariness is apparent in most of the characters under consideration in this dissertation, and historical evidence garnered from the literature, journalism, and art of Victorian museum culture intimates that this desire existed in actual Victorians as well. I do not wish to suggest that characters *are* humans, but as Mieke Bal argues in *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (1985), characters *resemble* humans (80). Like humans, characters often question their own ordinariness as they attempt to better understand the social sphere and their places in it.

Yet doing so is no simple task, for as Bourdieu argues in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979), the social world is a dynamic "network of oppositions" between broad categories such as unique and common, fine and coarse, elegant and crude, and brilliant and dull (468). Anchored to the fundamental opposition between the "élite" culture of "the dominant" and the "mass" culture of "the dominated," the social world is comprised of "fields organized around polar positions" (Bourdieu, *Distinction* 468, 469). As individuals position themselves and are positioned in these fields in accordance with their tastes and practices, the social world emerges as a matrix through which individuals move in their "pursuit of distinction" (Bourdieu, *Distinction* 226).

Building upon Bourdieu, I argue that Brontë, Dickens, Eliot, and James track their characters' movements through a social matrix in which subjects, objects, and practices are distinguished from one another through acts of distinction. Carried out through such practices as visual inspection of subjects and haptic interaction with objects, minute acts of distinction enable individuals to classify subjects, objects, and practices into two broad categories: ordinary and extraordinary. Part of Bourdieu's "network of oppositions" (*Distinction* 468), these categories exist in oppositional relation to one another. All that is emplaced outside the domain of ordinariness exists in the domain of extraordinariness. Yet these domains are unstable, ever in flux as social trends and tastes change, dictating adjustments to acts of distinction. Ordinariness and extraordinariness thus emerge as variable social constructs, their meanings context-contingent. While ordinary can be understood as common, standard, usual, conventional, or representative, extraordinary, on the one hand, can mean unique, rare, novel, remarkable, or exceptional, and, on the other hand, ubiquitous, inferior, substandard, monstrous, or grotesque. With both a positive and a negative connotation, extraordinariness coexists with ordinariness not

in a binary, but in a balanced ternary.[8] Within this tripartite system of distinction, domains dynamically engage with one another. The domain of ordinariness interplays with both the domain of positive extraordinariness and its inverse, the domain of negative extraordinariness, when acts of distinction alter the perception of a subject, object, or practice. When viewed from a distance, a common teacup, for instance, can appear exceptional due to its unusual embellishment or innovative design. When viewed up close, however, the same teacup can appear substandard due a pinpoint nick or a hairline crack. The teacup's categorization depends upon the act of distinction used to discriminate between comparable objects.

Of course, acts of distinction depend upon the individual enacting them. To a decorative art connoisseur, a teacup can appear representative of a class of tea wares, an artisan's oeuvre, a time period, a location, a socioeconomic status, a social movement, a trend in taste, or perhaps even an entire culture. Yet for these exact reasons, the same teacup can appear to an amateur collector to be a marker of distinction. Moreover, a teacup that a decorative art connoisseur dismisses as representative can swell with distinctive value when an amateur collector deems it representative of a particular aspect of her life or identity. An object's distinction thus depends upon one's psychic distance from it.

Additionally, an object's distinctive value depends upon when it is evaluated. When a collector assesses a nicked teacup up for auction, the object may appear flawed and therefore of limited collectible value. Yet the same collector may endow the teacup with sentimental value if the nick occurs after years of use. Distinction is thus an expression of the intersection of a subject's and an object's biographies.

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[8] Useful in comparison logic, ternaries are positional systems comprised of three terms. Whereas unbalanced ternaries can be expressed with the numbers 0, 1, and 2, balanced ternaries can be expressed with the numbers -1, 0, and 1.

The acts of distinction I discuss in this study occur in museums and museal spaces. As characters encounter objects deemed extraordinary—to a culture, to a community, or to them—they adopt and discard what Bourdieu refers to as "strategies of distinction" (*Distinction* 66). In an attempt to confer distinction upon themselves, individuals enact practices that the dominant classes consider distinguished. For instance, characters visit museums and museal spaces, scrutinize subjects and objects on view, formulate and express art critical opinions, discuss their museum visits with others, and collect, organize, exhibit, and preserve what they perceive to be extraordinary objects. By adopting these strategies of distinction, individuals attempt to symbolically and materially cultivate distinction. Yet these strategies do not remain static. Over time and with practice, they become routine social performances. The pursuit of distinction thus necessitates adaptation; the dominated classes must reject stale strategies and embrace novel ones. Moreover, they must remain cognizant of the ever-fluctuating boundaries between the domains of distinction.

I argue, then, that characters classify themselves and are classified by others in accordance with their perceived degree of distinction at any given moment. As they calibrate and recalibrate their distinctive value, individuals struggle to accept the fact that they are at times ordinary and at other times extraordinary. Stated otherwise, characters labor to understand that they occupy an intermediary space in the social world.[9]

The novels in question in this dissertation are about coming to terms with ordinariness—or at least "constructing a story about ordinariness with which [one] can bear to live" (Luxmoore 98). Of course, the stories that people tell themselves about their own ordinariness invariably

[9] To borrow the words of Foucault in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1970), characters are "intermediate productions" similar to "the polyp between the animal and the vegetable, the flying squirrel between the bird and the quadruped, [and] the monkey between the quadruped and man" (147).

involve other people; that is, people constantly measure themselves against others (Luxmoore 44). However, the Victorian realist novel at times seems to be more interested in how people measure themselves against objects. Certainly, characters frequently compare themselves to others; one has only to think of the Dodson sisters' continual criticism of one another's actions and emotions. Yet I argue that the novel dramatizes the struggle to come to terms with human ordinariness most powerfully in scenes of encounter between ordinary subjects and extraordinary objects. In these scenes, the novel engages in a cultural conversation about sameness and difference and represents the basic human desire to achieve a balance between the two. As they juxtapose ordinary subjects and extraordinary objects in museums and museal spaces, novelists invite readers to calibrate characters' metaphorical value in relation to a constant: the extraordinariness of the museum object.

However, to borrow the words of Mayhew, this can be "a task of a most perplexing character" (452), for fictional objects are just as unstable as fictional subjects. Ordinary things such as tea wares and tablecloths transform into extraordinary objects when collected, and extraordinary objects such as crystal bowls devolve into worthless things when exposed as flawed. Like subjects, objects move between domains of distinction, defying classification. How, then, can subjects measure themselves against objects when both subjects and objects are characterized by instability? To investigate this question, I examine Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852-53), George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), and key scenes from Henry James's fiction. Ultimately, I argue that scenes of encounter between ordinary subjects and extraordinary objects invite comparative acts and attest to what appears to have been a deep-seated cultural anxiety about the ordinariness of the self in the Victorian period.

The comparative acts between ordinary subjects and extraordinary objects that I propose in this study raise several important questions. How does a comparative project anchored to Victorian museum culture intervene in literature's subject/object problematic? How does such a project contribute to our comprehension of the relationship between fictional subjects and objects? How does comparison exacerbate or resolve the tension between ordinariness and extraordinariness as these values are depicted in Victorian realist novels?[10] To begin to answer these questions, I examine in what follows recent scholarship on the subjects, objects, and museums of Victorian fiction. But what is more, in a comparatist fashion, I envision these distinct bodies of literature as components of a Venn diagram,[11] with this dissertation at its center.

Theorizing Literary Character

Almost three decades have passed since the publication of John Frow's influential article, "Spectacle Binding: On Character," and it is now axiomatic that the concept of literary character is one of the most problematic, undertheorized, and controversial aspects of narrative theory (Boehrer 542; Frow 227).[12] As Alex Woloch reminds us, "For a long time now, characterization has been the bête noire of narratology, provoking either cursory dismissal, lingering uncertainty,

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[10] The work of Radhakrishnan (20) has inspired these research questions.

[11] Radhakrishnan analyzes the Venn diagram as an illustration of the comparative project (18-19).

[12] Frow effectively summarizes the two main problems with literary character: "First, the concept is not specific to the discourse of literary theory but is necessarily dependent upon cultural schemata defining the nature of the self. Critical (and indeed informal) use of the concept tends to be a reproduction of these schemata rather than thematizing the relationship between the two conceptual sets. Second, and consequently, the concept is both ontologically and methodologically ambivalent; and any attempt to resolve this ambivalence by thinking [of] character either as merely the analogue of a person or as merely a textual function avoids coming to terms with the full complexity of the problem" (227).

or vociferous argument" (14). Scholarship on character has proven equally problematic; as Elizabeth Fowler notes in *Literary Character: The Human Figure in Early English Writing* (2003), "Our tools for the study of literary character are surprisingly primitive compared to those we have developed for...other formal aspects of fiction" (3). As a result, "Literary scholarship...speaks of characters as if they were real people and, just as frequently, warns us that they are not" (Fowler 5). Literary critics' "queasy ambivalence" (Boehrer 542) toward character has resulted in a near abandonment of character analysis in recent decades. I aim to reanimate the conversation about literary character by suggesting that in the Victorian realist novel, character is best understood through an examination of museum culture, which, with its dual investment in the subject and the object, can help us understand broader cultural issues surrounding sameness and difference, ordinariness and extraordinariness.

Characterization sparked debates between humanists and structuralists throughout much of the twentieth century; as Woloch argues, these debates stemmed from the fact that "the literary character is itself divided," existing at the intersection of reference and structure (17). Scholars of characterization have thus been forced to take a side, to analyze either the individuality of the character or the character's emplacement within the structure of the narrative (Woloch 17). In *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (2003), Woloch offers a means through which to reconcile this theoretical tension; he combines humanist and structuralist interpretations of character to formulate what he calls the "character-system" (14). In this system, the implied resemblance between the fictional character and the live human is integrated into the narrative structure (Woloch 15). "The opposition between the character as an individual and the character as part of a structure dissolves in this framework," Woloch contends, "as distribution relies *on* reference and takes place *through*

structure" (17, original emphasis). Woloch's notion of the character-system is useful to this study because it enables me to focus on the "socioformal dimension" of narrative (Woloch 17)—that is, the way in which a character emerges as extraordinary through its emplacement within the narrative in relation to other, ordinary characters. However, I extend Woloch's conceptual model of characterization to formulate what I call the "character-object system." With this model, I am able to theorize the emplacement of the character in relation to the emplacement of the object within the narrative structure. In the character-object system, the character emerges as ordinary vis-à-vis the extraordinary object. Thus focusing on what I call the "sociocultural-formal dimension of narrative," I am able to theorize how the character is elaborated not only in relation to other characters, but also in relation to objects.

Objects and their circulation are at the center of Deidre Shauna Lynch's conceptualization of character. In *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (1998), Lynch argues that with the explosion of the marketplace in the long eighteenth century, writers and readers used characters in novels as a means to become acclimated to the commercialized world. For Lynch, character is anchored to history, society, and culture; it cannot "unfold anytime and anywhere" (4).[13] Invested as it is in theorizing character within the context of Victorian museum culture, this study takes as its foundation Lynch's sociocultural-historical approach to character. If Lynch aims to rewrite one chapter of the history of literary character, I strive to rewrite another. Character, then, as both Lynch and I

[13] In contrast, Woloch's conceptual model of characterization is transhistorical; "the dynamics of distribution—and the tension between structure and reference that emerges in, and formulates, distribution—is inherent to narrativity as a formal process" (30). The nineteenth-century realist novels to which Woloch applies his theory simply "illuminate particularly well the tension between the structural and referential axes of characterization" (30). The primary advantage of Woloch's conceptual model of characterization, he contends, is that it can "elucidate a narrative process that is quite relevant to a broad spectrum of literature as well as to pictorial and cinematic art" (30).

understand it, does not change over time; instead, what changes are the sociocultural-historical factors that "compose the field in which reading and writing occur" (11).

Though Woloch takes a formalist approach to character and Lynch takes a sociocultural-historical one, both are concerned with the relationship between the individual and the collective. For Woloch, the major character emerges only vis-à-vis minor characters that revolve around it; this is how the "social dimension of form" operates (18). For Lynch, a character must appear similar to yet different from others in the social sphere; even an individual face indexes a social norm (33). Because both critics conceptualize character as a relational construct, E.M. Forster's theory of "flat" and "round" characters informs both their works. In *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), Forster argues that flat characters "are constructed round a single idea or quality" (103-104) and remain static throughout the text. In contrast, round characters encompass numerous ideas and qualities and develop as the narrative progresses. Because flat and round characters exist in oppositional relation to one another, "a novel that is at all complex...requires flat people as well as round" (Forster 108).

Forster's theory of flatness and roundness is useful to this study because it provides me with a foundational set of terms upon which to base my theory of ordinariness and extraordinariness. As both Woloch and Lynch make clear, roundness is typically associated with the psychological depth of the major character, whereas flatness is typically associated with the social expansiveness that minor characters represent. Introducing a new set of terms here is not difficult: major characters can be classified as extraordinary by virtue of their status as major characters, and minor characters can be classified as ordinary by virtue of their status as minor characters. It can become mental shorthand to associate roundness with extraordinariness and flatness with ordinariness. However, I argue that the Victorian realist novel subverts this notion

at the same time that it upholds it. By relentlessly insisting upon the extraordinary ordinariness of the major character—a claim I will support in a moment—the novel trains readers to associate roundness with ordinariness while simultaneously reinforcing an important "article of our literary faith," the notion that a round character is the best kind of character (Lynch 12-13).

Thus, interested as I am in sameness and difference, in ordinariness and extraordinariness, literary character as I understand it is a relational concept; it therefore resembles what French structuralist Philippe Hamon describes as "a *bundle of relations* of similarity, opposition, hierarchy and disposition (its distribution) which it enters into, on the plane of the signifier and the signified, successively and/or simultaneously, with other characters and elements of the work" (qtd. in Frow 231, original emphasis). The "value" of a character, Hamon argues, lies in its "oppositional relation to other characters" (Frow 231). In this study, I value the role an ordinary character plays in establishing another character as extraordinary; that is, I value the character's oppositional function. But because I am interested in how the Victorians' anxiety about the ordinariness of the self manifested itself both within literature and without, my view of character incorporates what Bal describes as the "human aspect" of character (80). The implied resemblance between the character and the human is what enables me to examine Victorian museum culture.

The Extraordinarily Ordinary Characters of the Realist Novel

If the Victorian realist novel is, as I believe, preoccupied with sameness and difference—that is, with comparison—so too are its scholars. In a discussion of the evolution of the novel's form, Frits Andersen compares the nineteenth-century novel to its successors and argues that it is more extraordinary than its modern and postmodern counterparts not only because of its "unorthodox crossbreeding" of literary genres, but also because it focuses on "the scandal of the

ordinary"—that is, "the shockingly ordinary by which each of us imagines that we are something special" (73, 74). Moving in the opposite historical direction, Caroline Levine argues that the extraordinarily ordinary characters that populate Victorian realist fiction help distinguish the nineteenth-century novel from its predecessors:

> The novel in Britain had in fact long been interested in the ordinary individual rather than the epic hero: we might think of Defoe's Moll Flanders or Richardson's Pamela. But nineteenth-century writers continued to widen the field of representation to capture the truths of prosaic, gritty, and hideous experience. Thanks to the realists, poor, marginal, and hitherto neglected figures, such as seamstresses, pawn-brokers, factory workers, drunks, prostitutes, and beggars came to be seen not only as serious artistic subject matter, but also subjects in the philosophical sense, sources of knowledge and action in the novel rather than picturesque or comic objects. (89)

As Levine suggests, one of the primary objectives of realism is to elevate the ordinary individual to extraordinary heights. In the nineteenth-century novel, Andersen argues, "the extraordinarily ordinary aspects of [characters'] lives are invested with lofty dignity" (73). Paradoxically, the mundane ordinariness of everyday life is what "shapes and ennobles human subjectivity" (Andersen 73). The familiar, the predictable, the stuff people know all too well is what enables the individual to transcend ordinariness (Andersen 73). Thus, the ordinary individual becomes extraordinary within the space of the novel; the character transforms into "a hero whose story is just as entitled to be told as the tragedies of kings" (Andersen 73).

However, as Sudipta Kaviraj reminds us, "the very idea of a narrative celebration of an ordinary, unexemplary individual's life...is almost a contradiction in terms. How can a person deserve to be a hero, deserve to be the subject of narrative celebration because he is ordinary,

because his life is *not* spectacular?" (270, original emphasis). I argue that the Victorian realist novel takes up this question and ultimately answers that individuals deserve to be protagonists because they are extraordinarily ordinary. As Kaviraj suggests, protagonists are extraordinary not because they are idiosyncratic or deviant and not because their thoughts are unlike those of any other, but because they are characterized by "an emphatic lack of 'distinctiveness'" (269).

Of course, distinctiveness is a relative term; as Kaviraj points out, "the meaning of ordinariness and its counterpoint...vary in specific cultural contexts" (269-70). While Kaviraj argues that nineteenth-century Indian fiction is most concerned with moral ordinariness, I suggest that the Victorian realist novel casts a much wider net; that is, it encompasses numerous aspects of ordinariness. As characters compare their life experiences to those of others, they emplace themselves within domains of distinction, appraising qualities as diverse as attractiveness, socioeconomic status, emotional expressiveness, intellect, and awareness of social norms and cultural customs. Ordinariness thus emerges in the novel as a multifactorial characteristic. Sometimes characters strive for extraordinariness, but at other times, they do just the opposite. As Elaine Freedgood says of objects, sometimes characters stand out, and sometimes they just stand (51). Characters' continuous movement between domains of distinction means that the individual's position within the social sphere is ever in flux.

The Material Culture of the Realist Novel

Over a quarter of a century has passed since the publication of Asa Briggs's *Victorian Things* (1988), and it is now a commonplace that objects held a deep cultural fascination for the Victorians.[14] It is also axiomatic that recent scholarship has become fascinated with the Victorians' obsession with objects (Pykett 1). As Lyn Pykett notes in "The Material Turn in

[14] Plotz perhaps best articulates this point: "One universally acknowledged truth about the Victorians is that they loved their things" (1).

Victorian Studies" (2003), since the movement toward cultural studies in the mid-1980s, "there has been a veritable explosion of interest in all aspects of nineteenth-century material culture" (2). Whereas earlier material culture scholarship focused on consumer culture and theories of consumption and commodification, more recent studies have examined objects in a variety of contexts (Sattaur 347). The turn from Marxist to cultural materialist and new historicist approaches to objects has become known as "thing theory" (Sattaur 347). Interdisciplinary in nature, thing theory is the backbone of this dissertation, which integrates methods and perspectives from literary studies, museum studies, and art history to explain the relationship between the subject and the object in terms other than those of capitalism. Similar to other studies informed by thing theory, this study takes up questions about identity, the development of the self, and the relationship between the individual and both the material and the social world. Moreover, it returns to canonical texts with a fresh perspective and elucidates lesser-known verbal and visual artifacts of Victorian museum culture.

Typically considered the first major critical work to interpret the objects of literature as more than mere commodities, Bill Brown's *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (2003) has shaped numerous studies, this dissertation included.[15] Similar to Brown, I

[15] Brown's study came on the heels of such influential works as *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (1981), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (1986), *History from Things: Essays on Material Culture* (1993), *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (1996), *Learning from Things: Method and Theory of Material Culture Studies* (1996), *Material Cultures: Why Some Things Matter* (1998), and *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life* (2000). This dissertation has been informed by these classic texts as well as more recent ones, such as *Handbook of Material Culture* (2006), *Understanding Material Culture* (2007), and *Thinking Through Material Culture: An Interdisciplinary Perspective* (2011).

am not interested in objects *qua* objects, but in how objects shape and transform subjects.[16] My research questions thus echo several of Brown's: why and how do subjects attach significance to objects? What desires and fantasies do objects create and feed? And what fears and anxieties do objects provoke and alleviate? (4, 12) To pose these questions is to build upon the work of Jean Baudrillard, who declares in *Fatal Strategies* (1983), "We have always lived off the splendor of the subject and the poverty of the object" (111). I take this to mean that literary criticism has traditionally focused on the subject at the expense of the object. When the object *has* been studied, Baudrillard argues, it has been "only a detour on the royal road to subjectivity" (111); that is, literary critics have made short shrift of the object as they have labored to better understand the subject. Similar to Brown and Baudrillard, I advocate a deeper commitment to the object in studies of the subject. But if, as Baudrillard contends, literary critics have swerved toward the impoverished object in order to better understand the splendid subject, I do the opposite; I examine the extraordinary object so as to gain a deeper comprehension of the ordinary subject.

As Jennifer Sattaur notes in a recent overview of thing theory in Victorian studies, Brown initiated a critical move away from conceptualizing literary objects as mere commodities (351). While many critics have since abandoned interest in the object as commodity, John Plotz has

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[16] A note on terminology is necessary here. In *Material Culture Studies in America* (1999), Schlereth argues that the terms "things," "objects," "artifacts," and "material culture" should be used in academic discourse as terms of increasing specificity of meaning, with "things" being the most general and "material culture" being the most specific (2). However, these terms are frequently used differently and even interchangeably in scholarship across disciplines. Brown understands objects as windows through which abstract concepts such as history, society, and culture are visible. Things, in contrast, are objects that cannot be looked through. In "Thing Theory" (2001), Brown argues, "We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily" (4). Based on these definitions, Brown is more interested in things, whereas I am more interested in objects.

advocated a doubled interpretation of the object as both commodity and non-commodity (Sattaur 351). In *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move* (2008), Plotz examines objects that travel with British subjects to the colonies and argues that the most valuable objects in Victorian literature and culture are those that are endowed with a double meaning (12)—that is, those that have both economic value as commodities and sentimental value as non-saleable objects (2). Plotz and I share an interest in the relationship between the subject and the object in Victorian literature and culture; however, our studies differ in important respects. Whereas Plotz examines objects within the context of Victorian imperial culture and is therefore concerned with their exchange and sentimental values, I examine objects within the context of Victorian museum culture and am therefore concerned with their collectible value. Of course, most collected objects have at least some measurable market value,[17] and some collectors conceive of their objects as financial investments.[18] It would therefore be inaccurate to say that while Plotz is interested in priceable objects, I am interested in their priceless counterparts. It would also be inappropriate to diminish the importance of the sentimental in this study, as some collectors feel a deep emotional connection to their objects.[19] However, collectible value is more than an object's exchange or sentimental value; it is a constellation of intertwined personal, social, and cultural values that enable an object to be perceived as extraordinary. Collectible value is therefore determined by a

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[17] For instance, the Louvre purchased the painting that appears in the opening scene of *The American* from the collection of Marshal Nicolas Jean-de-Dieu Soult in 1852 for the exorbitant sum of £24,612 (Baedeker, *Paris and its Environs*... 98).

[18] In her discussion of collectors' motivations, Formanek suggests that relatively few collectors perceive their objects as financial investments (333).

[19] As Cairns and Silverman indicate in *Treasures: The Stories Women Tell about the Things They Keep* (2004), most of the objects that women collect and preserve can be superficially interpreted as objects of sentimental interest; however, it is more accurate to read these objects as representations of narratives about women's most profound life experiences (173).

number of factors, such as the object's age, condition, and rarity in relation to other objects of its kind as well as the narratives that inhere in it and the emotions that it elicits. Plotz's work thus assists me in conceptualizing objects as both commodities and non-commodities, though I am far less interested in the object as commodity than Plotz. But whereas Plotz focuses on "dually endowed" objects (2), I focus on those that are multiply endowed.

Victorian novels indicate that women endowed particular kinds of objects with collectible value. In *Women and Personal Property in the Victorian Novel* (2010), Deborah Wynne examines some of these objects, textiles and tea wares among them. Dissimilar to other thing theorists, though, Wynne focuses less on objects and more on the concept of ownership (5), arguing contra Andrew H. Miller in *Novels Behind Glass: Commodity Culture and Victorian Narrative* (1995) that the objects of Victorian literature and culture are most valuable when they cease circulating as commodities and are retained and used as personal property (5-6). Examining literary "movables" within the context of Victorian property law, Wynne undermines the assumption that the objects that women own or believe they own are of less consequence than male-owned objects such as real estate. I concur with Wynne that more critical attention should be devoted to literary movables, especially those that appear in Eliot's fiction, but because this study is concerned with reading literary objects within the context of Victorian museum culture, I interpret movables not as property, but as collectibles. Naturally, collected objects can be owned or believed to be owned, as is the case with Mrs. Tulliver's household wares. However, I am less concerned with ownership than I am with possession. As Baudrillard argues in *The System of Objects* (1968), objects have two functions: utilization and possession. When an object is "divested of its function, abstracted from any practical context...its destiny is to be collected" (8). Once collected, the object ceases to be a teapot or a tablecloth and

transforms into a "piece" that coordinates with similar or dissimilar objects in a set; that is, it becomes a possession (Baudrillard 8). Understood in the context of Baudrillard's theory of possession, what Wynne conceives of as Victorian literature's "magpie grouping of odds and ends" (10) transforms into something far more extraordinary: a collection.

The transformation of ordinary objects into extraordinary ones is an important subject of this dissertation, which aims to redress a notable imbalance in recent scholarship on the material culture of the Victorian realist novel. Since the publication of Elaine Freedgood's *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (2006), literary critics have become increasingly interested in the "everyday wares, mundane materials, [and] ordinary stuff" of realism (Felski 185). In her landmark study, Freedgood argues that a wealth of information about Victorian history, society, and culture "hide[s] in plain sight" (35) in the commonplace objects that clutter up the realist novel. To access this latent information, Freedgood advocates a literary critical method that "temporarily breaches the narrative frame and the symbolic system of the novel" (6), investigates the ordinary object "in terms of its own properties and history" (11), then returns the thing to its "novelistic home" and "refigure[s] [it] alongside and athwart the novel's manifest or dominant narrative—the one that concerns its subjects" (12). The primary advantage of this method is that it enables twenty-first-century readers to recover the "lost" meanings of things—that is, the meanings that ordinary objects may have had for Victorian readers (51-52). I do not employ Freedgood's method *per se* in this study; however, I share with Freedgood an investment in new historicism. I therefore often interpret the object as Freedgood does, as "an index of something culturally significant both within the novel and outside it" (11). Moreover, I draw upon Freedgood's work to argue that extraordinary objects often masquerade as ordinary

ones in the realist novel. Often misread as reality effects,[20] ordinary objects such as teaspoons and sugar tongs "[don't] stand out; [they] just stand" (Freedgood 51). Even when exhibited in parlors, atop tables, and on mantelpieces, exceptional specimens of decorative art frequently remain hidden under the guise of ubiquitousness. Readers tend to dismiss them without a second thought, for in the context of the Victorian domestic interior, that most cluttered of novelistic spaces, there is nothing particularly noteworthy about a couple of teacups on display. But I contend that ordinary objects transform into extraordinary ones when collected, organized, exhibited, and preserved, and as Freedgood argues about ordinary things, ordinary-turned-extraordinary objects contain compressed references to complex sociocultural-historical realities (84).

Dissimilar to other scholarship informed by thing theory, then, this dissertation focuses not on ordinary objects, but on their extraordinary counterparts, be they specimens of fine or decorative art. In her examination of the recent turn in Victorian studies toward the uses and meanings of imperial objects, Erika Rappaport notes, "Heretofore, the everyday and the rare have occupied separate analytic frames" (289). Commonplace commodities such as textiles and unique objects such as works of art have seemed to hold different kinds of meanings. Rappaport, however, contends that it is important to focus on "the production, circulation, and consumption of both the unique and the common" in order to construct more forceful arguments about imperialism (290). Neither capitalism nor imperialism is the focus of this study, but I wish to

[20] Barthes uses the term "reality effects" to refer to objects that signify a general rather than a specific real within texts. Reality effects are typically considered useful in that they enable readers to interpret lengthy texts with relative ease and efficiency. "We can brush by all kinds of things in novels," Freedgood writes, "dismissing them with a brief and paradoxical acknowledgement: oh yes, the real, the literal, never mind" (10). As Price explains, "tuning in" and "zoning out" at appropriate times enables readers to process the sheer quantity of information presented in Victorian novels (233).

advance a claim that is similar to Rappaport's. I wish to argue that in the context of the Victorian realist novel, it is important to examine the collection, organization, exhibition, and preservation of both garden-variety and one-of-a-kind objects. For as the novel makes clear, ordinary objects become extraordinary when endowed with collectible value. Viewed through the same analytical lens, a teapot, a tablecloth, or a soupspoon can serve the same narrative function as a painting, a portrait, or a sculpture. In other words, objects of low culture can help us arrive at the same questions about the ordinariness of the self as objects of high culture. By placing ordinary objects in the same analytical frame as their extraordinary counterparts, we can breathe new life into the question of how objects can help us think productively about the subjects that animate Victorian realist novels.

Despite its divergence from other literary criticism informed by thing theory, this dissertation attempts to explain the relationship between subjects and objects in terms other than those of capitalism. It therefore focuses on the museum, a space theoretically antithetical to the marketplace.[21] Wrested from their economic contexts and installed within the museum, priceable objects become reconceptualized as priceless ones. In turn, upon their entrance into the museum, subjects cease to perceive themselves as consumers and are transformed into viewers. Museum culture is thus an expression of the complex relationship between museum objects and museum subjects.

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[21] In practice, museums are connected to the marketplace through practices of consumption; this was as true in the Victorian period as it is today. For instance, objects at the Great Exhibition were not to be priced; however, exhibitors were permitted to employ attendants to explain the objects on view. Though these attendants were forbidden to invite visitors to purchase the exhibited objects, the Royal Commission did not prohibit them from disseminating price lists; the exhibition thus became a trade fair (Auerbach 120). Today, the commercialization of the museum is often cited as one of its most offensive faults. As Durston, a senior producer for *CNN Travel*, writes in his provocative opinion piece "Why I Hate Museums" (2013), the sale of objects in museums prevents visitors from connecting to the past: "Nothing subverts a museum's mission like a shiny, digitally printed banner broadcasting $4.95 replica Davids."

Victorian Museum Culture

As Caroline Patey and Laura Scuriatti note in their introduction to *The Exhibit in the Text: The Museological Practices of Literature* (2009), the affair between museums and literature has ancient origins (1). However, it is axiomatic that the Victorian period was a pivotal moment in the partnership between collections and narratives. Recent scholarship on the liaison between museums and literature has shown "a clear cross-fertilisation" between disciplines (Mills 3). As Victoria Mills notes in "Victorian Fiction and the Material Imagination" (2008), the turn toward material culture in literary studies has been mirrored by a turn toward linguistics and literature in museum studies (3).[22] The result has been a constellation of animated interdisciplinary conversations about the relationship between museums and literature.[23]

At the center of many of these conversations is the concept of comparison. Sameness and difference lie at the core of Les Harrison's assessment of the American museum as it is represented in literature. In *The Temple and the Forum: The American Museum and Cultural Authority in Hawthorne, Melville, Stowe, and Whitman* (2007), Harrison argues that the character of the American museum was in crisis in the nineteenth century. In contrast to their British counterparts, which were revered as educational institutions, American museums were denounced as spaces of popular entertainment (1). Debates about the character of the American museum tended to position cultural institutions on a spectrum between two idealized poles: the temple and the forum (3). "Serious museums" such as the Smithsonian were conceived of as "temples," institutions designed for the exhibition of culturally significant objects (3). In

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[22] As Mill notes, this turn is evident in the work of Susan Pearce, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, Leslie Bedford, and Mieke Bal (3).

[23] A number of these conversations are represented in Patey and Scuriatti's edited collection, which draws from papers presented at the 2006 European Society for the Study of English (ESSE) Conference.

contrast, "forums" such as P.T. Barnum's American Museum were places for the exhibition of animate and inanimate "monsters" (3). Writers frequently cast the conflict between the temple and the forum in absolute terms, but as Harrison elucidates, elements of both institutions were present to varying degrees in most American museums (3). The dissimilarities between Harrison's study and mine are readily apparent; while Harrison is interested in the character of the museum as it is represented in nineteenth-century American literature, I am interested in the character of the self as it is depicted in nineteenth-century British literature. Nevertheless, our studies share an interest in the concepts of comparison and distinction. Recast in the terms of this dissertation, Harrison's "temples" can be understood as extraordinary institutions of elite culture, despite the ordinariness of their visitors, while his "forums" can be conceived of as ordinary institutions of low culture, despite the extraordinariness of the monstrous subjects and objects on view within them. Just as Harrison argues that the character of the museum was far too complex to be fixed at either end of a spectrum, I contend that the character of the self was similarly unstable. Parallel with Harrison, then, I argue that elements of ordinariness and extraordinariness are simultaneously present in the subjects that visit the museums and museal spaces of Victorian fiction.

Similar to Harrison, Ruth Hoberman is implicitly concerned with ordinariness and extraordinariness as these concepts relate to literary representations of museums. In *Museum Trouble: Edwardian Fiction and the Emergence of Modernism* (2011), Hoberman argues that the museum movement experienced revitalization in the Edwardian period. "Between 1890 and 1914 alone," Hoberman informs us, "215 museums were created in Great Britain" (*Museum Trouble* 13). Hoberman indicates that this uptick in the museum movement inspired authors to represent the impact of museums on subjects: "Only when museums were an established part of daily life,

taken for granted as government-funded institutions and a fixture of every provincial town, could their impact on ordinary people begin to be gauged and depicted in fiction" (*Museum Trouble* 13). Interested as I am in the concepts of ordinariness and extraordinariness, I take this statement to mean that when museums lost their status as novel cultural institutions in the Edwardian period, they became ordinary and were thus absorbed into the realist enterprise. I concur with Hoberman that museums descended into ordinariness at the same time that they experienced an upward trend in popularity; however, I disagree with Hoberman's claim that the impact of museums on actual and fictional subjects can only be detected in Edwardian fiction. I argue instead that novelists began to represent the impact of museums on actual and fictional subjects in the Victorian period, when museums were considered novel cultural institutions. As I contend in chapter 1, actual and fictional subjects visited museums in droves for the express purpose of morally, intellectually, and socially elevating themselves. Stated otherwise, subjects visited museums to differentiate themselves from others and ascend to the domain of positive extraordinariness. However, in the process of becoming acclimated to Victorian museum culture, the opposite occurred; subjects became more similar to others, as was evident in their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Because the museum promised the elevation of subjects yet ultimately underscored their ordinariness, Victorian novelists used the museum as a stage on which to dramatize cultural anxiety about the ordinariness of the self.

As in Hoberman's work, the concepts of ordinariness and extraordinariness underlie Barbara J. Black's scholarship. Generally considered the first major critical work in literary studies to examine the relationship between literature and the museum in the Victorian period, Black's *On Exhibit: Victorians and Their Museums* (2000) has shaped numerous studies, this dissertation included, despite the fact that Black does not construct a central argument about

literature.[24] Black's book is, as Tim Barringer notes, "a series of musings about texts—relatively few of which directly describe or discuss museums" (152). However, Black's elaboration of Victorian museum culture is the foundation upon which this dissertation rests. Similar to Black, I understand museum culture to be a phenomenon that encompasses a set of interrelated sociocultural-historical practices that revolve around the museum. As Black explains, Victorian museum culture was:

> ...brought to fruition by key political events and social and cultural factors: the British involvement in imperialism, exploration, and tourism; advances in science and changing attitudes about knowledge; the nationalist commitment to improved public taste through mass education; the growing hegemony of the middle class and the subsequent insurgence of bourgeois fetishism and commodity culture; and the democratization of luxury engendered by the French Revolution and the industrial revolution. (9)

The birth of the public museum distinguished Victorian museum culture from both the collecting cultures that had preceded it and the museum cultures that followed it.[25] Victorian museum culture was shaped by a number of novel sociocultural practices, such as visiting museums, learning how to interact appropriately with both the subjects and objects on view in museums, interpreting verbal and visual representations of museums, collecting in tribute to museums, and developing museal consciousness, a concept upon which I elaborate in chapter 1. Victorian museum culture revolved around collections of all kinds and a variety of exhibition spaces. It was bound up with architecture, journalism, literature, and art, and it was animated by those who

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[24] Several major works on Victorian museum culture have followed Black's, most notably Hill's *Culture and Class in English Public Museums, 1850-1914* (2005), Yanni's *Nature's Museums: Victorian Science and the Architecture of Display* (2005), and Kriegel's *Grand Designs: Labor, Empire, and the Museum in Victorian Culture* (2007).

[25] Bazin provides a comprehensive overview of these cultures in *The Museum Age* (1967).

"constructed museums, celebrated and criticized museums, attended museums, worked in museums, wrote about museums, and collected in homage to museums" (B. Black 4). Above all else, Victorian museum culture was "a spirit that infused the age and many of its projects" (B. Black 4), projects as diverse as stamp, coin, china, fern, and insect collections; encyclopedias, dictionaries, collected works, and triple-decker novels; and libraries, zoos, aquariums, botanical gardens, and international expositions.

As Black makes clear, British culture in the Victorian period was a museum culture of spectacular proportions. Prior ages had collected, of course, as historians such as Germain Bazin, Oliver R. Impey and Arthur MacGregor, and Krzysztof Pomian have shown.[26] Indeed, the British Museum, that most iconic of cultural institutions, predated the Victorian era, established in 1753 and opened to the public in 1759. However, no one collected "with such a vengeance" as the Victorians (B. Black 17), and no other culture constructed purpose-built exhibition spaces with such zeal. The decades between 1830 and 1900, which I collectively refer to as the Age of the Museum, witnessed the opening of numerous major museums in London, including the National Gallery (1838), the South Kensington Museum, now known as the Victoria and Albert Museum (1857), the National Portrait Gallery (1859), the Natural History Museum (1881), the Science Museum (1885), and the National Gallery of British Art, now known as the Tate (1897). In the provinces, a multitude of municipal museums were created following the 1845 Museums Act and the 1850 Libraries and Museums Act, which enabled towns and cities to use taxes to fund municipal museums (Hoberman, *Museum Trouble* 10). Important municipal museums included the New Walk Museum and Art Gallery in Leicester (1849), the Derby Museum in Liverpool

[26] See *The Museum Age* (1967), *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (1985), and *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500-1800* (1990).

(1853), the Weston Park Museum in Sheffield (1875), the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (1885), the Manchester Museum (1890), and the Harris Free Public Library and Museum in Preston (1893).[27] National and municipal museums engendered the creation and renovation of semi-public and private exhibition spaces in both the metropolis and the provinces. As I explain in chapter 2, centuries-old country houses underwent extensive renovation projects in order to expand, redesign, and repurpose long galleries, and new country houses were built to exhibit collections purchased *en bloc*. Perhaps to an even greater extent than their wealthier counterparts, the middle classes collected objects with fervor, exhibiting them in nearly every room of the home, as I explain in chapter 3. Even the working classes displayed choice objects on humble mantelpieces in accordance with the exhibition practices of national and municipal museums. Thus, in the Age of the Museum, England witnessed not only a culture-wide surge in collecting, but also an unprecedented blurring of boundaries between public and private exhibition spaces.

Both within and outside of the Victorian realist novel, exhibition spaces are the architectural frameworks that shape and delimit the meanings of collections as well as the extraordinary objects that comprise them. What is more, many exhibition spaces are designed to not only accommodate, but also feature human bodies; this was as true in the Victorian period as it is today. As most verbal and visual representations of Victorian museum culture illustrate, exhibition spaces were designed to display subjects as well as objects. When designing museums, architects considered a number of human measurements, ranging from one's height to the length of one's stride to the circumference of one's skirt. Authors and artists frequently depicted exhibition spaces as stages for not only the display of the human body, but also the

[27] The dates provided in this paragraph indicate when the museums opened to the public. Several museums were formally established years earlier.

performance of everything from museum-going practices to gender norms to courtship rituals. Exhibition spaces thus served three important functions in Victorian museum culture: (1) they made visible meaningful connections between extraordinary objects; (2) they encouraged interaction between subjects; and (3) they fostered relationships between subjects and objects.

Fictional exhibition spaces serve an additional purpose: they provide both characters and readers with what Isobel Armstrong refers to as a "spatial education" (583). Victorian novelists well understood how to represent spatial consciousness in the context of domestic interiors and urban environments; as a result, most readers can easily visualize the three-dimensional space of the red-room that functions as Jane Eyre's prison and Tom-all-alone's, the slum that Jo calls home. However, the unfamiliar public space of the museum presented authors with a challenge, for the museum necessitated an educational process through which individuals had to learn how to orient themselves inside the museum and move through its series of exhibition spaces in concert with crowds of fellow visitors.[28] The museum therefore challenged novelists to represent not only the three-dimensional space of the museum, but also the process through which it became incorporated into spatial consciousness. To educate Victorians on these two matters was "a double task" for authors; as Armstrong notes, "it [had] to be done for the fictional consciousness in the text, and for the reader mediating the experience through print" (578). This was no simple task, but as I argue across the three chapters that comprise this dissertation, the spatial education that novels provided enabled both characters and readers to learn how to "read" the three-dimensional space of the museum. Moreover, it enabled these individuals to read the museum into other spaces, most notably the domestic interior. The novels under consideration in this dissertation thus bear witness to the development of "inter-spatial consciousness" (I.

[28] The numerous floor plans printed in guidebooks indicate that orienting oneself in museums was not intuitive. See, for instance, Baedeker's *Paris and its Environs...* 87, 92, 93.

Armstrong 577), a particular kind of shared consciousness that perceives similarities and differences between public, semi-public, and private exhibition spaces. This study is therefore structured around four distinct but related kinds of exhibition spaces: (1) public museums in urban centers, which I discuss in chapter 1; (2) semi-public country house galleries, which I discuss in chapter 2; (3) private sites of collection, including those within middle-class domestic interiors; and (4) auction sites, both of which I discuss in chapter 3.

Chapter Descriptions

In chapter 1, I argue that the Victorian impulse to wrestle with questions about human ordinariness and extraordinariness was an indication of the development of museal consciousness. Guided by the principles of physiological psychology, I argue that Brontë's heroine Lucy Snowe becomes "museum-minded" (Kreps 23) as she unconsciously adapts to the museal environment. Opaque to her, the development of Lucy's museal consciousness is made visible to readers through (1) her assimilation into the museum, an embattled public space that requires a latent awareness of what I call the "museum visitor social code"; (2) her unconscious comprehension of the museum's methods of collection, classification, exhibition, and preservation; (3) her adaptation to sensory engagement with visual and material culture both within and outside of the museum; and (4) her turn toward "museal counterdiscourse," a term that Peter M. McIsaac uses to describe the inversion of museal conventions in the human mind (8). Lucy's museal counterdiscourse is apparent in her unconscious construction of a museal environment that empowers women to take command of their own museal experiences.

In chapter 2, I focus on a particular class of extraordinary objects, ancestral portraits, and examine the relationship between socioeconomic status and both visual and verbal representation. Who deserves to be depicted in portraits? Can portraiture transform an ordinary

individual into an extraordinary one? Or, to the contrary, does portraiture bear witness to the ordinariness of all human subjects? I argue that Dickens engages with a corresponding set of questions in *Bleak House* as he explores how an ordinary individual can be celebrated in narrative as a hero or a heroine. Who deserves to be a central character? How can a hero or a heroine differentiate himself or herself from all others yet remain embedded in a social framework? That is, how can an individual be both unique and representative? To begin to answer these questions, I explore the Victorian fascination with ancestral portraits and examine the enactment of the "museum ritual" (Duncan 97) in the museal space of the country house gallery. I then analyze the trope of the ancestral portrait collection in *Bleak House*, arguing that Dickens employs an "unvisualized visual pattern" (Byatt 84) to explore what I call "hereditary facelessness." To establish a familial connection between Esther Summerson and her estranged parents, Lady Dedlock and Captain Hawdon (better known as Nemo), Dickens visualizes as a counter to the ancestral portrait collection at Chesney Wold a gallery of empty frames; that is, he creates a series of verbal "portraits" in which the faces of his heroine and her parents are either effaced or defaced. Whether screened, veiled, masked, disfigured, or composed out of existence altogether, the faces of Esther Summerson and her parents function as visual teases that gesture toward their familial connection but refuse to reveal it. I argue that Dickens's triptych of extraordinary faces explodes the trope of the ancestral portrait collection and underscores the challenge of representing individuals as similar to yet different from all others in the social sphere.

In chapter 3, I turn from fine to decorative art and return to the concept of museal counterdiscourse. I argue that in *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot activates the museal counterdiscourse of the auction, the cultural institution that counters the centripetal force of the

museum (B. Black 4), to temporarily expand Mrs. Tulliver into a round character. In select moments, Mrs. Tulliver appears to understand objects not only in the way that museums do, but also in the way that auctions do. Just as Mrs. Tulliver possesses a latent awareness of the significance of collecting, organizing, exhibiting, and preserving extraordinary objects, so too does she appear to comprehend the implications of dismantling and remantling collections. Mrs. Tulliver thus emerges as what I call an "intermediate character," a character that is sometimes minor and sometimes major, sometimes ordinary and sometimes extraordinary. To frame this argument, I examine the Museum of Manufactures, a cross between a museum and a home that helped cement the conceptualization of the domestic interior as a museal space. I then read the museal space of the Tullivers' storeroom, focusing on Mrs. Tulliver's complex relationship to her collection of "maiden-marked" decorative art objects.

To conclude this study, I examine the violence that Henry James inflicts upon the extraordinary objects on view in *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897) and *The Golden Bowl* (1904). Dispersed, shattered, and incinerated, these objects represent the descent of the museum into the domain of ordinariness at the fin de siècle, the collapse of the country house and the dismantling of fine and decorative art collections in the Edwardian period, and the modernist movement toward evacuating fiction of material objects. But more important to this study is the fact that James's museal violence eradicates the domain of positive extraordinariness from the system of distinction. For James, the domain of ordinariness *is* the pinnacle of the system of distinction. For characters such as Fleda Vetch and Charlotte Stant, there is no greater achievement than extraordinary ordinariness. Of course, this is appropriate, for ordinariness is the foundation upon which realism rests.

With this dissertation, then, I aim to (1) energize the conversation surrounding literary character by examining how fictional representations of museum culture activate considerations of human ordinariness and extraordinariness; (2) broaden the scope of the scholarship on the material culture of the realist novel by placing ordinary and extraordinary objects within the same analytical frame; and (3) depict Victorian museum culture as a pervasive cultural phenomenon that revolved around museums as well as a number of museal spaces both within literature and without.

CHAPTER 1

Extraordinary Minds:

Museal Consciousness in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*

When enthusiastic museum visitor Charlotte Brontë[29] visited the triennial Brussels Salon in the autumn of 1842, she experienced firsthand the shock waves that Edouard De Biefve's *Une Almé* (fig. 1) sent through the museum-going public. To most modern viewers, the Orientalist painting appears rather tame, neither especially innovative nor particularly bold. In terms of both its aesthetics and its subject matter, the artwork seems quite ordinary. As Jill L. Matus notes, *Une Almé* has vanished from the art historical record, and even the painter himself has all but faded out of cultural memory (365). But to Victorian viewers, the artwork was quite memorable, for

[29] In a letter to Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Taylor remembered the enthusiasm with which Brontë directed her companions to certain museums in London upon her first visit to the city in early February 1842: "She seemed to think our business was and ought to be, to see all the pictures & statues we could. She knew the artists and knew where other productions of theirs were to be found" (qtd. in Gérin 182). Gérin speculates that the British Museum, the National Gallery, the Suffolk Street Galleries, the Royal Institute Galleries, and the permanent exhibition of the Royal Academy at Burlington House were likely to have been on Brontë's museum-going itinerary (182).

the semi-recumbent Egyptian dancer and probable prostitute[30] depicted in the painting was deemed ostentatiously erotic.[31] Given the marginal status of its creator, *Une Almé* elicited an inordinate amount of chatter in the Belgian press, endowing it with a measure of extraordinariness. Reviews of the piece were mixed. While one art critic declared that he was enamored with the "devilishly beautiful" woman depicted in the painting (Landoy 21), another denounced her as a "vulgar character" with "the face of a woman of low degree" (anonymous qtd. in Gérin 210). Distanced as we are from Victorian culture, it is difficult to determine what may have incited this vociferous response to such a lackluster artwork. Yet I propose that embedded in the contradictory responses to *Une Almé* was both an intense fascination and a deep unease with the extent to which the painting unsettled the system of distinction within which subjects and objects were positioned in accordance with their degree of ordinariness or extraordinariness.

Une Almé prompted a number of provocative questions. What was "the face of a woman of low degree" (anonymous qtd. in Gérin 210) doing in a fine art exhibition? Could an ordinary woman—nay, even a woman of ill repute—be considered a viable subject of art? What did it mean for a dancer/prostitute to be literally and figuratively framed as an extraordinary object? I argue in this chapter that Victorian novelists took up a parallel set of questions in relation to the characters that animated realist fiction. How could an ordinary individual be celebrated in narrative as a hero or a heroine? What did it mean for a character to move between domains of distinction? And what was to be made of the intermediary space that individuals occupied in the

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[30] Drawing upon the work of Edward Said, Matus notes that by the nineteenth century, the Arabic word *almeh* was "practically a synonym for prostitute" (354).

[31] Aside from this reason, Victorians may have remembered *Une Almé* because it was atypical of De Biefve's oeuvre, which was largely comprised of portraits and historical, mythological, and religious scenes (Matus 365).

social world? To begin to answer these questions, I examine Brontë's *Villette* (1853), which intimates in its representation of Lucy Snowe that the Victorian impulse to wrestle with questions about human ordinariness and extraordinariness was an indication of the development of museal consciousness.

I theorize museal consciousness as a concept that connects museal space and mental space, the environment and the embodied mind that experiences it. I understand the term as Susan A. Crane does, as a shared consciousness that "understands the significance of collecting, ordering, representing, and preserving information in the way that museums do" (2). I argue that museal consciousness is dependent upon acts of distinction, practices through which subjects, objects, and behaviors are distinguished from one another and classified into two broad categories: ordinary and extraordinary. Museal consciousness comes close to what Peter M. McIsaac calls "inventoried consciousness" (8), yet it does not capture a sense of transhistoricism, as McIsaac's term does. Nor does museal consciousness understand the museum as Hans Haacke does, as a "manager of consciousness" that participates in the modern "consciousness industry" (9). Instead, museal consciousness is anchored to Victorian England, the birthplace of the public museum (B. Black 9) and the center of animated conversations about the relationship between the environment and the embodied mind.

As Vanessa L. Ryan argues,[32] mental science underwent a profound transformation in the Victorian period, as theorists sought a new science of mind that would have practical implications (2). Physiological psychology was thus developed as a "master science" that enabled analysis of not only the human mind, but also human behavior (2). This scientific field was understood as a means through which to understand how the populace could cultivate

[32] Just prior to press time, Ryan's *Thinking without Thinking in the Victorian Novel* (2012) was discredited; it is now out of print.

distinction through education, artistic appreciation, moral edification, and social reform (2-3). In this respect, the new science of mind shared the core mission of the museum, a novel cultural institution intended to increase the cultural capital of Britons. I argue that physiological psychology and the museum evolved in parallel, generating a widespread interest in the relationship between the embodied mind and the museal environment.

As those interested in physiological psychology, novelists included, became less interested in mental content such as thoughts, desires, and intentions, they became more interested in "the function of the mind and how it leads to adaptive behavior" (Ryan 9, 7). The "dynamic, adaptive function" of the mind could only be understood in relation to the individual's subjective experience of the environment, the space in which the individual would respond to social cues, acquire new information, and develop new skills through "unconscious and reflexive learned behavior" (Ryan 6, 9).[33] As Ryan argues, theorists and novelists turned their attention to "unconscious cerebration," a mode of "nondeliberate thought" that fostered considerations of the mind in terms of processes (2, 9). The emphasis placed on the processes of the mind contributed to a view of character as "a process and an unfolding" (140), as George Eliot writes in *Middlemarch* (1871-72).

In this chapter, I too understand character as a process that unfolds over time. Guided by the principles of physiological psychology, I argue that Lucy Snowe becomes "museum-minded," to borrow a term from Christina F. Kreps (23), as she unconsciously adapts to the museal environment. Opaque to her, the development of Lucy's museal consciousness is made visible to readers through (1) her assimilation into the museum, an embattled public space that requires a latent awareness of what I call the "museum visitor social code"; (2) her unconscious

[33] For a detailed explanation of how physiological psychologists understood the unconscious, see Dames 222-23.

comprehension of the museum's methods of collection, classification, exhibition, and preservation; (3) her adaptation to sensory engagement with visual and material culture both within and outside of the museum; and (4) her turn toward "museal counterdiscourse," a term that McIsaac uses to describe the inversion of museal conventions in the human mind (8). Lucy's museal counterdiscourse is apparent in her unconscious construction of a museal environment that empowers women to take command of their own museal experiences.

To frame this argument, I examine literary, journalistic, and artistic representations of female museum visitors, Brontë included. Despite what appears to have been gender equity in museum visitor attendance, the literature, journalism, and art of Victorian museum culture indicate that gender was a crucial variable in the development of museal consciousness, for men and women experienced museums and the objects on view within them differently due to the museum visitor social code. As a component of Victorian England's broader social code, the museum visitor social code was a set of tacit standards of speech and behavior that dictated interpersonal relations in the public space of the museum. Of women in particular, the code demanded a calculated social performance designed to engender specific perceptions of socioeconomic and moral extraordinariness. I therefore focus on women and the development of feminine museal consciousness in this chapter.

On View: Museum Mothers / Museum Monsters

A comprehension of the development of museal consciousness necessitates an awareness of museum visitor history. However, to undertake a study of Victorian museum visitors is no simple task, for as Kate Hill contends, "The visitors are the great unknowns of Victorian museums" (125). Since the first visitor survey was not conducted in a Western museum until 1897 (Hudson 7), little evidence exists to inform us how the millions of Victorians who visited

museums responded to these novel cultural institutions and the extraordinary objects on view within them. Kenneth Hudson laments the dearth of firsthand accounts of early museum visits:

> One searches for comments wherever they are to be found, realising that only the exceptional person is ever likely to write down his feelings and find a published outlet for them and that the great majority of men, women, boys and girls who have ever entered a museum or an art gallery have been interested or bored, stupefied or invigorated, without anybody but themselves or their friends knowing about it. (7)

Published in 1975, Hudson's comment underscores the challenges that inhere in museum visitor history, but it also indicates that the Victorian impulse to juxtapose, compare, draw distinctions between, and classify museum visitors was practiced well into the twentieth century. Hudson intimates that little has changed since the Victorian period; extraordinary museum visitors are those who reflect upon their museal experiences and document their impressions of museums and museum objects for the benefit of future historians, whereas ordinary museum visitors are those who visit museums for the sake of education and entertainment. While extraordinary museum visitors are governed by their intellect, their ordinary counterparts are swayed by their emotions. Hudson's binary classification scheme elucidates common perceptions of museum visitors, but it does not capture the complexity of the classificatory system that Victorians used to comprehend these individuals. In what follows, I argue that the Victorian system of distinction did not lump together "men, women, boys, and girls" of all socioeconomic classes; instead, it remained highly sensitive to gender, age, and class. Historical evidence indicates that women were particularly difficult to classify as either ordinary or extraordinary museum visitors because of the commonalities they shared across domains of difference. Hypervisible in the public space

of the museum, women moved between domains of distinction in accordance with their perceived degree of maternity or monstrosity.

If most Victorians lacked enthusiasm for documenting their impressions of museums and the extraordinary objects on view within them, they demonstrated a particular zeal for recording their impressions of their fellow museum visitors. Museums were social spaces in which to see and be seen, as is evident in an 1845 poem in which the *Illustrated London News* depicts the British Museum's diverse array of visitors as its "nucleus of attraction":

A motley crowd was gather'd there
As ever throng'd a show—
Many as worthy of a stare
Themselves, I well do trow,
As those strange things they came to see,
Things pick'd up throughout Christendee! ("Easter Monday at the British Museum" 202)

Comprising what was considered a "particular branch of the collection" ("The British Museum and Its Frequenters" 4), museum visitors often endured just as much scrutiny as museum objects. As the anonymous author of an 1888 article printed in the *Leeds Mercury* wrote, the British Museum "makes no charge for admission, but the one penalty it does exact is that its visitors should undergo examination like all the other curiosities of the place, and be carefully labelled and exhibited for the entertainment of their fellow-sightseers" ("The British Museum and Its Frequenters" 4). In other words, museum visitors must be distinguished from one another and classified in accordance with their degree of ordinariness or extraordinariness. Museum visitors of both genders and all socioeconomic statuses could only hope to remain "uncatalogued"—that

is, unridiculed in the press, where museum visitors were often "disposed to blush for the shortcomings of [their] fellow-frequenters" ("The British Museum and Its Frequenters" 4).

When paired with descriptive "catalogues" of the individuals who comprised the curious and rather "odd collection" ("The British Museum and Its Frequenters" 4) on exhibit in museums, visual representations of museum interiors indicate that visitors were exposed to public view and were therefore part and parcel of the museum's "empire of sight," a term I borrow from Susan Stewart ("Prologue" 28) and to which I will return later in this chapter. Apparently more "worthy of a stare" ("Easter Monday at the British Museum" 202) than their male counterparts, female museum visitors receive the lion's share of visual attention in images that depict museum visitors "undergoing examination" by their "fellow-sightseers" ("The British Museum and Its Frequenters" 4). For instance, the focal point of an 1887 image that depicts the entrance hall of the National Gallery (fig. 2) is what appears to be a working-class woman tending to her child on the steps at the far right. She is observed by two sets of male eyes; one man, presumably a fellow museum visitor, looks down upon her from his elevated position at the top of the staircase, while a uniformed attendant keeps order by scrutinizing her from some distance. As a museum mother, a particularly problematic kind of female museum visitor to which I will return later in this section, the ordinary, working-class woman is metaphorically looked down upon and policed at a safe distance by the dubious male onlookers in the image. In contrast, in a circa 1895 representation of the National Gallery (fig. 3), a respectably dressed woman stands near the base of the east staircase and attracts male admiration. A young boy leans on the railing just over her shoulder, casually observing her, and a gentleman in a top hat—if he would only turn around—is in position to contemplate her beauty from a higher vantage point at the top of the staircase. Meanwhile, a man who appears to be a uniformed attendant looks across

the staircase at a middle-class woman observing a massive painting with her well-behaved young son. Mirroring the attendant's gaze, another gentleman appears to regard this respectable museum mother at closer range. Enmeshed in a network of sightlines, both women appear as models of propriety; that is, they exude extraordinariness. Underscoring the point that women were at the center of the visual culture that dominated public spaces such as the museum, an illustration printed in *Graham's Magazine* in 1852 (fig. 4) depicts a woman pinned under the relentless gaze of mischievous dandies at a music hall, one of the cultural institutions that appeared along with museums on many middle-class women's social itineraries during the London Season.[34] Similar to the images of the National Gallery, this illustration makes abundantly clear that when exposed to public view, women of all socioeconomic statuses underwent close visual examination, the act of distinction *par excellence* of the museum.

Naturally, some female museum visitors may have suffered under the oppressive weight of the male gaze, feeling that their honor had been assaulted or that their modesty had been violated (John F. Kasson 127). However, historical evidence indicates that male onlookers did not deter most women from visiting museums. Lara Perry informs us that although the normative museum visitor was male, "the actual [museum] visitor seems just as likely to have been female" (128), as is evident in Giuseppe Gabrielli's 1886 painting of the Barry Rooms at the National Gallery (fig. 5). "Women appear in every kind of documentation of the visiting public," Perry explains, "from Visitors' Books (in which visitors signed their names) to private correspondence to reports and reviews in newspapers" (128). Because museums were "some of the few public spaces freely available to urban middle-class women" (Perry 131), it is probable that these

[34] Esther Summerson undergoes a similar ordeal in chapter 13 of Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852-53). While making the rounds of the major theatres in London, Esther becomes the object of Mr. Guppy's visual attention, much to her discomfort and displeasure (184-87).

women were the most frequent female museum visitors. Due to their ubiquitous presence in museums, these women occupied space in the domain of ordinariness. At the same time, however, these women were deemed distinctive. Since bourgeois women were believed to "sanitize" the public space of the museum, which was "contaminated" by the presence of working-class visitors of both genders, and to reform the uncouth manners of the masses through their embodiment of refinement, their presence in museums was welcomed (Bennett 28-33). Given their status as models of proper museum-going comportment, middle-class female museum visitors were a spectacle that it was deemed proper to behold.

But if these paragons of respectability were believed to exert a civilizing influence on working-class museum visitors of both genders, they did not operate alone. Instead, these women worked in conjunction with their spouses and their children to help Britain represent itself as a united and legitimate nuclear family.[35] For as Hill explains, "It was supposed that the respectable museum or gallery visitor came in a family group, while the roughs were more likely to be young and single. The family group was felt to guarantee a certain degree of propriety and to discourage rough behavior" (131). Richard Redgrave, the art director at the South Kensington Museum, was an enthusiastic proponent of museum visitor families, especially those of the lower classes. He proclaimed in an 1857 lecture that "holidays [to museums] are earnestly to be encouraged [because] they tend to bring the whole family—the working man, his wife, and children—to enjoy themselves *together*" (qtd. in C. Whitehead 62, original emphasis). An illustration printed in the *Graphic Supplement* in 1872 (fig. 6) indicates that the values espoused by middle-class families were believed to trickle down to their working-class counterparts. The image, which depicts an East End family enjoying a holiday visit to the National Gallery,

[35] Perry details the ways in which the National Portrait Gallery was enlisted to visualize the nation as a family (35-58).

suggests that efforts to elevate the level of respectability in the museum have succeeded. The institution of the nuclear family seems to have enabled representatives of the lower classes to rub elbows with their betters. The exhibition space does not appear to be defiled by the presence of these working-class individuals; indeed, there appears to be no morally or socially objectionable behavior in sight. Ordinary individuals seem to have acquired a measure of distinction; thus, the museum's objective of social harmony appears to have been achieved.

As the matriarchs of the museum, fertile museum mothers like the one depicted in Charles Compton's 1855 oil on canvas *A Study in the National Gallery* (fig. 7) assisted the museum in promoting itself as the nation's "great[est] sign of cultural health" (B. Black 42). In an era in which visitors to the British Museum Reading Room frequently complained of the "medically recognized" condition "[m]useum headache" and two notable British Museum employees were supposed to have died due to inhospitable working conditions in "draughty galleries" and "miserable unventilated cells" (Conway 32),[36] healthy museum mothers of all classes symbolized the nation's well-being and potential for growth. Under the nurturance of museum mothers, the museum was conceived of as "the space not of the dead body" or the diseased body, "but of the productive and reproductive social body" (B. Black 42-43).

Visual representations of female museum visitors of all classes as wives and mothers indicate that Victorian femininity was built upon a scaffold of reputable reproductive sexuality, a notion around which museum culture revolved. William Small's 1880 illustration "At the Royal

[36] Conway reports that when Emanuel Deutsch, an esteemed assistant in the Hebrew manuscripts department, and Edward Warren, the head of the transcription department, died in 1873 and 1874, respectively, due to the unhealthful work environment at the British Museum, panic ensued. Conway claims, "The trustees visited the room where the two scholars had perished, and condemned it. But several rooms only a little better were still used, and another able assistant, an eminent author, barely saved his life by resigning a post he had held in the museum for over twenty years" (32).

Academy" (fig. 8), which depicts at its center a tall, stately woman surrounded by several gentlemen (one of whom is sure to be her husband) as well as a trio of young children, echoes the visual rhetoric of maternity that characterized many portraits of royal women that hung in museums in the Victorian period. Perry suggests that portraits of royal women that emphasize the maternity of their sitters underscore the importance of sexually ethical reproduction in the Victorian notion of ideal womanhood. "If queens and royal women bore the burden of representation," Perry contends, "it was as exemplars of reproductivity" (7). Likewise, if female museum visitors were exposed to public view, it was as models of maternity.

In theory, then, mothers were considered the ideal female museum visitors, responsible for domesticating the public space of the museum. However, eyewitness accounts of actual museum mothers indicate that such women were often viewed as museum monsters, guilty of some of the worst crimes against decency and by no means adherent to Victorian standards of feminine civility. Thomas Uwins, the Keeper of the National Gallery from 1847 to 1855, was a harsh critic of museum mothers. He observed that many women entered the museum with infants in their arms and trains of children following them, the consequence of which was "all the little accidents that happen with children, and which are constantly visible upon the floors of the place" (qtd. in Taylor 59). Rather than "cleansing" and "sanitizing" the public space of the museum, these mothers, responsible for the actions of their children, were guilty of soiling it.

But public urination (and perhaps defecation) was a minor infraction compared to the most shocking crime against decency committed by museum mothers: breastfeeding. In 1850, the eminent scientist Michael Faraday testified to museum officials that he had seen women "suckling their infants" at the National Gallery (qtd. in Taylor 61). Another witness, William Connington, corroborated Faraday's report: "You constantly see women sitting there, with half-

a-dozen children running about and even with babies at the breast" (qtd. in Taylor 61). Three years later, the esteemed art historian Gustav Friedrich Waagen expressed his repugnance toward public breastfeeding and urged museum officials to ban mothers, wet nurses, and perhaps even babies from the National Gallery:

> [F]reedom of admission is carried too far, infants in arms with their nurses…being allowed entrance. I have at various times been in the National Gallery, when it had all the appearance of a large nursery, several wet-nurses having regularly encamped there with their babies for hours together….[S]uch persons should in future be excluded from visiting the National Gallery. (qtd. in C. Whitehead 61)

Breastfeeding was so offensive to Waagen that "in spite of all [his] love for the pictures, [he was] more than once obliged to leave the building" when museum mothers were in attendance (qtd. in C. Whitehead 61). The fact that these three men went on record about lactation is remarkable, for as John F. Kasson reminds us, intimate bodily functions "were generally beneath discussion" in the nineteenth century (124). On exhibit in the public space of the museum, mothers' breasts drew attention to the biological processes of the female body in a way that not only embarrassed male viewers, but also denied the museum the respect it deserved as an institution of high culture.

Baring one's breasts was not the only museum-going crime committed by female museum visitors. Rabble-rousing women reportedly drank gin, peeled oranges, ate strawberries, flirted with men, chatted loudly, used crude language, spat on paintings, stared at nudes, quarreled over chairs, read scandalous novels, took shelter from inclement weather, bothered museum attendants with trivial questions, disregarded museum objects altogether, encouraged their children to run up and down museum corridors, and even did gymnastics in exhibition

spaces.[37] Such raucous behavior sometimes escalated to museum vandalism. For instance, in 1889, three young women were suspected of scratching seventeen paintings in the National Portrait Gallery with a hatpin (Perry 134-35), causing extensive damage and inspiring militant suffragettes to launch vicious attacks against prominent paintings in the Edwardian period (Bailkin 191-203; Hoberman, *Museum Trouble* 124-25).[38] Antithetical to strategies of distinction, such disruptive and destructive behavior undermined the civilizing work of middle-class female museum visitors and tainted the sterile environment of the museum, causing it to descend into the domain of ordinariness. Moreover, such conduct represented women as unfit custodians of cultural property, a notion that accounted for their exclusion from curatorial positions in museums. As Tony Bennett reminds us, "the authoritative voice of the museum remained monologically male" (33).

Even when on their best behavior, female museum visitors often distracted men from their rational recreation. When attired in sumptuous gowns, voluminous skirts, and bedecked hats, women were reputed to shatter men's concentration and even deprive them of their minds. The anonymous author of a rather humorous article printed in *Chamber's Journal* in 1861

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[37] Detailed accounts of female museum visitors' disorderly conduct appear in Brontë, *L* 706; Hill 125-38; Hoberman, "Women" 497; Taylor 29-66; C. Whitehead 59-66; "The British Museum and the People Who Go There" 591-93; and "The National Reading-Room" 131.

[38] Given female museum visitors' unpredictable behavior, museum officials took measures to protect museum objects and maintain order among the museum-going public. In the Edwardian period, when anxiety concerning museum vandalism reached a fever pitch, female visitors of all ranks were detained at museum turnstiles by uniformed attendants, who inspected women's handbags and muffs and confiscated their umbrellas and walking sticks (Bailkin 198). In the Victorian period, however, efforts to minimize female museum visitors' unruliness were much less transparent. For instance, museums often used catalogues and guidebooks as textual resources in programs that aimed to create and enforce standards of morally and socially acceptable museum-going behavior.

explained that female visitors to the British Museum Reading Room were the cause of many of his "false quantities, misspelling[s], mistranslation[s], and wrong references":

> I am preparing a work for the assistance of scholars, in which accuracy of reference, &c., is of prime importance; but at the whisk of silk and the rustle of muslin my faculties go from me. For you will have noticed that a great many of the ladies are young and good-looking withal, nor are their stockings blue, but charmingly white, like their hands, while their eyes are for the most part unspectacled, and the lashes thereof long and silky. Now, St. Anthony might have worked in the presence of eyelashes long and silky, but I am not a saint, so I can't. ("The National Reading- Room" 131)

Attractive female museum visitors were said to fluster male artists as well as scholars. Noting the fact that women comprised the majority of the art students admitted to the National Gallery on Student Days, the anonymous author of an article printed in the *Daily News* in 1887 wrote, "Perhaps it is fortunate that the fair sex should predominate as decidedly as it does. A few pretty women amongst a large collection of artistic young gentlemen might exert a disturbing influence" ("Students' Day in the National Gallery" 2). In her discussion of the British Museum Reading Room, where women seem to have been the most distracting to men, Ruth Hoberman explains that "male observers seemed to experience [women's] conspicuous presence as an imposition of bodily imperatives on an otherwise disembodied, rational workspace" ("Women" 497-98).[39] If women were revered for bringing the decorum of the domestic sphere into the public space of the museum, they were also condemned for besmirching that space with inappropriate exhibitions of the female form.

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[39] For more information on women's presence in the British Museum Reading Room, see Bernstein's *Roomscape: Women Writers in the British Museum from George Eliot to Virginia Woolf* (2013).

Well aware that their bodies were on view in the public space of the museum, female visitors wielded tremendous power over their male counterparts. Perhaps to minimize women's control over the exhibition space, certain patriarchal behavior patterns were established. For instance, the convention of male visitors reading the museum's catalogue or guidebook aloud to their female companions placed women under the instruction of men and forced them to relinquish their control over of their museal experiences (Perry 129). This practice is illustrated in an 1871 *Punch* cartoon (fig. 9) that depicts at the far right a male visitor bending down to read the Royal Academy Exhibition's catalogue to his seated female companion. The nearness of the man's face to the woman's indicates that the visitors are intimately acquainted, and the cartoon suggests that this museum-going convention may have been a courtship ritual. Brontë lends credence to this supposition in *Villette*. In chapter 19, she depicts male visitors as effective communicators of educational information and female visitors as passive (but cheerful) listeners. When Dr. John Graham Bretton, a seasoned museum visitor who possesses a "perfect knowledge" of "every museum" and each "object worth seeing" in Villette, escorts Lucy Snowe to what appears to be a fine art museum, he "communicate[s] much note-worthy information" to her as they take a "very pleasant" turn around the exhibition space (Brontë, *V* 198, 196, 205). Ever the gentleman, Dr. John even condescends to "bend his bright handsome head" to listen with kind attention to Lucy's "obscure and stammering" thoughts on museum objects (Brontë, *V* 205). His tolerance of his female companion's comments is magnanimous indeed, as is evident in an 1894 *Pall Mall Gazette* article in which an instructive aunt advises her niece, an inexperienced museum visitor, to not vex her male escort with trivial questions about the artworks on view at the Royal Academy: "You cannot dream of how annoying it is. Solomon speaks bitterly of a contentious woman, but he probably never took one given to the abominable

habit of asking meek questions round a picture gallery" ("Hints on Visiting the Academy, Addressed to a Young Lady" 3). Considered together, the *Punch* cartoon, *Villette*, and the *Pall Mall Gazette* article indicate that museum-going conventions that placed women under the instruction of men institutionalized men's role as educators of the less intellectual and therefore far more ordinary gender. In accordance with this view, the museum was often deemed a man's educational workspace, a space designed exclusively for his rational recreation.[40]

But despite the perception that female museum visitors were intruders into a masculine space, the fact remains that women were instrumental in the creation and maintenance of the museum visitor social code, which, in Brontë's words, was the "invisible influence" (*L* 631) that coordinated interpersonal relations within the public space of the museum.

The Development of Charlotte Brontë's Museal Consciousness

Brontë's voluminous personal correspondence reveals that between 30 May and 30 June 1851, she visited the Great Exhibition no fewer than five times. Returning to the Crystal Palace in London's Hyde Park at more or less regular intervals and perusing the items on view for two to three hours at a time,[41] Brontë became one of the more than six million visitors to witness the most extraordinary spectacle that Britain had ever produced. Her recurrent visits to the

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[40] This view pre-dated the Victorian period, as is evident in Archibald Archer's 1819 oil on canvas *The Temporary Elgin Room*, which depicts the museum as a male-dominated space. At least eighteen persons converse in small groups in the British Museum's Elgin Room, seventeen of whom are distinguished male visitors and chief members of the Museum's staff and one of whom is a well-dressed woman clutching her male companion's arm. The disproportionate number of men in the painting represents the museum as a space designed for men's rational recreation.

[41] Brontë's personal correspondence indicates that she visited the Great Exhibition on 30 May, 6 June, 13 June, and 23 June 1851 (*L* 625, 630, 636, 648). The date of her fifth visit is unknown; however, Brontë mentions the visit in a letter dated 14 July 1851 (*L* 666). In letters dated 24 June and 7 June 1851, Brontë recounts that she spent two and three hours in the Exhibition, respectively (*L* 648, 630).

Exhibition incited a profusion of textual production.[42] Her letters from the latter half of 1851 reveal a compulsion to express her impressions of the "marvellous, stirring, bewildering sight" despite the fact that it was "not much in [her] way" and "each renewed visit was made under coercion rather than of [her] own free will" (Brontë, *L* 628, 639, 666). Despite Brontë's express instructions to her correspondents to "not press [her] much on the subject of the 'Crystal Palace'" (*L* 666), she related her impressions of the Exhibition in no fewer than thirteen letters, nine of which followed one another in rapid succession and contained similar sentiments. In both their content and their form, these letters reveal that Brontë's recurrent visits to the Exhibition were transformative experiences in her life. In the process of learning how to comprehend the Crystal Palace's complex floor plan, interpret the multitude of items on view, and navigate the museal space in concert with other visitors, Brontë became increasingly acclimated to Victorian museum culture. This acclimation had two contradictory outcomes. On the one hand, Brontë became more educated, socially savvy, and culturally competent; that is, she entered the domain of positive extraordinariness. But on the other hand, Brontë acquired a museum education that was similar to that of scores of other visitors to the Exhibition; thus, she remained anchored to the domain of ordinariness. In what follows, I argue that Brontë defied classification as a museum visitor, traversing domains of distinction as she adapted to the museal environment.

Svetlana Alpers contends that museum culture thrives upon "the ritual of attentive looking," a reflexive learned behavior that is as unique to Western culture as is the museum in which it is learned and practiced (26). This act of distinction enables museum visitors to perceive minute differences between subjects, objects, and practices and then classify these entities within

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[42] Buzard, Childers, and Gillooly note in their introduction to *Victorian Prism: Refractions of the Crystal Palace* (2007) that the Great Exhibition was responsible for a culture-wide explosion of textual production (1).

the system of distinction. Brontë's personal correspondence reveals her gradual acquisition of this particular mode of spectatorship. In Brontë's first visit to the Crystal Palace, the Exhibition appeared in her untrained eyes as a bewildering superabundance of fragmented visual stimuli, as is evident in the profusion of broken phrases that pepper her account of the event. In a letter dated 31 May 1851, Brontë writes to her father, the Reverend Patrick Brontë:

> Yesterday we went to the Crystal Palace—the exterior has a strange and elegant but somewhat unsubstantial effect—The interior is like a mighty Vanity Fair—the brightest colours blaze on all sides—and ware of all kinds—from diamonds to spinning jennies and Printing Presses are there to be seen—It was very fine—gorgeous—animated—bewildering—but I liked Thackeray's lecture better. (*L* 625)

The ten dashes that appear in this passage attest to sudden shifts in Brontë's memories of the Exhibition. With its jumbled profusion of visual stimuli fresh in her mind, Brontë represents the event as a disjointed chain of linguistic fragments. The inverted sentence at the heart of this passage indicates that in Brontë's mind, the sheer quantity of objects on view takes precedence over not only their careful arrangement within the museal space, but also the technologies of display that endow some of them with visual distinction. Unpracticed in the ritual of attentive looking, Brontë appears visually unsophisticated in this letter; that is, she seems quite ordinary.

However, Brontë's letters reveal that subsequent visits to the Crystal Palace gradually acclimated her to the Exhibition's influx of visual stimuli. In her account of her second visit to the Exhibition, Brontë writes to her father that she is "more struck…on this occasion" with the careful order and spectacular arrangement of the items on view:

> Its grandeur does not consist in *one* thing but in the unique assemblage of *all* things—Whatever human industry has created—you find there—from the great compartments

> filled with Railway Engines and boilers, with Mill-machinery in full work—with splendid carriages of all kinds—with harness of every description—to the glass-covered and velvet spread stands loaded with the most gorgeous work of the goldsmith and silversmith—and the carefully guarded caskets full of real diamonds and pearls worth hundreds of thousands of pounds. It may be called a Bazaar or a Fair—but it is such a Bazaar or Fair as eastern Genii might have created. It seems as if magic only could have gathered this mass of wealth from all the ends of the Earth—as if none but supernatural hands could have arranged it thus—with such a blaze and contrast of colours and marvellous power of effect. (*L* 630-31, original emphases)

In both its content and its form, this passage attests to Brontë's increased comprehension, appreciation, and perhaps even internalization of the Crystal Palace's methods of exhibition. Patterning her sentences on the structure of the *Official Catalogue of the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations* (1851), a descriptive publication that lists accumulations of like goods, Brontë uses cumulative sentences as well as recurrent words and phrases to connect her descriptions of related objects. Moreover, in accordance with the Exhibition's classificatory system, which arranged items on a vertical spectrum between Raw Materials and Fine Arts, Brontë uses dashes to separate her descriptions of dissimilar objects. Furthermore, in describing the machines, works of precious metal, and gemstones on view, Brontë recalls the hierarchical structure of the Exhibition's floor plan, guiding her correspondent through the Crystal Palace's west end, which exhibited works produced in Britain.[43] In this letter-turned-guidebook, Brontë

[43] The Exhibition's floor plan indicates that the items that Brontë describes in this passage were grouped in classes and exhibited on the north side of the Crystal Palace's ground floor and in its South Central Gallery. See the *Official Catalogue of the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations* 12-13.

demonstrates both her awareness of the Exhibition's structure and her ability to order information in the way that museums do.

Nevertheless, the aforementioned passage underscores Brontë's lack of visual sophistication. Awestruck by the Exhibition's "blaze and contrast of colours and marvellous power of effect," Brontë appears perplexed and even spellbound by the "mass of wealth from all the ends of the Earth" that "none but supernatural hands could have arranged" (*L* 631). Dazzled to the point of confusion, Brontë attributes the Exhibition's spectacular arrangement of goods to the "magic" of "eastern Genii" (*L* 631). In this respect, she demonstrates her lack of cultural knowledge concerning the ritual of attentive looking. If ever a museum visitor was in need of a guide to train them in this learned behavior, Brontë was such a one.

Fortunately, in her fourth visit to the Exhibition, Brontë gained an informative guide, Sir David Brewster, who spoke in the "kindest and simplest manner" concerning the items on view (*L* 648). In a letter dated 15 November 1851, Brontë describes the mental transformation that ensued to her publisher and possible suitor, James Taylor:

> It [the Crystal Palace] struck me at the first with only a vague sort of wonder and admiration, but having one day the privilege of going over it in company with an eminent countryman of yours—Sir David Brewster, and hearing in his kindly Scotch accent his lucid explanation of many things that had been to me before a sealed book—I began a little better to comprehend it—or at least a small part of it. (*L* 718)

Here, Brontë traces her metamorphosis into a trained museum visitor. Equipped with Brewster's lucid guidance, Brontë transforms from a bewildered visitor who views the Exhibition with "only a vague sort of wonder and admiration" to an informed visitor who reads the event like an open book. In learning how to practice the ritual of attentive looking, Brontë learns how to

comprehend the Exhibition—"or at least a small part of it"—and gains a considerable measure of cultural literacy in the process.

Brontë's visit to the Crystal Palace with Brewster appears to have been a pivotal moment in her acclimation to museum culture, for she seems to have drawn upon her museum-going experience with this informative guide when writing *Villette*. Presumably representing Brewster in the character of Dr. John, who introduces Lucy Snowe to museum culture and proves instrumental to her development of museal consciousness, Brontë underscores the social nature of museum-going. For in visiting the Great Exhibition as well as Grosvenor House and Bridgewater House with a host of close friends and eminent acquaintances in the summer of 1851, Brontë learned to move and think in concert with the "living tide" of visitors that rolled through these museal spaces "with a deep hum like the sea heard from a distance" (*L* 631). In practicing the ritual of attentive looking at the Exhibition, Brontë observed that her fellow visitors appeared "ruled and subdued by some invisible influence," for "not one loud noise was to be heard" and "not one irregular movement [was to be] seen" among them (*L* 631). Emulating her fellow visitors' behavior, Brontë was absorbed into the museal environment. In this respect, she physically joined the ranks of the ordinary. At the same time, however, Brontë gained a measure of distinction through the acquisition of the social education that the museum afforded.

Though Brontë's visits to Grosvenor House and Bridgewater House supplied some material for *Villette*, her recurrent visits to the Great Exhibition provided a wealth of inspiration for her novelistic representation of Victorian museum culture.[44] For in leaving London on 30 June 1851, Brontë carried the Exhibition back to Haworth with her in the form of vivid

[44] Readers often assume that Brontë's visits to Brussels between 1842 and 1844 supplied most of the material for the novel. However, Dolin explains that the novel incorporates later experiences and events, including those that occurred during Brontë's visit to London in 1851 (xv).

memories. On 15 November 1851, Brontë wrote to Taylor that although she had been quite interested in many of the events that she had attended in London, "[w]hat [then] chiefly dwell[ed] in [her] memory [were] Mr. Thackeray's Lectures, Mademoiselle Rachel's Acting, D'Aubignés, Melville's and Maurice's Preaching and—the Crystal Palace" (*L* 717). The dash in this sentence attests to the prominent position that the Exhibition occupied in Brontë's mind almost five months after she had visited it. Moreover, this punctuation mark attests to Brontë's competence in representing linguistic information with the same attention to visual distinction that the Exhibition paid to the objects on view. Like an object encased in the Crystal Palace's superabundance of glass, the Exhibition survived in Brontë's memory long after it closed on 11 October 1851. In what follows, I argue that Brontë's recurrent visits to this museal space as well as others inspired not only the museum scene that appears in chapter 19 of *Villette*, but also the novel's depiction of the process through which Lucy Snowe develops museal consciousness.

The Development of Lucy Snowe's Museal Consciousness

Preserved for a decade in Brontë's "extra-institutional" memory, to borrow a term from Crane (2), De Biefve's *Une Almé* and its controversial reception make an appearance in *Villette*.[45] In chapter 19: "The Cleopatra," Brontë reimagines De Biefve's dancer/prostitute as the Queen of the Nile and intensifies the details of the composition exhibited at the Brussels Salon. Stated otherwise, Brontë reconfigures not just an ordinary woman, but a *fallen* woman, as the most extraordinarily beautiful, wealthy, and powerful female monarch in Eastern history. Moreover, Brontë attributes her fictional artwork not to the largely unknown painter Edouard De

[45] Charlier identified *Une Almé* as the probable source of inspiration for Brontë's *Cleopatra* in 1933.

Biefve, but to the renowned Old Master Peter Paul Rubens.[46] Brontë's insistence on the extraordinariness of the museum object is impossible to overlook, and it invites readers to examine the relationship between the painting and its viewer, Lucy Snowe.

In contrast to *Cleopatra*, Lucy embodies ordinariness; she is a homely, poor, unmarried woman without family employed as a schoolteacher abroad. As the character-object system dictates, Brontë's heroine emerges as ordinary vis-à-vis the extraordinary object. However, Lucy's capacity for critical thought is far from ordinary, as Brontë makes clear in her depiction of Lucy as a museum visitor. Chancing upon *Cleopatra* one morning alone in what is presumably a fine art museum in the city of Villette, Lucy narrates her unfavorable response to Brontë's ordinary-turned-extraordinary artwork. I reproduce the passage in its entirety because the massive amount of textual space afforded to it underscores Brontë's dual emphasis on the extraordinariness of the museum object and the extraordinariness of Lucy's intellect:

> This picture, I say, seemed to consider itself the queen of the collection. It represented a woman, considerably larger, I thought, than the life. I calculated that this lady, put into a scale of magnitude suitable for the reception of a commodity of bulk, would infallibly turn from fourteen to sixteen stone. She was, indeed, extremely well fed: very much butcher's meat—to say nothing of bread, vegetables, and liquids—must she have consumed to attain that breadth and height, that wealth of muscle, that affluence of flesh. She lay half-reclined on a couch: why, it would be difficult to say; broad daylight blazed round her; she appeared in hearty health, strong enough to do the work of two plain cooks; she could not plead a weak spine; she ought to have been standing, or at least sitting bolt upright. She had no business to lounge away the noon on a sofa. She ought

[46] For a detailed interpretation of this authorial move, see Kromm 388-90.

> likewise to have worn decent garments; a gown covering her properly, which was not the case: out of abundance of material—seven-and-twenty yards, I should say, of drapery—she managed to make inefficient raiment. Then, for the wretched untidiness surrounding her, there could be no excuse. Pots and pans—perhaps I ought to say vases and goblets—were rolled here and there on the foreground; a perfect rubbish of flowers was mixed amongst them, and an absurd and disorderly mass of curtain upholstery smothered the couch and cumbered the floor. On referring to the catalogue, I found that this notable production bore [the] name "Cleopatra." (Brontë, *V* 199-200)

With this narration, Lucy dethrones Cleopatra and reconceptualizes her as not just an ordinary woman, surrounded by the garden-variety stuff of everyday life, but an indolent, untidy, obese, and indecently clothed woman. Victimized by Lucy's imagination, *Cleopatra* descends to the domain of negative extraordinariness. At the same time, Lucy rises to the domain of positive extraordinariness, for in comparison to the unattractive, slothful woman depicted in the painting, Lucy appears neat, trim, and industrious, her mind busy at work. Thus playing with the domains of distinction, Brontë subverts the character-object system.

Emplaced near *Cleopatra*, Lucy adopts a strategy of distinction to appear morally superior to the scantily clad Egyptian queen. When she sits down on a bench in front of *Cleopatra* in a vacant exhibition space and proceeds to scrutinize the composition's lascivious details, Lucy resembles the woman depicted in H.E. Tidmarsh's circa 1885 representation of the National Gallery (fig. 10). Yet Brontë is quick to ward off readers' suspicions that her chaste Protestant heroine may be harboring indecent thoughts. She installs a "cordon of protection" before the "enormous piece of claptrap" and notes that Lucy "takes advantage of [the bench's] accommodation" not to examine *Cleopatra*, but rather to rest and contemplate "some exquisite

little pictures of still life" that "[hang] modestly beneath that coarse and preposterous canvas" (Brontë, *V* 200).[47] As Reina Lewis argues, *Cleopatra* represents "the negative aspects of an active female sexuality with which Lucy cannot be associated" (36). She thus averts her gaze from the indecency on view in the museum. With her eyes downcast, Lucy appears sufficiently moral. However, it is impossible to escape *Cleopatra*. Installed at the center of the exhibition space, Lucy is stationed at the optimum location for beholding the "picture of pretentious size," which is "set up in the best light" in the most prominent position in the room (Brontë, *V* 199).

Christopher Rovee explains the social importance of painting installations in nineteenth-century museums. In accordance with the hierarchy of genres, massive historical compositions were installed in the most prominent positions in exhibition spaces, whereas smaller landscapes, portraits, and miniatures hung low on walls except when used to fill space in upper corners (34). Stated otherwise, more extraordinary artworks enjoyed pride of place in museums, while their less extraordinary counterparts functioned more or less as visual clutter. This arrangement had the effect of spatially organizing museum visitors according to their taste levels and social statuses, which were reputed to amount to much the same thing. Visitors with sufficient cultural capital to understand and appreciate the most prestigious paintings would have to move to the center of an exhibition space in order to view them from a proper distance. As Rovee explains, "The hanging of paintings could quite literally center a certain kind of (tasteful, well-off) viewer" (34). In contrast, viewers with a taste for less refined paintings would have to move to the margins of an exhibition space in order to gain an unobstructed view of them (Rovee 34). Painting installations thus spatially organized museum visitors in accordance with the positions these individuals occupied or aspired to occupy in the social world.

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[47] Brontë saw still lifes of this description at the Brussels Salon in 1842. Gérin provides a brief overview of their favorable reviews in *La Renaissance* (210).

Lucy's self-installation at the center of the exhibition space therefore reveals her "cultural level of aspiration," to borrow a phrase from Pierre Bourdieu (*Love of Art* 15). Seated on the bench in front of *Cleopatra*, Lucy claims a share of the symbolic capital that is associated with the massive painting. Spatially classifying herself with the respectable museum visitors who inhabit the centers of exhibition spaces, she "claims a higher cultural level than that which is indicated by [her] qualifications" (Bourdieu, *Love of Art* 15) as a schoolteacher. Lucy's strategy of distinction underscores the importance of a woman's position within the Victorian "status theatre" (Ellis qtd. in Davidoff 51), the social sphere in which women often used fine art museums as "instrument[s] in the quest for gentility" (Gillett 218).

In her discussion of the Victorian art scene, Paula Gillett explains that during the London Season, a visit to an art exhibition was "an essential experience for all who wished to gain or to maintain status" (218). In other words, such a visit was an attempt to confer distinction upon oneself. The aforementioned *Pall Mall Gazette* article entitled "Hints on Visiting the Academy, Addressed to a Young Lady" indicates that women were expected to demonstrate their social rank via the performance of certain museum-going conventions. For instance, the author of the article educates her niece on the social importance of the ritual of attentive looking: "The pictures that are at or below the level of your head are the only pictures you need notice. They are said to be 'on the line.' Not only does looking at the others strain your eyes, and add to your labour, but it shows that you are unfamiliar with the unwritten code of display" (3). This excerpt indicates that a woman's betrayal of her unfamiliarity with a fine art museum's methods of exhibition could quite possibly trigger her social downfall—that is, her descent into the domain of negative extraordinariness. For women who wished to showcase their social status, the proper performance of the ritual of attentive looking was a requisite skill to develop and hone. It is

therefore not surprising that Lucy diverts her attention from the monstrous *Cleopatra* to the cluster of still lifes installed beneath it. In viewing the paintings "on the line," she not only makes economic use of both her time and her energy, processing the museum's abundance of visual stimuli in an efficient manner,[48] but also demonstrates her comprehension of both the museum's methods of exhibition and the social performances that revolve around them. Lucy thus activates her elevated social position.

But unlike respectable female museum visitors, who often positioned themselves (on the arms of male escorts) at the centers of exhibition spaces in order to serve as models of proper museum-going comportment, Lucy makes a spectacle of herself in the museum. For in the same moment that she averts her gaze from *Cleopatra*, she undermines her own attempt to portray herself as extraordinarily modest. As an unaccompanied young woman whom no one would ever characterize as exhibitionistic,[49] Lucy is installed at the center of the exhibition space, seated in front of the scandalous artwork. On view in the museum, Lucy is neither an ideal museum mother nor a vexatious museum monster. Nevertheless, she is a problematic museum visitor in two major respects. First, as a poor, unmarried, and childless schoolteacher who happens to have a few quite respectable connections,[50] she occupies a liminal position in the social sphere.

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[48] Vrettos discusses mental energy and efficiency in relation to the Victorian theory of finite mental space (67).

[49] Typically, Lucy labors self-consciously to not attract attention to herself. In chapter 20, she is mortified when Mrs. Bretton insists that she wear a pink dress, her "sombre daily attire not being calculated to attract notice" (Brontë, *V* 221). Wearing the pink dress, Lucy anxiously awaits Dr. John's assessment of her appearance: "'I *do* hope he will not think I have been decking myself out to draw attention,' was my uneasy aspiration" (Brontë, *V* 208, original emphasis).

[50] In chapter 26, Lucy notes the respectable "grade of [her] acquaintance" and mentions that she receives "frequent invitations from a chateau and a great hotel" (Brontë, *V* 292). Madame Beck expresses pleasure that Lucy has "such associates as must cultivate and elevate, rather than those who might deteriorate and depress" her social status (Brontë, *V* 292).

Defying classification, Lucy is neither middle-class nor "of no social significance" (Brontë, *V* 59). Second, in the public space of the museum, she straddles the line (to use a rather unladylike metaphor) between propriety and immodesty. For on the one hand, Lucy is escorted to the museum by a well-respected physician, Dr. John, whose presence lends her considerable social capital and protects her from unwanted visual attention from male spectators. But on the other hand, Lucy encounters the scandalous *Cleopatra* alone, navigating the exhibition space unaccompanied while Dr. John takes care of business in the city (Brontë, *V* 198-99). John F. Kasson reminds us that nineteenth-century social codes did not require women to be accompanied in cultural institutions such as museums (132). Nevertheless, a male escort was recommended,[51] and the avoidance of situations in which shame or victimization might occur was often preferable to exposing oneself to public view (John F. Kasson 116). Alone in the museum, Lucy opens herself up to unwelcome visual attention and becomes vulnerable to assaults on her honor. Unbeknownst to her, Lucy thus increases the sense of indecency on view in the museum. As she hangs in the balance between propriety and immodesty, Brontë's fictional museum is scandalized perhaps far more than was the Brussels Salon in 1842.

Unchaperoned and exposed to public view in front of *Cleopatra*, Lucy enacts a daring social performance that disturbs the museum's most conventional male visitor, Monsieur Paul Emanuel. Recognizing that Lucy needs to be rescued from the realm of impropriety, the austere professor is quick to offer his protection to his naïve female acquaintance. In accordance with Victorian standards of honorable male behavior, M. Paul "refuse[s] to collaborate in another's self-exposure" (John F. Kasson 126); he forcibly escorts Lucy to the margins of the exhibition space and orders her to confine her attention to *La vie d'une femme,* four dull paintings deemed

[51] The author of "Hints on Visiting the Academy, Addressed to a Young Lady" encourages her niece to visit the Royal Academy Exhibition with a male escort (3).

appropriate for female viewers (Brontë, *V* 200-202).[52] In doing so, he echoes what many etiquette manuals expressed: that it was prudent for women to "err on the side of caution rather than…of boldness" (Smiley qtd. in John F. Kasson 132) when in public. Locked into an unfavorable viewing position near the wall, Lucy is forced to view the "bloodless, brainless nonentities" (Brontë, *V* 202) depicted in the paintings up close.

Epitomizing ordinariness, the maiden, the wife, the mother, and the widow represented in *La vie d'une femme* appear in marked contrast to the extraordinary female ruler depicted in *Cleopatra*. As Barbara J. Black contends, "The two masterpieces form a revealing diptych, one representing the exotic, sensual female that man desires and the other the domestic, dutiful female of Victorian sentimental narrative that man expects" (112). Lucy disapproves of the latter even more than she does the former; as Black points out, "Her assessment of the narrative painting is even more vitriolic than her mischievous revision of *Cleopatra*" (112). Describing the women depicted in *La vie d'une femme* as "most villainous" (Brontë, *V* 202), Lucy ascribes to them a baseness that is far worse than ordinariness. Face-to-face with the "flat, dead, pale, and formal" (Brontë, *V* 201) representations of powerless women, Lucy physically confronts and mentally attacks the patriarchal aspects of the museum visitor social code that place her under M. Paul's authority in the museum.

To subvert the conventions that placed female museum visitors under the command of their male counterparts, Lucy does not remain in her unfavorable viewing position for long. Defying M. Paul's strict orders to "turn to the wall and study [the] four pictures of a woman's life," she "veer[s] round, and survey[s] the gallery" (Brontë, *V* 204, 202). In doing so, Lucy asserts her power as an autonomous museum visitor and claims her right to view the objects on

[52] Brontë saw Fanny Geefs' triptych *La vie d'une femme* exhibited at the Brussels Salon in 1842. For reviews of the piece, see Gérin 210.

exhibit at her discretion. Seated at the margins of the exhibition space, she directs her vision toward the center of the room and gazes upon *Cleopatra* from afar. Nineteenth-century museum literature suggests that Lucy does well to examine the painting from this viewing position. In an undated mid-nineteenth-century pamphlet that accompanied an exhibition of Edward Augustus Brackett's 1852 sculpture *Shipwrecked Mother and Child*, the American sculptor Horatio Greenough contends that it is best to view art from a distance. Observing that spectators often make the mistake of viewing art at close range, he writes, "I venture to suggest to those who wish to enjoy it, that they sit quietly on the several sides of the room, and even there survey it with half-closed eyes" (qtd. in Joy S. Kasson 36). In Greenough's opinion, viewing art from afar enables spectators to see beyond an artist's technical skill and focus on the intellectual and emotional responses that art evokes in viewers. In examining *Cleopatra* from a distance, then, Lucy adopts a strategy of distinction and portrays herself as a sophisticated museum visitor.

While gazing upon *Cleopatra* at a distance, Lucy frustrates M. Paul by announcing, "I can see her quite well from this corner" (Brontë, *V* 205). She then requests an unobstructed view of the effeminate dandy Colonel Alfred de Hamal, who snickers an inappropriate response to *Cleopatra* to a male companion at his elbow: "Will Monsieur have the goodness to move an inch to one side?" (Brontë, *V* 204). With her attempt to reposition M. Paul, Lucy aims to displace masculine authority in the museum. Refusing to submit to the museum-going convention of being conducted around an exhibition space and shown a museum's most extraordinary objects by a male chaperone (though she welcomes the practice while on the arm of Dr. John), Lucy attempts to take command of her own museal experience and recognizes the museum's potential as a place for women's rational recreation.

Emboldened and defiant, Lucy resembles the woman who unabashedly gazes at an off-screen male spectator (Marshall and Warner 73) from the top of the stairs of the National Gallery in James Tissot's 1874 oil on canvas *London Visitors* (fig. 11). Tissot's problematic museum visitor, whose respectability is ensured by the dignified male escort at her side but whose modesty is called into question by her refusal to adopt a downcast glance, points with her umbrella toward a future in which the museum visitor social code authorizes women to take ownership of their own museal experiences. Equally problematic, Lucy constructs a museal counterdiscourse that empowers women to symbolically and materially cultivate distinction on their own terms. Through unconscious, reflexive behaviors, Lucy brushes museal conventions against the grain and thus transforms them (McIsaac 8). Stated otherwise, Brontë's heroine rejects standard strategies of distinction and invents novel ones.

The Museal Space of the Garden

The literature of Victorian museum culture indicates that the development of museal consciousness was a process that unfolded over time. In *Museums and Art Galleries* (1888), Thomas Greenwood describes the process through which "uninformed and uninitiated" (26) Victorians became acclimated to museum culture. In reference to an imaginary working-class museum visitor who experiences a sense of reverential awe upon visiting a museum on a summer holiday, Greenwood writes:

> It is not the objects themselves that he sees there, and wonders at, that cause this impression, so much as the order and evident science which he cannot but recognise in the manner in which they are grouped and arranged. He learns that there is a meaning and value in every object, however insignificant, and that there is a way of looking at things common and rare, distinct from regarding them as useless, useful, or merely curious. (26)

Despite the presumed intellectual ordinariness of Greenwood's museum visitor, the museum's classification scheme is not lost on him. Neither is the museum's dominant message that once collected, ordinary objects transform into extraordinary ones. "Common and rare" objects co-exist in the museum as they do in this dissertation. Viewed through the same analytical lens, "useless, useful, or merely curious" objects have just as much value as those created for the express purpose of exhibition.

With this lesson learned, Greenwood's museum visitor initiates the process through which museal consciousness is developed. Counterintuitively, however, his transformation from an awestruck and rather bewildered spectator to an educated and well-trained museum visitor is completed outside the museum. On a Sunday afternoon's stroll with his family, Greenwood's museum visitor:

> ...discovers that he has acquired a new interest in the common things he sees around him. He begins to discover that the stones, the flowers, the creatures of all kinds that throng around him are not, after all, so very commonplace as he had previously thought them. He looks at them with a pleasure not before experienced, and talks of them to his children with sundry references to things like them which he saw in the Museum. (26)

Outdoors, Greenwood's museum visitor perceives the garden-variety objects of nature as extraordinary. For as Udo Küsel argues, "The whole environment is one, large museum if we recognise it as such, and if we apply museological principles [to it]" (qtd. in Davis 101). Within the museal space of the natural environment, Greenwood's museum visitor learns to appreciate the intrinsic value of the material world and passes the museum's so-called object lessons on to

his kin.[53] The information he has acquired and the skills he has developed in the museum have become portable and have "take[n] the museum beyond its own walls" (Crane 2). Greenwood thus illustrates that once developed inside the museum, museal consciousness is refined outside it.

Brontë, however, advances a somewhat dissimilar narrative of the development of her heroine's museal consciousness. Rather than commencing inside the museum and terminating outside it, the development of Lucy's museal consciousness begins and ends in what may seem an unlikely place: the garden of Madame Beck's convent-turned-boarding school.[54] In this museal environment, Brontë reveals that Lucy is "thinking without thinking" (Ryan 3) about Victorian museological practices long before she enters Villette's fine art museum on the arm of Dr. John. The novel may have insight into its own museal consciousness, but Brontë's heroine does not.

I propose that Brontë's conceptualization of the garden as a museum is a textual echo of a European cultural tradition that stretches as far back as the seventeenth century. As John Dixon Hunt argues, British travellers to the Continent in the early modern period tended to perceive gardens not as annexes to cabinets of curiosity, but as cabinets of curiosity in and of themselves. This perception was not unfounded; Hunt explains that "gardens were used not simply for spill-overs for extensive collections, but as an integral part of the display" (76). Gardens exhibited mixed-content collections that consisted of both *naturalia* and *artificialia*; for instance, botanical specimens and precious stones as well as antiquities and fine art. Indeed, it was the juxtaposition

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[53] For more information on "use-inheritance," the theory that parents can pass learned behaviors on to their children, see Ryan 22.

[54] The garden is based on the one at the Pensionnat Heger in Brussels, where Brontë was a pupil and an instructor in 1842 and 1843, respectively. For historical information about the garden, see Ruijssenaars 24-25.

of these objects that generated curiosity (Hunt 77). Flower collections were prized just as much as those of antiquities and fine art, as is evident in the prominent place they occupied in catalogues (Hunt 77). Such collections were exhibited in Italian *giardini segreti*, "private spaces to the sides of villas, where...visitors would not usually be admitted" (Hunt 77). These museal spaces and the botanical collections on view within them strongly resonate with "l'allée défendue" (Brontë, *V* 107) and the flowers to which Lucy devotes considerable attention. I therefore understand the pensionnat's garden as a museal space in the context of the prehistory of the museum. For as Bill Brown contends, the realist novel has the ability to preserve residues of prior cultural phenomena: "Within literature the detritus of history lingers, lying in wait" (*Material Unconscious* 4).

Before Lucy seeks solitude in the "building of palatial splendour" (Brontë, *V* 108) that is the fine art museum in Villette, she rehearses this move in the pensionnat's enclosed garden. With its rectilinear architecture, the garden resembles the exhibition spaces that comprise fine art museums (fig. 12 and fig. 13). Becoming a frequent visitor to the garden's alley, Lucy restores order to its neglected collection of botanical specimens. She narrates, "I made myself gardener of some tintless flowers that grew between its closely-ranked shrubs; I cleared away the relics of past autumns, choking up a rustic seat at the far end. Borrowing of Goton, the cuisinière, a pail of water and a scrubbing-brush, I made this seat clean" (Brontë, *V* 108). Here, Lucy gestures toward the novel's awareness of Victorian curatorial practices. For in reviving the colorless flowers and eradicating signs of decay in the garden, Lucy unconsciously assumes the role of museum curator, or keeper, a profession that underwent modernization in the 1850s.

Brandon Taylor explains that in accordance with new protocols for museum management in the mid-nineteenth century, curatorial duties were divided between two kinds of museum

specialists: directors and keepers. Whereas museum directors were responsible for selecting and purchasing collectibles, constructing accurate histories of objects, and arranging collections within exhibition spaces, museum keepers were responsible for inspecting collectibles and detecting signs of damage or deterioration in them, protecting objects from potential accidents, and ensuring that exhibition spaces were thoroughly cleaned, well ventilated, and appropriately illuminated (62-64). The new rituals of cleanliness that were of utmost importance to museum keepers evolved in the wake of the health and sanitation reforms of the 1830s and 1840s and coincided with debates concerning the mental degradation and moral degeneracy of the laboring classes (64-65). In an era in which crowds of museum visitors were believed to damage collectibles with the toxic miasma that their bodies emitted (60-61) and contaminate civilized exhibition spaces with raucous behavior, keepers took extensive measures to maintain museums that were devoid of dirt, dust, darkness, and decay.

Read in the context of 1850s curatorial practices, Lucy's painstaking efforts to rid the garden of dead leaves and scrub its "rustic seat" (Brontë, *V* 108) clean reveal the novel's awareness of museological practices and Brontë's perception of the natural environment as a museum. Washed and sanitized, the "rustic seat" that Lucy "reclaim[s] from fungi and mould" (Brontë, *V* 108) transforms into an important piece of furniture, a material precursor to the bench that she later uses to install herself at the center of the fine art museum. When she proudly declares, "*I* made this seat clean" (Brontë, *V* 108, emphasis added), Lucy justifies her claim to the botanical collection and takes ownership of the museal experience that she has unconsciously created in the garden.

Yet the feminine space of the garden remains a distant approximation of Victorian England's masculine institutions. For whereas museums were managed by male directors,

maintained by male keepers, guarded by male attendants, and designed for the rational recreation of male visitors, the garden is managed by Madame Beck, maintained by Lucy Snowe, guarded by Rosine Matou, and designed for the rational recreation of the boarding school's female students. In terms of both its "personnel" and its "visitors," the museal space of the garden is fundamentally feminine. If the authoritative voice of the museum was male, that of the garden is female. In Brontë's literary imagination, women *are* suitable custodians of material culture.

Brontë's reversal of the gendered aspects of museum culture creates considerable tension in the museal space of the garden. For in a move that turns museum culture on its head, Brontë represents men not as the dominant consumers of the museal space, but rather as inappropriate and unwelcome visitors to it. In a scene in which Dr. John voyeuristically observes a "missile" drop prone at Lucy's feet as she meditates on hope in the garden one evening, he "burst[s] coarsely" (Brontë, *V* 110) into the museal space to retrieve it. Startled and appalled by Dr. John's sudden invasion of the garden and his rude interruption of her pleasant reveries, Lucy narrates, "It was a sacrilege—the intrusion of a man into that spot, at that hour; but he knew himself privileged, and perhaps he trusted to the friendly night. He wandered down the alleys, looking on this side and on that—he was lost in the shrubs, trampling flowers and breaking branches in his search—he penetrated at last the 'forbidden walk'" (Brontë, *V* 113). In this scene, Brontë inverts cultural anxieties concerning female museum visitors' inappropriate behavior by representing Dr. John as a disruptive and destructive presence in the garden. Exercising his male privilege of unrestricted motion even in a space that is "forbidden" to male visitors, Dr. John "penetrate[s]" and soon withdraws from the garden with the same sense of entitlement with which he visits and leaves Villette's fine art museum. In the process of committing this violation of feminine space, he injures the botanical specimens that Lucy has worked so hard to maintain. Making his body

"painfully and problematically visible" (Hoberman, "Women" 498), Dr. John transforms the garden from a well-ordered museal space into a jumbled heap of downtrodden botanical specimens. Lost and disoriented in the garden, Dr. John appears in dire need of a guidebook; his "perfect knowledge of Villette" and "all its galleries, salles, and cabinets" (Brontë, *V* 198) is of no use to him here. But despite his confusion, Dr. John manages to relieve the garden of its most treasured objects: "the casket, the bouquet, and the billet" (Brontë, *V* 114) that comprise the curious "missile." Taking possession of these coveted collectibles, Dr. John escapes the notice of Madame Beck, the museal space's "directress," as he "[takes] the garden at two noiseless bounds" (Brontë, *V* 82, 114). Fleeing from the garden with the same haste with which he invaded it, Dr. John rushes to repatriate the treasures to their masculine site of origin: the neighboring boys' college.

Upon assessing the destruction committed at the hands—or rather, the feet—of Dr. John in the garden, Lucy's first instinct is to restore order to the botanical collection. Unconsciously drawing upon 1850s curatorial practices, she expresses her desire to rid the museal space of dirt, debris, and signs of deterioration: "Some plants there were, indeed, trodden down by Dr. John in his search, and his hasty and heedless progress, which I wished to prop up, water, and revive; some foot-marks, too, he had left on the beds: but these, in spite of the strong wind, I found a moment's leisure to efface very early in the morning, ere common eyes had discovered them" (Brontë, *V* 116). In her curatorial role as unofficial keeper of the garden, Lucy visually inspects the botanical specimens and detects signs of damage in them; that is, she performs curatorial acts of distinction. As Edward P. Alexander reminds us, "The curator is the first line of defense in conserving museum materials" (144). Lucy therefore works to "prop up, water, and revive" the downtrodden specimens. Detecting signs of trespass in the museal space, she works to "efface"

both Dr. John's footprints in the soil and his masculine presence in the garden. Just as the museum-going convention of signing into visitors' books as parties conducted by men often effaced female visitors from museum attendance records (Perry 131), Lucy expunges the visual records of Dr. John's intrusion into the garden. In erasing the imprints of his body in the soil, Lucy reimagines Dr. John as a phantom visitor to the garden, a mere shadow of an embodied presence.

But despite Lucy's efforts to efface Dr. John's masculine presence from the feminine space of the garden, the museal space is permanently contaminated by his intrusion into it. In her curatorial role, Lucy laments the fact that Dr. John's presence has tainted the otherwise sterile museal environment: "[T]hough Dr. John had spoken very low in the few words he dropped to me, yet the hum of his man's voice pervaded, I thought, the whole conventual ground" (Brontë, *V* 115). Just as museum keepers worried that "the sulphurous vapour or the miasma" emitted from visitors' bodies would saturate the museum's atmosphere and injure the collectibles on view (Faraday qtd. in Taylor 61), Lucy fears that the sound of Dr. John's voice has permeated the garden. Though his footprints are effaced, Dr. John's disembodied voice lingers in the museal space, contaminating it like noxious effluvia.

Unable to rid the garden of this immaterial kind of debris, Lucy bemoans the utter destruction of l'allée défendue:

> My alley, and, indeed, all the walks and shrubs in the garden, had acquired a new, but not a pleasant interest; their seclusion was now become precarious; their calm—insecure. That casement which rained billets, had vulgarized the once dear nook it overlooked; and elsewhere, the eyes of the flowers had gained vision, and the knots in the tree-boles listened like secret ears. (Brontë, *V* 116)

Lamenting Dr. John's rape of the land—*her* land, as she conveys with "my alley"—Lucy mourns the loss of the privacy and security that the garden had afforded her. By obliterating the tranquility that characterizes museal spaces, Dr. John has "vulgarized" Lucy's "once dear nook." The seclusion that had attracted her to the alley is now "precarious" and "insecure." Where she once experienced peace and communed with nature, Lucy now feels the ominous threat of imminent danger. The botanical specimens that she used to cherish are now nightmarishly personified; in accordance with the set of inversions that characterizes the museal space of the garden, the inanimate collectibles have become animate. Endowed with vision and hearing, the flowers and trees infuse the museal atmosphere with a loathsome kind of miasma: an oppressive sense of surveillance. Unable to eliminate this immaterial detritus, Lucy resigns herself to the facts that "things extraordinary [have] transpir[ed] on her premises" (Brontë, *V* 115) and that her private site of collection has transformed under Dr. John's influence into a masculine and therefore public museal space.

Touch in the "Empire of Sight"

In accordance with the set of inversions that renders the garden a mirror image of a museum, Brontë reverses the traditional "sensescape" (Classen and Howes 201) of the modern museum in her representation of the garden. Underscoring the importance of haptic interaction with extraordinary objects, Brontë undermines the considerable emphasis that museums placed on vision. The extent to which Victorian museums favored vision over touch and denied the multisensory biographies of objects (Classen and Howes 200) is evident in Greenwood's "Useful Rules to Keep in Mind on Visiting a Museum" (fig. 14). Of the twelve recommendations that Greenwood makes, six stress the importance of vision in museum-going, and none refer to museum visitors' tactile interaction with extraordinary objects. In encouraging museum visitors

to "avoid attempting to see too much," to "remember that one specimen or one article *well* seen is better than a score of specimens casually inspected," and to "see slowly, observe closely, and think much upon what [they] see" (388, original emphasis), Greenwood reveals the extent to which the museum was governed by visual perception. Stewart has examined the preeminence of vision in museums since the Victorian period, finding that modern museums are "so obviously—so, one might say, naturally, empires of sight that it hardly occurs to us to imagine them as being organized around any other sense or senses" ("Prologue" 28). In modern museums, where "objects are colonized by the gaze" (Classen and Howes 200), interacting with extraordinary objects is "an elaborately ritualized practice of refraining from touch" (Stewart, "Prologue" 28). Avoiding haptic interaction with objects on view is a crucial strategy of distinction; this was as true in the Victorian period as it is today.

As a well-trained museum visitor, Lucy refrains from touching the extraordinary objects on view in the fine art museum, expressing "only the calm desire to *look* on a new thing" and minding the cordon that is stretched before both *Cleopatra* and the cluster of still lifes installed beneath it (Brontë, *V* 109, emphasis added). However, in the garden, Lucy experiences the thrill of touching the botanical collection's most extraordinary treasures, "the casket, the bouquet, and the billet" (Brontë, *V* 114), before Dr. John repatriates them to their site of origin. With the casket "open in [her] hand," Lucy wonders, "Was this a billet-doux? A thing I had heard of, but hitherto had not the honour of seeing or handling. Was it this sort of commodity I held between my finger and thumb at this moment?" (Brontë, *V* 110-11). Handling the billet-doux, Lucy performs an important act of distinction; she enacts the pre-Victorian custom of touching extraordinary objects in order to gain access to "interior truths of which sight is unaware"

(Classen and Howes 202).[55] Holding the rare love letter "between [her] finger and thumb," Lucy experiences an intense emotional connection with both the object and its creator. In this instance, touch functions as "an important medium of intimacy" between subjects and objects and "provides the satisfaction of a corporeal encounter" (Classen and Howes 202). As Constance Classen and David Howes argue, "By touching a collected object the hand of the visitor also encounters the traces of the hand of the object's creator and former owners. One seems to feel what others have felt and bodies seem to be linked to bodies through the medium of the materiality of the object they have shared" (202). In handling the love letter, then, Lucy becomes physically and emotionally linked to its anonymous writer. In this respect, she is literally and figuratively moved by the extraordinary object. In touch with the billet-doux and "in touch" with the amorous emotions expressed in it, Lucy becomes motivated to collect love letters of her own. For as Susan M. Pearce contends, "Objects can have about them a glow of significance, sending sparks of their own into the imagination of the beholder which kindles a desire for possession" (*On Collecting* 172).

The Impassioned Collector

Handling the love letter in the garden causes Lucy to develop an intense emotional connection with material culture. For as Stewart argues, "Of all the senses, touch is most linked to emotion and feeling" ("Prologue" 31). The depth of Lucy's emotional investment in extraordinary objects is most evident in her narration of her process of collecting letters from Dr. John. Upon returning to Madame Beck's boarding school after spending "one happy fortnight" (Brontë, *V* 196) with Dr. John, Lucy becomes preoccupied with Dr. John's promise to write her

[55] Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, touching collected objects was a routine matter. Stewart traces the custom from the fourth to the eighteenth centuries ("Prologue" 29-30), and Classen and Howes focus on the importance of touch in the British Museum and the Ashmolean Museum in the eighteenth century (201-202).

letters containing "any cheerful nonsense that comes into [his] head" (Brontë, *V* 228). In love with Dr. John, Lucy imagines the amorous content and tone of his immaterial letters, endowing them with what Werner Muensterberger refers to as "a subjective exaggeration or overestimation of value" (231). In other words, Lucy confers distinction upon objects that otherwise lack distinctive value. With Dr. John's letters materialized in her mind, Lucy becomes inflamed with what Frank Herrmann has termed "an 'I-must-have-it' feeling" (21), a powerful sense of longing for a particular kind of collectible. Transformed into an impassioned (albeit passive) collector of letters from Dr. John,[56] Lucy yearns for what she perceives to be extraordinary objects. Describing the "strange, sweet insanity" (Brontë, *V* 240) that collectors often experience, Lucy details the inner turmoil that tortures her as she awaits the arrival of one of Dr. John's letters:

> I suppose animals kept in cages, and so scantily fed as to be always upon the verge of famine, await their food as I awaited a letter. Oh!—to speak truth, and drop that tone of a false calm which long to sustain, outwears nature's endurance—I underwent in those seven weeks bitter fears and pains, strange inward trials, miserable defections of hope, intolerable encroachments of despair. This last came so near me sometimes that her breath went right through me. I used to feel it, like a baleful air or sigh, penetrate deep, and make motion pause at my heart, or proceed only under unspeakable oppression. The

[56] It is a common misconception that to collect, one must go in search of collectibles. Martin differentiates "active collecting (seeking things)" from "passive collecting (receiving things)" and "unconscious collecting (storing things)" (fig. 5.1). In a similar vein, Muensterberger explains that collectibles can be "found, given, bought, discovered, or even stolen" (13). Collectors, then, are defined by neither the kinds of objects they collect nor the means by which they acquire them, but rather by the range of intense emotions that they experience and the peculiar kinds of behaviors that they exhibit while collecting (Muensterberger 3). It is therefore appropriate to consider Lucy a collector and interpret her passive acquisition of Dr. John's letters as an act of collecting.

> letter—the well-beloved letter—would not come; and it was all of sweetness in life I had to look for. (Brontë, *V* 268)

In a feverish state of mind, Lucy paints a disturbing picture of the collector's psyche, which, as Muensterberger explains, is often wracked with "moments of tension, sensations of distress or [restlessness], and harrowing doubts" (4). Lucy endures the agonizing wait for a letter in the same manner in which she awaits the return of Dr. John's love. In this scene, it appears that her passion for Dr. John's letters rivals her adoration of Dr. John himself. Muensterberger explains that this phenomenon is not unusual: "It is not at all uncommon for the attitude of a devoted collector toward [her] objects [to be] similar in many ways to a lover's passion" (231). Yearning to collect a love letter like the one she handled in the garden, Lucy redirects her anxious longing for Dr. John toward an object that contains traces of his hand. With her mind focused on acquiring a letter that will "provide the satisfaction of a corporeal encounter" (Classen and Howes 202) between herself and Dr. John, Lucy's discourse becomes infused with desperation.

Comparing her longing for Dr. John's letters to the restlessness that ravenous "animals kept in cages" experience upon "await[ing] their food" (Brontë, *V* 268), Lucy represents collecting as a painful "kind of craving" (Muensterberger 4). In his discussion of the "all-consuming drive" that motivates collectors to acquire extraordinary objects, Muensterberger explains that oral-incorporative metaphors are often associated with collectors: "Observing collectors, one soon discovers an unrelenting need, even hunger, for acquisitions" (3). Unsated with the consumption of one collectible, collectors incessantly pursue collectible after collectible. As Jean Baudrillard contends, "a single object can never be enough" ("System" 8). Thus, the relationship between collecting and eating becomes clear: "Like hunger, which must be sated, the obtainment of one more object does not bring an end to the [collector's] longing" for

extraordinary objects (Muensterberger 13). To use metaphorical language, "[r]egardless of how often and how much one ingests, within a few hours hunger returns and one must eat again" (Muensterberger 16). Experiencing the hunger pains of famished animals, Lucy craves ownership of Dr. John's letters. To borrow a concept from Pearce, Lucy desires "the kiss of possession" (*On Collecting* 173), the pleasurable sense of sweetness that attends the acquisition of collectibles.[57] Since a letter from Dr. John is "all of sweetness in life" that Lucy expects (Brontë, *V* 268), she must obtain one in order to regain her emotional equilibrium.

But as Muensterberger reminds us, returning to a balanced state of calmness and composure is often difficult for collectors, who experience "feelings of exhilaration and states of transport" (4) as often as they experience distress and despair. Regaining emotional equilibrium proves arduous for Lucy, who experiences euphoria upon receiving a letter from Dr. John. Considering the collectible to be "the letter of [her] hope, the fruition of [her] wish, the release from [her] doubt, [and] the ransom of [her] terror," Lucy experiences a cathartic release of frustration upon receiving the letter from the "unwarrantably interfering" hands of Rosine Matou and M. Paul (Brontë, *V* 238). Enthralled with her new collectible, to which she is drawn by "strong magnetism" (Brontë, *V* 238), Lucy performs an important act of distinction; she unconsciously authenticates it through sensory perception. Reflexively using the haptic skills she has learned in the garden, she turns the letter over in her hands, measures its heft, and determines that it is "not a slight note, but an envelope, which must, at least, contain a sheet: it felt, not flimsy, but firm, substantial, satisfying" (Brontë, *V* 238-39). Drawing upon her experiences in the

[57] Similar to Muensterberger, Pearce uses the metaphor of the kiss to underscore the importance of the recurrence of the act of collecting. She contends that like a kiss, "the moment of magical transformation" that attends the acquisition of a collectible "is brief, and since we cannot prolong it, we look continually to repeat it; hence the limited satisfaction which one object can bring and the desire on the part of collectors to keep on adding to their collections" (*On Collecting* 173).

"empire of sight" (Stewart, "Prologue" 28) that is Villette's fine art museum, Lucy then visually examines the letter, carefully inspecting the "clean, clear, equal, decided hand" in which it is written and the "round, full" seal that has been "deftly dropped by untremulous fingers, [and] stamped with the well-cut impress of initials, 'J.G.B.'" (Brontë, *V* 239). Feeling the impression of Dr. John's fingers on the letter, Lucy experiences the thrill of a corporeal encounter between her love interest and herself. In touch with Dr. John through the materiality of the extraordinary object, Lucy becomes "in touch" with her most passionate emotions.

Upon unconsciously authenticating the letter, Lucy returns to the metaphors of hunger and satiation to express her exhilaration in "the moment of magical transformation" (Pearce, *On Collecting* 173) that attends the acquisition of her collectible. With what she perceives to be an extraordinary object in her hand, Lucy narrates in ecstasy:

> I experienced a happy feeling—a glad emotion which went warm to my heart, and ran lively through all my veins. For once a hope was realized. I held in my hand a morsel of real solid joy: not a dream, not an image [on] the brain, not one of those shadowy chances imagination pictures, and on which humanity starves but cannot live; not a mess of that manna I drearily eulogized awhile ago…It was neither sweet hail, nor small coriander-seed—neither slight wafer, nor luscious honey, I had lighted on; it was the wild savoury mess of the hunter, nourishing and salubrious meat, forest-fed or desert-reared, fresh, healthful, and life-sustaining. (Brontë, *V* 239)

Here, Lucy's mood swings like a pendulum to the opposite end of the emotional spectrum because "acquisition acts as both a palliative and a stimulant" (Muensterberger 252). Metaphorically transformed from a ravenous animal to a sated hunter, she validates Pearce's claim that "we genuinely feel different if we have found something important to add to our

collection" (*On Collecting* 173). No longer craving an absent collectible, Lucy experiences a surge of pleasurable emotion. In the same moment, her collectible transforms from an immaterial "image [on] the brain" to a material "morsel of real solid joy." Holding this small portion of "nourishing and salubrious meat" in her hand, Lucy paradoxically uses her imagination to make sense of what her tactile engagement with the object convinces her is real. Though "[t]ouch is the most important vehicle for our access to reality" (Stewart, "Prologue" 34), Lucy is more interested in imaginative metaphors of consumption. Her fluency with such metaphors is evident in her manipulation of them. Whereas she once longed for the "sweetness" (Brontë, *V* 268) of one of Dr. John's letters, Lucy now expresses distaste for "sweet hail" and "luscious honey." Preferring instead the "wild, savoury mess of the hunter," Lucy reimagines Dr. John's letter as a rich and substantial meal of meat. In her "moment of magical transformation," Lucy's metaphors of consumption metamorphose as well.

As Lucy imaginatively transforms Dr. John's letters into "venison" (Brontë, *V* 239), Brontë confers upon her heroine a considerable measure of distinction. Activating the hunting trope that is prevalent in the literature on collecting, Robert Benson contends that "pictures are the big game of collecting" (qtd. in Herrmann 23).[58] With this statement, Benson indicates that collectibles are afforded varying degrees of prestige, and fine art is at the top of the collecting hierarchy. Given the novel's portrayal of Lucy as "a rising character" (Brontë, *V* 309), I propose that as Lucy compares her letter to venison, Brontë acknowledges the existence of a collecting

[58] Danet and Katriel explain that hunting is the most prominent metaphor in discourse about collecting because "some of the objective features of the pursuit of collectibles are isomorphic with the hunting of animals" (37). In a similar vein, Herrmann explores the historical significance of the hunting trope, citing Sir Martin Conway's well-known 1914 publication *The Sport of Collecting* (22-23).

hierarchy, raises letters to the level of paintings, and expresses Lucy's desire to emulate the extraordinariness of fine art.

From Museum to Mausoleum

In the process of becoming an impassioned collector, Lucy learns to preserve extraordinary objects in the way that museums do. Taking possession of her treasured collectible, a letter from Dr. John, her immediate impulse is to encase, protect, and preserve it in its current state of perfection. Instead of reading the letter, Lucy chooses not to "consume the venison at once and with haste" (Brontë, *V* 239). Instead, she steals to the locked dormitory of the boarding school and preserves the collectible in her bureau. Lucy narrates her methodical process of preservation:

> …I opened a drawer, unlocked a box, and took out a case, and—having feasted my eyes with one more look, and approached the seal, with a mixture of awe and shame and delight, to my lips—I folded the untasted treasure, yet all fair and inviolate, in silver paper, committed it to the case, shut up box and drawer, reclosed, relocked the dormitory, and returned to class, feeling as if fairy tales were true and fairy gifts no dream. (Brontë, *V* 239-40)

In this scene, Lucy comes closest to imagining an intimate moment between herself and Dr. John. Nearly touching the letter's seal to her lips, Lucy indulges in her fantasy of engaging in an amorous corporeal encounter with Dr. John. "With a mixture of awe and shame and delight," Lucy imagines kissing her love interest; in this moment, she feels "the kiss of possession" (Pearce, *On Collecting* 173) most keenly. Experiencing the pleasure of acquisition, Lucy regards her collectible as what Brenda Danet and Tamar Katriel refer to as "a springboard to fantasy" (29). Touching the letter with her hands and almost with her lips, Lucy reveals her "twofold

interest in the world of objects—objects viewed in their distinctive concreteness and objects viewed as invitations to reverie and fantasy" (Danet and Katriel 29). Drawn into a magical world in which "fairy tales [seem] true and fairy gifts [appear to be] no dream," Lucy exerts considerable effort to preserve her collectible in its "fair and inviolate" state. Enclosing the letter in a sheaf of protective paper, encasing it in a box, storing it in a bureau drawer, and locking it in a room, Lucy validates Walter Benjamin's argument that "the most profound enchantment for the collector is the locking of individual items within a magic circle in which they are frozen as the final thrill, the thrill of acquisition, passes over them" (487).

Given that the extraordinary object provides the collector with "a magical escape into a remote and private world" (Muensterberger 15), Lucy becomes motivated to construct a collection of letters from Dr. John. Transformed into an avid collector in a matter of weeks, she narrates, "I possessed in that case, box, drawer up-stairs, casketed with that first letter, four companions like to it, traced by the same firm pen, sealed with the same clear seal, full of the same vital comfort" (Brontë, *V* 253). Enthralled with the pleasing rhythm of sameness and difference (Pearce, *Museums* 69-88) in Dr. John's letters, Lucy becomes preoccupied with preserving what she considers to be five extraordinary objects. For despite the fact that her collection of letters is hidden from view and protected within a series of nested containers, it is still on exhibit to the meddlesome Madame Beck and M. Paul, who often visit the collection in order to steal and read the letters. Handling the delicate paper collectibles, these intrusive visitors run the risk of damaging them with creases, tears, and fold lines (Guldbeck 95), for touching objects too much often results in their destruction (Stewart, "Prologue" 35). Since Madame Beck and M. Paul often repatriate the collected letters to their site of origin with visible signs of deterioration, Lucy becomes determined to safeguard them from destruction. Seeking a safe

location in which to store her valuable collection, Lucy immediately dismisses the boarding school's attic:

> No, I did not like the grenier. Besides, most of the boxes and drawers there were mouldering, and did not lock. Rats, too, gnawed their way through the decayed wood; and mice made nests amongst the litter of their contents; my dear letters…might be consumed by vermin; certainly the writing would soon become obliterated by damp. No; the grenier would not do—but where then? (Brontë, *V* 295)

Underscoring the importance of a clean, well-ventilated, and temperature-controlled museal environment that is free from excessive moisture and rodent and insect infestation, Lucy reveals her awareness of the proper conditions under which objects in general and paper products in particular must be preserved. Observing that wooden furniture in the attic is moldering, Lucy foresees the disintegration of her letters, which, as Per E. Guldbeck informs us, would have been written on paper made of wood pulp in the 1850s (87). Given that such paper had "a bad reputation for deteriorating" (Guldbeck 87), Lucy exerts considerable effort to preserve her collected letters and thus confer distinction upon them. Fearing that the handwriting on them will soon become "obliterated by damp" if she stores the collection in the attic, Lucy reveals her comprehension of the fact that paper often develops blurred ink spots when exposed to excessive atmospheric moisture (Guldbeck 94). With her seemingly specialist knowledge of the proper conditions for the preservation of extraordinary objects, Lucy appears in marked contrast to such non-experts as Madame Beck and M. Paul, whose disregard for the organic nature of material culture poses an imminent threat to the collection of letters. Gesturing toward her awareness of the fact that "proper control of the environment in which a collection is kept is one of the most important conservation measures collectors may take to slow down [the] deterioration of

artifacts" (Guldbeck 19), Lucy asserts herself as a sophisticated and conscientious collector-curator.

In the final phase of her development of museal consciousness, Lucy returns to the garden, where she preserves her collected letters and upends the museum's emphasis on exhibition. Exerting considerable effort to arrest the letters' process of inevitable deterioration, Lucy wraps them in waterproof "oiled silk" and seals them "hermetically" in a "stoppered" bottle made of "thick glass" (Brontë, *V* 295) (fig. 15). Encased in glass and protected from moisture, which causes paper to wrinkle, pucker, and warp (Guldbeck 94), the letters, like extraordinary objects in a museum, are protected from destructive atmospheric conditions. However, Lucy's preservation methods are not enough to safeguard the collectibles from the harmful touch of Madame Beck's and M. Paul's hands. The thought that her collection "might fall again, into [their] hands, jar[s] [her] very soul" (Brontë, *V* 294-95). To protect her letters from mishandling, Lucy must render them "nothing to look at" (Classen and Howes 200); that is, she must consign them to obscurity. In a move that undermines the preeminence of vision in the museum, Lucy preserves her collectibles in the cool, dark space of a pear tree's deep hollow. She narrates her methodical process of preservation:

> Well, I cleared away the ivy, and found the hole; it was large enough to receive the jar, and I thrust it deep in. In a tool-shed at the bottom of the garden, lay the relics of building materials, left by masons lately employed to repair a part of the premises. I fetched thence a slate and some mortar, put the slate on the hollow, secured it with cement, covered the whole with black mould, and, finally, replaced the ivy. This done, I rested, leaning against the tree; lingering, like any other mourner, beside a newly-sodded grave. (Brontë, *V* 296)

Here, Lucy activates the association between a museum and a mausoleum.[59] For in sealing her collection behind a series of obstructions, she feels not the "thrill of acquisition" that attends "the locking of individual items within a magic circle" (Benjamin 487), but rather "a sad, lonely satisfaction" (Brontë, *V* 295). Lingering beside the "newly-sodded grave," Lucy mourns the loss of both her beloved collection and her imagined relationship with Dr. John. Moreover, she laments the demise of her drive to collect, for the burial of her collection signals its completion as an entire set and, in consequence, the death of her collecting impulse (Baudrillard, "System" 13).

Hidden from view in the garden, Lucy's collected letters resemble the hundreds of objects that are housed in the storerooms of modern museums. For as Classen and Howes explain, "Often, in fact, it is only the most visually-striking artifacts which are put on display" (200). Consigned to the dark underbellies of museums along with "unobtrusive articles of furniture, chairs of ordinary joiner's work, and carpets of no striking pattern" (Brontë, *V* 98), less visually prepossessing objects such as Lucy's collected letters are all but forgotten in "empires of sight" (Stewart, "Prologue" 28). Nevertheless, such objects are vital to museums, which cite "the preservation of collections for posterity" more often than the exhibition of extraordinary objects as their *raison d'être* (Classen and Howes 208). Despite its resemblance to a mausoleum, then, the cool, dark space of the pear tree's deep hollow serves an important purpose: it preserves the narrative of Lucy's development of museal consciousness.

Opaque to Lucy, this narrative unfolds over time, as did the process through which Victorian readers adapted to museal environments through their journeys into realist fiction. As Ryan argues, novels functioned as guides to human thought and behavior: "[F]iction offered a

[59] For more information on this association, see Adorno 175.

possible means of training the mind" (7). As I argue in the next chapter, novels trained readers to attend to not only extraordinary minds, but also extraordinary faces. In *Bleak House* (1852-53), Charles Dickens intimates that those well trained in the art of portrait interpretation tended to view characters in the way that they viewed portraits: with close visual and mental attention, using their strongest analytical and imaginative powers.[60] By modeling these acts of distinction, the novel was capable of training the mind to detect sameness and difference, ordinariness and extraordinariness in even unvisualized portraits.

[60] Dickens makes this explicit in a tense scene in which Lady Dedlock and Mr. Tulkinghorn face off with one another: "They look at each other, like two pictures" (*BH* 604). Readers attentive to the portrait trope may recognize this as a textual echo, for earlier in the narrative, Dickens captures Mr. George in the act of scrutinizing Mr. Tulkinghorn's file boxes: "Mr. George stands looking at these boxes a long while—as if they were pictures—and comes back to the fire, repeating, 'Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, and Manor of Chesney Wold, hey?'" (*BH* 399).



Figure 1: De Biefve, Edouard. *Une Almé.* 1842. Lithograph. *La Renaissance: Chronique des Arts et de la Littérature* 4 (1842-43). "Looking at Cleopatra: The Expression and Exhibition of Desire in *Villette*." By Jill L. Matus. *Victorian Literature and Culture* 21 (1993): 345-67. Fig. 4. Print.



Figure 2: Warren, E.M.B. 1887. Watercolor. *The National Gallery: An Illustrated History.* By Alan Crookham. London: National Gallery, 2009. 2. Print.



Figure 3: View of the National Gallery. 1895. Wash drawing. *The Nation's Mantelpiece: A History of the National Gallery.* By Jonathan Conlin. London: Pallas Athene, 2006. 401. Print.



Figure 4: Westcott, Thompson. 1852. "The Physiology of Dandyism." *Graham's Magazine* Feb. 1852: 120-23, 468-71. 471. *Google Book Search.* Web. 15 Feb. 2012.



Figure 5: Gabrielli, Giuseppe. *The National Gallery 1886, Interior of Room 32.* 1886. Oil on canvas. Government Art Collection, London. *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000.* By Charlotte Klonk. New Haven: Yale UP, 2009. Fig. 3. Print.

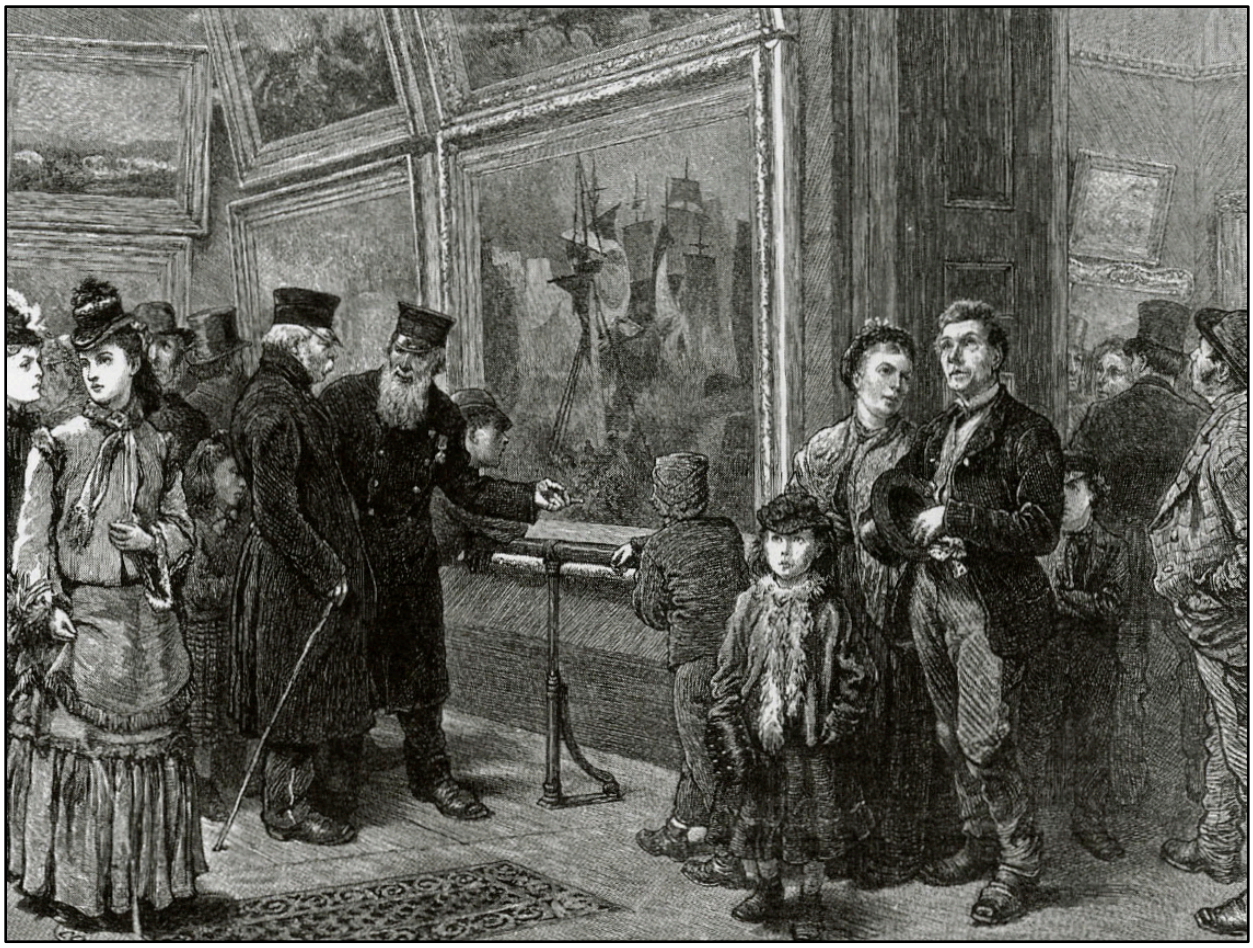

Figure 6: "Holiday Folks in the National Gallery." 1872. *Graphic Supplement* 10 Aug. 1872. *The Nation's Mantelpiece: A History of the National Gallery.* By Jonathan Conlin. London: Pallas Athene, 2006. 233. Print.



Figure 7: Compton, Charles. *A Study in the National Gallery*. 1855. Oil on canvas. *Christie's*. Christie's, n.d. Web. 7 June 2012.



Figure 8: Small, William. "At the Royal Academy." 1880. *Graphic* 26 June 1880: 648-49. *Worlds of Art: Painters in Victorian Society*. By Paula Gillett. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1990. Fig. 7. Print.



Figure 9: Keene, Charles. "Unprejudiced!" 1871. *Punch* 13 May 1871: 188. *Worlds of Art: Painters in Victorian Society*. By Paula Gillett. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1990. Fig. 34. Print.

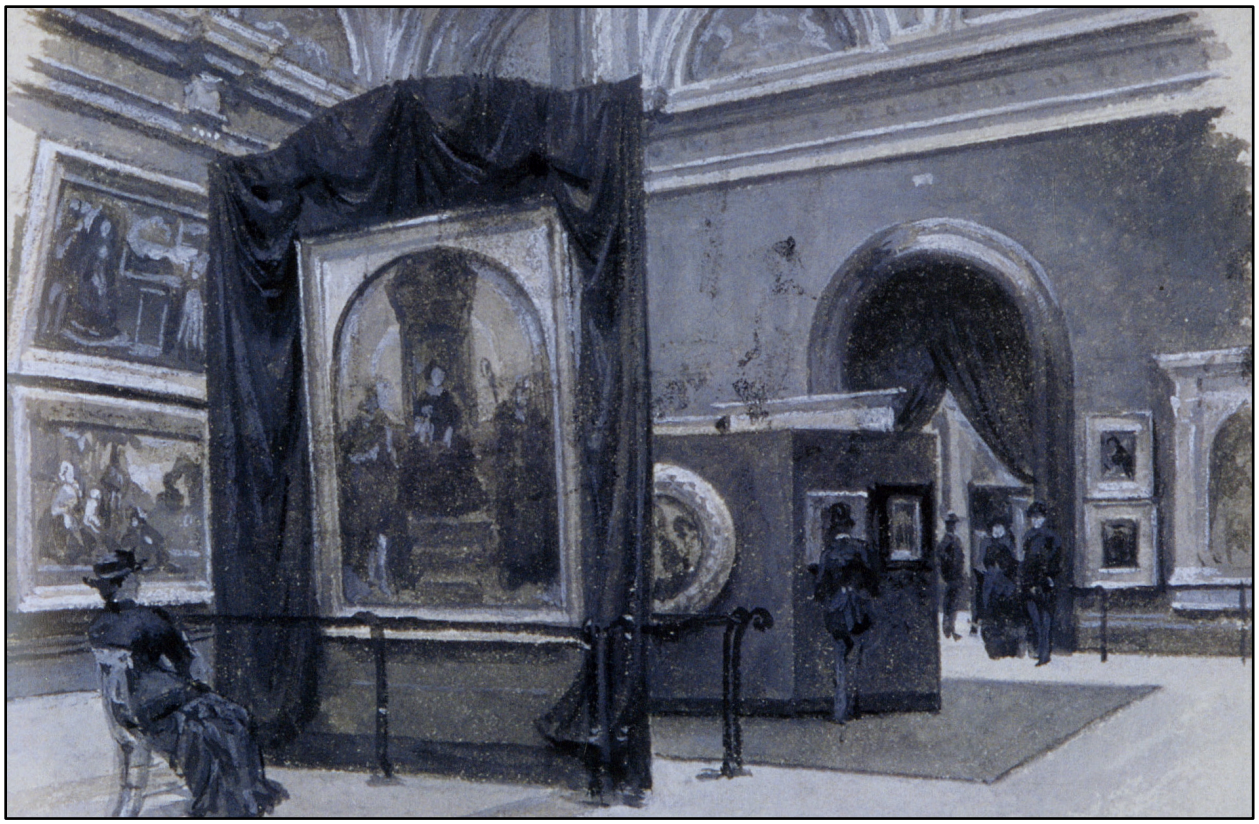

Figure 10: Tidmarsh, H.E. c. 1885. Watercolor. *The National Gallery: An Illustrated History.* By Alan Crookham. London: National Gallery, 2009. 47. Print.



Figure 11: Tissot, James. *London Visitors.* 1874. Oil on canvas. Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo. *James Tissot: Victorian Life/Modern Love.* By Nancy Rose Marshall and Malcolm Warner. New Haven: American Federation of Arts; Yale Center for British Art; Yale UP, 1999. 70. Print.

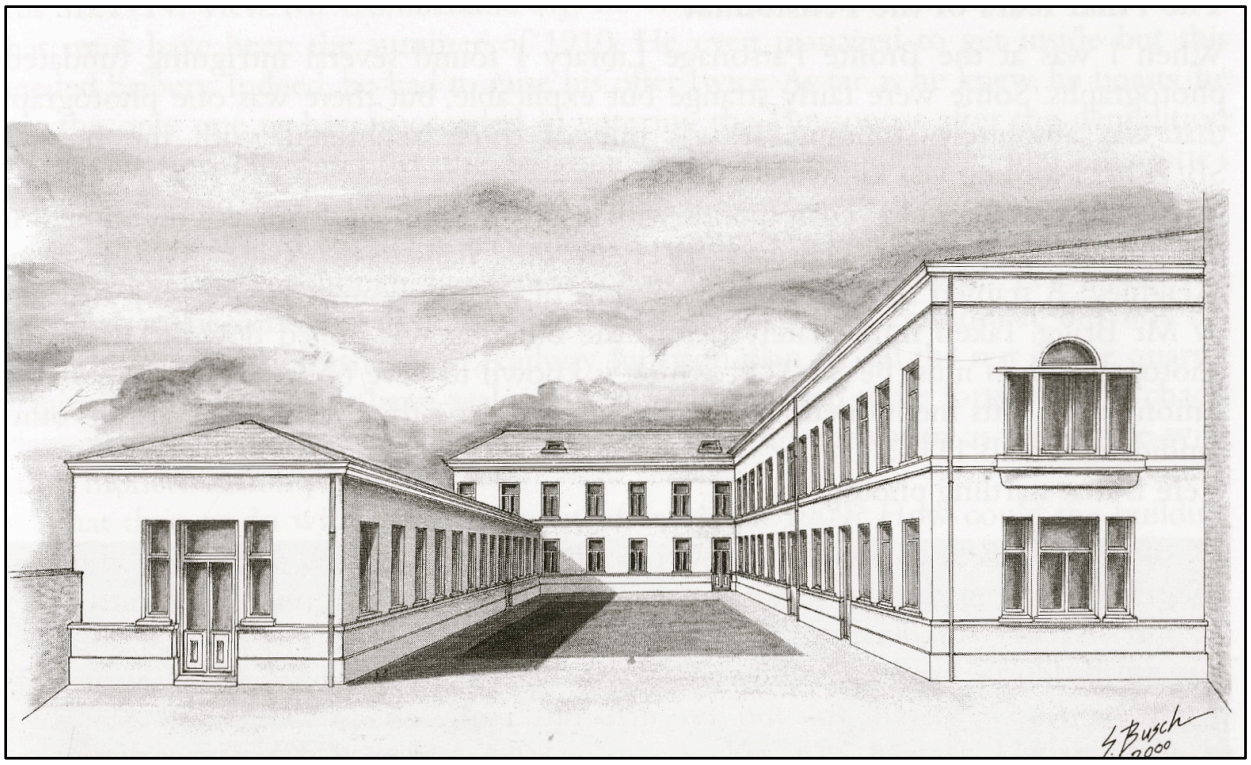

Figure 12: Busch, Selina. "The Pensionnat. A view from the garden." 2000. *Charlotte Brontë's Promised Land: The Pensionnat Heger and Other Brontë Places in Brussels.* By Eric Ruijssenaars. Haworth: Brontë Society, 2000. 25. Print.



Figure 13: Busch, Selina. "The Pensionnat and the garden." 2000. *Charlotte Brontë's Promised Land: The Pensionnat Heger and Other Brontë Places in Brussels.* By Eric Ruijssenaars. Haworth: Brontë Society, 2000. 25. Print.

MUSEUM MEMORANDA.

USEFUL RULES TO KEEP IN MIND ON VISITING A MUSEUM.

1.—Avoid attempting to see too much.
2.—Remember that one specimen or one article *well* seen is better than a score of specimens casually inspected.
3.—Before entering a Museum ask yourself what it is you wish particularly to see, and confine your attention largely to those specimens. Consult the attendant as to what is specially interesting in each room.
4.—Remember that the main object of the specimens is to instruct.
5.—Have a note-book with you and record your impressions, so that on a succeeding visit you may pick up your information where you left off on the previous visit.
6.—Introduce in conversation your impressions of what you see in Museums.
7.—Consult frequently the technical literature on the special subject in which you are interested.
8.—Visit the nearest Museum periodically, and let it be to you an advanced school for self-instruction.
9.—Remember there is something new to see every time you go.
10.—Make a private collection of *something*. Remember that a collection of postage stamps has many uses.
11.—Follow up some special subject of Museum study.
12.—See slowly, observe closely, and think much upon what you see.

Figure 14: Greenwood, Thomas. "Museum Memoranda. Useful Rules to Keep in Mind on Visiting a Museum." *Museums and Art Galleries*. London, 1888. 388. Print.



Figure 15: H. Poths & Co. Advertisement. *Museums and Art Galleries*. Thomas Greenwood. London, 1888. Advertisements: c. *Google Book Search.* Web. 7 June 2012.

CHAPTER 2

Extraordinary Faces:

Ancestral Portrait Collections in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*

Near the end of their tour of Chesney Wold in chapter 7 of Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852-53), readers are perhaps disappointed to discover that the showpiece of the Lincolnshire country house, the portrait of the celebrated Lady Honoria Dedlock, is unvisualized. "Painted by the fashionable artist of the day" and considered not only "a perfect likeness," but also "the best work of the master" (Dickens, *BH* 101), the portrait anchors the massive ancestral portrait collection at Chesney Wold. Installed over a fireplace and flanked by portraits of "the great Lincolnshire baronet" (Dickens, *BH* 632), Sir Leicester Dedlock, and his father, the late Sir Leicester, the portrait of Lady Dedlock is a material testament to the wealth, taste, status, and power of the Dedlock ancestral line. Yet in lieu of a thick description of this extraordinary representation of the most extraordinary woman among England's social elite, readers are presented with a "portrait" of an extraordinarily ordinary country house visitor, "a young man of the name of Guppy" (Dickens, *BH* 424). Presumably wide-eyed and open-mouthed, Mr. William

Guppy, a law clerk whose social status and income are "tolerably good," not only stands beneath the portrait of Lady Dedlock, but also stands in stark contrast to the "beautiful, elegant, accomplished, and powerful" woman depicted in it (Dickens, *BH* 427, 413). With his eyes upturned toward the portrait, Mr. Guppy yearns to symbolically appropriate the distinction of both the object and its subject in order to capture the heart of his love interest, Esther Summerson. In this juxtapositional and comparative scene, Dickens explicitly visualizes the balanced ternary that "stretch[es] *all* the way from pole to pole" between the domains of positive and negative extraordinariness (Dickens, *BH* 413, original emphasis).

Distinguished and distinctive, Chesney Wold is a literary testament to the Victorian fascination with ancestral portrait collections and the country houses in which they were exhibited. As a symbol of elite culture, Chesney Wold does not capture the democratization of portraiture that occurred in the Victorian period. As social and economic structures evolved in the nineteenth century, more people across the socioeconomic spectrum were able to commission portraits. Executed in pen and ink, in oils, in watercolor, and in the photographic medium, portraits were no longer reserved for the upper classes. Even low-income families could sometimes afford silhouettes and thus "make a portraitive statement similar to those produced in patrician display rooms" (Fay 57). To borrow a phrase from Bob Jakin of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), portraiture had "come down i' the world" (321); that is, it had descended into the domain of ordinariness.

In *Bleak House*, portraiture comes down to several characters, including Mr. Guppy. On view in his mother's "close little sitting room," the portrait of Mr. Guppy "[is] more like than life: it insist[s] upon him with such obstinacy, and [is] so determined not to let him off" (Dickens, *BH* 567). More flattering are the portraits of the law stationer Mr. Snagsby, "a mild,

bald, timid man" who "tends to meekness and obesity" (Dickens, *BH* 143), and his jealous and domineering wife. Though their home shares space with a shop that is part warehouse, part counting house, and part copying office, it is "a Temple of plenty and splendor" in the eyes of their seizure-prone servant Guster (Dickens, *BH* 144). From her perspective, the small drawing room is "the most elegant apartment in Christendom," and "the portraits it displays in oil—and plenty of it too—of Mr. Snagsby looking at Mrs. Snagsby, and of Mrs. Snagsby looking at Mr. Snagsby, are in her eyes as achievements of Raphael or Titian" (Dickens, *BH* 144). Equally extraordinary—which is to say, ordinary—are the portraits of the thrice-married Mrs. Bayham Badger, a doctor's wife of about fifty who "rouge[s] a little" (Dickens, *BH* 187). Installed over the piano and over the sofa in the Badgers' drawing room, "Mrs. Bayham Badger when Mrs. Swosser" and "Mrs. Bayham Badger when Mrs. Dingo" represent the subject as a woman connected to a long line of "highly distinguished men" (Dickens, *BH* 191, 188).[61] In this respect, the portraits of Mrs. Bayham Badger bear resemblance to that of the esteemed Lady Dedlock. However, as an extraordinary representation of an extraordinary individual, the portrait of Lady Dedlock increases the sense of ordinariness that characterizes not only the portraits of Mr. Guppy, Mr. and Mrs. Snagsby, and Mrs. Bayham Badger, but also the subjects depicted in them. Painted with an excess of oil and exhibited in small, middle-class domestic interiors, these decidedly less impressive portraits associate their subjects not with refinement, stateliness, or exclusivity, but rather absurdity, vanity, and typicality. Within the character-object system, Dickens's characters emerge as extraordinarily ordinary vis-à-vis the museum-quality object.

[61] Similar to Mrs. Tulliver's collection of maiden-marked household wares, which I discuss in chapter 3, these portraits bear witness to the profound shifts in identity that women experience upon marriage.

With its democratic range of subjects, then, the collection of portraits on view in *Bleak House* represents the socioeconomic spectrum of Victorian England. It therefore raises provocative questions about the connections between class and both visual and verbal representation. Who deserves to be depicted in portraits? Can portraiture help an individual become "a rising character" (*V* 309), to borrow a phrase from Charlotte Brontë's heroine Lucy Snowe? Stated otherwise, can portraiture transform an ordinary individual into an extraordinary one? Or, to the contrary, does portraiture bear witness to the ordinariness of all human subjects? I argue in this chapter that Dickens engages with a corresponding set of questions in *Bleak House* as he explores how an ordinary individual can be celebrated in narrative as a hero or a heroine. Who deserves to be a central character? How can a hero or a heroine differentiate himself or herself from all others yet remain embedded in a social framework? That is, how can an individual be both unique and representative?

To begin to answer these questions, I frame *Bleak House* within the context of the Victorian fascination with ancestral portraits and examine the enactment of what Carol Duncan refers to as the "museum ritual" (97) in the museal space of the country house gallery. I then analyze the trope of the ancestral portrait collection in *Bleak House*, arguing that Dickens employs an "unvisualized visual pattern," to borrow a phrase from A.S. Byatt (84), to explore what I call "hereditary facelessness." To establish a familial connection between Esther Summerson and her estranged parents, Lady Dedlock and Captain Hawdon (better known as Nemo), Dickens visualizes as a counter to the ancestral portrait collection at Chesney Wold a gallery of empty frames; that is, he creates a series of verbal "portraits" in which the faces of his heroine and her parents are either effaced or defaced. Whether screened, veiled, masked, disfigured, or composed out of existence altogether, the faces of Esther Summerson and her

parents function as visual teases that gesture toward their familial connection but refuse to reveal it. I argue that Dickens's triptych of extraordinary faces explodes the trope of the ancestral portrait collection and underscores the challenge of representing individuals as similar to yet different from all others in the social sphere.

Portraits of Public Interest

"The land overflows with portraits," declared an article printed in Dickens's periodical *All the Year Round* in 1865. "Not a squire's house in the country but has its 'ancestor' of more or less merit and interest" ("Portraits" 92). Despite its hyperbolic tone, this was not an overstatement. Methodical inventories of country house collections undertaken throughout the nineteenth century revealed that Britain possessed an embarrassment of portraitive wealth.[62] Whether built up over numerous generations or commissioned *en bloc*, portrait collections existed on a scale commensurate with the massive country houses in which they were exhibited (fig. 16 and fig. 17). Considered for centuries particularly important and impressive objects to collect, portraits—especially those commissioned, exhibited, and bequeathed in long sequences—were "an indispensable adjunct of any ancient seat" because they supplied a visual vocabulary in which to express the wealth, taste, status, and power of landowning collectors who had either "a particular appreciation of the arts or an understanding of the réclame associated with possessions of the kind" (Russell 133). Moreover, for individual members of collecting dynasties, portraits functioned as visual documents that attested to their membership within particular ancestral clans. Because portrait collections embedded individuals within traditional

[62] George Scharf, the Secretary and Director of the National Portrait Gallery from 1857 to 1895, recorded portraits in country houses as detailed annotated sketches in pocket books. These visual inventories indicated that private fine art collections were "a major source of historical material" (Waterfield 15). Today, they are still "a valuable source of information" for the National Portrait Gallery ("Gallery History").

familial frameworks, they held pride of place in both the country house and the Victorian visual imagination.

Though ancestral portraits constituted private fine art collections, their purpose was never confined to the private sphere. Full-length, large-scale, and public in intent (Shepherd 11), ancestral portraits were conceptualized, painted, and exhibited as statements of sociopolitical power, even in centuries prior to the nineteenth, when country houses entertained only family members and select visitors of the social elite. But in the Victorian period, the public function of private fine art collections became much more apparent due to a number of sociocultural factors. For instance, the rapid development of the railroad network facilitated brief excursions to country houses (Tinniswood 147), which opened their doors to thousands of curious (and, as it was hoped, respectable and well-behaved) visitors (fig. 18). Considered "the first great age of country-house visiting" (Mandler 4), the mid-nineteenth century brought the public within reach of private fine art collections. Moreover, three ambitious surveys of country house collections, J.D. Passavant's *Tour of a German Artist in England* (1836), Gustav Waagen's *Works of Art and Artists in England* (1838), and Adolf Michaelis's *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain* (1882), all originally published in German but widely read in English translation, placed private fine art collections before the public eye (Waterfield 14). Furthermore, the owners of country houses made substantial loans to major temporary art exhibitions, the first of which was the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857, which exhibited no less than 386 portraits of Britain's most "illustrious or infamous dead" (Cunningham 109).

In the summer of 1857, Dickens became one of the more than 1.3 million visitors to the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition, a forum not for the display of advancements in industrial technology, as one may have expected in the foremost manufacturing city in Britain, but for the

exhibition of over 16,000 works of fine and decorative art (Pergam 1-3). Dickens related his impressions of the Exhibition in a letter to his close friend, the eminent actor and producer William Macready, juxtaposing the extraordinary objects on view and the ordinary subjects who came to view them:

> The collection of Pictures in the Exhibition is wonderful. And the power with which the modern English School asserts itself, is a very gratifying and delightful thing to behold. The care for the common people, in the provision made for their comfort and refreshment, is also admirable, and worthy of all commendation. But they want more amusement, and particularly (as it strikes me) *something in motion*, though it were only a twisting fountain. The thing is too still, after their lives of machinery, and Art fires over their heads in consequence. (*L* 320, original emphasis)

As Dickens indicates in this letter, the organizers of the Exhibition strove to attract ordinary individuals in an effort to emphasize the democratic nature of the event. Celebrated as an instrument of education as well as social and moral edification, the Exhibition was lauded as a civic space in which "those to whom fortune has denied the higher luxuries of life" could interact with "the rich, and [those] who have" (Prince Albert 180). Prince Albert underscored this sentiment in the speech with which he inaugurated the Exhibition on 5 May 1857, stating that the "wonderful collection of...treasures of art...must strike the beholder with grateful admiration, not only of the wealth and spirit of enterprise of this country, but also of that generous feeling of mutual confidence and goodwill between the different classes of society within it, of which it affords so gratifying a proof" (180). With the power to unite individuals across the socioeconomic spectrum, then, the Exhibition was believed to counteract Manchester's association with industrialization and its attendant social, moral, and environmental ills (Pergam

4). But as Dickens indicates in his letter, the Exhibition emphasized class boundaries more frequently than it obscured them. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the British Portrait Gallery, where extraordinary representations of historical figures as extraordinary as Queen Elizabeth, William Shakespeare, John Locke, Sir Isaac Newton, and the Duke of Wellington[63] appeared in marked contrast to those who lived "lives of machinery" in Manchester.

Nevertheless, the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition was, as Elizabeth A. Pergam notes, "a blockbuster *avant la lettre*" (1), and due to its success, a chronological series of three massive loan portrait exhibitions followed at the South Kensington Museum in 1866, 1867, and 1868.[64] These exhibitions not only attested to the nation's immense portraitive wealth, but also awakened what were supposed to have been unaware country house owners to the value of their ancestral portraits. Samuel Redgrave, one of the coordinators of the exhibitions, had no opinion of the curatorial sensibilities of these collectors. He shuddered at the thought of portraits of national interest being "lost by consignment to the housekeeper's room, or even to the attics" and proclaimed that the purpose of the series of public exhibitions was to:

> save the portraits themselves from destruction by cruel exposure to the sun till all traces of colour and the finer qualities of the art are hopelessly dried out; or by exposure to damp or changes in temperature, so particularly injurious to early portraits on panel; or worst of all, subjection to greater dangers in the hands of incompetent repairers, who, in the attempt to restore what is irretrievable, destroy the only remains of original art which may have been spared. (Redgrave v)

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[63] For a complete list of the individuals depicted in the British Portrait Gallery, see the *Catalogue of the Art Treasures of the United Kingdom Collected at Manchester in 1857* 111-32.

[64] In total, these three exhibitions boasted nearly 3,000 exhibits (Hulme and Buchanan 13).

In order to rescue portraits from the injurious or even destructive hands of their owners, then, it was necessary to transfer them into the public sphere. Granted, not all owners of ancestral portraits had the curatorial instincts of Brontë's heroine Lucy Snowe; but Francis Russell has revealed that most country house owners preserved, organized, and displayed their portrait collections with the utmost care long before "the age of the professional museum curator" (Jackson-Stops 10). It was this care that reinforced the distinction of the dominant classes, enabled loans of ancestral portraits, and made possible the major temporary art exhibitions that not only played a vital role in the sociocultural life of Victorian England, but also "helped to ensure the formal and permanent foundation" of the National Portrait Gallery (Pointon 229).

Established on 2 December 1856 as the first state-controlled cultural institution of its kind,[65] England's National Portrait Gallery was a museum designed to animate a linear historical narrative of the nation through portraits of its monarchs and most illustrious subjects (Perry 1).[66] The Gallery must be understood within the context of its ancestors, for in order to amass its collections, it drew upon the ancestral portrait collections held in country houses across

[65] The National Portrait Gallery in London served as the precedent for what would become its institutional counterparts in Edinburgh (1882), Washington, D.C. (1968), Canberra (1998), and Ottawa (2001). The National Portrait Collection, a component of the National Gallery of Ireland, opened in Dublin in 1875. To date, these four (or five) institutions are the only museums of their kind in existence. The concept of a national portrait gallery is thus unique to the Western world, as Pointon explains: "The national portrait gallery is a phenomenon exclusive to the industrialized west, to the English-speaking nations, and to the modern period commencing around the mid-nineteenth century" (228).

[66] The National Portrait Gallery was predicated upon the notion that as markers of elite culture, portraits were quintessentially British, as the artist Benjamin Robert Haydon made clear in 1817: "Portraiture…is one of the staple manufactures of the empire. Wherever the British settle, wherever they colonise, they carry and will ever carry trial by jury, horse-racing, and portrait-painting" (qtd. in Shawe-Taylor 7). Given the longstanding association of portraiture with Britishness, it is appropriate that England was the first nation to represent itself to both the empire and the world through portraits of its monarchs and most eminent subjects.

England.[67] When the Gallery made these images available for mass public consumption, visitors arrived in droves to view them. Visitor attendance at the Gallery increased well over six-fold in the first decade of its existence ("Gallery History"),[68] and an article printed in *All the Year Round* in 1863 noted that visitors to the Gallery were willing to "squeeze the digestive organs quite flat over a wooden barrier" and endure "personal anguish and twisting of the spinal column" to catch a glimpse of even uninteresting portraits of unremarkable persons ("National Portraits" 254).

To account for the enthusiasm with which Victorians visited the National Portrait Gallery, we can look to Richard Brilliant, who explains, "Portraits owe their high reputation and enormous popularity to their unique subject matter and to the intensity of the viewer's engagement with the portrait image at a much deeper level of personal involvement and response than is usually encountered in the experience of visual images" (19). As a class of objects to which viewers devote close visual and mental attention, portraits were in the Victorian period, as they are today, perceived as particularly fascinating museum objects. As Dickens's contemporary Walt Whitman declared in a front-page article printed in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* in 1846, "There is always, to us, a strange fascination, in portraits. We love to dwell long upon them—to infer many things, from the text they preach—to pursue the current of thoughts running riot about them" ("Visit to Plumbe's Gallery").

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[67] In her discussion of the difficulties that attended the acquisition of portraits of eminent subjects, Hooper-Greenhill cites an unfavorable review of the National Portrait Gallery printed in *Scribner's Magazine* in 1896: "There are no portraits to be found of some of the most eminent and interesting men and women. Moreover, when they exist, they are often unobtainable, for, however patriotic a man may be, he hesitates to part with the most cherished of his family possessions, and when they come onto the market they often fetch prices beyond the modest income of the Gallery" (44).

[68] The National Portrait Gallery reports that visitor attendance increased from 5,300 in 1859 to 34,500 in 1869 ("Gallery History").

Whitman's remark anticipates what Peter Clothier has termed "slow looking," an act of distinction that involves sustained, focused contemplation of a work of art. As a "master lesson" in the value of patience, deceleration, immersive attention, and "skepticism about immediate surface appearances" (Roberts), slow looking is a strategy of distinction anchored to the dominant classes' slower tempo of life and prerogative to squander time. Akin to competencies that are both "ancient and slowly learned," such as fishing, cooking, gardening, and evaluating wines, slow looking promises to enable the dominated classes to "appropriate...the art of living of the aristocrat, or country gentleman, [who is] indifferent to the passage of time and rooted in things that last" (Bourdieu, *Distinction* 281). Afforded a high degree of distinctive value because it unfolds over time, slow looking was a means through which Victorian visitors to the National Portrait Gallery could acquire a measure of distinction.

Despite the allure of the portraits exhibited at the National Portrait Gallery, the transference of ancestral portraits from the private sector into the public domain caused an unfavorable transformation in their reception. Though many visitors to the Gallery welcomed the opportunity to view ancestral portraits in a public exhibition space, others recoiled from the institutionalization and commoditization of private family histories. Marcia Pointon explains that paradoxically, the process of democratizing ancestral portrait collections produced a strong nostalgia for the inviolable privacy of the country house (244).[69] The masses may have flocked to the National Portrait Gallery, Pointon writes, "but in the realm of fantasy, and of popular mythology, the correct location for the portrait remained the historic house, and the rightful interpretation [of the portrait] was the property of the subject's descendent" (244). Stated

[69] Mandler discusses in detail the Victorian fascination with mansions of the so-called Olden Time (31-69, 86-100).

otherwise, as extraordinary objects, portraits were intended for extraordinary exhibition spaces and extraordinary viewers.

The Provincial Museum Ritual

The zeal with which Victorians visited museums and exhibitions in urban centers for the express purpose of viewing portraits is well documented. This fervor for the visual consumption of portraits extended to private collections housed in the provinces. Ancestral portrait collections were a major draw for the thousands of individuals who visited country houses in the Victorian period. With the assistance of new railroads and more leisure time,[70] excursionists were often inspired to develop their taste in portraiture and refine their artistic sensibilities. Moreover, many country house visitors sought to improve themselves via the educational and motivational experience of viewing ancestral portrait collections. Margaret D. Stetz explains: "Looking at portraits…was instructive and uplifting. There was something to be learned from the features of those who had accomplished significant achievements; the distinction of their minds and spirits would be written on their faces, and viewers would be moved to self-improvement by contemplating their expressions" (12). The transformative experience of viewing ancestral portrait collections was not to be missed, for even the uneducated and uncouth masses could have their imaginations "pleasantly stirred by the pictures…that almost ever abound[ed] in the Seats of [their] territorial proprietors" (Burke qtd. in Tinniswood 157). Thus, every possible effort was to be made to view ancestral portraits, which, in Lord Palmerston's opinion, served as the "great[est] incentive to mental exertion, to noble actions, [and] to good conduct on the part of the living" (qtd. in Stetz 12).

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[70] Tinniswood explains that as branch lines came to connect country houses with major towns and cities (147), "the eighteenth-century practice of making an extended summer tour by chaise or on horseback dwindled" and was gradually "replaced by the organised outing to a specific property or group of properties—the day-trip, in other words" (150).

In the spirit of self-improvement, then, excursionists descended upon country houses in unprecedented numbers, prompting the formalization of admission procedures. The eighteenth-century system of controlled admission, whereby the appearance of both would-be visitors and their servants (not to mention their conveyances and calling cards) underwent close inspection before a tour (Mandler 9), was replaced with the publication of fixed days and hours of admission and the issuance in advance of tickets.[71] A modernized act of distinction thus replaced an outmoded one. This procedural reform is evident in *Bleak House* when Rosa, the maid at Chesney Wold, refuses to admit Mr. Guppy and Mr. Jobling for a tour: "I went to the hall door, and told them it was the wrong day, and the wrong hour" (Dickens, *BH* 100). However, soaked with rain, Mr. Guppy deferentially removes his hat and offers Rosa both his calling card and a narrative about his (albeit distant) professional association with Mr. Tulkinghorn, thus activating the outmoded system of admission. His informal application to tour the house proves successful, which is appropriate, as Tinniswood explains:

> In spite of the process of formalisation that was being forced upon some of the more popular houses by an increasing number of tourists, the procedure generally remained the same: one sent a servant ahead to enquire if it would be convenient to see the place, or gave in one's card at the porter's lodge, or simply knocked at the door and asked to come in. Even at the major houses, where fixed opening hours had been introduced, this was still the accepted procedure, the only difference being that the servants who showed you round would expect a more substantial tip. (102)

Despite its lax implementation, the formalization of admission procedures spoke to "the ceremonial nature of museum space and the need to differentiate it (and the time one spends in

[71] For more information on changes to admission procedures, see Tinniswood 94-96, 102, 150.

it) from day-to-day time and space outside" (Duncan 11). It was believed in the Victorian period, as it is now, that museums constituted "a marked-off, 'liminal' zone of time and space" (Duncan 20) in which visitors, removed from the practical concerns of their daily lives, could open themselves up to a transformative experience through which they could acquire a measure of distinction.

In her discussion of the public art museum as a ritual site, Duncan contends that visitors activate the "museum ritual" (97) through the performance of its script or scenario, which unfolds as the visitor moves through a sequence of spaces (12, 20). In the museal space of the country house, however, it is crucial to place substantial if not equal emphasis on the role of the housekeeper in the enactment of the museum ritual. For the housekeeper, as a senior member of the domestic staff—that is, an individual who occupies an intermediary space in the social world—was responsible for structuring the visitor's museal experience through the verbal performance of an anecdotal and historical narrative. The housekeeper was indispensible to the museum ritual, as was evident in the substantial amount of money she earned in tips, usually between one shilling and half-a-crown per tour (Tinniswood 102). Sometimes, the housekeeper's celebrity as a docent was even preserved in portraiture, as in the case of Mrs. Garnett, Lord Scarsdale's housekeeper for well over four decades, who was depicted in the Marble Hall at Kedleston with a guidebook in hand, prepared to welcome visitors and commence the museum ritual (fig. 19). It is appropriate, then, that Dickens represents Mrs. Rouncewell, the veteran housekeeper at Chesney Wold, in a series of "portraits" in which she is framed by both the architectural features of the country house and the anecdotal and historical narrative that punctuates the museum ritual. Once she has granted admission to Mr. Guppy and Mr. Jobling and has transferred the museal script into the mouth of her protégé, Rosa, Mrs. Rouncewell

watches the museum ritual unfold: “In each successive chamber that they enter, Mrs. Rouncewell, who is as upright as the house itself, rests apart in a window-seat, or other such nook, and listens with stately approval to Rosa’s exposition” (Dickens, *BH* 101). Represented as a recurrent visual element of the sequence of exhibition spaces at Chesney Wold, Mrs. Rouncewell structures the museum ritual with her authoritative presence.

Moreover, Mrs. Rouncewell initiates the museum ritual with a welcoming hand gesture: “The old housekeeper, with a gracious severity of deportment, waves her hand towards the great staircase. Mr. Guppy and his friend follow Rosa, Mrs. Rouncewell and her grandson follow them, [and] a young gardener goes before to open the shutters” (Dickens, *BH* 101). To activate their role in the performance of the museum ritual, the visitors to Chesney Wold mount the grand staircase, an architectural echo of the majestic staircases that formed the structural centerpieces of many public art museums (fig. 20 and fig. 21). Like museum visitors, Mr. Guppy and Mr. Jobling ascend this architectural showpiece to commence their tour of the ancestral portrait collection at Chesney Wold in “a suitably elevated state of mind” (Hudson 163). For as Duncan explains, “Art was understood to be a source of valuable moral and spiritual experience” (36). In accordance with this view, the fine arts in general and portraiture in particular were “ranked not merely among the ornaments of human life, but among the appointed means for the elevation of the human mind” and soul (Stanhope qtd. in Taylor 94). To view portraits such as those at Chesney Wold was thus to uplift oneself with the assistance of museum architecture.

However, to elevate oneself in this manner was a hard-won achievement, for museum architecture often posed significant if not insurmountable challenges to visitors. Grand staircases

frequently barred elderly individuals and persons with physical disabilities access to collections[72] and contributed to "museum fatigue," which plagued even the most able-bodied visitors.[73] Nevertheless, the staircase was vital to the enactment of the museum ritual, as Kenneth Hudson explains: "The grandeur of the staircase was felt to be of much greater importance than its exhausting inconvenience to visitors" (163). For the staircase was the means through which visitors could ascend to the domain of positive extraordinariness.

The strenuous nature of museum-going sometimes cast a shadow over the museum ritual, causing it to be perceived as a "habitual or routinized behavior that lack[ed] meaningful subjective context" (Duncan 12). Dependent upon routine actions, the museum ritual threatened to become a stock strategy of distinction and thus associate visitors with ordinariness. Dickens captures this sense of ritual as a hollow performance in his initial description of Mr. Guppy and Mr. Jobling's visit to Chesney Wold:

> As is usually the case with people who go over houses, Mr. Guppy and his friend are dead beat before they have well begun. They straggle about in wrong places, look at wrong things, don't care for the right things, gape when more rooms are opened, exhibit profound depression of spirits, and are clearly knocked up….Thus they pass on from room to room, raising the pictured Dedlocks for a few brief minutes as the young

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[72] In his discussion of the ways in which museums create and perpetuate social injustice, O'Neill claims, "When our great Victorian museums were built, with their majestic steps, it did not trouble the authorities that they would effectively exclude [people with disabilities], because, well, because it was the way things were. Art museums had to have big steps [and] facades in the classic manner, and cripples had to accept the difficulties sent them" (38).

[73] Brontë complained of "museum fatigue." In a letter to Amelia Taylor née Ringrose dated 7 June 1851, Brontë describes her second visit to the Crystal Palace, declaring that "it is hard work—going over it—after some three or four hours' peregrination—you come out very sufficiently bleached and broken in bits—when you come 'home' you drop into a chair—or better—on to a bed, and don't rise for any invitation or menace or clamorous dinner-bell—till you have a had a space of rest—" (*L* 633).

> gardener admits the light, and reconsigning them to their graves as he shuts it out again. It appears to the afflicted Mr. Guppy and his inconsolable friend, that there is no end to the Dedlocks, whose family greatness seems to consist in their never having done anything to distinguish themselves, for seven hundred years. (*BH* 101)

Exhausted and bored, the pair of country house visitors moves through the sequence of exhibition spaces at Chesney Wold with little interest in the ancestral portraits on view. The innumerable homogeneous portraits in the collection saturate their appetites for visual stimuli. So as not to become overwhelmed with the abundance of images, the visitors streamline the viewing process, quickly scanning the portraits' visual elements in a semiconscious state. Though the ritual space of the country house is designed to elicit "a special quality of attention"—namely, deep contemplation—from visitors (Duncan 10), Mr. Guppy and Mr. Jobling shut down their meditative and interpretative powers and become unresponsive viewers whose despondency undermines the intended transformative effect of the museum ritual on country house visitors. In this scene, the two men appear more ordinary than ever.

In marked contrast to Mr. Guppy and Mr. Jobling, Mr. Skimpole is Chesney Wold's most animated and imaginative visitor. His visit to the country house is so memorable (albeit far from morally or spiritually transformative) that he later relates the narrative of his museal experience to Esther Summerson, Ada Clare, and Richard Carstone, thus enacting a second (and rather humorous) ritual performance. Through Esther's narration, Dickens's readers are provided with a lively virtual tour of the collection of ancestral portraits:

> [Mr. Skimpole] had been over the Hall in the course of the morning, and whimsically described the family pictures as we walked. There were such portentous shepherdesses among the Ladies Dedlock dead and gone, he told us, that peaceful crooks became

> weapons of assault in their hands. They tended their flocks severely in buckram and powder, and put their sticking-plaster patches on to terrify commoners, as the chiefs of some other tribes put on their war-paint. There was a Sir Somebody Dedlock, with a battle, a sprung-mine, volumes of smoke, flashes of lightning, a town on fire, and a stormed fort, all in full action between his horse's two hind legs: showing, he supposed, how little a Dedlock made of such trifles. The whole race he represented as having evidently been, in life, what he called 'stuffed people,'—a large collection, glassy eyed, set up in the most approved manner on their various twigs and perches, very correct, perfectly free from animation, and always in glass cases. (*BH* 558-59)

Here, the Dedlock ancestral portrait collection descends to the domain of negative extraordinariness in the same manner in which *Cleopatra* falls victim to Lucy Snowe's imagination in *Villette*. With his imaginative revision of the intended narrative of the ancestral portrait collection, Mr. Skimpole illustrates that in practice, visitors seldom if ever adhere to the ideals of the museum ritual. Duncan explains: "In reality, people continually 'misread' or scramble or resist the museum's cues to some extent; or they actively invent, consciously or unconsciously, their own programs according to all the historical and psychological accidents of who they are" (13). The "accident" that is Mr. Skimpole's whimsical personality enables Dickens to reverse the direction of the transformative effect of the museum ritual. The narrative of the ancestral portrait collection does not transform Mr. Skimpole; instead, he transforms it, thus underscoring the power of the unique (and imaginative) individual in the enactment of the museum ritual.

However, the more passive (and less fanciful) country house visitor Mr. Guppy turns this notion on its head, suggesting that the portrait has a power all its own. The extent to which the

extraordinary object acts upon the ordinary subject is evident in Dickens's description of Mr. Guppy's encounter with the portrait of Lady Dedlock exhibited at Chesney Wold:

> Even the long drawing-room of Chesney Wold cannot revive Mr. Guppy's spirits. He is so low that he droops on the threshhold, and has hardly strength of mind to enter. But a portrait over the chimney-piece, painted by the fashionable artist of the day, acts upon him like a charm. He recovers in a moment. He stares at it with uncommon interest; he seems to be fixed and fascinated by it. (*BH* 101)

Here, the portrait of Lady Dedlock rouses Mr. Guppy from his despondent state; he becomes animated as the extraordinary object seems to transfer its life force to him. Presumably wide-eyed and open-mouthed, Mr. Guppy exclaims, "Dear me! Who's that?" (Dickens, *BH* 101), indicating that the portrait, the sole object in his field of vision, has restored his capacities for thought and speech. However, at the same time that the image vivifies its viewer, it fixes him in space and slows down his mental processes. In a deeply contemplative state, Mr. Guppy "remains so absorbed by the portrait, that he stands immoveable before it until the young gardener has closed the shutters" (Dickens, *BH* 102). Frozen beneath the portrait, Mr. Guppy declines into a deathlike trance; to borrow the words of Germain Bazin, "The act of looking becomes a sort of trance uniting spectator and masterpiece" (265). With Mr. Guppy's eyes upturned toward the portrait, Dickens visualizes a diagonal line that connects the powerful image to its weakened viewer. Suspended in space together, the extraordinary object and the ordinary subject thus become similar visions of death-in-life.

With the assistance of Mr. Guppy, who is "fixed and fascinated" (Dickens, *BH* 101) by an object that is itself fixed and fascinating, the lifeless portrait of the live Lady Dedlock becomes both the showpiece of the ancestral portrait collection at Chesney Wold and the

centerpiece of *Bleak House*. Installed over the massive hearth in the Dedlock portrait gallery (fig. 22), the image asserts a claim to the visual and mental attention of both viewers and readers. A wealth of information lies beneath the surface of the portrait, these individuals believe, and to decode the mysteries of its visual language is their greatest mission. Neither Mr. Guppy nor Dickens's readers are interested in any other image on view at Chesney Wold. For the portrait of Lady Dedlock symbolizes the tension between the concealment and revelation of Esther Summerson's origins that drives Dickens's narrative.

Ancestral Portrait Collections

"Dreary and solemn the old house looks," Dickens writes in an atmospheric description of Chesney Wold:

> with so many appliances of habitation, and with no inhabitants except the pictured forms upon the walls. So did these come and go, a Dedlock in possession might have ruminated passing along; so did they see this gallery hushed and quiet, as I see it now; so think, as I think, of the gap that they would make in this domain when they were gone; so find it, as I find it, difficult to believe that it could be, without them; so pass from my world, as I pass from theirs, now closing the reverberating door; so leave no blank to miss them, and so die. (*BH* 590-93)

Within the ancestral portrait gallery, this passage suggests, time becomes synchronous as the living and the dead connect as if in coexistence. The ensemble of portraits visually archives the past and preserves the present for future generations, placing live viewers and deceased subjects together on a temporal continuum. As a representation of intergenerational connectivity, the ancestral portrait gallery is a visual display of narrative. Its pictured walls speak of biography, of history, and of memory itself, and as viewers in the ancestral clan work to decode its visual

language, the collection becomes the site at which their identities are made visible. Within the ancestral portrait gallery, such viewers use images from the past to see themselves with a difference; that is, they see difference in sameness. In the act of remembering their ancestors, they affirm their own positions in time and space and locate themselves within a network of ancestral relationships (Batchen 97). Studying the faces of those who have come before them, these viewers become gathered into the collection, pulled into its web of familial connections. Bound by the framework that shapes their identities, these viewers discover that they exist in the spaces between portraits as much as they do in the faces of their ancestors.

Dickens's description of the ancestral portrait gallery at Chesney Wold suggests that an individual portrait is never divorced from the context that instills it with meaning. Granted, a portrait may be temporarily displaced from its position within the ensemble; for instance, upon Esther's arrival at Bleak House, she discovers that "half-length portraits, in crayons, abounded all through the house; but were so dispersed that [she finds] the brother of a youthful officer of [hers] in the china-closet, and the grey old age of [her] pretty young bride, with a flower in her boddice, in the breakfast room" (Dickens, *BH* 79). However, "lost" portraits such as these invariably seem to gravitate toward re-collection, for as Elizabeth A. Fay contends, "Portraits are not meant to exist in isolation as material objects" (59). As was particularly evident in the 1860s, when the proliferation of *cartes-de-visite* initiated a craze for portrait albums,[74] or "portable portrait galleries," as David Piper calls them (276), the significance of a single image depended on its relationship to others. The relationship between portraits was as important as the objects themselves, for these relationships told the stories that individual portraits could not. The impulse to collect, organize, and exhibit portraits was thus indicative of the desire to learn,

[74] Homans reports that at the time of her death in 1901, Queen Victoria possessed 110 albums containing 100,000 photographs, most of which were portraits of herself and her family (197).

create, or revise the narratives that connected them. The spatial arrangement of portraits was of crucial importance, as it revealed the narrative of the collection. Because portraits were "probably seldom scrutinized in isolation but as part of a spatial dialogue" (Pointon 17), it was necessary to install them within a framework that would clearly communicate the tale one wished to tell. In his discussion of picture-hanging practices in British stately homes between 1700 and 1850, Russell reveals that "the spaces between works assumed a novel importance" and that "calculations of spacing, both vertical and horizontal, were carefully worked out" (138) (fig. 23). A photograph of Sir Philip Hendy, the director of the National Gallery between 1946 and 1967, illustrates that pictures were hung with the same extensive forethought well into the twentieth century (fig. 24). Today, curators continue to devote the utmost care and attention to the spatial organization of pictures. Given the emphasis that has historically been placed on the staging of spatial conversations between pictures, it is important to consider the framework within which Dickens embeds his characters.

Similar to an ancestral portrait collection, *Bleak House* is comprised of a multitude of individuals who are inseparable from the networks of familial and social relationships that shape their identities. But unlike such a collection, the novel does not always adhere to the strict organizational principles of a fixed framework. With characters such as Lady Dedlock and Nemo, Dickens adopts a more flexible model, one that enables him to frame and reframe these characters in accordance with the shifting parameters of his multistrand narrative. His approach to Esther is the most radical, for "so strange" is her "place in this world" that from the time of her birth, she "had never borne a name" (Dickens, *BH* 539). With her origins unknown and her future uncertain, Esther has a radically flexible identity. She is never merely Esther; she is or has the potential to be Esther Summerson or Barbary or Hawdon or Dedlock or Jarndyce or

Woodcourt—or, for that matter, Dame Durden or Mrs. Shipton or Mother Hubbard or Little Old Woman or even Cobweb. She has "so many names" that her own name is "quite lost among them" (Dickens, *BH* 111). With her birth name uncertain, Esther defies classification.[75] To borrow a phrase from Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, she is "human warious" (88). Esther thus bounces between familial and social units, struggling to both define and test the framework of her identity. Like a portrait temporarily displaced from its position within an ensemble, Esther seems to incessantly gravitate toward re-collection in meaningful units that will shape the boundaries of her identity. The image of the ancestral portrait gallery is thus crucial to Dickens's development of a multistrand narrative that revolves around the related issues of heredity and identity.

To establish the significance of the ancestral network from which Esther is excluded, Dickens visualizes the portrait gallery at Chesney Wold as a space sanctioned for story. Its long perspective, depicted in an illustration by Phiz (Hablôt K. Browne) (fig. 25), is indicative of the linearity of the Dedlock ancestral narrative. Unlike public daguerreotype galleries, which were peopled with a democratic assortment of dissimilar faces, the portrait gallery at Chesney Wold is carefully organized to showcase homogeneity and display the Dedlock family's "greatness" (or rather, lack thereof) during the last "seven hundred years" (Dickens, *BH* 101). Paradoxically, the lack of distinction that characterizes the portraits underscores the Dedlock family's distinction. Visualizing a seamless historical narrative of the ancestral clan's socioeconomic power, the arrangement of the collection conveys that individual portraits—and, by extension, the subjects depicted in them—are embedded in a stable framework of tradition (Mattick 94). With its emphasis on the continuity of the Dedlock family line, the collection's spatial organization

[75] The relationship between names and classification is often discussed in scholarship on Victorian natural history. See, for instance, Endersby 137-38 and Yanni 14-15.

establishes legitimate kin relationships between individual portraits. Functioning as a three-dimensional genealogical map, the portrait gallery is a visual display of the massive network that maintains the clan's unity. Suspended on the walls together, the collection of ancestral portraits represents solidarity poised in space and intergenerational connectivity occurring on a temporal continuum. Moreover, the lack of interruptions in the "spatial dialogue" (Pointon 17) between individual portraits in the collection underscores the significance of direct descent in the Dedlock line. This is a pure bloodline, Dickens indicates, a map of uncontaminated reproduction, for even the family's hereditary disease (gout) "has come down, through the illustrious line, like the plate, or the pictures, or the place in Lincolnshire" (Dickens, *BH* 234). Paradoxically, however, the extraordinariness that has been passed down through the generations has caused the Dedlocks to descend into the domain of ordinariness.

Given the emphasis that Dickens places on inheritance, it is safe to assume that the collection of ancestral portraits at Chesney Wold "do[es] the work of genealogy by demonstrating the persistence of features from one generation to the next" (Morgentaler 41). Facial resemblance is a crucial criterion for membership within both the Dedlock clan and the portrait gallery designed to celebrate its distinction. To put on a united front, biological homogeneity must be maintained. In her discussion of reproduction and inheritance in Dickens's oeuvre, Goldie Morgentaler observes, "This emphasis on the physical resemblance between generations is Dickens's favourite device for indicating hereditary relationships" (42). He therefore returns to portraits time and again because they are "permanent records of family features which are simultaneously preserved through time and shielded from the ravages of time" (Morgentaler 41). The sense of permanence inherent in portraits thus indicates that portraits in Dickens's novels may be relied upon to decode "mysteries of connection" and "hint at heretofore

unacknowledged family ties, thus making visible on canvas the hidden bonds which link one character to another" (Morgentaler 41). Such narrative work is particularly evident in *Bleak House*, which revolves around Esther's unknown origins. Thus, because it foregrounds the notion of family resemblance, the ancestral portrait gallery at Chesney Wold serves as an architectural background upon which Dickens overlays his theme of hereditary facelessness.

A Gallery of Empty Frames

"It is pleasant," remarks the ever cheerful Mr. Skimpole, "and it is whimsically interesting, to trace peculiarities in families" (Dickens, *BH* 624). This observation resonates with particular strength in *Bleak House*, for the familial unit comprised of Lady Dedlock, Captain Hawdon, and Esther Summerson is characterized by a peculiarity that is as fascinating as it is unusual: facelessness. I argue in what follows that Dickens reveals the familial connection between these three characters, all of whom have distinct socioeconomic statuses, through the use of an unvisualized visual pattern—that is, a pattern that emerges not in the text, but in the reader's mind's eye. Such a pattern necessitates reverse acts of distinction; it requires readers to perceive similarities, not differences, between characters. Dickens's unvisualized visual pattern renders Lady Dedlock, Captain Hawdon, and Esther Summerson all but invisible and is all but undetectable. However, its recognition is crucial to a more nuanced comprehension of Dickens's exploration of the similarities that connect individuals across class boundaries.

In her discussion of portraiture and the perception of consciousness, Cynthia Freeland contends, "People's bodies and especially their faces offer us an entryway into their ongoing internal lives" (157). Susan Stewart concurs and narrows the scope of the argument, observing that portrait viewers tend to assign substantial significance to certain facial features. Because eyes and mouths are often believed to be "openings onto fathomlessness," these features in

particular frequently "become gigantic with meaning and significance" in the eyes of spectators (*On Longing* 127, 125). Portrait viewers tend to believe that "behind the appearance of eyes and mouth lies the interior stripped of appearances," and before their very eyes, "the face becomes a text, a space which must be 'read' and interpreted in order to exist" (Stewart, *On Longing* 127, 125).

Dickens was well aware of the importance of the subject's face to the portrait viewer. An article printed in *All the Year Round* in 1865 expresses the value that Dickens and his contemporaries placed on the faces depicted in portraits: "Tints of fancy, of humour, of firmness, of melancholy and pensiveness, in short, of the hundred-and-one shades of expression—the presence, in fact, of life—this is what gives the portrait its special value" ("Portraits" 91). Facial expressions were thus valuable because they enabled portrait viewers to perform visual acts of distinction. The emphasis typically placed on eyes is even evident in *Bleak House*, when Mr. Snagsby's eyes are described as "the windows of his soul" (Dickens, *BH* 382). However, Dickens subverts portraiture theory more often than not in his novel, routinely diminishing the significance of the faces represented in portraits by writing around them. For instance, in his description of the portraits that comprise the Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty, he refuses to visualize the faces that would render the female subjects unique. Instead, he reduces the women to a formulaic combination of portrait costumes, props, poses, and backdrops (N. Armstrong 155). The extraordinary women that comprise the Galaxy Gallery thus lose a measure of distinction: "[A]s the Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty wears every variety of fancy-dress, plays every variety of musical instrument, fondles every variety of dog, ogles every variety of prospect, and is backed up by every variety of flower-pot and balustrade, the result is very imposing" (Dickens, *BH* 305). Moments such as this recur throughout the text, as I demonstrate

in the analysis that follows. In these moments, Dickens "disfigures" the text, to borrow a term from Paul de Man; that is, he undermines the portrait trope in the same moment that he evokes it (McQuillan 80). Visualizing the Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty as a collection of faceless portraits, Dickens explores "whether there can ever be particularity in portraiture, some finite and unique quality that cannot be reduced to [an artistic] norm" (Brilliant 109). In other words, Dickens questions whether portraiture bears witness to the ordinariness of all human subjects.

In what follows, I argue that Dickens visualizes the familial unit comprised of Lady Dedlock, Captain Hawdon, and Esther Summerson as a triptych of faceless "portraits" that counters the massive ancestral portrait collection at Chesney Wold. Whereas the traditional portraiture on view at the country house renders familial connections hypervisible, the faceless portraiture with which Dickens visualizes the three characters in question does the work of genealogy in a much less conspicuous fashion. The unvisualized visual pattern that connects Esther to her parents enables Dickens to constrain portraiture's power of representation and delay the revelation of his heroine's origins. Thus, to maintain narrative tension and transcend the limitations of artistic convention, Dickens frames Esther and her parents in the context of facelessness.

Mr. Guppy (and, by extension, Dickens's readers) begins to unravel the mystery of Esther's lineage at the portrait gallery at Chesney Wold. This is appropriate, for surrounded by a visual display of ancestry that showcases the persistence of facial features from one generation to the next, Mr. Guppy is primed to detect the resemblance between Esther and her mother. When he views the portrait of Lady Dedlock installed over the fireplace, his first impulse is to imaginatively reframe the image in an alternative ancestral network. By the time he exclaims, "Dear me! Who's that?" (Dickens, *BH* 101), Mr. Guppy has already subconsciously compared

the face depicted in the portrait to the image of Esther "imprinted on [his] art" (Dickens, *BH* 428). Unbeknownst to him, his brain has detected a near match in the two images, which he later confesses to Lady Dedlock:

> 'Your ladyship, I do assure you, that having Miss Summerson's image imprinted on my art—which I mention in confidence—I found, when I had the honour of going over your ladyship's mansion at Chesney Wold, while on a short out in the county of Lincolnshire with a friend, such a resemblance between Miss Esther Summerson and your ladyship's own portrait, that it completely knocked me over; so much so, that I didn't at the moment even know what it *was* that knocked me over. And now I have the honour of beholding your ladyship near,…it's really more surprising than I thought it.' (Dickens, *BH* 428-29, original emphasis)

Here, Mr. Guppy reveals that he has performed a reverse act of distinction and has all but unraveled the mystery of Esther's lineage. Matched up in his mind's eye, the portrait of Lady Dedlock and the image of Esther "imprinted on [his] art" have shortened the distance between these two individuals. But despite the apparent obviousness of the resemblance between Esther and her mother, no one but the perceptive Mr. Guppy seems to detect it. Nevertheless, for Dickens's readers, the pair of images begins to operate as a single unit.

To make the genealogical connection between Esther and her mother a bit more explicit, Dickens visualizes the two women in a family "portrait." In a scene in which Esther takes shelter in the doorway of the keeper's lodge at Chesney Wold during a thunderstorm, a voice unknown to her inquires, "Is it not dangerous to sit in so exposed a place?" (Dickens, *BH* 274). Startled, Esther begins to see "innumerable pictures" of herself, as if in a mirror (Dickens, *BH* 274). Lady Dedlock materializes on the scene, emerging from the dark recesses of the keeper's lodge to take

up a position behind Esther. Assuming a conventional family portrait pose, Lady Dedlock places her hand on Esther's chair, close to her daughter's shoulder (Dickens, *BH* 274). Framed by the doorway and front-lit by lightning, Lady Dedlock and Esther are poised in space as a picture of mother-daughter intimacy. With the physical distance between them now closed, there can be no doubt as to their resemblance to one another. However, as Lady Dedlock intimates with her inquiry, this is a dangerous moment in Dickens's narrative, for portraiture is often associated with publicity (Williams 126). With the two women framed in a mother-daughter portrait, the resemblance between them threatens to expose their kinship to the public eye and reveal the shameful truth of both Lady Dedlock's premarital history and Esther's illegitimate birth. Stated otherwise, their extraordinary resemblance threatens to reveal their extraordinary ordinariness and eradicate the narrative tension.

To limit the threat that portraiture poses to his novel, Dickens labors to compose the faces of Esther and her parents out of existence. For instance, though Lady Dedlock is a hypervisible member of fashionable society whose portrait circulates in public as part of the Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty, readers see her in the act of shading her face with a hand-screen; stealing through the streets of London, disguised and closely veiled; covering her face with her hands as she sobs at Esther's feet; and wretchedly withering away, conscience-stricken, beneath a mask of composure (Dickens, *BH* 22, 238-43, 536, 538). For much of the novel, Lady Dedlock's face remains hidden from both her sister and her daughter, neither of whom had ever beheld her face from the time of Esther's birth (Dickens, *BH* 539). Moreover, like those of the other members of the Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty, Lady Dedlock's copperplate portrait is a visual tease in which Dickens substitutes conventional portrait props for her body parts: "[S]he is represented on a terrace, with a pedestal upon the terrace, and a vase upon the pedestal, and her shawl upon

the vase, and a prodigious piece of fur upon the shawl, and her arm on the prodigious piece of fur, and a bracelet on her arm" (*BH* 470). Here, Dickens uses a narrative style that mimics photographic vision.[76] Focusing his narrative eye not on Lady Dedlock's face, the presumed locus of her identity, but rather on a dislocated arm, Dickens fragments the portrait until the subject becomes a "literary and pictorial body-in-pieces," to borrow a phrase from Daniel A. Novak (1). Despite its apparent beauty, the portrait visualizes a dismembered woman. Installed over the fireplace in Tony Weevle's apartment—which, to be noted, was previously inhabited by Nemo—the "copper-plate impression" of Lady Dedlock is a visual horror compared to the one "painted by the fashionable artist of the day" on view at Chesney Wold (Dickens, *BH* 305, 101).

Equally horrific is Dickens's "portrait" of Nemo, or Captain Hawdon, as he was called when he fathered Esther. An absent presence in the lives of both Lady Dedlock and Esther, Nemo is described upon his death in a similar language of fragmentation:

> He lies there, dressed in shirt and trousers, with bare feet. He has a yellow look, in the spectral darkness of a candle that has guttered down, until the whole length of its wick (still burning) has doubled over, and left a tower of winding-sheet above it. His hair is ragged, mingling with his whiskers and his beard—the latter, ragged too, and grown, like the scum and mist around him, in neglect. (Dickens, *BH* 151)

With this portrait of Nemo, Dickens literalizes Byatt's assertion that "Portraits…are a rendering of death as much as a prolongation of a moment of life" (48). Killed by what appears to have been an accidental overdose of opium, Nemo is visualized as decapitated in the first line of this passage. Just as Dickens zooms in on Lady Dedlock's arm—a move that he repeats when Nemo's lifeless arm "swings over the bedside" (*BH* 152)—he temporarily transfers visual

[76] For more information on Dickens's photographic writing style, see Werner and Williams 10-12. Novak also discusses Dickens's relationship to photography.

attention away from Nemo's head to his feet. When he reinstates Nemo's head, Dickens frames his face with a profusion of unkempt hair but refuses to describe the eyes and mouth that would enable internal and external spectators to interpret Nemo's face as a legible text. Next, Dickens fits a death mask over Nemo's face, obscuring the features that would serve as clues to his interiority. As Nemo lies in the dark, two "gaunt holes" pierce the shutters in his dark apartment, functioning as "gaunt eyes" that stare down upon his deathbed (Dickens, *BH* 151, 152). Like a death mask, the shutters obscure any outdoor light that would illuminate Nemo's face and dispel the mystery of his identity, and the holes take the place of his eyes. Unlike Mr. Snagsby's eyes, which are described as "the windows of his soul" (Dickens, *BH* 382), Nemo's eyes are mere holes that reveal nothing of his spiritual depth. Of course, this is appropriate, as Nemo's soul has presumably already departed from his body. But what is more important is that the death mask fitted over Nemo's face establishes his resemblance to Lady Dedlock, who describes herself as a "wretched mother" who suffers "conscience-stricken, underneath [a] mask" (Dickens, *BH* 538). At the same time, however, Nemo's death mask maintains the twin secrets of Lady Dedlock's premarital indiscretion and Esther's illegitimate birth by concealing his true identity as Captain Hawdon. Dickens's faceless portrait of Nemo thus contradicts Catherine M. Soussloff's assertion that as an artistic genre, portraiture "actively works against anonymity" (23). Without a recognizable face, Nemo is well suited to his pseudonym, which, as Mr. Tulkinghorn points out, is Latin for "no one" (Dickens, *BH* 148). Without a proper name, Nemo, like Esther, defies classification.

Anonymous in the sense that she adopts an abundance of names to compensate for her unknown origins, Esther is also depicted as faceless in the novel. To frame his heroine within the context of her parents' intertwined personal histories, Dickens composes her face out of

existence as well. However, his approach to Esther's faceless portraiture is much more radical, for he disfigures her face with what appears to be smallpox, leaving her temporarily blind and permanently scarred. With her "poor face…quite gone from [her]" (Dickens, *BH* 526), Esther hides her unfortunate appearance. Like the man depicted in the frontispiece of Robert Chambers's *Illustrations of the Author of Waverly* (1825) (fig. 26), she effaces herself, communicating with Ada Clare from behind window curtains, approaching Richard Carstone under the protection of a veil, and even regarding her reflection in a mirror through a mass of her own hair (Dickens, *BH* 520, 547, 528). Though the final scene of the novel depicts Esther reminiscing about her former appearance, she declares that "it matters very little" that her face is disfigured (Dickens, *BH* 914, 515-16). After all, she "had never been a beauty, and had never thought [herself] one"; thus, she "can do without [her] old face very well" (Dickens, *BH* 528, 516). For Dickens, however, Esther's disfigured face matters enormously, for his heroine's facelessness is crucial to both the maintenance of narrative tension and the development of Esther's character. The extent to which Dickens labors to compose her face out of existence is evident in the fact that in the eighteen illustrations that represent Esther, eight picture her in profile and ten portray her from the back (fig. 27, fig. 28, and fig. 29). As Nancy Armstrong points out, "Browne not only refuses to allow us to see Esther, but also makes that refusal impossible to overlook. To offer the reader a view of the back of her respectable bonnet…is to conspire with the novel in concealing the face she shares with her mother" (141). To make Esther's resemblance to Lady Dedlock explicit would release the narrative tension upon which the novel depends. Therefore, Dickens must make the two women's kinship implicit via the notion of hereditary facelessness.

When Dickens first began to publish in the 1830s, heated debates broke out over the notion of heredity (Morgentaler 20). Morgentaler has detailed the ways in which three distinct theories of heredity—preformation, blended heredity, and reproduction—had a major impact on Dickens's fiction (x). "Reproduction," of course, "afforded Dickens the opportunity of tying hereditary issues to aesthetics through the visual pun of the portrait" (Morgentaler x), but it is the theory of blended heredity that best explains the notion of hereditary facelessness. Morgentaler defines this theory thus:

> The theory of blended heredity—which was essentially an attempt to account for the contribution of both sexes to the biological endowment of their offspring—suggested that children represented amalgams or alloys of the characteristics of their parents. Each parent was thought to pass on all of his or her characteristics through the blood, and the resulting child was therefore a blend of the two endowments. (43)

Understood in the context of this theory, hereditary transmission perpetuated physical characteristics, including facial features, more or less intact from one generation to the next (Morgentaler 43). It is therefore appropriate that facelessness is passed down to Esther from her parents just as the Dedlock family's hereditary disease (gout) "has come down, through the illustrious line, like the plate, or the pictures, or the place in Lincolnshire" (Dickens, *BH* 234). But what is more significant is the fact that the theory of blended heredity can help us understand the transmission of multifactorial characteristics such as ordinariness and extraordinariness. As the product of a fallen woman-turned-aristocrat and an army captain-turned-opium addict, Esther is a mixture of distinction and disgrace. She thus occupies an intermediary space in the social world.

With not only facelessness, but also a measure of ordinariness and both positive and negative extraordinariness in their blood, Esther and her parents unite across class boundaries to comprise a familial unit; in portraiture terms, they constitute a gallery of empty frames (fig. 30). Unlike the aristocratic Dedlocks, whose portraits are assembled and exhibited at Chesney Wold, Esther and her parents are, for much of the novel, distant characters who operate within three different socioeconomic spheres and therefore three distinct narrative frames. Nevertheless, their shared facelessness makes them appear as though they move in unison through the novel, gravitating toward re-collection in the genealogical framework that shapes their identities. Unlike the Dedlock ancestral clan, the triptych featuring Lady Dedlock, Captain Hawdon, and Esther does not rely on formal portraiture to convey its unity, but rather on the invisible relationship between its empty frames.

About-Face

Given the emphasis that Dickens places on blended heredity, readers may assume that Esther inherits her identity in the same manner in which she inherits not only her facelessness, but also her measure of ordinariness and extraordinariness. However, inheritance in this sense has a major potential consequence. If Esther is inseparable from the familial unit of which she is a component, her individuality may be jeopardized; that is, she may be indistinguishable from her parents. In his discussion of group portraits, Brilliant warns that "the integrated ensemble may prevail over the independent individual" (93). Morgentaler notes that this occurs time and again in Dickens's fiction; his recurrent plot of hidden identity "places every individual, no matter how solitary, within the social context of a historical family" (46). There are few autonomous individuals in Dickensian fiction; "[e]very individual has a history, and every history is familial" (Morgentaler 36). In *Bleak House*, this is most apparent in Sir Leicester

Dedlock, who represents a "whole race" of "stuffed people" who have never done anything to "distinguish themselves" from one another (Dickens, *BH* 559, 101). For centuries, the Dedlocks have relied upon the extraordinariness of the family name to conceal their own ordinariness. Sir Leicester and his ancestors have sacrificed their independence for membership in the clan. In metaphorical terms, they have privileged the ancestral portrait collection over the individual portrait.

However, as Stewart points out, "In the collection, the more the objects are similar, the more imperative it is that we make gestures to distinguish them" (*On Longing* 155). Dickens must therefore differentiate Esther from her parents if he is to preserve her individuality. To do so, he does an about-face; he returns to her family's peculiarity, facelessness, but employs it to individuate her. This move is appropriate, for as Stewart explains, "To group objects in a series because they are 'the same' is to simultaneously signify their difference" (*On Longing* 155). When Esther comes to terms with her disfigured face, she is thankful that she no longer resembles her mother: "I felt, through all my tumult of emotion, a burst of gratitude to the providence of God that I was so changed as that I never could disgrace her by any trace of likeness; as that nobody could ever now look at me, and look at her, and remotely think of any near tie between us" (Dickens, *BH* 535). With her face severely scarred, Esther no longer poses a threat to either her mother or herself; Lady Dedlock's premarital indiscretion as well as Esther's ignominious birth can remain a secret. But what is more important for the development of Esther's character is the fact that her facelessness differentiates her from her parents. While her resemblance to her parents remained intact, she ran the risk of becoming like Sir Leicester Dedlock, a mere reproduction of a type—or in other words, ordinary. To become extraordinary, to achieve a unique identity within "a culture that felt compelled both to type all individuals and

to individuate some of them," Esther must "become one of a kind and, at the same time, reproduce the type from which…she [is] notably different" (N. Armstrong 156). Smallpox thus becomes Esther's saving grace, the force that rescues her from becoming an ordinary "stuffed" person (Dickens, *BH* 559).

To emphasize Esther's differentiation from her parents, Dickens literally and figuratively reframes her as an autonomous individual. While she observes her reflection in a mirror and becomes accustomed to her disfigured face, Esther reconceptualizes her identity:

> My hair had not been cut off, though it had been in danger more than once. It was long and thick. I let it down, and shook it out, and went up to the glass upon the dressing-table. There was a little muslin curtain drawn across it. I drew it back; and stood for a moment looking through such a veil of my own hair, that I could see nothing else. Then I put my hair aside, and looked at the reflection in the mirror: encouraged by seeing how placidly it looked at me. I was very much changed—O very, very much. At first, my face was so strange to me, that I think I should have put my hands before it and started back, but for the encouragement I have mentioned. Very soon it became more familiar, and then I knew the extent of the alteration in it better than I had done at first. It was not like what I had expected; but I had expected nothing definite, and I dare say anything definite would have surprised me.
>
> I had never been a beauty, and had never thought myself one; but I had been very different from this. It was all gone now. (Dickens, *BH* 528)

Framed by the mirror in this "self-portrait," Esther appears "very much changed" from the woman she was when Dickens posed her in the doorway of the keeper's lodge in the mother-daughter portrait. Her disfigured face has successfully undone the work of genealogy; the

external markers of her lineage are "all gone now." As Esther pulls aside both the mirror's curtain and the mass of hair that obscures her face, she unveils her new identity and emerges into the realm of the visible.

However, Esther's self-portrait as an autonomous individual seems to dissolve almost in the moment of its creation. This is appropriate, as images reflected in mirrors are always ever transitory; only the portrait has the power to preserve visual imagery. Esther's self-portrait is thus inherently unstable; the mirror frames Esther as an independent individual only to later reframe her as a component of a familial unit. Regarding her reflection in the mirror for a second time, Esther narrates:

> My eyes were red and swollen, and I said, 'O Esther, Esther, can that be you!' I am afraid the face in the glass was going to cry again at this reproach, but I held up my finger at it, and it stopped.
>
> 'That is more like the composed look you comforted me with, my dear, when you showed me such a change!' said I, beginning to let down my hair. 'When you are mistress of Bleak House, you are to be as cheerful as a bird. In fact, you are always to be cheerful; so let us begin for once and for all.' (Dickens, *BH* 639-40)

Here, Esther undermines her previous self-portrait by reframing herself within the context of the Jardynce family line. To assume the position of "mistress of Bleak House," Esther effaces her sad countenance and rearranges her facial expression to appear cheerful. In her discussion of a viewer's response to his or her own reflection in a mirror, Fay argues, "Aware of our reflection, we subtly change our behavior to render it more socially acceptable because we are more aware of ourselves as subjects for others to view and judge" (64). Becoming Mrs. Jarndyce thus requires a new face and a new outlook. Just when Esther had transformed into an independent

individual, she labors self-consciously to transform "once and for all" back into a component of a familial unit. Because Dickens "places every individual, no matter how solitary, within the social context of a historical family" (Morgentaler 46), Esther moves toward re-collection in an ensemble that will shape the boundaries of her identity. With her new identity as a married woman on the horizon, Esther promises to become just like her mother, the female figurehead of an ancestral line.

Esther's self-portraits thus reveal that identity formation is a flexible (if laborious) process. As Geoffrey Batchen argues, "individual identity is posited not as fixed and autonomous but as dynamic and collective, as a continual process of becoming" (97). Moreover, Esther's self-portraits illustrate that the face is a marker of the socialized self—a front designed for the consumption of the other, an object crafted for visual acts of distinction. Esther underscores the detachment of the face from the core self when she narrates, "I [was] afraid the face in the glass was going to cry again at this reproach, but I held up my finger at it, and it stopped" (Dickens, *BH* 639). A separate entity over which Esther has control, the face is a façade manufactured for affect. In this respect, it is like a portrait: inherently inauthentic. Since neither faces nor portraits argue for the equivalence of the object and the image, theoretically, both "can be freed from all forms of descriptive reference to physical appearance" without losing their statuses as signs of particular named individuals (Brilliant 154-55). It is for this reason that readers can recognize the resemblance between Esther and her parents despite the effacement and defacement of their faces.

In conclusion, as if a venerable housekeeper enacting the museum ritual in the museal space of a country house, Dickens guides readers through a series of exhibition spaces in *Bleak House*. On view are three distinct but related portrait collections. One is comprised of aristocrats

and tells a centuries-old tale of wealth, taste, status, and power. A second, more democratic collection is made up of "tolerably good" subjects (Dickens, *BH* 427)—law clerks, business proprietors, medical practitioners—and its narrative is one of the rising middle class. The third collection, however, is bit more difficult to comprehend; to borrow the words with which a guidebook to the British Portrait Gallery at the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition opens, "Of all portions of the Exhibition this is the one which most requires the aid of a *catalogue raisonné*" (*A Handbook to the British Portrait Gallery in the Art Treasures Exhibition* 3). For the collection presents viewers with a mixed bag of identities: a fallen woman-turned-aristocrat, an army captain-turned-opium addict, and a presumed orphan-turned-doctor's wife. "So far as we can judge from these pictures, no very definite principle has guided the selection of them" (*A Handbook to the British Portrait Gallery in the Art Treasures Exhibition* 3). Yet what unites the portraits in this collection is the narrative of the development of an individual within the context of the collective. Inextricable from a social network that includes individuals across the socioeconomic spectrum, Esther Summerson transforms over time from a financially dependent, virtually friendless, and seemingly unloved child to an economically stable woman, an adored wife and mother, and the nucleus of a cluster of loved ones. Over the course of Dickens's narrative, Esther becomes a little less ordinary and a little more extraordinary.

In this chapter, I have focused on ancestral portrait collections and the country houses in which they were exhibited, interpreting *Bleak House* as a narrative portrait of the Victorian fascination with the interrelated notions of history, heredity, and individuality. This fascination was apparent even when economic ruin forced the dispersal of country house collections. For instance, when the second Duke of Buckingham went bankrupt in 1848, thousands flocked to the forty-day auction of Stowe's contents in omnibuses chartered for the purpose (Mandler 101).

Turned inside-out with its extraordinary collections dispersed, the country house transformed into another kind of spectacle, an abandoned wreck of historical narratives (Mandler 101). The sale of dozens of ancestral portraits came as a particular blow to the Duke and his kin, for as Pointon reminds us, "Portraits as material objects are much less frequently sold by their owners" than other kinds of fine or decorative art (238). Even when the identities of particular subjects have been forgotten, portraits tend to survive the dispersal of family possessions (Pointon 14, 20) due to their status as extraordinary objects. In contrast, household wares tend to fall to the hammer early, even when they embody ancestral links. With an eye toward the ways in which the realist novel represents identity crises through the dispersal of domestic collections, I turn to these more mobile objects in the next chapter.



Figure 16: Cox, David. The Long Gallery at Hardwick Hall. c. 1839-40. Watercolor. Devonshire Collection. *The Polite Tourist: A History of Country House Visiting.* By Adrian Tinniswood. London: National Trust Enterprises, 1998. 43. Print.



Figure 17: Walker, J. The picture gallery at Somerley. N.d. The Earl of Normanton. "The Hanging and Display of Pictures, 1700-1850." By Francis Russell. *The Fashioning and Functioning of the British Country House.* Eds. Gervase Jackson-Stops, et al. Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1989. Fig. 21. Print. Studies in the Hist. of Art 25.



Figure 18: Cox, David. The Lion Gate at Hampton Court. c. 1840. Watercolor. Historic Royal Palaces. *The Polite Tourist: A History of Country House Visiting.* By Adrian Tinniswood. London: National Trust Enterprises, 1998. 143. Print.



Figure 19: Barber, Thomas. *Mrs. Garnett, Housekeeper*. c. 1768-1843. National Trust Photographic Library/John Hammond. *The Polite Tourist: A History of Country House Visiting.* By Adrian Tinniswood. London: National Trust Enterprises, 1998. 108. Print.



Figure 20: Smirke, Sidney. Scheme for the polychrome decoration of the front entrance hall of the British Museum. 1847. Watercolor. British Museum. *The Public Art Museum in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Development of the National Gallery*. By Christopher Whitehead. Burlington: Ashgate, 2005. Fig. 9. Print.



Figure 21: Fairholt, F.W. "The Entrance Hall." 1852. "A Day at Chatsworth." By S.C. Hall. *Art Journal* Jan. 1852. *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home.* By Peter Mandler. New Haven: Yale UP, 1997. Fig. 33. Print.

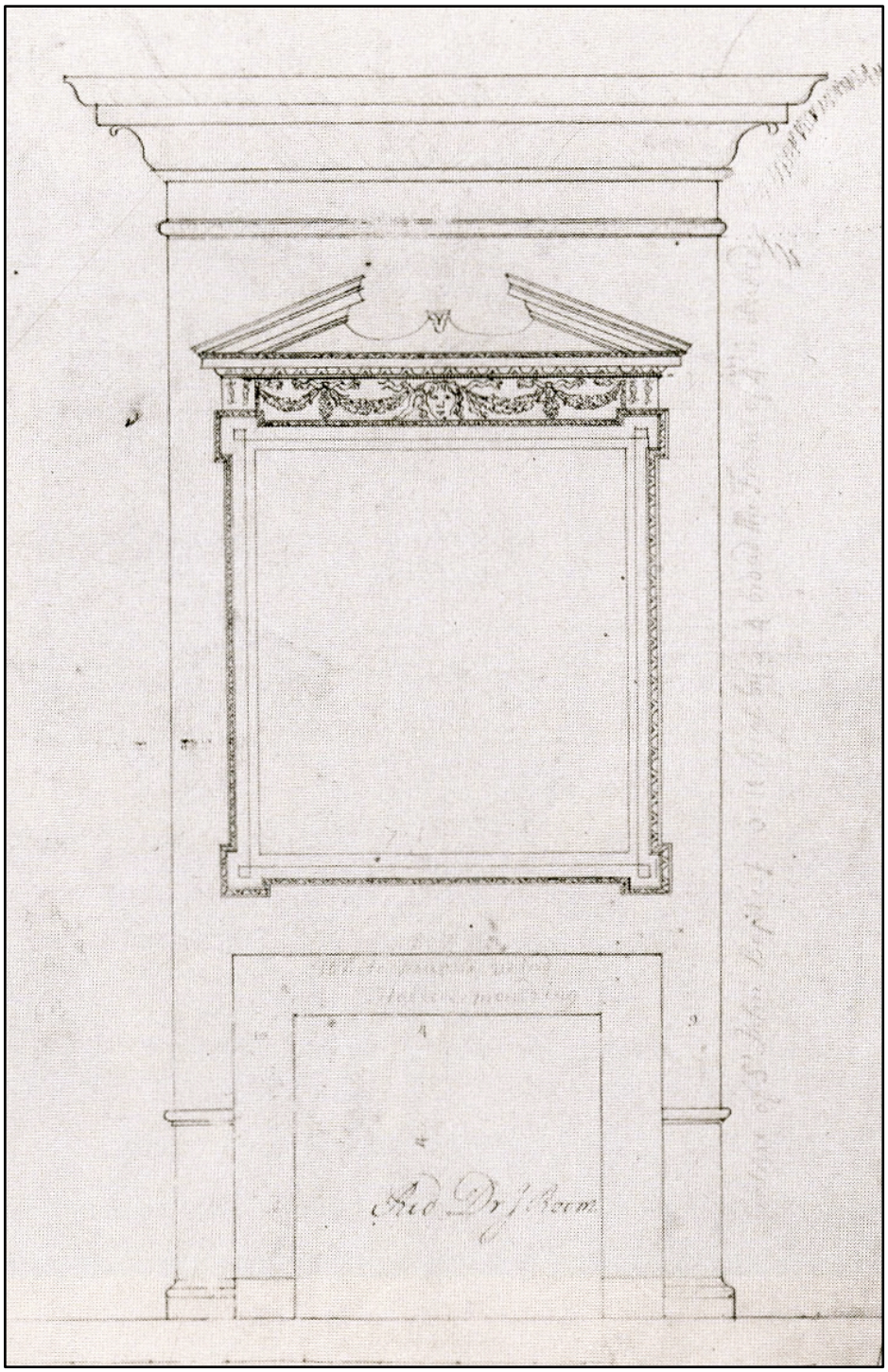

Figure 22: Project for an overmantel in a Red Drawing Room by an associate of Sambroke Freeman. N.d. "The Hanging and Display of Pictures, 1700-1850." By Francis Russell. *The Fashioning and Functioning of the British Country House.* Eds. Gervase Jackson-Stops, et al. Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1989. Fig. 9. Print. Studies in the Hist. of Art 25.



Figure 23: Hanging plan for the Blue Room in an unidentified house, English School. c. 1750. British Architectural Library, RIBA. "The Hanging and Display of Pictures, 1700-1850." By Francis Russell. *The Fashioning and Functioning of the British Country House.* Eds. Gervase Jackson-Stops, et al. Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1989. Fig. 5. Print. Studies in the Hist. of Art 25.



Figure 24: Philip Hendy, Director of the National Gallery. c. 1955-60. Photograph. *The National Gallery: An Illustrated History.* By Alan Crookham. London: National Gallery, 2009. 110. Print.



Figure 25: Browne, Hablôt K. "Sunset in the long Drawing-room at Chesney Wold." 1852-53. Etching. *Bleak House*. By Charles Dickens. Ed. Stephen Gill. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. 592. Print.



Figure 26: Frontispiece. *Illustrations of the Author of Waverly*. By Robert Chambers. 1825. *Desire and Excess: The Nineteenth-Century Culture of Art*. By Jonah Siegel. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000. Fig. 36. Print.

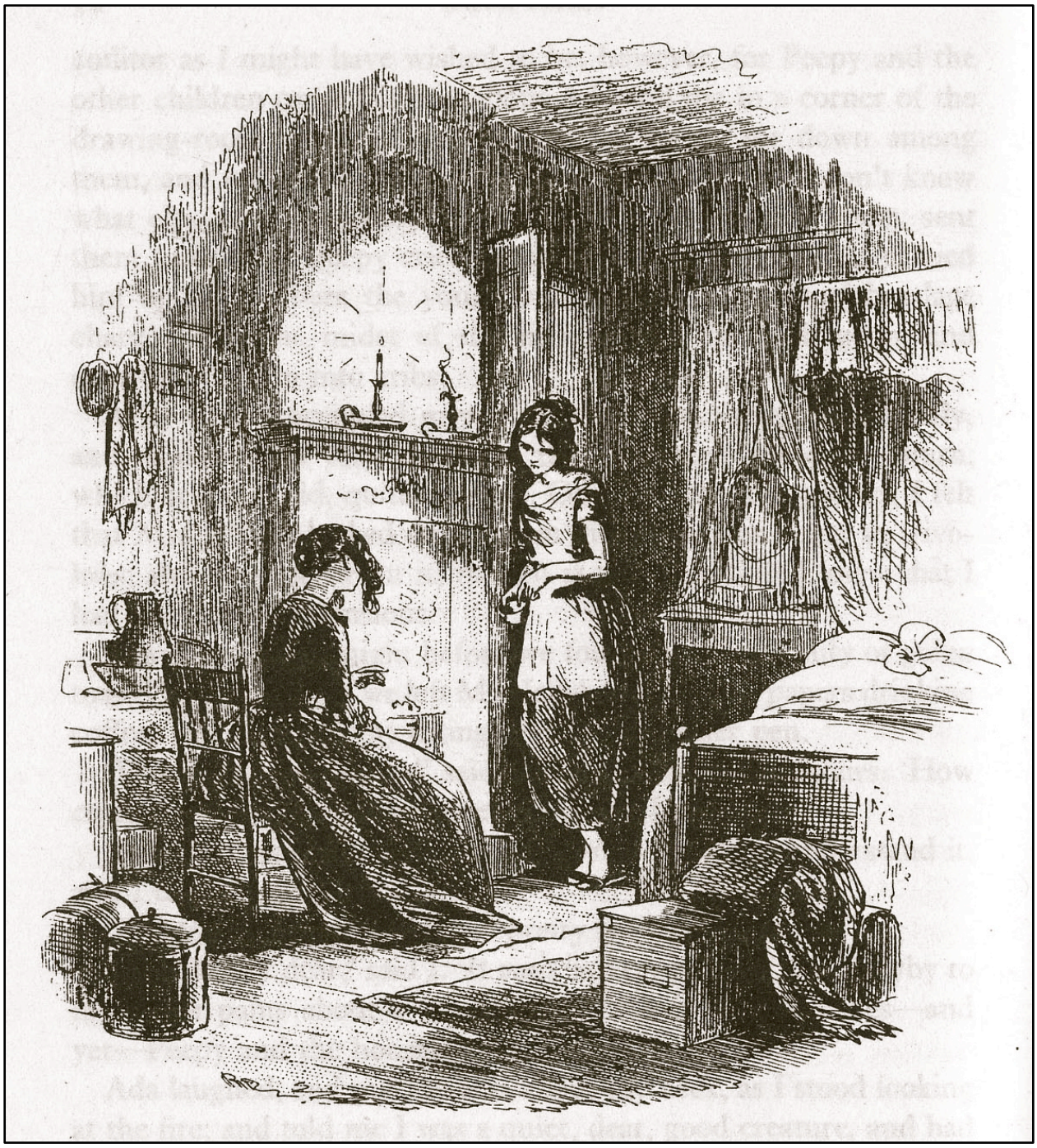

Figure 27: Browne, Hablôt K. "Miss Jellyby." 1852-53. Etching. *Bleak House*. By Charles Dickens. Ed. Stephen Gill. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. 54. Print.



Figure 28: Browne, Hablôt K. "A model of parental deportment." 1852-53. Etching. *Bleak House*. By Charles Dickens. Ed. Stephen Gill. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. 348. Print.



Figure 29: Browne, Hablôt K. "Lady Dedlock in the Wood." 1852-53. Etching. *Bleak House*. By Charles Dickens. Ed. Stephen Gill. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. 532. Print.



Figure 30: Project for a room in an unidentified house attributed to Thomas Paty. N.d. "The Hanging and Display of Pictures, 1700-1850." By Francis Russell. *The Fashioning and Functioning of the British Country House.* Eds. Gervase Jackson-Stops, et al. Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1989. Fig. 8. Print. Studies in the Hist. of Art 25.

CHAPTER 3

Dismantled Collections:

Auctioned Household Wares in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*

"But it was over at last," the narrator of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) informs readers at the outset of book 3, chapter 6. One of the most extraordinary events of the narrative, the auction of the Tullivers' household wares, has commenced and terminated in the lacuna between chapters. Readers are too late to experience the spectacle of the auction; all that remains is a thick description of a collection of individuals who have plummeted to the domain of negative extraordinariness as their decorative art objects have fallen to the hammer. At the center of this collection is Mrs. Tulliver, whose bankrupted husband has remained unconsciousness "throughout the critical hours when the noise of the sale came nearest to his chamber" (Eliot, *MF* 236). A minor character in comparison to her children, Mrs. Tulliver becomes enthroned at the center of Eliot's post-auction scene. When the traumatic sounds of the auctioneer's hammer and bidders' footsteps have ceased, Mrs. Tulliver's face materializes in vivid detail:

> Mrs. Tulliver's blond face seemed aged ten years by the last thirty hours: the poor woman's mind had been busy divining when her favourite things were being knocked down by the terrible hammer; her heart had been fluttering at the thought that first one thing and then another had gone to be identified as hers in the hateful publicity of the Golden Lion; and all the while she had to sit and make no sign of this inward agitation. Such things bring lines in well-rounded faces, and broaden the streaks of white among the hairs that once looked as if they had been dipped in pure sunshine. (Eliot, *MF* 236)

Granted a considerable amount of textual space here, Mrs. Tulliver acquires a measure of literary distinction. At the same time, however, she becomes a mere caricature, a victim of one of the numerous auctions that erupt across the landscape of Victorian fiction (Nunokawa 5).[77] Embodying both uniqueness and representativeness, Mrs. Tulliver occupies an intermediary space in the system of distinction.

Yet most critics have dismissed Mrs. Tulliver as a minor character of minimal importance. Devoted more to her household wares than to either her husband or her children, Mrs. Tulliver is typically thought to remain static throughout the text. To draw upon E.M. Forster's theory of "flat" characters, whatever Mrs. Tulliver does or says, it is to maintain possession of the objects at the center of her universe. Possession is not her *idée fixe*, as there is no mental space in which an idea can be fixed. Mrs. Tulliver simply *is* the notion of possession (Forster 104). Yet I argue that Mrs. Tulliver is far more complex than she appears on the surface of the text. She "surprises" us, to borrow the words of Forster (118), in moments where Eliot inflates her into a "round" character. In scenes such as the one cited above, Eliot reveals a whisper of Mrs. Tulliver's museal consciousness and indicates that it is anchored to a specific

[77] Auctions appear in the work of such novelists as Dickens, Eliot, Gaskell, Hardy, Thackeray, and Trollope.

"museal counterdiscourse," to return to the term that Peter M. McIsaac uses to describe the inversion of museal conventions in the human mind (8). I argue that Mrs. Tulliver's museal counterdiscourse is the discourse of the auction, the cultural institution that counters the centripetal force of the museum (B. Black 4).

Understood as the counter to the museum, the auction dismantles collections. So too does the "museum-minded" (Kreps 23) Mrs. Tulliver. In the aforementioned post-auction scene, Eliot renders Mrs. Tulliver mute and immobile; "imprisoned in the silent chamber" as the auction is carried out downstairs, Mrs. Tulliver appears to exist in a "living death" (*MF* 236). Yet I propose that it is here that Mrs. Tulliver appears most alive. For as she imaginatively disperses the objects that comprise her decorative art collection, Mrs. Tulliver unconsciously and reflexively performs the dismantling work of the auction. To borrow a term from Jean Baudrillard, she "destructures" ("System" 19) her beloved collection of household wares. Baudrillard argues that the ordinary objects that clutter up our lives—that is, the objects that we are most passionate about, the objects that are extraordinary to *us*—comprise collections that lack cohesion and are therefore "easily destructured by thought" ("System" 22). Eliot reveals that collections of ordinary-turned-extraordinary objects such as household wares are so fragile that they can be dismantled even through "nondeliberate thought," to return to a term that Ryan uses to describe reflexive thoughts that are opaque to individuals themselves (2).

I argue in this chapter that Eliot activates the museal counterdiscourse of the auction to temporarily expand Mrs. Tulliver into a round character. In select moments, Mrs. Tulliver appears to understand objects not only in the way that museums do, but also in the way that auctions do. Just as Mrs. Tulliver possesses a latent awareness of the significance of collecting, organizing, exhibiting, and preserving extraordinary objects, so too does she appear to

comprehend the implications of dismantling and remantling collections. For auctions have both a destructive and a procreative power. In the same moment that they destructure collections, auctions generate new ones. Auctioned objects thus descend from the domain of positive extraordinariness to that of ordinariness only to return to their point of departure. In an inverse fashion, Mrs. Tulliver inflates into a round character only to collapse back into a flat one (Forster 116). To borrow a metaphor from Forster, she curves toward rotundity yet "seem[s] more like [a] bubble than [a] solid" (108).

Implicit in my interpretation of Mrs. Tulliver as an "intermediate character" is the notion that characters are positioned and repositioned in the system of distinction in accordance with their degree of minorness or majorness. It is thus easy to associate minorness with ordinariness and majorness with extraordinariness. Yet Mrs. Tulliver unsettles this rudimentary classification scheme and resists the notion that character analysis is uncomplicated. As an intermediate character, Mrs. Tulliver is sometimes minor and sometimes major, sometimes ordinary and sometimes extraordinary. She thus calls into question an important "article of our literary faith," the notion that a round character is the best kind of character (Lynch 12-13). For as Foucault contends, "intermediate productions" such as Mrs. Tulliver elucidate an important "middle region" where it becomes possible to see that classification exists (147, xx-xxi).

I argue, then, that Mrs. Tulliver is a cross between a minor and a major character, a hybrid that enables us to reconsider literary character in terms of ordinariness and extraordinariness. To contextualize this argument, I examine the precursor to the Victoria and Albert Museum, a cross between a museum and a home that helped solidify the conceptualization of the domestic interior as a museal space. I then read the museal space of the Tullivers' storeroom, focusing on Mrs. Tulliver's complex relationship to her collection of

"maiden-marked" decorative art objects. Ordinary household wares that become extraordinary once collected, organized, exhibited, and preserved, maiden-marked objects are engraved, stamped, stitched, inked, or otherwise marked with the name or initials of the woman who procured them prior to marriage. Through these "texts of self," to borrow a phrase from Greg Dening (157), Mrs. Tulliver attempts to cultivate distinction and construct a cohesive self out of the fragments that comprise her plurality of identities.

The Museal Space of the Home

On the morning of 17 May 1852, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert became the first visitors to a curious specimen of a museum.[78] Established in the wake of the Great Exhibition,[79] which had closed its doors seven months earlier, the Museum of Manufactures, now known as the Victoria and Albert Museum,[80] was among the earliest cultural institutions in the world to be devoted to the decorative arts (M. Baker 18)—that is, those objects deemed both useful and ornamental. As such, it contained an atypical collection, one comprised of extraordinary specimens of ordinary objects: carpets and candlesticks, bellows and bowls, inkstands and

[78] For an account of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert's visit to the Museum of Manufactures, see "Museum of Practical Art."

[79] The first objects on view at the Museum of Manufactures were purchased from the Great Exhibition by a committee comprised of the civil servant Henry Cole, the artist Richard Redgrave, the architect Owen Jones, and the Gothic revivalist Augustus Welby Pugin for less than £5,000. For a detailed explanation of how the funds were spent, see "Museum of Ornamental Art and Exhibition of Designs."

[80] The Museum of Manufactures, open for seventeen trial days in May and June 1852, reopened permanently as the Museum of Ornamental Art on 5 September 1853. On 22 June 1857, it reopened in its current location on Cromwell Road as the South Kensington Museum. The name endured for over four decades, but in her last official public appearance on 17 May 1899, Queen Victoria renamed the museum the Victoria and Albert Museum and laid the foundation stone for new construction. On 26 June 1909, Queen Victoria's son, King Edward VII, opened the expanded Victoria and Albert Museum.

armchairs, mirrors and combs.[81] Set up in Marlborough House, with its first-floor rooms repurposed as exhibition spaces, its kitchen converted into a lecture hall, and its cellar transformed into a storeroom for museum-quality objects (Frayling 23), the Museum of Manufactures was a curious cross between a museum and a home. Within this hybrid exhibition space, the ordinary stuff of daily life was transformed into an impressive collection of extraordinary objects. "Out of reach or locked away in glass cases,"[82] objects that were "fundamentally intended to be used, sat upon, and handled" (M. Baker 21) were defamiliarized in the eyes of museum visitors. With the assistance of innovative display techniques and a descriptive catalogue—that is, aids to acts of distinction—objects that had previously been overlooked as commonplace were transformed into "specimens." With its novel collection of decorative art objects, the Museum of Manufactures institutionalized the Victorian investment in the domestic interior and helped cement the conceptualization of the home as a museal space.

Similar to other museums, the Museum of Manufactures was intended to improve the taste of the masses and thus confer a measure of distinction upon them. Visitors were meant to symbolically appropriate the distinctive value of the objects on view; most of the objects were therefore "of a magnificent character" and "of a most elaborate design," as an 1852 *Leeds*

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[81] J.C. Robinson's *A Catalogue of the Museum of Ornamental Art* (1856) reveals that the museum contained objects as diverse as desks, daggers, snuff boxes, tea caddies, linen chests, wallpapers, wood floors, cabinets, frames, vases, flasks, wine glasses, and boxes of myriad shapes and sizes.

[82] The objects on view at the Museum of Manufactures may have been housed in protective cases, but the museum did not forbid haptic interaction with them, as an 1852 *Morning Post* article made clear: "The purposes of this exhibition are entirely of a practical character, and the contents of the museum are not only intended for show, but are actually to be handled and closely examined by workmen under proper restrictions, two of which are, to use the words of Mr. Cole, the superintendent of general management, in the first instance, that the workman shall wash his hands, and in the second that he shall pay 6d. The former rule to preserve the superficial beauty of the article, and the latter as a test of seriousness of intention" ("Department of Practical Art" 4).

Mercury article raved ("Museum of Ornamental Art and Exhibition of Designs" 11). Yet not all the objects on view merited such effusive praise. Because the Museum of Manufactures was designed to educate students, manufacturers, and consumers on proper design principles and thus standardize taste, a gallery called "Decorations on False Principles" was found to have been added to the museum when it reopened as the Museum of Ornamental Art on 5 September 1852. An article in *The Times* thought to have been ghostwritten by Henry Cole reviewed the gallery: "The ante-room is fitted up as a sort of 'chamber of horrors', with a collection of all kinds of so-called ornamental manufacture, which are considered to exhibit false principles of decoration, such as vulgar and inharmonious colouring, want of meaning and unity in pattern, graceless imitations of natural forms etc" (qtd. in Frayling 27-28). What became known as the "Chamber of Horrors" thus contained condemned objects, extraordinarily subpar decorative art specimens. Visitors were intended to demonstrate their cultural capital by recoiling from these objects.

To develop cultural capital, visitors were encouraged to devote considerable attention to the descriptive catalogue of the Museum of Manufactures. For as an 1852 *Morning Post* article made clear, the catalogue was deemed almost as intellectually valuable as the objects on view:

> Next in value to the articles exhibited is the catalogue itself; for, under the title and value of each specimen, are written critical remarks, in a style admirably adapted to render the beauties and defects easily comprehended by artisans, with the view of establishing a practical national taste among them, and of improving the judgment of the people in general. ("Department of Practical Art" 4)

Though the catalogue was aimed at the working classes, the middle and upper classes could benefit from it as well:

> [I]t may be fairly expected that true taste will be so rapidly and widely-spread among the working-classes that any one in a higher sphere venturing to select any article of either dress, furniture, or ornament, without the necessary information, may find themselves the objects of ridicule to those whom they have hitherto considered inferior to themselves in every respect—they may be even laughed at by the little boys who are taught in the public drawing schools of practical art.…It will, therefore, be necessary for all persons to be well read in the catalogue of the Museum of Ornamental Art. ("Department of Practical Art" 4)

As an extraordinary object itself, the catalogue could save even the most dominant classes from accidental descent into the domain of ordinariness.

With the establishment of the Museum of Manufactures, the museum began to take on the visual characteristics of the home, and reciprocally, the home began to take on the visual characteristics of the museum. The line between the museum and the home became increasingly blurred as museums encouraged visitors to take home with them not only a comprehension of the museum's methods of collection, organization, exhibition, and preservation, but also reproductions of actual museum objects. Guidebooks were filled with advertisements for replica museum objects, such as autotype copies of Lord Leighton's frescoes *The Industrial Arts as Applied to War* and *The Industrial Arts as Applied to Peace*, which were commissioned in 1868 to decorate the South Court of the South Kensington Museum (fig. 31); papier-mâché lay figures, such as those "Exhibited in the South Kensington Museum, Education Department" (fig. 32); electrotypes of various "Originals in the Imperial and Government Collections in England, France, Russia, Austria, Italy, Denmark, and Holland" (fig. 33); and Turkish carpets, "being mostly Reproductions of the rarest Antique Eastern Carpets Exhibited in this Country" (fig. 34).

Although these objects were mass-produced, they were believed to approximate the distinction of museum objects; thus, to purchase them was to materially appropriate the distinctive value of unique or rare decorative art objects. Some decorative art manufacturers, such as the cabinetmakers Wright & Mansfield (fig. 35) and the glassmaker W.S. Dobson (fig. 36), advertised their products with verbal and visual references to success in international exhibitions. Others, such as F. Michel, whose aquatic "specimens" were to be found in Oxford Street, "near the British Museum" (fig. 37), and R. Bowman & Co., whose decorative art objects were to be found in Fulham Road, just "three minutes from South Kensington Station" (fig. 38), emphasized the proximity of their stores to museums as an advantageous feature of their products. As a collection, the myriad advertisements printed in guidebooks "encouraged the public to take part of the museum home with them" (B. Black 72), thus fostering a strong association between the museum and the home.

Moreover, advertisements encouraged museum visitors to cultivate distinction by becoming avid collectors. Printed in Greenwood's *Museums and Art Galleries*, H. Poths & Co.'s advertisement for "Specimen & Show Bottles for Museums, Collections, Exhibitions, &c." (fig. 15) emphasized the importance of Greenwood's tenth "Useful Rule to Keep in Mind on Visiting a Museum": "Make a private collection of *something*. Remember that a collection of postage stamps has many uses" (388, original emphasis) (fig. 14). Even humble collections of inexpensive, commonplace objects were valuable, Greenwood conveyed. Sir William Henry Flower, the first director of the Natural History Museum, concurred, arguing in 1897 that a collection's educational value far surpassed its monetary value: "Far more, however, than the intrinsic value of the collection, in the case of the beginner, is its value as a means of education to the owner" (66). Even more importantly, Flower contended, the collection helped its owner

develop “many valuable practical qualities: originality, order, neatness, perseverance, taste, [and the] power of discriminating small differences and resemblances, all of which [are] found useful in other spheres of life” (66). Collecting was deemed a particularly advantageous pastime for children, especially boys, because it could feed their natural curiosity and help them develop a sense of industriousness (Flower 63-69). Yet the benefits of collecting extended to adults of both genders. Collecting, it was said, could improve one’s taste, increase one’s respectability, beautify the home, provide moral and social edification, assist in the development of a Protestant work ethic, provide a positive alternative to drinking and gambling, and function as a source of amusement and relaxation in leisure time (B. Black 73-76). Stated otherwise, collecting was a strategy of distinction through which ordinary individuals could cultivate the multifactorial characteristic of extraordinariness.

As a material testament to the cultural capital of its owner, the collection became an essential feature of the Victorian home. Visual representations of domestic interiors indicate that “despite variations over time and across income levels,” the collection of decorative art objects was “the index...of a successful domestic situation” (Logan 105). Comprehending this index required skill in the art of mantelpiece interpretation, a practice that combined numerous acts of distinction. The mantelpiece was the standard exhibition space for decorative art collections, as Thad Logan explains: “The hearth had for Victorians a practical and symbolic centrality in the home and thus was a site at which both functional and ornamental objects were concentrated” (Logan 113). The significance of the mantelpiece as an exhibition space is evident in a 1904 photograph of the two-story, top-lit hall at Clouds, the Wyndham country house in Wiltshire built between 1876 and 1885 (fig. 39). The small-scale, symmetrically arranged collection of delicate decorative art objects exhibited on the overmantel counterbalances the geometric lines of

the paneling and windowpanes in the massive hall. As Madeline Wyndham wrote, there is "very little" in the hall, "but what is looks well" (qtd. in Dakers 90). Logan explains this "less is more" attitude toward aristocratic decorative art collections: "In general, the higher the family on an economic scale, the more likely the garniture was to be composed of expensive objects, often in luxurious materials, in a simple arrangement. A larger collection of less pretending objects was typical in modest homes" (116). Stated otherwise, the scale, economic value, and organization of a collection reflected the owner's position in the social world.

This sentiment is echoed in an 1877 photograph of Old Swan House in Chelsea (fig. 40), which belonged to Wickham Flower, a collector of Japanese porcelain (Gere 287). Installed over the fireplace are less than two-dozen blue-and-white porcelain pieces,[83] and a much more substantial collection of books is modestly tucked away behind the glass doors of bookcases. In 1878, Lucy Orrinsmith expressed her enthusiasm for such exhibition spaces in *The Drawing-Room: Its Decoration and Furniture*: "At a convenient height for easy access, little rows of book-shelves might be introduced by clever arrangement, or small cupboards with tiny latticed doors, giving a through glimpse of the glint of rare treasures within" (129).

In tasteful, upper-class domestic interiors, then, decorative art collections tended to be understated in both their size and display. Bourgeois domestic collections were "modest enough in terms of scale and materials, [and] the underlying principle of organization was the same" (Logan 114). However, as an 1849 painting of a working-class cottage in Wiltshire illustrates, collections of decorative art objects seemed to increase in size and take on a more cluttered appearance as they slid down the socioeconomic hierarchy (fig. 41). With its dense display of

[83] Gere notes that some of these decorative art objects "may have once belonged to [James] Whistler, Wickham Flower having been one of the buyers when the contents of the White House were sold in 1879" (287). In this respect, they attest to the procreative power of the auction.

blue-and-white dishes intermixed with objects as diverse as kitchen shears, silhouettes, and the figure of a cat, the image reveals that collections of relatively inexpensive decorative art objects were an "appropriation of the aristocratic habit of accumulation and display" (Logan 107). In other words, such collections were an important strategy of distinction for the dominated classes.

Decorative art collections thus made their home in domestic interiors across the socioeconomic spectrum. Moreover, they were featured in nearly every room of the home, including the staircase hall (fig. 42), the drawing room (fig. 43), the dining room (fig. 44), the study (fig. 45), the bedroom (fig. 46), and even the kitchen (fig. 47).[84] More private workrooms such as the kitchen have traditionally fallen below the critical threshold of material culture historians, who have tended to focus on the more public reception spaces of the domestic interior. However, Victorian home management and improvement literature suggests that even the kitchen was conceptualized as an exhibition space for decorative art objects. In *Household Organization* (1877), for instance, Florence Caddy visualizes a cook "near a nice bright stove, placed in a recess glittering with Dutch tiles or Minton's *artistic plaques*, surrounded by burnished pans and pots of well-lined copper or brass and neat enamelled saucepans" (71, original emphasis). Caddy's juxtaposition of ornamental objects and more functional objects illustrates that even when not exposed to public view in reception spaces, decorative art objects were collected, organized, exhibited, and preserved. Ordinary objects were thus transformed into extraordinary ones.

More private museal spaces are rarely depicted in either visual or verbal representations of Victorian domestic interiors. The storeroom that appears in *The Mill on the Floss* is a notable exception. On view in Mrs. Tulliver's storeroom is an impressive collection of a particular class

[84] One might add to this list outdoor rooms such as aviaries, menageries, and winter gardens.

of decorative art objects: maiden-marked objects. Actual and fictional maiden-marked objects have hitherto received minimal critical attention;[85] I therefore aim to initiate a more animated conversation about these objects in what follows. Focusing on Eliot's representation of the storeroom, I argue that Mrs. Tulliver's collection of maiden-marked objects is a material testament to her unconscious conceptualization of the domestic interior as a museal space.

Maiden-Marked Objects

Upon her death in 1844, the childless widow Mary Pearson Evarard bequeathed to her niece, Mary Ann Evans, the future George Eliot, her watch, the kitchen clock, a wardrobe, a chest of drawers, twelve sugar bowls, and four salt spoons marked "MP." These initials stood for Mary Pearson, the widow's name before she married John Evarard in 1812 (Hughes). Stamped with Mrs. Evarard's "maiden mark," the set of salt spoons presumably predated her marriage and entered the Evarard household as a form of property called "movables." In contrast to "real" property, which English common law defined as land and such man-made improvements to it as homes, icehouses, wells, and roads, movables such as furniture, textiles, ceramics, silver, livestock, slaves, and even servants could be transported with relative ease from one male-headed household to another upon a woman's marriage. As J.H. Baker argues, "a marked difference in value" was perceived between these two varieties of material culture (380). Whereas real property was considered "a capital asset" and was therefore associated with distinction, movables were deemed "ordinary chattels" (J. Baker 380). So too, of course, were women, who metaphorically became movables as they adopted new names and presumably new identities upon marriage (Ulrich 130).

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[85] Hannah Barnard's press cupboard (c. 1684-1716) is a notable exception. Ulrich's work on this iconic maiden-marked object has cleared the ground for future scholarship on maiden-marked objects in general.

Marked with the name "Elizabeth Dodson" or the initials "E.D.," Mrs. Tulliver's movables are associated with ordinariness through not only the gender of their collector-curator, but also the museal space in which they are housed: the storeroom. Located inside the generations-old Tulliver home, which has been transferred from father to son along with the land upon which it is built and the gristmill that has long supported the Tulliver family, the storeroom is lined with shelves. In this respect, it resembles the more public exhibition spaces of the domestic interior. As Jenni Calder explains, shelves designed to display specific objects proliferated in the Victorian home (84). Shelves were often installed above mantelpieces, and "[d]ressers and sideboards were designed with numerous little shelves on which vases or statuettes could be placed" (Calder 84). Similar to those installed in reception spaces such as drawing rooms and dining rooms, the shelves that line the Tullivers' storeroom activate the association between the museum and the home. As the museal space in which Mrs. Tulliver keeps "all the precious 'best things' that [are] only unwrapped and brought out on special occasions" (Eliot, *MF* 202),[86] the storeroom reveals that the museum enterprise was quite at home in the domestic interior.

Yet a fundamental difference existed between the museum and the museal space of the domestic interior: while the former was a monument to extraordinariness, the latter was an architectural testament to ordinariness. Theorists such as Baudrillard draw this distinction even today. A museum is "a space where the everyday prose of the object-world modulates into poetry," a space where a collection achieves perfection (Baudrillard, "System" 8). In contrast, a

[86] Calder explains that "even quite humble homes" typically had two sets of silver and china: one for everyday use and one for special occasions (35). "The best china might exist more for show than for use," Calder writes, "but it was important for it to be there, to be brought out, perhaps, for a wedding or a christening" (35). Understood in this context, both of Mrs. Tulliver's sets of tableware can be considered commonplace; however, her "best things" (Eliot, *MF* 202) can be deemed exceptional due to the rarity of their use.

museal domestic interior is an "ambiguous territory" (Baudrillard, "System" 8), a space where objects continually shuttle back and forth between the domains of ordinariness and extraordinariness, utilization and possession. Decorative art objects, which have both an ornamental and a use value, are particularly mobile. Unlike museum objects, which are removed from their functional contexts and installed in exhibition contexts, decorative art objects such as tablecloths are sometimes used and sometimes possessed. When transported from a storeroom to a dining room and spread over a table, a tablecloth loses its status as a possession and situates its owner in relation to others in the social sphere. When the tablecloth is transported back to the storeroom, it regains its status as a possession and rejoins a system of interrelated objects that refers to the owner alone (Baudrillard, "System" 7). The system of objects that refers to Mrs. Tulliver is comprised of such household wares as linen chests, a silver teapot, china, spoons, skewers, ladles, castors, and sugar tongs. Marked with her maiden name, these decorative art objects literally refer to Mrs. Tulliver and are therefore instrumental to her unconscious conceptualization of the storeroom as her "personal microcosm" (Baudrillard, "System" 7).

Of course, it is the maintenance of this microcosm that accounts for not only much of the tension surrounding Mrs. Tulliver's collection of maiden-marked objects, but also the reader's perception of Mrs. Tulliver as a weak, neurotic, and egocentric character. When the bailiff enters the Tulliver home to inventory the objects to be sold at auction, Mrs. Tulliver reflexively rushes to the storeroom to touch and gaze upon the household wares that are most extraordinary to her—that is, those that she has endowed with sentimental value. Afraid of her unknown future, Mrs. Tulliver attempts to symbolically appropriate the distinction of her maiden-marked objects. Her floral china is particularly strong: "there's never been a bit broke" (Eliot, *MF* 209). Yet Mrs. Tulliver's attempt at fortitude proves futile, for she is unconsciously struck with two thoughts at

once, both opaque to her but apparent to Eliot's readers: first, that the auction will cause her to lose a measure of distinction; and second, that the auction will underscore what she and the social world have always already known: that she is extraordinarily ordinary.

Unconsciously and reflexively, Mrs. Tulliver attempts to overturn these thoughts by enacting an extraordinary social performance in the presence of her extraordinary objects. When her children enter the storeroom, they witness their mother in an emotional tumult:

> Mrs. Tulliver was seated there with all her laid-up treasures. One of the linen-chests was open: the silver teapot was unwrapped from its many folds of paper, and the best china was laid out on the top of the closed linen-chest; spoons and skewers and ladles were spread in rows on the shelves; and the poor woman was shaking her head and weeping, with a bitter tension of the mouth, over the mark, "Elizabeth Dodson," on the corner of some table-cloths she held in her lap.
>
> She dropped them, and started up as Tom spoke.
>
> "O my boy, my boy!" she said, clasping him around the neck. "To think as I should live to see this day! We're ruined....everything's going to be sold up....to think as your father should ha' married me to bring me to this! We've got nothing....we shall be beggars....we must go to the workhouse...." (Eliot, *MF* 202-203)

The considerable amount of textual space devoted to Mrs. Tulliver's emotional outburst represents Eliot's attempt to temporarily inflate Mrs. Tulliver into a round and therefore extraordinary character. Yet Mrs. Tulliver fails to curve toward rotundity; she remains as flat as the shelves upon which her household wares are displayed, a static representation of narcissism. While her children stand stock-still "in mute wretchedness—their minds quite filled for the moment with the words 'beggars' and 'workhouse'" (Eliot, *MF* 203), Mrs. Tulliver reflexively

soothes her own mind instead of theirs. She takes another tablecloth onto her lap, unfolds it, scrutinizes its pattern, then strokes it "automatically" (Eliot, *MF* 203).[87] In doing so, Mrs. Tulliver exhibits a profound lack of maternal nurturance. To return to a concept elaborated in chapter 1, she demonstrates maternal monstrosity. To both characters and readers, Mrs. Tulliver exists nowhere but within the domain of negative extraordinariness.

Citing her inordinate devotion to her maiden-marked objects, most critics have denounced Mrs. Tulliver as a "pathetic" and "absurd" minor character (Thale qtd. in Armitt 56). Yet I argue that in select moments, Eliot activates the museal counterdiscourse of the auction to temporarily expand Mrs. Tulliver into a round and therefore extraordinary character. For instance, when Mrs. Tulliver displays her maiden-marked objects in the storeroom, she exhibits a latent awareness of both the destructive and procreative powers of the auction. Still in emotional turmoil, Mrs. Tulliver speaks to her children:

> "To think o' these cloths as I spun myself," she went on, lifting things out and turning them over with an excitement all the more strange and piteous because the stout blond woman was usually so passive: if she had been ruffled before, it was at the surface merely: "and Job Haxey wove 'em, and brought the piece home on his back, as I remember standing at the door and seeing him come, before I ever thought o' marrying your father! And the pattern as I chose myself—and bleached so beautiful, and I marked 'em so as nobody ever saw such marking—they must cut the cloth to get it out, for it's a particular stitch. And they're all to be sold—and go into strange people's houses, and

[87] Here, Mrs. Tulliver activates Baudrillard's argument that beloved objects are like beloved pets, the sole beings in existence with which it is possible for humans to coexist harmoniously ("System" 11). Unlike her stubborn husband, who "goes to law" despite her express wish for him not to take financial risks (Eliot, *MF* 204), Mrs. Tulliver's tablecloths do not set themselves at odds with her. Like docile lap dogs, the tablecloths "incline obediently towards [her], to be smoothly inventorized within [her] consciousness" (Baudrillard, "System" 11).

> perhaps be cut with knives, and wore out before I'm dead. You'll never have one of 'em, my boy," she said, looking up at Tom with her eyes full of tears, "and I meant 'em for you. I wanted you to have all o' this pattern. Maggie could have had the large check—it never shows so well when the dishes are on it." (Eliot *MF* 203)

Here, Mrs. Tulliver curves toward rotundity as she uses her maiden-marked objects as *aides-mémoire* in order to live cyclically. As "a fixed repertory of temporal references that can be replayed at will, in reverse order if need be" (Baudrillard, "System" 16), Mrs. Tulliver's collection of maiden-marked objects enables her to recall key scenes from her past and imagine key scenes in her future. To live cyclically in this manner is to emulate the work of the auction, which dismantles collections and their attendant narratives only to construct new ones in their wake. But as Mrs. Tulliver expresses, the procreative power of the auction is not always positive; post-auction narratives can be as horrific as pre-auction narratives can be pleasant. Imaginatively destructuring her collection of maiden-marked objects with more violence than typically attends an auction of household wares, Mrs. Tulliver expresses that extraordinary objects can not only fall victim to the ravages of time, but can also be tortured with seam rippers and even, more barbarically, "cut with knives." "Broke to pieces" (Eliot, *MF* 209) through the work of the auction, ordinary-turned-extraordinary objects such as household wares can plummet back into the domain of ordinariness and, more importantly, take their collector with them.

This, of course, is Mrs. Tulliver's principal fear. For as Deborah Cohen argues, "Possessions [are] the very stuff out of which the self [is] made" (137). Mrs. Tulliver's vicious destructuring of her own decorative art collection is a justifiably desperate attempt to "piece together [her] world" (Baudrillard, "System" 6), to construct a cohesive self out of the fragments that comprise her plurality of identities. For similar to Dickens's heroine Esther Summerson,

Mrs. Tulliver is never merely Mrs. Tulliver; she is always ever Bessy and E.D. and Elizabeth Dodson as well. Her maiden-marked household wares are thus "texts of self" (Dening 157) that contextualize her in the social world. The loss of these objects represents a traumatic loss of self, a wresting of the individual from the social framework in which she is embedded. The violence with which the auction threatens to dismantle Mrs. Tulliver accounts for the desperation with which she fights to "[keep] the things wi' [her] name on 'em" (Eliot, *MF* 204).

The Horror of Museal Fragmentation

Extraordinarily ordinary as she is, Mrs. Tulliver has the capacity to destructure her own decorative art collection with her mind. This power is evidence of her unconscious comprehension of the sense of fragmentation that inheres in museums and museal spaces such as domestic interiors. As Stephen Greenblatt argues, "Museums function, partly by design and partly in spite of themselves, as monuments to the fragility of cultures, the fall of sustaining institutions and noble houses, the collapse of rituals, the evacuation of myths, [and] the destructive effects of warfare and neglect and corrosive doubt" (21). Monuments to precariousness, museums are haunted by the imminent threat of not only the dispersal of their collections, but also the collapse of the cultures, dynasties, and individuals that collect extraordinary objects. In this respect, museums exist on the brink of inevitable ruin.

But if museums remain on the verge of destructuring, auctions remain on the verge of restructuring. For in the same moment that they ruin collections, breaking them up into lots and dispersing their constitutive objects among an assortment of collectors, auctions generate new collections by causing dispersed objects to become integrated into other, existing collections. Paradoxically, then, auctions assist in the rise of collecting cultures in the same moment that they bear witness to their collapse.

With the procreative power of the auction opaque to her, Mrs. Tulliver perceives the auction as some perceive the museum: as an institution that anticipates the inevitable fracture, decline, and fall of those who collect. In her eyes, the auction is a museum of ruins. For like the museum, the auction classifies, exhibits, and stores (albeit temporarily) collections of extraordinary objects, many of which are markers of the (often financial) ruin of collectors. As a testament to both the collecting impulse and its downfall, the auction exists as a monument to the unstable relationship between ordinary subjects and extraordinary objects.

Eliot visualizes the ruinous power of the auction through the metaphor of the flood that dominates the final two chapters of *The Mill on the Floss*. Focalized through the novel's heroine, Maggie Tulliver, the flood that sweeps through St. Ogg's with terrifying force represents the horror of museal fragmentation. As the Floss crests, "threatening masses" of "huge fragments" (Eliot, *MF* 521) overcome Maggie and her brother, Tom. Both drown, but as their shared tombstone makes clear, "[i]n their death," these two major characters "were not divided" (Eliot, *MF* 522). Read straight, this inscription conveys that the brother and sister were not divided from one another in death. Read slant, however, the "text of self" (Dening 157) that is the tombstone indicates that Eliot subjects neither of these two major characters to self-fragmentation. Similar to Mrs. Tulliver's floral china, these two are "never...a bit broke" (Eliot, *MF* 209).

At the close of the novel, it remains unclear whether Mrs. Tulliver ever constructs a second collection of decorative art objects. Of course, as a "capital asset" (J. Baker 380), Dorlcote Mill is rebuilt. To visualize the regenerative power of the auction, Eliot enlists the metaphor of nature:

> Nature repairs her ravages—repairs them with her sunshine, and with human labour. The desolation wrought by that flood, had left little visible trace on the face of the earth, five

> years after. The fifth autumn was rich in golden corn-stacks, rising in thick clusters among the distant hedgerows; the wharves and warehouses on the Floss were busy again, with echoes of eager voices, with hopeful lading and unlading. (*MF* 521)

Moments later, however, Eliot undercuts the regenerative power of the auction, indicating that once dismantled, collections are irreparably damaged: "Nature repairs her ravages—but not all. The uptorn trees are not rooted again; the parted hills are left scarred: if there is a new growth, the trees are not the same as the old, and the hills underneath their green vesture bear the marks of the past rending. To the eyes that have dwelt on the past, there is no thorough repair" (*MF* 521-22).

Concluding the novel with the damaging force of the auction, Eliot emphasizes the terror with which Britons regarded bankruptcy, the "most spectacular form of economic failure in Victorian society" (Weiss 14), and the auctions that evacuated domestic interiors of objects endowed with distinctive value. As the creators and consumers of a corpus of literature engrossed with financial ruin, Victorians were haunted by images of "carpetless floor[s]" and "unfaded space[s] on...wall[s]," ghostly spaces where furniture had once stood (Eliot, *MF* 237, 239).

Yet even more horrific than this "strange new bareness" (Eliot, *MF* 237) was the destruction of objects endowed with distinctive value. When Warwick Castle burst into flames in the early morning of 3 December 1871, Britons scrambled to rescue the estate's extraordinary fine and decorative art collections (fig. 48). Six days later, the *Illustrated London News* described the chaotic scene in vivid detail:

> [E]verything...portable was removed, until the apartments were bare of everything save the furniture that was too large or too heavy to be carried away. The pictures were torn

> out of the beadings on which many of them were inlaid in the walls; the tops of costly marble tables were taken off; the rich old tapestry in the state bed-room was wrenched off the walls; and Queen Anne's bed, presented to the Earl of Warwick by George III, was pulled down and carried away piecemeal. ("The Fire at Warwick Castle" 555)

"Denuded" and evacuated, Warwick Castle burned for four hours ("The Fire at Warwick Castle" 555). When the embers died out and the smoke cleared, the grand hall, with its elaborately carved Gothic roof, was discovered to be a total loss. "Here were exhibited Cromwell's battered helmet, and the doublet in which Lord Brooke was killed at the siege of Lichfield, in 1634," the *Illustrated London News* reported with dismay. "The blackened walls and the charred fragments and ashes of the gorgeous roof alone remain" ("The Fire at Warwick Castle" 555).

News of the spectacular fire at Warwick Castle reached Henry James in America ("W" 89), and it appears that the image of the burned estate lingered in his memory. For as I illustrate in the coda, Eliot imagines the dismantling of collections, whereas James imagines their utter destruction.



Figure 31: The Autotype Company. Advertisement. *A Guide to the Collections of the South Kensington Museum.* London, 1896-97. *Google Book Search.* Web. 2 Mar. 2013.



Figure 32: Lechertier, Barbe, & Co. Advertisement. *A Guide to the Art Collections of the South Kensington Museum.* London, 1870. *Google Book Search.* Web. 2 Mar. 2013.



Figure 33: Elkington & Co., Ltd. Advertisement. *A Guide to the Collections of the South Kensington Museum.* London, 1896-97. *Google Book Search.* Web. 2 Mar. 2013.



Figure 34: Cardinal & Hartford. Advertisement. *A Guide to the Collections of the South Kensington Museum.* London, 1896-97. *Google Book Search.* Web. 2 Mar. 2013.



Figure 35: Wright & Mansfield. Advertisement. *A Guide to the Art Collections of the South Kensington Museum.* London, 1870. *Google Book Search.* Web. 2 Mar. 2013.

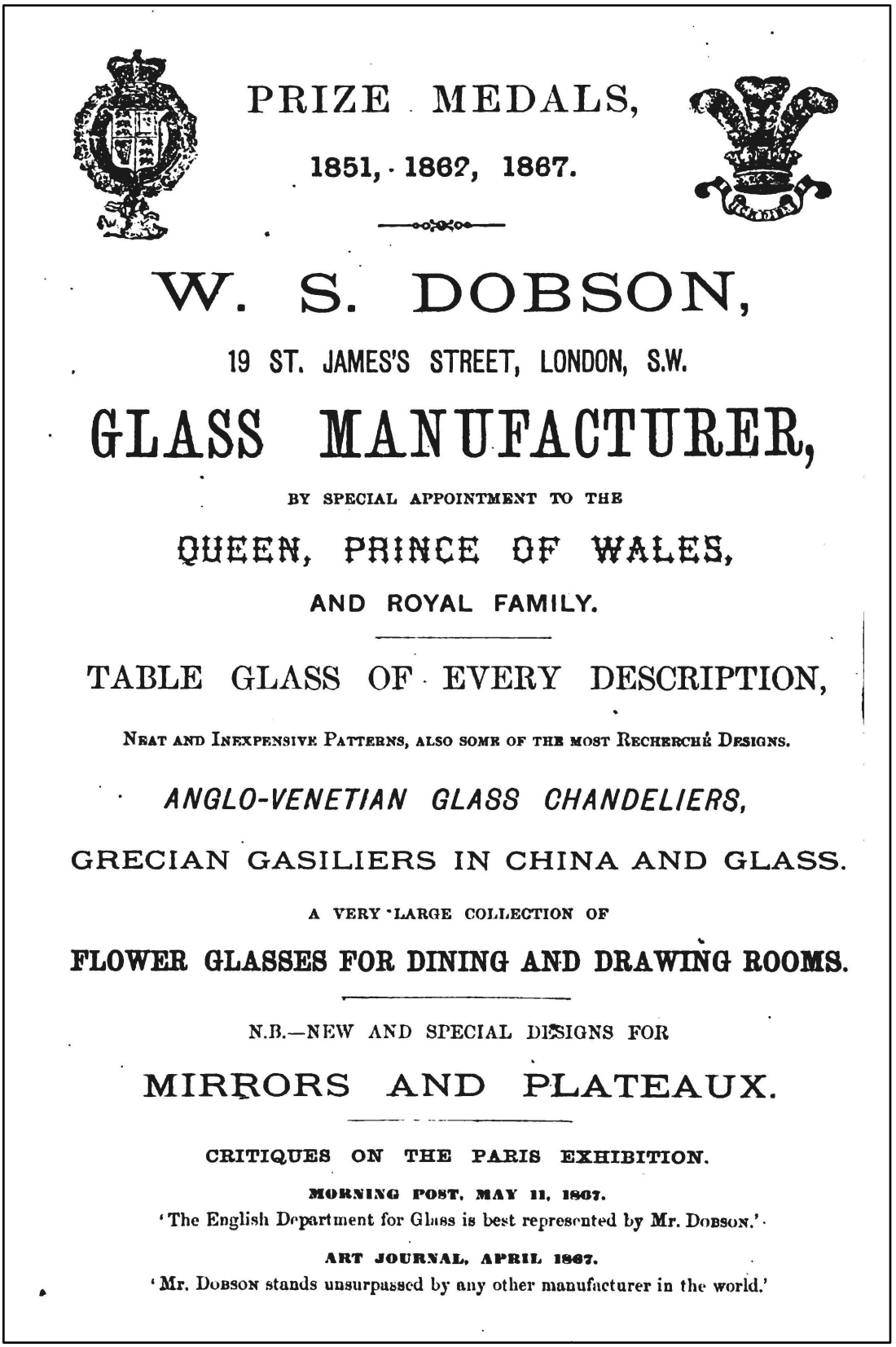

Figure 36: W.S. Dobson. Advertisement. *A Guide to the Art Collections of the South Kensington Museum.* London, 1870. *Google Book Search.* Web. 2 Mar. 2013.



Figure 37: F. Michel. Advertisement. *A Guide to the Art Collections of the South Kensington Museum*. London, 1870. *Google Book Search*. Web. 2 Mar. 2013.



Figure 38: R. Bowman & Co. Advertisement. *A Guide to the Collections of the South Kensington Museum.* London, 1896-97. *Google Book Search.* Web. 2 Mar. 2013.



Figure 39: Hall at Clouds, Wiltshire. 1904. Photograph. *Nineteenth-Century Decoration: The Art of the Interior*. By Charlotte Gere. New York: Abrams, 1989. Fig. 334. Print.



Figure 40: Lemere, H. Bedford. Morning room at Old Swan House, London. 1877. Photograph. Private collection. *Nineteenth-Century Decoration: The Art of the Interior*. By Charlotte Gere. New York: Abrams, 1989. Fig. 333. Print.



Figure 41: Dalby, Elizabeth Pearson. *Interior at Compton Basset, Wiltshire*. 1849. Gouache. Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum. *Nineteenth-Century Decoration: The Art of the Interior*. By Charlotte Gere. New York: Abrams, 1989. Fig. 129. Print.

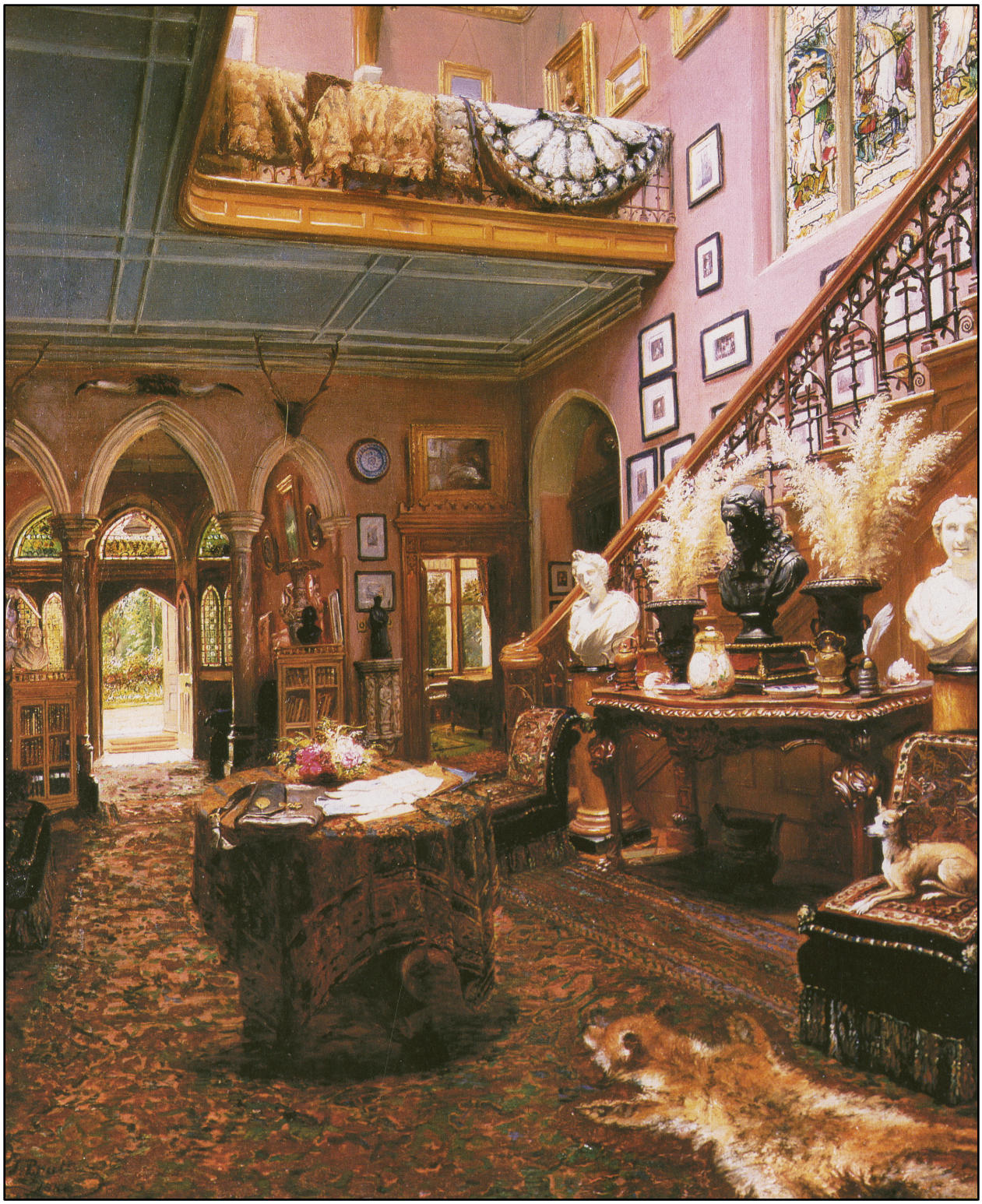

Figure 42: Pratt, Jonathan. Staircase hall. 1882. Oil. Christopher Wood Gallery (Bridgeman Art Library). *Nineteenth-Century Decoration: The Art of the Interior*. By Charlotte Gere. New York: Abrams, 1989. Fig. 468. Print.



Figure 43: Drawing room at Horton Hall, Bradford. c. 1850. Watercolor. Clarendon Gallery, London. *Nineteenth-Century Decoration: The Art of the Interior*. By Charlotte Gere. New York: Abrams, 1989. Fig. 287. Print.



Figure 44: Whiteway, Michael. Peacock Room at 49 Prince's Gate, London. 1869. Photograph. *Nineteenth-Century Decoration: The Art of the Interior*. By Charlotte Gere. New York: Abrams, 1989. Fig. 396. Print.

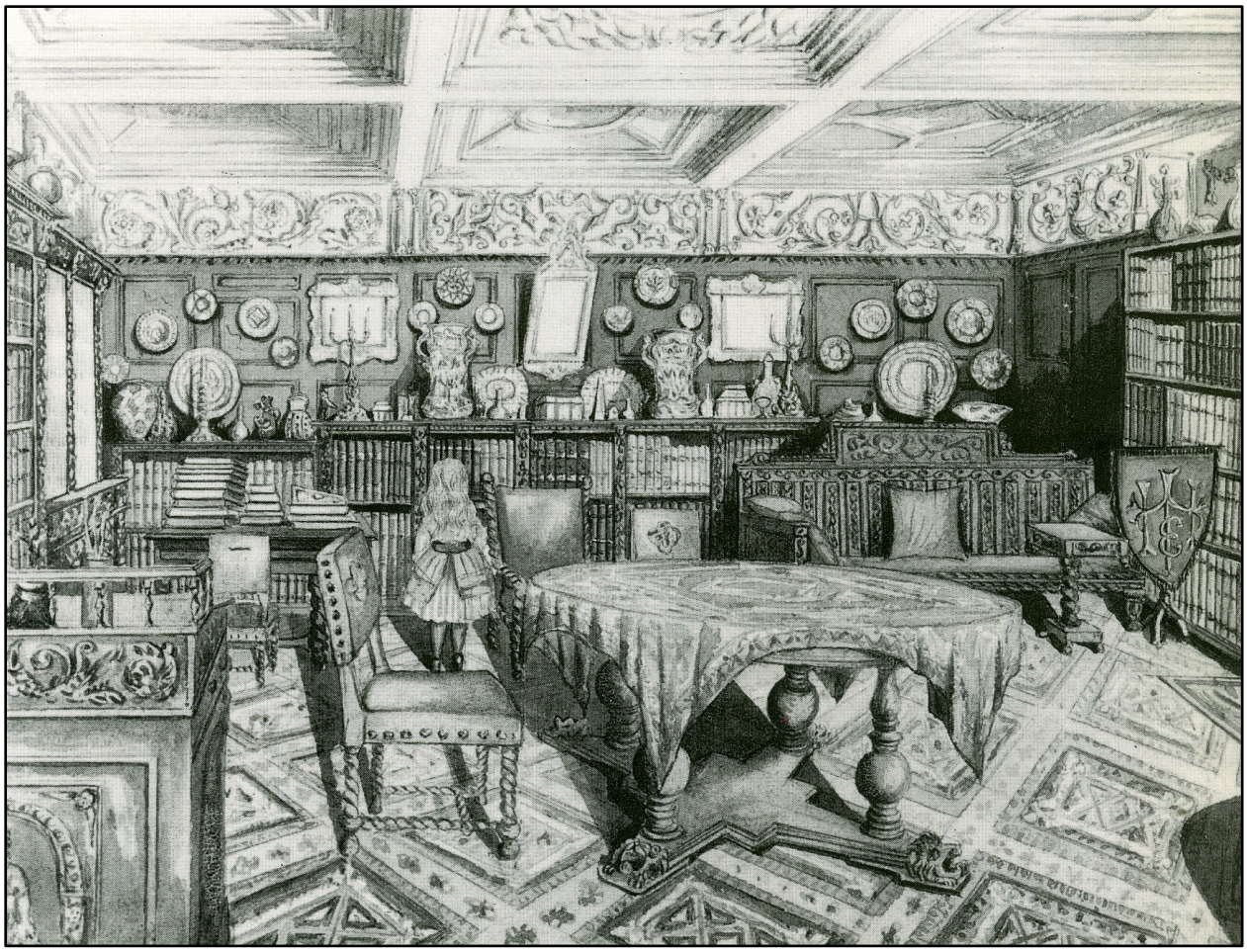

Figure 45: Study at Horton Hall, Bradford. c. 1890. Clarendon Gallery, London. *Nineteenth-Century Decoration: The Art of the Interior*. By Charlotte Gere. New York: Abrams, 1989. Fig. 345. Print.



Figure 46: Bedroom at 37 Augustus Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham. 1892. Photograph. National Monuments Record, London. *Nineteenth-Century Decoration: The Art of the Interior*. By Charlotte Gere. New York: Abrams, 1989. Fig. 331. Print.



Figure 47: Kitchen at Wickham Hall, Kent. 1897. Photograph. Private collection. *Nineteenth-Century Decoration: The Art of the Interior*. By Charlotte Gere. New York: Abrams, 1989. Fig. 474. Print.

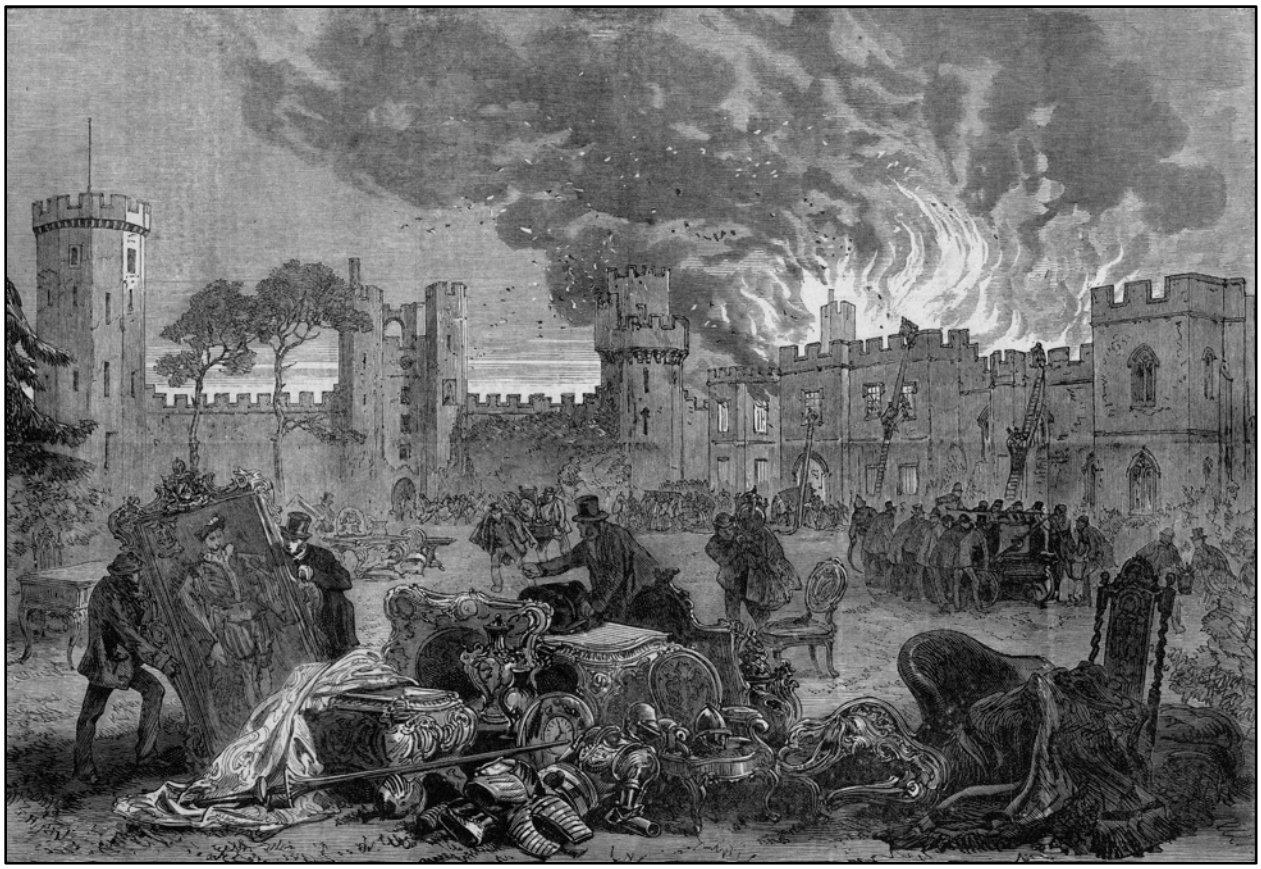

Figure 48: "The Fire at Warwick Castle." *Illustrated London News* 9 Dec. 1871: 541. *The Illustrated London News Historical Archive, 1842-2003.* Web. 30 May 2014.

CODA

Destroyed Collections: Museal Violence in Henry James

When prospective visitors to the Bethnal Green Branch of the South Kensington Museum opened Henry James's 1873 review of the Wallace Collection of fine and decorative art,[88] they may have been surprised to discover that the text did not commence with the achievements of legendary English painters, as the catalogue to the exhibition did,[89] but with a thick description of the extraordinarily ordinary district of Bethnal Green:

> ...Bethnal Green discerns itself through the thick local atmosphere the unillumined possessor of a Museum and a gallery of pictures—treasures which all well-dressed London is flocking eastward to behold. Half in charity and (virtually) half in irony, a beautiful art-collection has been planted in the midst of this darkness and squalor—an experimental lever for the 'elevation of the masses'. The journey to Bethnal Green is a

[88] The Branch Museum of Science and Art at Bethnal Green opened on 24 June 1872. James's review appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* six months later, in January 1873.

[89] See C.C. Black's *Catalogue of the Collection of Paintings, Porcelain, Bronzes, Decorative Furniture, and Other Works of Art, Lent for Exhibition in the Bethnal Green Branch of the South Kensington Museum, by Sir Richard Wallace, Bart.* (1872).

> long one, and leads you through an endless labyrinth of ever murkier and dingier alleys and slums, and the Museum, whether intentionally or not, is capitally placed for helping you to feel the characteristic charm of art—its being an infinite relief and refuge from the pressing miseries of life. (James, "WC" 67).

The marked contrast between the extraordinary objects on view and their squalid surroundings was not lost on James's contemporaries. Septimus Hansard, the rector of Bethnal Green and a frequent contributor to *The Times,* echoed James's sentiments in a letter to the editor dated 16 March 1874:

> All who have been to see the Hertford collection of pictures lent by Sir Richard Wallace for exhibition at the Bethnal-green Museum must have noticed the remarkably untidy patch of ground on which it is situated. The space alongside the building—which, be it remembered, is the property of the nation, and not of the inhabitants of Bethnal-green—is a receptacle for old hats, old shoes, dirty pieces of paper, dead cats, old pipes, rags, brickbats, and other rubbish, to say the least of it, out of place alongside a national museum containing one of the finest collections of pictures in the world. (8)

The Wallace Collection on view at the Bethnal Green Museum prompted a number of provocative questions. What was an institution of elite culture doing in the East End of London? Could extraordinary objects become "contaminated?" Stated otherwise, could fine and decorative art objects lose their distinctive value through an association with poverty, filth, disease, pollution, violence, and moral corruption? And, even more importantly, could a museum truly enable ordinary individuals to achieve distinction? To turn this question on its head, what would happen to ordinary subjects if there were no extraordinary objects to emulate?

I argue that James takes up this final question in *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897) and *The Golden Bowl* (1904), which the Wallace Collection inspired at least in part.[90] For as Bernard Richards argues, "Every fine collection represents a challenge and a contrast to the mundane world, but *this* collection had made the point with particular vividness for James" (xxvi, original emphasis). Both of James's novels are invested in the "exemplary contrast" (*SP* 12) between ordinary subjects and extraordinary objects, and in both texts, major characters acquire a measure of distinction by symbolically and materially appropriating the distinctive value of extraordinary objects.

In *The Spoils of Poynton*, Fleda Vetch, "who hadn't a penny in the world nor anything nice at home, and whose only treasure was her subtle mind," recoils from her father's collection of "old brandy-flasks and match-boxes, old calendars and hand-books, intermixed with an assortment of pen-wipers and ash-trays" and metaphorically transforms into a curator of Poynton's extraordinary decorative art collection (James 8, 99). The "treasure" that is her museal consciousness enables Fleda to visualize the collection at any time, anywhere: "She wanted indeed no catalogue to count [the objects] over; the array of them, miles away, was complete; each piece, in its turn, was perfect to her; she could have drawn up a catalogue from memory" (James, *SP* 162).

Charlotte Stant of *The Golden Bowl* acquires a measure of distinction in a similar fashion. When she enters the novel, Charlotte is an "extraordinarily alone" woman who "has no home—absolutely none whatever" and who "owns almost nothing in the world...but two colossal trunks" (James, *GB* 30, 31). Yet at the close of the novel, Charlotte is the mistress of a "museum of museums, a palace of art...a receptacle of treasures" (James, *GB* 107). As Mrs. Adam Verver,

[90] The frontispiece of the 1908 New York Edition of *The Spoils of Poynton* was Alvin Langdon Coburn's photograph of some of the objects in the Wallace Collection.

Charlotte conducts visitors around the fine art gallery at Fawns (James, *GB* 510), becoming, on the surface at least, like the extraordinary Adela Gareth, "a custodian equal to a walking catalogue, a custodian versed beyond any one anywhere in the mysteries of the ministration to rare pieces" (James, *SP* 100). To borrow the words of Bill Brown, both Fleda Vetch and Charlotte Stant find themselves "embraced by the [novels'] embodiment of aristocratic sensibility" (*Sense of Things* 145).

Yet James tempers his characters' embodiment of distinction. Fleda Vetch, for instance, is one of Mrs. Gareth's "best finds," yet she is always ever a mere "scrap of furniture" (James, *SP* 169). Charlotte Stant too is a piece of "human furniture," a slave to her husband, who controls her as if with "a long silken halter looped round her beautiful neck" (James, *GB* 451, 560-61). Likened to "ordinary chattels" (J. Baker 380), these female "movables" represent James's insistence on human ordinariness.

To underscore this insistence, James dismantles his fictional collections in the same manner in which Eliot does. Activating the museal counterdiscourse of the auction, Fleda Vetch destructures Poynton's decorative art collection with her mind. Upset that Mrs. Gareth has stolen the collection and installed it at Ricks, Fleda imaginatively transforms it from "a happy whole" into an assortment of "chopped limbs" (James, *SP* 53). Charlotte Stant, it seems, is incapable of such mental feats, but she is responsible for the dismantling of the fine and decorative art collections at Fawns. Her marriage to Mr. Verver prompts James's visualization of "Fawns so dismantled...Fawns with half its contents and half its best things removed" (*GB* 562). With Poynton's and Fawn's collections disassembled and dispersed, Fleda Vetch and Charlotte Stant find it difficult to appropriate the distinctive value of the country houses' museum-quality objects.

But James takes this notion one step further, subjecting the extraordinary objects on view in his novels to spectacular destruction. As *The Spoils of Poynton* concludes, James sets Poynton and its "unique collection of artistic curiosities" aflame (173). Choked with smoke, Fleda Vetch becomes "limp and weak" (James, *SP* 184) as the destruction of her relationship with Owen Gareth strikes her with full force. With equal force, in one of the most memorable scenes in *The Golden Bowl*, the eponymous vessel is "dashed...boldly to the ground, where...with the violence of the crash, [it] lie[s] shattered" (James 430). At this moment, Charlotte Stant crashes to the domain of negative extraordinariness, for the "ruins of the precious vessel" represent her immorality as an adulteress (James, *GB* 441). Burned and smashed, James's extraordinary objects reveal that Fleda Vetch and Charlotte Stant have "come down i' the world" (Eliot, *MF* 321)—or rather, that these characters have always ever exuded ordinariness.

The violence that James inflicts on the extraordinary objects on view in his novels represents the descent of the museum into the domain of ordinariness at the fin de siècle, as I argued in the introduction; the collapse of the country house and the dismantling of fine and decorative art collections in the Edwardian period, as I intimated in chapter 2;[91] and the modernist movement toward evacuating fiction of material objects.[92] But more important to this dissertation is the fact that James's museal violence eradicates the domain of positive extraordinariness from the system of distinction. For James, the domain of ordinariness *is* the pinnacle of the system of distinction. For characters such as Fleda Vetch and Charlotte Stant,

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[91] For more on this topic, see Mandler's *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (1997) and Strong, Binney, and Harris's *The Destruction of the Country House 1875-1975* (1974).

[92] For more on this subject, see Brown's *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (2003).

there is no greater achievement than extraordinary ordinariness. Of course, this is appropriate, for ordinariness is the foundation upon which realism rests.

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