

“IN FORMLESSNESS AND APPETITE”: MODERNIST FORM AND IMPERIAL FOOD  
POLITICS, 1890-1922

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Duke University, and the University of Georgia in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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## ABSTRACT

Jessica L. Martell: "In Formlessness and Appetite": Modernist Form and Imperial Food Politics,  
1890-1922

(Under the direction of Gregory Flaxman)

My dissertation explores the impact of the British Empire's food system upon the culture of the Anglophone world. I argue that the experiments we collect under the auspices of literary modernism emerged in response to the social conditions created by imperial Britain's newly-industrialized eating economy. The texts I investigate, including works by Thomas Hardy, E. M. Forster, Joseph Conrad, and James Joyce, sought new strategies to represent what Joe Cleary calls "the spectacle of lived unevenness" that this shift in economy produced. For instance, as industrial food production erased distinctions between rural and urban spaces, traditional genres that relied upon these categories were pushed into new and hybrid artistic territory. My first two chapters summon ecocritical insights to analyze the transformation of pastoral and country house novels, which admit increasing aesthetic strangeness and chronological distortion into their figurations of reality. Later chapters utilize Marxist and biopolitical frameworks to examine the political impact of the food system upon colonies like Ireland, ultimately linking modernism's disjointed narrative forms to the nutritional stratification created by imperial agribusiness. By reading literary experimentation in light of the empire's food history, my work revises the perception of modernism as a fundamentally urban phenomenon and reveals its early engagement with the challenges of resource production and consumption that still haunt our political and environmental discussions in the wake of globalization.

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## INTRODUCTION

### The Food Politics of Literary Modernism

Beneath these superstructures of wealth and art, there wanders an ill-fed boy.  
E. M. Forster, *Howards End*

Food scholars often begin their work with the inclusive statement that eating makes us all human—that it brings people together across a table, or in the fields, or in the exchange of recipes and stories. Claude Lévi-Strauss’s *The Raw and the Cooked* (1964) is a common source for this impulse, and the study of gastronomy provides many examples that affirm Lévi-Strauss’s search for “harmonies” among world cultures.<sup>1</sup> His work, along with the theories of cuisine suggested by Mary Douglas and Roland Barthes,<sup>2</sup> paved the way for food to be taken up as a serious topic of academic inquiry because it has a capacity to create meaning beyond its own material reality.

I begin instead with the premise that studying food lands us in a realm of cultural differentiation. This contrary insight also comes from Lévi-Strauss, since what he found to be consistent in human culture was its tendency to produce opposing binaries, such as the distinctions we hold between cooked and raw, or fresh and rotten (145-46). If the universal quality of culture is its tendency to fall apart into distinctions, then we must also admit the existence of real, radical difference that cannot always be resolved into static categories.<sup>3</sup> For

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<sup>1</sup>The search for harmony is reinforced by his choice of musical interludes to structure *The Raw and the Cooked*.

<sup>2</sup>For their contributions to food studies, cf. Douglas, “Deciphering a Meal” and Barthes, “Towards a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption,” both collected in *Food and Culture: A Reader* (2008).

<sup>3</sup>This observation follows Michel Foucault’s critique of structuralism in *The Order of Things* (1966).

instance, Lévi-Strauss's most fundamental term, "cooked" (Fr, *cuit*), refers to a state of being "acted upon" or "finished." He applies it to objects that have been socialized from a given natural state in order to become consumable and declares that, "in native thought," cooking "mark[s] the transition from nature to culture" (165). By creating an inherent opposition between nature and culture, this conclusion can also be used to infer that people who are closer to nature are further from culture. Such assumptions have long justified the expansion of Western civilizations into territories that needed to be somehow "finished." Food scholars have demonstrated the centrality of dietary regimes and gastronomical habits to cultural histories of race, gender, and class, but this research often demonstrates the failure to reconcile difference into meaningful similarities between cultures. The study of food, when placed into historical contexts, equally reveals the potential for conflict in the gaps between fundamentally estranged perceptions of nature and the world.

Recent trends in scholarship affirm the affinities between eating and modern empire, a political and social phenomenon that expanded its reach by "acting upon" natural spaces and indigenous cultures in order to socialize and consume them. If Frantz Fanon proved that Europe created the Third World, then works by Jared Diamond, Mike Davis, Frank Trentmann, Stanley Mintz, and Richard Wilk, among others, demonstrate that building a modern food system was a crucial factor in that development. As Allison Carruth has argued, "in the multiple social and... ecological structures it shapes," food is "a constitutive feature of modernity" (4). Thus, this project places the emergence of a modern cuisine, predicated at is was upon the exploitation of colonial resources by the *telos* of industrial capitalism, at the center of my investigation of cultural modernity.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>By referring to a modern cuisine, I mean a culinary culture, or group of cultures, that is fundamentally structured by mass production instead of traditional agriculture.

My project examines a crucial period of historical transformation in order to demonstrate how the practice of eating created the modern Anglophone world. The industrialization of the British food supply in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was central to shaping experience of modern empire in Europe as well as the territories it governed. Late Victorian food corporations produced an entirely new eating economy, which globalized agricultural production in order to outsource and conceal the exploitative arrangements that underwrote its expansion. I argue that the varied literary experiments that we collect under the banner of modernism emerged in response to the social conditions that this new imperial eating economy created. Through the food system, the empire presented its vast territorial holdings as a giant farm that could be worked by populations who would benefit from projects of “development” and “improvement.” The consumer culture of the early twentieth-century tacitly accepted this pastoral fantasy; thus empire supported the success of British agriculture, and British agriculture supported the success of empire. But modernist texts contain formal strategies that interrupt and challenge this cycle of complicity. The novels I examine in these chapters embrace avant-garde forms in order to challenge the premise that the British Empire was a harmonious entity. These texts demonstrate that its imposition of the industrial logic of production upon rural ecologies only intensified cultural perceptions of modernity as unstable and of the globe as an asynchronous, incompatible collection of diverse time zones, climates, and cultures. Furthermore, some of their strategies draw upon the material unevenness that the food economy introduced into twentieth-century life in order to undermine the assumptions of shared prosperity that it fabricated.

The British Empire’s food system was the last major industry in the nation to industrialize, but its dominance of global markets was achieved with astonishing speed. Within

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one living generation, roughly between 1850 and 1914, imperial food companies had mapped an entirely new nutritional geography onto the British countryside and its colonial holdings. The industry's model, predicated upon the replacement of small-scale, mixed-use domestic farming with factory farming,<sup>5</sup> was largely outsourced overseas. The expansion of colonial acquisitions in the late Victorian era enabled the use of fertile lands, their indigenous peoples, and populations of migrant settlers and workers, to power the accumulation of capital from these new operations. New supply networks, from luxury consumables to staple crops, were controlled by large-scale producers who secured vast amounts of colonial farmland, built highly-mechanized production facilities, and controlled global distribution networks. While land and production concentrated into fewer hands, the consumer base, especially in growing urban areas, vastly expanded. As historian John Burnett writes, “[m]an's most basic need was at last becoming the nation's biggest business” (148)—a critical insight into this transformation, which ultimately served to create the stratification within global food systems that still exists in the present day.

Privatizing the food supply, a phenomenon that corresponds with the ascendance of liberal ideology in British political thought, revised preindustrial categories of scarcity and plenty. The industrial food system was (and still is) hailed for the remarkable changes it made in modern diets around the globe: the vast improvements in the quality of available nutrition, the reduction in global mortality rates, and the exhilarating expansion of a consumer economy for all

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<sup>5</sup>The term “factory farm” tends to have more political traction in the U.S. than in Britain, perhaps due to the sheer size of the Chicago stockyards and the famous non-fiction traditions that accompanied their development (Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* [1901], for instance). But to confine the term to an American context is to overlook the extensive networks of transatlantic shipping routes along which tons of foodstuffs, especially animal products, traveled. For example, between the mid-nineteenth and the early-twentieth centuries the expansion of industrial meat production was indeed a transatlantic phenomenon, though standard histories of diet tend to have a national focus. For recent scholarship on transoceanic food trades, see Richard Perren's *Taste, Trade and Technology: The Development of the International Meat Industry Since 1840* (2006) and Suzanne Friedberg's *Fresh: A Perishable History* (2009).

social classes.<sup>6</sup> Yet any master narrative of its progress is challenged by the realities of unevenness and underdevelopment that persist within it. Recent scholarship on the political ecology of famines has made a compelling case that, in the world today, “the differential allocation of food *is* the gross injustice of European hegemony” (Slocum and Saldanha 1). Preindustrial societies with agrarian economies understood scarcity as a general condition of life. The industrial food system permanently relieved scarcity for many but also allowed it to continue in targeted sections of the population (Foucault 30-40). By 1914, the empire was producing more calories than ever, but these calories were unavailable to certain sectors, especially in poor, rural, and colonial populations. Put another way, the agrarian problem of “hunger amidst scarcity” gave way to the “distinctly modern crisis” of “hunger amidst abundance” (Araghi 155), and pockets of hunger and malnutrition became normalized aspects of the modern experience of eating.

The study of literature provides a powerful medium through which one may both trace the historical continuities of modernity as well as analyze the cultural ruptures that characterize its novelty. By creating a “spectacle of lived unevenness” (Cleary 213), the empire’s new eating economy gave rise to the experimental strategies of literary modernism in the Anglophone world. Fredric Jameson was one of the first to explore the ways in which modernist aesthetics was connected to the experience of empire. In “Modernism and Imperialism” (1990), he revitalized modernist studies by complicating the movement’s relationship to empire and suggesting its deep ambivalence to imperial power. This approach has been expanded in recent decades, and many would now assert that modernism is as much a challenge to, as well as a product of, imperial

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<sup>6</sup>The debate continues over whether or not the nineteenth-century industrial food system was a “blessing” of modern life, but Fogel articulates the commonly-held view that its bounty was a precondition for improving the quality of health and extending the lifespans of global populations in the twentieth century (8-9).

ideology and culture. Jameson registered its critique by examining the impact of globalization on the forms of the modernist novel. While he sees postmodernism as the product of a totalized global system that has normalized its own existence, Jameson argues that modernism, which emerges as empire is still in the process of expanding its reach, is able to source from precapitalist forms of production and ways of life to fuel its imaginative process.<sup>7</sup> Thus, modernism is unique because it contains “the matrix of possible aesthetic responses to a capitalist moment defined by the clash between old and new; it corresponds to the lived experience of the uneven temporalities of ‘simultaneous non-simultaneity’” (Cleary 213), which were produced by shifting economies and expanding markets.

The chapters of this project demonstrate the substantial but underexplored ways that the nutritional geography of late empire produced the “uneven temporalities” that defined modernism’s episteme. Nowhere was the culture of modernity more divorced from its preindustrial past than at the empire’s tables—and not just in London but Dublin, Mumbai, Sydney, and all of the ports and villages grouped under the banner of British rule. The task of feeding a global empire introduced the logic of surplus production into the oldest industry, agriculture, in which biological and ecological forces had traditionally dictated method and determined outcome. Factory farms, shipping routes, and grocers’ chains consolidated into supply networks that were increasingly characterized by distance, technology, differentiation, and regulation (Otter 531; Wilk 88-89). The effects of these trends removed food products from their natural context and disconnected the global transformation of landscape from the tastes that shaped it. The expansion of transoceanic shipping brought new climate zones into British

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<sup>7</sup>This paraphrase is indebted to Joe Cleary’s synthesis of Fredric Jameson’s *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991).

kitchens, and the forces of commerce worked to transcend the latitudes, seasons, and ecological limits that a grocer's shelves would have previously reflected.

Yet agrarian perceptions of season and affinities for place persisted within the new consumer economy. Limits of technology were partially responsible for the persistence of older temporalities within the modernizing food system. As a totality, industrial food networks “emerged gradually and unevenly and often overlaid, without entirely eradicating, an older set of smaller, dispersed, isolated and unregulated spaces” (Otter 531). Some features of traditional agriculture were preserved in older processing facilities or unregulated practices like private butchery. Others were maintained by niche luxury markets, or in customs and habits more broadly—eating lamb on Easter, for instance, even though by 1900 the wild success of New Zealand's lamb industry had made it ubiquitous year-round. Temporal non-simultaneity was also created by how the new economy presented itself to the public. As the industry replaced farms and farmers with factories and clipper ships, it also worked to conceal these changes. British foodstuffs were marketed to consumers as products of idyllic agrarian practices. Names, brands and labels conjured green countryside, happy workers, and wholesome industry, all features of a traditional economy that were disappearing from domestic regions. The marketing of temporal continuity helped the new system establish itself under the veneer of agrarian fantasy, even while the way of life it presented was in the process of becoming extinct.

In *Aesthetic Theory*, Theodor Adorno argues that the “unresolved antagonisms of reality return in artworks as immanent problems of form” (6). Literary scholars have yet to acknowledge that modernist literary forms, genres, and practices developed during the most radical decades of change in the modern food system. By reading modernism as a cultural product of the industrial eating economy, my critical goals are twofold. First, by tracing the presence of traditional

agrarian structures, customs, and communities in modernist texts, my work challenges a persistent critical perception that the movement “venerated” industrialization and aspired to create a world in which “technological fixes saved populations from the unpredictability of nature” (Carruth 12). Even the most elaborate production technologies have not changed the fact that food enmeshes humans in nature, “imbricating them irrevocably in a profusion of nonhuman worlds” (Slocum and Saldahna 1). Current work in food studies and ecocriticism demonstrates the powerful role that vital and natural forces play in the formation of culture. The first half of the project, then, expands the evidence of modernism’s engagement with nature by demonstrating how the modern novel was transformed by its struggle to escape the distorted perceptions of the natural world that the food industry imposed upon modern culture.

The rise of industrial agribusiness was an imperial phenomenon, and my project also works to weaken modernist writers’ complicity with the project of empire. The second half of this project reads modernism’s erratic distribution of narrative content as a rejection of the industrial fantasy that empire was a vehicle of plenty. The food system increasingly alienated the empire’s more marginal populations from the modern capitalist economy, preserving archaic scarcity conditions in the very locations which produced its great agricultural bounty. The changing arrangements of agricultural production created “a new ecology of everyday life” in rural and colonial spaces, and the “new hazards, propensities, dispositions, and patterns of living” among these populations became legitimate objects for state intervention and control (Nally “Storm” 716). Yet as literature evolved new strategies to interrupt, evade, and exceed the limitations of realism, its new forms suggested new ways of imagining life outside the social relations that defined the era.



This project is organized by the two most important social effects of privatizing the empire's eating economy: the transformation of the human relationship with natural spaces, and the emergence of modern strategies of managing populations closely aligned with these spaces. Both nature and the colony were perceived as obstacles to the commercial logic of efficiency, and both invited industrial fantasies of control that sought to integrate them into the industrial economy. Modernist texts, however, challenge the fundamental errors of perceptions that enabled these fantasies. The first two chapters examine how the industrial food system grew by obscuring humanity's interactions with the natural world. Literary crises of representing natural space and natural time testify to the impact of the industrial food economy on cultural production. To some degree, both Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1890) and E.M. Forster's *Howards End* (1910) are products of these reconditioned interactions. Both novels attempt to implement formal features that conceal the ecological and social consequences of industry—the pastoral for Hardy; anachronism for Forster—but neither execution is successful. My first chapter on Hardy's novel measures the impact of the dairy industry's demand for surplus production upon representations of rural life. The pastoral mode in *Tess* endeavors to create a pastoral fantasy of farm life, but its aesthetic strangeness indicates that the transformation of real landscapes by the industrial food system prevents certain classical literary forms from functioning. Thus, the failure of the pastoral critiques industry's demands upon nature to exceed its ecological carrying capacity.

*Howards End* also registers the industrial food economy's distortion of natural processes. The project's second chapter explores how refrigeration and shipping in the empire's meat trades changed perceptions of temporality. Forster's novel grapples with the new, seemingly infinite quality of nature that the burgeoning meat supply introduced into daily life. This new supply

network effectively suspended time by removing seasonality from the food chain, concealing the exploitative realities of imperial industry behind a fantasy of plenty. Forster's use of anachronism, in which multiple historical eras inhabit the novelistic present, borrows the fantasy of infinite time and testifies to the exhilaration the new economy promises. Yet its frequent recourse to anachronism suggests that the narrative cannot imagine the Edwardian present as a part of a historical continuum. Forster's chronological tic indicates the magnitude of the rupture that has made by commerce's mastery of natural limits, and the novel is deeply conflicted about the cultural costs of discarding the agrarian structures of daily life.

The second half of this project extends the implications of the mastery over nature into an examination of empire. My work has been inspired in part by Wendell Berry's suggestion of affinity between nineteenth-century European imperialism, which designed and enforced non-native political systems, and modern agribusinesses that seek to implement non-native strategies of mass production into the environment. "The industrial economy is inherently violent," he writes. "It impoverishes one place in order to be extravagant in another, true to its colonialist ambition" (26). In a similar vein, Michael Pollan's interdisciplinary efforts have explored the psychology of control over nature as a reflection of human relations that are characterized by domination.<sup>8</sup> Pollan's work exposes the precariousness of technological fixes to address what Karl Marx had laid out as early as 1850 as an inevitable confrontation between the limits of nature and the expansion of capital.<sup>9</sup> To assume that the logic of capitalism can absolutely control ecological processes is an illusion. Furthermore, such a belief assumes the right to do so, just as the assumption of civilized superiority justified colonial rule in the quest to expand

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<sup>8</sup>Pollan's chapter, "Potato/Control" in *The Botany of Desire* traces the human desire for control through multiple historical events, including the Irish Potato Famine.

<sup>9</sup>Chapter Three explores the growing importance of ecology for contemporary Marxisms.

imperial reach. The study of food, then, provides important overlaps with postcolonial, environmental, and other fields of study that question the outcome of Western development.<sup>10</sup>

Berry and Pollan, among other contemporary voices, aim their critique at today's multinational agribusinesses, commercial-political hybrids that have deep roots in the historical analogues provided in the food corporations of late empire. The aftermath of world war, and the subsequent decolonization of the developing world, has done little to dissolve the residue of colonialism that persists in our modern food system—for instance, in its tendency to dispose of components perceived as unproductive; its habit of seeing living things, from land to animals to people, as inorganic elements to be utilized; and, most significantly, in its insistence on maintaining the presence of scarcity in order to increase profit and control.<sup>11</sup> The evolution of the modern food system, in fact, maps very closely onto the evolution of the modern strategies of governance that accompanied empire-building. The synergy between food production and population management becomes more distinct as agrarian forms of capital production give way to larger commercial endeavors, which increasingly prioritize commercial production over natural processes and human need.

In the early twentieth century, the imperial agribusiness sold itself as a patriotic necessity for the civilizing mission, and its expansion was sold to the public in the name of “improvement.” This discourse, however, concealed the uneven and underdevelopment that the industrial food economy created. While tariff reform, free trade treaties, and anti-interventionist policies were implemented to assist the free flow of “market forces,” the new food economy was in fact predicated upon “forced markets”—the unchecked exploitation of natural and human

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<sup>10</sup>For recent collections that explore this nexus, see DeLoughrey and Handley (2011) and Roos and Hunt (2010).

<sup>11</sup>The “troubling paradox” of our current food system—that despite tremendous gains in productivity, nearly one billion people are hungry (Carruth 4)—is also part of the legacy of empire.

resources by overseas ventures that mass produced animals and crops at low cost. As David Nally points out, it was arguably easier to improve standards of living for domestic citizens when imperial trading partners “discovered” new populations to exploit; and a “medieval lack of interest in the lower orders” could be profitably transferred overseas to secure supply contracts without concern for whether or not colonial labor forces halfway across the globe were well-fed (“Food” 38; “Storm” 717). The stratifying effects of the new food economy were both produced by, and formed the basis of, new patterns in state control. By the late nineteenth-century, the racist doctrine that had fueled military conquests, plantation economies, and slave labor gave way to scientific discourses on wastefulness and inefficient use of colonial spaces and peoples, who were seen as resources to fuel imperial project. While the colonial body remained the focus of control, administration reconceived the colonial space in terms of populations, which could be managed in order to increase their capacities for production.

The third and fourth chapters of this project turn to texts that explore the way in which the imperial state used scarcity conditions to justify interventions that guaranteed, as well as expanded, its own existence. Accordingly, it shifts its focus to non-English writers and colonial spaces. The works of Joseph Conrad and James Joyce undermine the concept of imperial “duty” and challenge the myth that a prosperous economy is based upon the “efficient” cultivation of colonial spaces. Rather, the increasingly radical distortion, fragmentation, and disorientation of their works demonstrate the debilitating impact of the empire’s eating economy on peripheral and subaltern populations. Chapter Three analyzes three of Joseph Conrad’s novels, set all over the colonial world, to investigate what I call the “imperial metabolism” that the food supply created. Conrad’s texts question the rationale of imperial improvement projects, which were used to justify the agricultural cultivation of the colonies. While imperial rhetoric of free trade

platforms claimed to bring freedom and prosperity to all British territories, Conrad's texts expose the underlying conditions of exploitation which predicated these claims. His reliance upon strategies of negative narration, such as ellipses and omissions, expose the realities of dearth that industry created within its global network.

While Conrad's skeletal narratives expose the false ideals enshrined in imperial production, the excesses of Joycean aesthetics celebrates inefficiency for its potential to exceed the enforced scarcity of the colonial space. The final chapter of this project examines the effects of the new food economy in colonial Ireland. My analysis of the aftermath of the Irish Famine shows the intimate ties between food corporations and colonial governmentality and reveals how state intervention in the form of welfare perpetuated a condition of immiseration in marginal populations. In the early twentieth century, major figures of the Irish Revival envisioned an escape from scarcity and control by boycotting British imports and advocating for a return to local food production. Joyce rejects this platform as pastoral nostalgia and reconceives modern Irish culture as a cosmopolitan product of global exchange. His aesthetic strategy creates its own abundance, rejecting scarcity as the only historical condition of modern Irish identity.

Joyce's predilection for—and his ability to circulate in—an international economy may read as an ironic celebration of plenty that the new eating economy brought to the ports of Dublin; and, in some ways, it is. Food studies in every discipline critique the wrongs of industrial capitalism, but this work also shows the promise it creates for transcending its own boundaries into cooperative arrangements, alternative economies, and hybrid states of being. The study of the food politics of empire encourages new ways of moving beyond master narratives of Western history by assessing the conditions of uneven and underdevelopment it created. Such an endeavor demonstrates the power the modern state gained in trading violent enforcement for

more subtle strategies of intervention. But it also reveals the ways that ecologies, alternative systems, and the people responsible for making those systems, can evade its control. My work demonstrates that modernism measured the destructive effects of forcing rural spaces into markets that debilitated their well-being. The new aesthetic strategies it created were innovations that opened possibilities for new relations of production that were not predicated by the misuse of people or natural spaces. The worlds of the novels in this project hold potential for self-governance and self-created markets, which grow organically from their own resources and according to their own logics. Putting the texts I have chosen into the same conversation forms a web of relations between spaces—the urban metropolis, the rural landscape, the provincial colony—that the empire’s eating economy endeavored to keep separate in the public’s imagination in order to maintain its power. The act of assembling them together onto these pages reveals how inseparable these spaces actually were, and still are today. I hope that this project demonstrates the value of literary study, not only as a way to historicize contemporary food crises, but also as a site of advocacy for fair use and communal responsibility that should govern any economic vision.

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## I.

### The Industrial Fantasy of Nature

CHAPTER ONE:  
Imperial Agriculture, the Pastoral, and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

Near the end of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), the eponymous dairymaid returns as a mistress to the wealthy Alec D'Urberville in order to support her homeless family after they lose their tenancy. Victimized by what the narrator calls "agricultural unrest," families like the Durbeyfields,

who had formed the backbone of village life in the past, who were the depositories of the village traditions, had to seek refuge in the large centres; the process, humorously designated by statisticians as 'the tendency of rural populations toward the large towns,' being really the tendency of water to flow uphill when forced by machinery.<sup>12</sup>

Because statisticians are unable to explain England's rural crisis except by describing it as a vague "tendency," the narrator steps in to correct the "humorous" misunderstanding, which is actually a misapprehension of causality. Rural migrancy is not a supernatural confluence of individual wills all being exercised in unison. It is a feat of social and economic engineering that exerts force against a natural pattern—like water "flow[ing] uphill when forced by machinery."<sup>13</sup>

The metaphor's passive construction establishes a power relation of human design over a natural

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<sup>12</sup>Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, London: Penguin, 1998, 352. Further references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text.

<sup>13</sup>The metaphor of water "being forced uphill by machinery" first appeared in Hardy's essay "The Dorsetshire Labourer," which was published in *Longman's Magazine* in 1883. Tim Dolin argues that large parts of this essay were later imported into *Tess* (122-23). In its first prose iteration, the cottagers who did not own their own land are evicted by landlords who do not accept the responsibility of care for non-employees. In *Tess*, they are re-imagined as descendants of noble ancestors who are forced to leave land that they once owned. This fictional transformation of the cottagers' status provides insight into the novel's title, a reference to John Durbeyfield's discovery of his noble heritage and the subsequent ruin it visits upon his daughter.

process; furthermore, it highlights that power's invisibility. The triumph of a dominant design over nature resonates thematically throughout the novel, most obviously in Alec's assault but also in Tess's choice to return to him. Her decision may appear to have been undertaken freely, but readers are urged to identify and critique the larger social forces that drive her to act against her nature.

Scholars have long read the decline of rural England into Tess's fate, arguing that she represents a "preindustrial world" that is destroyed by industrial modernity (Meadowsong 232). Critical attention thus tends to gather around literal examples of mechanization, like the threshing machine or the railway.<sup>14</sup> But even in idyllic spaces where machines do not intrude, Tess labors according to a mechanical logic of production that is far from "preindustrial." Taking its cue from the opening passage, this essay brings to light the larger social and economic arrangements responsible for the visible trends of rural depopulation and mechanized labor. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, imperial Britain's new eating economy rendered many rural foodways<sup>15</sup>—food industries and the ways of life attached to them—obsolete. Agricultural depression in England had prompted widespread shifts from arable farming to livestock, and from smaller scale, mixed-use farms to consolidated, specialized ones. These new operations were born from crisis, thrift, and the pressure to compete in open markets, and they were some of the first iterations of what we think of today as the factory farm: highly mechanized, driven by surplus production, and fueled by migrant labor.

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<sup>14</sup>For examples, see Meadowsong 225-48; Gatrell 29; Shires 160; Ingham 110.

<sup>15</sup>Dating from the 1930s, the term "foodways" refers to food-related customs or habits that can identify the cultural attributes of an individual, group, or society. The field of folklore began to use the term in order to define an area of study in the 1950s, when what could be called "material" culture was not examined as frequently as the spoken or performed arts. The concept has since enjoyed heightened regard in fields across the humanities and the social sciences, especially in anthropology and cultural geography. For an introduction to the term's folkloric origins, see Camp 29-31.

Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* engages with these developments in vivid detail, from the Durbeyfields' forced migration to Tess's itinerancy among a variety of farming operations. Nature imagery abounds in the novel, but only Tess's employment at Talbothays Dairy is characterized by the pastoral mode. Though it is imperfectly formed, Hardy's choice to summon a pastoral tradition reflects the rapidly changing foodscape<sup>16</sup> of the period, in which rural operations that served urban demand were more likely to survive the process of modernization. By participating in the liquid milk trade to London, Talbothays comfortably situates itself within new urban supply lines, while the "starve-acre" farm of Flintcomb-Ash cannot expand its reach beyond a local economy. The pastoral mode thus emerges in the Valley of the Great Dairies where, true to classical form, the rural sphere serves the urban one.

My intention is not to read *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* as an incomplete iteration of pastoralism whose formal failure can be explained by late Victorian political economy. Rather, I offer a reading of Hardy's pastoral as an important measure of the uneven integration of rural communities into industrial modernity. At Talbothays, the natural world is gripped by a fitful fertility that grotesquely exaggerates the conventional pairing of bucolic scenery with courtship and romance. Hardy's pastoralism is a measure of the inequalities that emerged in the new systems of imperial production, and it provides an important critique of the imbalanced system of domestic relations that resulted from rural exploitation. In his novel, the integration of urban and rural spaces frustrates the pastoral's ability to function, and its strangeness results from the application of a classical arrangement to a landscape in which material relations have shifted. The inequalities of the new system of production also suggest the foreclosure of certain plot

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<sup>16</sup>The term "foodscape" draws upon discussions of "landscape." In the field of cultural geography, it often refers to the act of viewing a place using food "as a lens to bring into focus selected human relations" (Yasmeen 528).

possibilities, and Tess's sacrifice embodies Hardy's critique of industrialization as larger economic designs transform both the material history of agriculture and the experience of rural modernity in Britain.

### The Pastoral: Overview

The pastoral is a fictionalized account of rural life, a literary tradition thought to have its origins in the idylls of Theocritus (3rd century BC) who wrote poems about shepherds of his native Sicily for an urban audience in Alexandria. For as long as peasants have tended their flocks, song and music have “relieved the tedium and brutality of rural life” (“Pastoral Poetry” *OCD*), and the verse form is present in a variety of Western poetic traditions, from the eclogue and bucolic, to the elegy and the idyll, to the more recent anti-pastoral. Up until the early fifteenth century, the term referred to poems or other dramatic genres in which shepherds idealized their lives, loves, work, and the natural world around them. These iterations often followed strict verse form and thematic conventions (Gifford 2). In order to accommodate nontraditional examples of forms, the pastoral can also be discussed as a mode,<sup>17</sup> or manner, in which the content of a work is nature-oriented but the form itself may not comply with traditional prerequisites. The ongoing drift away from formal coherence in pastoral texts is a shift that this chapter's analysis of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* will connect to the late nineteenth-century crisis of agricultural production in England and the declining material conditions of rural life that the form's “world of song” draws from in its attempt to create an idyllic interlude at Talbothays Dairy (“Virgil” *OCD*).

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<sup>17</sup>Cf. Frye 40; Gifford 2.

The defining quality of the pastoral is its artifice. Its chief concern has always been the relation between the figurative and the actual, juxtaposing the idealized world of the shepherd with the troubled *polis* nearby and exploring the differences between the two spheres with highly artificial constructs of language and form. To insist upon realism is ultimately to destroy it, as its most remarkable feature is the ability to transfigure the natural world into dramatic, elemental, and metaphorical terrain. Elements of realism may be present in pastoral works—notable in, say, the works of William Wordsworth or George Eliot—but they are generally subsumed into more universal concerns. The difference between a pastoral poem and a nature poem, according to Owen Schur, is that in the pastoral poem, nature is mobilized as a “common experience to all people, experience mediated by play of language” (9). It is the impulse to represent a general experience that distinguishes the pastoral. As William Empson puts it, “I read into [pastoral literature], or find that the author has secretly put into it, more subtle, more far-reaching and I think more permanent, ideas” (88) than other forms of writing about work, nature, and rural life. Critics disagree over the extent to which the pastoral can take on realistic detail and remain intact; but it is clear that the pastoral’s basic function is to provide a literary staging ground for the conflicts that arise among various rural and urban experiences.

While the epic is concerned with heroism and the georgic with work, the pastoral bases its explorations of the human condition upon leisure and play. This play, however, is not frivolous; its task is to explore transgressions of social boundaries, and one of the features of its kind of play is the form’s “willingness to entertain, and indeed encourage, respite from rules” (Schur 4). The pastoral’s rules, then, are to ignore the rules, and its playfulness comes from examining the consequences of such irony. Not only does the pastoral provide an imagined space that permits transgression; its space is in fact designed for it, setting up conflicts between urban

values and an opposing rural worldview in order to create more harmonious social communities (ibid.). It does this by sweeping away “the complexities of active life” so that “the eternal and fundamental elements reveal man to himself,” placing humankind in proper relation to the larger universe (Lincoln 3). The shepherd figure, educated by the natural world, returns to the imperfect social world ready to participate more fully in the community which he now views from an enlightened perspective. Fundamental ironies and tensions thus resolved, the art form imposes order and meaning upon nature. Ellen Terry Lincoln’s definition of the pastoral is compelling: it figures “a condition in which the characters understand life in relation not to man’s activity but to the fundamental patterns of the created world: day and night, the seasons, birth and death, love and fear, fertility and drought”; and is especially valuable as a means of returning human ambitions to their proper place in the perspective of these “great elemental cycles” (2-3). It is an art form that draws from the natural world in order to impose order and meaning upon it, and then applies that order to existing social arrangements.

But a more nuanced treatment of the form itself reveals a kind of tension that no artistic design can resolve. The pastoral’s function may be to realign humankind in the larger cosmos, or to create social harmony from the wisdom gained therein, but the form itself rests upon a fundamental divide between speaker and subject that, while giving unique rhetorical power to the form, also produces a crisis of sincerity and authorship. Empson calls the pastoral “a puzzling form which looks proletarian but isn’t” (83)—a succinct way to articulate the cultural, social, and political gaps that often exist between subject and speaker. The learned speaker feigns simplicity, if not in actual narration or voice then in the imagining of simple characters, such as the fool, the bumpkin, or the poor farmer. The resulting representations of simple or naïve subjects are likely to be pulled from stock or else mystified, idealized, and distorted by the urbane point of view.

Very different explorations of the relationship between speaker and subject can be found in works by Empson and Friedrich Schiller, two thinkers who mobilize pastoral representation in their analyses of the larger crisis of authorial relationship to the natural world. In *On the Naïve and Sentimental in Literature* (1796), Schiller offers a novel reclassification of literature into two categories, works written by authors who are at one with the natural world (naïve, or immediate), and those by authors who are not at one with the natural world (sentimental, or reflective). Schiller bases his categories of literature not on style, school, or geography, but on different ways an author relates to the natural world: poets “will either *be* nature, or they will *seek* the lost nature” (Schiller 106). Those in the latter category, in which he places himself, are sentimental writers, and the purpose of their work is to “lead an estranged humanity back to the world” (Murray 827). Schiller’s speaker must navigate the pitfalls of modernity on an endless quest for the natural world from which he or she is fundamentally alienated, in order to achieve unity with it. As he concludes, “nature makes man one with himself, art separates and divides him, and through the ideal he returns to that unity” (Schiller 112). Paradoxically, it is the ideal or sentimental in art that leads us back to nature, so that modern people can regain their naïveté—their oneness with nature and the natural world. The sentimental author/speaker is the prophet, the one who will lead the way back.<sup>18</sup>

For Empson, the author/speaker can also be an instrument of revelation, but his pivotal study *Some Versions of the Pastoral* (1935) critiques the duality of attitude that the pastoral form forces upon the speaker, who must be at once learned and simple, urban and rural. The feigning

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<sup>18</sup>Thus Schiller looks forward to Romanticism, during which the pastoral undergoes significant revisions. The English Romantics, for example, felt freer to disregard the form and the content of the traditional pastoral and instead “to look on nature with heightened emotion; to endow primitive life with benevolence and dignity; and to place a greater value on sentiment and feeling” (*New Princeton Encyclopedia*). These writers owe much to Schiller’s writings on the naïve.



of simplicity, he notes, produces the constant danger of looking insincere or even comical; and it also brings into striking relief larger problems of representation in general. Empson describes the “essential trick” of older, more classical pastoral forms as “making simple people express strong feelings... in learned and fashionable language (so that you wrote about the best subject in the best way).” The artificial combination of two sorts of people—simple and learned—leads to the reader regarding the author/speaker (and possibly him or herself) as possessing the merits and best qualities of both worlds (85). This is an important effect. However, to make the clash of high style and low theme work in the right way—“to not become funny”—the writer must keep up a firm pretence that he is unaware of it (*ibid.*). Historically, Empson implies, classical iterations gave way to mock-pastorals, anti-pastorals and other works that freed themselves from formal conventions, or else went out of fashion, because the strain of maintaining elaborate pretenses based so far outside the author’s own experience became difficult to ignore (*ibid.*).

Empson observes the speaking arrangement of the pastoral—the simple character speaking in the learned tongue—is fundamentally based upon “the double attitude of artist to the worker, of the complex man to the simple one (‘I am in one way better, in another not so good’).”<sup>19</sup> By characterizing the pastoral speaker’s tone as necessarily humble, Empson simulates the internal process of the author/speaker in the creation of a pastoral work: “‘I now abandon my specialized feelings because I am trying to find better ones, so I must balance myself for the moment by imagining the feelings of the simple person... I must imagine his way of feeling because the refined thing must be judged by the fundamental thing...’” (85-6). It is a unique function of the pastoral to critique the “refined” world of culture by imagining an

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<sup>19</sup>Empson’s work obviously participates in class-based debates about art’s social utility and the representation of the lower classes. To be a proletarian artist, he says by way of illustration, the artist must be at one with the worker; but the artist is never at one with his audience. The pastoralist, he implies, has the same ironic burden.

alternative that draws upon notions of a more “fundamental” natural world. But the act of imaginative creation itself is refined, not fundamental. In other words, a paradox is created: the speaker is imagining an alternative world to the city, but s/he is *of* the city, unable to discard the learned point of view. For Schiller, this situation is not ironic or paradoxical; it is the result of a constructive synthesis of the two opposing perspectives, the sentimental with the naïve. Empson leaves the two disparate, the tension unresolved, and the speaker’s situation brimming with irony. Furthermore, the resulting double attitude of the speaker reflects a larger, “more permanent truth about the aesthetic situation” (86). The artist is both inside and outside at once, simultaneously of the modern world and alienated from it, able to reflect upon it in a complex manner but still feeling judged by its most basic precepts.

Pastoral literature can encourage the modern world to return to a naïve state and enable modern societies to judge themselves based upon the fundamentals it has lost sight of. But it also poses a problem that can generate material consequences because the source of these fundamental values—the rural space—must be assimilated into the urban vision in order to realign urban values. Regardless of method or intent, the only voice speaking is the learned one. The countryside remains silent or else is ventriloquized by the urban. This is the form’s deepest irony; and herein lies its biggest challenge to environmentally-minded studies of rural literature and culture. Does its formal structure of retreat and return actually encourage the exploitation of nature in the name of progress, or of wisdom, or education? Has this elaborate ruse enabled a material history of aristocratic domination and class struggle? At the very least, doesn’t it cultivate and perpetuate urban-centric attitudes?

Skeptical voices have condemned the pastoral form as inherently flawed for all these reasons. It is fraudulent, escapist, and insincere; it is overly artificial; it is a vehicle for social and

economic oppression. Even its most ordinary treatments in reference books betray the form's complex and difficult critical history. One, for instance, calls the pastoral "an elaborately artificial cult of simplicity," and another includes Edmond Gosse's declaration that it is "cold, unnatural, artificial, and the humblest reviewer is free to cast a stone at its dishonored grave" (*Concise Oxford*; qtd. in *New Princeton*). One of the most coherent and compelling twentieth-century threads of literary criticism on the pastoral is the argument that, as much as it is a way of looking at the countryside, the pastoral is also a way of *not* looking at it (Barrell and Bull 4). At its most traditional, the logic runs, the pastoral is created by the powerful and employs stereotyped impressions of rural life in order to reinforce class hierarchies and perpetuate inequality.

When one examines the relationship between pastoralism in nineteenth-century Anglo-American literature and the material history of these landscapes, it is easy to argue that the literary idyll conceals the material conditions of rural life from the reader. One influential example of this position can be found in Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City* (1973), a work that complicates the histories of both the countryside and the city, which so often form themselves into a false binary of attributes and environments. Williams traces representations of rural and urban spaces throughout the English literary tradition and demonstrates that reinforcing a gulf between the two settings—as does the pastoral in its most common forms—is detrimental. Such a move not only utilizes the countryside as a support system of the city, perpetuating the attitude that rural spaces are mostly valuable in the service of urban populations; it also creates myths that the countryside is dying, already dead, unable to arrange and govern itself, or otherwise crippled beyond agency.

Terry Eagleton observes that it is often easier to substitute an imagined history for a real political agenda in the quest for a solution to social problems (36).<sup>20</sup> The pastoral is often guilty of this offence by staging the countryside as a lost Golden Age, a speculative pre-history of Western civic society characterized by simplicity, permanence, and security of values. It is an ambiguous creation, operating as either a possible past or a possible future (Barrell and Bull 5), and it is often activated by a poet as an alternative world that critiques the present time. Williams dismisses the notion of a Golden Age as “a myth functioning as a memory” (43), drawing attention to the tendency of idealization to obscure complex or dangerous realities in the present. Another common pastoral device that perpetuates urban-centric perspectives is the idea of the countryside as an escape or refuge, “a figure for contemplative life” that enables the urban citizen to return to the city recharged and able to participate in civic life once more (Lincoln 2). Schur classifies the retreat theme under the trope of the *locus amoenus* (“lovely place”) and notes its tendency in pastoral works to create nature that is “discontinuous, fragmented from any surroundings, and inherently artificial” (Schur 10). The pastoral, he concludes, “always tries to displace reality with another world” (11).

If one follows Williams, the displacement Schur mentions obscures reality in a way that has real social, cultural, and political repercussions. In a pastoral arrangement, the implied relationship between city and country is one of domination; and it is no coincidence that, in the industrialized world, living conditions in rural areas have deteriorated so severely in service to dominant urban, imperial, and capitalist mentalities. Such a critical formulation is now almost always mentioned in basic introductions to the pastoral form. For example, in their introduction

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<sup>20</sup>Eagleton condemns F.R. Leavis’s Scrutineers, who mourn the loss of “the organic society” to modern industrial capitalism, for perfecting this technique: “Unable to present a political alternative to [an industrial] social order... [they] offered a historical one instead, as the Romantics had done before them” (36).

to *The Oxford Anthology of English Pastoral Verse* (2003), John Barrell and John Bull admit the possibility that the pastoral is “at base, a false vision, positing a simplistic, unhistorical relationship between the ruling, landowning class... and the workers on the land,” a relationship which mystifies the social and economic hardships that a life dependent upon the land actually entails (4). Historically, it has been a literary form created, activated, and controlled by the ruling classes, often landowners, who rely on stock tropes and characters because the realities of rural life remain outside their own experience. Not mentioning this critique, it is implied, would result in an erasure of a difficult part of its history.

But this critical position does not recognize that nineteenth-century pastoral fiction, as well as recent critical work on it, has also been able to do important work in challenging the oppositional binaries that produce or reinscribe rural underdevelopment. In *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), Leo Marx argues that the pastoral novel accommodates myth and history simultaneously in order to challenge the romanticized, ahistorical views of rural life that permitted its exploitation. While “sentimental pastoralism” enabled the assumption that idyllic nature exists to serve a more sophisticated order of existence, “complex pastoralism” is a formal development that “acknowledges the facts of history” by allowing the temporary intrusion of a more complex reality into the symbolic landscape. This intrusion prevents a solipsistic withdrawal into an idealized landscape in which “no tension exists... between the self and the environment,” checking the form’s otherwise problematic tale-spinning of a joyous return to nature (L. Marx 10; 25; 363; 24-26). What Marx calls complex pastoralism is a development of the form that Terry Gifford describes as “self-knowing, problematized, and responsible” because

it acknowledges the specific burdens of use that industrialism imposes upon nature (249).<sup>21</sup>

Recent criticism has focused on forms of pastoralism that provide “a discourse that can both celebrate and take some responsibility for nature without false consciousness” in order to bring a more “mature environmental aesthetics” into literary criticism.<sup>22</sup>

While it has been argued that the violence of agricultural history in England made the pastoral an “impossibility” for a late Victorian writer like Hardy (Barrell and Bull 431), I see Hardy’s summoning of the pastoral mode in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* as a self-acknowledging iteration, demonstrating not only how responsible economic and cultural networks are for the condition of natural spaces, but also how effectively nature can work its way into human histories and narratives. Hardy’s fiction provides literary critics with a kind of ecological engagement that does not rely upon “a deep withdrawal from society” into unpopulated or remote spaces (Kerridge 126). We should not always analyze Hardy’s nature from the Lawrentian view, as a raging wilderness that dwarfs the “charmed circle” of transient human life (Lawrence 29). Because it is also partially domesticated by agriculture, Hardy’s natural world can be entwined in, and inextricable from, the human world of social labor.<sup>23</sup> Animal husbandry and agricultural cultivation—activities from herding and dairying to greenhouse gardening, root gathering, and threshing—create an important interface between humanity and nature. Wessex gives us a world of “multiple life forms in interaction and interrelation” (Krielkamp 474) that

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<sup>21</sup>In their introduction to this edited volume, James and Tew remark that Gifford’s use of Leo Marx in his theorization of postpastoral literature “offers the possibility for a resolution in part of transatlantic differences” in pastoral criticism, which has been largely subject to national divisions in a way that warrants rethinking (27).

<sup>22</sup>Gifford, *Pastoral* 148; Buell 32.

<sup>23</sup>It is important to recognize ecocriticism’s achievements in combating anthropocentric assumptions that nature exists in literature as “a theater for human events” instead of as “a presence for its own sake,” as Buell writes (52). In an effort to honor *Tess*’s project, however, I am just as interested in the opposition of natural and human worlds that the pastoral arranges as I am in the transformative nature of their interaction.

revises the critical assumption that the pastoral must understand nature as entirely separate from human infrastructure in order to function.

This new reading allows the possibility for an ethical balance between the two spheres by allowing them agency to interact and influence each other. In *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), Hardy is already using scenes of animal husbandry to enact “a logic of the disruption, crossing, and interweaving of species-based biological categories,” for example when Gabriel Oak teaches baby lambs to drink milk from the spout of a teapot. The lambs adapt readily to this practice, illustrating their “plasticity,” their readiness to adapt to “unnatural” human culture (Krielkamp 476). This overlap is rich with possibilities for understanding “an integrated natural world that includes the human (Gifford *Pastoral* 148). Culture intrudes in the form of the teapot, but it is assimilated into the lamb’s life cycle without troubling the bucolic space. In *Tess*, the intrusion is more extreme, as culture, in the form of industrial production, is writ large into the entire landscape. Gabriel’s “crossing” over into the animal realm is still rooted in a notion of pastoral care that accepts the obligations of responsible stewardship. In the earlier novel, animal husbandry does not constitute domination because the human intrusion does not fundamentally alter the life systems of the pastoral space. In contrast, *Tess* admits an entirely new kind of stewardship in the form of industrial dairying, which nature is unable to accommodate and remain untroubled. The form’s malfunction critiques the growing imbalance in human-ecological interactions that industrial agriculture affects.

#### Agricultural Depression, Rural Migration, and the Wessex of *Tess*

For much of Britain’s history, huge gaps between landowning and labor classes rendered egalitarianism possible only in literature. The pastoral, in which the elite retreated to nature to

refresh and refine their values, depended upon the separation of spheres; thus the literary tradition, it is argued above, helped to preserve them in reality. Social and economic mobility increased after industrialization, although Hardy's pastoral still relies upon submission of the rural sphere to urban design. The pastoral in *Tess* is attached to the only part of the local economy that was still able to shelter and give life after the disastrous effects of depression—the dairy farm. The dairy is one of the few agricultural industries of rural England (and especially in Dorset) that survives the 1870s and 80s, eventually expanding to become one of the most important remaining facets of domestic agricultural production before the First World War. The success story of the dairy is embroiled within the histories of imperial trade, land distribution, and labor issues; and out of much conflict, violence, and loss comes Hardy's Talbothays, the figuration of the natural world as life-giving, generative, healing, and surrounded on all sides by “the active world of strife”—forced migration, famine, cultural isolation and alienation. The pastoral episode in *Tess* is appropriately fleeting, as the steel “feelers” of imperial urbanity creep closer and closer to the insulated world of Wessex (Hardy *Tess* 206).

## §

Simon Gatrell argues that the writing of *Tess* in 1890 marked a decisive moment in the development of Hardy's Wessex as we know it today, an area larger than just his home county of Dorset that takes in neighboring counties. In other words, in the writing of *Tess*, Hardy crystallized the notion of a region (27). In the years following *Tess*'s publication Hardy revisited his own earlier novels in terms of this new framework, and Wessex gradually developed into the fictional terrain that is recognizable to readers today—local in detail, but also representative of “any and every place” (Hardy “General Preface” xii). From its inception, Wessex has always been a blank screen upon which critics have projected a variety of interpretations, the most



important of which views Wessex as the staging grounds of the conflict between traditional ways of life and the forces of modernization in late nineteenth century England. In this view, it functions as a metaphorical borderland between older, more traditional social formations and those that emerge as a result of rural England's integration into the imperial narrative of industrial capitalism. Tim Dolin repackages this notion into a compelling political reading. Wessex, he quips, is "the name that Hardy gave to what happened between 1874 and 1895" (119).<sup>24</sup>

But what did happen between 1874 and 1895? The decline of rural populations, the rise of urban centers, the spread of industry and the embrace of Free Trade ideology in shaping political discourse had all been well underway by the 1870s. Something more specific must have "happened" in those two decades. Drawing upon the 1895 Preface for the reissued *Far From the Madding Crowd* in which Hardy calls Wessex the "territorial definition" of a "recent historical crisis," Dolin theorizes that crisis as the realization of a mid-century shifting fault line between two generations after which the cottager classes of rural England were supplanted by migrant workers (Hardy *Far* 5-6; Dolin 119-20).<sup>25</sup> He argues that this trend toward migrancy is not traceable back to 1870s but emerges in the early 1880s. Additionally, the 1880s was a decade of profound personal and professional change in Hardy's life—among other events, Hardy moved back to Dorset after a decade of living in London, reinventing himself as a writer who could document, speak for, and draw from the "vanishing life" of the countryside (Dolin 121; Hardy

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<sup>24</sup>These two dates signify the first printing of *Far From the Madding Crowd* in 1874 and its reissue in 1895, when Hardy recasts the novel as part of the Wessex schema. Thus they bookend a period of reflection upon the nature of the regional project.

<sup>25</sup>This generational shift can be seen in Hardy's fiction by examining the gaps in understanding and communication between Joan and Tess Durbeyfield, or Aunt Drusilla and Jude and Sue, for example.

“General Preface” xiii). This break of continuity in rural life, Dolin argues, constitutes a representative experience of modernity for Hardy (119).

Dolin’s insight is compelling, but his analysis is incomplete. The loss of tenancy and increased migrancy of rural populations were very important issues to Hardy. What happened to Dorset and other rural areas between 1874 and 1895, however, were visible symptoms of the larger social, political, and economic forces that, by privileging British industry over British agriculture, reduced traditional domestic farming to the point of chronic failure and forced radical changes in the nature of food production. In sum, the patterns in human behavior that Dolin brings to our notice are driven by the restructuring of agriculture—and are therefore, at base, issues of eating. What happened between 1874 and 1895 was the complete transformation of British agriculture, from labor-driven craft industries that fed local populations to large-scale productions that did not. During these years, Dorset’s landscape experienced radical change as the nation’s industry shifted from an essentially agrarian, smaller-scale, and mixed farming norm to a streamlined, specialized, and consolidated systems of industrial production

Waves of agricultural depression, rippling through the last quarter of the century, were largely responsible for igniting this transformation. The two largest waves occurred between 1875-1884 and 1891-1899 (M. Williams 5). The result was widespread failure of staple industries, particularly in cereal crops,<sup>26</sup> and also of local cottage industries like butter and cheese-making. Other sectors were transformed virtually beyond recognition, especially those pertaining to livestock and animal husbandry. The southwest counties were particularly hard hit. In Dorset, traditional farming families who by thrift survived the first waves, largely succumbed to the second (Brown 32). Farms fell into disrepair; previously productive lands were left

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<sup>26</sup>These crops are usually all grouped together as “corn,” as in the Corn Laws.

fallow. Roads were overgrown, cottages abandoned. Hardy watched as whole families were forced into migratory patterns in search of seasonal work, or else lured into the slums of growing towns by the promise of steady wages.<sup>27</sup>

Although *Tess* confirms his interest in the farm laborers affected by these changes, Hardy's non-fiction suggests that he was also intensely engaged with the plight of the cottager and tradesmen classes, a biographical detail that has significance for an examination of the pastoral mode in his fiction. Many critics who discuss rural life in Hardy's works draw from his only non-fiction essay on the subject, "The Dorsetshire Labourer," published in July 1883 in *Longman's* magazine. Commissioned as a response to the 1879-1882 Report of the Richmond Commission on Agricultural Distress,<sup>28</sup> this essay remains Hardy's one public foray into party politics on the subject of working conditions of agricultural laborers and land reform. The Richmond commission was established by Parliament to study the extent to which rural England had been decimated by the depression conditions of the 1870s. The report concluded that agricultural industry in Britain had been essentially crippled, and it stressed the depression's universal nature (Perren 11). However, it also claimed that, while most landlords and tenant farmers had suffered losses in quality of life, the lives of rural laborers were less likely to have been affected by depressed conditions. Part of the rationale behind this claim is that rural wages remained steady for the surviving workers who chose to remain behind because so many others migrated to town or emigrated from Britain altogether (ibid. 17).<sup>29</sup> In the 1850s and 1860s, the

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<sup>27</sup>Douglas Brown's *Thomas Hardy* (1961) gives a thorough account of the effects of these agricultural depressions on late Victorian rural populations, and especially in Dorset. Cf. 32-9.

<sup>28</sup>Hardy's essay was part of a series commissioned by the paper that explored "the peasantry of different parts of the United Kingdom...by five writers with special local knowledge" (qtd. in M. Williams 211). The series included pieces on Ireland, Scotland, and Wales as well as England (ibid.).

<sup>29</sup>According to the report, landlords were most affected by loss of income, followed by tenant farmers (Perren 17).

Dorset population had a 76% migration proportion, and in the 1870s, Dorset was one of only nine English counties that recorded an absolute population decline. Part of the reason for increased rural migrancy was labor's response to the conditions of chronic depression. The Agricultural Workers Union, for example, openly encouraged farmworkers to move around in search of work and to avoid binding themselves by contracts that lasted over one year (M. Williams 111-12). This strategy attempted to ensure that demand for labor remained consistent and that workers could find the best markets for their skills. Even after the collapse of the AWU in the 1880s, trends of rural exodus and internal migration continued.

Although he does express grief at the loss of social stability that resulted from increased migration, Hardy also notices that not all of the effects were negative for all rural classes. In fact, his depiction of Dorset agricultural workers in "The Dorsetshire Labourer" illustrates the Richmond Report's claim that in most rural areas, the lives of agricultural laborers remained relatively unperturbed in the 1870s—or even, in some cases, improved. Increased migrancy led to increased independence from feudal relations with landlords and tenant farmers. The growth of the railways and local schools helped to "emancipate the average Dorset laborer from the psychological bondage to their locality, so that many of them tried to solve their problems by going elsewhere" (M. Williams 111). Coupled with steadier wages and decreasing food prices, many workers enjoyed a vast improvement in living conditions compared to their counterparts earlier in the century.

Hardy is "unsentimental" towards the idea of migrancy in the laboring classes because he witnessed these improvements (Brown 40). In his essay, Hardy celebrates them by cleverly reversing the common trope of city folk who come to the countryside looking for an idyllic retreat but are instead shocked by poverty and filthy living conditions. Instead, Hardy's urbanites

are bossy, interfering social reformers looking for squalor but who are instead astonished by the decency of humble life behind dirt walls, learning that “apparent squalor is not really squalor at all” (Hardy “Dorsetshire Labourer” 55). This technique dramatizes the limitedness of the city dweller’s view and highlights the “more inclusive, more nuanced” local resident’s perspective (Dolin 124-5). Hardy does reinscribe the expected picturesque into his account of the laborer’s life. The rural people are characterized as decent, salt-of-the-earth types, “humorous in simplicity” (men) or admirable in their “modesty” (women) (“Labourer” 64). But ultimately he objects to his own creation, declaring on their behalf: “It is only the old story that progress and picturesqueness do not harmonise. They are losing their individuality, but they are widening their range of ideas, and gaining in freedom. It is too much to expect them to remain stagnant and old-fashioned for the pleasure of romantic spectators” (ibid. 65). In this analysis, tension exists between an obvious desire to support the continued liberation of the lower classes from feudal subsistence and the consequent anxiety over these peoples losing their “peculiarities as a class” or type (“Labourer” 64). He dismisses that anxiety as a “romantic” projection, the product of an outsider’s lack of understanding. In contrast, the local perspective understands that to constrict the workers to stereotype, or “caricature” to use the essay’s term, would be to restrict their human development (ibid. 51).

While the lower classes of laborers were “awakening to the sense of an outer world” (“Labourer” 67), the intermediate classes of cottagers, craftsmen, and tradesmen saw drastic declines in numbers and fortunes. Hardy’s essay positions the fate of the cottagers as the real tragedy that results from agricultural depression. Many critics consider the cottager class to be Hardy’s own class, as well as the class of his parents.<sup>30</sup> He himself describes it as the “better-

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<sup>30</sup>Cf. M. Williams 113.

informed class ranking above [agricultural laborers]—the blacksmith, the carpenter, the shoemaker, the small higgler, the shopkeeper... together with nondescript-workers other than farm-laborers” (ibid. 72). They are also referred to as “life-holders,” or *liviers*, a term referring to people who built their own houses on leased land with the agreement that the residence could stay in the same family for multiple generations. This intermediate rural class could hold property but were not landowners; they were businessmen but did not have a formal education; and they were workers but not on the land. They had a high degree of mobility within country society between the landed classes, the educated clergy, and the laboring classes. To Hardy’s frequent frustration, outsiders could not easily distinguish it from other laboring classes and tended to regard all rural working classes as homogeneous (Dolin 128). After the 1870s, when prices began to fall, cottagers began to be evicted as more and more landowners allowed life-holdings to lapse (M. Williams 113)—or, even more poignantly, allowed their cottages to fall into disrepair and then knocked them down rather than rebuilding them and renewing the life-lease (Hardy “Labourer” 73). Although the title of the essay suggest otherwise, the crisis of the cottagers’ displacement seems to be the real topic of Hardy’s essay, which laments the detriments to rural communities that result when this class is forced down the same road as the laborers.

Dolin notes the significance of “the displacement of Dorset laborer by the Dorset cottager” in Hardy’s imagination (128). In his view, Hardy’s substitution of one for the other is an effort to bracket class struggles in his quest to unify the experience of all rural England under his regional banner. This substitution is “a crucial effacement of the real political character of the agricultural landscape that Hardy is writing about—a landscape in which class hostilities are not the central preoccupation, but are instead replaced by the struggle of cottagers against larger

structural changes in the rural economy” (ibid.). Two levels of strategy reveal themselves here. First, Hardy absorbs the fate of all the rural classes of Dorset into the fate of his own class. In turn, his class becomes a universally representative experience of all the downtrodden. As he himself puts it, “[t]he question of the Dorset cottager merges in that of all the houseless and landless poor, and the vast topic of the Rights of Man...” (“Labourer” 74). In doing so, Hardy declares himself qualified to represent what he sees as a universal condition of victimization by larger political forces. Secondly, the cottagers’ plight fuels what will become Hardy’s most iconic thematic preoccupation. Their struggle translates into the struggles of all the characters in Wessex, which becomes “the much wider struggle of all communities against modernization” (Dolin 128). The fate of the *déclassé* “expands to fill the larger Wessex: ideal representatives, at once local and universal, of the forms of transition that Hardy was intent on exploring,” providing “the defining condition of Wessex” (ibid.)—a space where class interests can be transcended in order to explore the larger effects of a social order under the pressure of collapse.

“The Dorsetshire Labourer” thus provides a non-fiction example of Hardy’s privileging an intermediary vantage point to represent, and to record, the modern condition. Those who operate between classes have a view of the larger system at work, and they can access the power that comes with mobility—the power to represent, to speak for, and to translate difference. This is an important feature of Hardy’s work to discuss in context of rural life and also its literary figuration. The disappearance of the cottager class in the Dorset countryside is a representative trauma of modernity for Hardy because the important function that they serve will no longer exist when they are gone. In Hardy’s Dorset, the cottagers are the ones who have passage into both the rural and the urban worlds. They can speak to either, and on behalf of one or the other. Eliminating these classes shrinks the possibility of interaction between the stratified spheres.

Empson characterizes the speaking arrangement of the pastoral—the simple character speaking in the learned tongue—as fundamentally based upon “the double attitude of artist to the worker, of the complex man to the simple one (‘I am in one way better, in another not so good’)” (85). An intermediary position between the fundamental and refined spheres is a prerequisite upon which Empson’s formulation rests. The speaker must have access to the “best” from both spheres in order to produce the synthesis of “bests” that is the form’s special genius. As the pastoral requires the intermediary position of the speaker, so, to Hardy, rural Dorset requires the intermediary classes in order to speak.

The pastoral in Hardy’s hands becomes something it had rarely been: the rural attempting to speak for itself. Hardy as author/speaker is not an elite voice ventriloquizing an experience from which he is completely estranged. Of course it is possible to argue that, in “The Dorsetshire Labourer,” Hardy does take an elite position, endeavoring to distinguish himself from a lower class and therefore inappropriately speaking for a more marginalized experience of rurality than his own. But Hardy as author/speaker also represents a rural experience that exists altogether outside of the landed classes and therefore provides a significant departure from traditional arrangements of perspective in pastoralism. It is important to keep in mind, as both Merryn Williams and Raymond Williams point out, that the Dorset into which Hardy was born in 1840 was still reeling from the labor unrest of the 1830s. Hardy himself was born just six years after, and three miles away from, the banishment to Australia of six farmers known as the Tolpuddle Martyrs, whose crime was to form an agricultural union (M. Williams 108; R. Williams 197). Both critics read the unrest of rural laborers as crucial to Hardy’s relationship to the countryside and its working classes.



We should also consider how Hardy was received by the reading public and literary circles of the time. Part of his contribution was to render more complex an experience of rural life that the urban public tended to view as simple and homogenous. In his own words, Hardy wanted to correct the reliance upon caricature that happens when a class of people “lies somewhat out of ken of ordinary society”—to challenge a habit of seeing the rural working classes as “allegorical representatives” by making them “not typical of anyone but [themselves]” (“Labourer” 51; 53). His success as a writer arguably lay in his ability to portray rural life as vivid, complex, profound, and full of variety and color. In doing so, Hardy attempts to speak for those who were an invisible but crucial part of the urban experience. In 1883, a reviewer commended Hardy for his gift of sharing with an urban readership his “intimate knowledge of rural life,” revealing to an astonished Hardy what others had already judged his trademark to be (qtd. in Dolin 122). It was an unexpected insight for Hardy into his own career and arguably refocused him on the conceptual development of Wessex.<sup>31</sup> Soon after, Hardy began his meticulous Facts notebook and otherwise immersed himself in Dorset life, rendering his work “less unmethodical” and probably leading to a more unified, vivid concept of Wessex (Dolin 122). This example illustrates just how critical urban critical reception was in cementing Hardy’s identity as a regional writer. He was cast as the trusted double speaker, a voice reporting to the urban center from the rural space.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Havelock Ellis surveys Hardy’s career for an article in the *Westminster Review*. Ellis identified “rural life” as the source of most striking continuities in Hardy’s varied career and gently remonstrated how Hardy seemed to be leaving this subject behind as time went on. Cf. Dolin 121-22.

<sup>32</sup>Not all contemporaries were as generous in their regard for his niche. Raymond Williams recounts Somerset Maugham’s infamous description of Hardy, “with his boiled shirt and high collar; he had still a strange look of the soil” (qtd. in Williams 199). Henry James also famously patronized the rural orientation of Hardy’s work. He once remarked that *Tess* was the one book that “good little Thomas Hardy” had written that had some degree of “charm” (qtd. in Ingham 216).

Using Hardy as his primary illustration of success, Wendell Berry defines regionalism as “local life aware of itself,” best produced by authors who write from their knowledge of the place they live in—and the place in which they “intend to *continue* to live” (Berry 936; original emphasis). Continuity of association is crucial for Berry’s regionalist to guard against the exploitation of the regional character, however unintentional, for the purposes of delighting a larger (implied: urban) audience. The regionalist is a key part of physical and historical preservation of rural areas because “without a complex knowledge of one’s place, and without the faithfulness to one’s place upon which such knowledge depends, it is inevitable that the place will be used carelessly, and eventually destroyed” (937). Carelessness of use, exploitation, overpackaging to the point of simplicity—these are the pitfalls of the false prophet, the bad regionalist, and will lead to overconsumption of the rural by the urbanites who have developed a taste for the quaint, wholesome, or rejuvenating.<sup>33</sup> Appealing to an urban audience creates a precarious existence for a regional writer, but Berry regards Hardy as successful because his work exists for itself and demonstrates his intent to continue the same relationship with Dorset regardless of urban tastes and demands.

Despite perspectives like Berry’s that view Hardy’s career as a line of defense against urban exploitation of the rural space, Hardy is not often considered a political writer. One recent historian criticizes his lack of social reforming chops by calling him “a detached and educated member of the Dorset market-town middle or professional class, with literary connections in London” and insinuating that he exaggerated ties to the lower rural classes in order to appeal to his urban reading public. When compared to the actual historical record, the writer concludes, Hardy’s presentation of the conditions of Dorset life is “unrealistic and evasive” (Snell 399;

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<sup>33</sup>Unsurprisingly, here are all of the critiques of the pastoral form that have been catalogued above.

395). This is a glossed, new critical reading of Hardy's literary figuration of rural life and a miscalculation of the task of the regionalist in general. The assertion that Hardy feigned working class status to court an urban public's taste for quaintly escapist rural fiction is flatly contradicted not only by his biography<sup>34</sup> but also by Berry's assessment of Hardy as a regionalist who discourages empty, disingenuous consumption of the rural space. More importantly, this historian's argument rests upon the assumption that literary realism is the best way for a fiction writer to address social problems. A glance at Hardy's work situated within the scope of Victorian offerings demonstrates how altogether unique his works are in their portrayals of rural life. He demonstrates just how ineffective verisimilitude by itself can be in revealing the underlying—and largely unacknowledged—forces that are responsible for the social problems so often addressed in Victorian fiction.

Patricia Ingham objects to the above assessment of Hardy as an "evasive" rural chronicler by pointing out how different his treatment of working class poverty is from earlier "condition-of-England" novels, which appear to be concerned about social ills but ultimately rely upon harmonious resolutions of narrative that reinforce the existing class structure. Often in the novels of Gaskell or Dickens, Ingham argues, it was a common convention for the resolution of a personal conflict to "inappropriately" stand in for "a solution to a systemic disorder in society" (Ingham 111). Here, she declares, is the true blindness—"it is the bypassing... of what creates poverty which is evasive" (ibid.).

This chapter opened by analyzing Hardy's metaphor comparing rural migration to "water flowing uphill," and this image demonstrates how valuable his work can be in debates about political evasion in literature. The first draft of this passage read: "A process which is designated by statisticians as 'the tendency of rural populations toward the large towns,' is really the

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<sup>34</sup>Cf. Millgate ch. 1.

tendency of water to flow uphill when forced” (“Labourer” 73). Ten years later, the metaphor was extended in *Tess*, becoming “the tendency of water to flow uphill when forced by machinery” (355). There is no evasion of economic or social history in this metaphor, and the addition of “machinery” only reinforces its political specificity to an industrializing era. In both iterations, Hardy carefully stages the unraveling of a common truism about why rural people have been moving in order to expose the presence of the larger social and political “machinery” beneath.<sup>35</sup> This is a significant and unique feature of Hardy’s fiction. Upon deeper scrutiny, the academic language of the statisticians is exposed as mysterious, inscrutable language, which in turn cloaks a larger systemic ill.<sup>36</sup> The statistician’s version of the story leaves the motivations of the migrant “populations”<sup>37</sup> unnamed so we may fill them in, as we wonder why moths are drawn to a flame. The narrator then corrects the academic’s error: this movement is not natural but artificially produced. Like the academic, Hardy retains the passive voice. His passive construction, however, not only highlights the reality that a larger force is making it move; it also draws attention to the fact that this force remains unnamed and unacknowledged.

Much of Hardy’s fiction, though perhaps lacking in overt political rhetoric, is in fact highly political in its tendency to attribute the root causes of injustice to institutions such as marriage, the church, or the university. Hardy is committed to depicting the disastrous consequences that structural ills have upon the poorer and working classes. His working class characters are individual men and women with arguably more specificity, vividness, and

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<sup>35</sup>The addition of the word “machinery” in the second version resonates with the iconic threshing scene in *Tess*, another moment in which the rural workers are overwhelmed by industrial design.

<sup>36</sup>The word “humorous” is also a notable addition to the later version, a jab at the disembodied voice of academic authority for getting it wrong.

<sup>37</sup>Chapter Four expands upon the dehumanizing effects of this word which, in a political context, quantifies groups of people in order to intervene in their behaviors.

complexity than many previous literary portrayals of the rural working classes in the English canon, which otherwise tends to represent this group as “characterized by their common economic function—labour” (Ingham 111). His characters receive no relief from the forces that act upon them. Clym Yeobright is never relieved from the crushing work of furze cutting; Jude is never admitted to Christminster; Tess is neither reformed nor especially repentant (ibid.). Furthermore, Hardy’s novels do not reinforce existing class structures by providing harmonious resolutions—his challenges to social class, gender norms, and religious dogma were so unprecedented, in fact, that contemporary reviewers sometimes regarded his work as “the literary and intellectual equivalent of bomb-throwing” (Ingham 217). Part of the critical outrage that Hardy’s work often provoked stems from the acknowledgement that his work exposes “the way that social class predetermines the possibilities open to individuals; the fuzzy nature of the criteria on the basis of which the class hierarchy is constructed; the corrosive effects it produces; and the flimsiness of the rationale offered for the system” (ibid. 111). Subject to arbitrary but totalized control, Hardy places his characters at the bottom of the social ladder of a system in which mobility is given as a possibility but remains untenable. The resulting struggles show the havoc “wrought” by the desire to advance, but they also reflect “the mortifying effect when [this desire] is thwarted” (Kerridge 138). Hardy’s fiction is deeply unreconciled to the inequalities of wealth and power that other Victorian writers tended to re-inscribe, and his body of work demonstrates an unflinching refusal to “bypass” or “evade” the idea that larger systemic causes bear responsibility for human tragedies.

A comparison of *Tess* to George Eliot’s *Adam Bede* (1849) provides a helpful illustration of Hardy’s political engagement on behalf of the rural space. Both novels involve the seduction of a girl from the laboring classes by a man of higher social standing, but Hardy offers a

substantial revision of Eliot's treatment of sexual exploitation. In Eliot, it is as if inequality and class stratification are etched permanently into the world. Both Hetty and Dinah are reinstalled back into the social order—the former through repentance and sentencing, and the latter through marriage—thus preserving the social arrangements that enabled the original transgression.

Hardy's work, in contrast, challenges the existing order not only by refusing to rehabilitate or reintegrate Tess into society, but also by acknowledging the complex realities of an economic system that would allow a poor girl to be taken advantage of by a much wealthier man.

According to Raymond Williams, "Tess is not a peasant girl seduced by the squire; she is the daughter of a lifeholder and small dealer who is seduced by the son of a retired manufacturer" (R. Williams 210). Hardy is able to challenge the notion of type that Eliot applies to Hetty by portraying the social and economic circumstances of rural life with far greater complexity.

Williams continues, "it is not only that Hardy sees the realities of laboring work, as in Marty South's hands on the spars and Tess in the swede field. It is also that he sees the harshness of economic processes, in inheritance, capital, rent, and trade, within the continuity of natural processes and consistently cutting across them" (ibid.). The representation of complex economic relationships, the implication that they lie at the base of all human interactions, and the refusal to leave them unacknowledged, are all features of Hardy's approach that create fiction that is more deeply engaged with social problems than books which may include more overt glimpses of such issues but ultimately reinforce them as inevitable or natural. Unlike Berry, Williams prefers not to label Hardy as a regionalist because the term may inadvertently classify Hardy as conservative; or that he is the "last voice of an old rural civilization," a misnomer that implies that the experience that Wessex represents is somehow receding further and further from the reality of the present (197). But Berry's formulation also regards the regional writer as a living

voice, and his summoning of Hardy is an effort to activate the rural space as an equally relevant territory to explore the social problems of modern life. Hardy's work provides a significant advancement in the figuration of economic forces of late nineteenth-century rural fiction and contains a powerful critique of real social forces that were at work in rural communities.

### Free Trade, the Land Question, and the Making of the d'Urbervilles

...while other classes and manufacturers and great industries of various kinds has risen and prospered upon the ruin of agriculture, the condition of the latter had been *the one black mark and the one stain upon the glorious reign of the Queen*.

-Excerpt from a leaflet distributed at Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee<sup>38</sup>

In the context of agricultural change, one of the most important political issues that made its way into *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* was late Victorian land use, an issue that generated heated debates on the national stage and transformed the politics of the English countryside in the 1870s, 80s, and 90s. The Land Question, as it was known in contemporary political terms, concerned the debate over reforming outmoded laws that concentrated land ownership into the hands of the upper classes. Aristocratic landlords leased parcels of their land to tenant farmers, who in turn employed agricultural laborers on their farms. Until the late nineteenth century, owners were legally unable to sell land that they inherited, calcifying the class structure into the tripartite hierarchy of owner, tenant, and laborer. But as agricultural depression and rural migrancy set in, a flurry of debates took place between the Conservative and Liberal parties over agricultural policy in terms of private use and the state's role in rejuvenating the industries of rural England.

The discussion over government intervention in agricultural matters had been particularly fraught since the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 that, by lifting protective import tariffs, opened

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<sup>38</sup>Qtd. in Readman 17; original emphasis.

British agriculture to the same forces of Free Trade which governed other industries. Historically in England, agriculture had enjoyed special status as “the greatest industry” or “the national industry.” Removing the protective tariffs of the Corn Laws thus subjected agriculture to the same forces of Free Trade that governed other industries, marking a monumental change in political attitude. As historian Paul Readman explains, “the repeal of the Corn Laws signaled a growing conviction that commerce and manufacture, not farming, was the quintessential national industry” (86). Agriculture was thus downgraded in status and subjected to competition from global markets.

In 1848, two years after the tariffs were repealed, Karl Marx spoke on Free Trade economics to the Democratic Club of Brussels. In this speech, Marx presciently tags British agriculture as the earliest casualty of liberal ideology.<sup>39</sup> Marx stages the competition for dominance between manufacturing and agricultural industries by simulating conversations between hypothetical figures such as workers, manufacturers, and tradesmen who debate how best to use rural space to promote the economic health of the nation. When the Worker asks the Manufacturer why his wages have not risen after the repeal of the Corn Laws—a common rationale that had been used in support of tariff repeal—the Manufacturer admits that changing food prices do not actually determine wages as much as competition between workers does. Instead of examining the shortcomings of his own labor policies, the Manufacturer then attacks the practice of domestic agriculture, arguing that it is an archaic, inefficient use of land and labor that would be better utilized in the manufacturing trades:

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<sup>39</sup>Marx’s speech is a striking forerunner to the later political rhetorics that emerged in response to the abysmal agricultural depressions of the 1870s and 1880s, when the major parties were forced to revisit the mid-century debate over government’s role in influencing land use.



...bear in mind the circumstance that our soil consists only of rocks and sandbanks. You surely do not imagine that corn can be grown in flower-pots! So if, instead of wasting our labor and our capital upon a thoroughly sterile soil, we were to give up agriculture, and devote ourselves exclusively to commerce and manufacture, all Europe would abandon its factories, and England would form one huge factory town, with the whole of the rest of Europe for its agricultural districts (K. Marx 26).

This dystopic factory-scape is Marx's satirical representation of capitalist ideology, an Anglo-led belief system which assumes the rest of Europe will arrange its means of production in a cooperative way instead of a competitive one. As one-dimensional as his myopic vision of prosperity may seem, Marx's stage villain is in fact the early rehearsal of a political dogma that, only two decades later, allowed widespread domestic agricultural failure.

The Manufacturer's single voice is met by a chorus of protests from farmers and agricultural workers, who ask in unison: "And what, pray, is to become of us? Are we to help pass a sentence of death upon agriculture, from which we get our living? Are we to allow the soil to be torn from beneath our feet?" (27). Fueling the workers' common plea is the terror of the divorce from the landscape itself—land which otherwise tends to remain invisible in debates over how it should be used. Marx's rural laborers encourage a move beyond abstraction by reminding the audience of the social and cultural consequences for human life should the natural world itself remain entirely excluded from economic debates over resource use. Marx is aware that agriculture is about more than calculations. When it is allowed to dry up like any other industry, it will not simply disappear and be replaced seamlessly with imported commodities. Agriculture is tied to food supply, which is in turn linked to very basic notions of sustenance and security. It is also the basis for many ways of life. To speak of agriculture only using the

language of capital is to elide a diverse range of native and rural cultures that are an inherent part of its systems.

Both the Corn Law tariffs and their repeal were—and remain—sources of ideological controversy. A compelling variety of public figures and scholars, however, have testified to the link between unchecked Free Trade ideology and the agricultural depressions of the late nineteenth century. Although he did not support Protectionism, Marx expressed ironic support for the Free Trade position of repeal because its disastrous consequences for rural populations would generate revolutionary conditions (K. Marx 42).<sup>40</sup> Disraeli was one of the first public figures to “prophesize the ruin of agriculture” after the repeal had passed; and by 1902, H. Rider Haggard had declared, “Free Trade has filled the towns and emptied the countryside; it has gorged our banks but left our rickyards bare” (qtd. in Brown 30; 31). Looking back, numerous scholars across the disciplines today also testify that the unrestricted embrace of Free Trade ideology was one of the most significant contributing factors to the evaporation of domestic British agricultural production and all of the resulting byproducts, including rural migrancy, urban overcrowding, and the rapidly increasing reliance upon imported foodstuffs.<sup>41</sup>

There no consensus on how Hardy should be read in light of the history of the Corn Laws and the ensuing non-intervention of the state throughout a quarter century of agricultural depression. “The Dorsetshire Labourer” has been read as an expression of Hardy’s support of the

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<sup>40</sup>“To impose protective duties on foreign corn is infamous, it is to speculate on the famine of peoples,” he writes (24).

<sup>41</sup>For examples, cf. Paul Readman’s *Land and Nation in England: Patriotism, National Identity, and the Politics of Land 1880-1914* (2008), a meticulous and thorough account of the Land Question debates including their relationship to Free Trade policies. On the link between Free Trade and the death of British agriculture, Readman’s fourth chapter on agriculture echoes literary scholarship on Hardy by Brown and M. Williams. Perren’s economic history *Agriculture in Depression, 1870-1940* also provides evidence for this connection. Published in 1902, H.R. Haggard’s *Rural England* was a contemporary voice against the destructive effects of liberalization upon rural life. He interviewed Hardy for the Dorset section.

Liberal Party's Free Trade stance, casting the Liberal policy of tariff repeal as a measure which liberated rural workers from the interests of production monopolies that were dominated by aristocratic landholders. For instance, Michael Valdez Moses reads Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) alongside "The Dorsetshire Labourer" and finds in the pairing a "more optimistic appraisal of the material consequences of economic liberalization," pointing out that to believe in economic liberalization as a policy that benefitted the poor "was perfectly consistent with the views of many mid-Victorian radical defenders of the poor" (53). Hardy's body of work clearly supports the Liberal push away from primogeniture toward more equal distribution of land and documents the greater freedom for the rural and working classes such policy produced.<sup>42</sup> However, liberalization of land ownership and liberalization of agricultural markets—i.e. the trade of agricultural commodities—are two different things, and Hardy does not weigh in on specific policies. After a century's worth of policies in the Anglo-American world, the liberalization of agricultural markets in an increasingly globalized imperial trade economy has yet to eradicate rural poverty and hunger, even in the developed world. In the Victorian context, unregulated competition resulted in the flooding of British markets with cheap imports, causing prices to plummet, small farming to evaporate, mass production to dominate, and wealth to concentrate once more into the hands of a few.<sup>43</sup> Yet opposing these trends provided a greater political liability than counteracting them, and historian Robert Schwartz

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<sup>42</sup>The Liberals took their inspiration on land reform from the "veteran radical" Richard Cobden's 1864 push for the establishment of a League for Free Trade in Land, a movement influenced by the writings of John Stuart Mill and others who argued that primogeniture and other existing forms of land transfer were evils that encouraged undercultivation, artificially restricted markets, and unevenly concentrated land and therefore the distribution of produced goods (Readman 14).

<sup>43</sup>And to all this add an entirely new problem – the widespread political anxiety over Britain's heavy dependence on imported foodstuffs and the national security crisis that would ensue should international relations deteriorate. Chapter Three describes this new crisis in detail.

observes that, even in the face of rural unrest, “opposing protectionism, or other forms of farm-income support, carried little political risk” (250).

Both “The Dorsetshire Labourer” and *Tess* are particularly sharp in their critiques of these commercial trends in the changing experience of rural modernity, as the rest of this section will demonstrate. The late nineteenth-century reorganization of wealth in England was fueled by both depression and concentration. The evaporation of small-scale rural agricultural industries made unprecedented consolidation of agricultural production possible. Consequently, one of the most significant developments in rural politics was the Land Question, as politicians in the 1880s and 1890s increasingly addressed the use of the land that remained in private hands after decades of migration and impoverishment. I turn to the Land Question as the most helpful and relevant political debate to examine when looking at Hardy’s figurations of agricultural change in *Tess* because traces of its content and rhetoric remain in the novel long after contemporary readers would identify its original historical context.

The Land Question and the class struggles it ignited were “vital to Hardy’s maturing conception of Wessex” (Dolin 129), and they are especially striking in *Tess*. On the way to the railway depot to deliver the day’s milk, Angel points out to Tess “how many present tillers of the soil were once owners of it,” and expresses his surprise that “certain schools of politicians” don’t exploit these circumstances more vehemently (Hardy *Tess* 208). Dolin characterizes Angel’s remark as an “intermittent moment of contact” that the novel “arranges” between the insulated world of Wessex and the politics of rural Britain in the 1880s (116). He argues that Angel is referring to Joseph Chamberlain’s Radical Programme (1885), which called for a variety of measures designed to promote prosperity in rural areas and stressed the need for new policies that would free up land from a calcified system of inheritance in order to make it available for

small-scale ownership.<sup>44</sup> Hardy was an avowed Liberal, but the Radical Party's stances on land reform were at times closer to his own than his own party platforms.<sup>45</sup> "The Dorsetshire Labourer," published around the same time that the Radical Programme was gaining momentum on a national stage, is engaged with the issue of land reform and can be read as a plea for political action to curb rural depopulation, and especially of the cottager classes which he deems so important to village life.

Traces of the Land Question debates migrated from "The Dorsetshire Labourer" into *Tess*. The metaphor of water "being forced uphill by machinery" provides one contact point, as does Hardy's reimagining of the cottagers' plight when it is imported into the fictional terrain of Wessex. In the earlier essay, the cottagers who did not own their own land are evicted because landlords do not want to accept responsibility for people who do not work on their estates. In *Tess*, however, Angel's comment suggests that Hardy has invented a past for them. The migrating life-holders are conceived as descendents from noble ancestors who once owned the very land that they are forced to leave. The invention of a noble genealogy for the cottager families provides Hardy's novel with its central preoccupation, most notably observed in the book's title, a reference to John Durbeyfield's "discovery" of his aristocratic heritage and the subsequent ruin it visits upon his daughter.

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<sup>44</sup>The Programme, published in 1885 in the *Fortnightly Review*, called for land reform, more direct taxation, free public education, the disestablishment of the Church, universal male suffrage, and more protection for trade unions. Aiming for the urban middle class vote as well as the rural, Chamberlain's program advocated for smallholdings that would rebuild a yeoman farming class—and which would also have the effects of relieving urban overcrowding and halting the growth of socialism in urban slums (Dolin 122-4). The Radical Programme was doomed after the Liberal party split over Home Rule in Ireland, and Irish independence temporarily claimed the political spotlight from rural land reform in England.

<sup>45</sup>The same week that "The Dorsetshire Labourer" was published, Hardy alludes to Chamberlain's "electrifying" speech in letter to his friend John Mortley. Dolin interprets "The Dorsetshire Labourer" as Hardy's (somewhat muted) entry into the public debates over Radicalism (Dolin 122-3).

Multiple interpretations can explain this invention—as an effort to complicate rigid notions of social class, for example, or to dramatize the disjuncture between blood status and individual worth (Ingham 116). The biographical record suggests that Hardy believed his own family of working class Hardys was once the noble Norman le Hardyes (Millgate 270-2).<sup>46</sup> But most importantly for this chapter, the connection between genealogy and landowner status provides insight into the role that social class played in the Land Question. Angel's comments suggest that politicians of the 1880s would have found a ready audience for their smallholdings positions if they would have taken greater advantage of the “occulted genealogical status” of the life-holders who believed themselves descended from ancient landowning families (Dolin 129). The connection between land ownership and social status is present in an interview Hardy gave to the *Pall Mall Gazette* shortly after *Tess* came out. When asked about his views on land reform, Hardy replies that squires and landholders would gain allies if they would “let people have little freeholds” because “a man would give anything for half an acre” (“‘Hodge’ as I Know Him”). Reforms offering smallholdings of land are desirable not only because land ownership would offer a more liberated egalitarian future—it also offers a mythical connection to a grander past as well. Being divorced from the land, then, is figured as an ahistorical condition in *Tess*, a state of being that has resulted from a rupture in the distant past. This rupture could be healed with reform, it is implied, which would regenerate the lost connections between eras.

No sustained legislative intervention reversed trends of agricultural depression and rural depopulation in Britain, but there was a good deal of political rhetoric about the traumas that resulted from them. The triumph of the Free Trade agenda did not mute an “older agriculturalist discourse” that increasingly cried out for relief from 1870 onward (Readman 87). By the 1880s,

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<sup>46</sup>Hardy once remarked that he would have called his novel *Tess of the Hardys* if it hadn't sounded “too personal” (qtd. in Millgate 271).

all of the major parties had become aware that slowing the hemorrhaging of rural industry—or at the very least making the discussion of that hemorrhaging a prominent part of their agenda—would be politically beneficial.<sup>47</sup> Land reform, pitched as a solution to depression, received top billing on many major party pamphlets, particularly in the late 1880s and early 1890s, dwarfing all other social issues (26).

Rationales for reform varied from the Conservative party's policies that idealized England as "a nation of sturdy, country-dwelling producers, not enfeebled, slum-dwelling consumers," to the Liberal and Liberal Unionist advocacy of smallholdings and allotments to increase production by counteracting the consolidation of industry into large farming operations (Readman 94-9). But all major parties eventually grew to support smallholdings reform on seemingly unlikely common ground—by discouraging or removing "idle landlords," predominantly wealthy landowners who either did not maintain their land effectively or else did not use it for agricultural purposes (104). Large estates were perceived by Liberals and Tories alike as aristocratic pleasure parks that produced nothing useful, or else were neglected due to poor financial management (103). Historically, and even into the 1870s and 80s, there had been a "longstanding association between large-scale capitalist farming, food production, and patriotism" among Conservatives, who held fast to a "well-established" party position that the undercultivation of the land was unpatriotic (94-6). "Inefficiency" was an enemy of the Conservative mindset; and as farming itself yielded less and less profit, the growing concern over the lack of domestic food production opened the Tories to the idea of supporting reform through smallholdings.

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<sup>47</sup>After the 1884 Reform Act, which extended the franchise to 75% of the agricultural laboring classes, party platforms included "many public expressions of patriotic lament" intended to diffuse the unrest in rural areas (Readman 17; 87).

By the 1890s, all the major political parties seemed to some degree ready to place large estates upon the political chopping block in the name of revitalizing the small trade and laboring classes of rural England.<sup>48</sup> New legislation made it easier for “financially embarrassed landlords” to liquidate their wealth in property in order to pay their debts, an option which had previously been illegal and had left many debt-ridden aristocrats unable to maintain their estates properly (Readman 103). But new owners who purchased unused farmland, and who were unaccustomed to agricultural production, were also an obstacle to recovery. Not only were new owners likely to stop farming operations altogether, but changes in ownership sometimes resulted in the mistreating, overcharging, or evicting the tenant farmers who had also been “inherited” with the purchase of the land, many of whom had tended (and resided on) the estates their entire lives. Additionally, changes of hand led to increased expulsion of the cottagers and life-holders that Hardy treats in such detail in “The Dorsetshire Labourer,” whose eviction was an even more common practice than cuts in farm staff because they did not necessarily work for the estate.

Eventually, legal reforms pertaining to land ownership made it easier for “agriculturally incompetent” landlords to transfer land into the hands of farmers more suited to the task, and more stringent tenants’ rights laws were also introduced (Readman 103); but widespread reform did not occur until after the turn of the century. In the meantime, the debate over how England’s countryside could be best used—and who could best use it—continued. Using land inefficiently, and especially for pleasure or sport during a time of deep agricultural depression and rural poverty, remained a sensitive political topic.

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<sup>48</sup>This consensus provides an ironic reversal of politics of the 1830s and 40s, since the fortunes made from Free Trade were used to purchase foreclosed and abandoned farmland.



The debates over the Land Question inform the implication in *Tess* that the residents of the countryside who currently own land have either usurped it from its rightful owners (the humble “tillers” in Angel’s comment above); or have not earned it; or worse, do not deserve it because of abuse, neglect, frivolity, or ignorance. Tess’s personal tragedy is set against a backdrop of usurping pseudo-aristocrats like Alec d’Urberville—in a thematic parallel, also her rapist—men of newly moneyed families who buy aristocratic names and tracts of land in the country to convert into pleasure parks. When Tess arrives at The Slopes, the Stoke-d’Urbervilles’ newly purchased seat, the estate house is described as

...not a manorial house in the ordinary sense, with fields, and pastures, and a grumbling farmer, out of whom the owner had to squeeze an income for himself and his family by hook or by crook. It was more, far more; a country-house built for enjoyment, pure and simple, with not an acre of troublesome land attached to it beyond what was required for residential purposes, and for a fancy little farm kept in hand by the owner, and tended by a baliff. (Hardy *Tess* 69)

This figuration of the “new” estate aptly reflects the real anxieties and resentment surrounding the crisis of agricultural depression and the consequent debates over how land would be best put to use in its wake. Its purpose is “enjoyment, pure and simple,” not production, and the presence of a “fancy little farm” that is neither “troublesome” nor operated by a “grumbling farmer” (in other words, a tenant farmer) only reinforces the notion that this is a hobby farm, uninterested in feeding or supporting people—the simulated relic of a very recent past which is no longer a reality in the present.

Tess’s time working on Mrs. d’Urbervilles’ poultry-farm contains an important allusion to Hardy’s claim in “The Dorsetshire Labourer” that cottagers have been unfairly displaced by

the forces of modernization, and more specifically by outsiders who have benefitted from the recent decades of change. At The Slopes, the tenants-for-life have been replaced by Mrs. d'Urbervilles' pet chickens, and their coop is described in terms of a military usurpation: the birds' "headquarters" are a cottage "in an enclosure that had once been a garden but was now a trampled and sanded square" (87). We are told that this cottage had once housed "the copyholders" (tenants for life by contract) now buried in the nearby churchyard, and that their descendants

felt it almost as a slight to their family when the house which had so much of their affection, which had cost so much of their forefathers' money, and had been in their possession for several generations before the d'Urbervilles came and built here, was indifferently turned into a fowl-house by Mrs. Stoke-d'Urbervilles as soon as the property fell into hand according to law. (87)

The omniscient narration provides the local community's presumed reaction to Mrs. d'Urbervilles's decision to replace people with chickens. Couched in moderately peeved language (it was "almost a slight") is Hardy's scathing critique of a moneyed outsider buying up an estate, steamrolling over local custom on the basis that they own the land "according to law," and without possessing the land in the sense that it should be possessed. One of the first decisions of the new lady of the manor is an exhibition of wealth that displays outrageous frivolity in its blindness to the history of the local space that it—and its pet chickens—have literally usurped<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup>Appropriately, Mrs. d'Urbervilles is also blind.

The only food growing at The Chase seems to be the hothouse strawberries that Alec summons in an effort to seduce his new cousin.<sup>50</sup> “They are already here,” he says to Tess; and the agricultural metaphor is clearly directed at her (72). Divorced from natural cycles and rhythms, dominated by an unsympathetic and artificial design, the hothouse plants have been forced to bear fruit early, foreshadowing Alec’s attack on Tess and the subsequent birth of the child Sorrow. Tess’s rape will continue to be described and analyzed in agricultural terms—it is later described as a “passing corporeal blight” on her development that, after time and some reckoning, allows her a “mental harvest” of awareness; and at one point Tess wishes that her “maidenhood” could be regenerated by the same “recuperative power that pervaded organic nature” (150; 127). The Slopes, the well-polished kit-farm where “everything looked like money,” spares no expense in its attempt to replicate the offerings of the region’s delicate local systems of life and culture (69). However, the impulse to recreate the native system is one of domination. The disruption of ecosystem that the hothouse garden represents runs parallel to the rupture in Tess’s natural growth and development that Alec inflicts upon her. As Hardy so fatalistically puts it, “the coarser appropriates the finer thus” (104)—and even in this famous phrase, an attempt to account for cruelty and injustice, Hardy uses the terms of the harvest. Grains are sorted and ground to coarse or fine finishes according to their final purpose, with the coarse always surfacing first in a mixture of the two.

Alec is not the only force preventing growth, health, and regeneration in the novel. Tess is used badly by two men who fundamentally misunderstand her. Angel Clare provides a foil to the ineffectual aristocracy that Alec represents, but he is equally responsible for rural decline.

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<sup>50</sup>Alec calls them “British Queens,” the dominant variety of most British markets from 1840 to 1890. Cultivating small fruit like berries was one way for some farmers with money to invest in infrastructure to modernize their business after the decline of arable farming (Perren 14).

His crisis heralds the turning away from agricultural stewardship to recreation and other exploitative attitudes toward the countryside that rural politicians in the 1880s often characterized as obstacles to the regeneration of arable farming. One of the most remarkable scenes in Hardy's novel occurs when a homeless Tess, described as having "a hunted soul," wakes up on the grounds of a new estate surrounded by a flock of dying pheasants that have been wounded by an unidentified shooting party:

...she heard a strange new sound among the leaves. It might be the wind; yet there was scarcely any wind. Sometimes it was a palpitation, sometimes a flutter; sometimes it was a sort of gasp or gurgle. Soon she was certain that they came from wild creatures of some kind, the more so when, originating in the boughs overhead, they were followed by the fall of a heavy body upon the ground. (287)

The injured birds in the trees above her had escaped a hunting party and managed to roost in safety, but they are ultimately unable to recover from blood loss. Like a heartbeat in the branches overhead, the birds "flutter" and "palpitate" as they bleed to death and fall to the ground. At this point in the novel, Tess has been abandoned by her husband of four days, Angel Clare, whose shame at her secret history of assault drives him abroad with the intention of establishing for himself the "thriving life as a Colonial farmer" (143). The dying birds, shot only for sport, highlight Tess' abandoned hopes for her own marriage; but they should also be read as the abandoned dreams of productive land use in England by young men like Clare, who pursue agricultural wealth in colonial territories instead of establishing farms at home. At Talbothays Dairy, we learn that Angel has decided to pursue an agricultural career because he conceives of farming as a vocation that "probably would afford an independence without the sacrifice of... intellectual liberty"—liberty that the Cambridge education his father desires for him would

presumably take from him (143). Thus, Hardy's idealization of a farmer's life is as a foil to a university career, affording liberty of mind away from the "modern town life" that Angel so despises (*ibid.*). Angel has no location in mind—"farming in the Colonies, America, or at home" are all equally attractive options (*ibid.*). However, after Tess divulges her past and he learns that Alec is still alive in England, he finds himself drawn to a red and blue sign advertising farmland abroad and flees to Brazil to begin his life as "an emigrating agriculturalist" (272). Just before he leaves, he remarks to Mercy Chant that his scheme "snaps the continuity of existence" (277)—a desirous state for him psychologically, since he cannot face loving a woman who has a sexual past; but it is also an important comment to consider in reference to his abandonment of English land for colonial speculation. His departure ends the possibility that the hopeful young farmer has a future in England and ruptures the "continuity" of rural existence as the source of liberty from town-centric social systems that the narrator had previously idealized.

The pheasant scene suggests that England's countryside is left to the d'Urbervilles types and their frivolous uses of the land for allegedly refined pursuits. These urbane poseurs, however, have neither connection to local history nor any notions of proper stewardship that are necessary to sustain life in the rural space. For Hardy, they instead exhibit the desire to control, dominate, and destroy. When she was younger, Tess had "caught glimpses of these men [sport hunters]...peeping through bushes, and pointing their guns, strangely accoutered, a bloodthirsty light in their eyes" but was told that they were only dangerous for a few weeks a year when "they made it their purpose to destroy life—in this case, harmless feathered creatures, brought into being by artificial means solely to gratify these propensities—at once so unmannerly and unchivalrous toward their weaker fellows in Nature's teeming family" (288). The notion that the rural space exists for the sport of outsiders is epitomized in this passage. The fact that the

pheasants are bred solely for the purpose of obliteration by “bloodthirsty” men clearly illustrates upper class abuse of their privilege as stewards of the land—they are even able to create creatures to destroy for their own amusement.<sup>51</sup> Astonishingly, once she realizes what is happening around her, Tess breaks the dying birds’ necks and relieves the misery inflicted upon them by their attackers, men who find pleasure in destroying innocent life. Hers is a parallel act of violence to theirs, but it is mercifully done; and it is also an act which she, in her misery, desires for herself.

The “flutterings and palpitations” of the strangled landscape, and of Tess’s dying hope for a new life with Angel, are symbolized by the injured pheasants, whose mass slaughter evokes grief over the disappearance of a conception of land use that can only be remembered or imagined in the present. With his departure, the dream of revitalizing England’s farmland through responsible use and good stewardship is no longer a sustainable one.

### The Dorset Dairy and Hardy’s Pastoral

So great has been the change that the farmer of 1800, were he alive now, would scarcely recognize his county. The number of sheep kept has dwindled, the corn area has become less, dairying is more general, the area of permanent and rotation pastures has increased, and many small minor industries have completely died out.

*The Victoria County History of Dorset*, 1908<sup>52</sup>

The rearrangement of productive forces drove the Land Question debates and decimated many rural industries. In *Tess*, Hardy’s formal choices are often grounded in the visible food

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<sup>51</sup>The pheasant episode in *Tess* may have been inspired by a discussion in 1882 that Hardy had with a gamekeeper about the mass slaughter of birds during a local hunting party; in a later notebook entry he imagined the surviving birds fluttering in the trees at night (Millgate 218-9). Hardy and his first wife Emma had “a common hostility to blood sports” and sometimes quarreled with neighboring landowners who hunted near their house (Ingham 13-4). They were activists against other forms of animal cruelty as well (Millgate 218-9; 380-1).

<sup>52</sup> Qtd. in M. Williams 106.

history of Dorset during this period of change. Though nature imagery abounds in the novel, a recognizably pastoral mode only appears when Tess becomes a milkmaid at Talbothays Dairy. The dairy environment nurtures Hardy's protagonist, regenerates her social prospects, and readies her return to the labor market. The connection between the pastoral mode and the dairy setting is no coincidence. The Dorset dairy is one of the surviving foodways of this period of rural crisis, and its emergence during the depression as a thriving, modernized industry provides a representative example of how new eating patterns in the late nineteenth century affected the agricultural sectors of rural England. Many smaller industries and local practices disappeared, but by the 1890s the dairy had grown from a niche industry to the single largest sector of British agriculture. The industry's rise to prominence, particularly in Dorset, provides evidence that, following the depression, the success of rural industries was largely determined by whether or not they could fit themselves into the changing logic of urban supply lines. The Wessex of *Tess* reflects the subsequent rearrangement of production, and Tess's stay in the Valley of the Great Dairies demonstrates how the pastoral function is challenged when new forms of agricultural industry intrude upon the symbolic territory of the bucolic space.

In the 1880s, dairying expanded from niche markets into the single largest sector of British agriculture.<sup>53</sup> Increases in urban demand were largely responsible for this growth.<sup>54</sup>

Before 1870, most of London's liquid milk had come either from urban dairies in which cows were stalled in the city center, or from cows grazed in suburbs close enough for easy transport. In

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<sup>53</sup>Until the 1870s, the term 'dairy farming' implied the manufacture of butter and cheese from surplus milk that had not been consumed. Selling milk was considered a retail business rather than a farming practice. But the dairy industry was changing. As Taylor explains, the amount of milk devoted to cheese and butter making fell by an astounding 75% between 1860 and 1908 (Taylor "Growth" 49). These trends "aided the process of structural change" within the dairy industry, as the huge drops in cheese and butter making were soon replaced by correspondingly dramatic rises in sales of liquid milk (Taylor "Dairy" 589-91).

<sup>54</sup>One recent article places the growing urban demand for country milk in the context of "the late-century national project to replace human milk with cow's milk" in its effort to privatize family care (Carroll 167).

the mid-1860s, after a particularly bad series of cattle plagues had exposed the poor living conditions of urban cattle, city residents began to favor the “fresh country milk” that had begun to arrive by train in small quantities from further flung pastures. Urban demand for non-urban milk catalyzed the growth of an entirely new domestic industry that served London’s population. By 1880, the Local Government Board estimated that railways carried 20 million gallons of milk into London every year (Whetham 371-72). In only 50 years, liquid milk became the single most important item produced on the farms of England (Taylor “Growth” 63-64), particularly in the southwest counties like Dorset.

Dorset had long been known for its dairy products,<sup>55</sup> but after the 1870s, dairy farming became one of the most common ways for a Dorset farmer to modernize his operation in order to survive the depression. The Blackmoor Vale in the north of Dorset was at the forefront of dairy industry restructuring in the 1870s; and by 1882, large dairies like the Semley Dairy were advertising “twice daily dispatch[es] of cooled milk from 3,000 cows in Dorset for the London market” (Taylor “Dairy” 58; Whetham 375).<sup>56</sup> The railway made structural changes both possible and desirable. The Great Western Railway connected the southwest region to London and other towns, allowing farms closest to the railways to capitalize on the fast growing liquid milk trade. If a dairy farm was near a railway line, the owner was likely to be drawn into the milk trade by offers from urban wholesalers, many of whom began to build cooling depots along the local lines in order to facilitate greater collection volumes and farther-reaching collection

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<sup>55</sup>Cf. Taylor: “In 1870, the average stocking density in England was 65. 3 cows and heifers per 1,000 acres of crops and grass... Cornwall, Dorset, Westmorland, and the West Riding of Yorkshire had figures in the high 80's and 90's” (“Dairy” 586).

<sup>56</sup>“In 1871 Thomas Kirby started a business of buying milk from local farms and, from a depot near Semley station, sending it to London for sale. The depot was the first in Wiltshire serving primarily the London market. Others were opened by Kirby in south Wiltshire and Dorset in the 1880s... They traded in 1889 as Semley and Gillingham Dairies and from 1890 as Salisbury, Semley, and Gillingham Dairies Co. Ltd.” (Crowley).



ranges.<sup>57</sup> Many farmers found that sending milk to London was a reliable source of income—demand was steady; turnover was quick; the speed of transport ensured speedy paychecks; and the telegraph enabled quick communication regarding supply and demand so milk was only sent where and when it was needed. By the 1890s, London’s urban dairies were virtually nonexistent, and the center of London drew the vast majority of its milk supply either from farms 30-50 miles away or from the cooling depots established along the railway lines that reached farms 50 miles or further from London (Whetham 379).

Dorset’s dairy industry provides a striking illustration of how the industrialization of specialized agricultural sectors contributed to uneven development in rural areas by redistributing rural populations along the railways. Using Dorset as his model, historian Robert Schwartz demonstrates that unequal railway access clarifies why some rural areas weathered the decades of agricultural depression better than others. In Dorset, participation in the milk trade was a crucial part of the story. Completed by the 1870s, the primary lines of Dorset’s railway networks suited farmers in lowland valleys who were generally well serviced by local stops. In contrast, great swaths of the central and upland areas were left without rail access because no secondary lines were built to reach them.<sup>58</sup> During the 1880s, the most severe decade of depression, “parishes closer to railway stations tended to have higher rates of population growth than those farther afield and... the inaccessibility of rail service often went hand in hand with pronounced village depopulation” (242). Schwartz’s work draws population data from three

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<sup>57</sup>For a detailed description of the practices of wholesalers, the use of cooling depots, and an analysis of the fluctuating prices of depot milk, see Whetham 374-79.

<sup>58</sup>The companies of the largely privatized British railway system relied upon primary lines and tended not to invest in the construction of less profitable secondary lines (Schwartz 231). The Western railway was anchored by the town of Dorchester in the center, but two large lines also flanked the north and south borders of the county. The central line went to London, and some of the other major lines serviced growing seaside resort towns like Weymouth and Poole.

parishes in Dorset that correspond exactly with locations that Hardy drew upon when composing *Tess*. These three locations—West Knighton, Marnhull, and Alton Pancras—became the fictional Talbothays Dairy, Marlott, and Flintcomb-Ash, respectively.<sup>59</sup> The first two locations, traditional dairying parishes, had adequate railway access, but the third did not. Although all three parishes felt the effects of agricultural depression, the two with railway access fared better than Alton Pancras, where the population decreased sharply. Dairying was a likely factor in stemming population loss in West Knighton and Marnhull, locations where rail access encouraged the expansion of the milk trade. Farms too far from stations could not participate because milk tended to spoil in transit. These operations had much higher failure rates because they relied upon the production of cereals and root crops, markets that brought in less and less income as the depression deepened (Schwartz 242-43).

The history of the Dorset dairy illuminates Hardy's choice to mobilize a critique of industrial modernity against the backdrop of Talbothays. Cloaking his condemnation in a figuration of nature that is obsessed with overproduction, Hardy draws upon pastoral traditions to measure the increasing tensions produced by Britain's changing foodscape as it rejected the ethical balance promised by native stewardship for an industrial logic of expansion that served the demands of nonnative populations.

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<sup>59</sup>In an email, Dr. Schwartz confirmed his awareness of these parallels and explained that he chose these locations because of a future project on *Tess* and spatial history. According to Millgate, "Marnhull is the 'Marlott' of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*" and West Knighton is a village in the Froom Valley, Hardy's model for the Valley of the Great Dairies where Talbothays Dairy is located (177; 270). In *Thomas Hardy's Wessex*, Hermann Lea writes that Hardy's father owned a small freehold of land in West Knighton called Talbots, where Hardy's brother Henry later built a cottage called Talbothays. Like Millgate, Lea places the dairy of Talbothays in West Knighton. He adds that Flintcomb-Ash was based upon the area surrounding Alton Pancras, a village in the chalky uplands of Dorset (11-12; 20-22).

While all forms of agricultural production test the autonomy of the natural world to some degree, Hardy's pastoral suggests that to indulge in an idyllic fantasy is untenable if the corresponding environmental arrangements are too far away from the dream. After the "silent, reconstructive years" following Alec's assault and Sorrow's death, Tess sets out on a "thyme-scented, bird-hatching" May morning to begin a new life as a dairymaid (*Tess* 101). The imagery of birds hatching indicates the emergence of a recognizably pastoral function, and Tess's stay at Talbothays is meant to be regenerative. After her disastrous employment with the D'Urberville family, the protective episode at the dairy encourages Tess to rejoin the social world both as a laborer and as a potential bride for Angel. Hardy aptly titles this phase "The Rally."

Critics tend to reduce Tess's stay at Talbothays to the status of simple idyll, noting the contrast between the Froom Valley's Edenic lushness and the subsequent barrenness of Flintcomb-Ash. At first glance, the dairy does not seem modernized or industrial, but to view the dairy scenes as idealizations of premodern rural life is to unjustly reduce them to sentimental pastoralism. Meadowsong posits that Talbothays temporarily returns Tess to "a prelapsarian state—a preindustrial, unalienated condition where neither labor nor love entails physical subjection," and she highlights the "gorgeous sequences in which Tess's work appears to proceed in harmony with the natural world"—for example, when Tess is milking Old Pretty, her head resting on the animal's side and her hands moving "gently...like a beating heart" (237-38; *Tess* 150). This is an idealized moment of pastoral husbandry, but sustained attention reveals a more complex interpretation of the form. Other passages range from overwrought in their sensuality—"Amid the oozing fatness and warm ferments of the Froom Vale, at a season when the rush of juices could almost be heard below the hiss of fertilization... the ready bosoms existing there were impregnated by their surroundings"—to unsettling in their deflation of

idealized farm life—"The flies in the kitchen were lazy, teasing, and familiar, crawling about in unwonted places, on the floors, into drawers, and over the backs of the milkmaids' hands." Most notably, talk of business often generates anxiety at Dairyman Crick's table: "Conversations were concerning sunstroke; while butter-making, and still more butter-keeping, was a despair" (149). When one looks closer, very little about the dairy is preindustrial, prelapsarian, or idealized in the sentimental tradition of the pastoral.

The heavy sensuality of nature and the intrusion of commerce are two prominent disturbances of the innocent world of song that sentimental pastoralism would otherwise endeavor to create, and further analysis demonstrates that these two features are closely related. Epitomized in the "oozing fatness" of the Vale, Hardy dramatizes the dairy's fertile qualities with such fervor that his scenery verges on the grotesque. In late 1889, Mowbray Morris, the editor of *Macmillan's Magazine*, framed his refusal to publish *Tess* by pointing out this tendency, a symbol he employs to indicate the novel's moral impropriety. In his rejection letter to Hardy, Morris notes, "[y]ou use the word *succulent* more than once to describe the general condition of the Frome Valley. Perhaps I might say that the general impression left on me by reading your story—so far as it has gone—is one of rather too much succulence" (qt. in Millgate 277; original emphasis). Morris detects the connection between the "succulence" of the pastoral scenery and the novel's preoccupation with reproduction, but what he associates with licentious sexual content I read as the pastoral's response to abnormal economic conditions. At Talbothays the natural world seems to be spilling over and expanding beyond its capacity. The pastoral mode is consequently unable to accommodate this growth and remain idyllic as the landscape is disrupted by the industrial processes that increasingly make use of it. When Tess first sees the Froom Valley stretch before her, it is from the top of a hill after a difficult hike. As she surveys

the vista, the narration provides an unusual first impression of her new place of employment: “she [finds] herself on a summit commanding the long-sought-for vale, the Valley of the Great Dairies, the valley in which milk and butter grew to rankness, and were produced more profusely, if less delicately, than at her home—the verdant plain so well-watered by the river Var or Froom” (130). Where we expect the picturesque, the natural world lacks scenic beauty. Instead, the Valley is characterized by the system of production that uses it. The industrial process of the dairy has intruded into the panorama, and the scenery is displaced by images of milk and butter that “grow” as though they were living organisms like the grass or trees. The “rankness” of these products further disrupts the bucolic scene with its connotations of swollenness and excess. When it finally comes, the scenic “verdant plain” is subordinated to the industrial terms of volume and production, the pause of the dash making the beauty of Tess’s home seem like an afterthought.

When the narrator describes the dairy cows themselves, images of husbandry are again disturbed by the commercial undercurrent. As Tess reaches the barn, the cows are waiting to be milked: “[t]heir large-veined udders hung ponderous as sandbags, the teats sticking out like the legs of a gipsy’s crock; and as each animal lingered for her turn to arrive the milk oozed forth and fell in drops to the ground” (133). The cows are not placid in their lingering to be milked—there is an urgency conjured by their enormous “ooz[ing]” udders. “Oozing,” like “rankness,” is a word that connotes swollenness, this time to the point of discomfort. Hardy’s diction suggests that a line between abundance and overabundance has been crossed. These cows have been drafted into service in a way that is testing the limits of their natural design.

The grotesqueness of the valley is more than an exaggeration of idyllic conventions of bounty and fecundity. Talbothays’ dairy cows are literally oozing milk because Dorset is oozing

milk. London's demand for country milk was relentless, with total milk consumption for the city increasing from 170 million gallons in 1860 to just under 600 million gallons at the turn of the century, and per capita consumption rising from 9 gallons to 15 gallons in the same period (Taylor "Dairy" 592). The result of increased urban demand was overproduction down the supply lines. The number of cows "in milk" grew, and so did their per-head yields (Taylor "Growth" 47). It is estimated that, with improvements in feeding and milking practices, the average annual milk yield per cow grew from 360 to 400 gallons between 1860 and 1896 (Taylor "Dairy" 598; 589). In other words, cows that had once produced milk seasonally, or in tandem with natural birth cycles, or in moderate quantities to serve a local population, began to produce year round and in larger amounts in order to serve burgeoning outside demand.

Ecocritics will notice that, at Talbothays, natural forces are still allowed to weave themselves into the social world of labor. The dairy cows kick over buckets and prefer to be milked by some maids instead of others. Biological irregularities exert influence over production—the cows getting into the garlic, for instance. Even superstition is permitted when Tess's infatuation with Angel supposedly prevents the milk from turning into butter. In short, the practice of dairying seems closer to a craft than an assembly line formation. Yet Hardy's problematic pastoralism anticipates how nature will increasingly be artificially inseminated, cloned, fertilized, and otherwise manipulated to feed growing human populations. Like Tess herself, the natural world is being forced to produce, and the dairy cows of Talbothays echo her plight as they bear sustenance in accordance with a dominant human design instead of elemental cycles. If the pastoral typically functions to resolve human conflicts by arranging an encounter between them and the larger forces of nature, then it struggles to function as fewer natural forces are able to operate freely in the pastoral space. The form thus registers the problematic new logic

of production through aesthetic strangeness. It is springtime, the growing season; but the forces of reproduction in the valley are urgent, fitful, aggressive, almost vexed in their incessant urges to expand. Birds do not hatch in Hardy's pastoral so much as burst forth. Summer rain is "hot" and "steaming" instead of refreshing. Dew is "juicy," not delicate (148; 133; 165). Underneath nature's processes is a desperate fertility that, like Alec's attentions toward the "finer" Tess, becomes "coarse" in its aggressiveness (78). There is a macabre sensibility operating in these scenes, a seed of darkness within the season of life that measures the growing pressures of surplus production.

As Tess and Angel court, images of natural growth are indelicately sexualized. The landscape surrounded Tess with "mists of floating pollen grains," flower gardens "damp and rank with juicy grass," "tall blooming weeds emitting offensive smells," and sunlight that "opened petals and sucked out scents in invisible jets and breathings" (149; 148; 154). Before her first private conversation with Angel, Tess walks silently through a garden to where her lover is playing the harp, "gathering cuckoo-spittle on her skirt, cracking snails that were underfoot, staining her hands with thistle-milk and slug slime, and rubbing off [sticky blights] upon her naked arms ..." (148-49). The lurid "succulence" of the garden, to borrow Morris's term, and its obvious linking of the abject with the erotic, is a revision of the pastoral's usual pairing of playful courtship with joyful nature. This is a troubled Eden, with dead snails and "slug slime" strewn among the flowers and trees. The courtship, likewise, is troubled by Tess's secret sexual history, an experience of violent domination. In fact, the role that predation plays in the act of reproduction haunts Tess throughout the novel. She is the quarry of two men—literally hunted and attacked by one, obsessively pursued by the other who then drops his prey as soon as he has caught it. The narrative summons the pastoral mode in order to heal the violent transgressions of

Alec, but its aesthetic strangeness insinuates that a romantic resolution is unavailable because fundamental understandings of production and reproduction have been so distorted.

The pastoral mode attempts to renew Tess's romantic prospects, but Angel's high-minded idealism renders him so susceptible to idyllic fantasy that, when it comes, his profound disillusionment with her sexual past impedes her emergence from strife as a modern woman ready to participate in a modernizing world. With Alec's conquest haunting the pastoral narrative, Angel's courtship is nothing short of precarious. After several unsuccessful attempts to convince Tess to marry him, Angel invites her to travel with him to the railway station, ostensibly to deliver a day's worth of milk to the depot but actually to uncover the truth behind her reluctance to marry. After Angel unloads the barrels onto the platform and the "hissing" train accepts them, Tess is so dazed "by the few minutes of contact with the whirl of material progress" that she forgets to disclose Alec's attack, meditating instead upon how far from its origin the milk will travel before it is consumed:

"Londoners will drink it at their breakfasts to-morrow, won't they?" she asked. "Strange people that we have never seen... Noble men and noble women, ambassadors and centurions, ladies and tradeswomen, and babies who have never seen a cow... [w]ho don't know anything of us, and where it comes from; or think how we drove miles across the moor tonight in the rain that it might reach 'em in time?" (187)

Running through the middle of the pastoral episode is the train—the key to the dairy industry's development, and a crucial image of alienation in Hardy's depiction of what he calls "modern life" (Hardy *Tess* 206). Leo Marx calls the sudden appearance of industrial technology in the pastoral landscape a "counterforce," a device whose purpose is to bring in "a larger, more complicated order of experience" into the simplistic or symbolic experience of the pastoral world



(L. Marx 25). The counterforce, which Marx also refers to as “the machine in the garden,” juxtaposes opposing states of mind: the myth of rural simplicity, and industrialization as the counterforce to that myth. The significance of this counterforce is that it creates a form of the pastoral that “acknowledges the reality of history” (ibid.; 363). The interruption of the pastoral fantasy with “the facts of history” (27) is a significant development in the history of the pastoral because it undermines a romantic optimism that idealizes nature to the point of myth creation, and it prohibits the tendency for sentimentalism to reduce experiences of nature into artificially joyous idylls.

The counterforce of the train, a harbinger of industrial production, stalls the courtship. The commodified milk’s point of origin has been placed out of sight by the railway network, and Tess realizes that she is also invisible to the strangers at the other end of the line. The milk conceals the stories of human life and labor that existed in tandem with its manufacture, and, in Tess’s imagination, Londoners will wake and only see a bottle. They will have no idea that a rainstorm, a troubled girl with a violent secret, and a rejected proposal of marriage were very much a part of their milk’s journey from cow to breakfast table. Tess does not fully disclose her past at the depot, and the train renders her sexual history as invisible to Angel as her existence is to the “strangers” in London. The railway’s “steam feeler” may connects the city with her remote rural corner (186), but Tess’s musings also illuminate how industrial technology only exacerbates the perception of differences between them. Trade networks can connect communities, but fundamentally unequal arrangements of use within those networks only serve to reveal previously unfathomed distances between them.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Schivelbusch’s *The Railway Journey* (1986) argues that railway travel exacerbates the fundamental problems of urban perceptions of rural spaces. Trains, he writes, “know only points of departure and destination” and leave travelers “untouched by the space traversed” (38-39).

The alienation that the railway milk trade brings to Wessex foreshadows Tess's approaching alienation from Angel, who cannot comprehend the reality of Tess's sexual history that awaits him after their wedding. After she discloses the circumstances of Alec's assault, the aspiring pastor-farmer abandons his object of care, and the pastoral mode is unable to continue its leisurely interval. Richard Kerridge calls Angel's neglect of Tess "a tourist's failure" because he is unable to see beyond the "cultural fantasy he projects onto her" (133). Angel idealizes Tess as sentimental pastoralism idealizes nature, creating an ahistorical blankness upon which he may project his desires. His failure embodies the mistakes of a conventional arrangement in which the celebration of nature is not balanced by an acknowledgement of responsibility for it. His departure severs the narrative possibility of Tess's emotional recuperation, forcing her back into a state of migrancy toward the bleak, inorganic Flintcomb-Ash and the domineering Alec, whose false conversion to religious zealotry promises an equally false care ethic based upon financial control rather than natural sympathy.

## §

The Dorset dairy industry's exponential growth is often presented as a narrative of triumph over economic adversity. Hardy's figuration of the liquid milk trade is preoccupied instead with the consequences of such aggressive, and unprecedented, expansion. Talbothays Dairy is a representation of one of the rare rural foodways that weathered the depression, maintained a sense of regional identity, and supported a local population. But the novel also complicates its story of success. If in its maturity Hardy's pastoralism seeks to provide a discourse that can both "celebrate and take some responsibility for nature," to apply Gifford and Buell's criteria, then its formal operation may be foreclosed by its purpose. Perhaps it is not possible for the novel to celebrate the dairy's integration into industrial modernity without also

comprehending the great costs implied by its success—the emergence of unequal systems of production that only permit rural industries to survive when they prioritize economic expansion over ecological renewal.

Hardy's engagement with the structural tension between nature and industry requires a complex pastoralism that is self-knowing and responsible for nature's condition, but the strange iteration that appears in *Tess* tests critical understandings of its capacity for representation. Leo argues that the "counterforce" is an interruption of literary fantasy. But Hardy's novel asks us a new question: what if the machine is not an intrusion? The threshing machine, the hothouse, and the train are all alien objects that illustrate Marx's idea of counterforce, but the pastoral space of Talbothays has already begun to mechanize. Furthermore, this mechanization has encouraged the symbolic garden to flourish, if we recognize the success of the economic history it represents. Hardy triangulates Marx's binary by creating a hybrid space that is neither bucolic fantasy nor mechanical nightmare. Its oozing strangeness, however, suggests the ominous future of this compromised arrangement. As farms integrate the logic of the factory, a retreat into the fantasy of the pastoral is increasingly untenable. Neither the natural world, nor the figuration that draws from it, can remain unchanged by the pressure to exceed their carrying capacities.

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## CHAPTER TWO:

### “Only Connect”: Food Chains, Refrigerated Time, and E.M. Forster’s *Howards End*

At the end of E.M. Forster’s *Howards End* (1910), Leonard Bast walks down a rural lane towards Howards End, the Wilcox family’s homestead in the London suburb of Hilton, in search of his estranged lover Helen Schlegel. Leonard’s work as a clerk leaves him very low on the rung of London’s financial sector, but the sensitive, cultured Schlegel sisters both delight in his extraordinary curiosity. When he reveals that his family is originally from Shropshire, they fixate upon his ancestral “yeoman” origins to explain his frequent impulses to reconnect with the natural world.<sup>61</sup> As he walks to Howards End for the last time, the narrative persona briefly summons a pastoral mode to set the scene for the anticipated reunion of lovers. There are some farmers at work in the fields, and they are romanticized as “England’s hope,” carrying a “torch of the sun” until the nation decides one day to “take it up” again (*HE* 255-56). Leonard’s urbanized class status seems to dissolve and merge with these agricultural workers, and we are invited to see all of these working people as part of the same harmonious landscape.

Foreshadowing Leonard’s death at the hand of Charles Wilcox, the georgic idyll is suddenly interrupted by the passing of a motorcar, a “machine in the garden” (L. Marx 25-27) that reminds reader of the encroachment of urban life that threatens to swallow the area from every direction. The motorcar belongs to a “type whom Nature favours—the Imperial” (*HE* 256), whose technological prowess, according to the narrator, is a modern, metastaticized extension of agrarian cultivation:

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<sup>61</sup>E.M. Forster, *Howards End*. New York: Signet, 1992, 80. Future references will appear parenthetically in the text.



Healthy, ever in motion, [the Imperial] hopes to inherit the earth. It breeds as quickly as the yeoman, and as soundly; strong is the temptation to acclaim it as a super-yeoman, who carries his country's virtue overseas. But the Imperialist is not what he thinks or seems. He is a destroyer. He prepares the way for cosmopolitanism, and though his ambitions may be fulfilled, the earth that he inherits will be grey. (ibid.)

The Elizabethan term *yeoman* echoes throughout the novel, a term that historically described a smallholdings farmer. In the passage above, it suggests that the Imperial type perpetuates the values of an earlier age of property in which independence, diligence, and self-sufficiency were the basis for a virtuous and healthy nation. Like the yeoman's, the imperialist's values are at once domestic in focus and domesticating by nature; both types harness the inhospitable world of nature and work it in order to secure their bounty. But as tempted as the narrator is to view imperialism as a nostalgic return to a mighty and Merrie Olde England, the analogy is abruptly halted. The Imperialist is not a cultivator like the farmer. He has expanded production so that England is once more prosperous on a world stage, but the vastness of his endeavors has turned the world from green to "grey," extinguishing the agrarian ideal instead of perpetuating it.

The narrative persona's refusal to honor distinctions between historical epistemes— weaving feudal and Victorian visions of prosperity into the same national "type"—is rooted in the material transformation of the empire's eating economy, which expanded imperial prosperity by eliminating the temporality of nature from the food supply. By the first decade of the twentieth century, British food companies had created a vision of empire that made its vast territories appear as one continuous farm. Territories from Australasia to the Americas produced foodstuffs year-round, and the imported goods flooding London's ports from around the globe transcended the restrictions of both climate and season. Technological advances overrode the

temporality of the plate, which for so many centuries reflected natural cycles of scarcity and renewal. A static summer bounty awaited shoppers, diners, and chefs—not just in London, but also increasingly in Dublin and Sydney, Cape Town and Cairo, Mumbai and Belmopan.

The food chain was a triumph of Victorian industry, but its success was underwritten by agrarian fantasy which fabricated imperial harmony in an otherwise asynchronous, industrializing world. As farmer and butcher were replaced by cargo ship and factory, the cultural artifacts of empire registered their disappearance and questioned commerce's apparent mastery of natural limitations. Critics have long testified to *Howards End's* suspicion of imperial bounty, especially finance capital and the role it plays in invisibly supporting the Wilcox family's prosperity.<sup>62</sup> But the novel has yet to be examined for the impact of industrial food production, a similarly prevalent—and equally concealed—engine of culture in the decades before the First World War. Edwardian London's culinary offerings betrayed little sign of domestic and agricultural origin, a crisis of perception that emerges in the novel as anachrony, the disruption of narrative time. The concept of lineage in the form of genealogy is also actively under review in Forster's novel. The Edwardian food chain rendered many relationships invisible, and such gaps of knowledge play out in the novel's search for the "heir" of modern England.<sup>63</sup> Helen's son will inherit Howards End, affirming a growing suspicion that genealogical ties—nature's chains—are increasingly made by culture, not nature, in the modern age.

This chapter analyzes the novel's challenges to linearity in terms of the transformation of the Edwardian meat supply. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, record quantities of

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<sup>62</sup>Cf. Jameson, Thacker, and Turner.

<sup>63</sup>As Lionel Trilling famously wrote, "Who shall inherit England?" is the novel's most pressing question.

frozen meat were imported from Britain's pacific colonies. By examining this unique historical phenomenon, I recast Forster's use of anachrony as a way of suspending or preserving natural time. The chronological disruption of *Howards End* is actually a kind of refrigeration, the technology that caused the most dramatic changes in the Edwardian diet. Refrigeration extends the natural life span of an object by preserving it from the decaying influence of time. Similarly, the narrator's frequent recourse to anachronism attempts to extend the life span of a stable agrarian past in order to combat the perceived decay that modernity has wrought upon British culture. The novel's impulse to preserve the past is intended to shield its characters from the detrimental effects of fast-paced urban life. But the result is an uncanny looping of history, a reanimation of an expired era which the present moment has aggressively erased from British cultural memory. Ultimately, I suggest, reanimating the fantasy of a lost agrarian ideal only fuels the disorientation of novel's world as it searches for connection between links in a historical chain of relations that has been severed by industry.

### Is the Meat "English" or "Foreign"?

For much of British history, rural farms fed local populations, and the natural world reproduced itself in visible, legible, and elemental cycles of birth, life, and death. The industrialization of the food industry disregarded these cycles and sent a significant proportion of British food production overseas in conjunction with the expansion of empire. By 1910, when *Howards End* was published, a meal in London was, in a symbolic sense, no longer fundamentally British. Imperial Britain had become the largest consumer of imported foodstuffs in the world. As historian Richard Perren writes, "probably no country, either before or since [1914] has been so continually dependent on external sources for such a range of essentials," and it was seen as a key customer for emerging agribusiness ventures both within its own empire and

along other transoceanic supply lines (*Technology* 248). An early twentieth-century illustration by cartoonist H. M. Bateman illustrates the cultural ramifications of the radical expansion of import supply chains:

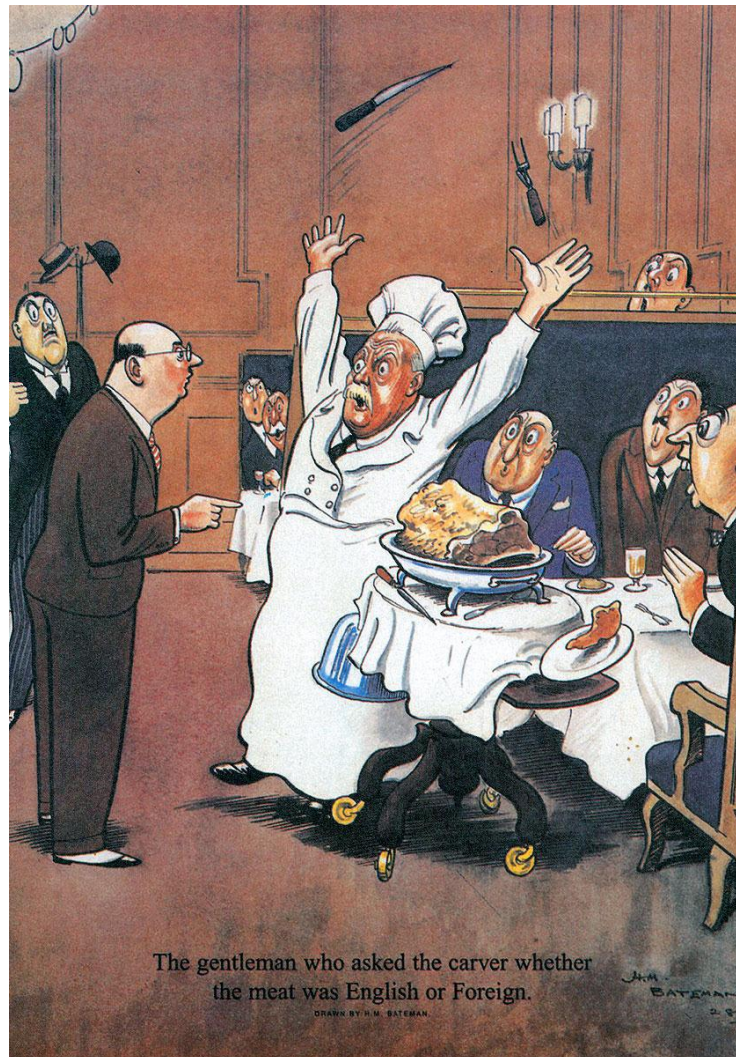


Figure 1: H. M. Bateman. "The Gentleman Who... Asked the Carver Whether the Meat was English or Foreign." Guildhall Library, London.

Bateman's cartoon may resonate ironically with a modern audience now that locally-sourced kitchens are once more in vogue. But in its original context, and despite its obviously comic intentions, the bulging eyes that greet the gauche inquiry into the meat's origin convey very real social anxieties about the extreme shifts in supply networks. Bateman created "The Man Who"

series to undermine the stodgy Victorian embrace of tradition by naively interrogating their underlying assumptions. In the above image, the viewer assumes that fine British restaurants would never source their joints abroad.<sup>64</sup> Yet by 1904, the approximate date of this cartoon, a London diner-out could rarely assume they were being served British meat. The crowd's grave reaction to The Man Who's faux-pas dramatizes how profoundly knowledge about food origin had changed from previous generations, and Bateman satirizes the stubborn denial that the Victorian social world had been affected by global exchange.

This image has graced the Bill of Fare at Simpson's-in-the-Strand, a London restaurant famous for its roasted meats, since 1904. Simpson's provides the backdrop for the beginning of Margaret Schlegel and Henry Wilcox's courtship in *Howards End*. As the cartoon implies, Simpson's is and has always been famous for sourcing all of their joints from the British Isles, defying the import trends of the early twentieth century. The insularity that such entrenched locavorism conveys is ruthlessly satirized in Forster's novel, which associates Simpson's with unjust class hierarchy and imperial conquest.

Simpson's nationalist cuisine was a reaction against the expansion of food imports that made animal protein widely available to all social classes. Its "antiquarian fetishism" positioned the nutritional plenty that imports offered as "transgressive modernity," a usurpation of traditional class distinctions (Aramavuden 342). Meat had long been a fixture of British luxury culture, but the postindustrial age saw per capita consumption of meat increase in nearly every sector of the population. Historian John Burnett emphasizes how remarkable the late Victorian figures for meat consumption are, since "the estimated consumption of 1 ¾ lb. of meat per head a week [by the 1880s] compares very closely with that of the present day" (131). Contemporary

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<sup>64</sup>The word *joints* refers to large cuts of meat on the bone that could be carved upon customer request.

evidence indicates that between 1902 and 1912, 95% of the world's frozen meat was exported to Britain (Higgins 167). The rise of imported meats made this possible (Perren *Meat Trade* 3).<sup>65</sup> British agriculture, still reeling from decades of economic depression, was unable to keep up with growing population rates, which effectively doubled between those brackets. The domestic supply was widely perceived to come up short, and most home-fed livestock was priced outside the pockets of the average laborer.<sup>66</sup> A rise in imports closed these gaps between production and consumption of meat for much of the working population.

These drastic figures were fueled by advancements in dry refrigeration technology. Unlike blocks of ice, dry refrigeration provided a consistent source of cold that could keep meat and other perishable goods frozen even in the equatorial conditions which transpacific routes required. The method was tested on selected shipping lines from New Zealand to London in the 1880s and widely institutionalized by the turn of the century. Dead meat was easier to ship in volume than live animals, eliminating animal welfare concerns for transportation companies, and by 1913 it had almost entirely replaced the practice of shipping livestock across the ocean (Perren *Meat Trade* 125; 163-5). Edwardian London sourced imported meat to a greater extent than rest of the country. Numbers of British-fed cattle, sheep, and pigs brought in to central city markets like Islington dwindled in the presence of the “ever-increasing development of chilled and frozen meat trades” (152). Of course, the meats that appeared on Edwardian plates may or may not have looked different, tasted different, or had different nutritional value than Victorian

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<sup>65</sup>Per capita meat consumption per head per annum increased from 86.8 lb. to 126.9 lb. between the same dates (ibid.).

<sup>66</sup>During and perhaps because of the rise of imported meats, the British home supply at the turn of the century was usually regarded as higher quality than cheaper imports and therefore largely geared towards more upscale retailers and butchers. This is not surprising, as breeding high quality cattle in Britain, and especially Scotland, had long been a source of pride, especially after the agricultural depressions of the 1870s and 1880s encouraged an unprecedented shift from arable farming to pasturage.

offerings. Accounts vary based on psychosomatic beliefs, dubious medical testimony, or sensational newspaper stories, and frozen imports were also derogatorily associated with lower and working classes.<sup>67</sup> One feature of this new economy is well understood, however. The origins of meat products were vastly different than they had been even thirty years previously.

The Victorian food corporation transformed the agrarian food chain beyond recognition by eliminating the connections between food culture and farming. A food chain can be defined simply as what happens between the farm and the plate (Segers et.al. 13).<sup>68</sup> What it looks like, however, can be massively complicated. The process of industrializing was erratic and uneven, and historical supply lines remain difficult to trace, though it is fair to posit that the Edwardian food chains displayed the following new characteristics: the chain *lengthened* as the distance from farm to destination grew; it became *differentiated*, as each link in the chain became more technologically complex or increasingly subject to public health legislation; and it *narrowed*, as activities along chain became geared toward one another or were consolidated by capital investment (Segers et.al. 14-15).<sup>69</sup> The result then, as it is now, was largely a shift in power from the farmer or producer to the business owner or corporate manager. Victorian provisioners like Thomas Lipton, George Sainsbury, and J. Lyons illustrate the unprecedented success of a new business model in which, after a period of initial growth, one company could eventually control

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<sup>67</sup>Whether nutritional content is diminished by the freezing process remains a matter of debate. Perren makes a convincing case that frozen meat was an inferior product. Freezing meat, he posits, makes ice crystals form in muscle fibers and ruptures smaller blood vessels, giving thawed meat a sweaty appearance and causing it to dry out when it cooks. Any ship crossing the equator had to use freezing techniques because the hot climate would spoil refrigerated cargo. Frozen meats from the southern hemispheres were always cheaper than North American products, which only required chilling (*Meat Trade* 125-26).

<sup>68</sup>I use “food chain” and “food system” interchangeably.

<sup>69</sup>Segers et. al. discuss food chains in Western Europe; I have applied their observations to the British meat supply more specifically.

all aspects of production, from farming and processing to packing and retailing.<sup>70</sup> This process, also known as “vertical integration” (Wilk 106), is crucial to any examination of global Anglo- or American food trades because of the role it has played in concealing realities of twentieth-century production.

A counterintuitive byproduct of vertical integration—especially in companies that source overseas—was that it became increasingly difficult to identify the origins of the food products. Vertically integrating a food product line should reduce the perceived distance between product and consumer by reducing the number of agents along the chain, preserving information which would otherwise be lost along the way. If a company like J. Lyons owns tea plantations as well as the means for shipping, marketing, and distributing that tea, it would be logical to assume that the tea’s origin would be clear to the consumer who seeks it. But the opposite effect is as common, if not more so. Anthropologist Richard Wilk traces the concealment of food origin back to the formation of Anglo-global food corporations at the turn of the century, and his study of British food companies illustrates how vertical integration was used to increase the distancing effect rather than decrease it (106).<sup>71</sup> Wilk confronts a body of social scientific work that affirms vertical integration’s capacity to simplify food supply chains but then cannot explain why distancing still exists after a food chain has been integrated. He asserts that this research has not examined cultural and linguistic mechanisms, which he groups under the banners of *appropriation* and *substitution* (90). These two mechanisms are especially active in the processes of branding and labeling, and they work “through the substitution of imaginary people and places for the real workers and machines that make food and their real physical locations” (106). A

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<sup>70</sup>This summary derives from research I completed in each company’s archives in London, UK.

<sup>71</sup>Wilk uses Lipton’s corporate archives, among others, to illustrate vertical integration.



picture of a red barn on a tin of meat, for instance, suggests that the animal in the product was raised on a farm by a farmer, eliding the reality that its ingredients may have arrived frozen on a boat or were processed in a factory. Thus, substitution allows the food company to conceal the industrial origin that exists behind the pastoral fantasy.

Simpson's insistence upon its meats' domestic origins also distinguished it as a venue with an honorable reputation. The frozen meat trade invited the illegal practice of fraudulent origin labeling, and the problem of retailers "passing off" imported meat as British was rampant. The frozen carcass as a commodity invited such confusion and abuse. Meat is a product that changes its appearance and qualities after arrival at port. Some cuts of meat were physically unable to be marked, and most carcasses were cut into smaller portions that no longer bore an original mark after it had been purchased. Growing gaps between prices of cuts made the issue more pressing.<sup>72</sup> Misrepresentation of origin was a common problem in London, where restaurants and hotels were under constant suspicion of passing imported meat off as British because diners rarely saw the product in a raw state.<sup>73</sup> To some degree, these difficulties have always characterized the butchery trades, but frozen meat from Australasia was a product of extreme distance, new technologies, and previously unfathomable surplus. This brief history of ubiquity in London's eating establishments illustrates the forces to which Simpson's was responding by highlighting their patriotic dedication to British farming.

By 1910, two trends had become noticeably intertwined with the growth of imported

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<sup>72</sup>Early attempts to enforce origin markings were feeble. The Merchandise Mark Act of 1877, for example, authorized British Customs to seize goods bearing fraudulent indications of origin (Higgins 162), but it had a limited effect. Until the Edwardian decade, adulteration, hygiene, and fair sales received more legislative attention than marks of origin. Perren writes that, "consumer protection, even by 1914, was still comparatively underdeveloped and was mainly confined to ensure purity in processing, and full weight of goods at the point of sale, rather than to ascertaining a product's exact origin" (*Meat* 162).

<sup>73</sup>The Trade Commissioner for South Australia, among others, "singled out the restaurant and hotel trades for buying substantial quantities of frozen meat, which they disposed of as English" (Higgins 173).

frozen carcasses from Australasia: the retreat of domestic husbandry into smaller luxury markets, and the decline of private butchery.<sup>74</sup> Yet despite the decline in numbers of British farmers and butchers, the food industry, including suppliers, grocers, and restaurants, continued to advertise their products as traditionally agricultural rather than industrial. Furthermore, a new and fascinating problem emerges from the history of the British food supply. In late Victorian and Edwardian archives, the label of “domestic” expands to include imperial territories, some of them thousands of miles away. Thus, the project of empire enables the perception of agrarian continuity; and these perceptions in turn underwrite the project of empire.

To regard the Edwardian meat trade as an expansion of animal husbandry, or frozen meat from Australia as a farm product, is to conceal the highly complex commercial system responsible for its appearance in a London market stall. Ironically, the development of new import supply chains relied upon the simulation of agriculture, even as traditional agriculture itself was slowly rendered extinct by its success. What still appeared to be, or was assumed to be, domestic agrarian labor had become a blend of commercial shipping, mechanized production, financial speculation, and imperial administration. Furthermore, it allowed the act of eating to remain “an agricultural act,” to borrow Wendell Berry’s famous phrase (227), in the larger cultural imagination when it was in fact becoming both a mechanical—and an imperial—act.

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<sup>74</sup>Perren details the rise of abattoir and the challenge it posed to private butchers, who after state control over animal slaughter was instituted in the 1890s, retreated to the niche of the home-killed trades (*Meat* 152).

### Anachronism as Refrigerated Time

...“very early in the morning in the garden I feel that our house is the future as well as the past.” (*Howards End* 268)

Chronometry inheres in the clock. Temporality may suffuse other components of the culture, noticeably its narratives... [Literary] form will absorb, manifest, and respond to local temporalities, contemporary shapes of time, without necessarily “knowing” that it does so. (Sherman 6)

The material changes of the Edwardian meat supply appear in *Howards End* as an inability to adhere to natural time, and this section argues that novel’s representation of temporality adapts the logic of the refrigerated food chain. By exhibiting a desire to preserve an expired product from the passage of time, the narrative persona responds to the instability of the fast-paced modern age by searching for its precedent in the historical past. The effect is to reanimate an expired era, much as a carcass would be thawed for consumption. Anachrony is a key feature of temporality in the world of the novel. It is an effort to connect the urban Edwardian present to an agrarian past, and its frequency implies that the modern food economy has caused a rupture in the perceived continuum—one could say the chain of events—of British history.

One of modernism’s notable features is its tendency to play with perceptions of time. Critical examinations of modernist writers from Marcel Proust to Virginia Woolf to T.S. Eliot have analyzed the modern novel’s attempts to synthesize the “empty” succession of moments that make up a narrative’s *chronos*, which Frank Kermode defines as “one damn thing after another,” with *kairos*, an idea of time marked by fullness and meaning. While chronology imposes a rudimentary narrative onto events, Ricoeur calls it “the opposite of temporality itself,” or the perceived experience of those events (qtd. in Sherman 10-12). Forster was interested in the subjective experience of temporality, and his collection *Aspects of the Novel* (1928), differentiates between “life in time” and “life in value.” The former develops in an objective, linear fashion, and the latter is dependent upon psychological factors: “there seems to be

something else in life besides time,” he writes: “something which may conveniently called value, something which is not measures not by minutes or hours, but by intensity, so that when we look at our past it does not stretch back evenly, but piles up into a few notable pinnacles” (*Aspects* 48-50). The presence of anachrony within *Howards End*’s narrative structure enacts this distinction, and Forster’s dismissal of the chronology associated with traditional realist forms is an attempt to capture the *kairos*, the fullness, of modern life.

Forster’s novel disrupts chronology in a manner that is distinct from other classics of Anglophone modernism. The influence of postcolonial theory has given rise to the argument that works by Joseph Conrad, James Joyce and even William Faulkner create chronological complexity in order to challenge representations of regional or colonial geographies as out of sync with industrial modernity. Throughout the Western world, the development of national chronotypes, a “collection of temporally coded traits” imposed by industrial development in the West, could be “positioned against those of regional cultures, which were understood to be shaped by tradition” and thus out of sync with more urbane or developed geographies (Duck 5). The colonial space is often problematically portrayed as lagging behind the advanced social order of the Global (or national) North.<sup>75</sup> Thus, the disruption of narrative time is a way of resisting national or imperial chronotypes. The works of Joyce and Faulkner, for instance, dramatize the subjugation of regions—Ireland and the American South—that are perceived as tugging against the currents of modernity as it flows forward in a (supposedly) orderly fashion.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Cf. Aravamudan on colonial time in Waugh’s “The Outstation” (337-40).

<sup>76</sup>The presence of Dunsink time in Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), an evocative residue of native Irish culture, testifies to the resistance of colonial populations to fully internalize the demands of the International Meridian Conference of 1884, the organizing body that instituted standardized time zones for the purposes of trade and made Greenwich, England, the center of the map of global time.

But Forster does not create multiple chronologies, letting several different tickers run at once to dramatize how place creates non-contemporaneity. Instead, in *Howards End*, multiple points along the timeline suddenly line up with each other, as if the ticker has looped back onto itself. Throughout the novel, the past reappears in the present and exists alongside it. It does so in an attempt to understand the Edwardian present of the novel, which seems so unstable to the characters who inhabit it, as the continuation of a stable past. Forster's distortion of time is not intended to show the disparities between time in a commercial center and that of outlying, resistant geographies. His technique criticizes the imposition of imperial chronotypes because they have been unable to eliminate the perception of cultural instability. In fact, bringing the empire under one timetable for the purposes of trade has only exacerbated the sense of asynchronicity within it.

Anachronism is the most common way that *Howards End*'s distorts narrative time. This trope, first coined in the sixteenth century, derives from the Middle Greek *anachronismos*, which originally meant "late in time" (Aravamudan 331). It generally may be defined as chronological inconsistency, especially when disparate historical eras exist simultaneously and even inflect one another. Forster's cultivation of "anachronistic essence" (Christie 20) is a prominent narrative technique by which the text stages conflicts between the natural unfolding of time and the vital presence of a historical era that should have already expired from the world of the novel. The narrative often seems to fold in upon itself, allowing natural time to seem like eternity, or allowing different historical periods to exist simultaneously in the same moment.

David Medalie argues that the attempt to disrupt the destructive forces of modernity is what makes *Howards End* a work of emerging modernism. The passage of time is not generally perceived as a disruptive process, though disruptive events may intrude. Nevertheless, we do

cultivate a sense of “normal” life that modernism attempts to challenge through interruption (7). Forster’s novel characterizes modernity as a “tidal force of dissolution” that is destroying traditional islands of refuge (8), a threat that is present in the text’s numerous descriptions of the eternally restless and ever-expanding city of London. In opposition to these forces of progress, growth, and accelerated change, Medalie argues, the house at Howards End seems to exist in stasis between the erratic phases of growth that are taking place all around it (9). The working farm upon which Ruth Wilcox grew up may be lost to history, but the house itself, even with its diminished acreage, seems to defy annihilation. Howards End is “the stillness...which exists within relentless motion... the persistent interweaving of contemporaneity and anachronism” (8). Margaret’s comment in this section’s epigraph—that Howards End is both past and future—implies that what could be mistaken for a static or frozen state could actually hold the potential movement of an approaching future.

In this work of early modernism, anachronism signals the capacity of the modern novel to triumph over the realist demand for linear narrative, and its constant bending of categories often feels like a demonstration of mastery. The narrative persona often attempts to transcend boundaries between historical epistemes by summoning preindustrial historical eras into the postindustrial present. For instance, the voice meditates:

The feudal ownership of land did bring dignity, whereas the modern ownership of movables is reducing us again to a nomadic horde. We are reverting to the civilization of luggage, and historians of the future will note how the middle classes accreted possessions without taking root in the earth, and may find in this the secret of their imaginative poverty. (Forster 119)

Here the narrator endeavors to redeem the emptiness of the present by connecting it to an idealized feudal order. This anachronism is atavistic, as modern Londoners must be described as the heirs of a more primal form of civilization, the “nomadic horde,” in order to make sense in the history books of the future. This passage is saturated with irony, as the present age is so different from what came before that it is as if England is being conquered by a new and foreign race upon its own territory (Medalie 9). Because England is arguably the world’s conqueror, the experience of being colonized in Edwardian London is out of historical sequence. The imperial Wilcoxes are also out of step with the progress that their commercial wealth makes possible, and the passage above guiltily admits that there is something feudal in the unthinking mercilessness of their financial mastery. Their conquering mindset does not blend easily with the modern notions of progress, tolerance, and humaneness that characterize the Schlegels’ worldview.<sup>77</sup> Even as they plunge forward into unimagined possibilities for creating new worlds out of new sources of wealth, the past won’t turn the Wilcoxes loose. The wake of their commercial destruction, which is geographically beyond the world of the novel, is suggested by the novel’s association of them—especially Henry—with a less sophisticated moral era, tugging like so much ballast against their restless expansion into the future.

When Margaret reimagines Henry’s dining room at Ducie Street as a medieval dining hall, then, it is to search for the Wilcoxian origin story:

The room suggested men, and Margaret, keen to derive the modern capitalist from the warriors and hunters of the past, saw it as an ancient guest-hall, where the lord sat at meat

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<sup>77</sup>I concede that, in the above quote, the Schlegels seem as much a part of the “civilization of luggage” as the aggressive Wilcoxes are. But the notion of the middle class itself is becoming more complicated, and the novel takes pains to place the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes at somewhat equivalent social positions, although their versions of prosperity clearly diverge.

among his thanes. Even the Bible—the Dutch Bible that Charles had brought back from the Boer War—fell into position. Such a room admitted loot. (129)

The connection between imperial capitalism and medieval lordship is created by the presence of multiple historical eras. But here Margaret, in the Edwardian present, has contrived feudalism through a lens of high Victorianism. In this fusion, Margaret has invented an origin story for the capitalist, a phenomenon in the present that has emerged with such great power that it seems to exist without historical precedent. Moreover, Margaret is inventing a history for Henry, who exists so completely in the present that he seems neither to recognize his own history (embodied in his relationships with Jacky and Ruth) nor to understand its consequences for the future (with Margaret).<sup>78</sup> Henry is characterized only by “his acquisitive grasp” (Cucullu 112), which like the rest of London seems to function by mechanism, without spirit. To use Forster’s own terms, Henry exists without the ability to “connect” the “outer” and “inner” lives that organize the Schlegels’ experience of the world (147-48), and his inability to place his own experiences in order—to form a coherent whole narrative of self—is a trait that is dramatized by his out-of-placeness in the present.

It is understandable that Margaret should want to make her future husband over as the modern equivalent of a warrior or a hunter, but she has created a false origin story—an illusion—through which the continuity of historical time is simulated in order to lessen the rupture of the present from the past. Charles’ Dutch Bible, lugged back from the Boer War, reminds us how unnaturally time has been manipulated in order to force such disparate eras of conquests into a straight or causal line. Margaret’s imagining is a textual construction that seeks to repair the rupture of the present from what she imagines to be a sleepier, more static past. In doing so, it

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<sup>78</sup>One of his faults, Margaret admits to the skeptical Helen, is that he “cares too much about success, too little about the past” (138).



makes the present seem inevitable and therefore morally unassailable. One does not critique the Boer War, for instance, if it is viewed as a continuation of an earlier conflict that history has deemed valiant. The almost magical falling into position of the present onto the timeline allows it to resist critique, as though it had been destined to unfold in this precise way.

§

Margaret's courtship with her "lord... at meat" begins at Simpson's-in-the-Strand, whose own origin story is as much of a pastiche of historical eras as Henry's. My own archival research suggests that Forster's satire borrows overtly from Simpson's own marketing campaign, which was circulated widely when it opened in its present location in 1904. A caterer named John Simpson had established the restaurant's Victorian reputation, but the business was acquired by the Savoy Group at the turn of the century and moved to their luxury hotel complex on The Strand.<sup>79</sup> This new, high profile establishment made a special point of reinventing itself at roughly the same time Forster was writing *Howards End*.

The Savoy Group was anxious that moving the restaurant to new premises would have a negative effect on business, especially from its well-established patrons. This enterprise took great care to create the image of the new business's continuity with the past.<sup>80</sup> Yet this required some historical acrobatics, since many aspects of John Simpson's mid-century establishment needed to be revised in order to court Edwardian favor. While the Victorian Simpson's looked to continental Europe for its luxury models, the new Simpson's redefined luxury using Britain's Gilded Age plenty for inspiration. For instance, while John Simpson's menus drew from "the

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<sup>79</sup>The Savoy Hotel Group was run by the d'Oyley Carte family, who built a hospitality empire out of the success of their Savoy Theatre (of Gilbert & Sullivan fame). Anglicizing Simpson's had the effect of extending their famous Victorian brand into the first decade of the twentieth century.

<sup>80</sup>Cf. Jackson, Newnham-Davis. I also thank Archivist Susan Scott for her information and insight.

express suggestions and plans of M. Soyer” (Newnham-Davis 3),<sup>81</sup> testifying to the culinary authority of French cuisine in Victorian London, Simpson’s-in-the-Strand redefined its cuisine as marked by the British virtue of simplicity. Its new offerings were firmly situated within the tradition of the rustic London chophouse. The French language so common on Victorian menus disappeared, as *entrees* were now relegated to a women’s dining area upstairs, and the *menu* became a “bill of fare” (Jackson 39). The Grand Divan dining room, not open to women until the 1970s, blended the aristocratic masculinity of the foxhunt with the refinement of the ballroom; and to this day, the kitchen’s trademark is still the tableside carving of roasted meats, especially lamb, mutton, and beef, huge sides of which are wheeled from table to table on silver trolleys.

In sum, the Edwardian Simpson’s heavily anglicized its own Victorian iteration.

Simpson’s had always catered to a male clientele, but its new owners turned from the continental influence that had established its success to a hyper-masculine Englishness in its décor, food, and attitude, signaling an inward turn on the post-Victorian luxury dining scene. This version of the past functioned through anachronism, allowing several “old” eras to co-exist with its “new” identity. The title page of a promotional pamphlet written for Simpson’s 1904 opening illustrates this tactic:

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<sup>81</sup>Alexis Soyer, arguably the first celebrity chef, ran the kitchens at the Reform Club in Victorian London. He is remembered for his efforts to feed the soldiers of the Crimean War as well as the victims of the Irish Potato Famine.

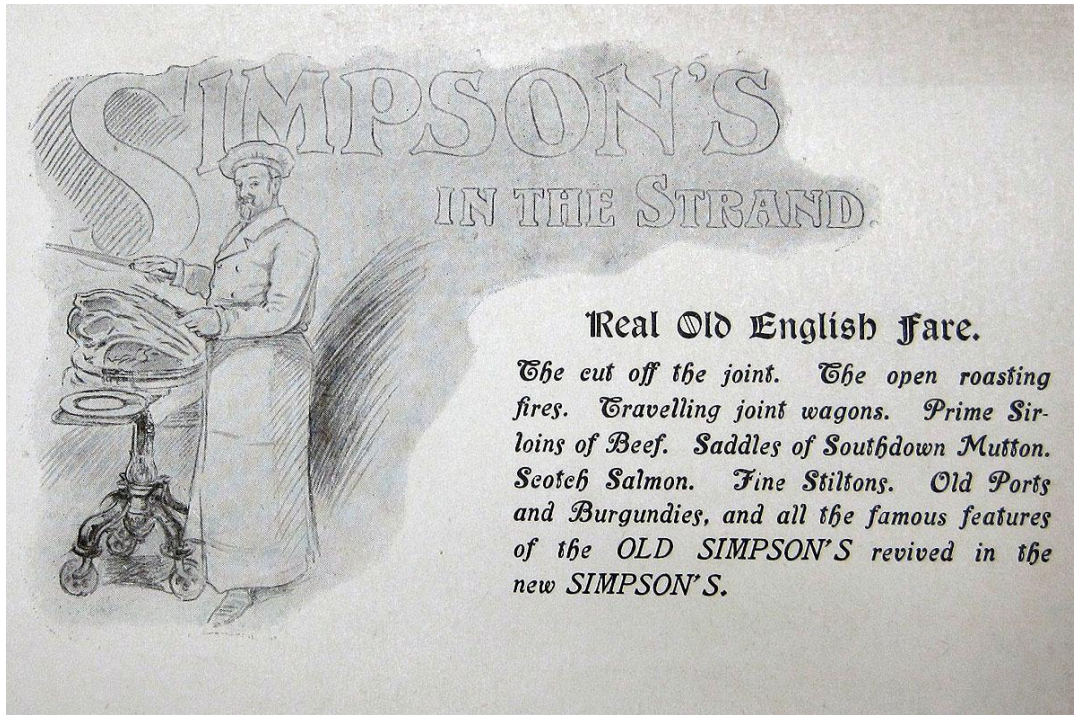


Figure 2: Title page of Nathaniel Newham-Davis's *Simpson's in the Strand: the Old English Tavern and Eating-House* (1904). Guildhall Library, London.

In this sketch, the smoke of the “S” rises from the joint of meat, generating a sense of motion that is reinforced by the pencil shading, and the roast seems like the source of this vitality because of its heart-like shape. But the anachronistic typeface of the subheading—part medieval manuscript, part Victorian theatre playbill—freezes the text into a kind of historical amber. The word “new” is not even capitalized, much less in all capitals like its “OLD” counterpart. Instead, it cowers weakly on the bottom line of the text. The Victorianization of the Edwardian Simpson’s—the summoning of Anglophilia that is at best muffled in its earlier records—implies that celebrating the modern present is not a viable commercial strategy in this cultural moment. The OLD is what courts the audience.

*Howards End* captures this anxiety and critiques Simpson’s anachronistic pastiche of national identity. Forster mocks its more reactionary patrons, diners like Henry who seem frozen in Victorian amber by glorifying insularity over cosmopolitanism. Mid-novel, after their

acquaintance is renewed, Margaret “humorously lament[s]” to the Wilcox family that she had never been to Simpson’s (*HE* 119). Presumably the humor stems from the fact that the socially progressive, literate, artistic, half German Margaret—whom Aunt Juley nervously and insistently labels “English to the backbone” (7)—embraces neither the nationalist aesthetic nor its ideological underpinnings. Yet this particular combination seems to lull Margaret into accepting it as a truly “solid” version of history:

...[Margaret’s] eyes surveyed the restaurant, and admired its well-calculated tributes to the solidity of our past. Though no more Old English than the works of Kipling, it had selected its reminiscences so adroitly that her criticism was lulled, and the guests whom it was nourishing for imperial purposes bore the outer semblance of Parson Adams or Tom Jones. Scraps of their talk jarred oddly on the ear. "Right you are! I'll cable out to Uganda this evening," came from the table behind. "Their Emperor wants war; well, let him have it," was the opinion of a clergyman. She smiled at such incongruities. (*HE* 121)

In the novel, Simpson’s aesthetic of “old Englishness” is conceived of by commerce instead of culture. The narrator wryly notes that it is “no more Old English than the works of Kipling,” and this is another important instance in which anachronism blends the medieval era with the late nineteenth century. Though it attempts to create continuity between the present and an ancient past, the restaurant can only manage to produce a version of Englishness that dates from the mid- to late nineteenth century—in other words, during the largest expansions of imperial capitalism. “[N]ourishing” the diners “for imperial purposes,” the Victorian era is controlling the image, demonstrating how difficult it has become to imagine pre-Victorian forms of cultural experience.

Yet Margaret thinks Simpson’s is a bit of a joke. Mr. Wilcox senses the joke but takes it far more seriously than anyone else at the table. Despite his quip that “it’s a bit of fun” to eat

there, Henry is clearly a lord of this dining space, sneaking in early to secure a table, instructing the carver to cut at the “most succulent” part of the roast, and tipping him so he remembers to come back (120-21). It is significant that, as he moves about in a state of complete mastery, the décor’s “well-calculated tributes to the solidity of our past” have allayed Margaret’s skepticism of its “incongruities.” Her submission to this commercial packaging of an imperial, masculine identity parallels her submission to Mr. Wilcox, the imperial, masculine trade titan, who is himself an anachronism. His obtuseness is not stupidity, like his son Charles; it is a refusal to leave the sheltered stasis of Victorian values and join the progressive new era that Margaret’s family embraces. Margaret wants to order her meal for herself, for instance, but Mr. Wilcox ignores her choice of fish pie and orders cider and the saddle of mutton instead, saying “[t]hat’s the type of thing” that one should go for in a place like Simpson’s. Later, he undermines her preference for Gruyere by ordering the Stilton (120-22). Henry, who has not been on a date in several decades, is not accustomed to women ordering for themselves in public. It was a common practice in Victorian courtships for a man to pre-arrange a lunch menu with the chef so that the woman arrived at the table and saw the printed courses on the table card.<sup>82</sup> Forster, then, has used the meal at Simpson’s to stage Henry as out of sync, not only with modern dating customs but also modern notions of female autonomy. It is equally notable that Margaret seems charmed by this throwback to the past since she seems comforted by imagining the present as having a historical origin instead of being an entirely new moment by itself. Simpson’s is a collection of disparate historical eras that have congealed into one, like the scenery that “heav[es] and merg[es] like porridge” when Margaret rides in Henry’s motorcar (Forster 157). The product, so carefully marketed as representative of imperial culture, is a simulacrum as

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<sup>82</sup>I am indebted to Susan Scott for this insight.

Baudrillard formulated it, the copy of an “Old England” that never existed, and one that has been carefully controlled and marketed to its Wilcoxian clientele. This place attempts to locate itself outside the flow of historical time, thereby mastering time itself, in an anxious effort to avoid being swept away in the currents of modernity.

A variety of social anxieties converge on the plate at Simpson’s: concerns over a lack of sustainability, a lack of real domestic industry, a new level of dependence upon invisible foreign supply lines. Those silver trolleys elevate a waning insularity that had until the last three decades been supported by Britain’s rural, and agricultural, sectors, and its advocacy for old-fashioned Victorianism is what gives Forster’s satire such a sharp edge. The source of Simpson’s recourse in anachronism, according to the narrator, is a high Victorian masculine commercial power, and the irony is clear: its muses are the very imperial titans whose economic ideologies had produced the broadening of exposure, the inability to remain insular, that it now had to defend itself against.

When one considers the transformation of the food supply, Simpson’s impulse toward myth-making can be read as a bastion of British nativeness holding out against a tidal wave of globalization which enforced an inescapable culinary cosmopolitanism, through which fewer and fewer products were domestic in origin. While Forster’s satire undermines the smug insularity of a reactionary dining culture, Simpson’s carefully cultivated image is also an overt opting-out of the import network, a declaration of difference from the dominant supply chains. The restaurant’s “Old English” origin story is in fact as a longing for an invisible history—an agrarian history, rooted in the richness of native soil—but it lacks precision; and its reliance upon a simulacrum short-circuits its own logical end. The effort does not make the past accessible; it creates a past that never existed. It produces a kind of nostalgia that is “foolish” (Christie 20)

because the simulacrum is a mere trick of a text. It is commerce that created the new Simpson's—an establishment that is ironically neither solid nor energetic—and it encourages the act of mourning for the loss of a stability that never existed.

Bateman's "The Man Who" illustration still appears on the cover of Simpson's Bill of Fare. The cartoon is a proud declaration that its kitchen has always been "British to the backbone," and to assume otherwise is offensive. The historical record testifies that the roasted mutton joints on Simpson's trolleys were in fact raised on British farms.<sup>83</sup> Yet, in the early decades of the twentieth century, those numbers had shrunk drastically almost everywhere else. New trade networks had globalized the British dining experience, and the new system had irreversibly entrenched itself into the nutritional reality of British citizens, especially in London. The anachronistic essence that Simpson's creates suggests a longing for a pre-imperial version of England—in this case, a self-sustaining, agrarian England. This longing has been produced by an entirely new economy, industrial rather than rural, global rather than local.

## §

Caporaletti argues that in Forster's fiction, a character that strictly adheres to objective, linear time will be numbed into a state of spiritual stagnation. Allowing the past to remain present produces a kind of spiritual vitality, she argues, developing a character's insight and understanding. Forster's manipulation of narrative time has an ethical purpose: "to denounce the dangerous emotional bluntness that the continuous flowing of time inevitably induces in people, and to shake them out of their spiritual numbness" (409). But if we examine the formal characteristics of Forster's play with narrative time, this ethical dichotomy is not at all clear in *Howards End*. When the past is reanimated—whether in Simpson's cuisine or in Henry's dining

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<sup>83</sup>Susan Scott speculates upon one suspension of this principle during the worst war years, when it is likely that "no questions were asked."

hall—the result is ethical confusion, not clarity. The past is summoned by anachronism to create false origin stories that glorify imperial conquest, or reinforce reactionary insularity, or relieve commerce of the blame it bears for removing the physical reality of the agrarian economy.

In its endeavor to combat the disorienting effects of modern life, the narrative's chronology takes the form of the new meat economy: it freezes nature. The development of the frozen meat trade and Forster's play with anachronism both employ the suspension of natural time in order for the past to appear once more in the present—in essence, to extend its lifespan. Furthermore, both are undergirded by the same impulse, to resist decay and destruction. Like other industrial products, frozen meat has been processed, meaning that it has been in some way mechanically or chemically altered from its original state. Processing largely functions to preserve a product across greater distances, for longer periods of time, and across a greater variety of climate zones. In order for a carcass to survive the transoceanic journey, it had to be removed from natural time, which (along with climate) would have subjected a product of nature to the forces of decay. Like transoceanic freezing technology, the trope of historical simultaneity has the effect of stepping out of natural time which would otherwise condemn the present to its natural finitude.

In order for it to have use value, a frozen carcass is thawed before going to market, when it once more becomes the source of nutritional vitality it had been before it was frozen. Yet the temporal universe of *Howards End* suggests that, although the reanimated past is meant to lend its vitality to the present, the result is a kind of draining of its energy, independence, and stability. Once thawed, a natural object has a limited time frame before it once more begins to decay in the climatic and ecological present. The narrative's reanimation of extinguished epochs unfreezes history from its linear fixity. But the unavoidable consequence of the thawing process



seems to be cultural decay—a world of Wilcoxes that seduce the cosmopolitan Schlegals and dominate the working class Basts in their conquest for mastery.

The false origin story of Simpson's, the imagining of the Imperialist as a "super-yeoman" or Henry as a feudal lord— all of these examples function in precisely the same way. The anachronistic summoning of the past is used, and especially by Margaret, in order to manufacture a coherent, unified, sense of British history. But the construction of a stable connection between past and present only compounds the sense of the flux of the Edwardian present by highlighting the instability—and the malleability—of time itself as it is reimagined for cultural purposes. To yoke postindustrial modernity to the historical continuum using images from preindustrial life is to substitute a fantasy of stability instead of isolating the origins of perceived alienation or critiquing the detrimental effects that new trade systems had on modern life.

### Reorganizing the Chain

The inability of the narrative to find and follow a straight line is dramatized in the novel's epigraph, "Only connect..." The ellipsis indicates that the action has been somehow foreclosed, a reflection of the cultural conditions created by the industrial economy, in which the only acts of connection possible take place through chronological innovation. Forster's preoccupation with distorted linearity is also reflected in the plot's crisis over who will inherit the diminished suburban homestead of Howards End. If the question of inheritance is the "dilemma of Forster's modernism" (Cucullu 119), the novel's ultimate pursuit is the "quest for relatedness" (Wallace 24) in a world where origins in the natural world are no longer apparent and have given way to the bonds of culture. The reordering of the food chain to conceal product origin also had the unintentional effect of reorganizing human chains by challenging the concepts of inheritance,

bloodline, and relation. Food is one of our most profound and normalized interactions with nature. The divorcing of food production from domestic farms, and seemingly from the natural world itself, thus throws into crisis the fundamental notion of linear, or genealogical, production, and gives rise to *Howards Ends*' most significant question: "Who shall inherit England?"

*Howards End* depicts two very different meals to illustrate the radical transformation of the food chain: the roast mutton lunch at Simpson's, and the Basts' dinner of canned tongue, which described by the narrator as "a freckled cylinder of meat, with a little jelly at the top, and a great deal of yellow fat at the bottom" (HE 43). The contrast between the two forms of meat—one roasted whole; one processed and injected into a can—is significant. The mutton is a carver's roast, an intact carcass that resembles the animal it once was. Its identifiable origin as an animal shape communicates the fact that it is a farm product, reinforcing the restaurant's advertisement that it was raised on a domestic pasture. In contrast, the very notion of a tinned tongue invokes muteness. Not only does it lack any suggestion of *anima* or animation, it is formless, eerily severed from its anatomical origin and forced to take the shape of its container. Leonard's tin may even contain matter from multiple animals or, since tongue is a muscle and would need "jelly" and "fat" added to it, multiple species. His meal has no identifiable geography. In fact, one would be pressed to identify it as an agricultural product at all. It has been subjected to the processes of commerce and transformed beyond recognition by the severance of relations in nature that industry imposes upon agriculture

We could easily compare the perpetuation of a family line to the act of making a chain. If one were to reconceive the novel's search for an heir as a search for a chain that has disappeared, then that search is imbricated with the changing structure of material reality as apparent in the history of the empire's food chain. Forster's interest in inheritance and family line should be read

as a response to this unique historical moment because the food industry was in the process of erasing the presence of the natural world from the food system. As farms disappeared and live husbandry was replaced by ships full of frozen carcasses, natural forces of production and reproduction no longer provided appropriate models for understanding human production, reproduction, or relatedness.

When Ruth Wilcox scribbles her deathbed request to leave *Howards End* to Margaret instead of her own children, the narrator grapples with the possibility that the larger culture might one day shift its perception of relatedness from genetic relatedness to cultural bonds: “Is it creditable that the possessions of the spirit can be bequeathed at all? Has the soul offspring? A wyche-elm tree, a vine, a wisp of hay with dew on it—can passion for such things be transmitted where there is no bond of blood?” (79). Ruth’s request stuns the Wilcox family, who are unable to comprehend how a bond of friendship could ever be stronger than a familial one. As Evie sniffs, “Mother believed so in ancestors too—it isn’t like her to leave anything to an outsider” (80). The narrative persona then absolves the family from blame for tearing up their mother’s note because “the problem is too terrific” for them to comprehend (79). The recognition that there is such thing as a spiritual heir *is* a “terrific” problem, because inheritance is, quite literally, the ultimate expression of human relatedness and a primary mechanism of perpetuating family line.

Critics have contextualized the quest for a family line in *Howards End* in terms of Forster’s own sexuality. After his university years at Cambridge, his group of friends and colleagues, the Apostles, was dissolved a little more each year by marriage as an institution. According to his most recent biographer Wendy Moffat, Forster watched his straight friends “disappear behind glass shade that falls between married couples and the world” and pondered

what his later life would look like since that option was closed to him (83). The dedication to his earlier novel *The Longest Journey* (1907), “fratribus,” conveyed a faith in brotherhood that recent criticism has examined in the context of inheritance. *Howards End* could be read as an attempt to develop a new literary model in which “domestic romance” is replaced with “queered cultural romance” that produces an educated male bourgeoisie, represented by the young two boys in the novel’s final scene (Cucullu 111). A physical chain is not the biological outcome of a queer line, thus the ties must be cultural, perpetuating themselves in the “possessions of the spirit” instead of the body (*HE* 79).

When the Wilcox family’s genealogical continuity is outsourced to the Schlegels, the implication is that cultural bonds have assumed responsibility for perpetuating England’s future without reference to traditional family models based upon reproduction. Without Helen’s child, the novel would be unable to arrange a coupling to produce an heir for the house. Charles’s disgrace has interrupted the patrilineal line of Wilcox succession, and Margaret’s union with Henry will remain barren. As she instructs Helen, “love your child. I do not love children. I am thankful to have none” (*HE* 276). She is Ruth’s heir designate, and she is a “spiritual” heir only. The transfer of property from Ruth, the prior “trust of a female avatar of the heteronormative standard” to Margaret, “the cosmopolitan woman ambiguously gendered” advocates a shift from antiquated maternity to a modern asexuality (Cucullu 114). The task of the female then becomes the raising of the male child by inventing a family dynasty that is based upon social relatedness rather than bloodline.

An important parallel exists between the concealment of corporeal supply chains and the pivotal event that forges this new family arrangement. Mirroring the absence of animal husbandry in the meat supply chain, the novel refuses to narrate the conception of Leonard and

Helen's child and relegates it to the offstage space. England's heir may as well have been conceived through spawning. Cucullu uses the phrase "andromic coupling" to describe sexuality in Forster's fiction, a term referring to fish that swim upstream to deposit their eggs; Leonard, who fertilizes his spiritual mate and dies, is a "sperm donor par excellence" (109; 111). Just as capitalism works to conceal the bodily truth behind food production, so the novel works to withhold the bodily business of breeding that is necessary to continue the line, class, and stock of the English identity. Neither Margaret nor her nephew possesses a claim to inheritance that is based upon a bodily line of origin. Perpetuating one's line is not a physical act for the Wilcox-Schlegels. There is no father to perpetuate a possibility of fertilization, and only the women bring up the child after Leonard is dismissed from the narrative. Space is then cleared for a queer, non-reproductive future—a future that mirrors the old farm, which has become a kind of "rustic Bloomsbury" (ibid. 47) that cultivates culture instead of crops.

Though it may not produce what we generally understand to come from nature—food, or children—this new space does promise revitalization. The "acquisitive grasp" of the imperial and commercial Wilcox line has turned its attention elsewhere, with Charles banished and Henry unmanned, and new models for identity, family structure, and human relations may be possible for English culture more broadly. Through Margaret's intervention, the family line no longer relies upon biology in order to replicate and perpetuate itself, and the reorganization of relations at *Howards End* is a response to the diminishing role that natural origin appears to play as agricultural products—once agrarian in origin, to be grown, raised, and harvested—are outsourced, frozen, canned, and otherwise mechanized beyond recognition.

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II.  
The Industrial Fantasy of Empire



CHAPTER THREE:  
Nutrition and Empire: Joseph Conrad's Imperial Metabolisms

In *A Book of Prefaces* (1917), H.L. Mencken's brief but contentious collection of essays critiquing American culture, the author pinpoints Joseph Conrad's relationship to a Western literary canon by calling him a "skeleton at the feast":

My business...is not with the culture of Anglo-Saxondom, but only with Conrad's place therein. That place is isolated and remote; he is neither of it nor quite in it. In the midst of futile meliorism which deceives the more, the more it soothes, he stands out like some sinister skeleton at the feast, regarding the festivities with a flickering and impenetrable grin (28).

The style evoked in this passage is marked by boniness, an absence of flesh—a stark contrast to the prosperous, fatted traditions of late Victorian realist prose. The metaphor is an insightful characterization of Conrad's position in British letters as well as the emerging canon of twentieth-century modernism more broadly. His body of work is neither *of* nor *in* Britain's late imperial culture. The features of his style—"the isolation of consciousness, indeterminacy of language and experience, philosophical skepticism and literary innovation" (Seeley 495)—indicate profound ideological conflicts. His fiction works to expose the production of late imperial culture, laying bare the skeletal framework of values that support the fleshiness of its wealth and power.

Conrad articulates his own struggle to inhabit British categories differently, although he, too, betrays a preoccupation with consumption and dearth. The 1920 "Author's Note" to later

editions of Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907) attempts to explain why the novel departed so drastically from its immediate predecessors *Nostramo* (1904) and *The Mirror of the Sea* (1906). While the most obvious change is geographic—*The Secret Agent* is Conrad's only novel set in London—he presents the difference in terms of an unequal exchange of light and energy:

One fell to musing before the phenomenon [of starting the new project]—even of the past: of South America, a continent of crude sunshine and brutal revolutions, of the sea, the vast expanse of salt waters, the mirror of heaven's frowns and smiles, the reflector of the world's light. Then the vision of an enormous town presented itself, of a monstrous town more populous than some continents and in its man-made might as if indifferent to heaven's frowns and smiles; a cruel devourer of the world's light. (xxxvii)<sup>84</sup>

While the ocean, and the tales it inspired, “reflect” the “world’s light,” the “enormous... monstrous town” of London appears as a “cruel devourer” of light, indifferent to the cosmos it is draining. Conrad detects an exchange of energy that Allen MacDuffie views as a kind of “metabolism” (76). Thus, Conrad’s “Author’s Note” prepares us to read *The Secret Agent*’s imagery of light and energy not simply as an ethical symbology, but also materially, as an attempt to represent patterns of global energy exchange that are grounded in real systems of production and consumption. Critics have often noted the centrality of entropy in the political and moral worlds of his novels, but the above passage suggests that an analysis of his energy tropes should include their contextualization in terms of the spaces that they occupy: the imperial periphery, the sea, and the city of London, “the very centre of Empire” (SA 214). When taken in the global perspective that Conrad’s *oeuvre* provides, the word “*devourer*” suggests a metabolic vision of “the city as a consumer within—indeed, a parasite upon—the greater natural economic

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<sup>84</sup>Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*. New York: Modern Library, 2004. Afterwards abbreviated SA and cited parenthetically in the text.

world system” (MacDuffie 76). This metabolic vision is materially inextricable from the emergence of an early twentieth-century nutritional geography: vital, fluctuating trade systems that spread across oceans, crisscrossing the globe and penetrating all its far-flung “lost corners,” to quote the narrator Charles Marlow. European centers in his work are both light and dark—they are both white “sepulchral [cities]” and “dark places of the earth” (*Heart of Darkness* 88; 5).<sup>85</sup> These designations correspond with the duality inherent in the natures of urban centers as they at once produce and consume global networks of resources.

This chapter argues that Conrad’s preoccupation with what I call “imperial metabolism” is grounded in the material history of the British Empire’s food supply. Reading *The Secret Agent* beside *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and *Lord Jim* (1900) provides a view of a “system of dependency extending far beyond the bounds of London and other western capitals... the coordinates of an exploitative, directional, global economy imagined in the thermodynamic vocabulary of energy flow, efficiency, and waste” (MacDuffie 76). This textual constellation has an often-overlooked material dimension, and Conrad’s summoning of energy tropes helps us map the empire’s “directional, global” eating economy that, by the Edwardian decade, had generated nutritional dependencies far beyond European centers. Conrad’s imaginings of trade and exchange can and should be understood in terms of Edwardian anxieties over consumption, waste, and dearth that accompanied an increasingly globalized food trade. By analyzing the parallels between economic and narrative modes of distribution, which create and disperse narrative energy unevenly, I argue that Conrad’s modernist techniques of negative narration<sup>86</sup>—

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<sup>85</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and Selections from The Congo Diaries*. New York: Modern Library, 1999. All citations refer to this edition, which will hereafter appear in parentheses, abbreviated *HD*.

<sup>86</sup> I take this phrase from Florence Dore, *The Novel and the Obscene: Sexual Subjects in the American Modernist Novel* (Stanford: Stanford UP: 2005). Dore defines “a negative mode of narration” as a category encompassing characteristics such as “reversals, elisions, and absences in the narrative logic” that all function to withhold key textual content (2; 7)

ellipses, elisions, and delays—are immanently connected to material systems of food production that function smoothly only by building dearth into their structural foundations.

This chapter will examine both content and form, an uneasy dichotomy in many modernist novels and especially in Conrad's works. Keeping in mind that this is not always the case, and that form and content are often at odds in modernist texts, I maintain that in the three texts considered here, the relationship between form and content is in fact productive in forming a critique of the material food system. A consideration of *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, and *The Secret Agent* together challenges the limits of what previous critics such as Jakob Lothe have assumed about Conrad's use of negative narration—namely, that his most economical works, such as the novellas, most successfully bring form and content together into one unified artistic product (2-3).<sup>87</sup> When one considers how prevalent the language of the food trades is throughout these three major works, and also how unpredictable the narration of *Lord Jim* and *The Secret Agent* actually is, it becomes apparent that it is most difficult to discriminate between the constitutive aspects of form and content in the two later, longer works. I assert that the broader a novel's view of the food system's material reality, the more difficult it is for its narrative to evenly distribute information according to conventional structures. Ultimately, the increasingly erratic distribution of Conrad's narration critiques the unevenness of nutritional distribution within the imperial food economy. The presence of culinary leisure alongside increasing immiseration implicates the condition of the underfed colonial subject in the appearance of negative narration as a formal characteristic of modernism.

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<sup>87</sup>“When the relationship is productive and successful, as in ‘Heart of Darkness’, it becomes particularly difficult to discriminate between constituent aspects of form and content. Although this difficulty is partly due to the narrative economy of this particular novella, it is also... closely related to sophisticated modulations of the narrative method employed. In other tales by Conrad the relationship is more strained—as in *Chance*, where the narrative function of Marlow invites adverse commentary, or in *Victory*, where the thematic purpose of the heavy allegorizing seems unclear” (Lothe 2-3).

## Use and Waste: Imperial Metabolisms

The language of thermodynamics, so prevalent in late nineteenth-century British fiction, helped structure imperial trade relations. The discourses of Victorian political economy often discuss natural resources from the colonies—from guano to iron ore to cultivated crops—in terms of energy. MacDuffie’s work surveys the political and economic uses of the thermodynamic terms *efficiency* and *waste* as scientific discourses were increasingly summoned to support the imperial project (76-82). A fundamental shift in conceiving material reality was inspired by the scientific notion of a finitude of energy, which is not created but liberated from dormancy in order to then be exchanged. One effect of this theoretical shift was a diminished conception of humanity’s place in the cosmos. If the earth was merely a by-product of the cooling of the sun, as Lord Kelvin’s mid-century work on the science of thermodynamics was often interpreted, then its cosmic destiny was a lifeless, frozen state, all its heat-energy eventually expended (Watt 152). Conrad and many of his contemporary writers developed a kind of “astrophysical pessimism” that railed against, in Conrad’s own words, the “curse of decay—the eternal decree that will extinguish the sun” (ibid.; qtd. in Watt 153). For some, evolutionary theory fueled anxieties that humans were merely accidental byproducts of natural selection, and that an apathetic nature, which had no interest in the perpetuation of the human species, determined the world. For others, apocalyptic musings heralded the doom of civilization which, through imperial exploration and contact with the remote corners of the earth, was in the process of being re-barbarized by ruthless conquest and savage exploitation. The destruction of Victorian culture often seems imminent in the literatures of the 1890s, its unprecedented yet tenuous prosperity always threatening to collapse.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>Watt catalogs other works that embody this pessimism over the atavistic degeneration of the social order, including William Morris’s *News from Nowhere* (1891), H.G. Wells’ *The Time Machine* (1895) and *War of the Worlds* (1898),

The thermodynamic concept of a finitude of energy led to dire forecasts for the future of resource-dependent England. Consequently, intra-imperial food trades became structured by the practices of directional exchanges, wherein resources flowed out and away from some regions and towards others. Anxiety over wastefulness tends to infuse discussions of empire-building with an urgent call to exploit the colonies in order to supply the global expansion of England's civilizing project. An ominous logic enters the public discourse which enforced cultivation of colonial resources in order to resupply the home economy as it expended its energy. The language of efficiency and waste tends to mask the ubiquity of directional exchanges by suggesting the "wastefulness" of leaving raw materials uncultivated or permitting an "inefficient" native mismanagement of them (Macduffie 77-78). Reclaiming this energy potential would qualify as efficient use, which had become a Victorian virtue.<sup>89</sup> It could also provide a store of fuel for the future which would be used to secure safety and order at home and abroad.

The popularity of Herbert Spencer's program of social Darwinism, which distinguished "high" and "low" races and codified a power structure among "stronger" and "weaker" nations, fueled the widespread advocacy of resource "recovery." His famous motto "Survival of the Fittest," which Darwin himself eventually approved as an accurate paraphrase of his theories, supported the idea of colonial expansion and justified the exploitation of overseas developments (Watt 156-7). Using this framework, social and political theorists could argue that the more advanced white races could and should use colonial territories to further what may be called "the Victorian religion of progress," in which the evaporation of belief in God's divine plan could be

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which was published a year before *Heart of Darkness*. Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) satirizes some earnest party guests who feared that the "fin de siècle" would bring with it the "fin du globe."

<sup>89</sup>"The devotion to efficiency," claims Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, is what makes possible the imperial age (7).

replaced by secular methods of securing the “privileged splendor of human destiny” (Watt 155). Economy and trade, for the Victorians, took on new moral and spiritual associations, enabling the peoples of the global south to benefit from the supposedly more industrious work of the northern regions, which embraced industry and science.

Turn-of-the-century primary sources demonstrate how the expansion of the food trades was undertaken as part of the civilizing mission of empire-building. The wild success of the imported food trades contributed to the perception of resource crisis that gripped the British public before the First World War. Edwardian periodicals demonstrate significant anxiety over the British food supply. The terms like *efficiency*, *waste*, and *use* provided writers with rhetorical touchstones to describe the effects of skyrocketing food imports. Faced with dwindling domestic agricultural cultivation, it appeared wasteful to leave a colonial territory uncultivated by industrial production. Some went as far as to insinuate that a lack of colonial production was immoral.

In his essay “Can the Empire Feed its People?” (1896), James Long conceives of underplanted colonies as wasted spaces that drain British wealth and prosperity. He implores the British government to curb food imports from “foreign” nations into the British Isles because of the trade’s vulnerability to international crises. The success of the imported food trades is a growing threat, argues the author, who believes that “our first duty to those who obey the British sceptre and fight our battles is to ensure their food-supply” (16). Following calculations of production figures and assessments of the “latent potentials” of “underutilized” lands, both at home and in colonial holdings, Long concludes that Britain’s colonies are a drastically “underused” agricultural resource. He then suggests that increasing the “efficiency” and volume of their cultivation could eliminate the problem of food security (21-28). Long is particularly

interested in Canada, where he estimates there are at least 203 million “under-cultivated” acres of “soil of the highest quality upon which future crops can be grown for export” (21). Other British-held territories are equally promising: “All the surplus food-stuffs we require, as well as the more luxurious products of the soil, could be produced in Canada, Australasia, India, and South Africa,” he insists, advocating for greater cooperation between the British home government and its colonial governments in order to make such uses a reality (16). Considering “their stupendous area,” the relatively small agricultural output of the colonies is the result of “inferiority of prices,” as “farmers will not grow what will not pay” (ibid.). Therefore, he concludes, the public must urge the state to both expand colonial agriculture and encourage intra-imperial trade relations so that farmers in the colonies will have an incentive to produce. Long, along with other writers of the time, considered agricultural cultivation an essential facet of national security.

While Long’s desire for greater intra-colonial economic cooperation seems partly motivated by patriotism, humanitarianism, and preemptive defense planning, it is also clear from this essay that he considers agricultural cultivation the territories as part of a system of fair exchange. He implies that this use has already been paid for by the “1 billion pounds” that Britain has “lent to India, Canada, Australasia, the West Indies, and South Africa,” though he does not specify in what manner this sum has been allocated (17). That the colonies “should” (ibid.) secure against future dearth by returning to the home country as wheat, milk, meat, and other foodstuffs is presented as a logical consequence. Agricultural products constitute repayment for financial aid.

Somewhat paradoxically, Long then characterizes the cultivation of the colonies as a relationship of mutual benefit because their use circulates wealth throughout the empire:



The Colonies... have to some extent applied preferential conditions to themselves. We desire closer social and commercial union with each in time of peace, and material support, the provision of food, in time of war. The Colonies are, for their population, our best customers, paying us more per head than any foreign nation, and in return we are excellent customers to them. (26)

It is evident that Long views colonial markets as valuable consumers of home products as well as valuable producers of imports. By trading with Britain, he suggests, the colonies can create “preferential conditions” for themselves and secure their own positions on a global stage. But Long’s platform has it both ways. The colonies have independent consumption capacity—a valuable feature in times of peace when “social” and “commercial” unions seem essentially equivalent. These territories have a different purpose in times of war, when presumably these mutual relations would give way to the necessities of supplying the home country with basic “provisions.” It is crucial to see how effortlessly the author can transform the “provision of food” from a Free Trade system that encourages independence in developing regions into a basic nutritional supply bank that serves the demands of the developed world. By describing a system of exploitation in terms of maximizing efficiency, imperial rhetorics were able to invent an equitable concept of exchange between energetic European efforts and their colonies, which were often conceived of as dormant spaces whose economic, or even human, potential, could be liberated by the work. In times of peace, their potential to be consumers would grow. In times of war, this arrangement could be suspended. This realm of exception is a common product of the overlap between Free Trade and imperial discourses. Yet this attitude towards colonial agriculture and the importation of foodstuffs contains an unworkable contradiction. There is a

disconnect between viewing the colony as both an equal trading partner and as submissive producer on call to support the demands of the state.

A range of thinkers, from agrarian philosophers to cultural anthropologists, have speculated on, and studied, the ironic culmination of this kind of logic, which has arguably developed modern industrial systems that are themselves often energy-intensive and highly inefficient. Firstly, conceiving of colonies as dependencies is, “in an important sense, putting things exactly backwards” (Macduffie 77) because colonial relations tended to permit an unmitigated extraction of resources as energy sources. This reversal is a common critique that twentieth-century Marxists, especially those working on the uses of Marxism in ecological contexts, have leveled at forms of industrial production that exploit natural resources of underdeveloped areas. For instance, Hornborg boldly claims that Marx understood industry’s demand for profit as not necessarily a “capitalist” problem that could be neutralized by a rearrangement of ownership, but instead as a more permanent effect of the inefficiency of industrial, as compared to biological or ecological, production (10).

It is one thing for an ecocritic to draw upon Marx’s critique of industrial exploitation and degradation; it is more of a leap to argue that Marx saw nature as an ideal model for production. Hornborg’s case seems against the grain of contemporary Marxist scholarship, since scholars often conclude from his intensely anthropocentric focus that Marx did not “like” nature.<sup>90</sup> But while his and Engels’ body of work does make human activity the driving force of historical change, James O’Connor points out that Marx’s vision did anticipate a time when humankind would not be alienated from nature. He interprets Marx as advocating for an “appropriation of

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<sup>90</sup>This quote comes from Anna Bramwell’s *Ecology in the Twentieth-Century* (1989), which provides a thorough critique of Marxism’s anthropocentrism, including the charge that neither Marx nor Engels grasped the profound interdependence between human and natural spheres of life (qtd. in O’Connor 2).

nature” that is not based “upon a logic of capitalist accumulation but rather on direct individual and social need” (2). Because this platform is not a vision of nature as its own end, ecologically-minded scholars and critics tend to assume that “ecological Marxism” is a paradoxical construct. But that assumption discounts the fact that Marx was engaged with what is arguably the primary ecological issue of his day: issues of soil quality, fertilization, and the beginning of industrial agricultural production. Marx may not have advocated for the conservation of natural resources on the romantic grounds that nature is intrinsically valuable, but his interest in promoting the “conditions of an ecologically rational agriculture” is also an environmentally responsible position (O’Connor 2).<sup>91</sup> It would be fair to characterize Marx’s attitudes towards the environment as advocating for its fair use. Insisting upon its unconditional preservation is not the only foundational tenant of either environmental philosophy or ecological scholarship.

I choose to call my mapping of the empire’s eating economy an “imperial metabolism.” The term “metabolism” does the important work of highlighting the act of eating as an engine of transformation; it is also an important term for Marx and appears in two volumes of *Das Kapital*. Evidence suggests that Marx takes the concept of metabolism (*Stoffwechsel*) from the nineteenth-century chemist Justus von Liebig.<sup>92</sup> Von Liebig alleged that industrial agriculture was tantamount to a “robbery system”—an industrial arrangement that took more from the soil than was, or even could, be put back.<sup>93</sup> Following von Liebig, Marx begins to formulate a critique of

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<sup>91</sup> Many approaches to organic farming are undergirded by this rationale, for instance.

<sup>92</sup> John Bellamy Foster argues that Marx was influenced by von Liebig’s work on the concept of metabolism (“Rift”). Cf. Foster, *Marx’s Ecology* 155-70; Burkett and Foster 109-10.

<sup>93</sup> In *Organic Chemistry in Its Applications to Agriculture and Physiology* (1862), von Liebig writes, “Great Britain robs all countries of the conditions of their fertility,” illustrating this claim by citing post-Famine Ireland as a prime example (qtd. in Foster “Rift.”).

imperialism by pointing to the agricultural crises that had begun to wrack Britain's colonies, and especially Ireland.

Industrial agriculture, according to Marx, was the most pernicious of industries because it turned peasants into wage laborers at an accelerated pace (*Capital* I 325). Marx was one of the first thinkers to question the perception of the Irish Potato Famine as an act of God, and he partially attributes Ireland's mid-nineteenth century agricultural crisis to the widespread exploitation perpetuated by agricultural industry.<sup>94</sup> The equation, he suggests, simply does not add up: "For a century and a half England has indirectly exported the soil of Ireland, without even allowing its cultivators the means for replacing the constituents of the exhausted soil" (ibid. 498). This industrial system is inherently inefficient. It is built upon imbalance and therefore always demanding in some form. Marx describes how soil nutrients (the levels of nitrogen, phosphorous, and other minerals that Liebig had examined) are increasingly drawn from the colony and exported, sometimes thousands of miles, back to the home country in the form of food and fibers. This process is emblematic of the broader inefficiencies of capital development. Industrial farming is wasteful, in Marx's words, because it "only develops the techniques and the degree of combination of the social process of production by simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth — the soil and the worker" (I 326). It creates a directional economy that renders colonial soil increasingly infertile, exhausted, and unable to sustain production, in addition to rendering the laborers increasingly vulnerable to shocks and threats.

A directional system of exploitation implicates the entire system and has an increasingly negative effect on all territories, including that of domestic spaces. In the first volume of *Capital*, Marx argues that human industry needs to correct the imbalance it had introduced in the natural

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<sup>94</sup>Chapter Four expands this analysis of the Irish Famine.

world. Acrobatic technological fixes were only temporary solutions and indicated the underlying inefficiencies that predicated industrial food production. Even in the 1850s, British cities struggled to manage the levels of pollution and waste that they were importing in the form of consumables. Agricultural sectors were increasingly forced by poor soil conditions to import bones from Napoleonic battlefields and Roman catacombs, together with guano from Peru fields, in order to restore the fertility of exhausted domestic soil (Foster “Rift”).<sup>95</sup> Von Liebig’s work suggested that the widening rift in the exchanges between humanity and nature could only be overcome through the systematic restoration of metabolic balance between humanity and nature. As Marx writes, the solution will come when society and industry can “govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control, instead of being dominated by it as a blind power; accomplishing it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature” (*Capital* III 570). As anthropocentric as Marxism can seem, passages like these should remind contemporary scholars that there is room to develop conceptions of labor as labor taking place in the natural world, which has its own requirements, demands, and features that in turn shape human activity.

When Marx takes the term *metabolism* from von Liebig, he removes it from its original scientific context, in which it describes the workings of a biological system, and reactivates it in a socio-political context. Metabolism thus comes to signify a social relationship, one that negotiates between social and individual need and nature’s carrying capacities. While critics have rightfully noted the limits of this approach—Marx does not seem as aware of the deep interconnectedness between social labor and nature as, say, Schiller, Emerson, or Thoreau—the term is helpful to establish a critique of imperial food systems in nineteenth- and twentieth-

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<sup>95</sup>The later invention of synthetic fertilizers worked to correct nutrient gaps in the soil, but related environmental problems, such as nitrogen runoff, still plague modern agricultural systems.

century Britain, which are governed by a set of relationships that are themselves as social, political, and economic as they are biological or ecological.

§

Conrad's body of work illustrates the imperial metabolism that food trades created because he presents a global system of capital exchange, a map which illustrates its fundamentally unsustainable logic. A metabolic system's inefficiency is best revealed by taking a longer perspective—by seeing whole system of exchanges as it takes from one area in order to fuel another. Hornborg asserts that the mystifications of capital accumulation can best be recognized by viewing an industrial system within a global framework: "Such a wasteful form of production can only continue so long as it is 'subsidized' by an asymmetric world trade in energy. Only from a *local* perspective can it appear 'productive' or 'efficient'" (10; original emphasis). Capital's expansive powers depend upon regions like the tropics and other places where industry could siphon raw materials and human labor without social or legal challenge.

The works of Macduffie, Trentmann, and others testifies to the crucial role that language of efficiency played in an imperial economy. Yet the concepts of commerce, exchange, and trade are often discussed abstractly as "energy," "resources," or "commodities." It is also important to understand how scientific discussions of energy exchange and economic discussions of commerce have concrete counterparts in studies of food production and consumption. In addition to reflecting his interest in both scientific and commercial topics, Conrad's preoccupation with metabolic exchange often takes shape in the language of cooking, dining, and cuisine, the trading of livestock and luxury foods, the cultivation of crops, and, on the other side of the spectrum, the grim realities of malnutrition. These historical, and cultural dimensions will be examined on the level of content and also of form, when the realities of nutritional supply and exchange either

generate content, as in the occasions of Marlow's tales, or else disrupt the presentation, and therefore the consumption, of his narrative strategies.

### *Heart of Darkness* and the "Diet of Unreason"

No fear can stand up to hunger, no patience can wear it out, disgust simply does not exist where hunger is; and as to superstition, beliefs, and what you may call principles, they are less than chaff in a breeze. Don't you know the devilry of lingering starvation, its exasperating torment, its black thoughts, its sombre and brooding ferocity? Well, I do. It takes a man all his inborn strength to fight hunger properly (*HD* 51).

Good cooking is a moral agent... The decency of our life is for a great part a matter of good taste, of the correct appreciation of what is fine in simplicity. The intimate influence of conscientious cooking by rendering easy the processes of digestion promotes the serenity of mind, the graciousness of thought, and that indulgent view of our neighbours' failings which is the only genuine form of optimism (Preface to *A Handbook of Cookery*).

*Heart of Darkness* sets the "devouring" city of London into sharp relief against the famine-like conditions of central Africa, creating an oppositional geography of excess and starvation. But although Conrad often appears to work dualistically through the use of ironic juxtaposition (London/the Congo, or East/West, for instance), his fiction often "dissolve[s] the dangerous habit of dualistic thinking, undermining the unexamined assumptions that make either/or thinking possible" (Tanner 18-19).

Not only do the above passages—one from Conrad's classic short novel<sup>96</sup> and one from a preface he wrote for his wife Jessie's cookbook, published shortly before his death—display his persistent fascination with the relationship between the alimentary and ideological. They also present an underexplored binary in Conrad studies: the bourgeois European kitchen/cook and the hungry savage, embodied in the cookbook's preface as the "red man's... wigwam" (Tanner 18) but, which had earlier taken form in the emaciated workers and starving cannibal crew of the

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<sup>96</sup>I prefer to call *Heart of Darkness* a short novel, though Ian Watt insists that it should be considered a "long novella" (224). Watt has in mind a category that includes similar short prose works by Mann, James and Lawrence; I am considering the work in the context of its relation to the longer Marlow tale *Lord Jim*.

steamboat in *Heart of Darkness*.<sup>97</sup> Though Conrad's cookbook preface endeavors to develop a light tone, written as it is by a husband who is snugly and securely fed by middle-class English life; and though it appears in a domestic volume that had a limited run, one gets a sense of "the varied states of consciousness and mood that are at play in all his major works: on the one hand decency, good taste, sanity of mind, optimism, kindness...[and on the other] violence, gloomy imaginings, a haunted existence, vague fears" (Tanner 18). Tanner labels these poles as the "cooking of sanity" and "the diet of unreason" (ibid. 19), though the following analysis will show that Conrad's work reveals the permeability of their opposition, for the wigwam "has its sanities," and the kitchen is often in a state of unreason (ibid. 36). These two categories interact with each other in the larger food economy that contains them both, though the patterns of exchange that emerge are largely directional, with the European kitchen sourcing much of its wealth and vitality from the tropical or exotic territory. Judging from Kurtz's fate, Conrad's work suggests that the effects of dissolving the boundary between exotic cultivation and domestic consumption are far from wholesome, healthy, or desirable. This loaded claim, however, could also be seen as an indictment of the entire metabolic system, which is responsible for circulating energy and vitality and yet seems to reinscribe deprivation in exotic and domestic corners alike.

## §

*Heart of Darkness* is set in King Leopold II of Belgium's recently acquired Congolese territories, which his regime endeavored to open to the civilizing influence of European trade.

"To open to civilization the only area of our globe to which it has not yet penetrated," the King

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<sup>97</sup>"The gluttony of their indigestible feasts was a direct incentive to counsels of unreasonable violence," Conrad writes of the foodways of Native Americans, conjuring huts full of dyspeptic, angry Indians—great hunters whom he asserts cannot cook. This is obviously an outrageous, un-anthropological claim, and one that Tanner suspects is intended to be a sort of joke, though in very bad taste (19).



declared in 1876, “to pierce the gloom which hangs over entire races, constitutes...a Crusade worthy of this century of progress” (qtd in Watt 139). This rhetoric of democracy, trade, and progress masked a “shameless” campaign to exploit the nearly one million square miles of land and its people that the king eventually claimed for Belgium, a project that developed “with increasing ruthlessness” in order to fund Belgium’s many projects and subsequently massive debts (Watt 139). When Conrad traveled to the Congo in 1890 to take command of a river steamer, he witnessed some of the most brutal aftereffects of the regime’s inhumane treatment of the territory and its inhabitants. *Heart of Darkness*’s critique of imperialism is very much in tune with a rising outrage against Leopold among the British public who, by the time it was serialized in *Blackwood’s Magazine* in 1899, were outraged by the “king’s misdeeds” (ibid.).

Conrad’s depiction of imperialism is not nationally specific, and the novel indicts the imposition of uneven consumption which characterizes British as well as Belgian trade systems. The novel’s locations are characterized by vague descriptions: the Thames is named on the first page, but London is referred to as “the biggest, and the greatest town on earth” (*HD* 3); Brussels is “the sepulchral city” (88); Matadi, the D.R.C.’s chief seaport, becomes the Company Station; even the Congo itself, one of the world’s largest river systems, remains simply, “the river” throughout. Connecting these vague coordinates is a metabolic system of work and trade wherein the categories of comfort and starvation are not only normal but also interdependent variables. The presence of dearth, in other words, is caused by the transfer of energy and vitality elsewhere, especially across the sea.

The Congolese workforce barely seems human in the novel, appearing as fragmented body parts—“black bones” and skeletal “shadows” with trembling “fingers”—merely so much raw matter to fuel the system that uses and discards them (*HD* 20). Marlow depicts them as:

...dying slowly—it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now,—nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest. (*HD* 20)

Here Marlow employs colonial discourse of “inefficiency,” as explained in the previous section, though his account ironically indicates that it is European time contracts and European food that condemn the workers to their exhausted, vulnerable states. Marlow is often impressed by the adaptability of the colonial subjects to European interferences, for instance when he expresses astonishment that the native crew of the ship does not eat the white men on the boat, who had thrown their food supply—rotten hippo meat—overboard. The crew is starving, exploited and commanded by a foreign culture, and yet they exercise “restraint,” marvels the narrator, by not indulging their reportedly cannibalistic natures (*HD* 51). It is Kurtz, in fact, who seems to be indicted as the cannibal. He is first seen with his mouth open wide, “as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him” (*HD* 74). Kurtz embodies “a certain kind of white imperial consciousness which...wants to engorge the world and transform it into itself” (Tanner 32), a dangerous kind of civilizing drive that yearns to devour difference and otherness and is enacted upon the emaciated Africans who populate the text.

Michael Sayeau explores the workers’ inefficiency in terms of unemployment, arguing that in *Heart of Darkness* this term does not simply denote lack of work. Rather, it is “a term that lies in the broken middle between work and idleness, a structural feature of modern economic life that haunts those who hold a position as palpably as those who lack one.” The novel, he insightfully argues, creates a world “in which consciousness itself—as well as its privileged

literary home, the novel—have been served notice as too inefficient to survive the irrational rationalization that characterizes capitalist modernity” (338). Sayeau’s essay illuminates the novel’s critique of the destructive effects of industrial capitalism upon imperial and colonial consciousness, and the genres associated with imperial modernity, but his premise rests upon an underexplored material dimension that warrants further analysis. Labor’s formative effect upon consciousness is a basic tenant of Marxist scholarship, and scholars working in these traditions can analyze literary representations of psychology in order to make arguments about the influence of economic forces upon artistic production. Furthermore, in the context of European empire, working the labor force to the point of collapse indicates the entrenched devaluation of certain kinds of consciousness, racially, culturally, and otherwise. But I would add that consciousness depends upon the workings of bodies, which in turn must be fueled; and the *how* of that process is also embedded in Conrad’s text. Sayeau concludes from his study that consciousness is no longer valued as a rational process, but the fact that consciousness—especially European consciousness—is often incapable of enlightened or rational functioning is important as well. In sum, it is not just that consciousness has been deemed inefficient by capitalist modernity. It has already been shaped by modernity’s irrational and inefficient way of maintaining and refueling itself in this specific historical moment. To articulate this premise using Conrad’s own culinary metaphor, “the cooking of sanity” is no longer possible because of the aberrant values and unbalanced material systems that it relies upon for its existence.

The presence of food in the novel clearly shapes the types of consciousness that are portrayed. Conrad’s work operates by the same fundamental assumptions that Claude Levi-Strauss makes in *The Raw and the Cooked*, that cooking is a universal phenomenon; and that by deciding what is edible and what isn’t, humans express their understanding of the distinctions

between nature and culture (145-46). When the white sailors toss the native crew's rotting hippo meat off the steamship, they assume the meat is inedible and therefore misread its significance as part of a different social order. Perhaps the sailors are encountering an unfamiliar method of preserving meat, for example; or perhaps the notion of preserving animal flesh is not customary among the native crew. Cooking—or in this case *not* cooking—creates an interface between culture and nature that invites our anthropological evaluation. Rather than to devalue the native's menu, Marlow's presentation of the incident is meant to condemn the Europeans' inability to either perceive or value such complexity.

Does Conrad mean for us to understand people “are” what they eat? If so, does that mean that he regards African cultural consciousness as “rotten,” “starving,” and “impoverished”? The depiction of native identity is a contentious topic in Conrad scholarship, and the food items in the novel illustrate these debates. One branch of Conrad's reception history, most notably articulated by Chinua Achebe, characterizes Conrad's depictions of Africans as racist. Especially in this novel, they are Spivakian subalterns—wordless, shapeless figures who do not seem to populate a real place that is home to real, robust cultures of people. They are just “limbs or rolling eyes,” without speech, agency or other human qualities that are bestowed upon European characters (Achebe 785). After Marlow sees the emaciated conditions of the Congolese workers at the Station, he says he “found nothing else to do but to offer [one dying boy] one of my good Swede's ship's biscuits I had in my pocket. The fingers closed slowly on it and held—there was no other movement” (*HD* 20). Achebe would argue that this nameless, faceless entity is only a synecdochal finger, lacking in animation, much less agency or identity. (Even more egregious is Marlow's comment that cannot even tell if the person attached to the finger is a man or a boy because, as he flippantly remarks, “with them it is so hard to tell” [*ibid.*]). It is impossible to

deny these problematic, at times overtly racist, overtones. Yet it is equally true that this scene confronts us with a powerful depiction of the macabre devouring of a workforce's vitality and therefore is also supposed to provoke our revulsion at colonial control. Marlow's depictions of racial otherness have important "epistemological limitations," but the narration's "failure to comprehend African cultural realities is... essential to and even generative of Conrad's critique of Western imperialism" (Moses 68 n2). For modern audiences, depictions of racist Western views can in fact generate important critiques of historical injustice.

The withered, emaciated presence of these workers in the novel is the result of the ruthless imperial control which dehumanizes its subjects, and the critique is reinforced by the ironic offer of the "good" European biscuit. That the "unfamiliar" food item is ambiguously accepted by the unmoving hand deepens the irony: one biscuit cannot feed one starving man, much less a starving workforce. It cannot repair a fundamentally exploitative arrangement, nor can it provide any degree of compensation for permanent conditions of injustice. Marlow's gesture symbolizes the prospect by which European ideas of "goodness" are in fact enfeebling a population, first by dominating a native workforce with inappropriate regulatory apparatuses (intense labor, foreign contracts, and foreign meals are all mentioned), then depleting their resources—and, finally, expecting to cure them with a tardy, token offer of assistance. If Conrad's representations of colonial subjects seem less than human, I would argue that the fact of their starving bodies demands an explanation. The worthless biscuit is hardly a conciliatory gesture that Conrad would expect us to accept, so why can we not read their purgatorial condition as a critique of imperialism's inability to nourish or sustain human life more broadly?

Furthermore, European cuisine produces neither a more enlightened nor rationally functioning social order. Following Kurtz's death, Marlow's subsequent illness and return to

Brussels is told at breakneck speed. It is hazy and incomplete, and includes a curious passage attacking European cookery:<sup>98</sup>

I found myself back in the sepulchral city resenting the sight of people hurrying through the streets to filch a little money from each other, to devour their infamous cookery, to gulp their unwholesome beer, to dream their insignificant and silly dreams. They trespassed upon my thoughts. They were intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating pretence, because I felt so sure they could not possibly know the things I knew.  
(*HD* 88-89)

Watt reads this scene for its curious reversal of motifs of light and darkness, noting that the category of light in the “sepulchral city” has changed its signification. It is “degraded to a cold and artificial brightness—it can no longer combat darkness...whiteness has become some diseased albino mutation, capable, no doubt, of producing the cold phosphorescent glow of idealism, but sick and pallid indeed” (251). One could say the same about the functioning of cuisine as a vessel of transmitting “sick and pallid” mutations of social values. With its accusations of “pretence,” intrusion, and “trespass” on the part of unwitting fellow Europeans going about their daily lives, this important passage anticipates both the scene of Jim’s narration of the Patna incident in the Malabar hotel, as well as the Assistant Commissioner’s dinner in a London Italian restaurant, both of which take place in restaurants whose patrons and cuisines are associated with superficiality and deceit. Even for a man who is in the grips of culture shock and trying to shake a tropical fever, singling out Belgian cuisine for its “infamy” seems an odd choice. To resent the quotidian ignorance of European daily life and to condemn its hypocritical values seem like measured reactions for Marlow. But he has just come from a trip during which

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<sup>98</sup>The “infamous” cookery in question is Belgian by implication.

the only nourishment was rotten hippo meat and hardtack. Are these more honest foods, presumably, than the “bourgeois kitchen” produces? The above passage suggests that, as Marlow denounces Belgian cookery—so, too, does he detest the social values that it has produced. If African identity is starved in this novel, then European identity is malignant. It “intrudes”; it “trespasses”; what it provides is “unwholesome.”

Marlow’s resentment of European cookery is a symptom of the radical skepticism of the imperial project that he has developed from his experiences in the tropics. In his analysis of *Heart of Darkness*, Moses argues that the topoi of “radical alienation” and “emotional disorientation” (44) demonstrates the significance of the geographical periphery of the British Empire, not just its urban centers, in the emergence of modernist aesthetics. “The paradigmatic Conradian scene of the imperial encounter,” he writes, is not one of mastery, as in contemporary imperial romances; instead, it is an experience “of *disorientation*” in which an assumed European omnipotence is “overthrown, confused, panicked, frustrated, and turned back on itself” (45). To extend Moses’s analysis, one should view the periphery more concretely as part of an imperial metabolism that is predicated upon resource extraction. The colonial space is not just a remote territory; it is also used to supplement, to grow, and to nourish another part of the world.

The apparatus of colonial trade is the source of much of Marlow’s disorientation. When conceived as a metabolic system, imperialism seems to disorient the Western characters as much as it enfeebles the colonial workforce. For instance, Marlow is completely unnerved when he sees some worsted tied around one of the starving worker’s necks. The image of a “bit of white thread from across the sea” is set in stark relief against the man’s “black” skin, and he struggles with the task of imagining the commodity’s full trajectory back to the jungle (*HD* 20). The string is a crucial reminder of the “trivial products into which the very vitality of African lives are

being converted” (MacDuffie 83) in order to amass far more substantial European prosperity than the random bits of detritus that trickle back down the river from the sea. But it also produces a kind of emotional vertigo, wherein Marlow is forced to reckon with the cause of so much suffering. The string, a product of a prosperous culture, has returned to disturb Marlow’s journey through the region of “sunken eyes” and “black bones,” reminding him of the true source of the immiseration around him.

To borrow Marlow’s word, the text presents the “infamous” reality of colonial exchange, whereby those who are immiserated and those who immiserate them are all less wholesome from the connection. *Heart of Darkness* does not clearly illustrate an opposition between “sane” European cookery and a “diet of unreason” within a subjugated colonial population, and it would shortchange the text to argue that Conrad’s depictions of Africans should be dismissed as products of a white dominant culture. To be horrified at the Company Station’s working conditions is to understand the magnitude of his critique of the artificiality, malignancy, and duplicity of the imperial project. Not only is the security, good taste, and “sanity” of “civilized” cookery openly challenged by Marlow’s declaration of its fraudulence; it is also permeated by the vague fears and haunting doubts of its own capacity to reason and rule. An examination of diet throughout this novel, from the remote tropics to prosperous urban centers, exposes the profound influence that alimentary concepts had on Conrad’s depictions of the ideological disturbances and contradictions of empire.



## The After-Dinner Tale and Negative Narration: *Lord Jim*

[The chops] brought forcibly to one's mind the night of ages when the primeval man, evolving the first rudiments of cookery from his dim consciousness, scorched lumps of flesh at a fire of sticks in the company of other good fellows; then, gorged and happy, sat him back among the gnawed bones to tell his artless tales of experience—the tales of hunger and hunt... (“Falk: A Reminiscence”)

Along with his descriptions of hippo meat, biscuits, and beer halls, the forms that Marlow’s tales take develops Conrad’s critique of imperial food trading, for their disorienting narrative structures are attempts to grapple with the surreality of the material arrangement of nutritional resources: some here, some there, the designs and causes of distribution remaining mysteriously out of sight. This section will argue first, that satiety is the origin point of all of Marlow’s tales; and secondly, the materiality of the meal is at least a partial source of all of their various omissions, delays, and interruptions. Like Conrad’s other narrators, Marlow endeavors to create a distributive system of social narrative. As Tracy Seeley argues, building an interpretive community through storytelling is crucial to Conrad’s paradoxical sense of the world as at once hopelessly lost and also redemptive, with his “trademark idealism and skepticism locked in familiar tension” (496). But Marlow’s tales are characterized by formal properties that inhibit telling as much as they enable, suffering from distributive problems that correspond to material problems in the imperial food system’s totality.

*Lord Jim* and *Heart of Darkness* were in fact conceived together. Conrad began Jim’s story, then put it down to write *Heart of Darkness* before picking it back up again.<sup>99</sup> The longer novel more concretely envisions exchange in terms of the food trades, especially in terms of the transpacific livestock trades described in Chapter Two. The novel also stages its primary

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<sup>99</sup>Conrad “assert[ed] that the three [Marlow] tales belonged together,” despite some variation in theme and approach (Watt 269).

narrative turns in conversations that Marlow has over and after meals in cafes, dining rooms, and at sea. Not coincidentally, *Lord Jim* relies more heavily upon negative narration to tell Jim's tale.

§

Critics have long explored the origin, nature, and effects of Conrad's narrative strategies. Moses suggests that Conrad's highly mediated narrative techniques originate in geographical and temporal experiences of remoteness; his shifts, silences, and delays are "*the concrete manifestations of the systems of social organization and communication that prevail at the peripheries of empire*" (62; original emphasis). For Conrad scholars and modernist scholars more broadly, this claim challenges the assumption that artistic experimentation in the early twentieth century was predominantly a product of urban, or urbane, experience. Marlow's sea travels are frequent and his routes are complex, and his fragmented tales have the qualities of patchiness, sketchiness, and delay that one would associate with nautical transmissions of knowledge. The "anachronous flow of information on the imperial periphery," whether by cable, word of mouth, or other forms of transit, can explain the way in which we as readers are asked to experience Jim's story (63-65).

Marxist literary critics have summoned Conrad's negative narration as evidence of capital's destructive effects upon consciousness and cultural production. In *Criticism and Ideology*, Terry Eagleton posits that all of Conrad's novels are

alive with subversive negation of its organic unity. At center of each work is a resonant silence, a central absence. This is the enigma of Kurtz, Jim, Nostromo, the dark brooding passivity of James Wait, the unseen explosion and mysterious silence of idiot Stevie... these absences are determinate, represent hollows scooped out by collision or exclusion of meanings; they are the limits of the Conradian ideology. (137)

In the final phrase, he means a fundamentally conservative worldview that must remain “obscure,” lest it be ruptured by events that challenge its stability. Conrad’s works, Eagleton’s analysis suggests, can only critique the status quo so much before they threaten their own existence. This political quandary returns as a problem of representation, hence the absence of crucial events like Jim’s jump, or Verloc’s bomb in *The Secret Agent*, because they suggest “cataclysmic transformation, an unpredictable leap in an organically evolving Nature that the novel’s conservative ideology can only accommodate as impenetrable mystery” (138).

Analyzing Conrad’s negative narration in service of his transnational study *Our Conrad: Constituting American Modernity* (2010), Peter L. Mallios organizes Conrad’s techniques into what he calls a “secret theory,” in which what begins as truth in a novel is transposed “into removed, blocked, central and strategically elusive character sites” like James Wait, Kurtz, Lord Jim, Karain, and Nostromo. These characters exist at “a profound perceptual remove” from their narrative observers, who are forced into a mode of expression riddled with delays, obstructions, and difficulty accessing whatever robustness constitutes their subjectivities (240-41). The implication, which Mallios suggests is a foundational modernist technique, is that “absent character centers” reflect, and critique, the fundamental impossibility of language to communicate precise meaning. For Mallios’ project, this is a significant insight because such an approach helps explain Conrad’s appeal to the post-war generation of American expatriate modernist writers in the 1920s and 1930s.

Ian Watt’s *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* (1979) analyzes specific types of negative narration in Conrad’s early career. Drawing upon the work of Gérard Genette, Watt examines the prevalence of anachrony in Conrad’s work, which he uses rather than anachronism to indicate gaps between the *histoire* and the *recit* of a tale—that is, “between the story and the

report,” or between the original sequence of events and their recreation in the form of a narrative (294). He asserts that the uses of prolepsis and analepsis are important stylistic features of *Heart of Darkness* that are then further developed in *Lord Jim*.<sup>100</sup> Prolepsis indicates anticipation, sometimes in the prefiguring of a future event in the narrative, or also in the report of an event at a point earlier than it occurs in time (*OED*). The first chapter of *Lord Jim* is proleptic, for instance, since it anticipates Jim’s life after the Patna crisis had been resolved (Watt 295). More important to my analysis is analepsis, a term that refers to the act of retrospection. Rather than understanding reverses in chronology as flashbacks (or accelerations as flashes-forward), Conrad’s use of anachrony is slower and more thoroughly developed (Watt 295). It is also thematically resonant—that is, a device that suggests continuity between a novel’s form and its content. Both Marlow’s narrative of Jim’s life and Jim’s narrative of the Patna incident occur analeptically. Moreover, both follow a meal. It has yet to be noted that Marlow’s tales, preoccupied though they are with conditions of human depravity and deprivation, are almost always told on full stomachs.<sup>101</sup> I would argue that this paradox, among other factors, is responsible for the puzzling delays, reversals, ellipses, and coded silences of these texts.

Scholars have explored the novel’s focus on trade and exchange, diligently tracing the ripple effects of connections and severances of ties throughout the narrative.<sup>102</sup> Such ties are

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<sup>100</sup>There are other techniques to examine. Moses’s analysis supplements Watt’s list, for instance, to include “shifting levels of interpolated and mediated narrative, fragmentary and elliptical dialogue, generic hybridization and modulation, the proliferation of abstract or impressionistic language— particularly in scenic description, and the work of involuntary memory (a special employment of anachrony)” (53). All of these features encourage beneficial close readings of the Marlow texts (involuntary memory, for instance, would help classify *Lord Jim* as an elegiac romance, in which the conquering hero of a foreign land is brought back to life by the pensive squire-narrator [Bruffee Ch.1]), but I focus my analysis on Watt’s features only.

<sup>101</sup>Conrad often deploys the after-dinner sailor’s tale—the period of settling down in between the day’s final meal and the transition to night duty. “Falk” is also told this way.

<sup>102</sup>Juhász reads the link between belonging and trade as a “central and permanent concern” in Conrad’s life and fiction. The logic of exchange, he notes, can go both ways in his body of work: money can affect one’s rank, but social standing can also increase one’s trading capacity (ix). Whereas “Typhoon,” “The Secret Sharer,” *Under*

often at once commercial and social. For instance, Jim does not go live on Chester's guano island, to oversee the harvesting of the fertilizer, because Marlow refuses to pass the information on to Jim. Marlow justifies his position by telling us almost immediately in a brief aside that the island was soon after destroyed by a hurricane. We witness the power of the narrative voice to precariously arrange connections, or else refuse them. It is always attempting to connect the far-flung, "lost corner[s] of the world" (*Lord Jim* 179),<sup>103</sup> through letters, like that of Jim's father who reports the banal events of daily life to a son he is unaware no longer lives; through commercial exchanges, even deals that fall through, like the crooked cattle trade deal in which Marlow refuses to enter (123); or through conversations, as Jewel and Tam' Itam have with Stein when they report the final events of Jim's life. Marlow's retelling of Jim's story becomes a global network, beginning with a trial in one small port, then widening to Patusan and the wider Pacific rim before being transmitted, via casual conversation, back through the ranks of European sailors—the living cargo of a story of "one of us" moving from ship to ship, across the globe (*LJ* 32).

Through the act of narrating, Marlow fashions communities of listeners in order to counteract the otherwise bleak, atomistic conditions of a life at sea. Seeley illustrates that the formation of these "interpretive communities" through storytelling mitigates against the bleakness of an atomistic universe. Though these community may rest upon a "shared illusion" of audience, threatened as it is by an inevitable dispersal, "artistic consciousness and commitment to others... sustains meaning by dispersing the authority of the text among many"

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*Western Eyes* and "The Duel" are all texts that concentrate on how "displaced characters sign, or refuse to sign, their respective social contracts," *Lord Jim* examines "the changes and transitions that take place within an already established order of trade." Jim is a character who is "dissatisfied with [his] current standing and therefore attempts to switch to a new economic model" (xiv).

<sup>103</sup>Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*. Oxford: OUP, 1999. All citations refer to this edition, which will hereafter be abbreviated *LJ* and appear parenthetically in the text.

(507). The act of telling “holds despair at bay,” resulting in neither romantic transcendence of the subject (Jim) nor the complete despair over his failure, yet the community is “[bound] together in the ongoing search for meaning” (508). This, she concludes, is the essence of Jim’s romance, which Marlow kindles in the minds of the men who sit quietly, smoking cigars, after dinner one evening.

The meal is the vehicle for establishing, and then growing, the tale’s interpretive network. Eating is the reason why Jim’s tale exists, why it is being told, and how it is passed on, from ship to ship and port to port. The first four chapters are told by an unidentified narrator who relates, via prolepsis, Jim’s backstory. Then, he reports, Marlow is prompted to take over the narration:

...later on, many times, in distant parts of the world, Marlow showed himself willing to remember Jim, to remember him at length, in detail and audibly.

Perhaps it would be after dinner, on a verandah draped in motionless foliage and crowned with flowers, in the deep dusk speckled by fiery cigar-ends. The elongated bulk of each cane-chair harboured a silent listener. Now and then a small red glow would move abruptly, and expanding light up the fingers of a languid hand, part of a face in profound repose, or flash a crimson gleam into a pair of pensive eyes overshadowed by a fragment of an unruffled forehead; and with the very first word uttered Marlow’s body, extended at rest in the seat, would become very still, as though his spirit had winged its way back into the lapse of time and were speaking through his lips from the past. (*LJ* 24-25)

The after-dinner scene, with its cane chairs and cigars, transports Marlow into a frame of mind that can conjure a distant past. The still interval also creates an opening for Jim’s romantic

history to be heard, received, and understood. An evening meal enables the transformation, as he explains:

...what I have done to be thus favoured I want to know. I declare I am as full of my own concerns as the next man, and I have as much memory as the average pilgrim in this valley, so you see I am not particularly fit to be a receptacle of confessions. Then why? Can't tell—unless it be to make time pass away after dinner. Charley, my dear chap, your dinner was extremely good, and in consequence these men here look upon a quiet rubber as a tumultuous occupation. They wallow in your good chairs and think to themselves, 'Hang exertion. Let that Marlow talk.'

Talk! So be it. And it's easy enough to talk of Master Jim, after a good spread, two hundred feet above the sea-level, with a box of decent cigars handy, on a blessed evening of freshness and starlight that would make the best of us forget we are only on sufferance here... Of course there are men here and there to whom the whole of life is like an after-dinner hour with a cigar; easy, pleasant, empty, perhaps enlivened by some fable of strife to be forgotten before the end is told—before the end is told—even if there happens to be any end to it (*LJ* 26-27).

I have quoted this passage at length to underscore the importance of satiety in creating the space for Jim's tale, not only its telling but also in forming the network of interpreters that will consume and transport it. The satisfaction that Charley's "good spread" has generated makes the men unwilling to perform their chores, Marlow jokes, and so sees his opportunity to act. The interval enables him to be the chosen bearer of the tale, and it is clear that he is the trusted person to tell it. He is not a man whose "easy" life has passed like a pleasant after-dinner hour, and therefore he has the cultural authority to tell this difficult story so it is not "forgotten." It does not

flow forth as leisurely as this preamble might suggest, however, and the interruption of dashes and the repetition of the prepositional phrase in his justification's final sentence anticipates the eventual fragmentation of the tale by second- and third-hand sources patched together.

I want to examine two significant moments in which the flow of Jim's story is marred by sudden disorientation. First, Marlow's tale is interspersed with large parts of Jim's own voice in chapters 7-12, when the young man's account of Patna incident is reported secondhand to the sailors. The narrative form here is a story within story—and it is after-dinner tale within an after-dinner tale. In these chapters, Jim speaks late into night as he and Marlow drink in the Malabar Hotel in Bangkok. Though Jim intends to speak with Marlow privately, the public space of the dining room creates an unintended audience. While Jim is yelling, disturbing other diners, spilling cognac, and being calmed by waiters, Marlow is aware that they are being watched by “globetrotting” diners whom he finds despicable (57). He complains about their presence, and we are reminded of the younger Marlow, recovering from his encounter with Kurtz and complaining bitterly about Belgian food and beer. In the Malabar, he says,

...the big dining-room of the hotel was more than half full of people with a-hundred-pounds-round-the-world tickets in their pockets. There were married couples looking domesticated and bored with each other in the midst of their travels; there were small parties and large parties, and lone individuals dining solemnly or feasting boisterously, but all thinking, conversing, joking, or scowling as was their wont at home; and just as intelligently receptive of new impressions as their trunks upstairs. Henceforth they would be labelled as having passed through this and that place, and so would be their luggage. They would cherish this distinction of their persons, and preserve the gummed tickets on their portmanteaus as documentary evidence, as the only permanent trace of their



improving enterprise...now and then a girl's laugh would be heard, as innocent and empty as her mind, or, in a sudden hush of crockery, a few words in an affected drawl from some wit embroidering for the benefit of a grinning tableful the last funny story of shipboard scandal. Two nomadic old maids, dressed up to kill, worked acrimoniously through the bill of fare, whispering to each other with faded lips, wooden-faced and bizarre, like two sumptuous scarecrows (*LJ* 56-57).

These diners are not a Greek chorus, analyzing the action or directing our gaze, but their ghostly group presence has an important function: to highlight Jim as “one of us,” not a tourist but a local, but someone who belongs there. In an unfortunate way, Jim has left his quiet corner of the developed, wealthy world where nothing happens and no one is ever tested. Although Marlow seems to worry he cannot return there, Jim’s isolation is a positive distinction. Jim is not a fraud, like Belgian beer and cookery or the diners in the Malabar. In other words, he is not bourgeois copy of an authentic romantic adventurer. His difference from the diners confirms that he is the genuine article.

The Malabar’s dining room is a culinary setting that collides disparate spaces of earth, collapsing distances between the charlatan values of a European “home” and the dramatic but pure “lost” corner in the Pacific. It is a strangely elegant place, not seedy, like the hospital where pink elephants dance around detoxing patients or Chester’s doomed guano island. Marlow’s bogus cattle deal could never take place here. The corrupt aspects of oceanic exchange, all present elsewhere in the novel, do not seep into this elegant place where Jim has an interval of safety, free from the narrow confines of European contracts, licenses, and blind, unexamined values like “duty.” Both men are looking for an alternative space, and the Malabar provides the right interval for Jim to tell his own tale and be heard by Marlow, an audience who is himself, in

the right mood, disenchanted enough with “home” to receive romantic tales without skepticism. The luxury setting of the international jet-setting hordes provides this safe place while also inviting the scathing satire of the more seasoned, worldly sailors.

To increase the diffuseness of the after-dinner tale even further, the twelfth chapter itself is then interrupted by another conversation in yet another dining room. This one takes place at a future time, thousands of miles to the south. Jim does not finish narrating the Patna incident after he jumps. He was unable to witness how the Patna was rescued, having already deserted the ship, so Marlow must reconstruct this scene himself. The narration continues by blending the public records from the trial with a private conversation Marlow later has with a French captain whose gunboat had come upon the abandoned Patna, and who had remained on it until it was towed to shore. The reader is aware that Jim is no longer speaking, but Marlow delays identifying both the source and location of his conversation with that source until after the story is almost completed. We do not even see Jim leaving the Malabar. The hotel’s patio swiftly dissolves into a café in Sydney, where the narrative reveals the rest of the tale to Marlow, who is drinking a sherry and listening to the French captain tell what it was like to come across the silent boat full of pilgrims and tow it to shore.<sup>104</sup>

The second major narrative interruption appears in Chapter 21. After Marlow has related the first part of Jim’s tale, the details of the Patna incident, he interrupts himself and reminds us again of the tale’s culinary context. He pauses at length to fret that his audience has lost patience for the lengthy story.<sup>105</sup> The men have been sated, he remembers, and they may have lost

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<sup>104</sup>For being so cranky about culinary institutions, Marlow takes a hedonist’s pleasure in his food and drink.

<sup>105</sup>When *Lord Jim* first appeared in print, this was a common critical objection. “Who could sit for so long a tale?” complained one reviewer in *Blackwood’s*, to which an annoyed Conrad replied that it was entirely possible for a ship’s crew to fill a night talking. This seems especially likely after a good meal, judging from Marlow’s glowing praise of Charley’s cooking and his subsequent endurance.

interest. Unlike Jim, they are obviously satisfied with the quotidian “daily bread” that accompanies the everyday life of work and trade (*LJ* 142). He worries that their satiety will put them in the wrong frame of mind to evaluate Jim’s unconventional character, which never seems to be satisfied. Marlow expresses some ambivalence about Jim. While he asserts that the young man had “achieved greatness,” he also wonders whether his listeners, and by extension the novel’s readers, will have the inclination to agree:

...the thing would be dwarfed in the telling, or rather in the hearing. Frankly, it is not my words that I mistrust but your minds. I could be eloquent were I not afraid you fellows had starved your imaginations to feed your bodies. I do not mean to be offensive; it is respectable to have no illusions—and safe—and profitable—and dull. Yet you too in your time must have known the intensity of life, that light of glamour created in the shock of trifles, as amazing as the glow of sparks struck from a cold stone—and as short-lived, alas! (163)

Jim’s romantic tale is told to an audience who has sacrificed their sense of romance for a “dull,” sated existence, implying that to privilege the rational capacity to sustain life must in turn starve the imaginative capacity. While acknowledging the inevitable passing of romantic sensibility into a state of maturity, Marlow also articulates sorrow for its loss using romantic language. This metafictional turn expresses Marlow’s, and by extension Conrad’s, apprehension over the reception of a character who is romantic by an audience who has largely foregone imaginative wonder, and the tale must arrest its own motion before it continues. As it approaches the romantic interval in Patusan, the more imaginative end of the tale—scrapped together from bits and pieces of reportage—will be forced to adopt a new form to accommodate its thinness.

The redemptive Patusan interval<sup>106</sup> is ended by a “yellow skeleton” named Brown and his starving crew. These men are European outlaws who invade the native ecosystem of Patusan, which is otherwise sustainable and whole. Patusan has been an important locale for exotic foodstuffs, such as pepper, edible birds’ nests, but it remains insulated from the larger systems of global trade. The devastating exchange between native ecosystem and European invaders, initiated by starving pirates, results in the destruction of the native metabolic system. Brown and his men shoot the chief’s son, gutting the local social organization of its power, and Jim pays for the breach with his life. As Jameson remarks, the first 100 pages of *Lord Jim* hold together like its own self-contained creation before “a tangible ‘break’” in form alters it radically (206-7). The thin end of Jim’s tale is told third-hand. Jim’s fateful confrontation with the pirate Brown is left to a series of letters from Marlow that report conversations, and these shifts in narration are imbricated in Patusan’s unbalanced condition. After Marlow leaves, the rest of tale is an absence filled in through letters from Marlow to an unknown recipient. Jim’s death, the result of Brown’s siege, is narrated in Marlow’s letters that even then are a retelling of eye-witness testimony; they contain about as much truth, he says, as the area “under a cloud” (*LJ* 303). There is a marked decline in the thickness of detail in the telling compared to beginning of novel. The most dramatic omissions are present when narrative tries to account for the conflicts caused by starvation and death. Then, Marlow’s voice is replaced by a series of letters that must fill in gaps and flesh out the rest of the tale.

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<sup>106</sup>I mean “redemptive” in reference to popular expectations for romance. I do not think Jim is redeemed; nor, Seeley argues, did Conrad, whose critique of imperialism is incompatible with Jim’s self-image as “tuan,” white savior (500-503). A popular audience, however, would have understood that he had been given a second chance.

If the mealtime story is the cultural surface of the phenomenon of eating—the set of rules, manners, customs, that define a community—then the meal itself is the base and a symptom of the trade that makes it possible. Jim’s narration of the Patna incident is saturated with the language of financial commerce—it is a bad deal, a broken promise, a bad certificate, violation of contract. The text also conjures the burgeoning transpacific meat and livestock trades when describing both Jim’s transgression and the administrative apparatus that handles it. The novel’s diction often signals the presence of this system, but the formal effect of the skipper’s presence also demonstrates the depth of the connection.

The novel’s diction conjures the presence of the empire’s successful transoceanic shipping trades of animal cargo and meat. The Patna’s passengers, a group of pilgrims traveling to Mecca, seem to hold promise as vivid characters but are then quickly degraded to a mass of animals by the ship’s staff as soon as they board the ship:

[The pilgrims] came covered with dust, with sweat, with grime, with rags—the strong men at the head of family parties, the lean old men pressing forward without hope of return; young boys with fearless eyes glancing curiously, shy little girls with tumbled long hair; the timid women muffled up and clasping to their breasts, wrapped in loose ends of soiled head-cloths, their sleeping babies, the unconscious pilgrims of an exacting belief.

**'Look at dese cattle,'** said the German skipper to his new chief mate. (11; my emphasis added)

The metaphor of “cattle” is significant in the late 1890s, when the manuscript of *Lord Jim* first appears in serial form. The transpacific cattle and dead meat trades was a decade into its peak. Advances in speed had made it possible to carry animals longer distances, and dry refrigeration

had made longer and longer routes of transport possible.<sup>107</sup> Further allusions to animal cargo appear as Marlow sketches in details of the Patna incident. The morning after the crash, a French gunboat comes upon the abandoned ship. Marlow describes the first glimpse of the moored ship and its eerily silent passengers:

There was an ensign, union down, flying at her main gaff (the serang had the sense to make a signal of distress at daylight); but the cooks were preparing the food in the cooking-boxes forward as usual. The decks were packed **as close as a sheep-pen**: there were people perched all along the rails, jammed on the bridge in a solid mass; hundreds of eyes stared, and not a sound was heard when the gunboat ranged abreast, as if all that multitude of lips had been sealed by a spell. (*LJ* 99-100; my emphasis added)

Marlow's account of the rescue is an imagined recollection inflected by the French crewman at the café in Sydney.<sup>108</sup> There is no joyful celebration to greet the rescue; instead, the eight hundred pilgrims are completely silent, like stunned sheep. Here and elsewhere, they have equivalent agency to other kinds of live cargo. All we know about their onboard experience is that their proximity evokes a comparison with a "sheep-pen," a concentrated agricultural operation, and that they are fed on a schedule by cooks preparing eight hundred "cooking-boxes." There are no dining quarters, no descriptions of meal times, no tables and chairs or dinner services. Conrad's other records of ship meals may be simple affairs, but there are often tables, cooks, conversations, and other observable evidence of eating as a social or cultural act. The "cooking-boxes" suggest a highly regulated feeding system designed to sustain life without

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<sup>107</sup>Chapter Two provides an extended description of the history of the transpacific cattle trades.

<sup>108</sup>I do still wonder whether it is Marlow or the Frenchman who inserts the language of animal husbandry into these passages.

culinary fanfare. They do not bear the same cultural markings as meals and therefore mark the pilgrims as a living but subhuman element on the ship.

Several characters connected to the bureaucracy of the shipping industry share such animal attributes and are associated with livestock. The skinny Portuguese “half-caste” clerk who assists the head of the Bangkok office, is described as a parasitic figure who takes foodstuffs and animals as handouts. Marlow identifies him to his audience by reminding them he’s the one who is “always on the hop to get something from the shipmasters in the way of eatables—a piece of salt pork, a bag of biscuits, a few potatoes, or what not. One voyage, I recollect, I tipped him a live sheep out of the remnant of my sea-stock...” (*LJ* 28). Marlow also introduces the Patna’s disgraced Skipper by recollecting that the presiding officer Archie Ruthvel mistook him for a pig’s head:

Ruthvel says he was giving [the clerk] a severe lecture—on official morality, I suppose—when he heard a kind of subdued commotion at his back, and turning his head he saw, in his own words, something round and enormous, resembling a sixteen-hundred-weight sugar-hogshead<sup>109</sup> wrapped in striped flannelette, up-ended in the middle of the large floor space in the office. He declares he was so taken aback that for quite an appreciable time he did not realise the thing was alive, and sat still wondering for what purpose and by what means that object had been transported in front of his desk... (*LJ* 28-29)

Devoid of context, the captain cannot tell he is staring at a living person. He sees only a flesh commodity that had mysteriously appeared in his office without an origin or a trace. When the screaming confrontation begins, Marlow retells the encounter in alimentary terms: “...they said, [Ruthvel] was sure to have somebody for breakfast. However, that morning he did not eat the

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<sup>109</sup>Pork can be rubbed with salt, sugar, or blends of other spices for preservation.

renegade, but, if I may be allowed to carry on the metaphor, chewed him up very small, so to speak, and—ah! ejected him again” (29-30). The bodily trope of eating accompanies the disgraceful transaction, the Skipper’s dressing down after his broken contract, and again Marlow’s report is infused with the language of eating.

The metaphoric association of the obese Skipper with an imported meat commodity is elaborately developed. Deprivation is only one part of this novel’s metabolism; other areas—of both the globe and the plot—are characterized by corpulence and excess. One of the most concrete signs of Conrad’s engagement with food appears in his motifs of thinness and corpulence as character traits. Biographers have speculated not only about his own his own health problems (included dyspepsia and various other stomach ailments) but also about his wife’s physique (“I married for quality and got quantity,” he is reported to have said about his relationship). Still other scholars have linked corpulence to the excesses of imperial prosperity, quite rightly. But states of obesity and thinness are also symptomatic of a metabolic system that is hard at work in the background of all of his novels. *Lord Jim* provides a vivid illustration of Conrad’s endeavors to depict the effect of uneven distribution in a system that consumes as well as produces.

The Skipper of the Patna is an extraordinary character, foul-tempered and more grotesquely obese than any of the Conrad’s public figures, bureaucrats, or anarchists: “You understand a man like that hasn’t the ghost of a chance when it comes to borrowing clothes,” quips Marlow (*LJ* 28). He is beastlike and speaks in “sulky grunt[s]” (16), described variously as a giant hog, a tortoise in his shell, and a baby elephant. At one point, he is simply platonically obese, “like a clumsy effigy of a man cut out of a block of fat” (17). But his animality is often based upon attributes of the meat trades. When he enters the shipping office to be confronted



with his desertion, he displays “some sort of animal instinct [that] made him hang back and snort like a frightened bullock” (28); his fists are as “dumpy and red as a lump of raw meat” (34); and Marlow refers to him as a “vast carcass” and a “thick carcass” (31), when he exits the courthouse.

This transoceanic man-beast has no nationality, though Marlow wryly speculates: “‘You Englishmen are all rogues,’ went on my patriotic Flensburg or Stettin Australian,” he says. “I really don't recollect now what decent little port on the shores of the Baltic was defiled by being the nest of that precious bird” (31). The Skipper sneers at English codes of conduct and law when he loses his certificate, claiming that there is always “room” for him in places across the sea: “Bah! the Pacific is big, my friendt. You damned Englishmen can do your worst; I know where there's plenty room for a man like me: I am well aguaindt in Apia, in Honolulu, in . . .” He paused reflectively, while without effort I could depict to myself the sort of people he was “aguaindt” with in those places...(ibid.). The Skipper is mysteriously unloaded, without context, in the port town; he has no apparent origin; his expansive, animal body is explicably transported across oceans. When Marlow describes both the entrance and exit of the treacherous crew to Bangkok, he inflects his descriptions with the language of the food trades. Upon his first sight of them, he declares:

There they were, sure enough, three of them as large as life, and one much larger of girth than any living man has a right to be, just landed with a good breakfast inside of them from an outward-bound Dale Line steamer that had come in about an hour after sunrise. There could be no mistake; I spotted the jolly skipper of the Patna at the first glance: the fattest man in the whole blessed tropical belt clear round that good old earth of ours. (27)

The Skipper is all girth, and his nautical trajectory encircles the Earth. Conrad's vivid imagery of this indecorous, satin-striped obesity has an economic root that the technical mastery of geography has made possible. When The Skipper leaves in a tiny gharry cart pulled by one small pony, the language describing his escape suggests the transportation of a beast across the sea:

His thick carcass trembled on its legs that were like a pair of pillars; it trembled from head to foot... He went off in a resolute waddle to the gharry and began to jerk at the door-handle with such a blind brutality of impatience that I expected to see the whole concern overturned on its side, pony and all. The driver, shaken out of his meditation over the sole of his foot, displayed at once all the signs of intense terror, and held with both hands, looking round from his box at this vast carcass forcing its way into his conveyance... [The Skipper] roared at him to be off, to go on. Where? Into the Pacific, perhaps... To Apia? To Honolulu? He had 6000 miles of tropical belt to disport himself in... The Pacific is indeed big; but whether he found a place for a display of his talents in it or not, the fact remains he had flown into space like a witch on a broomstick. (34-35)

The Skipper's bovine massiveness is a reminder of the invisible systems of exchange that he supports as crewman on a ship. British ships transported "thick" carcasses in "vast" numbers around the Pacific as part of elaborate industrial networks between the southern and northern hemispheres. Food trade routes are girdles around a fat sphere, a cinching together of geography, economics, and cultures of taste; and *Lord Jim* is facilitated by the intervals of pause that they enabled, as well as enacted, around the dining tables of the empire.

### “By-Products” and Biopolitics in *The Secret Agent*

Lately, circumstances...have compelled me to strip this tale of the literary robe of indignant scorn it has cost me so much to fit on it decently, years ago. I have been forced, so to speak, to look upon its bare bones. I confess that it makes a grisly skeleton (*SA* “Author’s Note” xxxix).

*The Secret Agent* (1907) reinforces the premise that Conrad’s recurring use of negative narration is an immanent reflection of unevenness in metabolic nutrition exchange. The final section of this chapter contextualizes what other critics have noticed as corporeal excess and burgeoning cosmopolitanism to substantiate Conrad’s engagement with a metabolism of exchange that gluts its food supply in select locations. In this later novel, set entirely in London, government officials and anarchists alike are disturbed by the swarming crowds which the booming culinary economy seems to have generated in the city’s streets.

The recurring motifs of obesity and by-products—symptoms of the abundance of industrial foodstuffs—indicate the text’s anxiety over both the efficacy as well as the failure of new forms of governance to monitor daily life the imperial metropolis. *The Secret Agent* is also fascinated with an “excessive corporeality” (Haines 88), which indicates this text’s investigation of the new forms of political control that have emerged in response to burgeoning urban populations. Its distorted, circular narrative is a critique of an “overloaded cosmopolitanism,” which this text conceives as a spilling out of identities into multiple national and geopolitical categories (ibid. 90). Thus, this chapter ends by introducing the concept of biopolitics, a term loosely referring to trends in purpose of modern governance from the enforcement of order to the management of life and all of its concurrent networks of influence. The genealogy of biopolitics will be treated in greater detail in Chapter Four, where it is contextualized as a strategy of population management in the colonial space. Conrad’s novel demonstrates that, ironically, the culinary bounty produced by the food trades also produces the teeming masses that the state has

become responsible for managing. Furthermore, the cultural freedoms that dining out introduces into London life also generates categories of identity that defy social classification, a phenomenon that threatens the coherence of the imperial social body.

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Reportedly inspired by a conversation with the writer Ford Madox Ford about a real anarchist plan, *The Secret Agent* portrays double agent Adolf Verloc's failed attempt to blow up the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, London, by enlisting the help of his half-witted brother-in-law Stevie. Stevie trips and blows himself up instead of the target, and when Verloc's wife Winnie discovers that her brother has died in such a manner, she stabs her husband and kills herself. Stevie's death mirrors that of the original bomber, Martial Bourdin, who blew himself up just outside the Observatory in 1894. Although Bourdin was still alive when Observatory staff rushed outside and found his disemboweled body, he was unable to speak and died on the way to the hospital. The case was never resolved absolutely, and the ensuing speculation surrounding the investigation, especially in the newspapers, assumed that Bourdin had aimed for the Observatory but tripped on a tree root in the park and detonated the bomb accidentally.

A striking feature of this novel is the missing explosion at the center of the plot. Rather than a delay between *histoire* and *recit*, as is the case in *Lord Jim*, Stevie's doomed act is entirely absent from the narration. Like other instances of negative narration in Conrad's works, the Greenwich bomb has been the topic of much critical debate. Eagleton provides a crucial reference point when he explains the silence of Stevie's death as "that of the mystical which can be shown but not stated... [the] text speaks its contradictions rather than speaks of them." Furthermore, the Professor is "a graphic representation of the text itself, wired for self-consignment to the afterlife... *The Secret Agent* reveals the truth of itself only by ceaseless

process of self-detonation” (139). Drawing upon Franco Moretti’s study of the *bildungsroman* novel, Hanes writes that the absence of the bomb could be attributed to the central absence of any character that would have appeared in realist fiction. *The Secret Agent* “eradicate[es]” social characteristics that would otherwise have enabled someone to climb a social ladder, thereby resolving the social contradictions of capitalism (this, according to Moretti, is a premise upon which the *bildungsroman* relies). The result, according to Hanes, is a novel that feels “static,” as if it is missing “the events or intrigues that would give it dramatic gravity... It would appear that nothing happens because the typical actors have been voided, that nothing happens because there is no one to act” (92-93).

When considered alongside the recurring motif of obesity in this novel’s cast of characters, the omission of depictions of culinary consumption provides another compelling site of absence. London is the “devourer of world’s light,” and corpulence is a recurring motif; but few people dine in Conrad’s figuration of Edwardian London, a rich metropolis full of culinary fanfare. Michaelis eats only carrot sticks, and Verloc subsists upon meager helpings of boiled beef. These products are Spartan, but apart from the skeletal Assistant Commissioner, almost everyone is fat. Ironically, the thin, “foreign”-looking detective is the only character in the novel who makes use of the “bourgeois kitchen,” when he visits an Italian restaurant in Soho. One explanation for the frugal impression Conrad provides of London’s opulent larder is that the cultural side-effects of empire’s trade in foodstuffs are under fire in this novel rather than the nuts and bolts of the trading process itself. Exotic indulgence and culinary opulence as methods of engorging are largely concealed from view.

Carey James Mickalites draws upon Julia Kristeva’s analysis of abjectivity to connect excessive corporeality in *The Secret Agent* with prewar anxieties over the “embodied

subjectivity” of the British citizen (502). Other recent critics have provided readings of the novel’s anxieties about the unregulated threat of pornography and anarchism, or about shifts in domestic spaces and relations; and while Mickalites’s work relies on a similar privileging of the cultural margins as sites of anxiety, he argues that “normative” areas—for instance, middle-class identity, or the public sphere—are defined and shaped by their responses to marginal spaces (503). To paraphrase, the bodily whole is shaped not only by what constitutes it, but also by what it chooses to exclude or reject. What is expelled inhabits the realm of the “abject,” which is not simply defined by filth but also that which disturbs order and coherence. The “abject” contains whatever is “ejected beyond patriarchal social systems of rationality, order, and value” (502). *The Secret Agent*, Mickalites then argues, employs a recurring motif of corporeality when it wants to push beyond the “bourgeois limits of the Victorian symbolic order” (504). Abjection, it should be noted, is illustrated by obesity, as in the case of Verloc’s large body, but also by fragmentation, as in Stevie’s exploded bodily remains. Stevie’s body, which is scraped off the ground with a shovel, is so horrific a sight that it sends the otherwise stalwart Inspector Heat into waves of revulsion. The crime defies explanation and mystifies the police force. Even the other anarchists are disturbed by the unexpected news of the bomb. It simply cannot be rationalized to fit any of the known modes of thinking that accompany patterns of criminal behavior or violent dissent.

Mickalites’s work testifies to the presence of an abject undercurrent which, in a different context, also demonstrates the persistence of something within the body that generates abjection—that the bodily whole itself produces the very elements which cause disorder, thus predicating the rise of biopower as a solution to internal conflict. Haines observes that “if the narrator of the novel sets up a conflict between the symbolic order and corporeal existence, the

former never wholly captures the latter, a subversive corporeality persisting as surplus” (86). Put another way, the conflict of the text is not simply anarchism versus liberalism, but an internal conflict that exists inside liberalism as a coherent ideology. Conrad’s portrayal of anarchism, then, is not simply adopting a conservative ideology that is nostalgic for order. It is instead, struggling with the state’s inability to overcome the social ills that it itself produces and must therefore diagnose. When examining this conundrum, Haines suggests that reducing the text to either a political work or an assemblage of aesthetic features, or to read it as a dialectic between these two realms that can in some way be synthesized, would shortchange its project. If, at the level of content, the novel stages a political struggle between liberalism and anarchism, “at the level of form this mutates, becoming an excuse to rearticulate the very concept of the political” (88). The results include a dismantling of liberal preconceptions of national and geopolitical boundaries; evolving distinctions between public and private spheres; and the subsequent emergence of new, ambivalent attitudes towards the very purpose and nature of modern governance. On the one hand, it “names a series of new controls that manufacture life... for the constitution of capital and the state.” On the other, “the very same field that poses new forms of oppression also poses new potentials for life that exceed both capital and the state” (88). In this way, Haines concludes, this novel is oddly hopeful for Conrad, generating “an image of life in excess of...control,” and “draw[ing] upon the energies or potentials” that could be said to constitute a utopian view of “future life” (ibid.). The presence of excessive corporeality in *The Secret Agent* indicates both a new system of controlling life, but also that which may escape that control.

The empire’s eating economy is the material system that gives rise to this excess life, which needs to be regulated and controlled, but which can also escape control. Conrad’s

articulation of this excessive corporeality adopts language that indicates the presence of the farming arrangements of imperial agriculture. Vladimir sneers that the infamous Agent Δ has been domesticated by his home life and a family of dependents, attributing the agent's apparently decreased capacity for revolutionary action to the security of a comfortable middle-class existence. ("You—a member of the starving proletariat—never!" he exclaims [SA 18]). It is conversely true, however, that one could read their exchange as a contract of domestication that recalls an agrarian industry. Verloc is also a kept man, part of a stable of secret agents who consent to exchange absolute freedom for care as well as control. The thoroughly domesticated Verloc displays animal-like attributes. Less brutally bestial than the Skipper, Verloc is nevertheless a barnyard creature, "burly in a fat pig style" (11); "[h]e's fat, the animal," remarks Vladimir's secretary as he leaves the office (16).

Verloc's preferred meal is reheated "cold beef," an emblem of British national identity, with all its conspicuous anti-Frenchness (SA 158). Roast beef was a folkloric English dish which modern meat processing had transformed into a cheaper commodity in order to distribute it more widely to the growing masses. In the process of its expanding availability, it was often summoned as evidence of growing prosperity among Britain's urban populations. Though it was often passed off as domestic in origin, beef, particularly the cheaper cuts that were roasted or braised in traditional preparations, were often foreign imports.<sup>110</sup> Like the rest of the London crowds, Verloc consumes this domestic symbol with foreign origins in his home kitchen, a place that illustrates his middle class Englishness, and which contrasts starkly with his otherwise "foreign" and continental associations that the narration gives him when he joins more public

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<sup>110</sup>Cf. Chapter Two for the role that cheap imports from the Pacific colonies played in these trends.



spheres.<sup>111</sup> It is ironic that Winnie kills her husband with their home kitchen's carving knife, reacting to the news of Stevie's death by slaughtering her treacherous, porcine husband at her table. It is more ironic still that Winnie had been about to marry the "son of a butcher in the next street, helping his father in business" before suddenly accepting Verloc's hand (31).<sup>112</sup> "It was clearly providential," the narrative comments on their union (*ibid.*), and it is "providential" that an act of butchery would then end it just as suddenly.

The innocent, mentally-disabled Stevie is pulverized into so much meat as well, reduced to a quantity of flesh that is described as an accumulation of "raw material for a cannibal's feast" and "the by-products of a butcher shop" (*SA* 72; 74). These gruesome associations with flesh-eating and meat production appear in conjunction with the novel's descriptions of abjection and reinforce the material systems at work underneath the novel's arrangements. Since the early nineteenth-century, by-products of butcher shops were associated with either working class poverty or corrupt business practices designed to cheat middle-class customers. Often dishonestly represented to produce surplus profits, especially in sausages and other forms of charcuterie, by-products were discarded in any way possible. Misrepresenting them as a higher-quality product was standard procedure into the twentieth-century, when legislation cracked down on adulteration and false advertising.<sup>113</sup> By-products, then, would indicate the presence of an abject realm, a physical substance that cannot be assimilated into capital, and would eventually require tighter oversight and regulation. Interestingly, a by-product likely refers to the

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<sup>111</sup>Verloc "generally arrived in London (like the influenza) from the Continent, only he arrived unheralded by the Press; and his visitations set in with great severity" (*SA* 6).

<sup>112</sup>The mystery is resolved when Winnie tells Ossipon that she stopped her romance with the butcher's son to marry a man who could support her brother and ailing mother (*SA* 224-25).

<sup>113</sup>Stories of tainted products abound in historical sources. In 1855, for instance, one non-discriminating butcher made headlines by transforming a deceased circus elephant into sausages (Ritvo 237).

parts of the animal body that cannot nourish humans—or not as well as other parts—and therefore would be difficult to assimilate into the body’s metabolism. Stevie’s exploded, expelled body indicates the power of the social metabolism to chew up and spit out what it cannot utilize. As Haines suggests, his fleshy remains are a kind of corporeal excess that changes the contour of the social body. After all, Vladimir has commissioned the bombing in order to terrify the citizenry into submitting to greater state control. Because “England lags” in the kinds of control and surveillance associated with biopolitical governance, he needs a trigger to increase public fear, from which he will earn public support.

Stevie’s physical destruction, though also a marginal and fundamentally pointless by-product of a larger ideology of anarchism, is nevertheless metabolized by Vladimir’s instructions into new forms of social control. Vladimir advises Verloc to perform an act of “pure destruction, although he specifies that it must not be “mere butchery.” It must give an impression of “madness,” he clarifies, with stark irony: “I am a civilised man. I would never dream of directing you to organise a mere butchery, even if I expected the best results from it. But I wouldn’t expect from a butchery the result I want. Murder is always with us. It is almost an institution. The demonstration must be against learning...” (27-28). Butchery, used here to denote routine killing, occurs without rationale or ideology. It is an empty structure that perpetuates the status quo, and it is common enough to be deemed institutional.<sup>114</sup> “Mere butchery” is uncivilized, associated as it is with animals. An act of violence committed in the name of or against an idea (against science, in this case), in contrast, elevates protest to a level of importance that disrupts the social order. The abjection of Stevie’s disintegrated body may be associated with a “cannibal’s feast” initially, but it is then assimilated into the complex,

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<sup>114</sup>Vladimir’s comment is insightful. By 1907, large-scale animal butchery had become heavily regulated by the empire’s fledgling public health system.

sophisticated political order of London's governance, which is defined by surveillance, management, and control. As Haines argues, Conrad's attitude towards biopolitical forms of control is fundamentally ambivalent, and they indicate both the complexity of the process while also reminding us of its fundamentally primitive, brutal underbelly. As subtle as Vladimir's strategy sounds, the technically-minded, ideologically-loaded explosion in Greenwich Park it is still an act of slaughter; and this is why Inspector Heat's comment reminds us so gruesomely of its consequences.

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Conrad's figuration of London is overflowing with crowds that alternately require and resist control. While the urban dining culture contributed to the resistance that excess, leisure, and prosperity produces as citizens become more prosperous, Conrad also renders abject, or in excess of control, London's cosmopolitan dining culture, which seems dangerous by encouraging diners to consume beyond geopolitical borders. There is an "overloaded" quality (Haines 90) to the culinary cosmopolitanism of the city, and the abjection of culinary excess is central to the Assistant Commissioner's meal at the unnamed Italian restaurant in London's Soho neighborhood.

Conrad's narrator calls the Italian restaurant "a peculiarly British institution" (SA 123) because it is a particular product of imperial London's prosperous, globetrotting middle classes. At the time Conrad was writing *The Secret Agent*, Edwardian London was the site of gastronomical fanfare. The rise of the middle classes in the last quarter of the nineteenth century set new standards and tastes, and the public space changed its offerings in response to an increase of leisure time and industry. While English cuisines tended to be prepared by domestic cooks and kitchens, restaurants become the location where new tastes were formed (Burnett 67-

70; 98). The “disreputable” areas of the West End, populated largely by immigrants, were frequented only by the bravest of Bohemian locals in the 1860s and 1870s. By the *fin de siècle*, however, consuming foreign cuisines had become a daring “novelty” of the middle-class artistic sets, an indication of the “smart, topical, and well-traveled” among them (ibid. 93-95). The importation of foreign cuisines joined the importations of staple and luxury foodstuffs in reshaping the city’s culinary culture.

A new type of restaurant appeared in Soho in response to the growing demand for culinary fare that Edwardian consumers associated with worldliness and refinement. This kind of establishment catered to the pre- and post-theater crowd, a population who embraced cosmopolitan lifestyles and tastes by offering inexpensive French and Italian menus. While these cuisines had already established themselves as part of London culture,<sup>115</sup> The Soho restaurant was distinctive because it catered to an increasingly well-traveled, cosmopolitan clientele who embodied social classes that were based more on ideas and worldview than on money or birth, though perhaps at times tenuously. The era of the Great Exhibition made the Continent easily accessible by both boat and rail; foreign holidays were no longer limited to the extremely wealthy; and travel agent firms like Thomas Cook began to offer inexpensive package deals that allowed a greater number of people to travel abroad than ever before (Burnett 94). Foreign cuisine seemed “smart and topical” to the young generation of professionals who were enjoying the booming economy, and confidence eating abroad became a mark of cultural prowess and social status in many of the increasingly educated middle classes.

In the 1860s, Italian and French proprietors opened small cafes and *albergos* in the West End that catered to their own communities, but apart from a few early Bohemian customers who

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<sup>115</sup>Wealthy Londoners had long been steeped in continental luxury, so continental cuisine—mostly French—was already served in high end establishments like grand hotels and private clubs Cf. Baedekker 12-20.

“found excitement in penetrating the shadier side of London,” few English diners frequented them (Burnett 94). Development in these neighborhoods was uneven, and many areas were considered unfashionable or dubious because of large immigrant populations and an active (and in some cases, illicit) nightlife. Assisted by cheap imported foodstuffs, the continental cookery so beloved in London’s luxury establishments gradually spread to the mid-to-low range clientele. To some degree, class segregation remained. The upper classes had their celebrity chefs and grand hotels but, lured by novel cuisine and low prices, London’s artists, actors, authors, and many other members of the rising middle classes soon discovered Soho.<sup>116</sup>

By the 1890s, a variety of French and Italian restaurants catering to this new kind of customer had opened in the West End. They ranged in prices, menus, and styles, but all were regarded as emblematically foreign. As the 1887 *Baedekker’s Handbook for London* bluntly puts it, “there are many cheap & good foreign places in Soho” (12). Among them, the guide especially recommends Gatti’s, a restaurant started by Carlo Gatti, who made his name and his fortune importing ice for Italian ice cream vendors from Norway. The guide lists various other restaurants in the area owned or operated by Italian families, such as Adelphi, Hotel de Previtali, Café Monico, and the St. James Hotel, a high end restaurant run by Charles Elme Francatelli, an Englishman of Italian origin who learned to cook from the great French *haute cuisine* chef Marie-Antoine Carême. Also included is Romano’s on the Strand, a restaurant opened by Alfonso Nicolino Romano, a wine expert and former waiter at the famous Café Royal. Much of Romano’s success was due to the large, effusive personality of “The Roman,” who joked with his regular customers in “(deliberately) broken English” (Burnett 96-97). Café Royal, a favorite

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<sup>116</sup>At some of these eateries, 10p could secure a full meal: *antipasti misti*, *ravioli*, *scallopine di vitello Milanese*, *zabaglione*, and wine (Hope 195).

haunt of James McNeill Whistler, George Bernard Shaw, Aubrey Beardsley, and Oscar Wilde (Hope 193), is also recommended.<sup>117</sup>

The Soho eatery was a nexus for artistic temperaments. Many of these restaurants had deep connections to the visual arts and the theater, another venue that documented the expansion of Britain's leisure culture. Developing tastes for new cuisine became closely linked to developing new artistic, musical, and theatrical tastes, and the rise in popularity of Soho restaurants signaled an important shift in public leisure habits. Restaurants were places in which people wanted to see and be seen. Confined previously to the home, social status was now a marker to be displayed in public. "Unlike earlier male-dominated eating habits," explains Burnett, "the new restaurants elevated food into glamour and placed its customers on to a public stage" (87). People-watching in restaurants near the theater district ensured that the performance could continue after the show had ended. The Soho restaurant was also commonly used as a vehicle for displaying artwork. *Baedekker's London* describes the Franco-Italian eatery Criterion as "sumptuously fitted up, and adorned with tasteful decorative paintings of eminent artists" (1887: 12), though "tasteful" did not necessarily mean that the decoration courted popular tastes. Burnett notes that the Criterion challenged conventional French and rococo styles of décor featuring pre-Raphaelite mosaics, tiles, and stained glass (157). The Hotel de Florence, a favorite early haunt of Oscar Wilde, commissioned frescoed walls and ceilings by up-and-coming London artists (Hope 195).

Soho's eateries epitomize the point of transaction between the British cosmopolitan classes and the cultures they used to satisfy their tastes for exotic escapism. This exchange

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<sup>117</sup>Wilde's final visit to the Café Royal reportedly included a conversation with George Bernard Shaw in which the latter unsuccessfully begged the former to give up his libel suit against Lord Alfred Douglas' father (Hope 194). Wilde's defeat led to his imprisonment on sodomy charges.

communicates the re-inscription of British colonial values into the lives of Britain's own citizens, so that the consumer becomes the colonizer. What politics had advocated abroad by force—dominance, consumption, cultural shaping—appeared at home consensually, and in the name of good taste. The restaurant's atmosphere enabled these trends because it provided a controlled environment for tastes to develop, and the exchange of goods and service for capital was interpreted as the consent of the culture being consumed. With the addition of sumptuous décor and a lively crowd wearing cutting edge fashions, the experience of eating out was transformed into safe, ostensibly apolitical, moment of transport. A “smart, topical” English tourist of moderate income no longer needed to travel to experience different cultures, nor was their complicity with the project of empire openly targeted. One consumed other cultures from the distant perch of one's own country with the assistance from non-natives who freely consented to, and even profited from, the experience.

It is the consensual transaction between the British diner and the culinary entrepreneur that receives Conrad's critical eye in *The Secret Agent*, and it is the cosmopolitan middle classes whom he insinuates have lost all personal characteristics because of their careless, rampant consumption. In the restaurant as on the city's streets, the implication is that unseemly types seem to be gorging themselves on imperial and metropolitan abundance. This is an inversion of classic Malthusianism; in *The Secret Agent*, it is as if too much food produces too many people. The cheap Soho eatery, then, is complicit in producing the crowded streets, teeming with life that exists in excess of regulation and control. It is thus described as filled with “sightless,” “unapproachable,” unidentifiable people who enjoy dining in an “atmosphere of fraudulent cookery” (SA 122-23).

It is unclear why the Commissioner chooses this spot to dine. His status as a police investigator suggests that he is able to detect a disguise, and the narrator so confidently employs the language of the police force. The restaurant is “one of those traps for the hungry...bated with a perspective of mirrors and white napery” (122). But he seems to be there for different reasons than the other customers, who give the impression that they are enjoying the ruse. At first, he himself feels a “sense of loneliness, of evil freedom” (ibid.), suggesting his ambivalence at the shedding of personal identity. This pleasure is insecure, and later in the passage he is struck with melancholy at his more than usually “foreign” reflection in the restaurant’s window, turning his collar and twisting his moustache to change his appearance. He notes a “feeling of independence” only when he leaves the place and returns to the damp Soho street (123).

Concerns over the detection of national identity are woven throughout *The Secret Agent*, articulated equally by the anarchists, who all have vaguely foreign-sounding names, as well as the Assistant Commissioner, the “queer foreign-fish” whose career was made in a “tropical colony” (SA 121; 82). The denationalized cuisine of the Italian restaurant echoes these new definitions of intra-imperial space, wherein official power is generated, and actively regulates, the life which exists beyond fixed territorial lines. Haines argues that this “deterritorialized power emerges most intensely” in the Soho eatery, writing that its “fraudulent” cookery indicates that nationality has become a commodity that can “circulate uncertainly between countries, a logo instead of a relation between people and place, a sign whose substance is all but reducible to its purchasability” (91). To be able to “purchase” cultural authenticity is to reduce genuine artifacts from international cultures to mere embellishment for the host country’s globalized (and globalizing) tastes for the aesthetic, artistic, and culinary. As Walter Benjamin writes, such exhibitions



glorify the exchange value of commodities. They create a framework in which commodities' intrinsic value is eclipsed. They open up a phantasmagoria that people enter to be amused. The entertainment industry facilitates this by elevating people to the level of commodities. They submit to being manipulated while enjoying their alienation from themselves and others. (152)

Conrad's depiction of culinary cosmopolitanism enacts a similar critique of the fact that the people on display have begun to enjoy putting on their show. The implication is that the foreign nationals who compose and serve Soho's "fraudulent cookery" have assimilated into British society by packaging their cuisine and marketing it to the general public. People flock to the West End to consume a simulation of dining in another country. In the process, different national cuisines are Anglicized beyond recognition. Perhaps immigrant groups, like Soho's Italian enclaves, have assimilated into imperial social norms, but their pantomime invites educated skepticism. A hollow performance that satisfies the tastes of the leisure classes forms a questionable basis for authentic political harmony.

In his reading, Haines asserts that Conrad's Italian restaurant is a "denationalizing machine" that churns out "life as bare necessity" by "eras[ing] the qualities of its individuals who are its patrons" (93). While the Soho eatery clearly operates according to the logic of commodification, I remain uncertain about the implications of this line of analysis. Haines' premise is that an overwrought culture of cosmopolitanism and leisure is churning out nothing but "bare necessity," raw materials to be controlled by the state. He implies that the people who dine in these eateries are more likely to be controlled and manipulated by new forms of governance. The history of Edwardian food culture challenges such a premise. Conrad writes that the restaurant's patrons are not "stamped in any way" (123), and this metaphor clearly

indicates that they do not belong to any particular national space. But is cosmopolitanism a state of “bare life”? I would argue that it is a category of multiplicity, a state of over-identification and over-categorization, not a lack thereof. Although Conrad’s description of the Soho patrons, as customers with “sightless” eyes, suggests the sinister quality of the pantomime, the Soho eatery does not churn out “bare” necessity. In this novel, it produces something a bit different—the “evil freedom” of overconsumption that cosmopolitanism affords. The Italian restaurant reveals the potential in a glut of nutritional resources to generate social categories that teem beyond state apparatus and classification. London’s middle class epicures retain freedom from police surveillance, bewitching the Assistant Commissioner into embracing their alterity rather than inviting his scrutiny.

## §

Conrad’s recourse to negative narration takes on alimentary dimensions. Conrad’s characters, Tanner notes, are often unnamed (for instance, The Professor, Assistant Commissioner, and the Great Personage). When they speak, his narrators employ phrases “like ‘his name was Tottersen, or something like that’, ‘I can’t tell now,’ or ‘of some sort’ ... Conrad is hereby building into his text,” he writes, “a deliberate imprecision, a sense of approximation, of dubiety, of the erosion of names and identities, an encroaching inexactness” (34). The purpose, he speculates, is an attempt to make his “very artful writing reproduce the artlessness of a told tale” (ibid.). This paradox is not unique to Conrad or to modernist writers more generally. My first chapter on pastoralism, for instance, provides the detailed history of a form that is constantly trying to minimize or conceal its own erudite artifice. But Tanner sees something unique at work in Conrad’s fiction:

...the motive is to undermine the illusory finality and exactitude of the written text, to untabilise its silent impersonal unquestionable authority, by reintroducing the hesitations of the speaking voice, the uncertainties and fadings of memory. This is not necessarily part of a philosophic attempt to impugn completely the capabilities of language as such. I think it is more an attempt to rephysicalise language, as it were, to get it off the page and back into the mouth, and make us aware of how intimately related it is to the body. (34)

Tanner merges the biological principle that one must eat to live with the social or psychological suggestion in Conrad's work that one must narrate in order to be counted. In his texts, it seems as if successful nourishment is not motivated by biological survival but "communal survival," in the sense that the experience passed along in a tale is made "assimilable and shareable" through narration. A tale does not just communicate facts; it also creates "a context in which the facts generate meaning" (ibid. 35-36). As *Lord Jim* illustrates, eating is a metaphor for how we consume the world around us, before disgorging it in the form of words. It enables the spinning of narratives that create community and ward off isolation.

Seeley objects to labeling Conrad a pessimistic writer, positing that in much of his work, "necessary disillusionment is mediated by community, that ideal organic entity that becomes a last defense against nihilism and isolation. While for Conrad, skepticism has eroded possibilities for absolute truth and certain knowledge, community creates the ground of consensual understanding" (497-8). Perhaps this insight into Conrad's worldview explains his preoccupation with alimentary functions, which embody the intersections of what we are able to consume and what we are able to say. It also suggests the importance of understanding the materiality of the empire's food trades, which distribute resources unevenly along its complex and far-reaching

supply lines. For this system, then as now, largely determines who is able to consume and, therefore, who is able to speak, and how.

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## CHAPTER FOUR: James Joyce and the Food Trades of Empire

A divided drove of branded cattle passed the windows, lowing, slouching by on padded hoofs, whisking their tails slowly on their clotted bony croups. Outside them and through them ran raddled sheep bleating their fear.

—Emigrants, Mr Power said.

—Huuuh! The drover's voice cried out, his switch sounding on their flanks. Huuuh! Out of that!

Thursday of course. Tomorrow is killing day. Springers. Cuffe sold them about twenty-seven quid each. For Liverpool probably. Roast beef for old England. They buy up all the juicy ones. (*Ulysses* 96)<sup>118</sup>

It must be remembered that there was still enough wheat, barley, oats, barley, butter, eggs, beef, pork, and lamb in Ireland, even in this famine year of 1847, to feed for a year four times as many people as were leaving the country. But all of this produce was still being sent to Liverpool on very same ships that carried the immigrants, whom the English lawmakers claimed could not be fed, were redundant in their native land, and therefore had to go somewhere else. (Gallagher 148-9)

Studies of modern Irish culture, marked as they are by the Irish Potato Famine of 1845, are often preoccupied with the twinned conditions of depopulation and deprivation. The most dramatic waves of Irish emigration in the modern period have resulted from extended periods of hunger and are therefore inextricably food issues. The first passage above from James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) connects the conditions of emaciation and emigration with the food trades of the British Empire, which sourced heavily from Ireland even during the famine years. In the "Hades" episode, herds of sheep and cattle that are destined for slaughter suddenly fill the road and halt Paddy Dignam's funeral procession. The animals are being driven to Dublin's quays for transport; and although the cattle are destined to become beef, a key ingredient in the cuisine of

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<sup>118</sup>James Joyce, *Ulysses*. 1922. New York: Random House, 1946. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text and abbreviated as *U*.



affluent society, the cows themselves are “bony.”<sup>119</sup> Jack Power, one of the men in the funeral carriage, calls them “emigrants,” transfiguring the herd into the crowds of emaciated poor who were forced to leave Ireland during the leanest years of the hunger.

In contrast, Joyce’s protagonist Leopold Bloom muses upon the cattle’s commercial destiny: “For Liverpool probably. Roast beef for Old England. They buy up all the juicy ones. And the fifth quarter is lost: all that raw stuff, hide, hair, horns. Comes to a big thing in a year. Dead meat trade. Byproducts of the slaughterhouse for tanneries, soap, margarine” (*U* 96).<sup>120</sup> His train of thought, which turns from transport to the more visceral realities of the meat industry, suggests that Ireland’s relationship to imperial Britain in the early twentieth century has not evolved much since the Victorian tragedy—England, it seems, still has the first pick of Irish agricultural bounty. This interpretation reframes Joyce’s well-documented gastronomical fixation<sup>121</sup> as more political than previously acknowledged. Food does not merely constitute a semiotics in his work. It is a material system whose figuration indicts imperial networks of exchange for the immiseration that is necessary for their successful operation.

As Bloom’s speculation implies, the British Empire’s food trades relied upon its colonial territories for the production of foodstuffs. Throughout the nineteenth century, the spread of commercial agriculture throughout colonies like Ireland necessitated new strategies for

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<sup>119</sup>These cattle could be connected to the foot-and-mouth epidemic mentioned elsewhere in *Ulysses* (foot-and-mouth disease was a recurrent problem along Dublin-Liverpool trade routes). Since increased official regulation in the 1890s tightened restrictions on shipping infected and ill animals (Perren 133), these are probably beef cattle. They could be heading for live transport or else face slaughter at port for the dead meat trade, as Bloom’s thoughts suggest.

<sup>120</sup>This phrase suggests the patriotic ballad “The Roast Beef of Old England,” written by Henry Fielding in 1731. The song praises the beef that “ennobled our hearts and enriched our blood” (Gifford 113).

<sup>121</sup>Numerous critics have attended to the presence of food, eating, and waste in Joyce’s work. Lindsey Tucker’s *Stephen and Bloom at Life’s Feast* remains the most detailed scholarly account. See also Allison Armstrong’s *The Joyce of Cooking*; essays on food and Joyce by O’Connell, Mara, Yared; Moran on hoarding in *Finnegans Wake*; Horowitz on *Ulysses* and waste. Bloomsday prompts annual popular articles about food in *Ulysses*, cf. Petrosian.

population management that intended to maximize production and minimize resistance. Imperial influence, taking form in the logic of commercial “development,” endeavored to redesign rural Irish ecologies in order to facilitate agricultural cultivation. The successful expansion of this model concentrated landholdings in private hands and forced poorer populations onto unusable land that was suitable only for potato crops. These trends gave rise to indigenous strategies in which rural populations survived but were increasingly vulnerable to external shocks. The blight that arrived from the European continent in 1845 devastated potato harvests and decimated the communities who relied upon it for survival. Those who did not starve or succumb to disease were largely forced to emigrate, and the removal of these surplus populations was regarded officially as a solvent solution to the scarcity crisis. With tragic irony, the same ships that carried Irish livestock, produce, and luxury goods to ports in Liverpool were also crowded with starving, desperate subjects of the British crown who had been evicted by landlords or otherwise forced by circumstance to seek a new life elsewhere (Rogers 325-26). Survivors who stayed were likewise regarded as surplus and increasingly subject to state control. New legislation rebuilt key facets of Irish infrastructure, especially pertaining to social welfare, and assisted in the development of new ethical subjects—“rational, self-interested and above all consistent” (Whelan “Cultural Effects” 142). The famine became an opportunity to expand governance over a population that had been “brought to the point of collapse” (Nally “Storm” 716).

The Great Hunger “politicized Irish eating behaviors and intensified food as a way to mark identity” (Mara 95). In the early twentieth century, two generations after the famine, the writers of the Irish Literary Revival regarded Britain’s uninterrupted consumption of Irish land, produce, and people as fodder for political resistance. But while key Revivalist figures like George Russell (Æ) advocated a withdrawal from the imperial influence in order to rebuild Irish

identity, Joyce sourced his vision for modern Irish identity from the ports of Dublin, reconceiving modern Irish culture as a product of global exchange. Unlike the forms employed by Joseph Conrad in the previous chapter, Joyce's prose is a flow, not a blockage, and it exceeds the limits of realist literary form rather than evading them. The Gilbert schema for *Ulysses* demonstrates that Joyce understood the novel to be a human body through which his characters pass. His preoccupation with the less pleasant attributes of embodiment, however, has not always been well-received. *Ulysses* has long drawn fire for imposing its own fleshy reality on the world with its gluttonous, even vomitous, "toomuchness."<sup>122</sup> *Ulysses*, as a textual Irish "body," refuses to obey the confines of traditional expectations, which value the art of selection in the creation of beauty. By refusing to distinguish between content and effluence, Joyce rejects scarcity as the only historical condition of colonial Irish identity. Its grotesque mimicking of the demand for surplus defeats the imperial logic of "improvement," which champions efficiency in order to better consume Ireland's population and landscape. Moreover, the heavy matter of Joycean excess suggests the possibility of a new Irish cultural identity, one that is based upon an eating, growing body that thrives beyond the reach of imperial control.

### Scarcity, Control, and the Politics of the Potato

Lots of new things happen in the garden, novelties unknown in nature before our attempts to exert control. (Pollan 185)

Starvation and food refusal are by far the most common contexts for studies of Irish food and culture, in part because the Irish Potato Famine is widely considered to be the "single most

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<sup>122</sup>The coinage comes from Joyce's later work *Finnegans Wake* (1939), wherein he calls attention to "the toomuchness, the fartoomuchness" of the language of the text (122.36).

important event in Ireland in the modern period” (Whelan “Cultural Effects” 137).<sup>123</sup> But the skeletal bodies and extinct cultures that feature so largely in these narratives must be contextualized by the key role that agriculture played in the development of the colonial Irish economy. Unlike its European neighbors, Ireland was less industrialized and more dependent upon export-fueled agriculture (Cleary 209). This section highlights the strength of Ireland’s agricultural economy in order to reframe the famine not as a scarcity crisis, but as a failure of imperial governance, a “tragedy beyond redemption” (Whelan “Cultural Effects” 152) that Joyce nevertheless later takes up as part of the Revialist project.

Perceptions of pre-Famine Ireland as poor and underdeveloped require some qualification. Irish food production has a less visible but equally remarkable history of plenty, although the wealth it generated was largely exported back to England. Agricultural trade between Ireland and England flourished after the Act of Union in 1801, which integrated the two economies more fully together. In the decades before the blight, an intense campaign to import the English model of agriculture championed the capitalist rationalization of production and dedicated large swaths of the Irish countryside to farming. As a result, Irish crop yields exceeded those of many European countries, including France and Scotland, and it was a key food exporter for growing markets. Pre-famine production levels fed over eleven million people at home and abroad and supported imperial populations with grain, livestock, and a wide variety of agricultural products, from skins and shoes to vegetables, seeds, and honey (Kinealy 92-112).<sup>124</sup> Up to the eve of the famine, in fact, Irish farming fed large areas of Europe.

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<sup>123</sup>Cf. Mara 94 on “troscud.” Maud Ellman’s *Hunger Artists* (1993) provides a more detailed history of hunger strikes as a method of political resistance; Steve McQueen’s *Hunger* (2008) is a filmic treatment of this strategy in the context of the Irish Troubles in the 1980s.

<sup>124</sup>“It is generally accepted that by the 1840s, Ireland had become the granary of Britain... [but] grain was not the only major food export to Britain: the data suggests that at the time of the Famine, the population of Britain depended heavily on Ireland for a wide variety of foodstuffs... including horses, ponies, animal skins, honey,

But Ireland's booming export trades, drafted as they were into the larger imperial economy, were increasingly predicated upon extreme socioeconomic stratification, especially in rural areas. The industrial model of farming demanded the reclamation of all but the most useless swamplands, the increase of grain-intensive animal husbandry, and the consolidation of small holdings into large farming units. The latter trend, in turn, encouraged widespread tenant evictions, and the increasing numbers of the dispossessed placed pressure on the remaining lands that were not in private hands. These trends concentrated the highest population densities onto the least arable land. Potato farming, also called cottierism, provided a unique strategy to cope with these detrimental trends by enabling the displaced Irish poor to reclaim and farm less fertile lands (Lloyd "Potato" 312; Kinealy *Famine* 91). By 1845, much of Ireland's rural population depended upon the cultivation of the potato for basic survival. Thus, widespread subsistence coexisted with booming commercial agriculture, a sophisticated and advanced system of food production controlled by the economic elite and predicated upon rural disenfranchisement.

Since the potato's earliest arrival in Europe from the New World, much of European culture remained hostile to its cultivation. Ethnocentric disdain for indigenous foods had deemed it unrefined, suitable only for consumption by the "conquered peoples" of the world (Zuckerman 8). Its unique and mysterious proliferation "seemed to contain in its being too little of human culture, and rather too much unreconstructed nature" (Pollan 199). The success of cottierism in rural Ireland further racialized the crop in nineteenth-century England and implied that its cultivation allowed a subjugated population to remain in a state of cultural darkness. While writers from Adam Smith to Michael Pollan have acknowledged the potato's importance to the

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tongues, rags, shoes, soap, glue, and seed" (Kinealy "Food Exports" 34). Ireland was also a leading exporter of poultry, rabbits, vegetables, pulses, eggs, fish, and potatoes (*Famine* 112).

prosperity of northern Europe,<sup>125</sup> English discourse on Ireland portrayed the potato as an emblem of the empire's moral and political struggles. The potato symbolized the racial degeneration of colonial subjects who rejected imperialism's civilizing drives. In the political battle over agricultural wages in 1840s England, for instance, both English Liberal Land Leaguers and Chartist parties employed racist rhetoric that blamed the potato-heavy diet of the Irish poor for Ireland's "uncivilized" workforce. The English peasantry relied upon a grain-based agricultural system to provide them with diet of bread; in contrast, according to some Free Trade rhetorics, "rejoicing in potatoes" had led "Erin's root-fed hordes" into their present state of degeneracy (Gurney 115-16). Thomas Carlyle went so far as to call the Irish poor "cannibals," asserting that a diet of potatoes would lead the English peasantry to reject the norms of a Christian society and "devour their own kind" instead of working harder to alleviate their own poverty (qtd. in Gurney 116). Even William Cobbett, an English reporter who idealized agrarian ways of life, was skeptical of the habits that potato farming engendered in the Irish cottiers. Potatoes require little care and grew in what were called "lazy" beds because they freed farmers from intensive labor.<sup>126</sup> In sum, bread was a civilized product of industry and fueled a wholesome, docile working class. A diet of potatoes bred idleness, resistance, and treason.

In 1845, the blight *P. infestans* arrived at Irish ports from Europe and devastated three successive annual potato harvests. The most vulnerable populations felt its most devastating effects. Between 1845 and 1853, almost three million people starved, died of disease, or

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<sup>125</sup>Pollan claims that the arrival of the potato from the New World fueled the prosperity of northern European climates, where agriculture was otherwise limited by climate in a way that the southern Mediterranean was not. Lloyd documents Smith's fascination with the vitality and beauty of Irish peasants, which he attributes to their diet of tubers ("Potato" 317).

<sup>126</sup>Potatoes are still planted in these beds, raised rows of loose soil that provide "none of the Apollonian satisfactions of an orderly field of grain" (Pollan 200). Of course, the assumption of leisure was exaggerated. Many cottiers worked such long hours on others' land that they had no time to cultivate other crops in their own plots.

emigrated (Kiberd *Inventing Ireland* 21). The decline continued even after the reinstatement of the potato harvest, and by 1900 the island's population had halved (Whelan "Cultural Effects" 137). The British government's official response to a decade of starvation, deportation, and death in Ireland is a problematic subject for scholars. Consensus characterizes it as nonintervention, though the implications of this conclusion vary widely.<sup>127</sup> Not many accounts venture beyond descriptions of scarcity conditions, often stressing the ecological component of the blight as the primary misfortune.<sup>128</sup> The suggestion that bad imperial governance is culpable for the famine invites controversy. "Blaming Britain" in the mid-century press led to accusations that "the tragedy" had been "harnessed to the bandwagon of Irish nationalism" (qtd. in Kinealy *Famine* 90); even in present day historical circles, accusing Britain of complicity makes scholars vulnerable to being "tainted with political or nationalist motivations" (90).

It is important to acknowledge the complex discussions that took place in political and cultural outlets as British authorities struggled with the mounting crisis.<sup>129</sup> Historical scholarship also demonstrates that authoritative English sources seemed unaware that the export trade had not been suspended by the famine and were therefore ignorant that the crisis was not being

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<sup>127</sup>Sporadic actions of relief qualify this claim to some degree. Peel's administration, for instance, authorized the importation of American corn in 1845 to stabilize food prices which fluctuated wildly due to price gouging. The Whig administration that succeeded him temporarily replaced public works with Irish soup kitchens in the spring of 1847 (Kinealy "Food Exports" 34; 36). But it remains difficult to say these examples constitute a strategy.

<sup>128</sup>Histories of British diet tend to dismiss the topic. For example, Derek Oddy writes, "...there were no great dearths during the Industrial Revolution, even though high prices around 1840 led to the decade later acquiring the epithet 'Hungry Forties.' The one major crisis resulting from the potato blight was confined principally to Ireland" (2). The brevity of this treatment in such an important history of British diet is unsettling. Furthermore, the continued perception of the famine as an unfortunate act of nature or God is perpetuated by contemporary food scholarship that condemns monoculture. Even Pollan elides the possibility of the empire's culpability by writing that dependence upon the potato was an illusion of control that made Ireland's rural poor "exquisitely vulnerable" to the "vicissitudes" of nature (158).

<sup>129</sup>Unfortunately, in one study, the private correspondence that proves British politicians were aware of how badly they had failed by refusing to stop food exports also evinces their demands to increase propaganda about English charity as well as orders to gag the press who questioned it (Kinealy *Famine* 109).

addressed.<sup>130</sup> Nevertheless, one pressing problem that recent work has taken up justly interrogates how such a crisis could have been a part of such an advanced economic arrangement. Why did liberal doctrine fail to adequately address such an extreme failure of distribution? The Act of Union in 1801 bound Ireland and Britain constitutionally, and the strong trade links that made their economies interdependent should have increased shared prosperity and reduced the possibility of catastrophe. Instead, calcified cultural and political barriers between England and Ireland meant that Ireland was “regarded habitually as separate”; and the famine was therefore not regarded as a shared crisis. Furthermore, during the worst years, Irish agricultural export markets continued to perform well commercially, suggesting the possibility that the “so-called ‘free market’ diverted food to areas with greater resources whilst the poor in Ireland starved” (Kinealy *Famine* 115-16).

The dynamic relationship between extreme scarcity and profitable surplus reappears throughout the global Anglophone Empire, implicating a larger set of strategies in the condition of uneven resources that, for a growing contingent of scholars, defines modern imperial governance. Earlier famine histories have alluded to, but generally left latent, the suggestion that the Irish Famine was a product of human design rather than natural catastrophe. More recent work makes a compelling case that the British response was driven by social engineering rather than the relief of suffering, and it is increasingly cast as an ideological choice in terms that vary in severity from “callous” to “genocidal” (Nally “Storm” 719; Rogers 235). Perhaps most inflammatory is the fact that, during the famine years, food exports from Ireland to Britain continued unabated and produced great wealth for English interests (Kinealy *Famine* 105). The

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<sup>130</sup> “...the fact that such large amounts of provisions were being exported from Ireland was not widely recognized at the time; even the authoritative *Mark Lane Express* pronounced in January 1847: ‘With the people starving in many parts of the island shipments of provisions from there to England are, of course, out of the question’” (qtd. in Kinealy *Famine* 111).



food scarcity controls that had characterized previous food shortages in Ireland in 1799, 1816, and 1821—including the closing of ports, the regulation of food prices, and the streamlining of food distribution—were not applied in 1845 (Kinealy “Exports” 34). Instead British legislation favored the expansion of public works projects in which taxes subsidized poor relief. This program, epitomized by the Irish Poor Laws, was “designed as much to appease British opinion and to promote social engineering as to alleviate poverty or save lives” (Whelan “Famine” 137). Ireland may be regarded by some as a settler colony whose proximity to England makes it a less exotic corner of empire, but the famine made it an early testing ground for disastrous social programs that became a global strategy to counteract scarcity conditions further afield.

Mike Davis writes that “famines are wars over the right to existence” (13). Although the Irish famine tends to be regarded as an anomaly in modern Europe, important recent work has shown that devastating famines in India, China, Egypt, Sudan, and Nigeria were to follow the Irish example.<sup>131</sup> His work, which he positions as an exploration of the political ecology of colonial disasters (15), insists that crop failures, droughts, and other natural events are not the causes of nineteenth-century famines. Many historians, geographers, philosophers, and theorists have since taken up the question of what role human action plays in the persistence of food scarcity. In the context of European imperialism, nineteenth-century famines should be understood as the end of a much longer condition of impoverishment in which a specific population “is progressively brought to the point of collapse.” In this light, events like blights and crop failures are merely “environmental triggers” to indicate the underlying injustice of social arrangements (Nally “Storm” 715). To consider these events “natural” is to disregard the structures that are put in place to respond to them, and the unique event of a famine should be

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<sup>131</sup>His pioneering work *Late Victorian Holocausts* (2001) provides extensive treatment of famines in colonial Asia and Africa. See also David Nally’s *Human Encumbrances* (2011) and Michael Watts’s *Silent Violence* (1983).

viewed as part of a longer continuum that includes the malnutrition before it as well as the mortality that follows.

The Irish Famine has not been more widely regarded as a “colonial” experience in part because Ireland’s political status between 1801 and 1922 remains somewhat contested. While scholars of Irish history seem quick to acknowledge patterns of colonial subjugation by Britain in, for instance, resettlement initiatives and plantation economies before the Act of Union, the legislation’s wording (it is an agreement between “the United Kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland”) ostensibly elevates Ireland’s status into equal participation. Thus, some view nineteenth-century risings, political controversies, and the famine itself as part of a conflict between equal political entities. But there is a compelling case for viewing the famine as a colonial experience, in which an imperial power redesigns a territorial holding so that it may support the civilizing project. Nineteenth-century famines in the Anglophone empire were produced by imperial power relations in which one culture subjugated another, and therefore they must be situated within “a historical geography of colonization” in order to be understood (Nally “Storm” 715). The colonial context, it can be argued, produced Britain’s way of handling the Irish famine as well as the ones that followed around the globe.

David Lloyd calls the British nonintervention in the Irish Famine “an effect of perpetual *transitionality*,” fueled by the imperial drive to transform the Irish character and subject it, once and for all, to the absolute influence of British civility (“Potato” 312). Colonial governance, Lloyd asserts, does not merely refer to the presence of English influence but rather a “revolutionary” impulse, guided by ideology and imagined possibility, to transform the lived reality of the Irish colonial space (“Potato” 313). Irish resistance to English rule, argues Lloyd, was not just understood in terms of active rebellion after 1801 but also included cultural

practices that were not compatible with English values, especially regarding property, family, and social life. In other words, rural Irish peoples existed in defiance of English conceptions of stability and prosperity.

By defying the theoretical foundations of British political economy, in which the accumulation of capital predicated population growth, an impoverished rural population established and sustained itself. The local system of property rights and inheritances that it developed, however, was objectionable to non-native forces of modernization, which could not integrate such a piecemeal approach into its logic of “improvement.”<sup>132</sup> Improvement, in the nineteenth-century context, mandated the legitimacy of British institutions and the undermining of indigenous Irish ones. The British failed to cultivate this legitimacy after 1801, Lloyd contends, in part because the rural Irish condition remained “a theoretical anomaly, and at times even a critical abyss, for British political economy as a discourse...[and] for British colonial government in practice” (“Potato” 312). The British project of improvement struggled to maintain its legitimacy in the face of the rural peoples’ endurance, which destabilized metropolitan assumptions about the virtue of colonial rule by producing its own social formations that remained recalcitrant to both imperial and capitalist ideologies.

The failure to suppress these currents of unruly growth registered in British political economy by exhibiting preoccupations with fertility, productivity, and reproduction. But contrary to popular assumption, Ireland was not the Malthusian instance *par excellence*; nor was the famine wholly understood as an inevitable check on population growth to those who watched it unfold. Malthus’s early attention to Ireland was in fact nondescript. The problem of Ireland, for

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<sup>132</sup>Before the blight, the indigenous Gaelic system of landholding that largely governed the cottiers’ small holdings before the blight facilitated divisions of land within families, encouraging early marriages and higher childbirth rates (Lloyd “Potato” 312).

Malthus, was not one of resource scarcity but one of political rebellion. If the Irish population continued to grow, he predicted that England would find the “disaffection” of twenty million people to be the problem, not their inevitable starvation (qtd. in Lloyd “Potato” 316). In an important way, Malthus intimates the motivation behind the British response to the Irish Famine—not solely a laissez-faire approach to legislate economic dogmatism, but also the political desire to debilitate an increasingly robust Irish population which, it was perceived, embraced alien social and cultural social habits, and who possessed the kind of spirited resistance that Britain sought to eliminate from its own working classes. In fact, Lloyd suggests that the problem of Ireland was “paradoxically not scarcity but *abundance*” (“Potato” 316)—abundance of population, ample means to support that population through cottierism, and the spread of social values antithetical to the civilizing project of English control. It is “the specter of abundance,” rather than of poverty, that “haunts political economy and makes Irish conditions a scandal for theory” as well as an impending policy nightmare. In this sense, Lloyd concludes that the famine “is a godsend not only to the administrator but to the theorists too, apparently confirming precepts whose predictive validity was made questionable by the condition of Ireland” in the first place (ibid.).

Kevin Whelan argues that colonial governance imposed “a Kantian hierarchy of sense” upon a fundamentally oral Irish culture in order to eliminate the threat of native resistance. Kant’s work, he posits, privileges the objective eye and ear over the mouth, an unstable organ associated with gluttony and drunkenness as well as uncontrolled emotion and sedition. In a nineteenth-century context, such features of a colonial population were anathema to English cultural restraint and subject to state regulation and discipline. In the aftermath of the disaster, the state took every opportunity to ensure that the “newly disciplined” post-Famine body “could

participate in the formation of a new ethical subject” (Whelan “Famine” 143), one that provided no resistance to either the civilizing project of modernity, or to the economic processes, such as agriculture, that undergirded it. The aftermath of the famine provided a way of accelerating this transformation. Famines, Davis argues, are “engines of historical transformation” because they can accelerate and totalize the very forces that produced them in the first place (15).

Studies of “the governmentalization of famine” show how “hunger has historically been judged as legitimate grounds for government intervention and administration” (Nally “Storm” 716). Legislative and administrative patterns in colonial governance demonstrate a “growing awareness of a new ecology of everyday life connecting human populations to hazards, propensities, dispositions, patterns of living, and socio-environmental risks. These new interrelationships become legitimate objects for state manipulation and control” (ibid.). Michel Foucault uses these networks to theorize what he called “biopolitics,” the state-led management of life, death, and biological being. Foucault did not invent the term, but he has arguably given it its charge. He first lights upon the concept of biopower in *The History of Sexuality* (1976), and his analysis deepens in a series of lectures in South America and France in the late 1970s. His study of biopolitics is grounded in a genealogy of eighteenth century medical institutions, which extends his understanding of “governmentality” beyond the study of disciplining the body into biopower, the drive of the state to exert technological control over populations at large.<sup>133</sup> According to Foucault, the French revolution gave rise to the belief that the citizenry was essentially reconceived “as a vital—living—mass,” and that this mass “was to become the constitutive principle of the modern nation state” which it would then “foster, serve, and modernize” in order to reshape modern society (Rees and Caduff 2). It is the rise of this concern

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<sup>133</sup>Cf. Foucault, “Birth of Social Medicine”; “The Crisis of Medicine or the Crisis of Anti-Medicine?”

with a “living” society that marks the transition from older forms of sovereign power to biopower, which is present in the regulatory systems that administer life in the modern state.

Foucault’s later lectures moved from larger conceptions of biopower into the specific technologies that enabled it. While much of the scholarship that follows his work concerns policing and surveillance, it is less widely recognized that he also placed the history of food provisioning at the center of this work (Nally “Food” 38). Famines, Foucault recognized, are events that created public health crises that “required new regimes of calculation and intervention,” such as statistical analysis, demography, and public health campaigns (“Storm” 716). These events created public health crises that required new degrees of intervention in order to regulate biological life and expand the spatial dynamics of state and capital.

The prioritization of commerce over human welfare in the empire’s food trades transformed the relationship between governance and governed. According to Foucault, the rise of “an ideology of freedom” associated with British liberalism essentially revised the notion that people have rights to food, as had been the case in earlier scarcity economies (*Security* 48; 32). By 1845, government intervention, which took form in anti-scarcity practices, had been demonized because they could purportedly disrupt the free movement of trade and further harm those who were starving.<sup>134</sup> Foucault clarifies that the true action implied by laissez-faire policy does not mean “doing nothing” but in fact invents a new reality called “the economy”; and the liberalization of the food system – “not interfering, allowing freedom of movement, letting things take their course” – only succeeded in redefining “the permitted and the forbidden” (*Security* 45–

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<sup>134</sup>Nally cites examples of anti-scarcity controls in both Eastern and Western societies, such as China and Holland. These ideologies were based upon “a moral economy” to regulate and store surplus in order to prevent starvation in lean times, especially in urban centers. These measures ensured that their citizens has a right to be free from starvation by supporting a subsistence existence through a mixture of price controls, public granaries, curbs on exports, prevention of crops for alcohol, duty-free imports, and other measures (“Food” 39).

46). The assumption that “markets are ‘natural systems’ operating outside of power and politics is itself an invention of the nineteenth century that takes for granted the violent manner in which the state must eliminate all behaviour that is now deemed aberrant or undesirable” (Nally “Food” 40).

Two major developments resulted from the liberal abandonment of anti-scarcity measures. First, scarcity was no longer understood as a general condition of life; but, for some, it became a normal condition. Under biopolitical conditions, hunger for targeted populations became a feature of modern life. Starvation was no longer seen as a cosmological inevitability but as a problem of governance (Foucault *Security* 35-37). Second, this targeted hunger was regarded as permissible insofar as its presence provokes desirable social change—or, in the words of anthropologist David Keen, “famines now have functions as well as causes” (qtd. in Nally “Food” 40). Scarcity incidents within a liberal regime triggered the expansion of disciplinary welfare systems, such as Poor Laws. These legal entities were predicated upon new distinctions between the “population,” which constitutes society and is governed by the state, and “peoples” who disrupt its ordered structures. By “throwing themselves on the supplies” that the state offers, the latter groups prove incompatible with the new regime of planned hunger and therefore “do not really belong to the population” (Foucault *Security* 44). They are perceived as justly outside the moral order and thus subject to state discipline and control. The assumption behind these laws is that the “distressed,” a common euphemism for starvation, need moral guidance from the state in order to correct their impoverished state (Nally “Food” 41). In sum, it was the dismantling of social safety nets that turned the potato blight from a scarcity crisis into a full-blown famine; and the famine relief offered by the British state took shape in the

development of a new penal welfare system that allowed the state to discipline the starving bodies of the colonial “people,” who threatened the social fabric of empire.

The study of imperial agriculture in Ireland demonstrates how central food production was to the emergence of biopower in the Anglophone world, and the industrialization of the food system should feature more widely in our continued understanding of biopolitics for two reasons. First, current scholarship on biopower continues to expand the understanding of “what it means to be biological” (Rees and Caduff 6). Advances in biomedical and genetic research, for instance, suggest that life might be relocated to the microscopic level, and new forms of biopower may accompany these discoveries.<sup>135</sup> Similarly, the technological features of industrial food economies have revised our understanding of the vital processes of nature by removing organic processes from their organic contexts. As evinced by the history of the Irish Famine, the industrial food economy in Britain provides the origin story for public health sectors in the developed world. The imperial food economy illustrated how, in effect, the vitality of life was removed from the field and relocated to the hospital, where it could be administered by state professionals.

Second, the study of imperial agriculture can challenge the assumption that biopower is an inherently metropolitan or urban phenomenon.<sup>136</sup> In his genealogy, Foucault does not consider how the biopolitics of food provisioning unfolds outside of major centers of European power. Nor does he turn to Anglophone history for support of his analysis. If he had, he would have found parallel developments that echoed the emergence of biopower in modern France.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup>Cf. Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself* (2007) and Sunder Rajan, *Biocapital* (2006).

<sup>136</sup>Social medicine was “based upon the expansion of urban structures” (Foucault “Birth” 142-43).

<sup>137</sup>Nally cites the writings of Edmund Burke, Adam Smith, and John Stuart Mill to demonstrate analogue of this logic in British circles as well as French thinkers. These thinkers, for instance, call attention to the “violence of



Emphasis on colonial food production in places like Ireland captures the unique dynamics possible within intra-imperial relations, which has the potential to revise Foucault's notion of the "national social," or "the emergence of 'society' conceived as a national population" (Rees and Caduff 6). Current work in biopolitics asks to what degree biopower has moved beyond the confines of Foucault's construction: "How have notions of life been decoupled from and recoupled with state apparatus, forging new relations?" What does biopower "beyond the nation-state" look like? (ibid. 7). But the study of imperial agriculture has already provided provisional answers to these questions because it has always relied upon a series of biopolitical forces that cannot be neatly classified as either state or social agents. Agriculture has long fostered specific political-commercial conglomerates that pursued both empire and economy at once. Some of these entities—including the East India Company, the Dutch East India, and Hudson Bay Company—used state power to control the global food supply and to increase their profitability:

What Philip McMichael (2000) defines as "imperial agribusiness" – the use of state and institutional mechanisms to control world agriculture and the circulation of goods – was made possible through colonial expansion, and in particular, the use of temperate lands, their natural endowments and their indigenous peoples (as well as European migrant and colonial populations) to power the process of capital accumulation ("Food" 41).

Agribusiness, which never poses a direct threat to state power, nevertheless indicates a domain outside its purview in which other forms of biopower emerge and are enacted. These conglomerates were not strictly concerned with administration, although they were responsible for bringing about some of its first experiments in bodily management and population control. The earliest, of course, were plantations. These "laboratories of modern governmentality" (ibid.)

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government intervention" in any form of trade system; they also blame governmental action for prolonging hunger by oppressing production and creating social welfare systems and dependencies ("Food" 40-41).

provide the most extreme instances of agribusinesses' domination over the human body and have been well explored in scholarship.<sup>138</sup> The sovereign model of power gave way to nineteenth-century models of interventionism, epitomized by the famine administration in Ireland and later in other colonies. Colonial populations have thus often been decoupled from legislative protection in order to make up agricultural labor forces. Then, under the scarcity conditions that the food economy generates, they are recoupled with the state apparatus by submitting to welfare and health administrations that provide relief from immiseration. This loose affiliation between agents of biopower demonstrates that this form of power has never exclusively been confined to, or relied upon, metropolitan centers but has always existed beyond the confines of the modern nation-state.

While the plantation model of farming in Ireland was largely implemented in the periods before the Act of Union, the legislative response to the Irish Famine highlights some key areas of biopolitical continuity. Colonies like Ireland, even as late as the nineteenth century, should be considered continuations of these "laboratories" of biopower in the sense that they played pivotal roles in the development of modern power structures. The "Irish question" continued to pose significant legislative and administrative problems for British rule, offering a "threatening alternative...to the unfolding hegemony of a capitalist economy and its gradually emerging state formation" (Lloyd "Potato" 321). Despite the impoverished misery that characterized rural life, its stubborn presence threatened "to overwhelm the discursive and political boundaries that [were] produced to contain it" (ibid.). Before the famine, state power expressed itself in the regulation and enforcement of land laws, the establishment of a paramilitary police force, and the creation of British school systems and curricula. The famine accelerated these state goals of

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<sup>138</sup>Stanley Mintz's *Sweetness and Power* (1985) traces the emergence of modern imperialism through the history of the sugar trade, for instance; cf. Duncan for a study of British coffee plantations in Ceylon.

social engineering. New exercises of biopower that emerged in its aftermath included the parliamentary refusal to enact scarcity measures like closing ports and eliminating grain exports for alcohol markets; the widespread implementation of Poor Laws, which in effect penalized poverty by taxing the poor to pay for social relief; and administrative efforts to clear “surplus” populations of the immiserated through emigration.

### Joyce, Population, and Revivalist Dublin

Solving scarcity crises has the perverse power to remind authorities of the “potential for life to replenish and flourish” beyond the bounds of state control (Nally “Food” 38). I turn to the works of Joyce to map the cultural ramifications of imperial biopower because no other modern Irish writer works as hard to repopulate the territory that lies beyond the policed borders of tradition. Joyce studies has been slow to integrate the insights generated by new famine studies.<sup>139</sup> Critics have done much to explore the barrenness and paralysis of modern Irish culture that resulted from the famine’s aftermath, but the ramifications of increasing English responsibility remain muted or elided in these works. Dramatizing the genealogy of biopower reframes Joyce’s persistent interests in food and farming as a political response to new regimes of colonial control that were justified as interventions to alleviate scarcity conditions.

Joyce’s collected non-fiction demonstrates that he identified imperial agriculture as a key mechanism of control that is recognizable, in retrospect, as biopolitical. In “Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages,” a 1907 lecture that he delivered in Trieste, Joyce laments the disappearance of a distinguished intellectual tradition in Ireland and associates the current state of cultural

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<sup>139</sup>Kevin Whelan, for instance, could still call for more work on “the colonial context” of Joyce’s works in 1995 (qtd. in Nally “Storm” 716). The recent collection *James Joyce in the Nineteenth Century* (2013) has taken up this call, though with a largely historicist approach.

paralysis with English rule. England's strategies for colonial domination are complex, he explains:

I find it rather naïve to heap insults on England for her misdeeds in Ireland. A conqueror cannot be casual, and for so many centuries the Englishman has done in Ireland only what the Belgian is doing today in the Congo Free State, and what the Nipponese dwarf will do tomorrow in other lands. She enkindled its factions and took over its treasury. **By the introduction of a new system of agriculture**, she reduced the power of native leaders and gave great estates to her soldiers. She persecuted the Roman church when it was rebellious and stopped when it became an effective instrument of subjugation. Her principal occupation was the keep the country divided... (*Critical Writings* 166; my emphasis).

Agriculture is positioned as site of equivalent control with the institutions of the treasury, the church, and the press, concentrating land and wealth into the hands of imperial interests and disenfranchising the practice of self-governance. "Ireland is poor," Joyce concludes, "because English laws ruined the country's industries... [and] because the neglect of the English government allowed the best of the population to die from hunger..." (*Critical Writings* 167). By identifying imperial agriculture as a key dimension of control, his lecture presents an abbreviated version of the famine narrative that affirms the conclusions of famine ecologists. Not only does it demonstrate Joyce's awareness of the deep structural control that the food trades exerted over Irish interests, it also evinces his conscious refusal to regard Liberal nonintervention as either a neutral or merely ineffectual strategy.

The secondary source in which I first saw this lecture cited, however, presents its political engagement in a very different way. The young Joyce wrote a number of other essays asserting

that the Irish were victims of colonial misrule and justifiably disloyal to the Crown; yet scholars persist in muting this intent in order to see him as a “cosmopolitan humanist with an aversion to militant Irish nationalism” (Kiberd *Inventing* 335). In his essay on emigration and *Ulysses*, Wim Van Mierlo calls blaming English rule for the famine a “nationalist” position and remarks upon the “ideological intent” of Joyce’s presentation of depopulation after the famine (188-89). Van Mierlo suggests that Joyce does not wholly blame English policy for the famine because he vocalizes his critique of empire through an unsavory character, the Citizen (ibid.; *Critical Writings* 166 fn.1). The Citizen is an obnoxious character in the “Cyclops” episode, and his diatribes do satirize the rhetorics of aggressively republican groups like Sinn Fein. “Blaming the English” was a rallying cry in Revivalist Dublin, especially in the Fenian presses, and it is well understood that Joyce uses the Citizen to mock the more narrow-minded discourses of nationalism.

But it would also be “foolish” to dismiss the “Cyclops” episode’s “equal critique of imperialism” (Kiberd *Inventing* 350). It is the Citizen’s myopic rage coupled with his lack of analytical capacity that is the true target of Joyce’s satire, and *Ulysses* in no way exonerates British policy from culpability for Irish depopulation and impoverishment. The historical sense in which Joyce used the word “nationalist” in 1907 does not carry the same connotations as Van Mierlo’s deployment of the term, which ignores contemporary discourses that have, in retrospect, written pre-independence “nationalism” into the history of violence and extremism in twentieth-century Ireland. Van Mierlo’s phrase “ideological intent” further trivializes colonial injustice by implying that scholarly work on the political ecology of famine creates a sensationalized account of history. What is intended to be a measured treatment of the topic in this scholar’s essay is, I believe, incomplete and bears an obligation to be updated. The insights

that studies of biopower and the making of the postcolonial world have offered to the study of modern Irish literature should remove the stigma of controversy from assigning responsibility for the wrongs of imperialism.

While I disagree with his deployment of language, I am also indebted to Van Mierlo's essay for guiding me to the following page from the recently unearthed "Subject Notebooks," which Joyce kept during the preparation and composition of *Ulysses*. (Again, I read it very differently.) The image below depicts notes Joyce wrote in association with the "Oxen of the Sun" episode, which in its final version contains parodic send-ups of classic texts of English literature and political economy. This page contains musings on Malthus, depopulation, and the Irish cattle trades:

rich vocabulary, because read little; Col. Russell (1867) Col. Richard  
Burke, Gloucester & established prob. sent church, 12 Dec. 1860, 120  
wounded, Michael B. - changed: he Casan (Eng. sp.) in spectr  
high. repub. troops in America & distributed 15000 stand of arms for  
invasion of Canada, dispersed by 1st Vally: Poland (Kosciuszko's  
heart is in Rappahannock): George III with a tail of cutlers and  
Dixie's exiles to viceregal lodge: Trenchard in 4. food decrease in  
within pages population is soon proportion: "Keltische Rasse  
von Keltien, gotische Thoral u. die Allbelebung der Natur. Die Keltische  
Dichter nicht keine Treuer, kein Orakel, kein Sagenbuch,  
keine Annalen, keine Sünde. Die keltische heidnische Religion  
kann keine Hilfe" (Julius Pokorny): Cattle trade less good  
than agriculture & role county of raw stuffs (horns & hoofs for  
combs) hides for shoes, farmers, fallow, bones etc for many.  
Hampshire meat trade better. 1/2 of whole crop of  
grain to feed oxen. ~~Deepen land of Bascos and Chaiman.~~  
~~Campers ago B. Paul added drainage of marshes for~~  
~~million acres - it - create. Internal reform, rate, high~~  
~~then Brit. farming system. Soil, tillage, potting. killed - South~~  
~~to the in family. Elizabeth Webb and making Cladding~~  
~~March 1860~~

Figure 3: *Ulysses* Preparation Notebook 1. Joyce Papers 2002, National Library of Ireland.

The lines in blue crayon<sup>140</sup> read, “Malthus in I. food decreases in / arithm progress, population in geom. progression.” Five lines down the page (not underlined), the script continues: “Cattle trade less good/than agriculture & rob country of raw stuffs (Bones & hoofs for combs) hides for shoes, tanners, fallow, bones etc for manure/Slaughter meat trade better.” This language appears in the Hades episode quoted at the beginning of this chapter as well as the Cyclops episode. In both cases, English control is located in the cattle trades, deepening the connection between agriculture and the debilitating effects of colonial rule in Joyce’s body of work. This page also identifies “Oxen of the Sun” as a third location for his critique of imperial food trades.

Critics have explored the Malthussian overtones in the “Oxen” episode and suggested that it should not be dismissed as a parody about reproduction.<sup>141</sup> From the opening of the episode, which imagines the downward plunge of a declining population graph as a slide, to its intertextual references to infant mortality in works like *David Copperfield*, “Oxen” is riddled with instances of death and loss as well as birth. Arguably, its true subject is “population loss on a massive scale and the rhetoric that justified it as somehow ‘natural’” (Alexander 439). The notebook page substantiates the connections between the cattle/oxen motif and Joyce’s critique of English policy during the famine. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, Odysseus’s crew sacrifices the cattle of the gods in defiance of divine orders forbidding it. The ship is consequently struck with Zeus’s lightning as punishment. Joyce’s implication is that colonial Ireland has been similarly required to withhold from eating its own bounty as a gesture of submission to the gods of empire, and thus sacrifices its own people’s well-being. The sacrificial “oxen” in this title become analogues to post-famine populations, whose tragic absence from the 1904 Irish census appears in a 1907 article entitled “Ireland at the Bar” that Joyce also wrote in Trieste: “There are twenty

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<sup>140</sup>If a color image is unavailable, this is the first underlined section in the image.

<sup>141</sup>Cf. Gibson and Alexander.

million Irish scattered throughout the world. The Emerald Isle contains only a small part of them. . . . Indeed, the Irish question is still unresolved today, after six centuries of occupation and over a hundred years of legislation that reduced the population of the unhappy island from eight to four million ” (*Critical Writings* 199). “Oxen” thus provides a critique of the discourses that justified or otherwise explained the tragedy of population loss as somehow natural or inevitable.

Post-famine depopulation is widely understood as one cause of the stagnant Irish economy at the turn of the century, which in turn produced the perception of intellectual and cultural stagnation that Joyce attacks in his early essays and more famously in *Dubliners* (1914). Kevin Whelan’s work on the cultural legacy of the famine pinpoints what he calls the “sluggishness” of post-Famine Irish culture, which had been stripped so drastically of native and agrarian traditions, from folk music and dance to more entrenched features like language and religious ritual. The Irish Literary Revival, a resurgence of art and literature in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that sourced from indigenous Irish stories, traditions, and history, is one way that Whelan marks the end of such sluggishness. From the 1880s onwards, when the first post-Famine generations take the reins of cultural production, young Irish writers generate a series of radical responses to its legacy. Most critics situate *Dubliners* and Joyce’s early novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), within the context of the Revival, the gravity of which concentrated in Dublin before Joyce left for the Continent permanently in 1912.

Perhaps unusually, the artistic awakening of the Irish Revival fueled Ireland’s economic and social revitalization. Kiberd argues that, in twentieth-century Ireland, “a cultural revolution begat a political one”; and in this way, “the Irish experience seems to anticipate that of the emerging nation-states of the so-called Third World” (*Inventing* 4). The vitality of Revival culture enables what Whelan calls “radical memory,” which he defines as “a recourse to the past



deployed for radical political purposes” (151). Rather than resort to nostalgia for a lost past, the Celtic Revival features artistic production that deploys the past to challenge the present by “restor[ing] to possibility historical moments that had been blocked or unfulfilled earlier.”

Drawing upon Toni Morrison’s concept of “rememoration,” Whelan observes, “[t]here is more in the past than simply what happened; at any given point in time, multiple trajectories towards the future are open” because, crucially, “imagination is bound up in memory” (“Cultural Effects” 152). Thus, Joyce’s generation of writers “radicalizes historicism” in order to link individual with social memory and enable a redemptive model for history in order to redeem losses that are “themselves beyond redemption” (ibid.).

If radical historicism fueled the emergence of Irish Revival, then modernism provided a stylistic fit. Irish literature is colonial and operates outside of the empire’s metropolitan center. It is a minor tradition, as Deleuze and Guattari have defined it: literature written in a major language by a minority group in revolt against its oppressors. While major traditions are “that which conceptualizes well expresses itself,” the quality of being minor “begins by expressing itself and doesn’t conceptualize until later” (28). By existing outside the gravity of a national literary tradition, minor literatures embrace the revolutionary potential of experimentation. Neither are they bound by the confines of a national language. Like many of his peers, Joyce regarded English as an alien tongue as well as an alien tradition. For many Irish writers, English was regarded as the “target” language rather than a “source”; and when they sought to articulate the absence of the historical past, “that articulation required a new language that was not exactly English, even if it was English-based” (Whelan “Memories” 62).<sup>142</sup> Irish modernist writers were,

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<sup>142</sup>This impulse can also be detected in, for instance, “Yeats’s occultism in *A Vision*, Joyce’s ur-English of *Finnegan’s Wake*, Gregory’s Kiltartanese, Synge’s sing-song, Beckett’s experiments in writing in French and then translating it back into English” (Whelan “Memories” 62).

in an important sense, already politically conditioned to embrace experimentation and linguistic play without regard to traditional modes of artistic production.

Joyce's body of work suggests that to be marginal and alienated is, in fact, *to be modern*. Irish people were not deprived of modernity in their provincialism and backwardness; they embodied it (Whelan "Memories" 65). For Joyce, modern life was an experience of "perpetual disintegration and renewal," and he often resented the cultural callouses that built up as a result of "mak[ing] a home in that disorder" (Kiberd *Inventing* 329). For Joyce, Dublin was an occupied city, and Ireland's impoverished and provincial place within the parasitic imperial economy ensured that it was dull, mechanical, lifeless, and paralyzed. "Paralysis" is a totem word that Joyce used to characterize the life of his characters in *Dubliners*, and critics often summon it as well to discuss this collection of stories. In *Dubliners*, writes Kiberd, "the city is a place of paralysis. It is less a centrally-planned singular entity than a collection of villages that got amalgamated; and liberation for any protagonist can only be imagined as movement out, away from the center of paralysis" ("Postcolonial" 120). Its impulse is to seek catharsis, purging the waste of modern Dublin and restoring cultural energy to urban life.<sup>143</sup> Joyce "employs a repetitive lexicon to describe this colonised world":

spectral, shrivelled, stale, vague, mean, dull, dark, melancholy, sombre, sour, sullen, gaunt, bleak, bitter, denuded, pallid, grey, servile, consumptive, narrow, tawdry, gloomy, listless. It is a world of shadows, condemned always to the second hand, to an identity based on alienation from self and others. (Whelan "Memories" 65)

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<sup>143</sup>The act of purging Dublin's waste also features prominently in "The Holy Office," a broadsheet that young Joyce used in 1904 to excoriate other members of the Celtic Revival.

Joyce's critique of life in Dublin is far from mere angst. For him, to escape from the provincial village is the only way to achieve artistic transcendence.<sup>144</sup> His figuration of the city is a "place of copied and derived gestures"; and each story within the collection is an "aborted attempt at freedom, an attempt which is doomed precisely because it couches itself in the language of the enemy... [each] gesture of revolt is fated always to have the old, familiar tyranny inscribed in it" (Kiberd *Inventing* 330). The plight of Joyce's characters is also the plight of the colonized artist, who is expected to produce imitations of an imported tradition by quaint village tastes that shun any gesture of "revolt."

*Dubliners* is inflected by both personal and national narratives of departure and exile. The collection may portray the city as culturally paralyzed, but the legacy of the Famine registers in each character's struggle over the decision to leave and seek a better life elsewhere. Many of its stories portray a celebration of departure as a sign that post-Famine Ireland has been somehow betrayed. If Ireland has betrayed its people by stifling their lives, the people are equally traitorous for entertaining the thought of escaping its inhospitable environment. Miss Ivors chides Gabriel for traveling abroad on vacation, accusing him of ignoring his own country as a worthy site for leisure and exploration. In "Boarding House," Bob Doran wishes to "fly away to another country" to escape an unfortunate affair but doesn't act upon this impulse (*D* 65)<sup>145</sup>; he later ends up a drunk at Kiernan's pub in *Ulysses*. In "Little Cloud," Little Chandler is envious of Ignatius Gallaher's success in the London, a place "far from his own sober inartistic life" (*D* 70). "Eveline" presents the most overt meditation over the decision to follow the trail of millions abroad. The story ends with Eveline clutching the quay railings in agony, "all the seas of the

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<sup>144</sup>Seamus Deane reads this frustration as "boredom," which, along with violence, defines life in colonized cultures.

<sup>145</sup>James Joyce, *Dubliners*. New York: Signet, 1991. All quotations appear parenthetically in the text as *D*.

world tumbl[ing] in her heart” (*D* 36), before fleeing from the pier and her lover, who had offered her the promise of marriage and a new life in South America. The characters of *Dubliners* do not vote with their feet, preferring a state of suspended mobility to the potential liberation of departure.

Joyce’s own decision to leave Ireland, mirrored to some degree in Stephen’s decision to flee to the Continent at the end of *Portrait*, exists in tension with the larger narrative of emigration that the Famine produced. Joyce often expressed his decision to leave Ireland in terms that were self-congratulatory, viewing the choice as an escape from Dublin’s provincial intellectual confines.<sup>146</sup> One typically modernist reading of Joyce’s departure uses this sentiment to build a reading of Joyce’s escape to a more cosmopolitan life in Europe’s great artistic centers. But his personal letters evince a more conflicted account of life abroad, in which Joyce paints himself as an exile trapped a life of poverty and partial employment that scarcely resembles the freedom of a young artist. Much of his correspondence attests to a self-righteous quest to vindicate his choice, although his personal history diverges sharply from the broader narrative of Irish emigration in which departure was a physical necessity for so many. The lecture that begun this section with such a virulent indictment of English rule also demonstrates deep cynicism for what has been left in its wake. *Dubliners* reads like a longer version of the final paragraph of “Ireland: Island of Saints and Sages”: “It is well time for Ireland to have done with her failure... [but] hurry up! I am sure that I, at least, will never see that curtain go up, because I will have already gone home on the last train” (174). This is a deeply pessimistic statement about the

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<sup>146</sup>Letters to his brother, Stanislaus, convey Joyce’s disgust for repressive social norms in Dublin society. His frustration also appears in a rare poem, privately printed in Trieste in 1912, entitled “Gas From a Burner.” The poem lampoons one publisher who refused to publish *Dubliners* on the grounds of immorality, but it is also a general condemnation of provincial Dublin culture.

future of modern Ireland and also remarkable for its displacement of the concept of “home,” which, even as early as 1907, is already to be found somewhere else.

§

Part of Joyce’s frustration with the confines of Dublin’s intellectual climate came from his rejection of the more conservative currents within Revivalist circles. The question of Irish agriculture features largely in his views on the nation’s cultural future. While Joyce critiqued the imperial food economy for its debilitating effects, he was highly skeptical that the return to domestic agriculture would enable Ireland to forge an independent cultural status. The Revival was a diverse movement, but some dominant streaks idealized the purity of Irish identity as a remedy for its modern bankruptcy, which it perceived as a negative consequence of internationalism.

Food was a key site of activism in these discussions. “Broadly conceived,” writes Helen O’Connell, the Irish Revival was “supposed to offset the incursion of mass production and industrialization, which were associated with England” (136). Agricultural practices and dietary habits were important yet underexplored mechanisms by which these ideas were communicated. Agricultural cooperatives, like the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (IAOS), were closely connected to the cultural aspects of the Revival by figures like George Russell (Æ). Russell was recruited as secretary of the IAOS by Lady Gregory and Yeats, who saw Russell’s involvement as “an extension” of their own activities (O’Connell 130).<sup>147</sup> Russell was responsible for placing the co-operative movement in agriculture “at the vanguard of Irish intellectual development” and allied it with other cultural movements (Allen 32-34). His tenure at the *Irish Homestead* encouraged some of the period’s most important writers, including the early fiction of Joyce.

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<sup>147</sup>Other evidence suggests, however, that these ties were also highly competitive. Cf. Allen on Russell and Yeats’s competing literary visions (33).

Three stories from *Dubliners* first appeared in print there in 1904.<sup>148</sup> Russell believed that the Revival should reach, and revive, rural Ireland, and he became convinced that the soundness of rural communities was essential to lead Ireland out of a disabling past and into a healthy future. Diet was a key facet of his platform, and he had specific ideas about what should be considered nourishing fare for the modern nation. White bread and tea, according to Russell, were debilitating foods, industrial products he associated with urban poverty and the empty, materialistic culture of England. He tirelessly advocated for local milk and oats to form a central part of the modern Irish diet (“Food Values” 375). His editorials in the *Irish Homestead* express concern that rural Irish people were still subject to the post-Famine pattern of weakness, illness, and emigration, and he blamed their condition on eating imported goods instead of Irish ones. “There is no doubt that the vitality of the Irish people has seriously diminished and that the change has come about with a change in the character of the food consumed,” Russell writes in 1913. “With increasing prosperity, in the financial sense, we have grown much poorer, if our standards are biological and not financial.” The increasing ubiquity of processed foodstuffs was the result of accelerated import markets. Russell thus rejects these products as a debilitating form of imperial influence; he even goes so far as to demand that the Irish state “investigate” these misaligned “food values” as a matter of national security (ibid.). The health of the Revivalist movement, he implies, is at stake in these consumer choices.

Joyce distanced himself from Russell’s claims about the corruptive influence of processed food and questioned the romantic assumptions about peasant culture they contained. His satirical digs at Russell—who appears in *Ulysses* as a “tall figure in bearded homespun” who wears a “cooperative watch” (*U* 9.269)—call into question the materialism underlying his fetish

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<sup>148</sup>“The Sisters,” “Eveline,” and “After the Races” all appeared in the *Irish Homestead* that year.

for local foods. The figure of Stephen Dedalus is a primary vehicle for this critique. In both *Portrait* and *Ulysses*, the Dedalus family regularly drinks weak tea and eats sugared bread, an obvious reference to Russell's bogeymen. Stephen seems to prefer this under-nourishing fare to the offerings of "Revivalist milk drinkers" (*P* 176),<sup>149</sup> suggesting that he is uncomfortable accepting "the regularity and nourishment obtainable in a religious or national community" (O'Connell 135). Stephen seems unwilling to accept the dichotomy that Russell's obsession with Irish agriculture forces between the wholesomeness of local offerings and the corrupting, debilitating influence of imports from abroad. This debate evokes Stephen's internal conflict between his own feelings of discomfort within the narrow cultural confines of Ireland and the exhilaration that living abroad offers him at the end of *Portrait*.

Kiberd labels the Revivalist fetish for pastoral fantasy as "merely a projection of imperial fantasy." The movement was aware that, as an urbane, educated movement, it lacked a sense of "being an authentic *somewhere else*," apart from an occupied British identity, and turned to the figure of the peasant as an "embodiment of the sacred values" which the movement lacked (*Inventing* 336). Joyce was skeptical of this agrarian rediscovery, and Stephen's suspicion of Russell's prescriptions has the important effect of "demystifying the Revival recourse to the notions of wholesomeness and the natural" (O'Connell 129). The debate over "food values" that appears in *Portrait* anticipates Joyce's turn to a more cosmopolitan vision for Ireland's entrance onto a global stage; and his works increasingly challenge the Revivalist definition of "wholesomeness" as purely local. Purity of any kind as a precondition of Irishness was deeply objectionable to Joyce, and *Ulysses* infuses the domestic landscape with an abundance of

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<sup>149</sup>James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Future quotations appear parenthetically as *P*.

influence by importing the world into its pages. It is a somewhat ironic return to an import economy, then, that creates this uniquely Irish novel.

“Life in the Wrong Place”: *Ulysses*, Excess, and Literary Tradition

Already here we encounter the relation of disgust to what is positively vital, to what is animated. And indeed there is undoubtedly associated with the extinction of life in putrefaction a certain—quite remarkable—augmentation of life: a heightened announcement of the fact that life *is there*. (Kolnai 73)

An extended discussion of an event that ended in the 1850s might seem unusual for a study of Joyce. It could also seem more appropriate to contextualize the Irish Famine by reading texts by famine survivors or emigrants. Terry Eagleton’s complaint still resonates that so few studies of nineteenth-century literature deal with it at all, despite recent efforts to expand the Irish Famine canon.<sup>150</sup> But others have answered these objections by pointing out that, as has been suggested in studies of Holocaust literature, traumatic effects register not just in literary content but also—and arguably more profoundly—in literary form. To merely look for representations of the Famine could leave the “Famine as effect” entirely unregistered, writes Lloyd, taking up Whelan’s claim that only in early twentieth-century texts “do the traumas of Ireland’s colonial history seem to find adequate forms, forms that interrupt the narratives of modernity and seek to give multiple voice to the conflicting imaginaries through which a damaged culture finds the means to live on” (“Review” 271). Also following Whelan, Lloyd describes late nineteenth-century Irish literature in terms of paralysis, in which “the literary forms available—novel, poem, even epic— failed to register the trauma of Irish history.” Early twentieth-century works, he asserts, are paradoxically more effective at registered the trauma of history “in their shattered and inorganic forms” (ibid.). Thus, it is crucial to understand Joyce’s

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<sup>150</sup>Cf. Fegan for a recent book that attempts to remedy this lack.



structures and forms as inextricably impacted by this pivotal event in colonial history. “Ireland after the famines of the mid-nineteenth century was a story of nowhere, waiting for its appropriate images and symbols to be inscribed in it,” writes Kiberd (*Inventing* 115). His and other scholarly works make a compelling case that Irish modernism filled that cultural vacuum.

The imperial fantasy of Ireland that motivated nonintervention idealized it as a patch-work quilt of idyllic grazing pastures, emptied of warring factions and compliant with administrative demands for a “unitary” social character (Kiberd *Inventing* 9). *Ulysses* rejects that fantasy by peopling the colonial space far beyond necessity. The novel’s reception history testifies to the disgust it provoked in critics, who were outraged by its vectorless fecundity. Joyce’s aesthetic choices are a deeply political challenge to the English narrative of post-famine decline by rejecting scarcity as the only historical condition of Irish identity. The “toomuchness” of *Ulysses* short-circuits the imperial project of improvement, which depends upon efficiency in order to support an economy that consumes its colonies, and establishes a basis for modern Irish identity that exists beyond imperial control.

## §

Excess is Joyce’s most radical formal strategy. While his approach arguably reflects a wider “modern stylistic obsession with plenitude” that in other contexts has challenged distinctions between the sacred and the profane (Moran 288-89), Joyce’s work has pride of place in discourses that interpret plenitude as artistic heresy. A range of publishers, critics, and readers—to say nothing of the American legal system—condemned Joyce’s fiction for its obscene content. But the form of *Ulysses* itself has also elicited a long and distinguished genealogy of literary criticism that expressed revulsion at its sheer volume. The novel’s insatiable appetite for everything, and Joyce’s refusal to censor or select from among his gushing

prose, led many critics to complain that, while it contained some artistic merit, it “as a whole rejects the principles of construction and restraint necessary for true art” (qtd. in Brooker 30). Many contemporary reviewers articulated their offense by attacking Joyce’s blatant refusal to edit. One columnist identified the novel’s “all-inclusiveness” as “part of its scandal, for it seems blithely to dispense with the notion of an artistic gatekeeper choosing and forming his materials: “material” is allowed to run riot, bursting the bounds of coherence, and raising the specter of an uncontrolled, unstratified world.” The novelist Arnold Bennett complained that “art (if this is art) consists no longer of selection.” Joyce’s contemporary George Moore remarked that *Ulysses* was not literature but more like shorthand or a telephone directory—in other words, that it simply collected information without imposing any coherent meaning onto it. This seemed to violate conventional understandings of artistic purpose, which is to control and reinforce human patterns and structures. As Sir John Randolph (Shane) Leslie complained, “[w]ithout form...there cannot be art. Art must be logical, almost mathematical. Its material, its conditions, its effects must be calculable. Windiness, inconsequence, and confusion argue the riot of Nature.”<sup>151</sup>

A “riot of nature” is an apt description, and the style of *Ulysses* was often equated to the sublimity of the natural world. Leslie was most graphic, calling the work “a Sahara that is as dry as it is stinking... the ocean of inferior writing.” Other critics chimed in, referring to it as “a viscous uninformed tide,” “[the] Dead Seas in an ocean of prose,” with “gulfs and bays which are muddy and noisome with the sewage of civilization.” It was also “a country without roads”; “the wide waters and the illimitable stars of this universe”; and “the dark flood of... consciousness.” Many of the aquatically-themed complaints mentioned sewers: “the latrine”; “a

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<sup>151</sup>Brooker compiled all of these quotations (29-30). I include so many to both demonstrate the force of the responses that *Ulysses* generated, and to attest particularly to the association of Joyce’s free-flowing prose with dirt, filth, and sewage.

French sink... a Cuchulain of the sewer... the dreary muck-ridden ride... the flood of his own vomit... an Odyssey of the sewer... the cloaca... who can wade through the spate?" In sum, it seemed to many that Joyce had "exaggerated the mysterious materiality of the universe" to the clear detriment of modern art, which would be forced to cede superiority to nature's effluence (Brooker 29-30).

Anxiety over profusion, as demonstrated in the paragraphs above, is often intimately related to anxiety over waste. Metaphors of material waste, from feces to putrefication, have a place in Western intellectual inquiry as a way to discuss "how substances were differentiated—why one was waste and another had value—when materially there appeared to be no distinction between them" (Gee 4). Indistinctness connects physical disgust to moral disgust. Abject matter is marked by the suggestion of putrefaction, a state of decomposition that blurs the boundary between living and dead matter. Abject ideas and aesthetics similarly refuse to delineate between accepted categories. Indistinctness is a material quality that confuses waste with valued abundance, states of surplus which perversely resemble each other (ibid. 8).

*Ulysses*'s excessive vitality seems to have aroused an awareness of "the spectacle of life in the wrong place" (Kolnai 41), stimulating widespread moral disgust with its refusal to differentiate between content and effluence. It seems to threaten infection from its ability to transcend the limits that tradition would set for it. Brooker's history reminds us that, since Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790), much of modern literary criticism has assumed that the matter of nature is opposed to the human mind; and furthermore, that the former should be controlled by the latter (30). Joyce's free-flowing excess irked modern critics by challenging the notion that artists have an obligation to shape and control the material they present. Jean-Francois Lyotard details the triumph of the Romantic assumption that art exists to produce

harmony between a subject's cognitive powers and the form of an object, as detailed in Kant's third *Critique*. To paraphrase Kant: as readers and critics, our imagination is best exercised by contemplating objects that appear to be purposive (in other words, *formed*). Artistic taste, then, is purified by the ability to move beyond mere materiality, and the escape from matter is what makes art beautiful. Lyotard contends that since the early twentieth century, art no longer deals with the beautiful but with the sublime—not quality but quantity. The Kantian sublime is “absolutely large” in quantity and does not so much ignite “pleasure as rather admiration and respect” by being “violent to our imagination” (qtd. in Brooker 31). Thus, “unboundedness” of texts like *Ulysses* does not just excite our imagination but also repels it. In sum, the aesthetic of the sublime that Lyotard offers, and that Joyce cultivates, “involve[s] a forcible outstripping of the cognitive powers, a refusal of the consolations of ‘form’, and an ambiguous effect, alternatively fascinating and repellant, on its perceivers” (Brooker 31). That, in effect, is the description of *Ulysses*'s effect on its early readers. Its “toomuchness” turned readers off as much as its obscene content by generating both fascination and revulsion.

*Ulysses*'s resemblance to a telephone directory or—more importantly—a census, is an observation that has other political valences. After the famine, the Irish census became an important way to tally survivors. Somewhat counterintuitively, the Irish census became “not an instrument of colonial rule... but a form of resistance to colonialism and depopulation” and resisted English explanations for Irish depopulation (Alexander 442). *Thom*'s, a private census mentioned in *Ulysses*, was lauded by the nationalist press for providing evidence of both the extent of English misrule and Ireland's recovery. One editorial praises the statistics for “showing the facilities for national greatness Ireland naturally possesses; and showing, also to all who *will* see some of the causes of her misery and prostration.” Another commends the agricultural

statistics for demonstrating that “the longer landlordism lives the worse it thrives” (qtd. in Alexander 443). Finally, census takers could record the steady increase of the Irish birth rate, another way to stimulate nationalist pride and illustrate the resilience of the people. To compare *Ulysses* to a census as an insult, like so many early critics did, opens the possibility that Joyce is using a work of art to subsume, subvert, or rewrite the objective historical account of degradation, just as *Thom’s* sought to create its own official record of the impact of the famine that existed outside the realm of English authority.

“Toomuchness” seems an unlikely strategy to characterize a holy book of literary modernism, which in its most canonical sense is indebted to Imagism and reacts so sharply against romantic “softness,” to use Wyndham Lewis’s language. Yet one of modernism’s most effective shapers, Ezra Pound, embraced *Ulysses* as the defining work of the artistic milieu. It is important to recognize that Joyce’s career pivots between the two main phases of Pound’s ideal “new” modern writing—the use of images as mimetic or evocative of reality; then, later, the use of images to reject those realities, thus creating their own world. Pound saw the work of Lewis, T. S. Eliot, and Joyce as the reclamation of classical art from the abuses of romanticism. He hailed *Dubliners* the source of a new “hard,” precise style that he felt distinguished Joyce from the messy “mob rule” of Ireland, opining that “a nation that cannot write clearly cannot be trusted to govern, nor yet to think” (qtd. in Brooker 39). Pound was thus an early critic to internationalize Joyce and celebrate his genius as universal rather than a product of a specific national conflict.

But, as we have seen, *Ulysses* is often described in precisely the opposite terms and thus poses an aesthetic problem for his Anglo-American counterparts. Pound, Eliot, and Lewis all reacted differently to *Ulysses*. Not only do their responses represent significant strands of

criticism that characterize Joyce criticism through c20; they also influence what we understand modernism to be (Brooker 39). Unsurprisingly, Lewis banishes Joyce from the modern canon. *Ulysses* epitomizes what Lewis calls the “Time-Cult” of literature, which he felt was bogged down by the Bergsonian rage for representing individuated consciousness at the expense of the hard, critical intelligence that he admired: “[Joyce’s] possession by the drifting influence of the time-mind is a parable of the passive, anti-agential time doctrine itself” (Brooker 47). Lewis also objects to its volume, calling it an “Aladdin’s cave of bric-a-brac... unorganized brute material... [and] sewage of a past 20 years old...” (Lewis 89). Lewis’s motivation is political, too, viewing Yeats and Joyce as writers who undermined the imperial status quo. It is clear that Lewis fears republicanism, and like other British critics quoted above, often linked Joyce’s unbridled excess with Fenianism.<sup>152</sup>

In contrast, Pound compares Joyce to “Papa Flaubert” and so makes *Ulysses* into a critique of modernity: an “inferno,” not an encomium, a satire of degradation, not a capitulation to it (Brooker 40). According to Paul Sheehen, the novel, with its “innate predisposition towards narrative, always posed a problem for modernism,” because novels always seem to evoke reactions from the mass culture which was supposed to be a target of attack. Flaubert’s hardness assists in Pound’s celebration of *Ulysses* by “pit[ting] style against debased forms of cultural imitation” (41). In his enthusiasm for its novelty, Pound thus disregards the criterion of selection and signals the beginning of new capacities for our understanding of the modern novel as a way of capturing reality.

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<sup>152</sup>Much like H.G. Wells before him, Lewis rarely gets past the imperial “otherness” of Irish writers. Wells objected to Joyce’s works as too political and saw his style as too Irish. Brooker notes the irony present in this assertion, which mirrors recent trends that seek to reassert Joyce’s Irishness in order to separate him from a wider, more cosmopolitan Anglophone canon (48).

The reception history of *Ulysses* reveals the extent to which its formal characteristics provoked outrage within the critical community. Even if these reactions did not engage overtly with the politics of empire, they were nevertheless part of the experience of its cultural production. An excess of prose enacts the same logic that baffled the theoretical underpinnings of pre-Famine political economy, which struggled to explain the abundance of population living outside the demands of the conventional economy. The critical revulsion at such excess mirrors the authoritarian impulse to control this unauthorized production—this aesthetic “life in the wrong place.” This lineage also demonstrates that even Joyce’s most enthusiastic supporters had to perform intellectual acrobatics in order to assimilate his strategy of excess into their master narratives about Western art as the most elite, refined, and elevated products of human culture. To return to Lloyd’s suggestion that the problem of Ireland was “paradoxically not scarcity [of resources] but *abundance*”—of population, but also of social values that were antithetical to the civilizing project of imperial control—then abundance as a literary strategy challenges a critical ideology that follows the same logic of efficiency and control. *Ulysses* has encouraged the Anglo-American establishment to recognize the value of a different model of narrative production, one that does not value selection but inclusion.

## §

“To challenge English ideas is merely to treat the symptoms,” argues Kiberd in support of Joyce’s avant-gardism. “[O]nly by rejecting English forms could the mind be opened to the democratic muse” (*Inventing* 118). If the realist novel is shaped by scarcity and selection of individuals, Joyce’s form rejects this logic, attempting to represent a cultural aggregate in way that does not reduce them to mere bodies that require management on the page. *Ulysses* refuses to use an imperial discourse of “population,” which treats recalcitrant groups as “non-human” in

order to justify the exercise of discipline or paternalistic care over them (Lloyd “Potato” 324”), to order the lives of the people in its novelistic world. Even to the point of difficulty or unpleasantness, it “insists no one will be left out” (Alexander 434). It refuses to quantify, account for, or contain the vitality it creates.

Reading *Ulysses* biopolitically thus evinces the political intent of its perceived literary transgressions and makes literary form crucial to studies of political resistance. Aesthetic excess is a strategy that refuses to adhere to the English narrative of Irish depopulation and degradation. For critics to express revulsion at this technique, perceiving it as the “spectacle of life in the wrong place,” is an indication that modernism in Joyce’s hands provides a powerful critique of imperial governance, which worked to contain the resistant cultural forces that “endeavor[ed] to break altogether through any boundaries... and permeate its surroundings” (Kolnai 41). To some degree, the avant-garde novel is destined to struggle with the realist demand for counting and ordering individuals in a story. The act of writing fiction inherently produces the anxiety of selecting the characters that inhabit the space it creates. But *Ulysses* refuses the “scarcity conditions” (Alexander 433) that forms the basis of traditional novels. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx famously declared that “[m]en make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.” Joyce’s refusal to select in the name of art, however, opens new intellectual space for an imagined collective of people to challenge imperial history as the dominant account of Irish modernity.



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