The Ends of Aloneness:
Scenes of Solitude in Nineteenth-Century Fiction

By

Patricia Frank

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(English)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2015

Date of final oral examination: 9/5/2014

This dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Susan D. Bernstein, Professor, English
Caroline Levine, Professor, English
Mario Ortiz-Robles, Associate Professor, English
Theresa Kelley, Professor, English
Mary Louise Roberts, Professor, History

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

At early points in this dissertation, several people wondered—politely—if doing a project on solitude might make things especially hard, turning the loneness of composition into active loneliness. Of course, there is this potential in writing, insofar as it's on us to bring our core ideas to light in a way that communicates. And even with a comfortable chair and iced tea and lemonade, it's surprisingly easy to feel that this task is just too much: too much for our words, our motivation, our basic ability to think straight.

Luckily, as things turned out, I didn't often feel this loneness tip the scales into a funk, a fact that bolsters one claim of this work, which is that states of solitude do not have to equal loneliness. And actually, my writing process wasn't solo in many ways. Due to the kindness of certain souls whom I can only start thanking here, I never felt a void of support. Instead, I knew that I could draw on others' careful readings and thoughts, as well as on their tolerant ears.

My advisor, Susan David Bernstein, was a model of calm leadership, always responding to my drafts with helpful and timely feedback. Caroline Levine, Mario Ortiz-Robles, Theresa Kelley, and Mary Louise Roberts are all warm souls and probing scholars of the type I aspire to be. To Justin Kolb and Karina Mendoza, your thoughts about learning and literature have helped me greatly over the years. I have valued picking your brains, but even more, your roles as friends: without them, the grind of graduate work would have had a much different face.

To my in-laws, the Van Dams, thank you for always asking me how the dissertation was going, and, importantly, how I felt: did I still like what I was writing? Was it starting to weigh me down? You recognized the emotional component of a long project, and that you did so made me feel understood in special ways. To my wonderful Frank family—mother Bel, father Alan,

sister Chris—thank you more than I can say for making my interests so deeply your own. It humbles me to think about how much care I've had from you, and to have had you as examples of honor, laughter, and great hearts and minds. For your play, for your faith in learning (how can I ever properly thank my parents for my education?), and for your loving principles, I am truly lucky to say that you are my family, my models, my tribe.

To Lingo, our smartest purchase ever, thank you for being such a sweet friend. To Auggie and Annie, both of whom were born during this work's duration, as well as little A. number three (sex unknown; due in three weeks), thank you for being so life-affirming: you are my best, and you are *the* best. You make me smile and laugh and think, empathize and take deep breaths, and I couldn't cherish you more. You have so much liveliness inside your three-and-under selves, it constantly amazes me. It is my joy to be your mother, including hearing the older ones chat—your observations are like gold—and kissing you grandly every day. Doing so, I have learned that your dear Vovó is right: as lovely as you are everywhere, the neck is where the honey is.

And lastly, to Mark, who will probably read these lines to both our dog and babies, thank you first for doing that, and then for your enduring support. The late-night snacks, the computer repairs, the cups of tea placed by my elbow helped me stay charged and see the light. There surely isn't a steadier husband, or one with a more twinkling eye. I love you and will always be grateful for your help and our work as a team.

Abstract

The Ends of Aloneness explores the role of solitude in nineteenth-century realist novels, making a case for the import of its partial nature, one that helps subjects navigate tensions and conflicts in their surroundings. Arguing for solitude's power in novels from this time because of its porosity, rather than in spite of it, *The Ends of Aloneness* seeks middle ground between pitfalls of Michel Foucault's vibrant theories of the era and Ian Watt's description of the novel genre's rise. The first outlook, which focuses on Victorian social surveillance, makes it easy to see distance as upsettingly compromised; with the second, it is easy to read aloneness through too much triumph as the basis of an ethos of liberal sovereignty. Working against both poles of thought, this project studies the hidden value of solitude's daily frictions, featuring writers who admit that being alone cannot be "pure" in a mechanized modern world, yet who show that partialness in solitude can be a boon, helping subjects mediate the plural demands of modernity.

For Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, and George Gissing, taking a sound approach to distance means accepting alienation as a feature of everyday life, but also as its own answer, a kind of auto-antidote. To this end, they politicize what I call "solitary styles," particularly in gendered terms. For example, they show that if distance can be a unique trial for women, then it can be uniquely agentic, yielding room for spontaneity and deeply considered responses to restrictive cultural norms.

Building on the work of scholars like Jeff Nunokawa, Christopher Lane, and Amanda Anderson, this project departs from recent ones by not privileging solitude that implies a rare event or set of possibilities. While this project does explore the thrills of choosing time apart, its full interest is in the mundane. Focusing respectively on women's time, women's space,

and economic organization of women's time and space, the first three chapters make a case for reading a trio of prominent texts—*Persuasion*, *Villette*, and *The Odd Women*—through an undernoted support for women's right to elective withdrawal. As for Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, while it shows women gaining ground through co-opting alienation, it cannot keep from wanting to contain female shrewdness as a rule, making it resist and bolster strains of social hypocrisy.

Notably, the novels here craft endings that reward strong solitaries with affection. Without erasing solo resilience or impressive habits of mind, they imagine solitaries "alone together" in connections that take cues from canny ways of blending dictates from self and world—in other words, that take their cues from proactive distance itself. Thus, while the phrase "the ends of aloneness" speaks to aims or goals for conduct, another aspect has to do with formal choices in closing scenes with regards to the marriage plot.

Together, the works included here reveal how solitude's imposition, yet imperfection, in modern times can yield new ways of managing frictive, demanding social codes. Further, they assert that women can especially profit from distance as a site of tactical acts. And third, they crystallize their views through key refashionings of the traditional marriage plot. Using it to show the lure of a strong solo stance, they do not resolve this stance through appeals to unity, but make it a guiding light for a shared commitment to distance, a way of being jointly apart that allows eccentric views to combine with others' and thrive, yet also merges them into even more habits of compromise.

Introduction:

Negotiating Solitude in the Nineteenth-Century Novel

At first blush, the novel *Quite Alone*, serialized in *All the Year Round* in 1864 and written mostly by George Augustus Sala, seems to gesture on every level to the perils of solitude. Its heroine, Lily, shy and subdued, becomes prey to unflattering gossip about the depths of her separation, with people from all walks of life speculating about her psyche and her personal circumstances. For his part, Sala, a journalist, had promised to finish writing the tale while working in the Americas, yet had a crisis from overexertion made worse by the trials of his expatriation: "I was in … a new world," he would later write, "baited and hated, always abused" (ii-iii).[1] Wringing out pages like "drops of blood" for several brutal, exhausting months, Sala arrived at a breaking point in the summer of 1864 (ii). He had writer's block; he was horribly anxious; he had promised much more than he could do. And so, he stopped sending new installments to the office of *All the Year Round*. His editors there, in "desperation" (iii), quickly scrambled to find a new writer to finish up the story's threads. They found one, yet never revealed his name, hiding from their readership that a new writer had any part in the crafting of the work. It would take reviewers, and Sala himself when prefacing a three-volume edition that he allowed, reluctantly, to be put out at the end of the year, to tell the story of *Quite Alone*, including the strange dual authorship that both saved Sala and caused him fresh pain.[2]

In diegetic and real life space, Sala reveals the dangers of subjects not finding balance in solitude, with his primary character Lily stuck in undue isolation, and with Sala finding himself both too far from familiar ground and in settings not distanced enough, with noise, distractions, and "battle" and "murder" impinging on his concentration (ii). Of course, Sala's situation counts

as desperate all around, and too infused with overwork to say if he should have done differently except for accrue fewer obligations. But under less heightened circumstances, was solitude more of a risk or a boon? And what, if anything, could be done to make being socially distanced productive—of fresh ideas, of efficacy—yet also responsibly generative?

Definitions of Solitude

This project contends that history has not assessed the promise of distance, of some keen sense of separation from normative groupings and trends, accurately in terms of how nineteenth-century novels perceive it. Partly, this problem is technical: critics have not explored enough the power of common separation in the spaces of such works, preferring instead to focus on exceptional forms of solitude, from performed philosophies of critical objectivity to intense misanthropy to private scenes of courting and sex. And partly, too, a reason for the limits of today's discourse on nineteenth-century distance is because of two key views in literary criticism: one, that "real" solitude is largely chimeric in modern times and has been since Victorian days and the growth of social surveillance; and two, that the most persuasive way to read distance empoweringly is to define it through the concept of the discrete and politically free, liberal individual, and especially through the public realization of inborn rights. Viewed as such, solitude can strengthen even in a watching world, and in fact supports the novel as a mouthpiece of bourgeois ideals of self-determination.

With this study, I explore the nineteenth century's nuanced discourse on the topic of solitude, and look specifically to the ways in which it portrays modern distance as an "impure," partial thing, yet still finds enriching value through, and not despite, this fact. I look to a nineteenth-century faith in common social separation being soil for useful acts, where "useful,"

as defined at the time, meant sustainable socially: a site of pushing beyond conventions without overtly scorning them. While other scholars have explored abstract or exceptional distance in nineteenth-century works, including forms of solitude that are happily elective or that announce themselves in privileged public terms, *The Ends of Aloneness* focuses on social distance as it filters down to subtler agentic acts, probing what mundane aloneness can mean for human and narrative change.

Even when they do address a typical solo act or mode, such as reading or walking alone, extant studies do not explore the precise affordances of solitude in major depth. Instead of studying solitude as an object in itself, they address affordances of a "host" for solitude, some specific state or act that it feeds or underwrites. In doing so, their center becomes less social distance *per se* than the essence of a practice for which distance is a substratum. To counter such a critical slant, I use this work to probe the common as a source of agency. I use Michel de Certeau's ideas of power seized by those who need it through the patterns of daily routine, yet grapple with, as these do not, aloneness as the thing itself, a fundamental testing ground for a subject's invention and force. I also foreground even more layers of pragmatic negotiation in states of separation than Certeau does in his work. While *The Practice of Everyday Life* tacitly considers distance as estrangement that "consumers" (xviii) fairly smoothly appropriate,[3] *The Ends of Aloneness* articulates a less straightforward, more detailed, path to strength through solitude.

In framing fruitful separation through more challenges than Certeau, this project aims to strip away much of the sheen of glory that *The Practice of Everyday Life* accords strong uses of solitude. It reads proactive solo acts not through vast, if coded, options for effecting personal will, but more through core concerns about simply getting by, about just coping socially. In fact,

Certeau says fairly little about distance playing a part in enhancing interactions, yet I explore how solitude, if proactive or what I call "strong," can help people fight coercion and improve relational skills. It can do so, for example, through renewing energy, or through a person's focus on conflicts within aloneness, a focus that can then augment her navigation of tensions elsewhere.

When I invoke types of distance that are daily or common, then, I do not convey ideals of total separation, but something much more mediated, partial, or attenuated. Further, while the stakes of this project are those of autonomy, I do not conflate, from the start, autonomy with solitude. Echoing the works I explore, I do not assume that distance, even when infused by grit, translates into realized power only in freeing or linear ways. Not aligning solitude with a set of certainties about the scope of agency, I approach it as a site of *questioning* the best scope of the self.

So how exactly do I define common or daily solitude? Given how the authors I study patently address the fact that solitude is always partial in a technically networked world, it is rare that we find them imagining a social vacuum. Rather, the crowded novelscapes of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, and George Gissing partially create their thickness through many versions of distance that circulate and collide. Crafting webs of separation, from bachelorhood to orphanhood to stolen moments of privacy, from daydreaming to writing or reading to miserliness or other obsessions, they reveal that solitude cannot be properly plumbed or fathomed if we treat it as only one thing, or even as a range of distinct yet fully coherent manifestations. The novels thus reveal that distance often has a plural tone within the bounds of a span or type. One example would be poverty, which is estranging in itself, yet which can create more distance as subjects self-cloister to save resources. Another example would be how

quietness can come across as being aloof, so that wanted social withdrawal slides into states of being rejected as others choose to stay away.

Emphasizing from the start the shifting tones of solitude, Austen, Brontë, Dickens, and Gissing still maintain that it can be a vital source of confidence. Mirroring their open approach to describing useful distance, this project thinks of solitude as simply and flexibly as it can: as being thrown on one's resources and being aware that this is the case, whether one's personal tools at the time are physical, cognitive, sensory, moral, or some combination of these.

Important to using this definition is considering solitude as separate from autonomy. If the latter term entails pursuing what one needs to thrive, then aloneness, as I perceive it, means scrutinizing this process first. Differently, then, from independence, autonomy, or self-reliance (although I sometimes use these terms to mean specific realizations of the promise of being apart), the phrase "being thrown on one's resources" means to conjure solo power as an emergent, in-process goal, and not to ring with completed success, in keeping with the complex treatments of social distance that I inspect.

For those who wonder if loneliness is a component of this work, I can only offer this thought: while feeling lonely is, of course, a frequent aspect of separateness, it is not an essential feature, either for me or the writers here. Thus, "loneliness" never functions as a swap for my primary term. As for other wording I use, I take "aloneness," "remoteness," and "distance," as well as "social separation," to be synonymous with "solitude," and treat them interchangeably. "Withdrawal" I use to indicate choice as an aspect of separation, and "alienation" and "isolation" to indicate a state of exclusion, whether systemic or transitory, and whether primarily real or perceived.

Origins and Main Arguments of This Project

In terms of critical interventions, the point of this study is to apply Certeau's views about the mundane as a field for reworking power to aloneness in itself, and to find a middle way between two very famous accounts of the cultural task of the novel during the nineteenth century. Specifically, I place this work between a skeptical perspective that aloneness cannot thrive in modern disciplinary times, when we are always both observed and shaped externally in ways that we cannot fully know, and one that trusts that we can bracket that which is external in distance by defining it mainly as inherent individual worth. In short, I locate this work between readings of nineteenth-century distance that focus on outer checks to its authenticity, and those that focus, victoriously, on the innate force of the self.

The current study asks us to note solitude's role in historical views of agency, self-sovereignty, and generally, of rich ways to live. Questions driving its contours include: What enrichments can live within the most typical solitudes? What can average solitude, according to nineteenth-century texts that explore this topic in depth, do to increase agency on respected terms from this time—on lively yet responsible ones? Within such queries, this project asks that we rethink a pair of views of the novel as social formation: first, a Foucauldian one that sees distance, especially in the time frame under study here, as intensely compromised and beset by social forces. And second, a view that grounds novel studies, one in which the novel's power as a cultural mechanism rests on taking solitude from a different single angle—namely, one of civic success, of inborn individual force expressed through publicly visible paths of self-sufficiency.

As the following pages convey, a concern with each of these models is that scenes of solitude do not receive their proper due for being as layered as they are in many nineteenth-century works. With Foucault, one temptation is to view novels as naïve when they portray

solitude, since his theories at least imply that true distance is an illusion under the terms of modernity. For their part, novel studies perspectives, at least as developed through Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Fielding, and Richardson* (1957), link aloneness to a known truth that is the power of the full self.[4] This is because Watt mainly defines distance through essential uniqueness, treating solitude as a state that imprints a person's will, rather than as this and one for gauging the right scope of the self. In this way, Watt imbues distance with the glory of forging life paths, as when he writes that "leaving home, improving on the lot one was born to, is a vital feature of the individualist pattern of life" (65).

Against readings of self-direction in nineteenth-century texts that rely on fixed lenses of progress or cynicism, this study attends to more variation in the period's dialogue about solitude and its role in productive, healthy lives. We misjudge this swath of time if we think its interest in distance pales in comparison, for example, to a renowned Romantic one. In fact, not ceasing from decade to decade and emerging through diverse genres, from poems to novels to journalism to weighty philosophical works, conversation about solitude and its varied virtues and dangers stretched across the period with energy and consistency.

And once we start looking, we see it all over. We see how nineteenth-century writers didn't simply shun the idea that solitude, even if partial, could be useful and enriching, but actively tried to voice its essence and its special strengthening force. Likewise, they did not just group solitude with autonomy, but asked precisely how it could—and should—be part of sovereignty.

From the century's start to its end, legions of thinkers, including those that I study in these pages, expressed anxiety over the thought of self-indulgence in solitude. If solitude could

be a site of expanded choice and will, then what could make it self-control versus perilous decadence? What conditions should be in place to encourage time apart to observe the former path versus the latter, dangerous, one of flouting conventions blatantly? Within the period's dialogue, the question of how to benefit from aloneness responsibly was vital to the discussion, totally central to its contours. Fervently, all sorts of thinkers wondered and worried about solitude, asking if the average person could control it enough to exploit it, and exploit it morally. This notion of responsible distance meant avoiding self-absorption and making solo conduct have a steady social thrust, a way of being compatible with the calls of collective life. Under this notion, various writers strove to think of social distance less as an insoluble problem in a rushed and greedy world and more as a way to weave one's agendas with careful social moves. If solitude could pose a risk through its room for following whims, then their plan was not to avoid it, but to strive to do it better. Like a view of optimal eating that rejects denying foods, the authors here promote self-trust, holding out faith that dogged souls of every stripe can make remoteness pay sustainably in its trials, as well as in the gleeful, heady, pungent thrills that it can bring.

The dominance of the realist novel during the nineteenth century, as well as its lasting reputation for reporting on daily life, makes it an intriguing place to look for thoughtful commentary about everyday solitude. Looking to this cultural form, I establish three main claims about its treatments of common distance. First, I contend that nineteenth-century novels teem with solitude, and that, while they show it to be "impure" or externally inflected, they assert its usefulness because of such impurity, as its own discrepancies and the way it foregrounds questions about balancing self and world yield ripples of attention to rifts in one's surroundings, from interpersonal differences to societal double talk. Admittedly, a stress on balance does

imply that solitude holds some normative sway in these texts, modeling calmness and good sense as well as canniness, shrewdness, and grit. Yet to the extent to which they position distance as a crucial tool for dissecting social norms and deciding what parts to abide, the works that I study are bold indeed, testing the plasticity of various mutual codes.

Part of how the works I study boldly press on boundaries is how they politicize distance as a lived experience, such as by exposing different figures' access to given forms. That they do so brings me to my second major argument, which is that the novels here claim a special hope for women in the space that distance offers for unscripted thoughts and acts, both in terms of respite from norms and of scrutinizing their force. The novels here all sympathize with female figures who are hindered in electing time apart, either thanks to being laden with unchosen isolation or because their subordinate status makes it hard to travel alone, take a walk from home alone, or initiate time away from leading duties as mothers as wives.

And finally, my third main claim is that, by way of literal ends, the novels here preserve aloneness to an unexpected degree, even when they tap into the standard Victorian marriage plot. Crafting endings that include greater obvious social engagement, they do not resolve aloneness or the lessons learned from it, but expand it into a state that can be authentically shared. Through intriguing formal choices that recast what unions mean, the novels here reveal how distance can be merged and melded with relationships like marriages or other intimate ties, whether this be through sharing quirks or room for partners to spend time apart. The chapters that follow thus explore how novels that value tactical distance—*Persuasion*, *Villette*, *The Odd Women*, and *Our Mutual Friend*—handle its fate through playing with form, as they seek to laud solo styles while also closing on integration.

As their endings help reveal, for the novels featured here, the answer to whether social distance can, without erasing itself, be a sociable enterprise is a notably eager "yes." But how, exactly, can separation hone an awareness of social realms, even improving a solitary's daily interactions with them? Again, for the writers that I take up, solitude is a perfect site for practicing reading the world for discrepancies and conflict. Each one shows how points of friction flourish in a modern world, not just in its stimuli, but also in and between aspects of its ideologies, such as notions of separate spheres that expect women to be "public" in subdued domestic roles, making themselves available for others' comfort and instruction. Thus, while these authors always depict well-used distance through heightened patience, observations, and suppleness, most of all, in their outlooks, an impressive solo style builds one's skills at navigating tensions in social values and forms. In fact, they show that solitude can support this kind of work because it has, in its own right, distinguishing tectonic clangs—ones that it offers solo figures the time and space to explore, if they will.

One example of a defining point of tension in solitude has to do with how it can serve both freedom and focus at the same time. Granting a subject breathing room from immediate social pressures, solitude creates leeway for inventive, unorthodox thought. Yet at the same time, the buffers of distance open up space for focused thought, for undistracted observation and committed contemplation, against the fragmenting of perception and reactive narrowing of vision that is so common, the works here imply, to a modern status quo. A second example of a core tension that emerges from solitude has to do with differences between the needs of the self and the world. Victorian writings in particular show that, under circumstances where exchange holds normative sway, solitude must always mean a complex pull between "me" and "them," meaning between subjective petitions and those of a larger group. Of course, at its most relaxing, solitude

can ease the pressure of immediate social claims. But if we deploy distance well, according to the type of view I have been describing here, then we never take this feeling and just run away with it. Instead, we make our social "breaks" include assessing the very pressures that we now feel respite from, thinking deeply about the details of how distance can ease and soothe.

Gissing, Dickens, Austen, and Brontë thus convincingly make the case that the conflicts in solitude can be exciting sites of returns, provided that they are studied correctly—which is to say, recurrently, as part of regular habits of thought. In this view of ideal distance, while it is tempting for a subject to use displacement from connections to erase, at least for a time, an awareness of daily trials, a better option calls upon on a learned persistence to confront the pull of cultural rubrics and laws. This means that, in the views of distance that *The Ends of Aloneness* explores, strong distance does not reject social claims and their frustrations; similarly, the best solitaries use their distance to learn more about social structures and plans, growing skilled at closely reading shared yardsticks, agendas, and codes. And if, in the end, this use of distance—not just active, but also proactive, being both seeking and calm—colors someone's solo style, then what we have, according to the ethics of the authors above, is a means of staving off both the dangers of solo self-indulgence and the fracturing of perception that modernity's dictates can bring, including temptations to conform as a solution to plural demands.

Perceived in this way, even forced aloneness in the works that I address stands as more than a register of modernity's pitilessness. Instead, it is a potent means of managing its oppositions and succeeding at compromise, what Franco Moretti has described as "the novel's most celebrated theme" (9).[5] In the way of Certeau's consumer who outwits prevailing forces in the language of routine, strong solitaries in the works here do not think of norms like a threshold to be crossed through deep escape, but like puzzles to be studied, stop and start, again and again.

Separation thus becomes social in both content and form, interactive in the study of conventions (this is content), and in yielding back-and-forth routes of reflection (this is form), resisting lavish flights from the now that give aims of transcendence in distance an ironically linear shape.

Building on a founding claim that nineteenth-century realist novels represent enriching distance as a site of compromise through its *being* compromised, my study highlights a prior shuffling or historical reframing as concerns about social distance were resettled from strict prescriptions as solutions to its flux onto notions of a holistic solitary stance instead. Especially to Victorian minds, the prospect of making solitude pay in sustainable, useful ways often meant invoking plans, some quite detailed, for its restriction. To those who backed such limitations, such as concentrating retreat only into summer months or confining novel reading to pre-settled leisure hours,[6] these were vital for keeping distance from evolving into slackness (or, conversely, into the firmness of obsessions or manias). However, as my research shows, against such drifts in public thought, there were nineteenth-century writers who intently worked to shift social interest in taming distance onto the concept of strong solo styles, where "style" denotes a broad approach to or attitude about being remote.

Asking if inner stances, even over outer regimes, can effectively smooth out distance as a learning experience, Austen, Brontë, Gissing, and Dickens show a serious certainty about the power of strong solo styles. They ask if people can make choices from within aloneness itself that can curb its worst temptations, and assert affirmative views, both against a social trend of supporting austerity as an approach to solo time and against thinkers who mistrusted its enriching potential at all.

Putting the weight of strong daily distance onto a self-conscious style, the authors here dodge neat resolutions to solitude's mutability.[7] Specifically, they contradict that solitude's flux

can be resolved by certain versions being approved or discouraged for certain subjects. Refusing to sort types of distance into "proper" ones for men, the wealthy, or the educated, they reveal that even when the issue is willed solitude, we cannot cleave its enjoyment from questions of social power and its standard distribution. Revealing how deeply privilege matters to a subject's relation to distance, they induce us to reflect on who is likely to have it function more in terms of choice or will and who is likely to have it function more as an imposed social breach.

Together, the texts that anchor this work insist on making us recognize how access to solo realms, from physical rooms to time for reading, is not neutral in its spread. Their assertions often unfurl, as we would expect, along gender lines, with ease of access to chosen distance being a greater problem for women in a time that moralized their voluntary enclavement at home, as well as their unswerving commitment to improving those around them.[8] Especially, then, on women's behalf, these novels query distance and power, asking why, if a woman has leisure and desires time apart, finding options in this vein should be a tricky proposition. It is also worth observing that as they probe the gender norms and related class norms that shape chosen solitude, the novels in the following chapters all indict, to some degree, what they jointly take to be blinkered Romantic idealizations, viewed by them as clearly thrilling yet privileged values of wandering. Through particular roaming scenes that fail to offer liberation, they resist perceptions of distance that, to them, do not account for cultural capital's role in it, a role they plumb explicitly as part of how they stake claims to truth.

The authors here have high hopes, then, for responsible styles of distance that, while not exempt from questions of political privilege themselves, still help subjects be agentic in politicized solo states. Part of such a style, as mentioned, is reading social patterns and slyly threading through them, so that clever compromise becomes an end—a valued goal—of

impressive solitude, as well as part of *The Ends of Aloneness* as a name for the current work. Still, a second part of this title gestures to another key feature of the works I study here. An added unique element to how *Persuasion, Villette*, *The Odd Women*, and *Our Mutual Friend* value distance is through tweaking, at their ends, the marriage plot. The huge import of such a plot to nineteenth-century realist works makes aloneness seem, at first glance, to be resolved in unities that mean rescue from separation. However, each work that I address rather uses intimacies to shed light a final time on a hero or heroine as a model of smart remoteness, crafting new relational forms that are fueled by and extend how a protagonist learned to be nobly effective in solitude.

Though readers and critics seem to skim over, in detailed realist works, either faith on authors' parts in porous or partial distance as a source of legitimate strength, or concluding moves that treat it as a keystone of rich relations, I contend that such aspects are very *there* in the works I address, with the lessons of strong solo styles grounding how these novels end, making solo figures intriguing and propelling intimacy. Having the marriage plot honor distance and nurture striking ways for subjects to be "alone together," Austen, Brontë, Dickens, and Gissing experiment with narrative closure to forge visions of caring unions that can coexist with withdrawal. Granting patient solo subjects equally patient forms of exchange, they ultimately reward and protect talents of strong solitaries through romantic love or marriage as a seal of their solo acts. In this sense, if we are startled by the profusion—once we see it—of enriching partial distance in nineteenth-century texts, then we might be more surprised by how much distance their endings retain, with learning to profit from it in reliably social terms being an essential facet of mature subjectivity.

Critical Considerations

Returning to the critical contexts in which I want to intervene, the first step in establishing a politicized middle ground between cynicism about aloneness being null in a modern world and optimism about its role in bourgeois self-determination is to assert that, luckily, we do not need to start from scratch. Nineteenth-century realist novels already think through and assert the politics of solitude, revealing how its distribution and entree to privileged forms—the kind that others recognize as being deserved and sacrosanct—are uneven across social strata, depending on a person's wealth, ethnicity, and especially gender.

Due to this fact, novel studies' conflation of distance with self-creation, even if only done on behalf of seemingly more naive periods, does not altogether fit with the nuances of solitude in nineteenth-century realist works. *The Rise of the Novel,* for example, first sees Watt describe aloneness as perspectival independence, both in terms of current thought and, importantly, from past structures of tradition and life-mapping. He writes that full individualism depends upon the latter distance, including "on a special type of economic and political organisation and on an appropriate ideology; more specifically, on an economic and political organisation which allows its members a very wide range of choices in their actions" (60). However, as his discussion unfolds, the main form of "organisation" that he describes is capitalism; in fact, he soon collapses all thoughts on solitude, which first emerged partly as eccentricity, into "economic individualism" and the "very wide range of choices" that industrial capitalism supposedly underwrites for all (49, 60). Yet as we clearly see in works by Brontë, Austen, Gissing, and Dickens, solitude as trailblazing, or at least as life-path forging, does not square with representations of all subjects' experience. Of course, this mismatch is more an issue for the poor, as well as for women from both lower and wealthier classes. Thus, what these four writers

paint is a less progressive picture of the promise of social distance than what Watt's condensed account of its import can provide.

From a very different angle, Michel Foucault, in his famous thoughts on nineteenth-century discipline, tacitly interprets aloneness in social and textual fields through layers of discipline that compress its freeing force, yet risks an over-distillation of what truly comes across in the novels from this time. Everywhere in the novels here are admissions, latent and open, of how distance day to day is imperfect or outwardly shaped. It is so because modernity does not sanction perfect retreat; beyond the fact of many subjects crowding psychic and physical space in an ever more globalized world, there is always the fact or specter of our neighbors assessing us, as well as institutional powers molding our visions and preferences in ways that we cannot wholly trace. However, the works that I explore insist, time and time again, that mediated solitude still is hugely generative. In fact, the authors I include use the space of authorship as an exceptional field of distance to endorse solitude's status as a common or populist good, believing that external shapings of common separations can, for any thoughtful soul, illumine the issue of social restrictions and how best to handle them.

A recent strain of scholarship in literary studies on distance shows how deeply the nineteenth century grappled with questions of solitude. Several important "solitude studies," as I consider them, have emerged in the last dozen years, from Amanda Anderson's *The Powers of Distance*, which probes critical detachment in Victorian fiction and culture, to Jeff Nunokawa's "Eros and Isolation: The Antisocial George Eliot," which reads Eliot through flash moments of reprieve from prying eyes, to Christopher Lane's *Hatred & Civility: The Antisocial Life in Victorian England*, which explores misanthropy in a range of Victorian texts. Further, a key study of sickness, *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art of Being Ill*, by Miriam Bailin,

overlaps with one broad claim of the aforesaid scholarship, for whether it figures social distance as escape, reclusiveness, or performative detachment, it argues that nineteenth-century texts attach more fluid agency to states of solitude than the era's reputation for order would have us suspect.

Reading Victorian life as rigid was confirmed a fitting move in the wake of Foucault's thesis about the Victorians and their success at normalizing supervision as a feature of daily life. However, in the last few decades, critics have exposed this era as more pliable and surprising than a lavish or monolithic corrective profile would suggest. A spate of recent scholars, then, argues that Foucauldian views of Victorian cultural forms can themselves be used too harshly, making nineteenth-century life seem more flattened than it was. Anderson, Nunokawa, and Lane all address Foucauldian readings of aloneness and assert, without rejecting seminal claims about social reconnaissance, that many subjects' agency during nineteenth-century times was, if not a boundless field, then yet more "imaginative" than sharply skeptical readings allow (Lane 4).

My own claims and analysis differ from those of these three critics in several key respects. First, I take as my main topic average, mundane solitude versus an unusual form, including those that these three scholars view as consistently willed or elective, versus being more combined. Second, I focus on authors' views of aloneness as special ground for women's health and social survival. And third, I highlight formal choices by the authors I include that entail the marriage plot "sealing the deal" in a signal way. Using marriage or its prospect to put sanctioned social weight behind a given solo style, Austen, Bronte, Gissing, and Dickens refashion the marriage plot to acknowledge and enlarge, though "alone together" forms, habits that readers have come to admire in successful solitaries.

Anderson, Nunokawa, and Lane all attend to narrower types or practices of solitude than I do by invoking style. This claim includes how they only probe distance that a character intends, from aspirational objectivity to cranky hermitism to rapturous means of blocking, briefly, social obligations and noise. In contrast, since my own concern is with subtle daily acts, with turning distance to strong ends in low-key or coded ways, I need to attend to mixtures of chosen and forced strains of separateness, including to a range of ways that figures make do in solitude. Put differently, while other studies focus on exceptional figures, my project looks to those whom many readers would quickly view as regular solitaries. Even if we group Bailin's thoughts, which do extend past willed solo modes, with Anderson's, Nunokawa's, and Lane's, *The Ends of Aloneness* is distinctive for probing average distance much more than existing works. As Bailin explains from the start, her work centers on the sickroom as an ontological "breach," a venue necessarily marked by aloneness as aberration (1).[9] Likewise, other solitude studies tend to probe the options in distance for perverse status, public distinction, or rapturous sensation over what is much more rote, persistent, and repeated in it. To me, this means that extant studies gloss over the grunt work of distance, work that is unglamorous and sometimes even retrogressive, from patching together trains of thought over scattershot private moments to methods of redirecting or even suspending conscious thought.

It is hardly hard to see how Lane explores uncommon distance in that he takes hate for people as his central subject matter. Nunokawa, while looking to some common strains of distance in the form of slipped attention and events of transactional leave—what sociologist Erving Goffman has labeled times of "awayness"—also investigates sexual contact as a transcendent shared solitude. Also, awayness drop in value as his discussion goes on; his work initially treats awayness as a mechanism of hope that surveillance can be thwarted, yet closes,

somberly, with the view that "no feat of awayness can ever run free for long" (859). Through this claim, Nunokawa reminds us that his interest is mainly the flash, the fleeting span, of solitude, and that he reads strong aloneness mainly through strong stabs of joy at being delivered from scrutiny. In contrast, my study looks to longer spans of solitude and the routine conduct entailed, as well instant and accretive advantages of time alone.

For her part, Anderson focuses on critical and performative distance in the nineteenth century, defined by her as an aspirational stance of objectivity. In viewing this type of social distance as a comprehensive approach to identity and expression, she implies Victorian interest in holistic solo styles, but ultimately reduces these to aims of mental neutrality. Anderson makes a vibrant case for why Victorian men and women's goals of objectivity should *not* come across to readers as exceptional solitude, reminding us that Victorian minds did not think of critical distance as a means by which a person could achieve a bird's eye view of his or her acculturation. However, Anderson's total study still evokes a sense of detachment as an overly fixed endpoint by leaving little room for remoteness to empower other than through disinterestedness. Even keeping her focus in mind, there is scant space in her views for lone conduct that enriches apart from helping detachment thrive. Solitude as objectivity therefore does seem valorized, being the road to which all impressive solo drive and tenacity leads.

For Certeau, as I briefly addressed, solitude is cleverly used when subjects find gaps in social programs to employ as points of insertion of their wills into supervised life, seizing power for themselves on a micro or granular scale. However, one issue in using Certeau to read nineteenth-century texts is that he assumes huge options for invention for smart consumers. And yet, at least in the novels here, while solitaries who function well do ingeniously "poach" effects from established social forms (Certeau xii), we do not sense endless avenues being available to

these figures. Cunning, yes; but endless choice, no. Rather, they have limited means for disarming social decrees. In light of this fact, as I study distance and its links to agentic potential in the novels I include while also trying to honor their webs of differently styled, internally shifting, and conflicting solitudes, I work to keep a balance between attending to density as a watchword and invoking Certeau's vast scale of inventive personal acts.

Nineteenth-Century Context and Debate

Turning now to an overview of nineteenth-century talk on distance, I return to Sala and the "curiosit[y] of literature" that is the narrative *Quite Alone* (*The Athanaeum* 818)[10] as a record of disparate views, condensed in one text, of solitude. With the beginning of the story, Sala creates a fragmented world of frippery and affectation, but also of forbidding exclusions for those on the outside of wealth. After giving a detailed description of Hyde Park at its busiest hour, filled with people representing starkly disparate miens and conditions, Sala offers a view of the park later, with its crowds dispersed, and with a woman who chooses this time to ride her horse with "no groom follow[ing]" ("Quite Alone," *All the Year Round* 251, 2). This woman, then, is "quite alone," a phrase which, in the serialized version, gets repeated eight times in the space of three columns of print.[11]

Describing the trendy, teeming park as a morass of bad behavior and mockable social displays, Sala invokes a common trope, extremely popular at the time, whereby the crowded metropolis is where true distance ironically lies, a distance that feels even more intense than a classic seclusion would, since it yields the loneliness of a failed promise of fellowship. The narrative draws on this rueful idea to help establish a social milieu that is worth retreating from, yet very soon it raises the issue of the heroine's unique choices, claiming her to be an enigma in

her social separateness. Perhaps this kind of choppiness is why the text got tepid reviews, or perhaps it is from Sala's failure to make Lily seem unique after all. Whereas *David Copperfield* shows the young David responding to distance with lively imaginative play, Sala only tells, not shows, that as a child, the lonely Lily "elected to build up a world of her own, and to people it with creatures of her own imagination" ("Quite Alone," *All the Year Round* 265, 339). This absence means that Sala claims, but does not portray to readers, connections between solitude and inventive movements of mind. Although he seems to want to render Lily a plucky solitary, he cannot allow himself, given her youth and femaleness, to assert her distance as a true source of empowerment. In this sense, Sala's work contributes to a set of anxieties circulating within nineteenth-century dialogue about solitude.

Although we might be tempted to think of their concerns about aloneness through Victorians' ways of forming backlashes against their forebears, eighteenth century literature, high Romantic lyric included, was not only enthusiastic about the worth of solitude. Like the period after it, the eighteenth century actively questioned solitude's role in a noble life, though "noble" carried different valences in discourse across the two spans. Mostly at stake in earlier discourse was the question of solitude's role in yielding insight and moral improvement on the level of the person, including the question of healthy responses to a range of social ills. From 1740 to 1789, odes and sonnets to solitude appeared frequently in print, with a theme of social life as an unbounded space of folly and aloneness as focused space that is also much freer, given that knowledge, virtue, and fancy have the leeway to flourish there. "Here on this spot, beside this stream," proceeds one ode from 1773, "... Remote from frantic folly's maze, / An humbler altar will I raise" ("Ode to Solitude," ll. 22-3).[12] Beyond such poems, many prose essays also lauded solitude; for example, "A Dissertation Upon Solitude," published in 1769, begins, "Happy is he

who, estranged from the tumultuous bustle of the world, enjoys the sweets of a delightful solitude, and whose principal conversation consists of an agreeable intercourse with himself" (79).[13]

But working against this widespread view of solitude yielding rich insights were writings that saw aloneness as a risky experiment, one that only the best trained minds could reliably undertake. An essay from 1747 claims that sages and moralists "are the only Persons to whom the Shades of Retirement afford Pleasure or Instruction" ("On Solitude and Society," 387).[14] Other essays lodged the complaint that since humans were made to be social, seeking distance was unnatural: "[A human] is naturally a social creature," argues a sample of this type, such that "no man but would shudder at the thoughts of a sentence being passed on him to be forever banished from all human intercourse" ("Thoughts on Solitude," 578).[15]

Famously, the Romantic lyric of the century's end and onward was intensely interested in distance as a major theme. While much mid-eighteenth century thought links aloneness to calm reflection and even ordered flights of fancy, Romantic lyric links it instead to spontaneous insight and vision, vision that stands as a basic source of inspiration and fortification. In Coleridge's "Fears in Solitude," the speaker describes a scene of seclusion, "a green and silent spot amid the hills," that constitutes a great blessing of life (l. 1).[16] From this spot and against a backdrop of political machinations, he stresses the intoxication of letting thoughts roam free, a move echoed by a bird's song whose source he cannot find with his eye, thus making it seem to arise from an undefinable place. The speaker's thoughts, as he perceives the "unseen … minstrelsy which solitude loves best" (l. 19) flow, not only across subject matter, but also from the detailed to broad and back again unselfconsciously, as the perfection of the scene makes him

ponder political strife, and then, as he zooms back to details, on the follies in his life that helped him be a wiser man, including helping him relish the distance that supports this kind of thought.

Yet even as the visions of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and like-minded poets took root, their work hardly quelled disagreement about the essence of being alone. An essay published in 1807 confirms late-century dissent when its offers this summary: "Much has been said, and various opinions formed, on the subject of solitude" ("On Solitude," 161).[17] From those who felt wary of solitude's promise at the eighteenth century's end, many charges echoed those from earlier parts of the era: that deep withdrawal from interactions disrupted God's will and the business of life; that the most enriching distance was in the form of private study; and that only the strongest minds could turn even this type to good use. Adding credence to such claims were two new translations of Johann Georg Zimmermann's *Solitude: Considered with Respect to Its Influence Upon the Mind and the Heart*, which saw publication in England in 1798 and 1799. In this work, Zimmermann argues that aloneness is useful in doses, but that even brief "Retirement is ... surrounded with a variety of dangers," and that with extended withdrawal, "the surrounding perils are not only innumerable, but almost irresistible" (107).[18]

Zimmermann's interest in how solitude related to the health of the subject, morally and imaginatively, fit with the terms of debate at the time, yet as the nineteenth century unfolded, people increasingly asked themselves how subjects not socializing would affect society's health. More overtly than earlier thinkers, Victorians mused on solitude not just in terms of subjective effects, but also of those for social bodies and even English culture at large. Would solitude soothe a person's frustrations—with crowds, conventions, with claims on one's time—and leave a fresh appreciation for human relationships? Or would it, conversely, degrade one's sense of social duty and sympathy?

Within such queries were constant efforts to construct a formula, a recipe for calculating what aloneness could be fruitful, and for whom and in what settings. Even when thinkers offered no blueprint for making distance enrich without its growing too intense, they spoke to the stakes of poor solo balance in both moral terms and personal, even medical, ones. Most ominous were various statements about solitude and mental imbalance, along the lines of an unnamed writer's claims in 1866 that as "a man is constitutionally gregarious and social, [he] cannot live a hermit life without violating the conditions upon which his mental health depends" ("Alone in the World," *Reynolds's Miscellany* 298).[19]

Both those who made a case for more distance in modern life and who argued for much less, viewing it as an ill of the times, worried about the tenor of distance shifting almost on a dime, its tone being tied to shadowy changes in people's energy, moods, and resolve. Moreover, due to the margin in distance for self-directed acts, arguments from across the spectrum worried about self-propulsion spiraling into decadence without the most careful management. Not surprisingly, given this context of anticipating excess, much nineteenth-century talk on distance centered on restrictive techniques. As confident as many claims were about how subjects should manage aloneness, embedded in the dialogue was a point of nagging doubt, an aporia about self-control. This point involved the degree to which solitary self-restraint could be responsive and organic, and the degree to which it required relying on external limits, a reliance that would make discipline in solitude be the careful application of a preset form of control. On the one hand, remoteness from others could heighten self-awareness, a process that would seem to require comfort with an ad hoc restraint as a subject constantly learned from her actions in real time. Yet on the other, through a softening of external checks on conduct, solitude could make a

person vulnerable from the very beginning to misjudgments and *mis*behavior, thus making her need to turn to outside guidance to manage it.

Many thinkers tried to bypass this theoretical conundrum by tackling the simpler issue of tips for keeping aloneness from becoming disarray. Some argued that only men should routinely withdraw from exchange, since women were ill-equipped to handle aloneness, including its charms. As Sally Mitchell and Kate Flint have separately revealed, the issue of women's private reading was highly fraught in Victorian life.[20] In a lecture on women and learning, Anthony Trollope warned his listeners that female minds "are made 'vague, loose, and unfitted for any general occupation' by any too-steady diet of fiction," and advised that novel reading be restricted to certain hours, hours which should "be interspersed with the performance of duties, however trivial, for the comfort of others" (qtd. in Ablow 140).[21]

Insofar as such sorting moves largely ask what forms of distance leading norms can tolerate, we can say that the nineteenth century came to view social distance via sociability, meaning largely civility, but also meaning implied acceptance of a social taxonomy. Although today, we use "sociable" to convey congenial traits, Victorians used it in part to signal upholding the terms of a social blueprint. A brief entry from 1876 in the magazine *Bow Bells* defines sociability as the granting of "proportionate respect to everyone," indicating a clear social order and methods for assessing ranks ("Civility and Ceremony," 428).[22] Admittedly, others viewed sociability as a "friendly interchange of thoughts" ("Sociability," 11)[23] or as a "habit of mixing and talking with one's fellows" ("Lucidity and Sociability," 641).[24] And yet, as "with one's fellows" reveals, such descriptions often suggest that sociability means conversing with others from the same walk of life.

In light of the era's growing support for using shared judgment as a basis for satisfaction, seeing "communities as a fine way of fulfilling individual needs" (Lane 4), Victorian discourse on solitude became obsessed with *how* people judge, which is to say, not only with morals, but also with physical mechanisms in minds and bodies for discernment. In "Efficacy of Solitude," a newspaper piece from 1840, the author claims that eyes and mind cooperate better in solitude, sharpening powers of observation. Beyond this, the author also states that "when few objects are presented to our contemplation we seize them—we ruminate over them—we think, again and again, upon all the features they present to our examination; and we thus master the knowledge of the great book of mankind" (282).[25] Here, variety is distracting, and the route to true understanding is to work with small bits of data until each one is absorbed. Such a conception supports solitude as a mode of enhanced acumen, since it gives us greater control of stimuli than otherwise. But working against this valuation were perceptions about solitude as a force that would compromise thought, from statements that subjects' wisdom would suffer from their not being forced to account for variety in the world to fears of fixed ideas in distance, even clinical manias.

The threat of mental instability seemed a likely result, for some, of being estranged from shared convictions via states of solitude. Drawing on the work of George Combe, whose interest in phrenology extended to discussions of illness, one author claimed that solo figures are plagued by "an incessant round of imagining, deliberating, and judging—fruitlessly, unsatisfactorily. ... In this state, one is almost sure to become the victim of certain fixed ideas, approaching to the character of insanity" ("Solitude," 97).[26] In statements like these, which were not uncommon from the mid-nineteenth century onward, far from leading to clarity, solitude yields disordered thought to a pathological degree.

Though hardly linking remoteness to madness, a poem by the writer Walter Jerrold develops the notion that solitude means a deeply unsettling lack of girding. Taking its setting as the Strand, that "highway wont to pulse with man," it suggests that the London street incurs, beyond an identity loss, an actual loss of shape when empty: "Dark and alone! The luminous-pointed way / Envista'd, and above on either hand / The shadowy substance of the builded Strand / Lost in vague outline in the sombre grey" ("Alone in the Strand," ll. 11, 1-5).[27] Here, the Strand is a formed corridor, and yet it seems to evaporate, to lift up and away from the earth when no people are on it weight it. The impression is that a landmark gets its features circularly, from the masses that flock to note these very features in the first place, and that, without the heft of crowds and their broadly collective decisions, its "builded" nature can only make a faint impression on the lone viewer.

Against this outlook on the Strand, and providing a fitting close to my brief survey here, are the thoughts of "Aeneas Sage," who rejects reading London through derisive or mournful views of being alone together in crowds. While true, Sage writes in 1862, "that poets and philosophers inform us that a man may be as solitary in the Strand as in the desert, they refer to the painful feeling of solitude ... rather than to that habit of mind which seeks removal from the crowd, and finds its happiness alone" ("On Solitude," 473).[28] Stressing, then, that being alone does not have to mean the growth of amnesia of one's social self, Sage attempts to persuade readers that solitude and social investment can peaceably coincide, even while using martial language for how distance preps subjects for the trials of modern times: "the solitary habit of mind induces a certain stoicism and a moral hardihood, which are a man's best armour in the battle of life" (473).

Like Austen, Brontë, Gissing, and Dickens, Sage's proposition here is that distance can see subjects learning to seize the best outcomes from its inner medley of features, and to fashion strong solo styles that are always essentially social. On the score of human ties, Sage implies that a will to distance can help people secure connections—not many, but ones that count—that are strong through fluidity, including through the room for surprise that strong solitaries create via hungry observations of the figures and scenes around them. In this sense, Sage's "On Solitude" is a handy distillation of the claims of the authors I read, insisting on a clear distinction between being lonely and being alone, and in its faith that mindful distance can revitalize daily exchange, leading to new and exemplary versions of relationality.

Chapter Descriptions

Though the novels I discuss depict rich tapestries of distance, I highlight in each chapter to follow one main type of solitude that an author works to align with a primary social ill, first as a reflection of it and then as a partial antidote. Each author highlights a cultural problem by discussing alienation, so that the novels I address partly read as testimony to how troubling it can be to be estranged from various groups, affiliations, or social webs. Yet at the same time, in every case, solitude offers a pathway out, provided that it is used to build resilience, critical consciousness, and habits of compromise both mentally and on the ground.

In Austen's case, the problem she shows is genteel women not owning their time. In Brontë's, the ill to be remedied is how women are constrained in externalizing their wills by arranging and moving through space. For Gissing, the evil to be exposed is a notion of separate spheres that blocks women from claiming power through both public time and space and the money that attends, or should attend, their paid labor there. And with Dickens, what we see is

clear disdain for commercialism, but also an ambivalent take on women being justified, in their pervasive social estrangement, in deploying solo feints to get by in a competitive world.

In Chapter One, I take *Persuasion* as emblematic of the patterns I explore with the whole of this work. The novel fashions widening circles of socializing for Anne Elliot, circles through which Anne encounters notably different styles of distance that both she and the larger story constantly compare to her own. Because the text stresses a social problem of women's rule-bound time, I attend to what I call Anne's domestic solitude, including efforts to infuse contrived, obtrusive social rhythms with more personal, comfortable ones. Grounding my investigation in D.A. Miller's view of *Persuasion* as a rupture to Austen's style, I claim that the novel should be read through the question of tenable style, but specifically through the ethics of styles of solitude. For example, included in the broad range of solo styles that Anne ponders as a pastime is an idealized Romantic one, which Austen rejects as unfit for a dependent woman's context. Austen is quite clear, in fact, in showing that Anne's solo style—her own approach to managing and making the best of solitude—surpasses those, through measuredness, of nearly everyone she knows. And while several formal choices help Austen urge readers to compare Anne's distance to others', it is with *Persuasion*'s end that she fully glorifies Anne through an unusual formal choice: she reworks the marriage plot to show distance anchoring a rebirth of Anne's failed engagement as her old lover realizes how balanced her distance has taught her to be, and as she has this couple perform Anne's solo style *as* a couple, making them "alone together" in surprising married terms.

In Chapter Two, on *Villette*, I focus on female mobility as an externalized corollary to the concept of women's time, highlighting Brontë's depictions of how genteel women are constrained in their uses of space, which read as registers of desires. Clearly addressing power relations that

affect how different subjects know and experience solitude, Brontë probes spatial aloneness—physical separation from others—from the perspective of women's lives, including through received ideas about what women should and should not do within domestic zones. Lucy Snowe "steals" private ground in plain sight throughout *Villette*, coloring her alienation with clear assertions of choice, yet ones that, within a context of quiet introversion, come across as non-aggressive. Even in her role as narrator, Lucy sets up spatial gaps, urging readers to import another speaker into her place at key moments in her tale when she needs more self-protection. Like each author I study, then, Brontë uses formal techniques as well as content to ratify a protagonist's solitude. In her case, unlike with Austen, she invokes the marriage plot only to have it fall apart when Lucy's lover dies on a ship. Still, the total message remains that the basis of Lucy's appeal was her solo style itself; and, in turn, she uses the lessons of her time of care with Paul to craft care with unknown readers in an "alone together" arrangement, one that makes her give and take as she appeals to readers' hearts, yet which also lets her insist—as she does when she holds back—on some dose of unrepentant privacy or social withdrawal.

My third chapter shows Gissing's work in exposing financial aspects of women's solitude, including economic effects of rules for women's time and space. I call his focus in *The Odd Women* an "economics of solitude," one which turns its lens to middle-class, unmarried females. Through female poverty as well as through his treatment of the standard Victorian marriage plot, Gissing deeply ironizes women's estrangement from what he sees as a human right to distance: a right to seek out separation as an act of real self-care. In lieu of a union that is to occur between the New Woman Rhoda Nunn and a progressively-minded man, we are left with female connections, including Rhoda's "alone together" middle-class home life with a friend. Because this setup is largely fulfilling through the respect that each woman grants to the other's need to

withdraw, it reinforces the novel's support for elective time apart as a birthright for everyone, including women, whether single or not.

The final chapter of this project shows how Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* makes a rich and detailed case for aloneness as a mixed tonic and powerful anti-venom, given its visions of a world void of fruitful institutions, one in which it only makes sense that a person would craft solo schemes as a way to survive socially. Gathering threads from earlier ones, this final chapter clearly probes the politics of solitude as it studies Dickens's treatment of the value of solo tricks. From several angles, *Our Mutual Friend* supports "benign" solo plots as justified reactions to a mechanized social scene, one that works unceasingly to flatten out difference to known quantities in keeping with a cultural passion for profit through codified use. Where women are concerned, however, this work is finally schizophrenic, sympathizing with their estrangement in a competitive world, yet wanting to preserve an image of women as free from designs. Despite creating several smart and likable female solitaries, Dickens can only support a turn to sociable solo slyness when it is performed by a man, and a respectable one at that. Dickens further expresses doubts alongside his progressivism at the close of *Our Mutual Friend*, through an altered marriage plot that yields "alone together" ties. For while he stretches a married ideal to include more than just two, he also uses romantic love to corral female potential, lauding but domesticating admirable female solo styles.

Taken together, these points of focus that account for varied forms of regular solitude, from moments of self-division to genteel women biding their time, work as stages for unfolding writers' visions of solo experience as sustainably strengthening. Training themselves to extrapolate from tensions in solitude, strong solo figures learn to unpack complex circuits of social power that lend central norms their force. Starting by addressing norms that bear on their

own retreat, the most proactive solitaries use distance for peace, of course, and even to avoid conscious thought, yet always come back to embracing it as a tool for honing critique, as well as risk-controlled conduct that satisfies them while avoiding censure.

Austen, Brontë, Gissing, and Dickens vary in their treatments of distance mainly by pointing out different tensions within modernity's dense demands that, they argue, separation both reflects and can knock down to size. For Austen and Brontë, these conflicts revolve around a gendered private sphere and its rules for time and space, as women are expected to confine their ambitions within modest bounds. Gissing also clearly takes on domestic ideology, yet strongly condemns the *public* sphere for an ironic stagnancy, forcefully identifying the pains and struggles of single women as the concept of gendered realms clashes with demographic change. For Dickens, the terms of commercial culture are an overriding complaint, yet one about which his indignation cannot undo conservative doubts. For while he claims that a shallow world, in which aloneness as selfishness thrives, can and should be battled by a solitude of non-harmful tricks, he ultimately cannot back women as critical solo schemers, even as he represents their disenfranchisement as unjust.

Within the social problems they study, which they clearly represent through two sides of a coin of distance as these problems testify to a woeful communal lapse, but also to solitude as a site of coping skills and analysis, all of the authors featured here are fairly orthodox in their basic hopes for the home. They want to see the home as a shield from the social frictions they note, whether gendered double standards or other hypocrisies, such as people valuing newness, yet deploying reductive schema to compress plurality. However, these authors do avoid imbuing the home with purity, representing it as a space of internal paradox. Namely, they look to paradoxes of fruitful "alone together" formations: ones that seal strong solo acts, granting thoughtful

solitaries the rewards of caring ties while not scuttling or making pointless the very habits we like in them. Instead, such habits become a map for rich relationality, for unions colored with sensitive seeking, and for social—interactive, non-hostile—expressions of individual will.

---

[1] Sala, *Quite Alone*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1864.

[2] Percy Hetherington Fitzgerald, a drama critic and contributor to Dickens's *Household Words*, reveals in *Memories of Charles Dickens* that Andrew Halliday (also known as Andrew Halliday Duff) was the one to finish the manuscript of *Quite Alone* on Sala's behalf. As he tells it, productivity was always an issue for Sala in his collaborations with Dickens. See Fitzgerald, *Memories of Charles Dickens: With an Account of* "Household Words" *and* "All the Year Round" *and of the Contributors Thereto*. 1913. New York: ASM Press, 1973:

"After a series of failures to perform contracts, advances of cash never repaid, many 'leavings in the lurch,' the reckless being began to importune his friend to 'give him one more chance.' Had he not a splendid stirring novel, all but ready, full of adventure? Either wearied out or in a fit of good nature, Dickens gave way. ...
It went on its course for a good many months, beginning in February, 1864, and reached as far as September 10th. In the next number, however, we were greeted with this notice:—

'"Quite Alone."
'The continuation of this serial story is postponed unavoidably until this day fortnight.'

We who knew our Sala could easily read between the lines—no 'copy' and no power to write copy disgust—promises. ... However, the story was actually resumed. ... On November 12th it was concluded. Had the unhappy Sala, then, therefore redeemed his promise? Nothing of the kind. I believe he supplied not another line, and it is certain that Boz was compelled to call in the aid of a deft emergency man—Andrew Halliday—who in an incredibly short time contrived to finish off the tale, imitating the style and peculiarities of his friend—for such he was—with due success. A curious episode altogether" (258-59).

[3] Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

[4] Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Fielding, and Richardson*. London: Hogarth Press, 1957.

[5] Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*. London; New York: Verso, 2000.

[6] See Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) and Sally Mitchell, *The New Girl: Girls' Culture in England, 1880-1915* (New York: Columbia University

Press, 1995) for greater discussion of gender norms and loaded, partisan assumptions regarding the effects of fiction on women and women's ideal reading habits.

[7] Christopher Lane makes this point well when he writes that "the best" Victorian writers perceived that strict schema for solitude, despite the era's intense investment in all sorts of classifying conventions, would be "neither credible nor aesthetically interesting" (13). Lane, *Hatred & Civility: The Antisocial Life in Victorian England*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

[8] Coventry Patmore's "The Angel in the House" famously consolidates ideal Victorian views of femaleness into the figure of a gentle wife and domestic guiding spirit: a tender, attentive, self-sacrificing, ongoing model of moral conduct. See excerpts in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Victorian Age*. 8th Ed. Vol. E. Stephen Greenblatt, General Editor. New York: W.W. Norton (2006), 1586-7.

[9] Miriam Bailin, *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art of Being Ill.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

[10] "*Quite Alone*, by George Augustus Sala." *The Athanaeum* 1938 (Dec. 1864): 818.

[11] "Quite Alone," *All the Year Round* 11:251 (Feb. 1864): 2-3.

[12] "Ode to Solitude, " *Weekly Magazine* 20 (1773): 177.

[13] "A Dissertation Upon Solitude," *Town and Country Magazine* 1 (Feb. 1769): 79-80.

[14] "On Solitude and Society," *Museum or, The Literary and Historical Register* 2:35 (1747): 385-88.

[15] "Thoughts on Solitude," *Westminster Magazine* 32 (Nov. 1777): 578-83.

[16] S.T. Coleridge, "Fears in Solitude," *Poetical Register* 7 (Jan. 1808): 227-34.

[17] Juvenis, "On Solitude," *The Weekly Entertainer* 47 (March 1807): 161-66.

[18] Zimmermann, *Solitude*. Vol. II. London: T. Maiden, 1799.

[19] "Alone in the World," *Reynolds's Miscellany* 37:959 (1866): 298.

[20] Again, see *The Woman Reader 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) and *The New Girl: Girls' Culture in England, 1880-1915* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

[21] Rachel Ablow, *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.

[22] "Civility and Ceremony," *Bow Bells* 25:640 (Nov. 1876): 428.

[23] "Sociability," *Bow Bells* 9:209 (July 1868): 11.

[24] "Lucidity and Sociability," *Speaker* 18 (Nov. 1898): 641.

[25] "Efficacy of Solitude," *The Mirror* 36:1030 (Oct. 1840): 282.

[26] "Solitude," *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* 585 (April 1843): 97-8.

[27] Jerrold, "Alone in the Strand," *Speaker* 19 (April 1899): 398-99.

[28] Sage, "On Solitude," *Good Words* 3 (Dec. 1862): 472-78.

Chapter One:

The Time and Tempos of Being Alone: Domestic Solitude in *Persuasion*

Persuasion centers on the experience of the reserved Anne Elliott, who suffers a painful broken engagement years before the narrative starts, and who lives with a family who views her, painfully, as "only Anne" (Austen 5). Through the troubles that Anne has claiming, first, enriching connections with others, and second, authority at home, Austen explores emotional and structural aspects of female distance, yet hardly has her takeaway message be one of pity for this woman. For while Anne is ensconced in a setting that limits her agency, even perversely blocking free time while not granting true exchange when her presence is required, she crafts an impressive internal resilience. In fact, she embodies one of the novel's most distinctive and highest honors, which is to express composure and forward thinking in solitude, a task that many of its figures, male and female, clearly do not.

For D.A. Miller, despite the power of Anne's solo style, *Persuasion*'s own aesthetic style makes the text depressing and weak. In *Jane Austen, or the Secret of Style*, he writes that Austen's last finished novel actually betrays an ideal, accomplished brilliantly elsewhere by Austen, of a storytelling voice that speaks through a divine separation from historical personhood.[1] Miller applauds the "will to abstraction" that informs this heady ideal: this voice that, since it has no peer, always locates its perceptions in the realm of universals (38). And given changes to this voice and its assertiveness in *Persuasion*, he interprets the novel as sad, lacking the confidence of its peers as the narrator gives us glimpses of a constraining humanity.

Rejecting such an interpretation, my reading contends that the narrator's "fall" from an exceptional isolation constitutes a formal endorsement of the concerted everyday work that Anne

does to make the best of her average solitude. More than any other axis, a figure's "resources for solitude" (Austen 25) separates impressive action from naiveté in the text. This means that the novel should be read through characteristic styles, but specifically styles of distance and their ethical implications.

If we accept that a humanization of the narrator's role and tone validates being able to handle solitude emotionally, as well as use it critically for assessing disparate views, then we can read the narrator's style as a conscious renunciation of the dangers of abstraction, rather than a lapse in a cherished "will to abstraction" achieved elsewhere (Miller 38). For abstract perspectives, as we're shown, can make people skim over details; or, instead, run too far with subjective observations, a pattern that is a special risk of careless moments of solitude. *Persuasion* therefore theorizes healthy, responsible forms of abstraction hand in hand with healthy distance, where the latter prospect demands taking the time to query one's views and investigate foreign ones, stretching personal energies across intersubjective borders to read other people's positions with both empathy and depth.

As the narrative progresses, Anne encounters more and more people with unique responses to distance, from her sister Mary's annoyance to an ill friend's patient endurance. Anne also meets more folks who patently do not do an ethos of balancing frictions in distance, one that here means self-fulfillment triangulated with sympathy and an interest in getting along. Putting different styles of distance into more contact as it proceeds, *Persuasion* formally urges readers to echo the judging work that Anne models throughout. In other words, a key effect of Anne's widening social spheres is to encourage us to weigh solo styles against each other, and especially against Anne's own, which steadily proves to be the most sound.

Yet what does "sound" mean when we try to be as detailed as we can? If styles of distance are attitudes, total approaches beyond the bounds of a single temporal span, then more than anything, strong solo styles as *Persuasion* represents them avoid extravagant self-expansion, from self-pity to heady notions of dissolving cultural ties. As much as the novel shows aloneness to be a major source of pleasure when it offers a sense of lifting of external expectations, it never sanctions deep visions of escape from daily demands. In fact, through Anne, Austen refutes visions of Romantic distance in which agents, free to wander, spin the open vistas of nature into prospects of release from oppressive social schemes. In keeping with its interest in the ethics of abstracting, observing, and asserting opinions to others, *Persuasion* treats this solo model as cloistered and privileged, both, defining the most tenable distance through a constant striving for balance between internal satisfaction and social accountability.

Admitting that solitude always asserts some tension between the self and the world—between instincts and conditioned responses; between the desired and the compelled—Anne deploys her separation as a source of its own improvement, using it to sharpen ways of mediating competing impulses. With one aspect of distance being that it lets one's thoughts default to unprompted tracks, Anne will often get creative in prolonging unscripted states, determining how to stay "in her head " without incurring social scorn. However, she is always compelled, both for morality and for pleasure, to turn self-driven musing outward, mentally immersing herself in the goings-on around her and making social exchange a dedicated object of thought. Although she gains leeway for fluid thought by putting in time with social scripts, studying these very scripts is a daily practice, too, making her solitude, as she intends, a largely anthropological state.

Even among the text's other women, where selflessness is a gendered ideal, Anne is especially conscientious in constantly checking her needs against those of other people, and in

working to understand their motivations and grounding assumptions. Tied to the rules of what I call a dreary "domestic solitude," Anne rebels internally. Within expectations that genteel women should be guided by commitments to improving the tone of the home and the interactions within it, Anne lets her internal life run free in solitude. Or rather, she does to the extent that she co-opts, for private ends, the stilted, "hurry and wait" tempos of her average days at home, making time and its rerouting a main component of how she turns her mundane distance to valued ends.

But if Anne pushes against her context by appropriating time for what she wants to think about, then she does not contravene, but rather embodies especially strongly, "female" traits of empathy as she uses countless hours first to read, and then to compare, the aims and assumptions of those around her. This kind of dogged comparing work—of personal standards against common wisdom; of neighbors' perceptions against her own, to see what blind spots she may have—is often thankless in Anne's world. However, it proves its practical worth time and again across the text, as Anne is emboldened to intervene to smooth out tensions with family and friends, and as she functions as a potent mediator within her circle.[2]

From high Romantic theorizations, which are clearly a legacy, Austen largely redefines truly worthwhile solitude by comparing Anne, the comparer, to those who do distance in terms too blithe (and, of course, too fearfully). Though Anne is the most level-headed solitary in the text, beyond her, the kindly Crofts stand as another key example of embodied fruitful distance within *Persuasion*'s relational webs. As a pair, the Crofts are known to need few pleasures beyond the other. However, they sustain real interest in the social scenes around them, as well as leave room for difference between them, diverging in appreciable ways. This means that

they are "alone together" in a considered, positive sense, striking a balance between withdrawal and engagement with larger groups.

Due to this fact, Austen uses the Crofts to help Anne realize what it could mean to be in a couple, yet not renounce the practices that distinguish her. To this end, *Persuasion* does more than have its content reinforce the import of Anne's solo reflections, and does more than make formal choices that urge our comparing work specifically on the score of these. It also innovates formally, if subtly so, at its conclusion, calling the marriage plot into play not to resolve, but to extend, Anne's proactive approach to distance. Granting Anne a shared remoteness as her old lover asks to learn from the poise she forged in the fires of a daily solitude, the text gives Anne her own unique way of being jointly apart in love, and crafts, more broadly, a happy third way between aloneness as social transcendence and entrenchment in the subjective, from affect to unthinking instinct.

Representing being alone neither in terms of a gleeful expansion nor a tragic breakdown of self, Austen treats it as a site of learning to merge conflicting ideals, given how it already highlights tensions between first and second nature. However, as a realist work, *Persuasion* does not depict aloneness only in calm and soothing lights. Acknowledging that being alone can mean frustration, depression, and fear, and admitting the vagaries of a largely subjective state, the novel chooses to group such nuance under the issue of patterned response—of style; of what a subject creates from a given set of terms—and works to portray, through plot and form, more and less proactive ones. In the end, it puts the weight of marriage as an institution behind a healthy solo style as Anne and Wentworth join their lives in a communal yet uncommon union, one that will move around the world embodying critical consciousness and compassion as noble traits, and which sees them as earnest scholars of the commands under which others move.

Austen and Romantic Aloneness

After its release in 1818, *Persuasion* was lauded for differing from Gothic tales losing ground at the time to a developing realist aesthetic, with critics praising Austen's skill at "conform[ing] … to real life, as well in the incidents, as in the characters and descriptions" ("Art. V.-Northanger Abbey, and Persuasion.," 368).[3] Yet just as it differs from Gothic texts in its commitment to the real, *Persuasion* also makes a point to resist the temptations inherent in an ideal of solitude that looms large in Romantic lyric, an ideal of strolling and wide open vistas that aid in committed contemplation.

Although the Romantic lyric tradition was available to Austen, she chose not to have *Persuasion* evoke it as it already stood. Instead, this work recasts its conventions, giving us a heroine who may not always agree with shared views, social codes, or ascendant ideals, yet who does not spend much time imagining escaping their hold, or even their neutralization. Rather, Anne's response to the fact that solitude lets one's thoughts roam is to use this freedom to practice constant social scrutiny, probing points of relational conflict and underlying discrepancies in heavily circulating strains of cultural ideology.

Through Anne's disciplined habits of mind, Austen works to shift ideas about "free" thought in solitude, making it about problem-solving over the growth of abstract visions, and about sociable self-assertion over a quest, however complex, to (re)locate a precultural self. Taking to task what she perceives as a solitary style that that means sloughing off, or hoping to, adherence to dominant cultural codes, Austen confronts the politics of supporting such a stance. She exposes gendered rifts in ideals of achieving aloneness as a transcendent state of being, from inequalities in the ways that men and women can own their time to inequalities over space with

which to make distance physical, and even to differences in perceptions of the status of physical bodies, in notions of bodies' deepest sensations being real or stable enough to ground a process of seeking out truth.

Finding it both hopeless and reckless to think that one can flee social duty in a state of solitude, Anne, in her distance, does not attempt to block or sweep away an awareness of restrictive cultural schemes. Instead, what she wants in solitude is to analyze social contexts and specific other people, but to do so on "her own" time and through steady first-hand observing. Doing so means remaining calm amidst emotion and sensation, but, at the same time, honoring the favored tempos of her body, including of her patterns of thought. It means, in other words, finding balance—a compromise, a middle way—between the quickened time of sensation and the rushed yet stilted time of domestic socializing, the latter kind of which sees Anne compelled to be available, a given presence in common rooms, where she ends up waiting for visits and either ignored by family members or burdened by shallow talk with them.

Anne proves to be quite good at reclaiming domestic time, making both its empty stretches and its jarring stops and starts feel more continuous with how she runs and what she wants. Entailed in this retrofitting process is learning to manage moments of affect, as she does impressively. After she encounters Wentworth for the first time in almost eight years, she is caught in a surge of emotion: "They had met. They had been once more in the same room!" (Austen 40). However, by "reason[ing] with herself" and working to make her feelings "less," she pushes herself into balanced thought, away from possible flights of fancy (40). Elsewhere, and beyond her own nerves, Anne suggests that Captain Benwick try to feel poetry less, so as to avoid transportation to a risky "key of abstraction" (Miller 35). Captain Benwick is "shy," we're told, and readily "disposed to abstraction; but the engaging mildness of [Anne's] countenance,

and gentleness of her manners, soon had their effect; and Anne was well repaid the first trouble of exertion" (Austen 67). In this case, Anne's main concern is that since Benwick feels the draw of certain poems so powerfully, he views these as delivering unfiltered truths about the world. Hoping, then, that her new friend can keep his thoughts and energies more firmly grounded in measured expression and perceptions of rhythms of life, Anne ventures to state a wish that he does "not always read … poetry; and to say, that she thought it was the misfortune of poetry, to be seldom safely enjoyed by those who enjoyed it completely" (68).

A shared walk to Winthrop, replete with attempts to lose her own thinking in poetry, exemplifies the gap between how *Persuasion* understands Romantic lyric solitude and what solitude means to Anne, from its everyday structural terms to what it means, from her standpoint, for distance to be truly of gain. Considering that the group on this walk includes Wentworth and two single women, the lively and pretty Musgrove sisters, rather than struggle with jealousy, Anne decides to train her attention on enjoying the scenery. Specifically, she calls upon poems—"some few of the thousand poetical descriptions extant of autumn ... that season which has drawn from every poet, worthy of being read, some attempt at description, or some lines of feeling" (56)—to elevate nature's constancy over the emotional quirks of human relationality.

In theory, this tactic seems to promise keeping Anne's thoughts on a stable track, and yet, in practice, it rapidly fails. In practice, Anne cannot shut down, first, her emotional stake in the talk between Wentworth and Louisa Musgrove, and second, her interest in how social scripts can be recast for private use. Despite her fear that Wentworth has a growing fondness for Louisa, Anne admits that the younger woman has a clever, winning way with turning conventional forms around, managing to talk about love and flirt through the patter of "mere lively chat, such as any young persons … might fall into" (Austen 56). In the end, then, the day's grand beauty cannot

compete with very present, very "mere" relational chat; Anne *must* listen, and she does, needing to know how things transpire between an old love and someone new, but also being highly attuned to the room for personal aims that can be won through shrewd expression within the bounds or planes of norms.

Yet whereas Anne is keen to note and gather space for the private here, the close of this scene reveals how distance as intent self-reference is an awkward, ill-fitting mantle, so that it necessarily falters as a mode of authority. When everyone convenes once more, Anne feels extremely relieved to give up her efforts at self-contained distance and to settle into a place at the edges of the group, enjoying the "solitude and silence which only numbers could give" (60). In one sense, this claim suggests a passive familiarity with social margins, yet in another, it also suggests an active balancing act achieved, a way of musing below the radar while being kept honest by her surroundings, aware enough of other people not to fall into a grave error of overstretching her feelings and thoughts. Though Anne pursues "lone" solitude here, she gives up what she initially tries, the atomized agentic model embodied by the well-known poets whose words she had hoped to find confidence in. And so, with self-referential distance failing to match both her typical prospects and her stylistic priorities, it constitutes a dead end for Anne, as well as for the text as a whole.

Solitude, Space, and Gender

Beyond the truth that the horizons of an idealized Romantic figure are not a fitting template for Anne, a further truth of the Winthrop scene is that, even among her neighbors, Anne cannot count on commanding space as a tool of self-assertion. This fact especially holds at home, including through her father's treatment of a cherished book on the peerage, one that sees

him sourly doubt that he will ever have to find space for inscribing Anne's married name on the Elliot family page. As the shared walk will confirm, Anne's typical solitude manifests as being unnoticed in some kind of larger group, or, conversely, as being noticed solely according to others' whims. Commonly found tucked away in corners of peopled domestic space, Anne is largely open eyes, a wallflower or other fixture who is almost always observing. Ironically, though, since so few people ever wonder about Anne's volition, while she is under-visible, she is often interrupted, making guaranteed private space an elusive goal for her.

Many scenes across *Persuasion* confront the issue of women's trouble, especially if they are dependent, with gaining bodily withdrawal. In her domestic solitude, structured by notions of separate spheres that govern how women should spend their time and enforce that women should be largely at home, yet "publicly" so, available as an aid to others, Anne does not take many risks in seeking out swaths of private space. In just one instance among many in which she yearns for such ground, however, Anne is forced to let her cousin accompany her on a short walk home, a walk that she desperately wants to use to think through Wentworth's recent acts. As the narrator describes to us, she "would have been particularly obliged to her cousin, if he would have walked by her side all the way to Camden-place, without saying a word. She had never found it so difficult to listen to him ... she could not be quite herself" (118).

Despite intense exasperation, Anne makes an energized effort to calm down and seem collected as she concedes both to her cousin's masculine will and gendered outlook. Under compulsion to be "herself," but really only *like* herself, which means acting specifically in ways that others find familiar, Anne intuits that her cousin expects her to be glad he is there—and, in turn, that he expects her sense of safety to keep her cohesive, reassuringly unaffected by external

contingencies. Thus, Anne digs deep into patience to suppress her agitation, and does so enough that she raises no red flags to her selfish cohort.

As it turns out, this cousin, William, has a plan to marry Anne for ownership of Kellynch, a plan that speaks to male control over financially and politically valuable material space. This plan sheds light on several of Anne's challenging exchanges with him, in which she accepts his company even despite a "suffering spirit" (126). But even before we understand that William wants to own Anne's home, we know that he exploits his maleness, imposing on Anne without incurring charges of invasion or rudeness. Instead, it is she who must frame her behavior and accept his spatial incursions through a politeness expected of women, a fact that testifies to a context of gendered societal double ideals.

Because Anne lives in a range of places once Kellynch is rented out, critics have called her a kind of roamer, akin, ironically, to a traditional wanderer in Romantic poems. As John Pikoulis has observed, Anne never "resides in ... one place for long" after the Crofts take a lease on Kellynch; and for him, this makes her a rover, constituting "that most potent" of Romantic lyric figures (Pikoulis 25, 24).[4] However, if Anne is meant to evoke the figure of a Romantic stroller, then she is meant to give it a twist, not actually being similar to a freely roving agent. Restricting her movement, for example, is the fact that she must travel at other people's behest: a genteel woman, yet one without money, she cannot initiate plans, but can only journey from home when others involve her in their own. Thus, even as *Persuasion* seems to grant Anne "remarkable freedom" for lengthy voyaging (Sodeman 798),[5] the novel foregrounds her core dependence, as well as how she is constrained *within* the spaces of different homes, lacking daily access to approved domestic privacy. In short, if Anne's geographical orbit widens as her story unfolds, then Austen marks a difference between mobility from village to village and that

between and inside domiciles. And if Anne comes to enjoy the former type of leeway in physical space, then she still lacks what she wants of the latter, making reliable solo zones a chimera from day to day.

Just as the novel scorns, through Anne, patterns of domestic confinement and trivial duties imposed on women, it tackles assumptions that genteel women should not suffer, let alone crave, being physically solitary. Even the kindly Admiral Croft, one of the story's most generous souls, has a hard time understanding how young a woman might want solitude. For example, at one point he says of Wentworth, who is his brother-in-law, "I wish Frederick would spread a little more canvas and bring us home one of these young ladies to Kellynch. Then, there would always be company for them" (Austen 62). As for Anne, beyond cousin William, even the women in her circle can show concern in all the wrong ways, saying over-solicitously that she looks ill and needs attending when in reality, all she wants is time and space without distractions: "Would they only have gone away, and left her in the quiet possession of that room, it would have been her cure" (158).

In one key instance of her neighbors completely failing to think that Anne might want less company and not more, Anne badly needs to get centered thanks to a secret letter from Wentworth, a letter written moments before while their friends were occupied. "Nearly turning his back on them all," Wentworth peels away from the group to write a note to Captain Benwick, after which he quickly writes a declaration of love to Anne (153). Although Wentworth is clever here, Anne must arguably be more so. In contrast to his autonomy, his freedom to sequester himself, Anne must plot to read her treasure, taking advantage of Mrs. Musgrove's attention to her hostess's table. Ironically, such feminized trappings of domesticity come to the rescue, offering Anne a needed measure of protection from curious minds. Yet Anne's solo window is

small, of course, and when more people enter the room, she is once again required to seem engaged and perform solo scripts, scripts that assume that she, unlike Wentworth, has no private priority that should override socializing, gleaning wisdom from other people, or exercising a soft female presence for the benefit of a whole.

If Anne's encounters with solo space are clearly shaped or informed by gender, then so are those of her two sisters, despite the fact that in many ways, they are radically different from her. In Mary's case, while she does not often find herself without company, when she does, hers is the distance of the bored mistress of a big house. As far as Mary's vocal wishes not to be frequently housebound go, *Persuasion* readily understands these, and grants Mary some empathy. However, because her total stance in solitude is selfish and cross, the novel takes her sharply to task for getting restless at home so quickly, instantly feeling massive pique when her husband goes somewhere without her.

One of the novel's biggest insults, lobbed early on at Mary, is that a person cannot endure or has "no resources for" solitude (25). But since it gives Mary's feelings some grounding in justified anger at the concept of separate spheres, her moments of distance, though different from Anne's, further speak to the text's disenchantment with rules about women's spatial horizons, and, of course, about corollary rules surrounding domestic time. As an upper-class mother and wife, Mary is expected to be satisfied by running her home and by the presence of her children. There is no doubt that *Persuasion* views such expectations as overly glib. However, just as obviously, it situates Mary's style of aloneness as a serious problem, too, since Mary is primed, in being self-centered, to get myopic in solitude, "fancying herself neglected" rather than being alone neutrally, let alone empoweringly (25).

In light of this lack of resilience in Mary, the narration holds back fairly little in its annoyance with her behavior. However, towards Elizabeth, it has a bit more tolerance, though tempered by its disapproval of her graceless treatment of Anne. Whereas Mary's sullenness is portrayed as largely foolish, Elizabeth's is more understood, since she is trapped in a stressful limbo, waiting with ever-dwindling options for an appropriate marriage suit. Specifically, the narrator notes the spatial cloisteredness of her days, the dulling "sameness" that lingers beneath the "elegance" on display at Kellynch (7). Through repetition of the word "and," as well as of the word "thirteen," the narrator crafts a sense of dullness in Elizabeth's daily environs: "Thirteen years had seen her mistress of Kellynch Hall … For thirteen years she had been doing the honours, and laying down the domestic law at home, and leading the way to the chaise and four" (7). These lines, plus a passage that gives an account of a romantic disappointment, offer readers a textured backdrop for Elizabeth's discontent. And yet, as with Mary, *Persuasion* concludes that this woman cannot be absolved of a sadly non-proactive stance of self-pity in her estrangement, developing neither "utility abroad" nor "accomplishments" at home (7). Thus, while she has had real trials, Elizabeth is negligent, never attempting to turn solo time to any kind of responsible use.

Domestic Life and the Pace of Aloneness: Solitude and Loose, Slow Time

Given the largely dulling rhythms of Kellynch for the young women there, one of the greatest boons to Anne of a state of solitude is that, while she cannot carve out sanctioned solitary space, she can use it for hidden battle with contrived social *time*, nurturing internal tempos that are freer and more familiar, looser and more methodical. Psychologist Ester Schaler Buchholz insists that people need time alone to nurture habits of self-regulation, ones that

depend specifically on letting personal tempos rule. To Buchholz, aloneness lets minds and bodies revert to their ideal rhythms whenever psychic space gets crowded by external stimuli. The prominence that she places, then, on the *time* of solitude, and on the helpful qualities of tuning experience to chosen speeds, is highly apt to Anne's situation, with Anne connecting with private rhythms as an everyday matter of course, defusing the waiting and pointlessness that colors much of her time at home with currents of deliberately slow reflection and curiosity.[6]

A huge source of relief for Anne, amidst the strictures of time at home as well as of social time more broadly, is being able to let "her attention take its natural course" (Austen 43). As simple as this phrase may sound, the pleasure behind it is huge for Anne, a weight lifted off her psyche as she lets intuitive rhythms dominate over harsh social ones. Anne's relief is palpable when she can break up polite discourse with internal self-direction. In this way, while her distance itself can generate monotony, when compared to the static rhythms or insistence of social claims involved in mannered dialogue, having her reflections run on no externally guided track is a greatly welcome source of newness, power, and surprise.

But if having room for slow contemplation is a prize of distance for Anne, then what techniques does she employ to gain as much of this time as she can? How does she infuse social time with a less forced, more hospitable pace? Across the text, she has different techniques for either productively slowing down time or making slow time at home productive, from being a person who *takes* the time to notice details in a scene to being skilled at bringing together trains of thought she has had to let drop. These are tactics that help Anne appropriate the waiting game of genteel domesticity. However, even more than these, Anne buys time for the unseen play of unique thoughts and mental leaps by playing with common social scripts, so that she evokes a proper façade while sustaining shadow circuits of attention under the skin.

One example of Anne's success at buying time specifically through, and not despite, social codes at work entails gaining a flash of distance through a brief and subtle postponement of a particular obligation. Prioritizing one social duty over another in circulation, she can slyly demote the latter without incurring obvious blame. We see this type of move in action at a party at Lady Dalrymple's, when Anne gets a chance to speak to Wentworth out of her father's and sister's hearing. Without being physically near her family, Anne has leeway for making choices, and elects to uphold one norm, the courtesy required of one at a formal gathering, over another, which is to defer to her elder relatives. With these relatives "in the background" and unaware of their expressions, Anne can balance dictates with instinct, gaining a fleeting moment of freedom—a relativized, but sincerely felt freedom—and an impression of being able to do what "she believed right to be done" (120).

Admittedly, the argument that when a person relegates without rejecting a social claim, she opens up space for social distance, might seem to put too fine a point on a moment of Anne's reserve not winning the day for once. Yet all throughout, we see in *Persuasion* faith that gaps in social control can be discovered by those who search, including through a triaging of norms, through meeting given expectations to mask pushing other to a back burner. The tone of this faith and its endurance means that the novel does aver that personal power can derive from crafting new yet safe agendas for fulfilling obligations that cannot be met together, agendas that satisfy personal needs while also covering up this fact, the main event of accommodation overriding all other effects.

Of course, important to her success at transforming the monitored time of a sheltered woman's days is that Anne simply holds herself to high standards in her reflections, forcing herself to be careful, calm, and not to rush to speedy judgments. Consciously staving off self-

expansion as a possible course in distance, she urges herself to avoid quick conclusions, making her instincts a topic of study and putting her "assumptions on trial," as Caroline Levine has said of nineteenth-century plots of suspense urging readers to self-examine and resist fast reasoning (88).[7]

When Anne has limited information about a given topic or problem, she resists going forth with it, even if doing so means a trial in waiting for details to trickle in. For example, regarding William and his possible interest in her, Anne refrains from speculating because of a want of verified facts. Lady Russell, sure that William wants to pursue her quiet friend, says to Anne that "time will explain," by which she means that coming days will bear out her prophecy. Anne, however, takes this wording as a reminder to wait for proof, and "after a little observation," tamps down her inquisitiveness, admitting that, until she knows more, "she [can] determine nothing" (97).

Beyond such acts of examining and working to control her temptations, Anne usefully mediates other peoples' desires as well. When those around her need advice, they seek Anne out as a solo sage, even as they fail to note how they compound her separateness, ignoring her until a crisis and then imposing freely on her. Wanting Anne to reason with her temperamental sister Mary, one of the young Musgroves says, "I wish any body could give Mary a hint that it would be a great deal better if she were not so very tenacious." Easily grasping this woman's thrust, Anne is reluctant to cross Mary; still, she does step into the fray by modeling equanimity: "She could do little more than listen patiently, soften every grievance, and ... give them all hints of the forbearance necessary between such near neighbors" (31).

A later discussion of Anne as judge occurs when Mary rues that Anne was not in attendance at a party, and therefore cannot resolve which of the women there Wentworth

preferred. Anne, of course, gives silent thanks that she was not there to act as an "umpire," given how challenging it would be to see Wentworth absorbed in another (52). But as the word "umpire" suggests, Anne perceives that others view her, thanks to her calm and watchful demeanor, as an ideal figure to weigh contending outcomes and outlooks.

Though Anne is kind enough not to mind when others praise her just when they need her, the narrating figure clearly bristles at such neighbors' selfishness. In this anger, the narrating voice and Anne's do not exactly comport; however, by way of a reasoning process that often gets its cues from Anne, the storyteller does seem to borrow from Anne's patterns of consciousness. In fact, through leaning so much toward Anne, the narrator loses—or better said, yields—a measure of singularity, including some of the seamless insight showcased by free indirect discourse.

While certain studies view the narrator's echoes of or concessions to Anne in terms of crude or strangely exposed double motives in the narration, my reading asks us to view overlaps between Anne's situated perspective and the narrator's placeless one as a purposeful technique of authorizing Anne's solo style. If there are shifts in certainty or swagger in the narrator's tone, then what if we attribute this fact to this figure putting Anne's habits of cautious judging to the test? To Thomas Wolfe, who reads *Persuasion* through an overwhelming concern with Anne's interiority, when the novel offers readers sizable shares of conversation, "we find that … it is not dialogue so much as mere 'talking' that exists for the sake of supplying Anne with material for feeling" (689).[8] And D.A. Miller accuses the work of unforgivable blemishes as the narrator claims, then loses, a characteristic confidence (75-76). In contrast to this type of reading, I suggest that given *Persuasion*'s central concern with influence, with its necessity, stakes, and effects, it stands to reason to construe the storyteller's uneven voice through an emergent,

working effort to endorse Anne's even one, making any intensive dips into Anne's habits of seeing formal signs of thematic endorsements of her careful movements of mind.

In fact, the narrator works at times to entertain opposing positions, a hallmark of Anne's solo style and character more generally. One example of such a time comes from a scene in which Mrs. Musgrove lavishes praise, uncritically, on her son, who died years ago. Even putting aside the fact that she is blind to his fecklessness, her manner registers as unseemly compared to Anne's subdued conduct, and even against her physical frame: she has big feelings on a big body, and, in terms of the narrator's view, a disregard for self-control that is too much for good taste to bear. Instinctively annoyed by her, the narrator mocks this expressive woman, yet soon admits the obvious fact that there is no essential link between people's size and what they can feel. Doing so tempers some of the sting of the earlier, dogmatic stance. Thus, although the "no" comes back—no; the narrator cannot stand the spectacle Mrs. Musgrove is making—the language involved is more objective, stating that whether "fair or not fair, there are unbecoming conjunctions ... which taste cannot tolerate … which ridicule will seize" (Austen 46). With this final evaluation, the narrator returns to instinct after displaying a pattern of thought that is very much like Anne's. However, there has been evident work to step away from a knee-jerk response, as well as a faint unsettling of "taste" because it requires no grounding in reason.

Exposing its own biases, the narration opens itself to judgment, implicating its influence with formal patterns that stress, through contrast, Anne's commitment to slow, calm thought.[9] In light of their financial straits, when members of the Elliot family talk of renting out Kellynch, Lady Russell begrudges the need, for while she is usually "rational," she has an unexamined attachment to "rank and consequence" (9). Not surprisingly, Anne, in contrast, draws on more than personal leanings when determining what to do. Pushing back against impulses as a poor

frame for a plan, Anne makes a case for "vigorous measures, a more complete reformation, a quicker release from debt, a much higher tone of indifference for every thing but justice and equity" (9). At least compared to her usual ways, in this special instance, Anne seems aggressive. Yet her problem-solving approach is characteristically slow: not sluggish, of course, but rather unhurried in the name of inclusive surveys.

The very heart of Anne's solo style entails patiently, even recursively, squaring others' needs and her own, rather than permitting herself a soothing, if fleeting, dismissal of them. Although he seems to privilege the flash of amnesiac solitude, in a comment that speaks indirectly to resistance to rushed judgments (and, more broadly, to social rhythms that are once impatient and stale), Jeff Nunokawa finds in Austen, both in *Persuasion* and other texts, "efforts to stop the long conversation of society that takes up so much of everybody's time ... or to retreat from it for a while, or to do both" (838).[10] As Nunokawa reads aloneness in nineteenth-century realist works, figures pay lip service to norms while pursuing other mandates, gaining "distance from … vigilance" in a range of passing ways (844-45). This is what he, adopting a term from sociologist Erving Goffman, calls practices of "awayness," practices by which subjects seize options for *de facto* retreat while technically being involved in social situations. When we describe awayness as such, much of what Anne says and does seems to fall within its scope. But overall, awayness suggests social escape while in plain sight, as well as escapes which neutralize or preclude transactional tasks, such as propping up a book to hide a nap in a library, or engaging with a baby as a way out of adult exchange.

When we study Anne's style of distance, especially in terms of its speed, we see that an apt description for it comes from psychological theory, such as that which views solitude as a crucial state of mind for sifting data into patterns. The psychologist Anthony Storr tells us that

cognitive integration, the process by which pieces of knowledge come together into a whole, happens even when we sleep, so that "some kind of scanning … process" is occurring during this time (22).[11] In fact, for Storr, deep thinking itself means "scanning … possibilities," as well as taking the time to forge "links between formerly disparate entities" (28, 199). Noting what Anne does in distance, it seems clear that this description of reflection fits her well; she is a classic scanner of options, and, in comparing readings of facts, seeks integration as much as she can. When she considers the solo style of her friend Mrs. Smith, for example, she steadily "watch[es]—observe[s]—reflect[s]," and, in seeing that neither of two working theories will suffice (one, that her friend is all resolution; the other, that she is all resignation), she blends them into a third idea, deciding that Mrs. Smith possesses the gift of an "elastic" mind (Austen 102).

Of course, as I have been claiming throughout, Anne conveys, to those who will see, that her own mind is "elastic" by infusing everyday time, which for her means domestic time, with the patterns of an unrushed, intensely comparative process of thought. It is the depth of this work in Anne that makes her musing so distinctive: distinctive enough that, in her hands, contrasts almost always lead to fresh perspectives or frames of reference. In the scene where Anne first meets Captain Benwick and the Harvilles, a stream of comparisons flows: Anne says Harville looks older than Wentworth; that Benwick comes across as short when "compared with either" man; that Mrs. Harville seems "less polished" than her accomplished husband (yet still appears to be good and kind), and that although Harville's manners are not quite at Wentworth's levels, he is still a "gentleman" (65). This moment is rife with analogies, and through them, Anne notes details without relying on binary groupings such as "common" versus "genteel" or even the concepts of "young" and "old," since she says that worldliness age makes men act older

than many women who out-age them by the clock. Moreover, when Anne sees the Harvilles' home and spies their mixture of furniture, the "common necessaries ... contrasted with some few articles of a rare species of wood … and with something curious and valuable from all the distant countries Captain Harville had visited," she refrains from reading the scene through a frame of jumbledness. Instead, she understands that the view, rather than having reducible parts, must be taken as a unit, one that delights her for how it merges "domestic happiness" with Harville's work (66).

Frequently, when her state of mind threatens to fall into one main track, Anne consciously turns to aloneness as a site of intense comparing. Sometimes, this turn means deploying distance and its leeway for self-driven thought to compare her present condition to aspects of the future or past, taking comfort in the fact that "the present will become the past" (Rohrbach 743).[12] And other times, she finds fulfillment in comparing her current self to a wiser alternate self, producing ironic self-assessments that help keep her in line: "Anne could not but be amused at the idea of her coming to Lyme, to preach patience and resignation to a young man whom she had never seen before; nor could she help fearing ... she had been eloquent on a point in which her own conduct would ill bear examination" (Austen 68).

One last example of Anne's commitment to measured verdicts and slowly-formed views comes from a scene in which she scans another home's interior, a fitting stage for the unhurried thought with which, I've argued, she co-opts the boredom of a traditional domestic sphere. Viewing the furnishings at the Musgroves', Anne cannot help but notice the clash between older and newer objects, the "flower-stands and little tables" scattered by the Musgrove sisters against the backdrop of aged wainscoting and portraits of the family forebears (27). Rather than scoff at this tangled view, which is much more ostentatious than the Harvilles' eccentric home, Anne

diffuses her surprise through the figures on the walls, wondering what these people would think "of such an overthrow of all order" (27). In the pause that this move opens up between observing and leveling scorn, thoughts that are kinder to the Musgroves have a chance to filter in. In this way, though put off by the room, finding it an aesthetic jolt, Anne avoids a mocking stance as a common default response, taking a notable extra beat to sketch a few lines of a gentler, still truthful, overview of the scene at hand.[13]

A Society of Solitaries

If Austen found, as she wrote in a letter, that Anne was "almost too good" for her, then she is not without all flaws, as her aloneness itself reveals (*Persuasion* 190). After all, she does have fun envisioning bygone Musgrove folks reacting to their descendants' hopes to seem trendy with their décor. Still, it would be hard to doubt that Anne is *Persuasion*'s moral ideal.

Consistently, Anne strives to live as fairly and free from snap assessments as she possibly can. Usually, she has success, and all throughout, the story links her status as a moral model to strong uses of solitude, ones that make her, of all the varied solo figures in its purview, the one who is the most proactive, seeing aloneness as a key means of critique and compromise, and who dips the least into indulgent solo satisfactions, from gossiping to petulance to trying to seal off the social world for a fleeting, transcendent time.

Despite their vastly different levels of expressed maturity, what most distinguish Anne from her sisters are their levels of tolerance for, and ways of acting in, solitude. While Anne can range from being patient with separation to craving more, Mary, for her part, frames all distance as others' failure to keep her involved. Given her meta flaw of dreading and fearing solitude, many of her worst-behaved moments come in the wake of being alone. But if it tracks and

knows the source of much of Mary's bad behavior, then *Persuasion* cannot forgive, for even more than being stubborn as a general characteristic, not being able to be alone without reverting to one's worst self is the novel's crystallization of a rigid response to the world.

Heedlessly letting her passions expand, Mary uses remoteness poorly, even unethically, Austen would say, taking advantage of its tensions between collective and personal views to privilege her instinctive sense that others should focus more on her. Yet as her thorough portrayal reveals, though Anne's response to being alone is the best that readers could follow, it does go untested with respect to other paths. Beyond the examples of her sisters, as Anne moves away from Kellynch, she comes across person after person who exhibits a characteristic solitary style or stance.

No criticism about Anne's travels probes how her expanding journeys make her encounter otherness specifically tied to *solitude*. The various solo styles she observes and the different habits they foster all have their distinguishing features, some of which are starkly at odds: compare Benwick's wounded withdrawal into the landscapes of Scott and Byron to Captain Harville's "usefulness" when an injury flares up again; or Mary's sulkiness to the resilience of the stoic Mrs. Smith (66). Through *Persuasion*'s very structure, its plotlines and its parallelisms, readers are asked to weigh such styles over and against each another: Anne's visit to Mrs. Smith recalls Mary's feigned illnesses, while Harville and Benwick are close friends who live together in the same home.

Much like Anne's and Mrs. Smith's, Harville's daily approach in distance exudes impressive buoyancy. Although he has been injured in war, rather than use the fact of this to retreat into fantasy or otherwise shut out the world, he looks for ways to help his family, even in his recreation. "His lameness prevented him from taking much exercise," the narrator states,

"but ... he drew, he varnished, he carpentered, he glued; he made toys for the children, he fashioned new netting-needles and pins with improvements, and if everything else was done, sat down to his large fishing-net at the corner of the room" (66). Doing so, Harville is self-reliant without ignoring those around him, and finds a way to balance his leanings with interests with more shareable yields.

In contrast to Harville's attitude, Benwick's relation to being apart opposes the former man's common sense. Where Harville is hands-on, he is dreamy, not in his professional life, but in his personal concerns, now overshadowed by the death of Harville's sister, whom he was to marry. While Harville is "no reader" himself, Benwick has clear "taste in reading," a taste that combines in a nexus of loss, natural shyness, and immersion in allusive, impassioned texts to put him at a distance from others in terms of common emotional ground (67). Benwick, then, is in fact *Persuasion*'s most authentic Romantic rover, traveling to imaginative realms and states of affect his friends cannot match.

Given the novel's refashioning of Romantic solitude, we might expect to see Benwick cast in a partly unflattering light. But while it does poke fun at him, positioning him as a man of the heart and only erratically of the head, on the whole, *Persuasion* views his solitude as more unworldly than narcissistic or dangerous, perhaps because, while he turns to withdrawal to assuage his personal hurts, Benwick never uses it to privilege his consciousness over others'. Thus, while Austen does suggest that he could be more proactive, she does not reproach him like she does Mary, charging him with naiveté at worst. This is why Anne, though younger in years, can claim "seniority of mind," and this is why she can counsel Benwick on deploying his solitude well: by turning his focus away from texts that glorify intense events and toward memoirs "of characters of worth" who struggle to weather life's highs and lows (68).

As pensive as Benwick, yet not as inclined to abstract conceptualizing, Wentworth is, for much of the story, a work in progress in solitude. Viewing Anne's friend Lady Russell as an enemy for the advice that led Anne to reject his proposal, he behaves more like this woman than he would care to admit, noting other people's feelings, yet without always delving deeply into their motives or perspectives.[14] In short, Wentworth and Lady Russell are smart without being as open-minded as their intellects hint they could be. Because the latter often fails to prove her "virtues ... against others," these merits have gone inflexible, just as Wentworth often conveys an overly "decided temper" (Pikoulis 24; Austen 41). And not surprisingly, Austen suggests that such traits have a relationship to a lack of reflective distance—suggests, that is, that both Lady Russell and the sometimes blustery Wentworth should use distance for the "elastic" thought that each is capable of (Austen 102).

In the end, Wentworth learns to embrace Anne's ethos of finding balance between trying to guide others' views and being open to having hers guided, calling her "the loveliest medium of fortitude and gentleness" (161). Yet notably, to get to this point, it takes more pensive solitude than Wentworth has embraced thus far. It takes, as he admits to Anne, "the leisure for reflection" that comes in the wake of a rupturing incident, Louisa Musgrove's fall at Lyme, to bring him to a full acceptance of the "excellence" of Anne's mind, that "perfect excellence ... with which Louisa's could bear so ill a comparison" (161). Through Louisa's injury, the violence of which essentially breaks the force of his encrusted ideas, Wentworth shakes his anger at Anne and takes the time to interrogate the contrasts that have been brewing for weeks between her and the vibrant girl. Viewing qualities of the two from several sides and with tamed passions, he learns at Lyme "to distinguish between … the darings of heedlessness and the resolution of a collected

mind. There, he had seen every thing to exalt in his estimation the woman he had lost, and there begun to deplore the pride, the folly, the madness of resentment" (161).

Seeing how Wentworth comes to admire Anne's focus in solo modes, it only fits that the couple's reunion involves a somewhat desperate search for a shared solitude in which they can focus on each other. In many ways, the reunion scene between the pair is singular. Not least, though, is its sheer abundance of overlapped public and private layers, from Wentworth's opening act of withdrawal that lets him write a letter to Anne (and eavesdrop on her conversation under cover of work at a desk that goes unhindered in a full room),[15] to the lovers' readings of each other's faces in Union Street, and finally, to their private discussion in the midst of a public park. With these moments of privacy against backdrops of busyness, it seems as though Austen, in granting the pair not one such moment, but many of them—a change from her original ending[16]—does not simply want to preserve realism or heighten narrative tension, but also to implant the value of solitude through repetition, including the patience and empathy that she connects to its highest use.

In *Persuasion*'s original ending, Anne and Wentworth do not have to struggle for a moment of separation. Rather, they are gifted with one as they suddenly find themselves together in the Crofts' sitting room. But even though Austen was unhappy with the way this ending turned out, it does make sense that her first reaction was to stage a reunion scene at the home of the generous Crofts. This is because the older couple, in addition to being kind, offers a way for the younger lovers to envision blending marriage with a sociable withdrawal, creating a union that's strengthened by distance without becoming insular.

Repeatedly, the Crofts are described as doing what Anne and Wentworth do in the novel's revised closing scenes: as crafting little zones of aloneness whatever their surroundings are,

making them alone, yet joined; joined, yet lone, distinct and distinctive. Together in terms of being close, they are also independent in terms of their closeness functioning, though always "at the least social cost" (Nunokawa 840), in the register of preferred tempos and priorities. "The Crofts knew as many people in Bath as they wished for," the narrator states, "[but] they brought with them their country habit of almost always being together. … They walked along in happy independence" (Austen 111).

In light of this "happy independence" that is an interdependence, too, it is hardly an accident that Anne and Wentworth mirror the Crofts. Nor is it random that we get hints that Anne will likely join Wentworth at sea—after all, Mrs. Croft did the same, having grown restless without her husband while he was away on trips. Such restlessness might tempt us to think that Mrs. Croft devolved, for a time, into Mary's want of grit, yet Austen invests her with such self-reliance, this is clearly not the case. Far from having broken down in the absence of her husband, she wanted to join him to be "herself," since she and he are so attuned that any question of comfortable rhythms has to account for the deeply embedded patterns of their relationship. This said, the pair does not see the world in completely identical terms. They often make different judgment calls, expressed through caring but firm mechanisms, such as when Mrs. Croft takes the reins to repair their carriage's course. Through this type of friendly move, the Crofts represent a noble model of interaction in one more sense: this is in how they will disagree, yet stay entwined emotionally, cheerfully handling particularity in and of the other one. Unlike Anne and Wentworth's bond when they first fall in love, a time when they compare to the Crofts on the level of affection ("With the exception, perhaps, of Admiral and Mrs. Croft, there could have been no two hearts so open, no tastes so similar, no feelings so in unison, no countenances so beloved" [42]), a main difference between the pairs is that the younger's initial sameness was

fragile because untested, whereas the Crofts' harmony is grounded in years of giving and taking thoughtful suggestions and corrections.

Insofar as they finally forge an understanding like the Crofts', Anne and Wentworth are left on firm ground, conceptually speaking, at novel's end. In one sense, though, the couple drifts, with Austen choosing not to depict a marital home "grounded spatially" (Sodeman 791), thus rewarding Anne with adventure, as well as continuing to recast Romantic solo mobility. But while they are not be spatially centered, Anne and Wentworth do get ensconced in a stable form of alliance, a sensitive relationship in which the Wentworth of stubborn claims—"I hate to hear of women on board" (Austen 46)—is replaced by one who learns to balance subjective and social concerns, particularities and generalities, one distinct outlook with another.

In this way, one element of how Anne's movement from Kellynch to Uppercross and Lyme and Bath helps prepare her for new horizons is to give her more tools for crafting a new type of fruitful distance: a type of "alone together" arrangement that she fashions and shares with a spouse. Through this shift in her circumstances, *Persuasion* gives a final push in its support of mindful withdrawal as a source of mature agency. Ensconcing Anne's virtues specifically as a model agent of solitude within the sanctioned space of marriage, it both endorses Anne's daily conduct through a standard writing device and tells us that this will not be a marriage that engulfs or replaces her gifts. Instead, as we are led to believe, the solo skills we admire in Anne will flourish as the cornerstones of a joined eccentricity.

Arguing that strong solitude can carry critical consciousness to any place a subject may be and into flexible social formations that, in fact, it helps create, Austen adds to nineteenth-century valuations of solitude by deflecting Romanticism's passion for open, natural space. Charlotte Brontë, as we will see, conversely embraces that solo space wields a special and

privileged force, but also powerfully recasts Romantic ideals as she reads them. Throughout *Villette,* she clearly claims that daily access to solo space is especially vital for women, so often restrained in both their everyday privacy and mobility. Brontë thus affirms the idea that elective solo spaces are key venues of agency, yet elevates the mundane and common—the drawing room corner, the hidden path—over tracts of unpeopled ground, grander and vaster than some margin of one's place of home or work, yet less available practically to a woman like Lucy Snowe.

---

[1] Miller, *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

[2] Notably, the rift in Anne's romance occurs in a pause in this trademark work of intense perspective comparing. Upon Wentworth's initial proposal, Anne writes off her impassioned thinking as a basis for good decisions. Still, with only one solid advisor, her dead mother's close friend, Lady Russell, Anne does not have several stable and distinct impressions to weigh—does not, that is, have fuel for comparing nuances of views like she normally does. Thus, she is "persuaded to believe the engagement a wrong thing—discreet, improper, hardly capable of success, and not deserving it" (Austen 19).

[3] Richard Whately, "Art. V.-Northanger Abbey, and Persuasion.," *The Quarterly Review* (Jan. 1821): 352-76.

[4] John Pikoulis, "Reading and Writing in *Persuasion*," *Modern Language Review* 100:1 (Jan. 2005): 20-36.

[5] Melissa Sodeman, "Domestic Mobility in *Persuasion* and *Sanditon*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 45:4 (Autumn 2005): 787-812.

[6] I am indebted to Buchholz's discussion of the rhythms and temporality of being alone for my exploration of Anne's solitude. Although Buchholz applies a clinical approach to the topic of "alonetime," her work on finding favored tempos for responding to stimuli are extremely apt for my project. For more discussion of the temporality of Anne's experience, yet from a completely different angle, see Emily Rohrbach's "Austen's Later Subjects" (*SEL* 44:4 [Autumn 2004]: 737-752), in which Rohrbach argues that Anne's subjectivity is experienced specifically as a narrative, as a present that is tightly framed by a vividly-remembered past and a vividly-imagined future.

[7] *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense: Victorian Realism and Narrative Doubt*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003.

[8] Wolfe, "The Achievement of *Persuasion*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 11:4 (Autumn 1971): 687-700.

[9] See Austen's letter to Fanny Knight from March 23, 1817, in which she writes, "You may perhaps like the heroine, as she is almost too good for me." Reprinted in Jane Austen, *Persuasion*. Ed. Patricia Meyer Spacks. Norton Critical Edition (New York: Norton, 1995), 190.

[10] In terms of defining solitude as distance from other people's expectations, I agree with Nunokawa, yet in terms of describing it as frisson or thrill, I am not convinced that this is the case consistently for Anne, or for others in *Persuasion*. Nor is it true for many other solitaries who populate nineteenth-century fiction, including the considerable numbers of orphans, outcasts, and old maids found there. In other words, Nunokawa's description holds brilliantly for some solitaries, but not as well for large numbers of them. "Eros and Isolation: The Antisocial George Eliot," *ELH* 69:4 (Winter 2002): 835-60.

[11] Anthony Storr. *Solitude: A Return to the Self*. New York: Ballantine, 1988.

[12] Emily Rohrbach, "Austen's Later Subjects," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* (Autumn 2004): 737-52.

[13] Pikoulis concludes from this move that "Anne tries "to be fair to everyone. It would have been easier for her to mock the ancestors or satirize their descendants but she does neither. ... Anne's strictures are rendered equivocal, identifiable with neither tendency" ("Reading and Writing in *Persuasion*," 26).

[14] This description of Captain Wentworth is especially interesting when compared to that of Mrs. Croft, his older sister: "Her manners were open, easy, and decided, like one who had no distrust of herself, and no doubts of what to do; without any approach to coarseness, however, or any want of good humour" (*Persuasion* 33). In other words, whereas Mrs. Croft gives no offense with her self-assurance, Wentworth, who is a charming man but not as flexible as his sister, can occasionally come across as being "headstrong" (19) and over-confident.

[15] This scene involves not just a change of heart for Wentworth, but also a significant swapping of roles, since it is often Anne, with her under-visibility, who overhears others' interactions. For example, on the group walk to Winthrop, almost the opposite dynamic occurs: then, it is Anne who, hidden by a hedge-row, overhears Wentworth and Louisa talking about the theme of firmness of mind.

[16] See pages 168-77 of the Norton Critical Edition of *Persuasion* for a reprint of the two chapters that were originally meant to conclude the novel. Of the original manuscript, whose production

history tells us about Austen's own attempts to maintain privacy while writing, Robin Flower reports that it was "written without paragraph division in a small, neat, slanted hand on both sides of sixteen leaves of paper, cut down from foolscap watermarked 1812 to a small size, 6 inches in height by a little more than 3 1/2 inches width. It was Miss Austen's practice to use such small paper, as it could be easily thrust out of sight on any sudden interruption." See "The First Draft of Jane Austen's 'Persuasion,'" *The British Museum Quarterly* 1:1 (May 1926), 16.

Chapter Two:

Across the Room, Across the Channel: *Villette* and Spatial Solitude

If Austen does not think of space as a site of power for Anne, instead turning to what she can do to appropriate time at home for methodical reflection, then *Villette* is more intent on addressing limits to space in middle-class women's lives and working to press on them. Included in the limits she rues is what Brontë represents as the unjust fact of women's fraught access to solo ground, meaning to guaranteed private space and willed moments of separation. Under this view, *Villette* creates a heroine who never stops seeking physical space to call "her own," as Lucy Snowe steadfastly pursues a range of sheltered nooks and zones.

In an international sense, Lucy is a traveler. However, because her traveling does not yield freedom, day to day, from her spatial positioning being subject to weighty rules, *Villette*'s praise of solo space does not recapitulate extant masculinized ideals of exploring the world and the self through unchecked claims to time apart. As Austen demonstrates with Anne, Brontë shows that Lucy cannot roam very widely, away from home, without incurring repercussions, but must harvest solo ground on a modest, mundane scale. Yet in a way that sometimes gets absorbed or lost in critical views, Lucy is remarkably skilled and successful on this head, exploiting both material coves and loopholes in social norms to infuse her otherness with the literal distance she craves.

A prominent feature of Lucy's life is her skill, from childhood onwards, at sustaining physical gaps between herself and those close by. Tracking others' positioning and carefully calibrating poses that make others risk being rude if they want to get nearer to her, Lucy is amazingly good at stealing bits of domestic ground.[1] While Anne's distance often entails being

mentally "there and not there," Lucy takes more concrete paths of physical separation, never lacking ideas for retreat and never being shy to seem, if not aggressive, then at least strange, in following up on these.

Put simply, Lucy's life swells with what I call "spatial solitude." With this concept, I mean aloneness projected onto literal ground, from Lucy's broad homelessness to residence in corners of rooms to palpable stances of reserve that keep even friends from getting too close. Given her treks from house to house as well as from England to Villette, critics are right to turn an eye to Lucy's wide-scale rootlessness.[2] However, I argue that it is too easy to have the fact of itinerancy, of placelessness on both community and wider national scales, obscure Lucy's talent and grit at placing herself, in granular terms, into rewarding spatial positions as she goes about her days.

Through practices that get short shrift from critics intrigued with how *Villette* entwines Lucy's relations to space with her self-development, Lucy is an excellent squatter, claiming0 dominion, not by force, but through quiet persistence, over spatial margins and scraps to forge realms of autonomy. If her life is characterized by personal loss and lack, then it is also deeply marked by determined efficacy at achieving solo spots. These spots afford her shelter for thought, for watching others, or just for rest—for enjoying *not* having to think—in line with the slant of her will and sense of accountability.

Whether by settling in empty rooms or at the margins of peopled ones, Lucy steadily poaches ground on an everyday micro scale, the scale Certeau isolates as a prolific site of power for subjects who cannot afford to flout, openly, social rules.[3] As with Anne throughout *Persuasion*, Lucy uses solitude to tackle just these questions of power, turning her layers of

alienation into a lens for commentary, silently observing others when she is part of social scenes and musing, when she is alone, on social scripts and relational tones. The key for Lucy is that she be able to do this work on her own terms, meaning in ones that are patently willed, or that she can coyly pass off as such.

Under this need, Lucy turns to shelters as proof of a wellspring of will, showing others that even if she does not always share her desires, that she has them just as they do, and that hers are serious, too. Seeming to boast a special sense for discovering empty spots and not scared to claim them as hers, Lucy can look to spatial distance as a tool of autonomy. It is a tool for calmly revealing that she does have preferences and will not suppress them all, as well as of suggesting to others that if *they* foist their wishes on her, they will be open to silent judgment (the more forbidding for its silence, for not being fully expressed outright).

Admittedly, within its many points of ambivalence as a text, *Villette* reveals that in the moment, distance can be greatly freeing or greatly piercing and sad. With little warning, it concedes, the tone of solitude can shift, making distance hard to predict as well as often hard to bear. But over the narrative's longer haul, its ambivalence or concern about the trials of solitude crystallize into support for distance as a way for Lucy to show that she can originate plans, even as others surely see her—and as she often feels herself—that relentless twists of fate have made her a victim of cosmic forces. In other words, if solo space is hardly only liberating, sometimes working to reveal the very breadth of Lucy's pains, then at least her choosing it never fails to yield, in time, real feelings of agency. In this way, spatial distance is ironically Lucy's most changing and most steadying, centering tool, one that sometimes makes her feel bad, but that always lifts her again when dark feelings pass away.

Because Lucy's separations can be so rife with pangs and doubts, some have argued that her withdrawal is a demeaning, injurious force, an internalized propagation of patriarchal tyranny. This is the position taken in the influential work of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, who claim, in *Madwoman in the Attic*, that Lucy's solitude constitutes a "terrifying ... deprivation" at the hands of male rule in the world (Gilbert and Gubar 400).[4] A pitfall of extant criticism is that it feels compelled to choose between the extremes of Lucy's distance, the nourishing highs and harrowing lows, to pull a coherent evaluation out of its intense vagaries. For Gilbert and Gubar, the desperate points of Lucy's remoteness outstrip the good, even as the narrating Lucy states that distance is "precious" to her (Brontë 107). In their reading, though we see Lucy constantly pursue solo space, her doing so attests to entrapment, to a reflexive replication of the gendered inequities and ideologies of her spheres.

Even for those who read solitude as a more useful force for Lucy, a trend is to flatten the moods of her distance, which are varied in the short term, separately from a more coherent and empowering *longue durée*. We see this kind of trend at work in 2001's *The Powers of Distance*: in this study, Amanda Anderson downplays times when distance means that Lucy enjoys a lapse in thought, over and against the times when it means deepened critical views.[5] Similarly, Elisha Cohn, who defends such pleasing lapses and their aesthetic consequences, claims that a wealth of this type of span—moments of hallucinogenic social distance in *Villette*—means that readers should interpret none of Lucy's solitude through a narrative of enhanced or increasing agency, but rather, only through Brontë's interest in suspending such a script.

However, if we should really choose between Lucy's distance being mainly a site of strengthening force versus one of passivity, or mainly for objective reasoning versus for its pleasant deferral, then why does Brontë paint Lucy's grit through how she weathers its

vacillations? And what of the compound mental moves required for nimbly poaching ground? Although she often reasons deeply once inside a private zone, her quick ways of getting there can't be wholly explained through such thought; neither, though, do they result from some break in consciousness. Yet if, as Cohn's ideas suggest, dreamy solo spans for Lucy are more determinative than ones of reasoning, contemplation, or alert problem solving, then why would Brontë show Lucy's smarts in gaining the space, the actual venues, for moments of dreaminess only to erase this shrewdness as a boon and means of change? One answer would be that Cohn wants us to read *Villette* through full irony, as Lucy reveals how little her "ethos" matters for "telos" in her world (Cohn 846). But given Lucy's use of "precious" to describe the role of choice as an ethos of her distance, it seems hasty to read *Villette* through such intense ironic tones (Brontë 107).

Other scholars in recent years, working against a critical trend of reading *Villette* primarily through the import of internal life, have resisted choosing sides among the dualities of Lucy's days. They claim that *Villette* itself does this more than we might think, insofar as it writes identity both in inner and outer terms. This line of argument would seem ripe for discussing externalized space, and yet, scholarship in this vein says little about Lucy's sheltered zones.[6] Addressing this gap, I assert a third main point of argument, beyond how expert Lucy is at squatting in vacant nooks, and beyond how bodily distance earns her constant yet critical faith for yielding, sometimes in fits and starts, valued feelings of efficacy.

Building on the critical claim that *Villette* is a both/and tale in terms of inner and outer force, I contend that Lucy's distance, being so material, has a special palpable force in drawing binaries, social either/or propositions, into a fluid realm where they can be scrutinized. In fact, combining Lucy's will to "win" slices of her surroundings with the notion that physical spaces

make the agents they surround, Brontë highlights molding power both in space as outside ground and as internal tracts, and articulates an aim of probing how such spheres interact.

Villette endorses Lucy's merging of the calls of self and world with the ending that it bears, which has much to do with space. This end, which Robyn Warhol describes as both "happy and not-happy" (Warhol 870),[7] sees Lucy's relations to space change in two important ways. First, although Monsieur Paul dies, before his fateful trip abroad, he arranges for Lucy to rent a home in a quiet suburb, there to live and be her own boss as she runs a school for girls. Second, Lucy eventually claims textual terrain as a writer, writing her memoir, we assume, from this or other private ground. Both changes to her life help Lucy admit the worth of robust social ties without renouncing lifelong habits of retreat through solo space. Such changes of course fuel sadness over her lost love with Paul, yet in a shelter that is hers for as long as she wants to stay, one in which she can create a desired microcosm or microculture.

With Paul, Lucy learns to be known without rejecting introversion, refusing exposure for its own sake while still being vulnerable to another. In writing, then, she aims for being open while still finding solace in safe pockets of reserve. Lucy even forms such pockets spatially across her text, asking us to place a proxy in her role as narrator, someone to whom the fates have been kinder and who has less sadness to share. Doing so, she demonstrates that she sees writing in terms of ground, of physical space in which her spot can be filled by a substitute when she needs to nurse raw wounds. At times, withholding key information; at times, exposing the split psychology that she elsewhere labors to hide; at times, appealing to readers directly as she asks us to be kind, Lucy uses memoir writing, first, to pinpoint a need for more or quicker balance in solitude, and second, to practice this very goal, to test merging more interaction with ingrained recourse to solo zones.

Finally granting Lucy love and a sense of belonging somewhere, Brontë, like each of the novelists whose texts I study in this work, aims to split the emotional costs of solitude from its strengthening force. Yet whereas Austen, for example, lifts solitude to its highest heights through a union that resists conventional domestic grounding and that centers on empathy as a social oddity (meaning, as a human trait that is too infrequently found), Lucy lands in reverse conditions: grounded, but quite happily so, and being single, though having loved. With *Villette*'s conclusion, then, Brontë crafts a different kind of "alone together" mode for Lucy than that which Anne enjoys, though each one is a clear result of a heroine's solo style, of her skills at "battl[ing] … life" and facing "distress" resiliently (Brontë 478). Lucy extends the hard-won blend between reticence and revelation that she learned through caring for Paul to an unknown group of readers through the mediation of text. At least showing us an agenda of attempting to give and take, Lucy achieves a tenable state of being alone, yet not alone, a way of winning others' care while still retaining the right to preserve some essential secrecy.

Spatial Solitude I: Domestic Space, Bretton

While Lucy is estranged from places, from stable homes to a native homeland, social withdrawal realized through space helps ameliorate this fact, allowing her to realize choices that shore up her sense of self. Though one might argue that such choices are essentially paper swords against implacable social forms, Brontë takes them seriously as minute assertions of will. She therefore links them from the start to Lucy's sense of identity, including to developments in refining her self-awareness.

Perhaps because of Lucy's lack of a stable life at home, her story is filled with attention

to houses, offering "realistic detail ... [about] domestic exterior[s]" (Shaw 818), and pages of "descriptions of ... everyday commodities" (Heady 348).[8] In fact, Lucy's first example of a winning solo style comes from her godmother, Mrs. Bretton, and does so for how this woman is at ease in domestic space, able to take managerial sway within her peaceful home for granted, yet never wielding force there glibly or seeming curbed by it. The story starts by recounting Lucy's yearly trips to the town of Bretton, where she spends several months at a time staying at Mrs. Bretton's home. Quickly, Brontë speaks to Lucy's admiration for this woman: her esteem at Mrs. Bretton's being in tune with her environs, from the town whose name she shares to the rooms in which she dwells. Fascinated, Lucy makes her godmother a point of study, probing the household authority that has so much to do with space, with ownership that never strains or has anything to prove, and whereby Mrs. Bretton both mirrors and sets her environments' tones.

Against the flux and uncertainty that Lucy hints at in her own home, one of Bretton's best features is how smoothly ordered it is, and how its mistress always performs a corresponding aura of calm, where calmness is the main watchword of Lucy's own desired solo style. In Mrs. Bretton, Lucy locates spirits that are so uniform, they "are better than a fortune to the possessor" (Brontë 5). Happier still, they reflect the steady tone of the neighborhood, a place where "Sundays and holidays seemed always to abide ... so quiet was its atmosphere, so clean its pavement" (5). Within the house, the "well-arranged furniture" helps maintain an organized feel, so that Mrs. Bretton is further an extension of the home. Lucy, in fact, describes this woman in deeply spatialized terms, tagging both the person and house with terms that echo one another—"well-made," "well-arranged" (5). Lucy also expresses a sense of hallowed continuity across fleshly person and place by invoking spiritual spaces from the pages of *Pilgrim's Progress*: "My visits to her resembled the sojourn of Christian and Hopeful beside a certain pleasant stream" (6).

Entailed in Mrs. Bretton's ways of being cohesive with living space is that she is so integrated as a perceiving subject and agent, always trusting that her instincts will help her "fight a good fight with the world" (177). Lucy, in contrast, whose inner self is split between longing and resignation, knows that she can never repeat her godmother's seemingly effortless poise. However, inspired by her example, she works to assert her own calm aura, including forging her own key ways of being "at home" with curated space.

In Lucy's case, this goal means using shrewd positioning to suggest, both to others and herself, that her solitude is a choice, a purposeful state that she controls. Through private zones, Lucy gains not just perches for people watching (one of her daily satisfactions), but also a more diffuse boost in feeling she has control over bigger life dynamics, a two-fold use in line with the claim that *Villette* is a double tale, including a double narrative of "a nobody and a somebody" (Dolin, *Villette* xxxv). At Bretton, then, as a *locus amoenus*, a kind of idealized region of peace, we see how keenly Lucy's self-image as a person who resonates with measured judgment in her own right is entwined with staking out select patches of everyday turf.

In a powerful early scene, Lucy uses self-deprecation to head off feelings of dislocation, yet soon embraces spatial distance as a way to recoup lost ground. In this instance, Lucy actually loses elbow room at Bretton, returning from a walk one day to discover her bedroom there will contain another girl, too. Wanting to lessen her emotions, Lucy lessens her status first, so that from being "quiet[ly] ... noticed" (5), she recasts her role in the home as someone never meant to stay: "A second guest is coming," she thinks, "Mrs. Bretton expects other visitors" (6). But even as Lucy curbs surprise by cutting her aspirations down, framing herself as just one entry in a string of invitees, soon, she rallies her energies to assert her history at Bretton to the girl, named Polly Home.[9] Notably, she makes a turn to *central* spatial spots to convey her status

there. Seeing Polly brought upstairs, Lucy wants to remove her shawl, a move that would expose her face and fix Lucy, the first thing she'd see, as the "face" of the Bretton home. In essence, Lucy tries to claim the clout of Mrs. Bretton here; however, this attempt breaks down almost as soon as it begins, since Polly instantly scans past Lucy to locate the home's true guide. Moreover, even as she aspires to a coolly privileged stance,[10] Lucy cannot keep her gaze from its customary sweep, cannot close the seeking eye that she hones from liminal spots. Though Mrs. Bretton tells her not to look at Polly and make her feel strange, Lucy watches her anyway, noting especially how she soon withdraws to a nook, "where the shade was deep" (8). Ironically, in claiming a corner, Polly does take Lucy's place, but starting with the very next day, Lucy fixes this expulsion by retreating once more to "her" zones.

Crucially, it is in the context of a return to spatial distance that Lucy first tells readers her name, assuring us with the following claim: "I, Lucy Snowe, plead guiltless of that curse, an overheated and discursive imagination" (12). Whether or not we believe these words, their context tells us that Lucy's self-fashioning largely relies on pride in observing from safe outlying posts. When Polly's father stops by to say a last goodbye to his daughter, he takes a private seat, as he thinks. But Lucy, seated herself in a margin, overhears the pair's conversation. That she does so reveals how her needs, enacted in space, can trump those of others, as well as how aware she is of this fact, and even how pleased. For while she doesn't exactly brag of a talent for eavesdropping, Lucy does comment again about being potently self-composed: "I, Lucy Snowe, was calm" (22). Thus, she expresses self-satisfaction through a claim that is clearly built upon sly feats of spatial placement.

Overall, what we see at Bretton is spatial distance empowering Lucy, giving her a way

to recast chronic fears about her own home, as well as to borrow at least a bit of Mrs. Bretton's self-assurance through asserting sovereignty over domestic ground herself: the sheltered, liminal places in rooms that no one else wants anyway, but that also suit her leanings for watching over directly engaging. However, within this innocuous trend, we also see Lucy using space—specifically, physical buffers or gaps—to reflect on gaps in wisdom between herself and less knowing others, a move that sometimes leads her into shades of superiority.[11] Early episodes therefore hint at how Lucy's solitude will be vexed. Although she keeps from sliding into self-fascination in solitude, Lucy is still open to miscalculating her self-reliance, including, because she weighs assets through flaws in others she hopes to avoid, just how much her sense of worth depends on having others around.

Spatial Solitude II: Transitional Space

Although its existence is consistent from one setting to the next, Lucy's spatial distance takes on different tones under new circumstances, from the Brettons' to the home of the elderly Miss Marchmont, to her brief stay in London to her residence in Villette. If Austen uses *Persuasion*'s end to give Anne's distance a different face, importing careful deliberation into a unit of two with Wentworth and setting this unit afloat as the duo travels the world, then she leads us to believe that its gist remains the same; that Anne remains as balanced in distance as she has always proven to be. In contrast, across and within new locales, the tenor of Lucy's spatial distance swings between poles of enjoyment and pain, of diversion and retrenchment, and only after many trials embodies a balance, a working balance, between the draws of retreat and exchange.

The fact of such shifts reminds us how deeply Lucy is forced to respond to change by different hurtful events, but also, of spatial solitude's role as her go-to source of strength. Not surprisingly, both of these truths—one, that Lucy's spatial aloneness is greatly variable; and two, that it nonetheless remains a potent site of will—strongly emerge when Lucy lands in a given transitional space. Such spaces range from a work position to a hotel room in London to several days spent on a boat as it sails to Labassecour, the Continental country of which Villette is the urban seat.

At the home of Miss Marchmont, where Lucy lives after unexplained events make her homeless, Lucy finds the cloistered rooms to be a kind of sanctuary. Ironically, in its heaviness, the space evokes a transience, since Lucy and readers both can tell that the end is near for its mistress, and thus, for Lucy's tenancy there. This space also proves elusive in terms of decoding the influence between Lucy's psychology and her material surroundings. In an almost parody of the clear, two-way connection between Mrs. Bretton's nature and her quiet home and town, here, we cannot decide how much Lucy imports resignation into the spaces of the sickrooms and how much their barricades imbue her with passivity. In fact, without resolving this knot, Brontë subtly lets us feel that both of these options are the case, given how Lucy chooses to stay within the limits of "hot close rooms" (38), yet also given how doors and walls block the growth of sorrowful visions, checking the flow of Lucy's remembrance. As Lucy describes this process of change: "[Miss Marchmont's] thus became my world ... I forgot that there were fields, woods, rivers, seas, an ever-changing sky outside the steam-dimmed lattice of this sick-chamber; I was almost content to forget it" (37).[12]

In the wake of Miss Marchmont's death, Lucy is left without work or home, making her "once more alone," as she describes her abject state (42). In her return to lacking any "possibility

of dependence on others" (36), Lucy proceeds to travel to London, there to seek new work: "a place." What follows, in her days of travel, is a fraught transitional span in which her mood swings easily, and in which spatialized distance mirrors her life's twists and turns while also helping her manage them.

Puncturing these psychic swings are moments of resetting the dial when Lucy calls up routine ways of claiming private but active posts, including the eager world-watching that grew dormant at Miss Marchmont's. In this sense, though distance for Lucy changes register, tone, or mood as she migrates from country to city and then from one nation to another, looking for solo spatial posts always becomes once more about force, literalizing at least some desire and eventually bringing her back to a sense of efficacy.

An episode of spatial distance shifting up and down in tone, yet still emerging, after anxiety, as a vein of agency, happens during what becomes a short stopover for Lucy in London. Traveling in the days before trains, getting to London takes all day, so that when Lucy arrives, it is night. Amidst the gloom, she feels so strange that she has trouble functioning; she feels already on foreign soil, in "a wilderness of which the vastness and the strangeness tried to the utmost any powers of clear thought and steady self-possession" (45). Lynn Shakinovsky and Kate Lawson note that Lucy's earlier choice to leave where she was born and go to London yields a "vertiginous moment of awareness ... that she does not belong" (933). And yet this night breeds an even more upsetting vertigo, so that, while Lucy is hugely relieved to finally find a hotel room, her worries soon preclude any peace: "All at once my position rose on me like a ghost. Anomalous, desolate, almost blank of hope, it stood. What was I doing here alone in great London?" (Brontë 46).

Not surprisingly, added to the sleep that makes the next day better is a material site to which Lucy responds physically, tapping into her own wells of strength as she reads spaces for sturdiness. Taking heart from St. Paul's cathedral in its blend of a strong scaffold with an aura of dizzying heights, Lucy starts to feel braver, as when she first decided to travel: "While I looked," she says, "my inner self moved; my spirit shook its always-fettered wings half loose" (48).[13] What proceeds from this sensation is a day that reminds Lucy, after the stasis of Miss Marchmont's, how enriching aloneness can be, and in which solo movement through space in particular is a thrill.

Walking for hours through London's streets, Lucy merges with living streams, and while she still feels separation even when surrounded by others, this is a heady, Romantic kind, of which she writes that to crisscross the city, "and to do it utterly alone, gave me, perhaps an irrational, but a real pleasure" (49). However, as we see in *Persuasion*, Romantic wandering, here imported into a metropolitan context, cannot be a model of tenable distance for *Villette* or its heroine. For if Lucy's day is intoxicating as she walks the city alone, then it is not methodical, and Lucy needs to stay committed to policies of deliberation, not being able to take any sense of buoyancy or luck for granted. Still, desiring something new to brighten her "desolate existence," Lucy decides she has "nothing to lose" by seeking her fortune elsewhere entirely, in the foreign port of Villette (49).

Ironically, while this new choice not look for work in London has at least something to do with the city's chaotic beats, with the pace that seems as if it would compress the caprices of fate, Villette emerges in itself as a site of voluminous change. As such, it urges Lucy to question her habits more than anywhere else, including and especially that of hunkering down in private nooks. Completely differently from Miss Marchmont's, and even from Mrs. Bretton's, the varied

stimuli of Villette and her cultural dislocation force Lucy to question her status, not only as a self-controlled subject, but also as an agent of the staidness for which the English are famed. At times, such layered self-inquiry is immensely draining for Lucy, making her feel more alone, more in need of a boost from a friend. And yet, as she eventually feels, Villette does nurse in her a usefully richer understanding of her capacities in the world.

A scene aboard the ship *The Vivid* shows how Lucy has not lost any of her capacity at keenly observing others while appearing disinterested. The ship affords her welcome chances to observe from solo spots, while, for readers, it affords a condensation of various shifts within Lucy's spatial retreat: the ups and downs that come with it, but then how it returns to level as a stabilizing force. Through Lucy's study of a pair that seems mismatched in marriage, the ship throws into relief a triple current of oscillation: first, we have its literal movement with the churning of the waves; then, Lucy's meandering moods; and last, we have a thought process, a chain of solitary reflection, which creates a dense dialectic that, in itself, has the power to soothe.

Through her watching on the ship, Lucy exposes—makes "vivid" to us—a key aspect of her solo style, which is how, in studying codes, she often invokes traditional views as an early step in thought. Within her interrogations of social forms and interactions, Lucy makes a point to concede that prominent norms can help account for certain aspects of human behavior, yet at the same time, she treats them only as starting points in digging for truth. Through this credo, while Lucy reposes "solitary against the ship's side," she tries to make sense of a startling couple made up of a young, attractive woman and a "plain, fat, and vulgar" man (52). At first, Lucy reads this pair through assumptions about the bride's tastes (derived from her notable elegance, which seems misplaced on the deck of a ship), and decides that she must be unhappy and that her laughter can only be hollow. However, when this woman gets close and Lucy sees that her smile

seems real, she starts to think in terms of common stereotypes about the sexes, whereby women have cheery tempers and men are valued as steady providers: "She must have been good-natured," she states, "but what had made her marry that individual, who was at least as much like an oil-barrel as a man?" (53). With the unflattering term "oil-barrel," Lucy assumes, likely correctly, that money helped secure the match, since this term suggests some wealth as well as a portly bodily shape. But in being double-toned, and in sustaining a question mark appended by the writing Lucy, this phrase sabotages itself as a definitive one, unsettling standard views that the pair could work out well because of essential gendered traits; because female warmth complements masculine solidity. Objectifying the boorish husband, Lucy turns the common path of objectification onto its head, seeming to imply she defends the vibrant wife and her narrowed sphere. And yet, the added question mark undermines this stance as well, for if the wife made canny choices to attain a stable mate, then she only did so within what Lucy sees as suspect values, ones that mean sacrificing true pleasure for frivolous satisfactions.

Further, on the ship abroad, more than just performing once more the complexities that reside under her conduct in solo spaces, Lucy reminds us how much she compares her solo style to that of her neighbors, setting us up for even more intense comparisons in Villette. In doing so, she spatializes distance as an entity, viewing it as a kind of stage that creates the players upon it through their solo attitudes. As she sails, Lucy discerns what the other travelers are like by how well they rise to meet "the dignity of solitude" (53). This phrase makes solitude seem like an agent, speaking to a heft that inheres in visible isolation, in the space *around* a subject, rather than to traits that inhere in practitioners themselves. In addition, this phrasing implies that Lucy, as a practitioner, sees herself as doing well in echoing such dignity. In contrast, the young Ginevra Fanshawe, a student sailing to Villette, confesses that, on trips alone, she initiates chats

with others as she finally does with Lucy. Doing so means that she "take[s] care never to be long alone" (54), but also, speaks her mind quite freely through a "careless temperament"—one that, Lucy soon decides, includes an unfortunate, overarching "incapacity to endure" (57).

Lucy's vision of the power of solitary performance creates a narrative question mark that leaves it unclear if Lucy claims a private spot, at a given time, more to absorb or to express a sense of personal potency. Regardless, we do not have to know (and neither does Lucy, to feel strong), what the chain of causality is. Instead, we only need to know that even as spatial distance registers contradictions in Lucy's world—her riven desires, twists of fate, others' luck compared to hers, restrictive social double standards—that Lucy never takes this to mean that spatial withdrawal is, for her, something to be given up. Rather, she weathers the vagaries of her encounters with solo ground and builds on this tolerance as an aspect of her own version of hardiness.

Spatial Solitude III: Domestic and Institutional Space in Villette

Because her strangeness is so acute when she emigrates to Villette, it is there where Lucy has the most cause to seek out, as a habit, therapeutic pockets of space.[14] The more that she moves from England's center, the stronger Lucy's strangeness becomes, a fact revealed by how she is treated, from servants aggressively sizing her up to two men noting her vulnerability and trailing her through Villette's darkened streets. On her first night in that city, Lucy is wholly dispossessed, "not possessing a phrase of *speaking* French" (61). And with her powerful foreignness highlighting gaps in practical wisdom, her being abroad, as James Buzard notes, "forcefully impresse[s] upon her that ... she has … passed beyond the limit of that sphere in

which English customs and language and, in fact, the whole system of interpretation and valuation that comprises existing English culture, holds sway" (Buzard 246).[15]

When Madame Beck, who runs a school, amazingly grants Lucy a place, the latter's foreignness actually aids her, cloaking specific eccentric behaviors in a broad mantle of incongruity. Chief among these is the practice of locating private coves, a practice that, despite the busyness of the school, flourishes there. While Austen's Anne might wish in vain to take a walk home by herself, Lucy is always able to find an empty *classe* in which to regroup, an hour in the dormitory, or time in the *allée défendue*, that overgrown and hidden portion of the school's abundant garden. For example, on a day that buzzes with party preparations, Lucy withdraws into a room, and then into a bookcase and book, each find tucked inside the other like a set of nesting dolls. Describing the thrill of these treasures, she writes: "I felt a pleasure in betaking myself ... to the schoolrooms, now empty, quiet, cool, and clean ... [T]aking from the glazed book-case, of which I kept the key, a volume whose title promised some interest, I sat down to read" (Brontë 132).[16]

Given the culture of surveillance that Madame Beck forms at the school, if living there once more lets Lucy study others from private posts, then she submits to scrutiny, too, making her both agent and object of watching in the *pensionnat*. In the first stages of her spying, Madame Beck disrupts Lucy's distance, such as by sending an emissary to meet her on the garden paths. Soon, however, she learns that Lucy is nonthreatening in her seclusion; her motives, though hardly worn on her sleeve, do not conflict with Madame Beck's own. Thus, when this woman honors her teachers by giving each a thoughtful gift, she has no tangible item for Lucy. Rather, she gifts her with not interfering with the latter's cravings for distance: "One thing ... I *can* do to please you," she says, "leave you alone with your liberty" (280).

In the bustling realm of the school, we realize the full extent of the links between Lucy's seizures of space and the rich, profound enjoyment of being able to think "her own" thoughts, a phrase that she often invokes in Villette and that she almost always connects to some form of spatial withdrawal. During a particular evening in the empty dormitory, Lucy revels in a sense of thoughts flowing seamlessly through her as her autonomy flows through the room: "Open[ing] my own casement," she writes, "... and leaning out, [I] looked forth upon the city beyond the garden, and listened to band-music from the park or the palace-square, thinking meantime my own thoughts, living my own life in my own still shadow-world" (118). This passage, with its repeated "my own," shows how Lucy claims possession of as much of the scene as she can, and how physical sovereignty supports the frisson of doing so. Included in this luxurious act is enjoyment in resistance, a steady "no" against the forces that would colonize her judgment—in this case, a nightly religious reading, which Lucy routinely evades. Likewise, on a day at the school when she once more feels oppressed, not by attempts at indoctrination, but by over-stimulation, she looks for comfort and renewal in a sheltered physical space as a literal testing ground for the play of non-compelled thoughts. "The whole day did I wander or sit there alone," she writes of being in the garden, "finding warmth in the sun, shelter among the trees, and a sort of companionship in my own thoughts" (130).

As she becomes better friends with Ginevra, with whom she reconnects at the school, and as Monsieur Paul is more intrigued by her characteristic reserve, Lucy does suffer from both figures' wanting to impede her retreat. However, though she does feel thwarted and annoyed at their invasions, Lucy remains extremely good at securing parcels of ground, inside and out, for personal ends, from teaching rooms to the dormitory to the attic to the *allée*. Moreover, sanctioned by cultural difference and feeling braver on the whole, she puts out feelers in other,

more public, parts of Villette as sites of fulfillment under the cover of chaos and crowds. If the conventional tact of the English meant that the Brettons, for example, said little about her quietness even as it puzzled them, then Lucy's new cohorts may have less tact, but let quirks slide, chalking them up to alienness and thus to inherent mysteriousness. Not wasting this fact, Lucy uses Villette to test how wide a net she can cast for physical realms of self-direction, from urban streets—though she still feels exposed—to picture galleries in its museums.

Hand in hand with piling up a diverse array of nooks, Lucy develops, in Villette, new layers of discernment to her social analysis. Yielding new social forms to explore, Villette gets Lucy to be bolder not only in seizing space, but also in the cultural readings that she forms in private zones. We see this change in her response to national religion, the "fruits of Rome": the "bloom," she writes, "savoured not of charity; the apple full-formed was ignorance" (420). Also through increased exposure to Continental highbrow culture, Lucy approaches with heightened vigor questions of how social norms circulate and inflect each other, so that musings about great art become more pointed observations about ideal femininity, and especially about frictions between Continental and English views.

With Villette as a deep "site of difference" that offers new ways of seeing the world, Brontë has Lucy consolidate her character and national identity through her situation abroad, and has her do so largely through framing English femaleness as rational (Shaw 827). Often, Lucy accomplishes this at the expense of Labassecour, as when invoking Madame Beck's stance that, in contrast to local girls, English ones need less discipline, or as when she states that the traits of "French blood" include "insincer[ity]" (Brontë 82). Lucy also recirculates a Continental stereotype having to do with ideas about travel—namely, that "only English girls ... can be

trusted to travel alone" (53)—so that her nationalized contrasts of women extend to uses of physical space.

In an art museum in Villette, Lucy's perusal of paintings of women conducting themselves quite differently in states of solitude underscores her own distance, seeking but also sociable in its nonthreatening spirit, as she lingers in liminal spots, "examining, questioning, and forming conclusions" (198). Not only do Lucy's thoughts on these works, from a painting of Cleopatra to a set of allegorical representations of women's lives, yield extended comparisons between dependable English women and more brazen foreign ones, but also lead to the contemplation of gendered uses of physical ground. Calling Mrs. Bretton's son, who has also moved to Villette, a "cicerone" who excels at explaining cultural treasures to others, Lucy admits to being "amazed at his perfect knowledge of Villette … penetrating to all its galleries, salles, and cabinets" (198). With such words, Lucy speaks to Graham's freedom to move boldly through public environments. This is a freedom that clearly attends the fact of his masculinity (as the word "penetrating" reveals), and that trumps Lucy's own mobility, even as hers trumps that of local women unmarried like her. To his credit, although the ease with which he moves could make him glib, Graham perceives that the "open streets" (198) that he strolls make Lucy feel nervous, and indulges more generally her need for physical solitude. He therefore leaves her alone for hours in picture galleries, to be "happy" (198).

In one of these cases, as Lucy examines a *risqué* painting of Cleopatra, she is urged into a margin by a prickly Monsieur Paul, yet co-opts it according to custom, so that it does not limit her. Finding her interest in the picture of this figure to be immodest, Paul leads her to a corner that ensconces much duller works, ones that flatly depict the life of an idealized passionless woman. Lucy submits to Paul's demands, which actually amuse her here, but characteristically

turns the corner into a spot for watching others and musing in her favored ways. Specifically, although she yields to being corralled physically, Lucy shifts her eyes and body toward the Cleopatra's onlookers to "turn the tables" on Paul's intentions, as Ruth Robbins has rightly claimed (219).[17] In fact, Lucy subverts Paul's dictates two times over with her moves, first, by observing flesh and blood women engaged in exciting recreation, and second, by making the male picture-gazers objects to be looked on themselves.

When Paul grows sanctimonious about the very topic of distance, making the claim that Lucy's "courage will not … sustain [her] in solitude," Lucy refuses to get riled up, knowing that to see her flustered is what her interlocutor wants (Brontë 204). During this span, as she has done countless times prior to it, Lucy gains power from her surroundings partly by locating foils for her level-headedness, with Paul and the Egyptian queen fitting the bill for fieriness. Moreover, as she has done before, Lucy unfolds, from her quiet corner, thoughts about popular views which concede that they have some worth, yet also tack back and forth as she seeks ruptures in them. For instance, though she tacitly weighs the solid flesh of Cleopatra against a solid English prudence, Lucy reminds us that English girls can be as audacious as this queen, and that English men can be blind in the face of such females' charms. As Lucy and her audience know, Ginevra is hardly without guile, yet Graham, who is obsessed with her, views Cleopatra scornfully against Ginevra's gleaming beauty, a clearness of cheek that he believes can only reflect a pureness of soul. Closing, then, her account of this day with Ginevra's selfishness and Graham's total misreading of her, Lucy partly qualifies the same views of English discretion that she earlier endorsed.

Through the scene at the museum, Lucy reveals how she used cherished hours of spatial withdrawal to find an energized middle ground between renouncing all common views and just

rehashing what they avow. In fact, the longer she lives in Villette, the more thoroughly she is able to dissect own her habits of mind. Within such a change, she starts to consider, as a more routine endeavor, what makes being physically separate meaningful and useful to her. Slowly, she begins to see that her well-being relies too greatly on assuming she can control flows of relational energy, and to realize that she cannot choose "how she ... wants to be seen" (Shaw 826) as much as she hoped she could—at least, not through as much solo *space* as she is used to seeking out. And yet, if Lucy grows more willing to examine deep-rooted instincts to pull back in a literal sense, then the shift is neither sudden nor does it happen linearly, meaning that her narrative is not a story of public over private, of going forth over staying still, or of freely-flowing expression over early reluctance and halts. Instead, as Karen Lawrence claims in her discussion of Lucy as cipher, Lucy's daily social reserve continues to afford her "real power," so that it is not "wished away" as a result of changing concerns (Lawrence 451-52).

When Lucy has been living and working in Villette for several months, the risks of her solitude come to a head over a long academic break. This event foregrounds the limits of her often successful tactics for transforming broad isolation into daily options for choice. Leading to it, Lucy was completely absorbed in a flurry of work, one that entailed anxiety, but also a welcome sense of importance. Thus, losing this momentum, Lucy finds herself at a loss. Faced with an emptiness all around that mocks the very concept of choosing empty nooks as helpful spots and a macro vacuum of purpose that, more abstractly, ironizes shoring up autonomy through subtle daily techniques, Lucy succumbs to desperation, suffering what we would call, today, a grave and lengthy nervous breakdown. Because this crisis happens while Lucy is effectively all alone, it is tempting to think that aloneness is its sole and certain cause, making Lucy lose her grasp, however briefly, on rational thought. Yet Brontë convincingly makes the

case that Lucy never loses reason, but is deeply overwhelmed by disappointment, exhaustion, and doubt: "I really believe my nerves are getting overstretched," Lucy tells herself; "my mind has suffered somewhat too much," clearly laying the blame on anxiety for her clouded, but not broken, brain (159).

Perhaps anticipating struggles with feeling centered during the break, Lucy's spirits "had long been ... sinking," and now, without any social observing to empower her seclusion, Lucy starts to see her whole life as aimless and ineffectual (Brontë 156). Not only does she feel inept in caring for a disabled student who is with her for much of the break, but she cannot—or so she fears—impress herself in others' thoughts. With dreams of failure even in death, so that loved ones beyond the grave are "alienated" from her spirit (160), and with the student, Marie Broc, epitomizing a depth of otherness that she fears could be her fate,[18] Lucy fears bleakness ahead and recoils at what she sees. Of course, Lucy's tactics in distance often helped her fight just these, these worries of a hopeless future. Now, however, in her depletion, she imagines an early death, visualizing having no strength and "reach[ing] … the end of all things earthly" (156).

During this time at the *pensionnat*, the negation of Lucy's ways of making her distance agentic is crushing. Lucy's panic finally ends when she collapses one night on the street, after which she is nursed by the Brettons, both of whom are now in Villette. From the "black" feel of this time, we might expect that once it ends, Lucy changes radically, no longer wanting to be complicit in any part of her separateness (157). Yet actually, her true reaction is not to reject solitude, including quests for private space. Instead, Lucy puts her habits under deeper scrutiny, so that she still seeks seclusion, but engages in closer looks at its outcomes on her psyche and her few relationships.

The fact that Lucy's crisis, then, does not yield even a pledge that Lucy will do anything to avoid returning to the depths of loneliness that it brought is the most surprising feature of what she experiences over the long academic break. In the wake of her collapse, she does not see speech, for example, meaning more engagement with others and expressive claims within it, as an infallible saving grace. Rather, what we get from Lucy, over the ensuing months, is a patchy, selective effort to sustain her valued quietness alongside an effort to take more risks as an interactive agent.

Gradually, in fits and starts, Lucy opens up to Paul, even coming to relish the fact that he takes her so seriously, liking how he misreads her in ways that err on the side of intrigue.[19] "Losing the ... impulse to recoil from" him and sharing emotional truths with him, Lucy uses their friendship to nurture the start of a goal that her memoir later extends,[20] one in which she will not renounce, but moderate, her urge for retreat (347). Lucy's interactions with Paul thus fit a pattern across *Villette* of Lucy carefully calculating "how ... [to] talk about herself" (Heady 356), but also raise the stakes of this work, so that Lucy, after the break, strives for greater connectivity while refusing to "talk nonsense" (Brontë, *Jane Eyre* 173), including to disclose secrets before—or unless—she is ready to share.

A wide array of scholars has shown how Lucy's story oscillates between restraint and opening up, or between muteness and revelation.[21] To some, such as Jon Hodge, who reads *Villette* through a lens of obsessive impulse in Lucy, this dynamic is part of Lucy's using writing, not just to order and resist her own neuroses, but also to gain power over cultural scripts by way of revision, including patriarchal accounts of women's health "that … pathologize" (Hodge 900). In his reading, Hodge implies that just as much as she wants to shift the diagnostic terms employed by the men to whom she is a puzzle they feel they ought to solve, so does Lucy want

to lord power over any reader at all, as she exploits calling the shots in a widespread, public way. However, given comments by her that meet us between our first reactions—at least, as she presumes them to be—and how Lucy hopes to be viewed, it seems right to call her withholdings part of a process of sussing out a new protocol for interaction, one that resists permitting withdrawal to be her only coping device, yet which also protects her options for silence or mystery.

Where nineteenth-century criticism of the novel is concerned, a central issue of debate was not if Brontë offered up a vision of strength through vocality, but the more fundamental question of whether Lucy seems to be hesitant to speak at all, which is to say, if we should read as her as a shy or a forward woman. Some readers described Lucy as a sound example of female quietness and discretion;[22] yet, for others, she was alarming for her lack of these vital traits. Matthew Arnold, for example, famously disliked *Villette*, finding it to be infested with a violent, raw despair. And though he wrote a flattering poem about Brontë after her death,[23] shortly after *Villette*'s publication in 1853, he wrote a letter to his sister calling the novel "disagreeabl[y]" filled with "hunger, rebellion, and rage" (qtd. in Lang 262).[24] In contrast, though, to both this reading and a reading that imbues Lucy with exemplary modesty, George Henry Lewes lauded the text for Lucy's singularity and that of the work as a whole. In radical opposition to Arnold, Lewes reads Lucy's self-divisions not as shocking or disturbed, but rather as the very heart of *Villette*'s creativity.

Further unlike Arnold and others, Lewes links his esteem for Lucy to Brontë's engagement with distance, having privileged information about her years living on the moors. Having begun corresponding with Brontë several years before his review, Lewes knew that her social sphere was a fairly limited one. However, for him, it wasn't strange that fiction of such

confidence could come from someone so socially sheltered;[25] instead, the keenness of Brontë's thoughts were surely due to how her mind had been "nurtured in solitude" ("Ruth and Villette," 485).[26] Reprinting a passage from *Villette* as a preview of what to expect, Lewes chooses as its best a lengthy excerpt from Lucy's time over the wretched, wrenching school break. He urges readers to go through it slowly, not for plot, but the truth of the feelings, which he sees done perfectly. Crediting Brontë's distance, then, with her skill at conveying truth, Lewes places solitude at the core of *Villette*'s success, at its enthralling "independen[ce]" from literary and cultural norms ("Ruth and Villette," 485).

Spatial Solitude IV: The Faubourg Cloltilde and "Writing this heretic narrative"

One of Lucy's rewards for changing is having a courtship with Paul, a nontraditional twining of lives that does not need, as proof of its force, to banish Lucy's daily reserve in a formative space of love. A further prize, attending this one, is Lucy's gaining a home of her own, one in which that lets her broadly set her days to the key of inclination, from whims and values to physical habits and aesthetic preferences. Lucy offers many details about the charming little house to which Paul takes her, as a surprise, in the quiet Faubourg Clotilde. After taking a thorough account of the home's layout and décor, she learns that Paul has arranged for it to be both where she will live and run a school for girls, making it a double realm of management and authority.

One effect of Paul's gesture means that Lucy can finally be, not just mistress of her own home, but an authentic mistress at all, years after first admiring Mrs. Bretton's ease with this role. Serving tea on that first day, she redeems her childhood scorn for girls who played hostess games (pantomiming command of a room in the absence of real influence), asking Paul if his friends

"knew what he had done—whether they had seen *my* house?" (Brontë 488, emphasis added). As the years pass while Paul is gone, Lucy makes the home more her own, both taking over the rent and expanding the space of the school to include the building next door. But even as she contemplates Paul's return from Guadeloupe through references to "my" property, a phrase that might suggest nervousness at the thought of sharing space, her pleasure in curating the place outweighs shadows of doubt, as Lucy finds clear satisfaction crafting personal nooks for Paul: "I have made him a little library, filled its shelves with the books he left in my care" (495).

Partly because this cozy house becomes so firmly Lucy's home, and partly because she knows what happens to certain local figures after she leaves the *pensionnat*, Lucy likely stays in Villette, writing her story from its environs at a time when her hair "lies ... white" (45). Such an assumption is fair to make, yet even if Lucy moves away, perhaps even returning to England after Paul dies on the sea, the quaint house in the Faubourg Clotilde is a key part of her maturation, letting her shape an immediate setting without the risk of falling into patterns of over-defensiveness, and proving that she can make real room for intimate exchange in her life.

The space of Lucy's memoir itself is a further proving ground, another tool with which to show that she can make herself understood without forgoing or watering down those perspectives that make her unique. Part of how Lucy approaches this task is through portraying her story as ground, emphasizing the role of narrator as a literal spot to be filled, and, at times, asking readers to fill it up with someone else—someone easier to like, or simply someone more fortunate, so that everyone can keep from having to visit her life's tragedies. We see this when she avoids describing a period of familial upheaval, an era that she glosses over through appeals to the conceit that she is a buoyant boat, "a bark slumbering through halcyon weather," and then a carefree passenger, in keeping with a social ideal of protected femaleness: "a great many

women and girls are supposed to pass their lives something in that fashion; why not I with the rest?" (35).

Beyond this example of displacement, there is the end of the narrative, an ending that tricks for not confirming that Paul has drowned while sailing home. Here, Lucy presents readers with quick cuts from site to site, shifting the ground from under our feet as if to mirror what surely happened to her grounding when hearing about severe storms, and then, a wreck. Once more, Lucy works to remove her presence from the field of narration, calling up other entities that can do a better job of drawing lessons from her pain, making it illustrative. Sweeping readers' thoughts to the coast, she appeals to "a thousand weepers" (495), then quickly and subtly tacks back to land, interpellating an alternate self, a placid projection of herself, to "pause at once" in her reporting so as to let "sunny imaginations hope" (496).

With this kind of self-conscious claim to a replacement or decoy speaker, Lucy gains distance from the past and its most harrowing memories. But given all of the personal change that she undergoes by the time she is writing in her own home, and given her many authorial trades—her moves to show understanding to readers whose respect she solicits in turn—such displacement reads as more than a purely reactive reflex. Instead, it reads as Lucy courting our good opinion and sympathy without capitulating to us, as she strives to enjoy and enact, yet not be engulfed by, need for retreat, and as she keeps in mind that distance realized through material space is, as an externalized venture, more than just her own venture to make.

Armed with such a hard-won perspective, Lucy creates an authorial "alone together" relational form to feel accountable to others, and maybe cared for by them, by choice. Unlike what we see elsewhere at the ends of the novels I study, Lucy's lasting means of having more or deepened social ties is not with a person, but with her story, a story that sees her draw on the

memories of a prior intimacy to explore connections with readers that give without homogenizing or taking all of her strangeness away.

Putting Lucy in the position of a designer or architect of compositional ground, Brontë formally underscores the import of "free" space for her, making chosen spatial withdrawal a major axis of her self-image at each stage she shares of her life. In line with Brontë's clear belief that solitude's agentic potential must be rendered open to women, George Gissing in *The Odd Women* takes as a deep concern the issues faced by "surplus" females—women unmarried and without funds, and thus on their own in several senses—as they seek to support themselves and find themselves with few good paths. Like Brontë's argument, Gissing asserts that gendered views of who gets to choose withdrawal are a social wrong to be changed through relaxed codes and norms surrounding women's mobility. But more than this, he avers that what need to change in the world are ideas about what count as inherent freedoms to start. Notably, *The Odd Women* places willed aloneness into this group, arguing through women's general overdetermined alienation that intentional time apart is, for women, an act of self-care, but also, for everyone, undeniable as an aspect of inborn rights.

---

[1] Of course, this rule has exceptions, from Ginevra's ceaseless gossip to young Polly Home's way of drawing Lucy out: "'Why do you sit here by yourself? You must come into the parlour'" (*Villette* 297). Yet on the whole, Lucy's mask of coolness and her protective body language signal a will to be alone that others do not dispute. As Lucy writes of the *pensionnat*: "A constitutional reserve of manner had by this time told with wholesome and, for me, commodious effect, on the manners of my co-inmates; rarely did I now suffer from rude or intrusive treatment" (235).

[2] A strain of scholarship, for example, explores Lucy's national identity, given how she is alien both in England and abroad. See Lawson and Shakinovsky, "Fantasies of National Identification in *Villette*," *SEL* 49:4 (Autumn 2009): 925-44. For attention to the political history between Belgium and England, see Anne Longmuir, "'Reader, perhaps you were never in Belgium?': Negotiating British Identity in Charlotte Brontë's *The Professor* and *Villette*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 64:2 (2009): 163–188.

---

[3] Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

[4] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979, 2000.

[5] Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, and Cohn, "Still Life: Suspended Animation in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 52:4 (Autumn 2012): 843-60.

[6] Eva Badowska, for example, has claimed that Brontë represents inner life as an object itself, framing Lucy's development in terms of commodity culture. For Karen Lawrence, who understands Lucy to adopt a cipher's pose, surfaces sustain Lucy's power. And Nicholas Dames, exploring how Lucy pursues a clinical mode of seeing, emphasizes her attention to presentation in reading others. See Badowska, "Choseville: Brontë's *Villette* and the Art of Bourgeois Interiority," *PMLA* 120:5 (Oct. 2005): 1509-23; Lawrence, "The Cypher: Disclosure and Reticence in *Villette*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 42:4 (March 1998): 448-66; and Dames, "The Clinical Novel: Phrenology and *Villette*," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 29:3 (Spring 1996): 367-90.

[7] Warhol, "Double Gender, Double Genre in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 36:4 (Autumn 1996): 857-75.

[8] See Margaret L. Shaw, "Narrative Surveillance and Social Control in *Villette*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 34:4 (Autumn 1994): 813-33, and Emily W. Heady, "'Must I Render an Account?' Genre and Self-Narration in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 36:6 (Fall 2006): 341-64.

[9] This name, of course, ironizes Lucy's struggles to feel at home, both at Bretton and generally.

[10] When Polly needs her nurse, for example, Lucy rings the bell without pause, smoothly meeting the needs of a guest as a hostess or insider would.

[11] While "I, Lucy Snowe, was calm" clearly echoes the earlier phrase in which Lucy tells her name, this new statement comes across as a concentrated credo, as if Lucy wants to convey that she is nothing if not calm, yet is also nothing *but* this, implying triumphant self-reliance. Soon, however, Lucy betrays how much she leans on others as foils. Describing her and the Brettons' reactions to seeing Polly bereft, Lucy sets up her singularity by creating, then consciously breaking, a linguistic chain of sameness: "Mrs. Bretton, *being a mother*, shed a tear or two. Graham, *who was writing*, lifted up his eyes and gazed at her. I, *Lucy Snowe*, was calm" (22, my emphasis). In other words, stressing her nature through comparisons to others, Lucy creates strong links through contrast, stabilizing her "I" through them.

[12] This passage makes Lucy seem entombed, yet her actions do make sense, given that she has just undergone several catastrophic losses and wants to cut fate off at the knees. To modern-day critics, as suggested, this kind of submission on Lucy's part, as well as her larger arcs of withdrawal, underlie debates about what constitutes agency in the text, including the functions of speech and reserve in her process of maturing.

[13] Prior to this, Lucy has a moment of Wordsworthian inspiration in which breeze becomes her breath, and breath as expansion of the body leads to expanded imagination. Writing of her uncertainty after Miss Marchmont dies, she states: "I drew in energy with the keen, low breeze that blew on its path. A bold thought was sent to my mind ... I saw London" (39).

[14] Suzanne Keen calls such pockets "annexes." She describes annexes across nineteenth-century texts as shadowed, off-limits, exceptional zones that novels pursue formally to make room for probing topics disallowed on more open ground. See *Victorian Renovations of the Novel: Narrative Annexes and the Boundaries of Representation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

[15] James Buzard. *Disorienting Fiction: The Autoethnographic Work of Nineteenth-Century Novels*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

[16] This layered withdrawal into nooks, and reading, recalls the first scene of *Jane Eyre*, in which the young Jane sequesters herself with a book in an empty room, and then a curtained window seat.

[17] Robbins, "'How Do I Look? *Villette* and Looking Different(ly)," *Brontë Studies: The Journal of the Brontë Society* 28:3 (Nov. 2003): 215-24.

[18] Margaret L. Shaw writes that "Lucy is placed alone in the pensionnat with a cretin, a woman whose total isolation and dependency suggest not just a contrast but also a continuum along which Lucy herself is placed." See "Narrative Surveillance and Social Control in *Villette*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 34:4 (Autumn 1994): 813-33.

[19] In contrast, though he cares for her, the confident, easy-going Graham never seems to lose the habit of viewing Lucy as safe and bland, as an "inoffensive shadow" (317).

[20] When Paul becomes Lucy's informal tutor, Lucy writes of wanting someone who loves him "better than he loved himself" to gather up his nuggets of wisdom (358). Although she means that she wants Paul's knowledge and philosophical thoughts preserved, we can view *Villette* as a version of this kind of careful record, as it attests to the generosity of his spirit and intellect.

[21] A strong divide in work on the text has to do with whether or not *Villette* should be read as a story of growth towards liberating self-expression. To Gilbert and Gubar, as we've seen, Lucy's memoir shows her growth through the discovery of a true voice. In contrast, Ivan Kreilkamp claims that *Villette* strives to show how "female agency [often] derives from the withholding ... of speech" (334). See Kreilkamp, "Unuttered: Withheld Speech and Female Authorship in *Jane*

Eyre and *Villette*," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 32:3 (Summer 1999): 331-54. See Susan Bernstein, *Confessional Subjects: Revelations of Gender and Power in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), for a description of the text's ambiguities over confession as Lucy grows more empowered. And for a reading of the narration's shifting tones as part of a sadistic struggle for mastery and "the conquest of knowledge" (911), see Jon Hodge, "*Villette*'s Compulsory Education," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 45:4 (Autumn 2005): 899-916.

[22] One review writes that while a reader might at first dislike Lucy, eventually, her reserve wins out, and "you learn to love [her]." "Currer Bell's New Novel," *The Leader* 4:151 (Feb. 1853): 163.

[23] This poem is "Haworth Churchyard," written in April 1855. *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* 51:305 (May 1885): 527-30.

[24] Matthew Arnold. *The Letters of Matthew Arnold: 1829-1859*. Ed. Cecil Y. Lang. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996.

[25] See Lucasta Miller for a discussion of British readers' shocked response to learning that Currer and Ellis Bell were young women living in the rural moors, and of how this keen surprise added to the sisters' fame. Miller, *The Brontë Myth*. New York: Anchor Books, 2005.

[26] "*Ruth* and *Villette*," *Westminster Review* 3 (April 1853): 485-91.

Chapter Three:

Alone Together or Just Alone?: Solitude, *The Odd Women*, and an Economics of Choice

The onset of *The Odd Women* depicts a case of too little, too late. The patriarch of the Madden clan, after years of not discussing money with his wife and daughters—for, he argues, women are not meant to think of finances—finally lets his oldest daughter into the state of the family funds. Though hesitant to burden Alice with such vulgar information, Mr. Madden describes a plan to put insurance on his life. His thinking is that such a move will provide for his six girls; however, he dies a few days hence, leaving this defenseless group thrown on what the older ones can earn through scanty workplace skills, as well as a small return on a modest inheritance. Some of the girls find underpaid work; some of them die while still quite young; all of them suffer from limited options for financial independence. And with this stark, compressed opening, George Gissing is off like a shot in portraying a social crisis of middle-class women in England, single and of marrying age, being outnumbered by single men, so that "odd" or excess females must confront the realm of paid work, a realm that is hostile to and technically restricted for them (Gissing 5).

In undeniably clearer ways than *Persuasion* or *Villette*, Gissing foregrounds money's pull in women's engagements with solitude. Much scholarship, probing the links that the novel illuminates between money and solitude, describes the female distance it renders in decidedly negative terms.[1] Of course, Gissing pities women blocked from chosen separations, either from being single and poor (and having little leisure time), or because of married dynamics that keep women's leisure prescribed. But while the text condemns such cases in no uncertain terms, it is

crucial for us to note that there is more to its female distance than frustration, oppression, and lack.

The Odd Women calculates an "economics of solitude," my chosen term for a primary lens, within fears about money's force, that filters Gissing's calls for change through the topic of separateness. Within complaints about money's hold on each facet of daily life, Gissing works to define true freedom; he defines it largely through self-time and willed withdrawal, viewing these as unmatched fields for intent and agency. Simply put, he crafts a metric for what it costs to be alone, both in terms of bare subsistence and of performing solo strength, with real autonomy meaning the right to seek out social distance freely: to choose, on an everyday level, how directly available to other people one should be.

Because he puts such emphasis on the poor's isolation, as well as on ideals of marriage that encode middle-class privilege into narrow moral terms, it seems, at first, that Gissing does mean only to align harsh distance with money's corrosive force. Yet beyond just linking wealth, or lack of wealth, to "bad" distance, Gissing explores reverse truths, too: wealth as an aid to rich privacy, as well as the fact that it cannot buy fruitful distance on its own. Thus, the novel's calculus keeps from reducing fully to money either painful or pleasing distance, stressing other resources, from proactive tenacity to tolerant relationships, in subjects laying claim to enriching separation.

As we see with Austen and Brontë, but in still more urgent terms, Gissing calls for embracing distance in daily living on two planes. First, a plane of cultural difference as subjects study and challenge norms, and second, a plane of domestic life, as he, in his own study of economic structurings of women's time and space, argues for the right to withdraw as a basic human right. Ultimately, Gissing unites both of these aspects of fruitful distance into a vision of

curious people being gladly "alone together" as they merge eccentric habits with attentive forms of exchange. But unlike Austen and Brontë do, Gissing suggests that an ideal type of jointly lone relationship radically depends upon—since he ties chosen distance to rights—the fact of gender parity. Thus, for him, it cannot thrive within the bounds, as they yet stand, of heterosexual marriages.

With this argument at his back, Gissing thus establishes Mary Barfoot and Rhoda Nunn, the main New Women in the text, as a healthy "solo" dyad as they live together, unmarried, and run a successful business. Across the story, Rhoda and Mary constitute an alternate to two extremes of sad aloneness and failed solo pairs, one aligned with poverty and the other with affluence, and both embodied by Madden sisters—the elder two, in the first instance, as they share a stifling room, and Monica, a younger sister, who marries into wealth, yet finds herself much more oppressed by bourgeois codes than she imagined. These sad pairings each entail a shared social separateness, but not in any proactive way, not enlivening or renewing energy on a personal note and not aiding politically the cause of women's enhanced agency.

Extant studies of *The Odd Women* are quiet on its strong distance, not in terms of its aspirations for rich female solitude, but on its strains of it, its actual examples of it. For instance, Sally Ledger has claimed that *The Odd Women* complicates, through the figure of the shopgirl, the question of who constitutes the boundary-pushing urban New Woman. In Ledger's view, what's odd in the text is how little Mary and Rhoda get out into the public sphere, where they would challenge its gender norms by occupying contested space in a "masculine … arena" (272).[2] She observes that Mary and Rhoda often wind up conversing at home, where they enjoy a comfortable, companionable domestic arrangement. Ledger assumes that this dynamic is to let Gissing ponder whether or not the lowly shopgirl might be a more trailblazing figure than the

educated New Woman. That is, she understands Mary and Rhoda's being largely depicted at home not through domestic separation having a possibly strengthening force. Instead, she reads their time at home through precluded public presence, a move that privileges public life as a field for engendering change.

Without denying the observation that women crusading for greater power do not spend much narrative time on male-dominated ground, I suggest that Gissing's portrayal of New Women happy at home is edgier than Ledger permits. This is less through implications of same-sex female fulfillment than through Mary and Rhoda's respect for each woman's will to distance. Gissing, I argue, makes the case that if his culture is to shift towards greater gender equity, then it needs both public drives for social justice for women and drives for household realms in which their rights to solo time can be nicely taken for granted. Never pitting private life against public power simplistically, Gissing makes concurrent calls for women's visibility and for them to have more ease in choosing *low* visibility. Doing so, he renders distance both a complement to engagement and a crucial element of naturalizing core rights for all. Recasting a traditional view of middle-class homes as enclaves for women, Gissing treats domestic life as a new kind of citadel, one that shields women's claims to unhampered time apart. At the same time that he invokes the landscape of the moneyed home to denounce conventional views, he does so to ground a proposed shift in ideology. Under this shift, the best home lives would sanction self-direction for women inside and outside the home, compensating for gender norms that systemically rein them in and protecting their right to choose distance as a real act of self-care.

Also under Gissing's views, the concept of being alone together, often invoked regretfully about Victorian urban life as well as being a metaphor within ideals of companionate marriage, undergoes significant change. Against the views of Monica's implacable husband Widdowson,

sharing a kind of intimate distance does not mean that each spouse needs only the other for hope and joy. In fact, beyond its massive sway, Gissing sets up money's limits largely through this man's resistance to how Monica envisions being jointly alone while wed, with her thoughts including goals of both partners having time apart.

Gissing further asserts money's limits when he invokes the concept of a valued solitary style. Squaring strong solo styles against financial considerations, *The Odd Women* shows how wealth can heighten someone's buoyancy, yet also claims that one needs more for enduring self-possession. Its verdict, then, is that while money matters for women's political progress, to be most potent, it needs pairing with subjective initiative, and to circulate in a context of revitalized gender norms. Through such claims, the novel asks that we rethink the nature of distance, defining choosing solitude as a central liberty.

To Gissing, nothing could be more basic than control over whether to be available to other people. Likewise, nothing could be more deflating than blocked access to this end. Having the freedom to tailor the rhythm of one's current circumstances, having the leeway to decide if one wants to talk or not, having the luxury not to feel responsible for others' moods—such platforms for agency are crucial to selfhood and health, yet too often elude "odd" women with little cultural clout. In Mary and Rhoda's fortunate case, merging their financial comfort with progressive politics, they are able to serve as models of what it looks like to take for granted, in an affirmative sense, time for purposeful female distance within a flexible household order. Of course, each one expects courtesy as a tone of their friendship, yet neither woman expects the other to account for needing withdrawal. Instead, they see such needs as givens and honor them, often wordlessly, making their home a place of fluid joining and parting, absence and presence.

For Virginia and Alice Madden, their lack of money means that they are stuck at home for much of the time, where they worry themselves sick over how to save resources. Their sister is a different example of forced solitude rooted in the primacy and ascendance of capital, thanks to a spouse who fiercely embraces middle-class goals of femaleness, and who interprets Monica's wishes for self-time as a blow to their vows. As these pairings circulate, the narrative urges us to compare their relations to elective or recuperative time apart. Between the Madden sisters' poles of domestic sequestration, in one case from penury, and in the other, from effects of rigid moneyed ideals for marriage, Rhoda and Mary are meant to shine as a viable, strong example of relational "solo-ness," one whose radical force derives from its very tranquility, from its very lack of clash around issues of daily withdrawal.

Money and Solitude, First Extreme: Virginia, Alice, and Privation

Through specific references to yearly incomes and wage earning, Gissing crunches the solitude numbers. Acknowledging that painful distance happens to everyone at times, *The Odd Women* shows how it falls to the poor acutely and disproportionately, since those struggling to get by to live so protectively. The novel outlines earning thresholds below which different men would strain to "keep" wives (or attract them first), as well as the often brutal task of stretching cash for single women as they face a dearth of paid work or that which barely pays at all. It thus creates a grim portrayal of a subset of London's poor for which poverty means forced hermitism, holing up in cramped living quarters and defensively guarding goods via physical seclusion.

Virginia and Alice represent the novel's first and most poignant example of Londoners mired in isolation because of fierce material lack. Although they are not technically lone

because of sharing a rented room, they function as hermits together from needing to hoard their scant assets. Through vicious headaches and bouts of illness that hardly improve on her spare London diet, Alice is obsessed with gauging the absolute minimum budget required to keep her and her sister alive: "If it came to the very worst, our food need not cost more than sixpence a day—three and sixpence a week. I do really believe, Virgie, we could support life on less—say, on fourpence. Yes, we could dear!" (Gissing 19). For Virginia, whose own health is fragile, the years have seen her slowly devolve into a flighty, high-strung woman scarred from previous rigorous study—from learning meant to compensate for the deadening rhythms of work, but which ended up being excessive and ruining her for cerebral tasks. In London, Virginia turns to drink, a move that feeds her stultifying, enervating distance more: not only does she have to hide her use of alcohol from Alice, but also, what she spends on it is money that she badly needs, making the sisters' retrenchment schemes even more necessary.

Although these sisters move to London for more opportunity, they end up having to minimize risk by staying home for most of each day, where they grow ever more apprehensive, ever less fit for surprise and change. The cloisteredness of the pair symbolizes how unneeded they are by the world, and gives them plenty of time to mull, obsessively, over this grave fact. Virginia, perversely, starts to relish her stagnancy as she waits for work, weighing it against a future of demeaning, thankless jobs or even more desperate want, and clinging to it as a haven from irrevocable abjection. As she admits one day to Alice: "You know, my dear, I am afraid I have not exerted myself as I might have done to find a new place. These comfortable lodgings, and the pleasure of seeing Monica once a week, have tempted me into idleness. It really isn't my wish to be idle … but oh, if one could work in a home of one's own!" (19).

Here, Virginia dreams of a life that would combine industry with domestic sovereignty,

a dream that is purveyed and realized by the pair of Rhoda and Mary. With a home, secured by Mary (who has inherited liberal funds), and a partnership in a school that trains women for office work, they view singleness as a triumph, a badge of honor for a woman. To them, a woman spends her life well if she seeks being unsupported in moneyed and marital senses, consciously choosing "to live alone and work steadily for a definite object" (44).

Of course, by such lights, Virginia and Alice live a travesty of self-dependence. In their household quarantine, being mindful can only mean an agonizing daily math, as they scrimp and calculate how to extend each coin they have. Commonly, for Victorian times, Gissing suggests that the unremitting depth of their distance erodes their health. Above their room's "close atmosphere," as well as above the sorrowful fact that Rhoda, when she sees Virginia, can instantly tell "the poor woman [is] starving" (20, 81), Gissing suggests in broader terms that extended, encompassing distance damages organic vigor. If such a stance is popular, though, then Gissing breaks from conventionality by dividing female distance into willed and imposed aspects. Doing so, he specifies that forced distance engulfs the sisters, undermining their physical strength. Yet also, boldly, he suggests that the other direction is true: that just as much as women's bodies suffer under imposed estrangement, that a lack of *positive* distance—in contrast to more socializing or just less forced solitude—hinders their vitality, too.

Part of what makes *The Odd Women* unique is that it broaches, specifically, the topic of women's best daily health, and that it specifically ties self-time or chosen remoteness to such a state. At first, the novel seems to suggest primarily that being alone is a likely source of illness, making subjects lazy or restless, indolent or intemperate, by dint of removing social checks on personal weakness and error. But while it affirms that solitude has the potential to weaken health if it means harsh deprivation, is an arm of social oppression, or even if it goes on longer than a

person means it to, it also affirms intended withdrawal as a feature of optimal fitness, mentally and physically. If Ian Watt aligns solitude, as one's sense of being distinct, with a cultural narrative of self-creation through the creation of life opportunities, then Gissing also imbues solitude with a part of what it means to be a vibrant soul in the world, yet because he writes of women, does not assume an easy path, in forging paths, on any level. As much as being poor unites many women in his work, a thread that brings together ailing women in particular is not being able to claim self-time as a strengthening act. Then, too, he shows us, with some sympathy—but not total sympathy—how female illness can include women's not even recognizing their potential for strength in withdrawal.

Like Austen argues in *Persuasion*, Gissing maintains that fearing distance and avoiding seeking it out is a greater personal risk than those the nineteenth century often blamed on solitude. As briefly explained in my introduction, nineteenth-century commentary about solitude's role in health included worries about its role in psychological degeneration, whether by, most benignly, making a person lazy and bored, or by being a gateway state to mental imbalance, most seriously. Some of this discourse isolates the physical perils of solitude, ruing its impact on bodily habits like eating, drinking, bathing, and dressing. But even more than hygiene or nerves, much of it describes effects of major distance, however defined, on cognition and mental health. At its mildest, an expectation of mental trouble in solitude held that people would lose social knowledge, an intimacy with accepted procedures, through substantial isolation, and that a brain would turn lethargic without access to stimulation beyond what a person could do for himself. At the other end of the scale were views that hefty time alone would yield not only a loss of knowledge, but also of acuity, and even breaks with reality.

A periodical piece, for instance, titled "The Discipline of Solitude" (1879) correlates major isolation with assorted forms of disease, first comparing the recluse's state to a "stagnant pool with its slime and filth and loathsome reptile life" (58), and concluding with a warning about solitude and insanity: "Take up your station in selfish solitude, and ten to one but you sink into an idle dreamer, a pitiful embodiment of error and superstition, or, it may become a confirmed lunatic" (60).[3]

While much discourse on solitude in the nineteenth century assumes or patently specifies a male experiencing subject, writers sometimes made a point to highlight solitude's impact on women, as *The Odd Women* does throughout. An article titled "On Solitude" published in 1891 starts with a story about a husband who has been rendered solitary through a cool and stilted marriage. Notably, though, while this piece begins with sorry feelings for a man, it soon asserts that married estrangement is a bigger problem for women. This fact is because, while a man can soothe domestic estrangement by drowning his cares in the rewards of public life, "the time has not yet come when the woman can toss aside her cares as a child throws off his bedclothes when the morning sun shines on him" (486).[4]

Especially when health was invoked, common to thoughts about female distance were essentialist notions that women were not made for time alone. At the end of the century, the writer of a magazine piece feels it is fitting to deploy a rhetorical mode to ask of readers, "Shall I be considered ungallant if I say that women are as a rule less able to appreciate the pleasures of solitude than men?" ("The Luxury of Solitude," 577).[5] And in a poem from *Bow Bells Weekly* published in 1888, the speakers centers her views of distance on an axis of healthy growth, punning on the words "standing alone" to depict a happy toddler learning to be independent turning into a modern woman who is blasé about marriage, to her later huge regret. The overt

message is that while females may find self-reliance exciting, the time will come, and come too late, when solitude turns into a curse. And the latent message is that those women who stay traditionally unsupported risk derailing the natural course of growth and development.[6]

Unlike this poem, which treats female singleness as a departure from nature's plans, *The Odd Women* holds that what is oddest about female autonomy is that society is not structured to support its flourishing. Miriam Bailin has studied the link, well-trod in Victorian fiction, between illness and moments when "sufferers … have become separated from the social roles and norms by which they previously defined themselves" (5). She argues that such separation must be the start of any discussion of the space of ministration. For Bailin and her analysis, if solitude sometimes precipitates illness, then it can also help lead the way out, with the sickroom reforming it through inversions of truth and value that this space inherently fashions—a space where physical bodies displace the demands of a social one. Assertions of this type clearly touch on many of solitude's latent boons, and even its visceral healing force. So why, then, if Victorian fiction teems with sickrooms that usher in distance and that transform it, if just for a time, into protection or the privileging of a patient's moods and whims, do we not see, in *The Odd Women*, bedsits or sickrooms that bring ease specifically as separate realms? Why do we not see that here?

With all of its infirm characters, from Mrs. Cosgrove's frail sister to the "invalidish" Bevis women to, most fully, Virginia and Alice, *The Odd Women* offers little soothing through the remoteness entailed in poor health, avoiding representing illness through auspicious privacy (Gissing 189). Given the novel's many techniques for representing solitude as an aid to vigor and balance, its lack of palliative distance in sickness is either an anxious slip about solitude's therapeutic worth, or, more likely, a move to keep strong distance from being ghettoized. A

sickroom that affords a woman a suspension of onerous norms would accord with the novel's main views, yet Gissing keeps from placing rich distance in a clearly liminal space. Creating a helpful sickroom, that is, would be a chance to stress the trials of normative domesticity for women, but it would also be to risk passively backing the status quo. For if the novel were to defend the sickroom as a solo realm, then readers might see as less pressing its calls for richer *everyday* options for women to have, for their optimum health, normalized elective withdrawal.

In Alice and Virginia's case, Gissing does not grant them any positive pleasure in illness at all.[7] Through their required, near-constant confinement, he ironizes prospects of freedom: freedom from having to account for all of one's reactions and choices; freedom from having to conform to the expectations of others. In short, the sisters' shared bedsit has no useful qualities, no silver lining to its cloud. However, without being cruel to them, Gissing shows that their condition does not have to be a foregone conclusion.

Without undermining his concerns with structural features behind their small room and their dull detention there, Gissing takes the sisters to task for not being more proactive, for not directing daily aloneness, as literally deprived as it is, towards learning and testing out when and where to take more risks. Out of the sisters' stuffy enclave, a scene in Trafalgar Square stresses Virginia's weakness for drink, throwing into relief the grit that could have driven her solo day out. On a rare long walk alone, Virginia stops to look around and enjoy the urban view, experiencing a heady joy that she calls a 'holiday," one she admits she "had not known since Alice's coming to London" (22-3). Virginia feels great relief in being untethered to other people, invisible as she notes urban throngs going about workaday tasks. But since she has already been to a bar for a quick, reviving drink, we mistrust the drinking in that she does on a visual plane, questioning her satisfaction in unhurried people watching. When we learn that she "viewed the

square like a person who stands there for the first time, smiling" (23), we must largely tie such smiles to their alcoholic source, a source that renders them simple and empty, rather than an element of social, seeking solitude.

As this scene illuminates, within expansive empathy, Gissing censures mature adults without proactive solo styles. Like Austen does in *Persuasion* and like Brontë does in *Villette*, he views passivity in aloneness as a failure of character, treating it as a major weakness, whether in a woman or man. Even as the narrative cites an earlier span of solitude as having injured Virginia's mind, a span before she lived in London when "her health [was] damaged by … study" (Gissing 16), it cannot keep from expecting more from Virginia's current state than her mental laziness and shortcuts to inspiration through drink. From Alice, too, the novel wants boldness, at once understanding her penny pinching in its full fastidious force and subtly faulting her for keeping the household going through strict daily plans, as if, as much as her careful plotting keeps the sisters from starvation, she would do better to risk more change versus extend such a pitiful state.

Money and Solitude, Second Extreme: Monica and Middle-Class Marriage

While Alice and Virginia maintain a kind of quarantine in their home, their sister Monica represents a different type of domestic internment. If the former's passivity adds to their suffering in remoteness, then Monica's case is the opposite: she suffers from not being able to keep from resisting the trite contours of the shared distance her husband extols, a way of being "alone together" that sees a wife subsume her interests wholly into the husband's own. While *The Odd Women* demonstrates Monica's strength in solitude, it also shows how she is restrained from enacting her solo style once she marries the serious, conservative Edmund Widdowson.

This fact is due to Widdowson's drive to shape Monica into a model of pliant womanhood, a household goddess who dwells with him in a realm of shared distance, defined by each one needing no other, beyond the other, for happiness. Being all in all to a spouse is how Widdowson thinks of leisure and stability in married life. However, with vastly different ideas, both of what good marriages mean and of conscious time alone as a nurturing, social force, Monica shows us the stakes involved in wanting self-time within a union, as well as within financial horizons that would seem to be her salvation.

Critically, Monica's pleas for change and greater autonomy in her marriage always start with and return to calls for greater time alone. As much as Monica would resist being called a New Woman, the core of the text, even spatially, are her steadfast arguments for elective time apart as her proper due, simply by virtue of being an adult subject with reasoned will. Having left Rhoda's school after just a few weeks there, Monica turns out to have been an "apt pupil" after all, for she asserts, with Widdowson, her "right to live a life of her own apart from that imposed … by …wedlock" (188).

Specifically, what Monica wants are free days of travel to London, there to enjoy new social scenes or simply wander as she likes. Through the shape of such desires, Gissing highlights the satisfactions of solo urban adventures as Monica openly fights for them in dialogue with her husband. From the start of their acquaintance, Widdowson surveils Monica, and after their marriage, strives to stop her from going anywhere alone. By making Widdowson sick with doubt over Monica's needs and claims for solo episodes, Gissing suggests how privileged he is in never having had to doubt his own power, once he gained money, to shape his days around ideas about social interaction—either about how much to have or from whom to claim company. In fact, the canker of his marriage is how Monica forces his hand on this very

certainty, as she asserts a confident sense of her own rights to decide: to assess, when tasks are done, how directly social to be; to select environments that match or do not grate on her moods; and to choose time with a friend or no one special at all, but simply to go into the city with no set purpose or chaperone.

Ironically, Monica gets to enjoy the city more as a penniless worker than she does when she becomes a well-appointed, leisured wife. Although, when employed at a shop, Monica strains for privacy and can barely recreate, she learns, to her intense dismay, that she still had more free time than in her transformed married life. At the hectic draper's shop, she is often tired and weak, yet she garners confidence as a crosser of urban terrain, making her self-reliance planned and her planning physical. Sadly for her, in her wedded days, although she still craves urban strolls, her lack of access becomes a sore; in fact, Widdowson's anger at London as a stage for Monica's smarts steers their relationship into rupture, into a truly destructive distance that eventually drives them apart.

The fervency of Monica's need specifically to wander London is the crux of the difference between the ways that she and her husband are wired, but also the extents to which they understand solitude as a site of rising to meet worldly challenges. Late in the novel, Widdowson targets the city as a source of pain, putting the blame on "this cursed London" for his current marital rift (250). Of course, no reader could deny that Gissing represents the city as a site of alienation, especially for the urban poor. But at the same time, he writes of it, and of urban distance more broadly, as fertile soil for self-cultivation, affording chances to feel empowered from knowing one is managing its psychic and perceptual trials. In Monica's case, her being female means that beyond a standard need for quick thinking in the city, she must confront gendered norms for conduct while exposed on open ground. Yet despite this annoying

burden, Monica views London strolling through a desire to test her wits, and through the fundamental rewards of self-driven consciousness. Even when the concrete point of a trip involves her friends, cracking the city's diverse codes gives Monica a rush of aloneness as a sense of lessened pressure from familiar duties or debts.

Although she wishes for more time to conclusively call her own, Monica, before her marriage, does use free days to take outings and to navigate the city. A female and poor, non-standard *flâneur*, she is yet a skillful one, proving she is able to meet the city's logistic obstacles, using the space of the city itself against the confusion and enervation that being immersed in its rhythms can bring. Despite at one point telling herself that "coming to London was a mistake" (38), Monica admirably meets the call for constant, flexible judgment making in engaged urban dwelling. If true engagement with a city "tests the urban dweller's … adaptability," then Monica's resourcefulness "proclaims her modernity" against her sisters' lassitude and timidity (Young 49, 53).[8] Widdowson, likewise, is also timid in interacting with London's flow; his preference for realizing freedom of movement is to take quiet country excursions or to choose to stay at home. After meeting Monica, when Widdowson does make city treks, they are done to stalk and keep watch, rather than enjoy London's puzzles and its surging plenitude. In fact, because of his behavior, Monica, despite her femaleness, emerges as the truer *flâneur*, with Widdowson's skulking making him "a parody" of the male urban stroller (Ledger 270).

While she is a poor urban dweller, boarding with her fellow shopgirls and working a punishing schedule, Monica's state is not her sisters' panicked, extended hermitism. Rather, it is fiercely wanting more leeway for private aims. Being immersed six days of the week in the cacophony of the shop, Monica yearns not just for change, but for greater solitude. Even on her few leisure days, Monica's openness on the streets to male projections of desire complicates her

time alone. One Sunday, when she and a man who wants to marry her both are free, this man, Mr. Bullivant, follows her, risking seeming impolite to capitalize on a longed-for chance. Having Bullivant's company conflicts with Monica's plans for the day, but his longing and male prerogative make him tag along for a while. The consequence is awkwardness as Bullivant knows he is being willful, and as Monica has no choice but to raise a painful topic—specifically, the meager salary that would mean, if she married him, a long engagement while he saved and worked to advance in his career.

As this scene reveals, Monica's urban solo time necessarily comes with strings. However, she still draws power from it, and views her solo time when single with nostalgia from the perspective of her troubled married life. According to Ledger's argument, in her role as a shopgirl, Monica functions in *The Odd Women* as a "socially disruptive figure," both "from her association with modern commerce … and from the difficulty of labeling her in class terms" (Ledger 270). Yet added to Monica's border crossing in her phase of life in the shop is how her excursions, when she gets them, make her fluid in physical placement, so that, on the whole, she challenges norms for female movement more openly than the novel's New Women do.

In contrast to her friend Milly Vesper, a student at the training school, the pre-marriage Monica works more overtly to recast the terms of her self-sufficiency. Whereas Milly adjusts her approach to living alone internally—"I [once] thought myself ill-used because I had to work for next to no payment and live in solitude. Now I should be ashamed to complain of what falls to the lot of thousands of girls" (Gissing 80)—Monica literally takes to the streets to shift the weight of her situation, using walking and getting around to draw newness into her orbit and to bodily manifest will. Especially, then, when Widdowson tries to deny her mobility, we see how important some willed aloneness is to Monica's state of mind and her overall endurance. After

marriage, despite a glut of material luxuries, Monica in fact gets sicker than she ever has before, as Widdowson reacts more strongly to her desires for time apart. A typical plunge into infirmity sees her in bed for several days, "and on rising … only sit[ting] by the fireside, silent, melancholy" (176). With her growing increasingly hopeless at her "unnatural" situation (223), illness, as we have seen before, grants separation but not relief; instead, the freedom Monica wants is more systemic and enduring than what a sickroom can afford.

On her honeymoon, while not ill, Monica does get somber at times from learning "less agreeable" things about Widdowson in the bedroom, as well as learning what his ideal of time spent with one's spouse entails (169). This honeymoon brings Widdowson to dizzying heights of happiness, primarily because of the fact that he gets to enjoy solitude with Monica as *he* defines it, as an "alone together" distance that consciously ignores other people to distill fullness and focus into a cloistered dyad. Monica concedes to this form as a temporary measure, submitting to a narrative of newlywed intensity, but to Widdowson, it should be a guiding light for their whole life. Thus, his joy in "spots by the sea-shore, when they sat in solitude" (170) is a state that he tries to recapture for the rest of their grinding marriage.

Dooming Widdowson in his efforts are Monica's increasing defenses of alone time being her due, as she argues for mobility and for not being supervised. But also, their moments of shared remoteness were never as shared as Widdowson felt, never being equally prized or equally contributed to. Although, later, he can intuit when Monica is feigning interest, on their honeymoon, he is blind to his wife's ploys for mental escape. These are moments when Monica wears a careful look of attentiveness while "thinking her own thoughts" (171), silently subverting a hermetic "alone together" ideal, one in which a fantastical bubble makes a social vacuum of

two, but whose creation depends on a wife letting her husband's aspirations and instincts enclose her own.

Emphasizing the import of Monica's claims for solitude is how the chapters in which these partners hash out disparate views of distance stand at the story's physical middle. As Monica feels, her reading of distance and what it can add to a marriage constitutes a litmus test for whether or not her overall judgment is to be given trust and respect. In contrast, Widdowson views her drive for solitude as an affront, her comments on needing a change of pace as a rejection of him and their vows. In the face of such obdurate thoughts, Monica tries, again and again, to express that personal time is a vital part of freedom, and that "freedom" is not sedition coming from the mouth of a wife. In one example of such work, she asks her husband to empathize with how she feels on lone excursions, based on the "ease" that anyone feels—or so she imagines—when strolling alone: "Suppose the thought took you that you would go and walk about the City some afternoon, and you wished to go alone, just to be more at ease, should I have a right to forbid you, or grumble at you? And yet you are very dissatisfied if I wish to go anywhere alone" (184).

During the couple's long discussions of gender norms and disparities, Monica's wishes always boil down to self-determined mobility. Her stance is that if a husband can choose the settings and company he prefers, then if she meets a reasonable threshold of domestic and marital duty, a wife should be able to do the same. Against Widdowson's paranoia, such contentions come across as reasoned, calm, and powerfully just. Yet part of why these arguments fail is that Widdowson never concedes a woman's human distinctiveness once she has joined a man in marriage. Although he admits that his independence partly means choosing how social to be, it seems unnatural in a wife to want or need more change than he, so much so

that he grows wary, imagining some type of collusion, when a doctor suggests that Monica have a "variety of occupation" (176).

Widdowson likewise never admits that Monica could be overwhelmed by the role he wants for her, the role of the caretaking wife who is happy, even relieved, to have tending to others' needs be her main route to efficacy. As hard as she tries to explain to him, Widdowson cannot understand how a woman could feel oppressed by cultural expectations to nurture, which means that he does not accept her comment that a solo excursion brings her "ease" like it would for him, removing layers of obligation to help others be comfortable (184). In fact, in the face of Widdowson's values, Monica's pleas fall flat twice over: first, because inseparableness is what true passion means to him, and second, because he is not compelled by the same norms as Monica is to be prepared to defer, routinely, to a spouse's judgment calls. In short, not only would Widdowson rarely want to walk through London alone, but also, he would rarely turn to urban solo adventures for power, not being subject to codes of domestic fulfillment and spousal submission.

Entailed in Widdowson's deaf ears are worries that extend beyond not being loved or properly viewed as his wife's counselor. A supplemental nagging concern is that being alone in public will make Monica a commodity. Even before the pair is married, Widdowson follows Monica in part to see with his own eyes the hardships that she undergoes, and in part to see if she seems to actively relish public view. His fear is basically that this woman may have a vein of coquetry, or else be scooped up under his nose, a worry that places her in the realm of property to be bought through marriage.[9] Tellingly, Widdowson hates his wife's past as much for how demanding it was as for the knowledge it gave her about the public aspects of London, from its

streets and neighborhoods to its modes of transportation. He deeply resents how Monica holds such knowledge up as a point of pride, an element of her self-esteem and wisdom as an adult. To him, a woman's enjoyment in strolling goes with relishing being seen, and though he believes that "a beautiful woman ought to be beautifully clad" (170), the sway attending Monica's beauty ought to pass to him as her mate; he hardly wants his wife to like being admired by a common gaze.

In both a helpless and selfish move, Widdowson calls up past loneliness and social awkwardness to dissuade Monica from pursuing time apart, claiming that his history of distance has groomed him to think dark thoughts. Leaping from her wish to be mobile to thoughts of her straying sexually, Widdowson, plagued by angst, begs Monica for monogamy and suggests that she is putting her fidelity on the line. When Monica reacts with shock that he could even think such a thing, Widdowson blames past solitude for making him, already nervous, even less fluent socially, as well as primed to be thrown off by someone self-assured like her. Confused by both her comfort with others and her comfort with solitude, Widdowson tries to recoup clout by drawing on Monica's sympathies, reminding her how shy he is, and subtly asking her to redeem his prior years of alienation with an agreement to erect a shared barrier against the world. "It's because I have lived so much alone," he says, attempting to explain and normalize his outsized fears. "I have never had more than one or two friends, and I am absurdly jealous when you want to get away from me and amuse yourself with strangers. I can't talk to such people. I am not suited for society" (187).

In citing his history and deep quirks as the main causes of his troubles, Widdowson proves how resistant he is to seeing what readers easily see, which are the inherent inequities in his gendered attitudes. His primary interpretive lenses justify calls for Monica to commit,

without question, to a seal against the world, a refuge from the social stings that he, as a man, has bravely weathered, and for which he deserves recompense. With such myopia, Widdowson ruins any chance he might have had for Monica to want to engage in joint retreat with him, either in addition to or versus time spent on her own. Widdowson is thus a victim of the fervor of his ideals, stubbornly clinging to a vision of himself as a bourgeois man who, reaping the fruits of life, can and should be able to assume a wife's complete devotion. For him, this means a wife who commits to a "companionate" union that takes all of its cues from him. Given how wrong Widdowson is in thinking that this model of marriage will succeed with Monica, or, in fact, succeed at all within new trends of modernity, *The Odd Women* shows some sadness for him.[10] But more, the novel is sympathetic to his beleaguered wife for thinking that Widdowson and his wealth would mean deliverance from strife and toil, only to find herself more constrained by his fervent allegiance to norms than by her earlier poverty.

Money and Solitude, Balanced Third Way: Rhoda, Mary, and Domestic Equality

With Monica joining her older sisters in excessive time at home, though, ironically, from an inverse pole of wealth and doggedness, it falls in the text to Mary and Rhoda to model successful female withdrawal, including a sustainable "alone together" relational form. Returning briefly to Ledger's claims, these assert that it is strange for Gissing to show Rhoda and Mary, both ardent activists, so often in the space of home, as opposed to showing them as provocative entities on male-driven civic ground, overtly unsettling the status quo of the workplace and public sphere. Yet unlike those of the Madden women, Rhoda and Mary's lives at home accord with Gissing's compound call for greater public power for women *and* more options for privacy as a keystone of independence.

While he does not make Mary and Rhoda especially present publically, only describing in oblique terms their visits to museums in London or their uses of transportation, Gissing does afford to readers privileged access beyond the doors and into the sanctum of the pair's home. He thus makes their leisure visible, describing in fairly detailed ways how they spend their time after dinner, both together and apart; how they freely move back and forth between bedrooms and communal space; and how they read one another's moods and scale socializing accordingly, granting room for privacy when either one senses the other needs it. Formally or structurally, Gissing also prods readers to compare this happy arrangement to those of other women we meet, especially that of Virginia and Alice, not only through Virginia's few visits to the comfortable Chelsea home, but also through the parallelism of two close women cohabitating.

The older Madden sisters, of course, can hardly claim pleasure in their way of being alone with someone else, but Rhoda and Mary certainly can. Part of how these women achieve a propitious "solo" state, a micro-world of progressive views that still engages with the world, has to do with financial luck, with steady incomes from their school and with Mary having gained a windfall after years of struggle, one that allows her to maintain the well-appointed home the pair shares. Mary and Rhoda's financial comfort helps them translate abstract ideals into a range of concrete settings, from the training school for women to their safe and spacious house. Further, it simply gives them space to give each other space without trials. This case stands in enormous contrast to that of the elder Maddens, of whom "the only time in their lives when they enjoy any type of private home life is when they are unemployed, and then their poverty is such that they must crowd into a small, airless room and virtually starve themselves for the privilege of living in their own place" (Colón 443-44). Such is Susan Colón's observation as she reads the sisters'

days, yet I would argue that she is too generous, with her diction of achievement (even if a perverted one), when we have Rhoda and Mary as such an evident counter example.

In their cozy, middle-class home, Rhoda and Mary rival the peace of those who are alone together in the story's only example of a truly happy, relaxed, heterosexual husband-wife team. This pair is made up of Micklethwaite, a friend of Mary's cousin Barfoot, and his wife, who finally marry after a seventeen-year engagement. With Mrs. Micklethwaite's younger sister, this pair lives purposely quietly; although he does not visit them for a longer span than he means to, Barfoot, who will become an impassioned suitor of Rhoda's, finds that he is nonetheless "the first guest that entered the house since their marriage" (194). When he visits, Barfoot is struck by how much he likes the tone of the home, much as he comes to treasure that of Rhoda and Mary's place. In this case, he reads the household as an almost sacred realm, as muted in the nicest ways: full of unforced courtesy "and the glow of a hospitable fire" (194).

The casual ease of the Micklethwaites' life makes it a desirable one, and gives the chapter that describes it the seemingly hopeful name "The Triumph." However, this union does come in for its share of (gentle) rejection as the novel clarifies its ideas of domestic health and the kinds of solitude that stable unions should support. For all of their closeness, the Micklethwaites are separate in one negative sense: they are not intellectually matched, and this, Barfoot reminds himself, is central for modern marriage, or for an alternate intimacy that can fruitfully take its place. For Barfoot, a healthy union cannot mean a lack of seeking from being steeped in the familiar, but must mean "the mutual incitement of … minds" like the dynamic he has with Rhoda (197).

But if Rhoda and this man are equals in their mental rigor, then this is true of Rhoda and Mary, not only as colleagues, but also as friends and tenants of a quasi-salon. Barfoot, when he

reconnects with Mary after a time of friction, lightly mocks his cousin's arrangement: "'Are you living quite alone?' He drawled slightly on the last word" (89). However, the more he admires Rhoda, the more he comes to understand how rich the women's domestic life is. Paradoxically, their debates, as well as their blends of granting wide berths and being solicitous, make Barfoot want to be there more, to visit their home all the time, yet also echo what they have by luring Rhoda away from it.

"There shall be no forms," Mary announces on the night of Barfoot's first visit, and this maxim of loosened constraints extends to the women's taking and granting privacy smoothly, without offense (90). When Rhoda tells Mary she wants to give the cousins some time without her there, she doesn't have to finish her sentence, kindly phrased as a request; it goes without saying—or very much saying—that the friends can leave as they like, but that doing so overlaps with being sensitive to each other. In this sense, their domesticity yields a truer courtesy than that born through niceties, with Mary not challenging Rhoda's absence and Rhoda not needing to explain her inclination to withdraw.

On this night, a conversation about married life and singleness inspires Barfoot's esteem for Rhoda and the domestic equality that she and Mary have together. Barfoot shares some juicy tales about unhappy friends of his, including one of his friend Orchard, married to an insipid woman who restrains his intellect, and who blindly shatters his efforts at compensatory distance, making him "liable at any moment to an invasion" of privacy (92).[11] In contrast to this hopeless pair, Rhoda and Mary match one another, mind to mind, in acuity, and honor difference in the other as well as a need for private space. At several points in the evening, Rhoda slips back into the room with no fanfare and no talk about what she's been doing alone. Barfoot notes the dual nature of Rhoda's freedom in the house—expansive freedom to speak her mind, yet also liberty

not to speak and to retreat physically—and the effect is to entrance him: "a calm sigh seemed to relieve his chest" (93). Both to endear himself to Rhoda and perceiving the vital role, in the peaceful tone of the home, of naturalized leeway for self-time, Barfoot is inspired to check his urge to draw Rhoda out: "She seemed little disposed for conversation, and Everard did not care to assail her taciturnity this evening" (96).

In the end, despite their intentions, Barfoot and Rhoda get hung up, not on daily negotiations for respecting and preserving the other's need for solitude, but on cultural implications of being "alone together" as Rhoda and Mary are, but in terms of a sexualized, male-female relationship. The broadly conceptual social distance that Rhoda and Mary enact is a shared eccentricity that does not overtly offend. It merges social consciousness with a pledge of social tact, and the rejection of widespread credos with engaging politically. In *Persuasion*, this type of ideal works, at last, for Anne and Wentworth as a heterosexual pair. In *Villette*, it does not work through the pair of Lucy and Paul, yet this fact is less from cynicism about marriage or marriage-like forms and more from cynicism about the issue of Lucy's normalization.

In *The Odd Women*, "alone together" as a conscious shared commitment to resisting leading norms, yet doing so sustainably, through an ethos of compromise rather than announcing oneself as an unruly threat, notably fails when applied to a romantic proposition between a woman and a man. To each party's deep surprise, Rhoda and Barfoot find they cannot buck tradition as much as they hoped. Although they plan to live together without the legal seal of marriage, gendered power plays trip them up, and they agree to wed only to call their whole romance off. The narrative result of this failure is that Rhoda and Mary's version of collective solitude—of a careful, relational, responsible nonconformity—emerges as the text's key model, one that shows how empathy and an expansive view of rights figure in a domesticity that is both

sincere and complex, and that throws into relief Gissing's sense of married parity as a still-elusive goal. For in the end, while Barfoot marries, it is not to a woman like Rhoda. Rhoda, for her part, vows to stay single, yet will change others' lives not just by telling other women to do the same (a platform of hers), but by modeling daily living that honors female freedom in political and feeling terms. Rhoda and Mary in fact inspire Virginia and Alice to make a change, as does Monica's tragic death: after it, the sisters leave London to establish a school for girls where they will live and work together in a more hospitable place. Thus, in terms of public markers of female authority and in terms of private support for women's needs and wills, Rhoda and Mary's domestic system anchors, at the novel's close, a focus on female resilience and revived female pairs.

Always finding at least the potential for revival in social distance, *The Odd Women* studies types of it that entail starkly compromised paths as well as those that define self-rule and that need to be open to all. Constantly foregrounding money's force in its vision of social justice, the novel highlights the economics of solitude in various forms. However, through a core claim that temperaments are shaped by funds yet not completely driven by them, as well as through the core issue of middle-class women's constraints in marriage, Gissing shows that enacting one's right to elective solitude is more than a matter of being leisured versus being struggling or poor. Instead, depicting women who are mired in limits on multiple fronts, he makes a case for willed withdrawal as an unquestioned liberty—essentially, as an inborn right, and as a quiet yet critical feature of authentic autonomy.

In *Our Mutual Friend*, a novel written before *The Odd Women* to the tune of a few decades, Dickens also paints a picture of a world in which money wields an overwhelming and ominous force. To him, a massive social problem is how triteness and competition grow

internalized in a highly money-driven society. Where female characters are concerned, this leaves Dickens in a bind: he gives us a world, as Gissing does, in which all subjects benefit from learning to be calculating in the face of superficial, deeply flattening social forms. Yet at the same time, the ruthlessness of cultural values he portrays renders it more necessary, if one has a strain, as Dickens does, of cultural conservativism, for women to be shielded from the worst ills of public life. Such ills include the protectiveness entailed in daily solo tricks as figures who use distance well attempt, through plotted but "honest" moves, to outwit social systems and schemes.

Our Mutual Friend is thus quite torn on the topic of solitude specifically as a state or field of intense self-preservation, and even more specifically, of mundane manipulations in the name of protecting the self. On the one hand, an obvious claim, all throughout the narrative, is that society forces so much alienation onto its subjects, we can only find it right when people, if they don't harm others, appropriate their solitude through private counterplots. However, on the other hand, the story cannot finally endorse a woman as a source of the most fruitful solo feints. Even despite the work it does to fashion female characters who are subtle, sharp, and mindful in their daily solitude, the novel, at its vexed conclusion, strains to absolve its protagonist, the male solitary John Harmon. Scorning gendered double standards, *Our Mutual Friend* upholds them, too, risking falsity to endorse Harmon, against certain counterplots that go on for far too long—and against solo women with better conduct than he—as a source of careful yet gritty, bold but non-mutinous, private plans.

---

[1] Even despite those aspects of studies that locate freedom in Monica's strolling, many pieces of scholarship are heavily weighted towards the elder Madden sisters' hopelessness (and later, that of Monica, too). For example, Susan Colón claims that while "Monica's independence is signified by her solitary mobility in London on her Sundays off," she would always be doomed to annoyance as a non-working wife from being trapped in a middle ground of ambition and industry: she has too much for her household sphere, yet too little for the world of everyday

professional labor. See Colón, "Professionalism and Domesticity in George Gissing's *The Odd Women*," *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 44:4 (2001): 441-58.

[2] Ledger, "Gissing, the Shopgirl and the New Woman," *Women: A Cultural Review* 6:3 (1995): 263-74.

[3] "The Discipline of Solitude," *Sunday at Home* 1291 (Jan. 1879), 58-60.

[4] "On Solitude," *All the Year Round* 5:125 (May 1891): 486.

[5] "The Luxury of Solitude," *Chambers's Journal* 14:715 (Sept. 1897): 577. In another periodical piece from several years earlier, the author cites an unnamed doctor known for treating nerve disorders to frame sociality as a health issue, making the case that women need others because of weak powers of self-regulation. Titled "Evils of Solitude," the piece asserts that female vigor demands the special energy that flows between people in interactions; it further states that girls too often, in their mistaken understandings, reject the "friction with unfamiliar minds" that is an organic necessity. "Evils of Solitude," *Bow Bells* 44:1134 (April 1886), 415.

[6] "Standing Alone," *Bow Bells Weekly* 39 (Sept. 1888): 205.

[7] See Miriam Bailin for many examples of Victorian novels that elevate the space of the sickroom as "redress from the struggles exacted by the largely, but not solely, middle-class Victorian insistence on the primacy of duty over personal inclination" (17). *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art of Being Ill.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

[8] Arlene Young, "Character and the Urban City: George Gissing's Urban Negotiations." *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920* 49:1 (2006): 49-62.

[9] In "Ideologies of Patriarchy, Feminism, and Fiction in *The Odd Women*," Deirdre David describes how Widdowson is constantly plagued by doubts about female character. Although she does not specifically cite anger at how Monica enjoys some of the city's tests, we can extrapolate from her thoughts on Widdowson's general state of fear about his wife's trustworthiness and attention to the world's dangers: "Widdowson can never be free of the suspicion that his wife will betray him, and his domestic tyranny reveals the mutually destructive patterns of subject/object relationships. Monica is wife, object, property … and he, the husband, is condemned to constant surveillance lest his goods turn out to be morally defective, or even worse, lest someone make off with them" (124). See *Feminist Studies* 10:1 (Spring 1984): 117-39.

[10] As Deirdre David writes, "Widdowson's misery is so fully realized by Gissing that it is impossible to slide him neatly into the slot, of male villain in a feminist novel" ("Ideologies of Patriarchy," 124).

[11] Patricia Ingham reminds us that Gissing viewed his own marriages in such a light. As she writes in an explanatory note, "Both [of Gissing's wives] became alcoholics and he found them

impossible to live with. In 1893 he wrote in his diary: 'Never a word exchanged on anything but the paltry everyday life of the household. Never a word to me, from anyone, of understanding sympathy—or of encouragement'" (*The Odd Women*. Ed. Patricia Ingham. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000 [377, note to p. 92]).

Chapter Four:

Money and Mechanization: Solitude and Counterplots in *Our Mutual Friend*

Persuasion, *Villette*, and *The Odd Women* all explore solitude's nature through changes that befall young women who must discover ways of caring for themselves, whether this be psychically, materially, or in both ways. In contrast, Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* features a seasoned male solitary, one whose background is marked by loss, but who has made his way in the world by the time the narrative starts, and who is never second-guessed in his path towards independence. Also distinguishing Dickens's text among the works that I discuss is that, far from sometimes fearing that he will not be remembered, John Harmon goes to great lengths to erase the self he was: adopting several aliases, he pretends that he is dead after he is almost killed for a vast inheritance. In doing so, he makes himself effectively without a peer, lone in the sense of being withdrawn as he tries to conceal his past, but also in the sense of dwelling in spectral existential space.

Through a range of solitaries as varied in lifestyle and disposition as Harmon, Riah, and Silas Wegg, Dickens portrays the dominance of an unyielding social order. One of the novel's primary themes is the restless drive for gain that colors social life, making daily interactions seem to be a zero-sum game in which, if one gathers force, then others need to live with less, either as a mathematical truth or a divine rule of the world. In keeping with this representation, Dickens offers up a realm of massive disaffection as subjects understand institutions to have failed in forging real coherence, furthering shallow self-regard and a daily wrestle for sway.

Given such a deep vacuum of enriching social webs, the narrative yields a vast array of solitaries and forms of distance. As it sifts through the weight of each, this work that bears

a sifting motif shows us the struggles that come from remoteness, yet grants it a central place in acts of clever agency. It thus participates in a pattern of depiction we find elsewhere in novels of its time: it locates one kind of separation at the core of a social problem, yet then pushes a mindful version, versus simply more socializing, as an auto-antidote.

As with other novels here, in the case of *Our Mutual Friend*, responsible styles of solitude are a tool for counteracting, through careful, coded uses of a buffer from outside demands, the inequities and oppression of certain cultural goals. More than other works and authors that this project explores, however, Dickens in *Our Mutual Friend* tags as woeful solitude the self-interest that resides in capitalistic structures, greed that creates estrangement for all from improving social ties. Also more than Austen and Brontë, and then Gissing after him, Dickens insists on strong aloneness being both a pathway to truth *and* a mode of daily deceit, of counterintelligence in a milieu of strict yet anemic cultural schemes. Painstakingly in this novel, Dickens ties mundane distance to everyday feints and tricks, both in terms of its risky aspects and its redemptive ones. Doing so, he paints a world in which survival depends on lying, and in which the best we can hope is that solitary subjects use their distance for "moral" deceits, victimless crimes in which they pursue satisfaction tenably.

Throughout the novel, one key way that strong solitaries push against norms is to play with character, creating fluid private deceptions on the level of social roles. In a densely commercialized world filled with patterns of buying and selling, Dickens sanctions certain subjects—but only certain ones, we'll see—in peddling falseness to the mills of acculturating forces. Fighting proverbial fire with fire, strong, proactive solitaries take the lead in misleading those who would judge them shallowly, employing active misdirection to challenge taxonomies or otherwise raise doubts about deterministic paradigms. More than simply shielding the

difference that the world would try to erase, strong solitude in this text has to mean regular risk, some daily effort to make end runs around homogenizing perspectives. A truly fruitful solitude for *Our Mutual Friend*, therefore, generates more than acts of omission, of hiding one's spirit in solitude. It yields acts of *co*mmission, too, as subjects circulate bad information: either false truths or conflicting data that make them hard to categorize.

Beyond being able to use distance to challenge social classifications, an added boon of it for Dickens is that it can actually protect people from acquisition, even as it might involve self-expansion through presentation, through experiments with performance. Dickens shows that a way to subvert popular values of greed and gain is to share a conscious commitment to "alone together" forms, a move that, in *Our Mutual Friend*, means small groupings that have an edge through undiluted connective force. Chief among such small, healthy structures are the groups established through family, the one institution, the text suggests, with the realistic potential for being adaptive and feeling, both.

Ironically, Dickens's closing vision of shared distance as watchful difference on an extended family scale is grounded in his own tricks, namely, his way of absolving Harmon, who finally changes his mind and reclaims his name and wealth. By way of this ending, which comes off as happy, *Our Mutual Friend* confirms its views of which solo lying is okay, views that, as we come to see, perpetuate social double standards that it otherwise refutes.

If it hints that, in all cases, subjects' motives for lying make sense in a corrupt society, then, in practice, the text reveals that approval for solo deceits depends on subjects' being restrained, not directly hurting others or shutting down fruitful options for them. This is a message with which it would be hard to have a moral dispute. What *is* problematic, though, is that Dickens would rather backpedal to defend a male solitary than allow a female one to serve

as an exemplar to readers, betraying a strain of hypocrisy that he cannot eradicate. Even as Harmon dwells too much in a gray zone of solo scheming, and even as he encounters women who impress in their solo-ness, being sly yet sociable, too, *Our Mutual Friend* considers him a model of worthy solitude, setting him up as a patriarch and backing his self-fashioning with the special privileges of wealth and robust social standing.

Harmon uses his wealth and clout to underwrite the solvency of several characters in the text, allowing them to take on new relationships to money and work. In order, however, to usher this figure into a post as a benefactor, the story has to pull great strings to explain his solo schemes, especially his ongoing lies after his marriage to Bella Wilfer. His confession, for example, only succeeds with major help from Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, revealing that Harmon's solo feigning is not fully self-justified. With this fact, the text betrays anxieties about its support for a moneyed gentleman as the only character whose proactive solo style can supply takeaway thoughts, including those about the terms of stable forms of shared withdrawal.

Admittedly, the text does try to atone for such tidiness, in keeping with a range of misgivings about its power to order knowledge. Being wary of institutions' tendencies toward completism, the novel works to check itself as an explanatory system, especially as it concludes. While it ends on multiple notes of affection and connection, it also leaves several ends untied, from deaths that will likely go unsolved to an emphasis on figures who will likely never marry. Yet if we feel that the novel tries to self-reflexively question its reach, then we cannot forget how it tries to whitewash Harmon in the first place, to absolve him resoundingly despite his extension of his tricks. As much as it condemns social codes for over-parceling the world to pieces, *Our Mutual Friend* still strains to explain every aspect of Harmon's plan, treading on its own

concerns about the lure of totalization to defend a staid maleness whose valorization it cannot resist.

Solitude and Manipulations: Working to Outdo Cultural Don'ts

Asserting a lack of integrity in social rules and traditions, *Our Mutual Friend* supports characters for whom a sane response to these one of satire and double dealing. Franco Moretti writes that Dickens "makes us see society like a gigantic Foucaultian *tableau*," and that his brand of realism reads "as a sort of visit to the zoo, where countless and amazing human exemplars are offered to our eyes, each one tightly locked in his cage" (193). Moretti argues that such a *tableau* bumps against the room for change required to make a narrative move, leading to clunky expedients like "the universally deplored, but nonetheless imperative necessity of narrative *coincidences*" (194). The first of these points, that Dickens's work affords us vibrant, and vibrantly comic, examples of social classification, only needs expanding by noting that Dickens, more than just reporting, also furthers stereotypes in the course of detailing breaches between societal haves and have-nots. The second, however, about scant means in the English realist novel for creating narrative plot because of taxonomic investments, passes over social distance as a realm of creative acts in the respite it can afford from the "tight" immediacy of social obligations and norms.

Not adopting docile façades, solitaries in this novel fashion more complex deceits, often performing multiple parts in what Garrett Stewart has called "an almost schizophrenic division of personality" (132).[1] For Stewart, the proliferation of syllepsis in this work adds to patterns in the narration that stress echoes and doubleness and attempt to straddle the wall in conceptual

binaries. Over and over, linguistically, we meet "a forking in syntactic s/pace" (120), a rupture that, to Stewart's eyes, uses "the leeway of everyday language" to "refuse a strict dualism" (122).

As Stewart argues with doublespeak, so I argue with solitude: namely, that Dickens isolates a negative, cynical form of it (in Stewart's case, "bad" doublespeak would be hypocritical social discourse), yet then proposes a new iteration of the same phenomenon as a shield against the lures of binary-heavy interpretation (in my case, a reductive split between the self and society, or between solitude and sociable acts). Both of us, notably, speak of "leeway" in common fields of activity: Stewart, on a plane of language, and my project, on a plane of immediate social duty. Given these resemblances between Stewart's tacit observance of how Dickens isolates a *different* kind of doubled talk as a fix for language abuses and my look at Dickens's faith that the same can be said of distance, perhaps it should not surprise that Dickens frequently represents the depths of people's social estrangement through palpable rifts in speech, gesturing to a paradoxical breadth and weakness in social structures via meta arguments about bits of communication. At the same time that readers can see that such rifts will never be avoided fully when humans meet, the way they unfold in *Our Mutual Friend* makes them register what Dickens feels, in terms of distance, can be stopped, which is solitude through social trends of not really trying to understand others.

Together, the novel's opening words establish a highly atomized realm, a world where broad communal bonds exist only in shallow terms, and in which, by implication, forms of solitude abound. Even with its very title, the novel questions social groupings and the strength of human ties with its strangely unmoored "our" and its reference to a friend that is as yet unknown to us. Further, the story's opening line repeats the title's ambiguous "our" and creates even more vagueness through open temporal references. This second "our," which should, in theory, limn

and locate a readership instead flaunts its haziness, as if the world the text will paint would consider as naive efforts to draw anything but shallow ties across big groups: "In these times of ours, though concerning the exact nature *there is no need to be precise*, a boat of dirty and disreputable appearance, with two figures in it, floated on the Thames" (Dickens 43, emphasis added). In short, the bold suggestion already is that people, including readers, must be trained to accept new terms on which to interpret other people, though when this kind of shift can occur, and how, is clearly up in the air. Still, as things currently stand, something has to give or change, for the standard terms in place for performing social connections are so ironically thin yet strong, it is pointless to fight them outright.

The story also gives the lie to putative ties of fellowship when two men, working as river dredgers who scour the Thames for saleable goods, including corpses floating there, argue over the lexical term for the bodies they hope to find. When Riderhood rows up to the Hexams, a father-daughter dredging team that has made a promising catch, the men soon start to fight over a term of affiliation, as well as over whether or not a corpse is a subject or an object, so that language as engagement crumbles with Hexam's pragmatic objections to the other's (self-serving) appeals to the men's being close allies. Constantly calling Gaffer "pardner," Riderhood gets him upset, and angry specifically over his diction: "I have been swallowing too much of that word, Pardner. I am no pardner of yours" (47). Again, as with "mutual" and "our," words that are meant to evoke sameness instead create a sense of warning, as Riderhood hints that the pair has agreed to a system of give and take, yet tries to impress, through repetition, the taking aspect of this dynamic, working to assert a right to share in all of Gaffer's spoils.

Gaffer further strongly objects to Riderhood's calling a corpse a "he," feeling this proves a moral looseness that fails to discern between types of prey. For him, this failure seems to

confirm an over-looseness in Riderhood, proving the rumors that swirl around that he is willing to rob live men (beyond just taking money from corpses, which both men do without compunction). Gaffer thinks that if Riderhood insists on viewing a corpse as a man, then he could take from any man the way that dredgers take coins from the dead. Therefore, Gaffer's own preference is that the living should call corpses "it"; however, Dickens soon reveals that even this seemingly neutral term is unstable in a context of acquisitive practices that serve to dehumanize anyway. As Gaffer philosophizes to Lizzie about their trade and his views of death, he uses "it" so many times that meanings crash against each other, undermining his rationalizations that corpses are obvious objects through a steady leaching of content from his favored term as he talks. Reminding Lizzie that "it," the river, has been like "meat and drink" to them, Gaffer's phrasing also suggests the form that silently trails behind them, raising specters of cannibalism that make his daughter feel dizzy and sick (45).

While Dickens has some fun with Gaffer claiming such high moral ground, through the Hexams, he shows a family driven to extremes to live, one whose labor their culture exploits as it scorns their poverty. This said, they are also people who, though never allowed to take basic daily survival for granted, manage to resist the greed that debases so much social life. At the home of the flashy Veneerings, the story depicts, with a lateral jump, a faction of people so debased, following up the river setting with one of lush display. Ironically, this privileged venue is as rife with social distance as the grim one we just saw, for, as on the murky Thames, estrangement resounds through everyday speech that assumes camaraderie, yet, in practice, neither improves nor truly reflects existing ties.

At the Veneerings' dinner party, people talk past one another, too indifferent and self-absorbed for language to function as social glue. Names are interchangeable, and men and

women are named as objects, so that a group of men become "Buffers," and "Twemlow," the real name of a guest, becomes synonymous with a piece of furniture for filling a room (53, 48). Also where Twemlow is concerned, the words "my dear" so often precede what the Veneerings say to him that they practically lose all sense, leaving him unable to tell how close the hosts are with any guest.

As they coalesce in the first, strained language and the special self-attention that greed creates thus merge again in this scene. In this instance, guests do harm by blindly barreling through others' words, just as they blindly eat rich food and even as they "ingest" death, not as the Hexams do by selling bodies for cash for food, but by begging to be fed with juicy stories about a demise. The death in question is Old Mr. Harmon's, a man in the news for leaving his son, the formerly disowned John Harmon, a huge fortune earned through the sale of common household garbage, or "Dust" (55). Here, as with Rogue Riderhood's specious claims to a business pact, language breaches speak to self-interest and myopic drives to acquire as normalized, deeply ingrained elements of social life. Amidst a string of broken volleys, partial rhymes, and baby talk (such as Mrs. Veneering's "Tease!," as in a wheedling "pretty please!"), Lady Tippins tries to get the story out of Mortimer Lightwood, Harmon senior's former lawyer and now agent of the estate. Given Lightwood's wry demeanor, such a task would always be tough, yet Lady Tippins fails to recall—or very likely, never knew, being hopeless at listening—where John Harmon has been living. Thus, she ends up calling him, as if it's all one, "the man from Jamaica" (54). Such a move prompts Lightwood to mock, and to say, nonsensically, that the only man he knows from Jamaica is a brother. His friend Eugene Wrayburn then joins in, playing on a guess of "Tobago" with a deliberately ruptured rhyme, all lilt and no logic: "Except

our friend who long lived on rice pudding and isinglass, till at length to his something or other, his physician said something else, and a leg of mutton somehow ended in daygo" (54).[2]

Given the context in which it is told, the novel's framing of Lightwood's story is comically, yet darkly, ironic: the tale describes a riven group, but is told within a room that rings with fractured dialogue and superficial interactions. In fact, even as Lightwood talks, the efficacy of speech takes a dive: from Dickens using a graphical mark to show four people speaking at once to guests smirking and making jokes when Lightwood pauses to let his words settle, the scene is one of dislocation masquerading as gay party chat. In this way, just as the first chapter does, this second chapter, which seems so removed from the murky, dangerous river and the open conflicts it breeds for the various goods in its waters, sets up a massive void between people, at all social levels, of genuine care, adding to Dickens's skewering of isolating patterns of gain, with all that these do to usher in egoism and seemingly boundless opportunistic impulses.

Women, Others, and Solitude: The Narrative Problem of Jenny Wren

Returning briefly to Stewart's reading of *Our Mutual Friend*, a notable feature is that he alights on an important observation with gendered implications, yet does not probe the causes behind what he notes about the two agents who tend to wield clever wordplay best. Stewart argues that the figures who are most skilled with syllepsis, using it against dualisms written into routine expression, are the omniscient narrating voice and Wrayburn, a blasé lawyer, even more cynical than Lightwood. Of course, several reasons spring up as to why this is the case: both of these subjects are worldly ones; both are masters of formal English while being able to play with codes of marginal dialects; and, regarding both of them, the novel can afford for readers to be

slightly wary of each, trusting their knowledge and perceptions, yet not really loving them with deep emotional warmth. But are such reasons enough to show why these actors get top billing among the many characters who cleverly play with everyday speech?

As I argue, the novel asserts that mindful plotting in solitude is a paradoxical key to battling solitude as an evil, including a failure of institutions—rendered through absence, through shells and shadows—to forge coherence in valid ways. In this reading, part of what makes Wrayburn and the narrating figure so successful at a kind of double talk that subverts another is the status of each one as mouthpiece, reluctant or not, of a given institution. These figures share a trait, that is, that renders each one self-divided, and therefore especially primed to experiment with dual tones. Not only is each one alienated (albeit on quite disparate planes), but each one is supposed to function as an arm of a social formation, the legal system and the novel, yet is plagued by weighty fears about institutions' acquisitive force. Thus, by granting his most developed satiric power to these two agents, Dickens deepens the novel's claim that a cutthroat, commercial-minded, flattening set of ascendant norms has pervaded not only schools or the probate courts, for example, but almost all social institutions under what Howard Fulweiler calls a strict "mid-Victorian political economy and its laissez-faire foundation" (Fulweiler 51).

Surely, though, despite such claims about projecting inner divisions outward onto the world and words as a form of commentary, there is yet another side to Dickens's choice to make Wrayburn and the narrator sylleptically skilled. This is a side that has everything to do with a nexus of gender and pull. Although Dickens is attuned to women's relations to double binds, such as that created by mistrust of female authority even as social competition forces them to be alert, ultimately, his paternalism forces him to try to save an image of women being shielded from a need for defensive designs. As with his roster of knowing children, Dickens admires but

also rues tactical female responses to conditions that transpire in a dog-eat-dog public sphere. Given this pattern in his works, studies that highlight his treatment of language, but do not explore the force of fluency in politicized terms, fail to note how even his play can register conservative thought.

In *Our Mutual Friend*, several important female figures do not read, and thus are partly estranged from communication networks. However, each of these women is tied to creative storytelling (Betty Higden's interest in Sloppy reading the paper through different voices; Lizzie Hexam's "reading" the future in the flickering of a fire), meaning that each one finds, through words, a path around certain limitations to their agency in discourse. Such shrewdness is something that Dickens lets us relish in each woman, but only, I argue, to an extent. For when it comes to understanding shrewdness as part of their *solitude*, part of broader mechanisms of opportunism (careful; non-harmful), Dickens eventually underplays the plotting of smart women and girls in the face of gendered injustice and impositions of self-reliance.

On the score specifically of female solitaries and schemes, Dickens explores female cleverness only to diminish it by endorsing Harmon so baldly, scrambling to position him as the novel's ideal solo plotter. Of course, this is not because Harmon is the only one in his world who can balance artfulness and social considerations in distance, but because he first embodies male, middle-class enterprise, and, in time, assumes the position of a benevolent patriarch. These are facts which Dickens lets trump perfectly good examples of others' solo styles and subtle play with character.

Because the story treats fragmentation and corrupted institutions as a woeful shared condition across various social strata, not all of its "minor" examples of common distance used well come from socially marginal groups. However, an obvious portion of those whose solitary

styles are dimmed in the face of Harmon's own do reside in marginal modes, including the fact of being female. Such a pattern lets us know about *Our Mutual Friend*'s reservations at fully endorsing the women who are very practiced, in fact, at using aloneness for private ends without offense to cultural codes, and in whom such compromise is elsewhere explained and admired.

By the time of *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens had long been taken with views of good-natured "Cockney resilience" (Cheadle 312).[3] Although he developed a clear fan favorite in *The Pickwick Papers*' Sam Weller, by the late mid-century, he explores a more thorough will to get by in the urban poor. Gritty yet restrained outlooks on states of alienation are a vital element of what the "best" cunning means in *Our Mutual Friend*, much more than in the comic *Pickwick*, or in later and darker works such as *Bleak House* or *Oliver Twist*.

We see expansive, forward-looking cleverness at work in Riah, a kindly Jewish man who ranks as one of the most overdetermined outside figures in the text. Riah's literal job involves multiple levels of role playing, sometimes making him act the part of selling "cheap clocks" and "strings of mock beads" to mask his work for a lending house, and making him let clients believe that he himself is the money lender, even though his reality is one of pressing destitution (Dickens 328). These are among the official demands of working for Fascination Fledgeby; and yet, as taxing as these can be, more so are the regular efforts that humoring those in power requires: Fledgeby, mainly, but also the clients whose bigoted views he is forced to uphold. This latter burden is brought to the fore on a day at Pubsey & Co. when Riah has no business to do, yet still has to perform a part when Fledgeby drops by unannounced. In the interactions that follow, Riah skillfully toes the line between validating and correcting Fledgeby's anti-Semitic remarks. Deploying an extravagant feint, a skilled performance of the extreme docility that Fledgeby requires, he recasts without controverting prejudiced claims into more global views:

"'Your people need speak the truth sometimes, for they lie enough,' remarked Fascination Fledgeby. 'Sir, there is,' returned the old man with quiet emphasis, 'too much untruth among all denominations of men'" (329).

If an aspect of Riah's estrangement is that he is a forced split self, then this remoteness allows him to hone a tactical con artistry, one that sees him win Fledgeby's trust through performances of submission. Much like Riah, her friend and protector, the disabled Jenny Wren is also othered in multiple ways, and shrewdly uses solitude to sharpen a vivid playing of roles. Yet unlike Riah and his burdens, Jenny in her self-presentation does not need to wear a mask of intense passivity, but can boast of complexity, issuing a challenge to others to make sense of surprise and difference that she refuses to tone down for them.

Upon a first viewing, Jenny appears to be "a dwarf—a girl—a something," a person who bears certain traits of both a juvenile and an elder (271). With what she calls "queer" body parts and a face "so young and so old," Jenny's mere physical form makes her hard to categorize; likewise, her attitude follows suit as she takes on the persona of a chaperone to her elders who at once resents the task and is youthfully chirpy about it (274). Claiming more authority, then, than most people expect her to, Jenny keeps interlocutors guessing about her defining qualities, including about her physical state and what her exceptionality means.

Keenly aware of the lure, for others, of reading her character through warped parts, Jenny proclaims her disabilities to mold listeners' perceptions of them. Further, she asserts herself as a kind of jolly enigma, offering inconsistencies to throw others off their guard. In the space of others' confusion about just who she "really" is, Jenny has a chance to shape: an opportunity, prior to judgment, to color understandings of her horizons and what she can do. Quickness, then, is Jenny's friend, and a cultivated part of her routine solitude. Unlike *Persuasion*'s Anne Elliot,

who recasts, through unrushed thought, the weight of stilted household time, Jenny, who cannot afford—on several levels—to rest like Anne, uses social alienation to develop an energized and speedy tempo of interaction, as well as a slippery corpus of traits that she presents, without reserve, to new people to figure out (while counting, of course, on them not being able to do so for a while).

Also to preclude others' pity, Jenny highlights her daily success with gathering disparate concepts and matter into cohesive entities. Doing so improves her status in her local social sphere, but also gives her special force in a text that sees decay outpacing fusion in the world. Helena Michie has written of Jenny's precocious knowledge that one's identity always means gathering up and grouping together fragments of self, as well as of her impressive work articulating herself from parts, where "to articulate," in the text, means to put shards together, in addition to ushering forth concrete utterance or expression.[4] In Michie's reading, Jenny is *Our Mutual Friend*'s best conduit for bringing others' desires to light, as well as a prominent fashioner of selves and, while not a heroine (the story's dual ones are Bella and Lizzie), nonetheless functions as its most authentic "center of awareness" (Michie 209). Proudly showing her sewing to guests, telling them that it is she who keeps the body and soul together of her alcoholic father, and happily acting as matchmaker, Jenny asserts great confidence as a kind of *bricoleur*. In doing so, she necessarily points up other people's trials in making confident sense of *her*, fitting her into social slots that would define the firm "*tableau*" Moretti sees in Dickens's work (193). The offcuts that she gets from Riah, the bits of tinsel and strings of beads that she buys and turns to dolls' costumes, represent the disparate roles that survival makes Jenny play, but also her prowess in generating "selves from scraps," including her own (Michie 209).

Michie explores how Jenny forges space for female utterance from within restricted options ever since she learns the importance of co-opting her culture's dissection of female agents into parts. In other words, her study addresses a consistent boundary line affecting Jenny's choices in life in the form of women's wholeness being culturally denied. My reading, however, also explores a graduated boundary placed around Jenny's horizons, which is one that stems from Dickens treating Jenny as self-reliant and as someone who needs to be saved. Again, as with precocious young people that appear elsewhere in his oeuvre, Dickens respects Jenny's pluck, yet finds it tragic that she is compelled to nurture this trait like a grown person would. Also, beyond being oddly wise, the fact that Jenny is a girl vexes the novel about her slyness; her unofficial detective work is always treated as necessary in a world of stifling codes, yet is checked by fantasies of her future domestication.

Through efforts to corral Jenny's force even while granting her admiration, the novel shows that Jenny counts as a real narrative problem, especially since she cannot be dismissed simply as a comic role. To lesser extents, Betty and Lizzie also need to be reined in as privately plotting solitaries, a move the novel accomplishes through idealized scenes of salvation. In Lizzie's case, Dickens shows her helping others from the beginning, starting with her brother, Charlie, whom she schemes to send off to school. Given her association with the work of dredging corpses, Dickens has Lizzie save herself through acts of saving others, and therefore through solo time as little about self as possible.

Two of Lizzie's greatest acts of saving happen when she is alone, meaning when she's out by herself, either walking or on the water. On the one hand, logistics demand that she be free and unencumbered to aid certain people in need; however, this fact also avoids any charge of selfishness in her self-directed time. Even as she is limited in choosing when to be apart, solitary

outings for Lizzie twice take dramatic turns to see her become the literal savior of someone in a desperate state. One such time, after having chosen work away from the city, Lizzie discovers the dying Betty, who has chosen, in her own right, to leave her home and try to survive as a solitary migrant, fiercely bidding for independence thanks to crippling fears about being forced to enter a workhouse. The scene is tender, to be sure, as Lizzie finds Betty on the ground and tries to give her as much refreshment and comfort as she can. Yet the scene is also strained, full of what Moretti calls "deplor[able] … *coincidences*" (Moretti 194), and discordantly full of moves that absorb each woman's choices—canny, brave, agentic choices—in a triumph of the most intense selflessness possible. Betty literally loses self in the arms of a quasi-friend (for Lizzie, it happens, is linked to her friends), and Lizzie, for her part, loses self in the twist that sees her choice to live remotely in the country lead her to be in just the right place at just the right time to rescue Betty either from dying alone herself or from dying with a stranger, whereas Lizzie is just once removed.

Returning to Jenny, through similar means, yet across more narrative ground, *Our Mutual Friend* attempts to tame her, making her the leading example of a pattern of praise and containment of strong solitary females. With Jenny, the novel lets her go forth in transforming the absence of moorings that aloneness can make people feel as she coyly, yet never cruelly, tricks others with her claims. In fact, as much as she frames herself as the helpless Cinderella needing magic from beyond, she tacitly positions herself as a magician of the mundane, sewing, stitching, and making beauty from apparent miscellany.

Though Jenny is a riddle to many thanks to her precocious poise, her solitude supports fact finding that lets her expose others' riddles as she penetrates hidden truths. Beyond just playing with character, social separation for Jenny means a wealth of detective work that gives

her knowledge on which to act to promote her own advantage, or that of her few close friends. When Lizzie's brother, for example, visits his sister at Jenny's home (where Lizzie lives before her move), he simply states whom he wants to see, yet Jenny forces his name from him even as she intuits it. And when Charlie's edgy teacher comes under Jenny's scrutiny, she makes an opera glass of her hand to quietly let Lizzie know that he is observing her, but also to trump his watching with hers: "Caught you spying, did I?," she asks, while stretching her gesture to both eyes (Dickens 276).

Jenny clearly takes deep pride in missing no detail within her reach. *Our Mutual Friend* endorses this feeling, showing that her attentiveness is a means of partly redeeming her general social alienation. But given that Jenny is poor, young, and female, she is at least three times removed from a cultural paragon of authoritative world shaping, and Dickens allows these facts to make him backtrack in supporting her—at least in her solo self-fashioning. Thus, as much as it reveals how Jenny turns her difference to power, the narrative softens her oddities, such as when she suddenly speaks about intending to marry someday. Although this mention certainly bears a whiff of "don't feel sorry for me," it also tries to standardize Jenny, investing her with normative visions, for a female, of being a wife.

We see such taming efforts go on in Jenny's ongoing claims about "Him," a doting yet shadowy future husband. Of course, given *Our Mutual Friend*'s interest in ambiguous pronouns, it might seem that "Him" concords with its use of linguistic slips to question the rigor of social ties, but since Jenny is so invested in specificity, the fact that "Him" is unspecified reinforces gendered conventions, evoking common domestic tropes that flatten out distinctiveness through a view of coarseness in men and a grooming touch in women. In fact, "Him" is an obvious way that the novel tries to corral Jenny's strong, expansive thought through a shallow aspiration to

domestic tyranny: "no intentions were stronger in her breast than the various trials and torments that were, in the fulness of time, to be inflicted on 'him'" (284). Through this dream, the text betrays a compulsion to regulate Jenny's sharp, designing mind just as it softens her sharp, knowing face with a shining corona of hair.

Alienation at the Center: Harmon as Solo Inside Figure

While Jenny's mutability is always impressive but half-alarming, Harmon's varied solo selves are treated as a response to danger more than a danger in their own right. Since Jenny's plotting often centers on making love matches, as well as being firmly grounded in debility, poorness, and girlhood, it is impeded as a mobile or portable model of agency. In contrast, Harmon's solo plots define strong distance in the end, epitomizing schemes for success that reflect daring, certitude, and an ample, unflustered view.

Aside from the trials of bearing the weight of several personae from day to day, the novel worries fairly little about Harmon living a secret life. Near the story's literal center is a scene that confirms Harmon's upkeep of an active compound self. The chapter is called "A Solo and a Duett," emphasizing Harmon's oneness that is also a doubleness, as well as stressing the self-direction (the "solo-ness") over guided action (the "duett-ness") in his recent acts. In one sense, the title is literal, given that Harmon soliloquizes as he explores his attempted murder, then has a charged discussion with Bella after his covert evening mission. Clearly, though, the phrase is meant to speak to fissured identity, too, for Dickens confirms that this man is not "solo" in an ontological sense, but has been juggling a handful of selves, as we have begun to suspect:[5]

> Here he ceased to be the oakum-headed, oakum-whiskered man on whom Miss Pleasant Riderhood had looked, and, allowing for his still being wrapped in a nautical overcoat,

> became as like that same wanted Mr. Julius Handford, as never man was like another in this world. ... Yet in the same moment he was the Secretary also, Mr. Boffin's Secretary. For John Rokesmith, too, was as like that same lost wanted Mr. Julius Handford as never man was like another in this world. 'I have no clue as to the scene of my death,' said he. ... 'Don't evade it, John Harmon; don't evade it; think it out!' (422-3)

The layers of resemblance here between Harmon and other men, the ones whom he has pretended to be, bump against the singularity of his death-in-life situation. Importantly, his response to this breach is figured as robust and heroic, even drawing from tropes of giving testimony at a trial. Alone yet bearing several personae, Harmon, we're told, has crafted these as a valid response to the world, one that allows him to resist while also participating in a culture that would reduce him, violently, to the shape of his family wealth.

As he wanders seedy streets in search of the scene of his attack, Harmon speaks aloud to himself, unfolding a lengthy monologue. On the one hand, this speech evokes the singularity of his condition, the fact that no one can possibly know the contours of his ghostly status: "A spirit that was once a man could hardly feel stranger or lonelier, going unrecognized among mankind, than I feel" (422). But on the other, as Harmon describes the circumstances that lured him to England after he had settled abroad, many readers must surely feel that his choice to craft plural selves against oppressive manipulation has established a more stable subject, one with a clearer sense of purpose than his old, susceptible self. Upon his return, Harmon was riven by feelings of being compromised, not just by the wealth that waited, but also by his father's decrees: "I came back, shrinking from my father's memory, mistrustful of being forced on a mercenary wife, mistrustful of my father's intention in thrusting that marriage on me, mistrustful that I was already growing avaricious. … I came back, timid, divided in my mind, afraid of myself and

everybody here" (423). As the repeated "mistrustful" shows, as well as its tie, through the synonym "timid," to a hampering self-division, Harmon's self-division now, though eerie, boosted his sense of self, helping him refine his desires and better navigate roles that structure subjects' energies.

In this scene, Harmon is filled with dramatic willpower, one of the ways in which the novel sanctions him as a solo schemer. Invoking a common type of pain, the dread involved in having to address a source of anxiety, the text foregrounds his discipline as he makes himself confront a massive vulnerability: "Let me determine to think it out as I walk home. I know I evade it, as many men – perhaps most men – do evade thinking their way through their greatest perplexity. I will try to pin myself to mine" (422-3). Beyond this, Dickens invests Harmon's acts with a quasi legality, invoking the standards of a sworn statement: of testifying, being deposed, or constructing an affidavit, a document that is much abused under Riderhood's vague sense of how an "Alfred David" works, but that Harmon starts to redeem through exacting self-inquiry (195). When he gets home and talks with Bella, she charges him (unfairly, we're shown), with trying to "cross-examine" her (433). Yet prior to this, Harmon's efforts to hold to an "accurately right" legal standard (424) are a clearly proper attempt to look circumstances in the eye, over and above the cowards, who, when trying to murder him, lied or "never looked at [him]" as they brought him a cup of drugged drink (425).

Differently from other figures who turn to role playing in their estrangement, Harmon's deceits largely involve struggles to remember his past after his physical injury, just as part of his current dilemma involves deciding how much of this past to let determine the course of his future. This means that an additional way in which Harmon's plotting gets authorized is through what the novel casts as a necessary pledge not to blindly embrace history, but to sift through

received ideas in search of those that deserve to go on. Howard Fulweiler rightly states that the concerns of *Our Mutual Friend* are paired with the promise of a good heritage, so that, beyond the Darwinian question, "How is the past being transformed into the future?," the novel also specifically asks, "What is worthy to be inherited?" (65, 66).[6] Missing from such claims, however, is how Dickens sets Harmon up as embodying usefulness specifically in his solo style, including in using accepted codes to mask unauthorized conduct.

Unauthorized, but justified: this is the stance that *Our Mutual Friend* takes, but takes too far, with Harmon as it strains to heroize him. In a cogent study of the role of money in the text, Daniel P. Scoggin makes the case that that Harmon is akin to father in his urgent speculating, risking a legitimate claim to an established, public role in hopes of a future reckoning. Scoggin asserts convincingly that Dickens uses *Our Mutual Friend* to show "how the demands of mid-Victorian capital have successfully naturalized the most nauseous of economies," one in which "the refuse of death … are never safe from being recycled and made to turn a profit" (99). However, like Dickens, as Scoggin cites Harmon's play with identity as a clever way to thrive in a culture that thrives, itself, "by recycling selves and things," he frames such gambles through appeals to a "justified return" (100-101). In this way, Scoggin's total discussion echoes the novel's stubborn attempts to defuse *all* threats evoked by Harmon's solitary plots.

At the conclusion of this work, efforts to crystallize Harmon's selfhood, including his goodness and social role, are at least given a subtle nudge through examples of non-integration. Part of the novel's "happy" ending is that Harmon ceases to be a group of solitary figures inside a single organic form and only refracts his identity through a role as a family leader and creator of options for others. To get to this sanctioned place, however, Harmon needs character witnesses, ones who can help him clearly explain and validate his identity swapping, and who therefore

reinforce that even though Harmon is positioned as an upright legal witness, he is still on shaky ground when called to a court of readers' opinion.

In the end, Harmon's main solo scheme, which is to draw out Bella's feelings, can only be brought to a joyous close through assistance from the Boffins, who create a little gang of gold-hearted liars along with him. Harmon's scene of confession to Bella is deeply triangulated. In fact, the reasons behind his choices come less from him than from Mrs. Boffin. The latter trades on affection for her to make disclosure to Bella successful, so that, as much as Bella declares a total allegiance to her husband, we can wonder how things would have gone without input from Mrs. Boffin—not just without her personal warmth, but without her intense buffering.

In its setup, the scene of disclosure feels like an extended volley, with no one agent bearing the weight of Bella's confusion without reinforcement. When Mrs. Boffin surprises Bella so immensely, she nearly faints, in comes the baby as a distraction, and in swoops Harmon, who further explains "how he had put a pious fraud upon her which had preyed upon his mind" (841). Next, quickly wanting to claim some of the heat just lifted from her, Mrs. Boffin reports to Bella that she and her husband have been agents of Harmon's plots as much as he, all of them allowing her to think of Harmon as John Rokesmith, and urging her to reconsider her goal of marrying into privilege: "It wasn't John only … we was all of us in it" (842). Happily for these loving liars, Bella is an altered woman—now, a very forgiving woman—and adds her hands into the pile as the four make a "family building" (842). And with this kind of fleshly structure, Dickens makes visible how much support Harmon needed to draw from friends to take the gathered emotional sting out of his extended deceits.[7]

With Harmon counterplotting so deeply that even disguises are necessary, a final and more linear way that Dickens supports his private scheming is to position his plots on a spectrum

with those of others who are crafty in their own solitude, yet whose framing cynicism is not as well restrained as his. Wegg and Riderhood, for example, are depraved solo subjects, dreaming up conspiracies meant to ruin others' lives and being steered by ruthless motives rather than just disruptive ones. While Dickens finds gallows humor in Hexam's only taking money if a mark is already dead, Wegg's and Riderhood's drives for gain have no obvious boundaries. Thus, each one is a "bird of prey" (45), not known for being especially social: raiders who swoop competitively to scavenge anything that they can.

Down the line from these two figures are Wrayburn and Lightwood, both sardonic, and both disgruntled, like Harmon is, specifically in their social privilege. The text enjoys Lightwood and Wrayburn's lack of gravity for a time, yet links each one to an irresponsible, because self-centered, solo style. This said, partly from being drawn into the corrective orbit of Harmon's patriarchal reach, each man changes his ways in time, rejecting a performed pique to embrace performing instead a proactive oddity.

Confused about his intrinsic desires from years of familial disapproval, Wrayburn is a riven self, one who truest self-expression comes from scorning the emptiness of the values of his elite circle. To pass the time, as well as to make frequent chances to see Lizzie, Wrayburn takes long walks alone, perhaps reflecting how Dickens himself would walk London's streets for hours at a time. Although he claims not to be able to conceive any kind of plan (348), Wrayburn uses these solo journeys toward a privately plotting end—yet one that, while being somewhat careful not to mar Lizzie's reputation, clearly elevate his desires over what is safest for her. In fact, though Wrayburn makes Bradley Headstone, who also secretly surveils Lizzie, a kind of prey through darkened streets, he also turns Lizzie into prey, knowing that her gentleness would never let her thwart his wishes: "He knew his power over her. He knew that she would not insist upon

his leaving her" (464). Disturbingly, for a fairly long time, Dickens lets Wrayburn continue such acts; he is only taken to task in muted ways, such as by Riah: "Sir … I wish that you were not so thoughtless" (465). Still, on a day to day scale, Dickens foregrounds, beyond the wit, the waste of wits or problem-solving in his stagey egotism, so different from Jenny's tone of bravado since it is grounded in real advantage, and since he does so little with it to bend social standards practically.

Through Riah and Jenny, who calls him a child, Wrayburn is framed as clever but "thoughtless," loath to act decisively, let alone responsibly, even in resistance to plans that he hates for his time and career (465). For example, not ominously, as in his habit of trailing Lizzie, but in a way that is egocentric for being glib and self-contained, Wrayburn uses his rooms with Lightwood to create an elaborate joke about the dynamics of normative homes. In the "dismal set of chambers" that he and Lightwood rent together, Wrayburn outfits a little kitchen to help him, as he wryly claims, better absorb the "domestic virtues" (335-36). Through a paean to this kitchen, as well as to his cubby-holed desk, Wrayburn scorns social institutions for their excessive ordering of life, but only talks, without useful action, perhaps to perversely embody his view that "energy" is an overused word: "If there is any word in the dictionary ... that I abominate," he states, "it is energy. ... Such parrot gabble!" (62). Wrayburn also mocks his father with the acronym "M.R.F." (standing for "My Respected Father"), which "sounds military" so as to convey an institutional hulkingness (193). But unlike Harmon, who pushes back against his father's dictates while young, Wrayburn does not resist M.R.F. through anything but behind-the-back talk until he chooses to marry Lizzie against traditions of same class pairs.

In contrast, then, to its solo villains, who are primarily male, and to disaffected men like Wrayburn who are not depraved, but who sometimes resonate danger and who always resonate

waste, the novel clearly supports Harmon's brand of conclusive agency. More than this, it also endorses masculine agency *per se* as an engine behind solo plotting, backtracking from representations of strong females in self-reliance, from Lizzie to Betty and especially to Jenny, softening their bold choices and stressing, both through content and form, the worth of Harmon's solo acts—his measured scheming and string-pulling—in an increasingly grasping world. After all, though Bella complains about what seem like calculations to make her want to marry him, it is because of how money makes her the veritable "property of strangers" (434) that Harmon contrives his deepest subversions of a debasing status quo.

Communal Solitude as Salvation

In a world like this, what vision, if any, does Dickens have for remediation? Is solitude, for all of its trials, some sort of deliverance? Reading the text in part through dispute with Certeau's views of seditious designs by consumers against producers, Molly Anne Rothenberg claims that the story shatters the prospect of deeply subjective intent, rather portraying agency as a complex amalgam of drives, conditioning, and personal aims (735).[8] For Rothenberg, in other words, the novel discloses "the impossibility of distinguishing between self- and social determination when it comes to agency" (720).

Admittedly, Dickens, in this work, disrupts clean notions of personal will, blurring at every turn, for example, the lines between animate human subjects and insentient physical objects.[9] Yet as *Our Mutual Friend* explores objectifying systems and norms, it sympathizes with subjects' wanting to feel effective and self-determined. Supporting a need to attempt recovery of a sense of personal will, the novel positions solitude as a perfect realm for this, giving us faith in separation as a nest for mindful acts because it can help us learn to embrace

greater merging between the self and the demands of the larger world. Not by yielding crystalline visions of where the self begins and ends, but by easing social noise at the level of current sensation enough for the question of personal preference even to emerge and be probed, solitude, the novel contends, can help a person do much better at navigating self and world, because it shifts or resets power when outside dictates seem about to overwhelm the force of the self. In fact, this is the issue, I claim, that Dickens turns to most in this text, a mundane, visceral, concrete issue, over philosophical questions about the space—if any exists—between conditioned or social concerns and inherent, intuitive ones.

Given the novel's belief, therefore, in proactive alienation that can yield creative responses to entrenched institutional claims, do solitaries, at their best, represent hope for the future for Dickens, especially given his faith in ties, and in smart people finding their ways to loving ones amidst vapid examples? The answer is both yes and no, since the novel combines its convictions. Like Austen's making Anne Elliot "particular *with another person*" (Miller 53), Dickens celebrates shared solitude as a haven for good sense, a joint distance that kills loneliness while preserving eccentric values from homogenizing pressures. After providing a vast array of manifestations of being alone, Dickens finally sets the best distance as the other works here do: as shared alternative values anchored in relational forms that draw on the weighty status of marriage while giving its standard version a twist.

Not just giving us Harmon and Bella as a fruitful aloneness of two, Dickens offers several couples aligned in a broader kinship group. Harmon and Bella finally marry and end up in the stately "our house," a home misnamed early on by Wegg to suggest that he was trusted by the family living there, which the Harmons recuperate through a "we" of camaraderie (Dickens 848). Sloppy, who physically launches Wegg from this house into a night cart, will court Jenny,

Dickens suggests, and both will prosper through patronage from the Harmons and the Boffins. Harmon, in fact, is so expansive once he has reclaimed his name that he uses a "broad construction" (875) to atone to those he has tricked, keeping Lightwood as his lawyer and sending business his way; rewarding Jenny for her friendship and unflagging allegiance to Lizzie (whose father, under Harmon's extension of the idea that he was dead, suffered from local accusations of *making* the corpses he found in the Thames); and honoring Riah for good turns to Wrayburn, including exposing Fledgeby, a move that aids in settling up Wrayburn's debts to the usurer.

In calling Harmon's amends "very broad," Dickens seems to admit their excess even as he feeds public tastes with lavish resolution. Dickens's endings have been lambasted by critics on a number of counts, from reducing "thorny ... problems" to good versus bad character (Rothenberg 722) to ultimately doing nothing to dislocate "the apparatus of power" (Farrell 793).[10] Such claims could easily be leveled at *Our Mutual Friend*. However, one aspect of transgression in its final chapters has to do with gathered misgivings about its coverage as it approaches and contemplates closure.

Emphasizing small new groups, Dickens makes them firmly aligned, though not in a way that re-enacts his early panoramic scale, a scale that relied on lateral jumps to shift our attention from group to group and that asked us to understand their separateness as a social plague. While the novel begins and ends with attention to different parties, at the start, their difference implies failed unity on a general scale; at the end, alternatively, with couples linked to other couples through business, care, and warmth, these emerge as antidotes to starkly acquisitive cultural schemes. There can be no doubt, of course, that the novel's shift from stressing "separate societies" like the dredgers and the urban *nouveau riche* (Hornback 249)[11] to a

small, diverse social circle that includes all walks of life is intended to be uplifting. But in attempting to synchronize so many characters' lives and courses, *Our Mutual Friend* must aggregate details into simplifying tracks, and this renders it self-conflicted in light of its stance against the work of flattening institutionalized norms.

Formally, we see signs of resistance to its own conclusiveness in a pool of frayed threads that linger at the end of the text. Questions within the story world must surely pulse, for example, from Headstone's trusting prized possessions to his neighbor Miss Peecher (whose surname sounds so much like "beseech"), since he leaves a short note along with his watch and chain, stating nothing of his motives for assigning such things to her care. From the perspective of the reader, this establishes poor Miss Peecher as a purposeful blip; we can see her single always, constantly re-reading the note, and turning the objects into tokens of a fantasized affection.

The novel's last chapter is imbued with many bits of disruption to closure, including, subtly, with its first sentence being grammatically incomplete. This is a chapter that makes a champion out of the timid bachelor Twemlow, giving him a moment on stage that leads to an empowering sense of shared singularity with Lightwood, but that also lets us wonder about repercussions for him. The chapter brings a group of people to another Veneering dinner. Lightwood, typically, starts the evening wrapped up in a "languid air" (887), but when discussion turns to Wrayburn and his recent marriage to Lizzie, he emerges from his reserve to defend the match and his friends. Shockingly, Twemlow also speaks up to support the love match, his thoughtful reaction delighting the lawyer over the bigoted, knee-jerk responses of the other party guests. Of Twemlow's short but punchy speech, William J. Palmer writes that it is the "strongest affirmation [Dickens] can give to his theme of the value of personal salvation. If the very least,

the most insignificant, member of the world can redeem himself and assert his own existence this forcibly, then all of mankind can look to the future 'gaily'" (494).[12] Clearly, the chronically bashful Twemlow takes a leap in courage here, and clearly, we are meant to read this leap as a personal win. However, the scene leaves palpably open, especially when Lightwood departs, just what Twemlow's social life, not vibrant before, will soon look like.

If speaking out against strict views has a measure of victory here, then another measure comes from how these men share opinions that are both odd and empathetic. That they do so recasts the tone of the "alone together" dynamic of the novel's opening scenes, which render everyday social glue only as joint myopia. Admittedly, with their assertion of an unconventional view, both men only begin to realize what they are willing to do and not do for the expression of their beliefs. Each one is excited, though, by a fruitful shared "soloness" here, a resistance to orthodoxy that is enlivened through partnership. That they "cordially" shake hands at parting and that Lightwood walks homeward "gaily" (892) speaks to the vibrancy each man feels in a taste of shared solitude. But what will each man do with his taste? In Twemlow's case, we get no answer; we are left to concurrently hope and have reservations about his path. In Lightwood's, through his confident step, we note a sense of being inspired to keep shedding passivity, and note a formal launch by Dickens of solo invention into the world, with energy from a nice surprise—a grounded, authentic social exchange—driving the lawyer happily forward, towards a true merging of home and work and off of one kind of scripted page.

While Dickens, then, like every author featured in my study here, isolates social scrutiny and responsible self-assertions as hallmarks of a strong solo style, he defines responsibility through intense irony, through sanctioned lying and role playing in a harshly mechanical world. But if he shows that alienation via values of acquisition affects all in society, then his support for

experimentation with the terms of character can only be channeled, in the end, into a respectable male. This fact reveals conservativism along with bold, even radical, faith in solo plots—in *counter*plots—as required duplicities against inflexible social forms.

---

[1] Stewart, "The Ethical Tempo of Narrative Syntax: Sylleptic Recognitions in *Our Mutual Friend*," *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 8:1 (Jan. 2010): 119-45.

[2] For more on the role of riddles in the text, see Gregg Hecimovich, "The Cup and the Lip and The Riddle of *Our Mutual Friend*," *ELH* 62:4 (Winter 1995): 955-77.

[3] Brian Cheadle, "Work in *Our Mutual Friend*," *Essays in Criticism* 51:3 (July 2001): 308-29.

[4] Michie, "'Who Is This in Pain?' Scarring, Disfigurement, and Female Identity in *Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend*," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 22:2 (Winter 1989): 199-212.

[5] A postscript by Dickens addresses his fear that some readers would think he had done a sloppy job of concealing Harmon's secret, when really, he meant for it to be blatant, making the narrative action more driven by expectation than by mystery: "When I devised this story," he writes, "I foresaw the likelihood that a class of readers and commentators would suppose that I was at great pains to conceal exactly what I was at great pains to suggest: namely, that Mr John Harmon was not slain, and that Mr John Rokesmith was he" (893).

[6] Fulweiler, Howard W. "'A Dismal Swamp': Darwin, Design, and Evolution in *Our Mutual Friend*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 49:1 (June 1994): 51-74.

[7] This scene underwrites, not just Harmon's virtue, but also the power of strong kinship units against the worst of society's ills. In this way, for all of the sparkle and freshness of the newly refurbished "our house" (*Our Mutual Friend* 88), Dickens suggests, sentimentally, that a sturdy family building is the more valuable edifice.

[8] Rothenberg, "Articulating Social Agency in *Our Mutual Friend*: Problems with Performances, Practices, and Political Efficacy," *ELH* 71:3 (Fall 2004): 719-49.

[9] For further critical discussion of this phenomenon, see Katherine Inglis, "Becoming Automatous: Automata in *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Our Mutual Friend*," *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 6 (2008): no pagination.

[10] John P. Farrell, "The Partners' Tale: Dickens and *Our Mutual Friend*," *ELH* 66:3 (Fall 1999): 759-99.

[11] Bert Hornback, "Mortimer Lightwood," *Dickens Studies Annual: Essays on Victorian Fiction* 39 (2008): 249-60.

[12] Palmer, "The Movement of History in *Our Mutual Friend*," *PMLA* 89:3 (1974).

Coda:

What Nineteenth-Century Solitude Tells Us of Perceptions Today

As we are told increasingly by journalism and popular science, the 21st century has a problem. It is a problem of waning connections in an immensely technologized world. Given tools that make the bare fact of communicating ever smoother, yet also seem to be urging us into aggressively self-run zones, into possessiveness of the choice to satisfy each whim or musing with new hits of information, solitude is a hot topic today. Sherry Turkle, a social scientist and scholar of technology culture, writes in her study *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other* that "these days … we look to technology for ways to be in relationships and protect ourselves from them at the same time" (xii).[1] In the 2008 article "Isolating the Costs of Loneliness," included in a publication of the Association for Psychological Science, the author claims that a specious view of social withdrawal as empowering is "creating a potentially urgent problem for a society living increasingly alone" (15).[2] More recently, Jonathan Safran Foer, writing in *The New York Times*, elaborates on a core assertion that "technology celebrates connectedness, but encourages retreat," stating that, in a time of obsession with connective personal devices, "our relationships to the world, and to one another, and to ourselves, are becoming increasingly miserly" ("How Not to Be Alone," June 8, 2013).

Such readings of contemporary culture go beyond perennial claims that a given historical time is not as cooperative as it should be to say that we are actually losing skills at maintaining social ties. Yet at the same time, from other corners, come laments of a different sort, ones that fear that we are forgetting, in a hectic, commercialized world, how to craft and enjoy solitude, or

even maintain unique selfhood. For example, in a volume titled *How to Be Alone* (a title on which Foer seems to play), Jonathan Franzen argues that what draws the volume's essays together is "the problem of preserving individuality and complexity in a noisy and distracting mass culture: the question of how to be alone" (6). For her part, Susan Cain defends, in *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, introversion as a site of pleasure and the prospect of change, writing that "today … [w]e're told that to be happy is to be sociable," and asking straightforwardly at the start, "Why *shouldn't* quiet be strong? And what else can quiet do that we don't give it credit for?" (4, 2).[3]

Cain suggest that we live in a culture beset by a plague of extroverts, as a review at the front of the book calls America's love of show, of performed abilities to sway through vigor, convictions, and charm. Yet, again, other writers aver that the problem with culture today is that, setting aside the issue of personality types, people simply aren't connecting and adopt in *de facto* ways the behavior of introverts—or, at worst, misanthropes—by virtue of sending care towards devices over people, from "smart" phones to e-readers to any number of electronic, internet-connected objects.

This deep divide in current assessments of the status of public engagement, and the belief that such engagement is the best indicator of how healthy a culture is, had an energized corollary in the nineteenth century. If U.S. culture today is sick because of modern technology and the fast "interaction" it brings, then in the nineteenth century, people worried about the draw and pace of the metropolis, including how it could disrupt truly devoted, sharing connections, and how those who *did* want ties could easily feel invisible there. Thus, when we attend to London in the era's views on distance, we can see how talk about it presages split views today on whether social

interaction is a sadly dying art, or whether many of us are too quick to label patterns of withdrawal or self-containment as reckless, impervious, and socially weakening.

As mentioned in this work's introduction, an extremely popular trope during the nineteenth century entailed depicting London's streets as sites of deeper distance than any place of seclusion in a non-developed realm. For many, this fact was ultimate proof, in a place that ought to ring with a feel of cooperation, of corroded social ties. For others, urban anonymity was a treat to be enjoyed, a respite from demands elsewhere to be pleasant or just "on," accountable to expectations for one's conduct, words, and moods. And, of course, to others still, the concept of "alone in a crowd" or "alone together" in throngs could be dismal and exciting, even potentially at the same time, making them invested in resisting dualities on this score.

An author going by the name "L.I.O.N." writes, in a poem entitled "Alone," of a man who walks city streets and is barely noticed at all, causing him to feel lonely: "Through the whirls of the city uncared for, scarce seen, / A stranger is turning and sad is his mien; / For thousands are passing, yet all are unknown, / "How now, 'midst this turmoil, at length I'm alone!" (*Powder Magazine*, April 1871, 53, ll. 17-20). An 1881 magazine story called "Alone in a City Full" tells the tale of a working girl who is let go from her job, sent from her rooms for lacking the rent, and who spends all Christmas Day wandering London, seeking help, only to die that very night near the home of a rich sister who refused to give her aid (*Every Week*, Nov. 1881, 335-8). Further, a piece from *All the Year Round* titled "Solitude—and a Crowd" opens with the general claim that no artist ever had enough distance or separation in the midst of active crowding for prime creativity, yet admits that "there is such a thing as the solitude of a great city," so that "it certainly is a fact that one may be as much alone in London as anywhere in the wide, wide world" (Jan. 1894, 63).

In contrast to these negative views of urban anonymity come others that commend the social release that it can bring, or that separate out events of being "alone in a city full" into those that we should rue because the people in question need help, and those we should accept because their agents, not desperately needy, simply need a social break. In a periodical piece from 1862, the writer notes that "modern life is against the solitary habit," and that urban industrial times leave precious little room for the work of calm reflection and mental recalibration ("On Solitude," *Good Words*, Dec. 1862, 472-3). In an 1891 piece, the author describes detached urban strolling as a valued, special way to stem personal biases: "We suspend," this writer says, "our own individuality and live objectively in the lives of others. … The world is our oyster, and it is at any rate capital exercise to stab the oyster-shell even if we do not eventually succeed in opening it" ("On Solitude," *All the Year Round*, May 1891, 487). And in "The Luxury of Solitude," published in 1897, the author portrays London streets not as worse locales of distance than the unbuilt natural world (meaning, ones that yield more distance in a problematic way), but praises both city and nature for enabling solitude. For the average city man, with male experience clearly implied, London offers delicious "rest from the torment of society" (*Chambers's Journal*, Sept. 1897, 578). Provided that he is not too well-known or disposed to loneliness, a man in the city can "lose" himself: "We can safely loiter down Piccadilly, and stand in the most exposed positions before print and book shops, without fearing that the throng will present us with too familiar faces. … We shall be passed, as we love to be passed, with a wag of the head" (578).

With the city bringing together rich and poor, genteel and common, women and men in social space, it raises questions of traits and goals that people share and those they do not. Some of the novels featured here draw on London to foreground calls for greater solo reflections on

subjective and social demands, both in how such needs conflict and in how to make them merge. Yet whatever city they choose, from Bath to Villette to London itself, all show figures, at some point, in places of dense population as a backdrop for building up a distance that is self-boosting *and* social. In this way, the writers here resist poles implied or avowed in contemporaries' views and in recent commentary on modern American life, poles that see social self-containment either as risky in most people's hands or as mostly liberatory.

For Austen, Brontë, Dickens, and Gissing, one cannot begin to dissect the core nature of solitude or its relation to social life without admitting, first and foremost, its openness to mixed tones, and next, its unjust social spread, thanks less to people's quirks or variability in character than to entrenched, inherited schemes of social organization. For them, chief among such schemes is an archive of gender norms, as each foregrounds the plight of women in a world that blocks them from a "very wide range of choices" where big life paths are concerned (Watt 60).[4] For Dickens, this is largely because the world, so harshly acquisitive, pushes shallow values of gain; thus, we see, in privileged women, sound judgment under attack, and, in working and lower-class women, a compulsion to assume as much "male" worldliness as they can. With the others, their works afford more patent critiques of separate spheres, notions of nature fitting women to assume roles in the home, and fitting men for taking risks in public and political life.

A shared move across each text is that they turn to average aloneness as an entry into critique, as a case study of social ills and the pervasive alienation of select populations. Yet at the same time, they all insist that solitude is not *just* an ill, just as it is not a realm of transcending social pangs—or shouldn't be, if one employs it to its most responsible ends, and thus to its utmost potential. Their nuanced visions of "utmost potential" mean using solitude's room for free

but focused thought to prioritize merging theories and outlooks conceptually, and, on a pragmatic plane, tenable ways of blending one's interests with others' expressed appeals.

Emphasizing that solitude, while far from being any one thing, is yet a stable tool for learning how to slyly insert private values or satisfactions into social performances, more nineteenth-century novels than the era's profile suggests think well of porous distance as a porous, merging mode—a compromised mode that urges work and thoughts on social compromise. Given critical histories where the novel is concerned, it is not hard to understand why readers have underplayed what nineteenth-century realist works say of solitude's common gifts, its mundane but much-needed force. As I have suggested, Foucault's theories make it easy for us to think that solitude is not real or only diluted in painful ways in mimetic Victorian texts, given the rise of increasingly precise agendas in institutions, and given how punitive force became the province of watchful neighbors, casual and naturalized as an aspect of regular days. In contrast, under a bedrock view within the field of novel studies, it is easy for us to think that solitude, by underwriting a bourgeois ethos of entrepreneurship and financial self-creation, carries too much glow or weight of unchallenged public triumph, even if a modern critic works to politicize such a view and to frame the past in terms of a more naïve outlook.

In the samples of textuality from this past that I have surveyed, solitude already operates as a deeply politicized site. Where women's lives are concerned, the nineteenth-century novels here reveal many strains or layers of imposed alienation, as well as unevenness in women's access to intended time apart. In doing so, they resist binaries in assessing solitude, framing it neither as a poison, sure to lead all but stalwart men down roads of self-indulgence versus those of self-control, nor as clear-cut testimony to the scope of personal will. Likewise, they resist reading distance through ideals of purity, but argue that, while separation must be partial or

shaped by others in a dense and diverse world, this fact does not have to mean that it lacks true strengthening worth, one that any thoughtful, resilient, forward-looking person can claim.

---

[1] Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. New York: Basic Books, 2011.

[2] Eric Jaffe, "Isolating the Costs of Loneliness," *Observer* 21.11 (Dec. 2008): 14-17.

[3] Cain, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*. New York: Broadway Books, 2013.

[4] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Fielding, and Richardson*. London: Hogarth Press, 1957.

Bibliography

Ablow, Rachel. *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.

"Alone in a City Full." *Every Week* 25:646 (Nov. 1881): 335-8.

"Alone in the World." *Reynolds's Miscellany* 37:959 (1866): 298.

Anderson, Amanda. *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Arnold, Matthew. *The Letters of Matthew Arnold: 1829-1859*. Ed. Cecil Y. Lang. Charlotttesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996.

Austen, Jane. *Persuasion*. Ed. Patricia Meyer Spacks. Norton Critical Edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995.

----. *Jane Eyre*. Ed. Richard J. Dunn. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2001.

Bailin, Miriam. *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art of Being Ill.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Balcom, Ian. *The Greatest Escape: Adventures in the History of Solitude*. Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, Inc. 2004.

Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.

Bernstein, Susan David. *Confessional Subjects: Revelations of Gender and Power in Victorian Literature and Culture*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.

Blanchot, Maurice. *The Space of Literature*. Trans. Ann Smock. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989.

Brontë, Charlotte. *Villette*. Ed. Tim Dolin. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Buzard, James. *Disorienting Fiction: The Autoethnographic Work of Nineteenth-Century Novels*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Cain, Susan. *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking.* New York: Broadway Books, 2013.

Certeau, Michel de. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

Cheadle, Brian. "Work in *Our Mutual Friend*," *Essays in Criticism* 51:3 (July 2001): 308-29.

"Civility and Ceremony." *Bow Bells* 25:640 (Nov. 1876): 428.

Cohn, Elisha. "Still Life: Suspended Animation in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*." *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 52:4 (Autumn 2012): 843-60.

Coleridge, Samuel T. "Fears in Solitude." *Poetical Register* 7 (Jan. 1808): 227-34.

Colón, Susan. "Professionalism and Domesticity in George Gissing's *The Odd Women*." *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 44:4 (2001): 441-58.

"Currer Bell's New Novel," *The Leader* 4:151 (Feb. 1853): 163.

Dickens, Charles. *Our Mutual Friend*. Ed. Stephen Gill. New York: Penguin Classics, 1995.

"The Discipline of Solitude." *Sunday at Home* 1291 (Jan. 1879): 58-60.

"A Dissertation Upon Solitude." *Town and Country Magazine* 1 (Feb. 1769): 79-80.

Dolin, Tim. Introduction. *Villette*. Charlotte Brontë. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

"Efficacy of Solitude." *The Mirror* 36:1030 (Oct. 1840): 282.

"Extract from Courtier's 'Pleasures of Solitude,' Just Published." *Lady's Monthly Museum* 6 (Jan. 1801): 76-77.

Farrell, John P. "The Partners' Tale: Dickens and *Our Mutual Friend*." *ELH* 66:3 (Fall 1999): 759-99.

Fitzgerald, Percy Hetherington. *Memories of Charles Dickens: With an Account of* "Household Words" *and* "All the Year Round" *and of the Contributors Thereto*. 1913. New York: ASM Press, 1973.

Foer, Jonathan Safran. "How Not to Be Alone." *The New York Times*. June 8, 2013.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Random House, 1977, 1995.

Franzen, Jonathan. *How to Be Alone: Essays*. London: Picador, 2003.

Fulweiler, Howard W. "'A Dismal Swamp': Darwin, Design, and Evolution in *Our Mutual Friend*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 49:1 (June 1994): 51-74.

Gilbert, Sandra M. and Gubar, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979, 2000.

Gissing, George. *The Odd Women*. Ed. Patricia Ingham. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.

Hall, Bishop. "Dangers of Solitude." *The London Saturday Journal* 1:19 (May 1839): 304.

Heady, Emily W. "'Must I Render an Account?' Genre and Self-Narration in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*." *Journal of Narrative Theory* 36:6 (Fall 2006): 341-64.

Hodge, Jon. "*Villette*'s Compulsory Education." *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 45:4 (Autumn 2005): 899-916.

Hornback, Bert. "Mortimer Lightwood." *Dickens Studies Annual: Essays on Victorian Fiction* 39 (2008): 249-60.

Jaffe, Eric. "Isolating the Costs of Loneliness." *Observer* 21.11 (Dec. 2008): 14-17.

Jerrold, Walter. "Alone in the Strand." *Speaker* 19 (April 1899): 398-99.

Juvenis, "On Solitude," *The Weekly Entertainer* 47 (March 1807): 161-66.

Keen, Suzanne. *Victorian Renovations of the Novel: Narrative Annexes and the Boundaries of Representation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Lane, Christopher. *Hatred & Civility: The Antisocial Life in Victorian England*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

Lawrence, Karen. "The Cypher: Disclosure and Reticence in *Villette*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 42:4 (March 1998).

Lawson, Kate and Shakinovsky, Lynn. "Fantasies of National Identification in *Villette*." *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 49:4 (Autumn 2009): 925-44.

Ledger, Sally. "Gissing, the Shopgirl and the New Woman." *Women: A Cultural Review* 6:3 (1995): 263-74.

Levine, Caroline. *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense: Victorian Realism and Narrative Doubt*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003.

Lewes, George Henry. "*Ruth* and *Villette*," *Westminster Review* 3 (April 1853): 485-91.

L.I.O.N., "Alone." *Powder Magazine* (April 1871): 53.

"Lucidity and Sociability." *Speaker* 18 (Nov. 1898): 641.

"The Luxury of Solitude." *Chambers's Journal* 14:715 (Sept. 1897): 577-9.

Michie, Helena. "'Who Is This in Pain?' Scarring, Disfigurement, and Female Identity in *Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend*." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 22:2 (Winter 1989): 199-212.

Miller, D.A. *The Novel and the Police*. Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1989.

----. *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Miller, Lucasta. *The Brontë Myth*. New York: Anchor Books, 2005.

Moretti, Franco. *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*. London; New York: Verso, 2000.

Mrs. Ponsonby. "Defence of the Novel." *Ainsworth's Magazine* 12 (1847): 231-34.

Nunokawa, Jeff. "Eros and Isolation: The Antisocial George Eliot." *ELH* 69:4 (Winter 2002): 835-860.

"On Solitude." *All the Year Round* 5:125 (May 1891): 486.

"On Solitude." *Good Words* (Dec. 1862): 472-3.

"On Solitude and Society." *Museum or, The Literary and Historical Register* 2:35 (1747): 385-88.

Palmer, William J. "The Movement of History in *Our Mutual Friend*." *PMLA* 89:3 (1974): 487-95.

Pikoulis, John. "Reading and Writing in *Persuasion*." *Modern Language Review* 100:1 (Jan. 2005): 20-36.

"Quite Alone, by George Augustus Sala." *The Athanaeum* 1938 (Dec. 1864): 818.

Robbins, Ruth. "'How Do I Look?' *Villette* and Looking Different(ly)." *Brontë Studies: The Journal of the Brontë Society* 28:3 (Nov. 2003): 215-24.

Rohrbach, Emily. "Austen's Later Subjects." *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 44.4 (Autumn 2004): 737-752.

Rothenberg, Molly Anne. "Articulating Social Agency in *Our Mutual Friend*: Problems with Performances, Practices, and Political Efficacy." *ELH* 71.3 (Fall 2004): 719-49.

Sage, Aeneas. "On Solitude," *Good Words* 3 (Dec. 1862): 472-78.

Sala, George Augustus. *Quite Alone*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1864.

----. "Quite Alone," *All the Year Round* 11:251 (Feb. 13, 1864): 1-3.

Scoggin, Daniel P. "A Speculative Resurrection: Death, Money, and the Vampiric Economy of *Our Mutual Friend*." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 30.1 (March 2002): 99-125.

Shaw, Margaret L. Shaw, "Narrative Surveillance and Social Control in *Villette*." *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 34:4 (Autumn 1994): 813-33.

"Sociability." *Bow Bells* 9:209 (July 1868): 11.

Sodeman, Melissa. "Domestic Mobility in *Persuasion* and *Sanditon*." *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 45:4 (Autumn 2005): 787-812.

"Solitude." *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* 585 (April 1843): 97-8.

"Solitude—and a Crowd." *All the Year Round* 1:264 (Jan. 1894): 63-8.

"Standing Alone." *Bow Bells Weekly* 39 (Sept. 1888): 205.

Stewart, Garrett. "The Ethical Tempo of Narrative Syntax: Sylleptic Recognitions in *Our Mutual Friend*." *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 8:1 (Jan. 2010): 119-45.

Storr, Anthony. *Solitude: A Return to the Self*. New York: Ballantine, 1988.

"Thoughts on Solitude." *Westminster Magazine* 32 (Nov. 1777): 578-83.

Turkle, Sherry. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. New York: Basic Books, 2011.

Warhol, Robyn. "Double Gender, Double Genre in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 36:4 (Autumn 1996): 857-75.

Watt, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Fielding, and Richardson*. London: Hogarth Press, 1957.

Whately, Richard. "Art. V.-Northanger Abbey, and Persuasion." *The Quarterly Review* (Jan. 1821): 352-76.

Wolfe, Thomas. "The Achievement of *Persuasion*." *SEL 1500-1900* 11:4 (Autumn 1971): 687-700.

Young, Arlene. "Character and the Urban City: George Gissing's Urban Negotiations." *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920* 49:1 (2006): 49-62.

Zimmermann, Johann Georg. *Solitude*. Vol. II. London: T. Maiden, 1799.