VICTORIAN CRITICAL INTERVENTIONS
Donald E. Hall, Series Editor

Lost Causes

Historical Consciousness in Victorian Literature

Jason B. Jones

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For Eliot Krzysztof Jones

And over there my Paladins
Are talking of effect and cause,
With "learn to live by nature's laws!"
And "strive for social happiness
And contact with your fellow-men
In Reason: nothing to excess!"
As one leaves off the next begins.
—T. S. Eliot, "Convictions (Curtain Raiser)" (1910)

Contents

Acknowledgments xi

INTRODUCTION
Historicisms: Old, New, and Discontented 1

CHAPTER 1
Chaos and Carlyle 18

CHAPTER 2
The Ghosts of Causality 38

CHAPTER 3
Causation and Interpretation in *Shirley* 61

CHAPTER 4
George Eliot's Crises of Consequence 78

EPILOGUE
Psychoanalysis in the Nineteenth and Twenty-First Centuries:
The Future History of the Victorian Novel 100

Notes 103

Works Cited 119

Index 131

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Introduction

Historicisms

Old, New, and Discontented

> The history of the Victorian Age will never be written: we know too much about it. For ignorance is the first requisite of the historian—ignorance, which simplifies and clarifies, which selects and omits, with a placid perfection unattainable by the highest art.
>
> —Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (1918)

Like most aphorisms worth remembering, Lytton Strachey's famous opening to *Eminent Victorians* is funny, economical, and, from the point of view of his target, achingly unfair. Its manifest content might be perfectly acceptable: Many Victorians shared Strachey's disdain for the standard life-and-letters biographical treatment, and for the tendency to flood the marketplace with bulky volumes of journals, letters, and reminiscences of even minor figures. What would have been truly painful, from a nineteenth-century perspective, is Strachey's apparently cavalier, though actually studied and, arguably, feigned, disdain for historical facts. In the nineteenth century's self-image, historical consciousness was a salient insight underpinning various forms of thought, including geology, biology, biblical criticism, philosophy, political economy, sociology, and the arts.[1] And a crucial part of historical consciousness involves recognizing the gaps in the historical record, coming to grips, in other words, with the difficult realization of how irretrievable the past really is. While this realization could tinge some Victorian historiography with melancholy, Strachey cheerfully implies that whatever we do not know, we are better off not knowing. The brilliance of this aphorism stems from his conflating of a minor joke about Victorian logorrhea with a repudiation of nineteenth-century historicism. By contrasting his own approach with "the direct method of a scrupulous narration" (1), Strachey wittily yokes two central historiographical concerns: What can historical narration hope to achieve, and is there conceptual value to elements that elude narration?

At the risk of overreading a minor joke, we can also see here how nar-

rowly Strachey confines his sense of "history": History is an epistemology, a mode of knowing the past.[2] He strikes a faux-Arnoldian note in these lines, as he laments modernists' inability to gain the distance necessary for a correct perspective on the past.[3] The notoriously prolix Victorians thus frustrate our desire to understand them—though, of course, Strachey believes he knows them all too well. Many modern readers of Victorian fiction align themselves with Strachey: those novels that take on specific moments in history are, as my title suggests, "lost causes"—either lost because they fail adequately to replicate the events of the past they promise to construct, or lost because they fail to capture our imaginations about history or historical consciousness.

There is, however, another dimension to Victorian engagements with history: For many Victorians, and here I would include Thomas Carlyle, Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot among others, history has an ontological, as well as an epistemological, dimension. For these writers, there is an element of history that always exceeds our understanding. We can know many elements about the past, but there is always an irreconcilable dimension to it. This is not to be lamented; rather, it is the condition of our knowledge, our action, and our identity in the present. Because the past is partially lost, there can be a present; because we cannot know everything about it, we are driven to learn as much as we can about it. Not because our knowledge of the past would one day become complete, but rather because the past's inaccessibility gives us room to speak. Perversely, then, the fact that the past is lost is not only why we have to write history, but it is also why we have a history at all.[4] And that is precisely the "lost cause" that interests me here.

When we grasp the Victorians' interest in history's ontological dimensions, we recognize that they strive neither to represent the real transparently nor to argue for simple fables of progress. By contrast, the texts I interpret in the following chapters—including Carlyle's *The French Revolution* (1837); Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge* (1839–41) and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859); Brontë's *Shirley* (1849); and Eliot's *Felix Holt* (1866) and *Middlemarch* (1871–72)—indicate that such stories of progress cannot account fully for either Victorian England's turbulent debates over political representation and industrialization, or the apparently widespread experience of alienation from history.

Rather than considering these texts as ahistorical or as uninterested in history, then, *Lost Causes* claims that they articulate, at the limits of historical narrative, surprising models of causation that, by emphasizing contingency and aesthetic or linguistic factors that resist meaning, arguably permit historical change. Written during a period that saw the ubiquitous, even virulent, spread of historical argumentation, the texts I examine try

to show how social and subjective realms connect, thus undermining two fantasies: that we are the authors of our own identities, and that we are the effect of historical forces. These apparently contradictory fantasies are actually complementary: They are two extreme responses to history, the first denying agency to historical forces, the second pretending that we have no responsibility for our actions.[5] Rather than accept this false choice, the writers I examine suggest that history and subjective experience are incommensurate, and are only partially legible to each other.[6] This does not imply that the Victorian novel focuses on private experience as a retreat from the social world; on the contrary, the texts I address show how historical explanations cannot fully account for even the coherence of a plot, much less such vexed problems as identity or the progress of society. And as we shall see, the claim that history and the subjective are only partially legible to each other has wider-ranging implications than one might expect.

To put this slightly differently, Victorian writers emphasize how neither individual will nor ideology can fully explain either the social world or private experience. If Victorian writers claimed only that historical forces cannot account for the richness of subjective experience, then we would be justified in calling them ahistorical.[7] Instead, in these novels characters find themselves stymied by both the world and their own surprisingly "obstinate" desires.

I borrow "obstinate" from an Edwardian novel, Arnold Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908), which recounts how Sophia Baines is often thwarted by what the narrator calls an "obstinate instinct" (439). Relatively unconstrained by social expectations, Sophia nevertheless frequently finds herself internally blocked from acting on her desires. At moments when its readers expected to find characters acting freely, *The Old Wives' Tale* thus dramatizes an obstinate resistance to symbolization, to history, and to consciousness.[8] *Lost Causes* argues that Victorian writers frequently appeal to this obstinacy when representing periods of tumultuous change; it manifests itself in their novels as an undermining of narrative cohesion.

Two implications of this position should already be clear: First, Victorian writers have much more interesting and nuanced approaches to historical knowledge than has usually been understood. And second, Victorian meditations on history are frequently more nuanced than the critical vocabularies currently deployed to interpret them.[9] My claim that the incoherence and intractability of Victorian narratives about the past has conceptual value, and is not merely a political or aesthetic failure, qualifies recent discussions of the historical and social-problem novel genres, and indeed requires a brief assessment of claims made about Victorian realism. Debates about the nineteenth-century novel, whether in the period or

now, frequently turn out to hang on assumptions about causes and effects, and about our desire to arrange these in coherent, meaningful narratives.

The writers I examine share in common a mistrust of "the direct method of scrupulous narration," if such a method purports to copy reality transparently. We should thus characterize differently their narratives, even the novelists' interest in realism: These and other Victorian writers are keenly interested in the limits of historiographic models of narrative, especially when those models attempt to represent the identities of persons, institutions, or communities as potentially unified. Understood in this way, I propose, the inability of historical plots to cohere represents not an aesthetic failure, but an interest in the contradictory ways that the social and subjective realms intersect.[10] Indeed, I argue that Victorian novelists sometimes engage historical plots not to show how society holds together, but rather to capture intractable dimensions about society. From this perspective, their often baffling representation of social conflict is strategic rather than ideological.

Attending to Victorian novelists' skepticism about historical narrative, especially narratives of origin, means rethinking the conventional charge that the Victorian novel becomes increasingly ahistorical and politically quietist over the course of the century.[11] Victorian intellectuals were famously self-conscious, even anxious, about the rapid political, technological, and economic transformation of their society, and historians' attempts to explain those transformations could offer perspectival solace for doubts about the pace of change. In the pages that follow, I want not to recapitulate the development of Victorian historicism,[12] but rather to unpack a specific mistrust of that historicism: Friedrich Nietzsche's complaints about "The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life." Nietzsche's formulation, I'll soon show, helps us reframe both Victorian novels' understanding of historical change and temporality as well as more contemporary debates between historicism and psychoanalysis; indeed, following this strand arguably permits us to see the deep fascination history has for psychoanalysis, and, in turn, the way a historically minded approach to psychoanalytic interpretation can help us read Victorian fiction more vividly.

Concerned on many levels about wedding science and history and its stakes for advancing the nineteenth century, Nietzsche suggested in 1874 that a scientific approach to history encourages us to view the world with false tolerance, and to disavow any responsibility for the present or future.[13] For Nietzsche: "And what we see is certainly a star, a gleaming / and glorious star interposing itself, the constellation / has really been altered—*by science, by the demand / that history should be a science*" (77, emp. in original). Had almost any other nineteenth-century figure

invoked it, Nietzsche's star would celebrate the extensive relationship, newly theorized in that century, between life and history: Reason's light finally illuminates our identity as clearly as it does the surrounding world. A newly scientific approach to history discloses more and more truths about who we are and where we have come from—indeed, some nineteenth-century historians even claim to predict the future.

Here, Nietzsche advances two invaluable arguments about the relationship of history to life: First, a falsely scientific historicism masks our own egoism; second, authentic history is an after-the-fact response to an enigmatic, oracular past. This belated rewriting of a vatic past is, Nietzsche argues, a mode of fantasmatic hygiene: From time to time we need to destroy our fantasies about history in order to be able to act in the present.

The primary thrust of Nietzsche's argument is that historical consciousness is not always healthy. In his view, we are accustomed to believing that the study of history encourages a kind of modesty and justice. We recognize that great deeds have been done before, and they were accompanied by injustices. We also see that different cultures have varying solutions to similar problems, which encourages relativism. Nietzsche counters this by arguing that an untrammeled historical consciousness confuses the distinction between external circumstances and internal desires: "the individual grows fainthearted and unsure and dares no longer believe in himself: he sinks into his own interior depths, which here means into the accumulated lumber of what he has learned but which has no outward effect, of instruction which does not become life" (84). Rather than focus on the standard Nietzschean argument in favor of action, I want to foreground the second half of this sentence, which claims that too much historical consciousness leads us to retreat into the solitude of our thoughts, rather than engaging the world. "Our thoughts," however, are just the detritus of historical awareness.[14] Rather than extending our awareness, historical consciousness risks leaving us impotent and confused.

Two consequences arise from this confusion of inside and outside, both equally deplorable to Nietzsche. The first is that if we believe world-historical forces drive historical progress, then it does not matter if we act at all. Nietzsche claims that historical consciousness thus produces decadence. A converse consequence is disingenuous action. Even if we do manage to act, we can always disavow responsibility by claiming that we are simply carrying out history's mandate. Not only does history thus provide an alibi for our own egoism, but, as I have just shown, we cannot even know our egoism properly. Whether we act or not, then, our decision will always be undercut by our failure to see that even our private experience of subjectivity reflects an accretion of historical determinants.

Rejecting scientific history, Nietzsche instead endorses a critical history.

He claims that the task of historiography is to free us from attitudes that are no longer useful, thus opening up an opportunity to effect change. Critical history does not develop new knowledge, but rather rewrites our historical fantasies: "It is an attempt to give oneself, as it were *a posteriori,* a past in which one would like to originate in opposition to that in which one did originate:—always a dangerous attempt because it is so hard to know the limit to denial of the past and because second natures are usually weaker than first" (76). This crucial sentence resists the argument that historical narrative can fully account for causal relations; instead, it renders causation superfluous. After all, our own past is capable of producing us, and so we do not need a "better" one. Nietzsche offers the paradox of an effect trying to write its own cause, a paradox made possible by the distance between thought and its context.[15] He also is careful to qualify the risk of turning critical history into a mode of voluntarism: it is difficult to know if we are rewriting enough, or too much, of the past, and it is hard to know whether or how the new history will work.

Because Nietzsche's account focuses wholly on critical history's ability to transform ideologies, he cannot eliminate the threat of voluntarism. He tries to mitigate this threat by emphasizing the vatic element of history. He argues that "[w]hen the past speaks it always speaks as an oracle: only if you are an architect of the future and know the present will you understand it" (94). The meaning of the past is never settled or finite. Although we inevitably interpret the past in light of our present concerns, that interpretation is no truer than previous interpretations, and will someday be superseded by the needs of another time. Critical history therefore can profitably destroy the fantasies that blind us, but it cannot replace them with more than newer fantasies.

Nietzsche's argument usefully contests the view that history is a mode of knowledge, and suggests that historical fantasy is at least as important as fact. In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1971), Michel Foucault extends this insight, arguing that the point of history is to dissolve our complacent sense of self-identity. Explaining that we tend to believe that the origin of an institution or person contains the truth of it, Foucault claims instead that stories of origins mask two kinds of multiplicity: they hide our own lack of cohesion in the present, and equally hide the origin's lack of unity. Like Nietzsche, Foucault sees history as promoting a false continuity, and urges an alternative, genealogy:

> Genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things; its duty is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present, that it continues secretly to animate the present, hav-

> ing imposed a predetermined form to all its vicissitudes. Genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people. On the contrary, to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations—or, conversely, the complete reversals—the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover that truth or being do not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents. (146)

Foucault sees historical narratives as partaking in the genetic fallacy—the argument that a thing remains identical with its origin. In this respect he follows Nietzsche closely, since both see conventional historical narratives as disabling. Meaningful action is not separate in such narratives from what was already anticipated at some point in the past. Foucault instead argues that the contingency of events thwarts our narrative ambitions.[16] Although we long to explain social transformations in causal terms, he contends that these are a species of accident.[17]

Because in Foucault's terms history moves by accident rather than causes, historical narratives are interpretations, not discoveries. As with Nietzsche, the task for genealogy is to free us from conceptual blinders:

> If interpretation were the slow exposure of the meaning hidden in an origin, then only metaphysics could interpret the development of humanity. But if interpretation is the violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules, which in itself has no essential meaning, in order to impose a direction, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a different game, and to subject it to secondary rules, then the development of humanity is a series of interpretations. (152)

Genealogy and critical history share the task of rewriting history in order to produce a new future; both therefore make history slightly redundant, since the future that will come into being has to exist in order for history to be rewritten. However, Foucault's account veers toward voluntarism insofar as genealogy's project is to "impose a direction, to bend it to a new will." He does not pretend that this imposition will be "final," or that individuals can achieve it, but does imply that history can be adapted to our demands. His own skepticism about teleology, inherited from Nietzsche, should remind us that interpretation rarely achieves what is wanted. All that it can reliably do, as Nietzsche explained, is derail previous interpreta-

tions. What is required, perversely, is a concept of interpretation without a specific aim, an interpretation that, contra to Foucault, does not seek to bend discourse to a new will. One of psychoanalysis's contributions will be this sense of purposiveless interpretation.

Nietzsche and Foucault share a conviction that narrative explanation misses crucial dimensions of historical change. By focusing instead on historical fantasy, they remind us of a peculiar belatedness about historical argument: It is a field of effects trying to invent its own causes, in the form of accounts that would then restore causal order.[18] These accounts never work for long, Nietzsche affirms, since the real work of causation is a "dice-game of chance and the future," rather than a coherent story (70).[19] In response to the contingency of time and events, we invent for ourselves histories that we take as our own. Nietzsche and Foucault's emphasis on belatedness and contingency is invaluable, yet they still conceive of causation as internal to discourse. In other words, although they minimize the determining force of history, they also tend to represent the causes of social transformation as emerging from discourse itself.[20]

We see this tendency most dramatically in Foucault's two works that have most influenced Victorian studies: *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality,* volume I (1976). In these works we see Foucault's vision of a society linked by "an uninterrupted work of writing" (*Discipline* 197), a society in which the smallest details of everyday life attest eloquently to the machinations of power that have called them into being. There is a breathtaking smoothness about the workings of power in these texts, a remorseless effortlessness with which cause calls forth each effect. Institutions, persons, and events are all relentless textualized and, at the end of the day, tend to be legible to our interpretive eye. The appeal of such a perspective to literary critics is formidable. The novels, poems, and other texts with which we ply our trade are, at a stroke, converted into the bearers of disciplinary power. Rather than standing as sources of liberation (or even just escape), under critics' attentive gaze literary texts have been revealed to bear within them our own slavish subjectification. This revelation is more or less the explicit thesis of D. A. Miller's *The Novel and the Police* (1988), one of the most sophisticated engagements between Foucault and Victorian fiction. Miller argues that "From [a Foucauldian] perspective, the enterprise of the traditional novel would no longer (or not just) be the doomed attempt to produce a stable subject in a stable world, but would instead (or in addition) be the more successful task of forming—by means of that very 'failure'—a subject habituated to psychic displacements, evacuations, reinvestments" (xiii). The work of literature is to make the work of power easier. Literature is not the aesthetic sweetener that makes the bitter pill of power easier to tolerate; it is instead the sac-

charine pill itself, luring us into submission. And what Miller argues on behalf of *Discipline and Punish,* Nancy Armstrong's equally influential and valuable *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1987) argues on behalf of *The History of Sexuality:* Foucault "makes sex a function of sexuality and considers sexuality as a purely semiotic process. . . . Sexuality is, in other words, the cultural dimension of sex, which, to my way of thinking, includes as its most essential and powerful component the form of representation we take to be nature itself" (11). Armstrong, like Miller, argues powerfully for the idea that literature expresses the disciplinary aims of social power. Central to this idea is the premise that literature and disciplinary institutions are mutually readable, even fully transparent to each other and exchangeable for one another (sexuality is *purely* semiotic).

As we shall see momentarily, the idea that literature and its cultural and political contexts are mutually interpretable is also a key premise of new historicism, one that it admittedly inherits from Foucault. For example, Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt dismiss as "perfervid" celebrants (the religious imagery is theirs) any who would assert a special place for literary art (11). However, it is worth asking whether this vision of Foucault is the whole Foucauldian story. After all, near the end of *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966), Foucault had already insisted that literature is "enclosed within a radical intransitivity" (300), and that literature and the concept of literary language emerge in the nineteenth century as a "compensation for the demotion of language, the most important and also the most unexpected" (299). This should immediately cast a wrench into the smooth operations of power: If literature is *intransitive,* then it cannot be the unequivocal bearer of power's imprint. And the unexpectedness of the literary confirms this doubt: There is, within the literary, something irreducible to the historical conditions that produce it. This irreducibility is *extra*discursive, not non- or prediscursive. It is not a dimension prior to or untainted by discourse to which we could gain straightforward access; it is, rather, a property internal to language and representation that obstinately refuses meaning.[21]

When Foucault describes literary language as intransitive, he is making an argument about history, social change, and causation, not just art. One of the most trenchant critics of Foucault, Joan Copjec, argues that the problem with his mid-1970s formulations is "his reduction of society to . . . relations" of power and knowledge, with the concomitant "conception of a cause that is immanent within the field of its effects" (5, 6).[22] It is this notion of immanent causality that American literary critics import from Foucault when they assert that, within a given culture, all texts, artifacts, events, and persons are, at least in principle, legible to each other. As an alternative, Copjec offers psychoanalysis's emphasis on language's failure,

which—as I shall argue more fully in a moment—recognizes that society's "generative principle . . . cannot appear" among the effects and institutions we see within it. Psychoanalysis "*install*[s] society's generative principle, provide[s] for it a place beyond the realm of positive appearances" (9). I agree strongly with Copjec that this is the crucial sociopolitical meaning of psychoanalysis's account of causation, but it is worth acknowledging that it links up quite clearly with a dynamic internal to Foucault's own thought.[23]

As I have been suggesting, psychoanalysis contains a set of arguments about historical consciousness, temporality, and causation that are vital to understanding the vicissitudes of these concepts in the nineteenth century. And while the individual chapters of *Lost Causes* largely avoid the ritualistic invocation of Freud and Lacan, I want briefly to underline what I find to be most useful about their theory of subjectivity, and its unsettled relationship to narrative and historical consciousness. By way of transition to this theory, I want to risk a quick, and I hope not unfair, joke that telescopes the difference between a psychoanalytic and a new historicist version of interpretation.

In the process of offering a lively account of the founding of *Representations,* Greenblatt and Gallagher reflect on the theoretical debates that inspired it: "At this distance we remember best the heated discussions of Althusser and Lacan, but, for all of our passionate interest, terms like 'Institutional State Apparatus' or the '*objet a*' have not found their way comfortably into our own teaching or vocabulary" (2). This has the ring of truth, because in the Lacanian parlance, the *objet a* names, and quite specifically, something absolutely disallowed within new historicist approaches: the *objet a* is, as I'll soon show, the *lost* cause of desire; its existence disrupts the mutual intelligibility of text and context, and its baffling temporal logic contributes significantly to the intransitivity of literary language. By contrast, Gallagher and Greenblatt suggest that a sufficiently adroit interpretation could correct the "slippages" and "absences" of traditional historicism, thus unifying the historical field.[24]

Psychoanalysis's focus on the object of desire as necessarily lost preserves a gap between the real and its symbolic elaboration. The key to this discovery, I'll be claiming, is the privileged, yet ambiguous, role of historical narratives within psychoanalytic clinical practice. In his seminar of 1966–67 on the logic of fantasy, Jacques Lacan reported to his audience that he had recently been asked what need, what exigency drove him to theorize the *objet a* as object/cause of desire. According to the transcripts of this unpublished seminar, Lacan also passed along his answer: It was about time. The *objet a* is the figure through which Lacan interprets the idea, which he discovered in Freud, of deferred action or belatedness (*Nachträglichkeit*).[25]

And if "everyone knows" that Lacan emphasizes deferred action, nonetheless it is the case that the peculiar mode of causality it implies is still far from understood. Joël Dor has argued that the problem with so-called "wild" analysis—and, implicitly, the sociocultural or literary application of psychoanalysis—is its application of a positivistic causal model to psychoanalytic theory (*Clinical* 5–6). Dor denounces the mode of analysis that proceeds by linking a textual thematic to an image in psychoanalysis—hunting, as it were, for phallic symbols, or evidence of anality, or explicit models of oedipal crisis. Instead, Dor insists, we have to pay particular attention to the temporality of the clinic. When we recall how Lacanian concepts are deployed clinically, their obsessive interest in the narratives about the past leaps into focus.

For the seductiveness of the past constitutes the engine and the risk of analysis—a Janus-faced reality that emerges immediately whenever Freud writes on technique. Consider, for instance, this remarkable description of psychoanalytic progress from "The Future Prospects of Psycho-Analytic Therapy" (1910):

> At its beginning psycho-analytic treatment was inexorable and exhausting. The patient had to say everything himself, and the physician's activity consisted of urging him on incessantly. To-day things have a more friendly air. The treatment is made up of two parts—what the physician infers and tells the patient, and the patient's working-over of what he has heard. (142)

Even granting the Rotary Club atmosphere of this particular essay, in which Freud tries to recruit more adherents to the psychoanalytic movement, there is something a little disquieting about a description in which the only person who speaks is the analyst! A more typical view—and one that is often quoted—is his claim from "Constructions in Analysis" (1937), where he claims that "What we are in search of is a picture of the patient's forgotten years that shall be alike trustworthy and in all essential respects complete" (258). This view of analysis is a sort of trick. Certainly, there is an attempt to attain a complete version of the past, but not because it is valuable in itself. Narratives about the past turn out to be a sort of royal road to the unconscious, better even than dreams, because the constant disruptions of the "picture . . . in all essential respects complete" force the analysand into a dawning recognition that language speaks us.

This emphasis on the self-estrangement of historical narrative emerges early in Freud's descriptions of technique. In a short, eponymous encyclopedia article, called "Freud's Psycho-Analytic Procedure" (1904), he declares that, after explaining the analytic rule to his analysands, he imme-

diately asks for a "detailed account of their case history" (251). At first glance, this seems trivial and self-evident: Of course the doctor will want to know his patient's history. But surely if the idea of *repression* means anything it means this: That analysands are constitutively incapable of delivering the goods when it comes to their own illness. It is not only that they will have forgotten or confused key details, but that the story that they want to tell is almost certainly not the story that they should be telling, at least not if they want to improve. (And, for that matter, there is no reason to trust that the analysand will want to improve—after all, the subject has a passion for ignorance,[26] and if improvement were simply a matter of wanting to, psychoanalysis would just be an especially trite form of self-help.) In other words, a founding axiom of Freudian technique is that anything the analysand says during this "detailed account" will be misleading.

Misleading, at least, at the level of *content.* Freud declares in this encyclopedia article that asking for a history of the case has a pragmatic benefit: The analysand's historical narrative will produce a useful number of "associations," which Freud defines as "the involuntary thoughts (most frequently regarded as disturbing elements and therefore ordinarily pushed aside) which so often break across the continuity of a consecutive narrative" (251). In other words, Freud asks for a narrative because he knows he will not get one. If analysands follow the analytic rule, then their narratives will always be interrupted. The claim here is not that the associations are the "true" history, or that they inadvertently provide relevant facts that the analysand has forgotten. Instead, Freud calls our attention to their meaningless disruptiveness. Put another way, it is the disruption that is the meaning, insofar as it signifies the existence of an Other speaker.

The first two seminars, and many of the early *écrits,* devote themselves to Lacan's critique of aiming at improved memory or a clearer narrative of the past as analytic ends in themselves. He claims, in Seminar II, that "reminiscence properly speaking . . . is the passage into the imaginary" (320/*Le séminaire II* 369). The argument here is obviously not that the memories are false, though that may be the case. Instead, Lacan wants us to see that reminiscences buttress, or, at the bare minimum, refuse to challenge, our self-image. The specificity of psychoanalysis's approach to memory emerges when we recall that even traumatic memories are imaginary in this way. For Lacan, the explicit content of analysands' narratives just isn't very interesting, because the narrative is almost by definition consistent with the ego's self-presentation.

Psychoanalysis is therefore not a hermeneutics. It is not a question of uncovering hidden or secret meanings, but, rather, a question of making possible the discovery of *truth.* This discovery begins when the subject accepts that imaginary unity is not the whole, or even the most interesting, story:

> In the course of analysis, as I have pointed out to you, it is when the traumatic elements—grounded in an image which has never been integrated—draw near that holes, points of fracture appear in the unification, the synthesis, of the subject's history. I have pointed out how it is in starting from these holes that the subject can realign himself within the different symbolic determinations which make him a subject with a history. Well, in the same way, for every human being, everything personal which can happen to him is located in the relation to the law to which he is bound. His history is unified by the law, by his symbolic universe, which is not the same for everyone. (*Seminar I* 197/*Le séminaire I* 222)

This passage's otherwise exemplary clarity is blurred by the use of "subject" to refer both to the person in analysis and the virtual subject on whose behalf an analysis typically is directed. Lacan here foregrounds the distinction between the "unification, the synthesis of the subject's history"—that is, the imaginary narrative that the analysand wants to tell—and the "symbolic determinations" that give the subject a history. The trauma is "impossible" or unintegrated at the level of the *imaginary* (at the level of the ego), all the while registering itself in the subject's *symbolic* history.

Psychoanalysis emerges as a theory and a therapeutics that aims to account for the asymmetrical relationship between historical change and individuals' or families' ability to incorporate those changes. In this sense, psychoanalysis is a species of Victorian novel, which addresses itself repeatedly to the tenuousness of causality—not, as is frequently suggested, to shore up the fit between individuals and their sociopolitical interpellations, but precisely the reverse: To attune readers to the ideological nature of any such "fit." If what an analysand learns from an analysis is that the narrative of one's identity is never the whole story, nor even the story one would want to tell, then a Victorian novel helps show its readers that fictions of social progress are scarcely credible on their own terms, much less when compared against their own experience.

In this way, the novelists I take up here appear to offer a rejoinder to historians—as varied as Thomas Babington Macaulay, the most famous adherent of Whiggish historiography, and Henry Buckle, whose *History of Civilization* (1857–61) attempted to discover historical laws as invariant as those of the physical world—could agree that English history is the unwavering story of progress. And Herbert Spencer's sociological theory of historical evolution, especially in relatively early works like *Social Statics* (1851) and *The Developmental Hypothesis* (1852), proposed that even human misery should be tolerated as a sign of our future perfection.

This misery was often showcased in a genre I will refer to as "Victorian

novels of the recent past." Addressing such a concept in *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties* (1956), Kathleen Tillotson argues that the 1840s saw the widespread use of a largely new technique: "the use of the past in novels of private life" (94). She claims that the novel of the recent past has two primary conceptual advantages over its antecedents, though these advantages tend to work at cross purposes. First, "the past, being past, can be possessed, hovered and brooded over, with the story-teller's supposed omniscience" and, second, "the past, being not the present, is stable, untouchable by the winds and waves which rock the present" (94). Tillotson's language initially suggests that these new novels imagine that the past is knowable: the past is "stable, untouchable," it can be "possessed" and related by an omniscient narrator. However, phrases such as "hovered and brooded over," or the "story-teller's supposed omniscience," suggest a more complex perspective is at work. As Tillotson acknowledges that the difference between "novels of the recent past" and "historical fiction" is fairly arbitrary, I will adapt it slightly. Throughout *Lost Causes,* I will use "novels of the recent past" to refer to novels set within a lifetime of the date of publication, which additionally deal with turbulent political events. These novels, I argue, dramatize how conventional historical explanations blind us to causal factors that do not mesh well with society. In other words, the novel emerges as a forum for critiquing our fantasies about historical meaning and their implication for social order.

Realism itself, as defined by practitioners such as George Eliot and Walter Scott, and theorists such as Harry Shaw, constitutes an attempt to represent historical processes. For instance, Eliot often asserts that only realism can show what is actually happening to the English countryside.[27] And in *Narrating Reality: Austen, Scott, Eliot* (1999), Harry Shaw explains that, contrary to widespread critical assumption, realism does not aim to represent reality transparently.[28] According to these thinkers, realism does not pretend to master history; instead, its narrative movement elicits reactions from readers that are analogous to their experience of historical change. What I want to underscore here is that nonmimetic elements are a crucial part of this process, even if no cognitive process is adequate to give them meaning.

As Nietzsche argued in the 1870s, realism replicates history in part through the formal incoherence of representation and plotting. But much earlier in the century, Walter Scott, too, draws attention to this point. In his famous 1815 review of Jane Austen's *Emma,* Scott wittily acknowledges that historical fidelity and plotting often seem at cross purposes. The early novelist was "expected to tread pretty much in the limits between the concentric circles of probability and possibility; and as he was not permitted to transgress the latter, his narrative, to make amends, almost always

went beyond the bounds of the former" (228). The improbability of this mode of novel—which Scott elsewhere calls the "Big Bow wow strain" of narration (*Journal* 114)—arises from the demand that all elements in the narration formally cohere. No matter how wild the protagonist's adventures, they are expected to coalesce. Were the exact same events to happen in real life, Scott insists, they would "usually be found only connected with each other because they have happened to the same individual" (229). The formal demands of fiction impose a unity on history completely lacking in the real world.[29]

Scott acknowledges that there is a new style of fiction that does not attempt to link up improbably diverse adventures; Austen exemplifies this style. Scott claims that, in this mode, precise description gives alternative satisfactions: the pleasure of "copying from nature as she really exists in the common walks of life, and presenting to the reader, instead of the splendid scenes of an imaginary world, a correct and striking representation of that which is daily taking place around him" (230).[30] Although we might think that Austen's mode of realism is closer to mimesis, since it does not depend on tenuous chains of causation, Scott argues elsewhere that the realism of minute particulars replaces temporal unity with a structural emphasis. He reminds us that "there is a distance as well as a foreground in narrative, as in natural perspective" ("Jonathan Swift" 155). The novelist is still not yet, at least in Scott's mind, able to eschew formal unity in order to represent history accurately. Because, outside of literature, history has no such unity, a tension exists between the flow of history and the demands of narrative. According to the logic of Scott's argument, accurately representing history deforms the narratives that purportedly explain it, because such a representation means disbanding aesthetic unity.

Realism paradoxically provides a framework with which to understand the tension between history and narrative. But if, as Scott claims, there is always a tension between history and narration, how can we interpret the popularity of the historical novel? As John Sutherland has wryly commented, the historical novel is the "most numerous and least honoured of Victorian fictional genres. . . . On no matter relating to the Victorian novel has posterity more diverged from contemporary nineteenth-century thought" (297–98). Virtually every major Victorian novelist experimented with the genre, and writers specializing in the genre, such as W. Harrison Ainsworth and especially Edward Bulwer Lytton, rivaled even Dickens in sales. The genre is difficult to define, thanks in part to its ambition: scrupulous attempts at historical reconstruction as well as formulaic plots of derring-do in period dress have an equal claim to the label. Nineteenth-century novels of the recent past, it appears, share with realism and historical novels an explicit concern with incorporating history into narrative.

Lukács's *The Historical Novel* (1937, trans. 1962) addresses directly the impasse of realism, whereby history necessarily deforms narrative. The historical novel, he argues, deduces "the individuality of characters from the historical peculiarity of the age" (19). By foregrounding the relationship between characters and their environment, the historical novel emphasizes the instability of the social world. Lukács claims that the point of literature is to awaken readers to the contingency of social institutions that otherwise seem permanent. The converse is true, too: Historical novels can insert apparently cataclysmic events, such as the French Revolution, into plots of progress and redemption.

Lukács's crucial claim is that the historical novel awakens its readers to movements of history. However, he is convinced of history's already established meaning, and so properly historical narratives always must mean the same thing or appear reactionary.[31] Jim Reilly's *Shadowtime: History and Representation in Hardy, Conrad, and George Eliot* (1993) offers an important supplement to Lukács. Reilly argues that nineteenth-century intellectual discourse, replete with history, compensates for modernity's failure to provide a satisfactory experience of history. In other words, people write obsessively about what they cannot find in the world. The structural transformations of the Victorian period were impersonal, not heroic, and consequently provoked alienation, not historical or radical consciousness. As Reilly cogently observes, "the nineteenth century's proliferation of historical genres compensates for the inexplicable absence of 'epic' history with an interminably voluble historical discourse" (4–5). Reilly argues that, as the pace and scale of social change accelerated, and individuals no longer experience history as continuous, the question of "historical meaning" became a lasting concern. Reilly reverses longstanding critical assumptions about modernism's so-called break with history, literary and otherwise. What is most useful for my purposes here, however, is simply his insistence that the notion of historical consciousness as primally driven by loss—by the "inexplicable absence of 'epic' history"—is intimately bound up with the form of Victorian historical narrative.

These histories also focus on turbulent events, and so are sometimes incorporated into the social-problem genre. The social-problem novel, also known as the Condition-of-England novel or *roman à these,* most famously focuses on industrial unrest: Examples include Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854), Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1855), and Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845). Thanks to its focus on contemporary questions, the social-problem novel is often asserted to aim for transparency.[32] However, like realist novels and historical novels, it too arguably focuses on social fantasy, rather than reality, since it struggles to represent political turbulence within a formally coherent narrative.[33]

Lost Causes contends that, as with the historical novel, the social-problem novel sets for itself tasks that it cannot handle, not in order to consolidate class interests, but to suspend, question, or even abolish them.[34] The social-problem novel usefully indexes middle-class self-doubt and self-criticism, especially when it appears to endorse middle-class hegemony. It is as though the novels understand that self-help and moral suasion cannot ameliorate the social concerns represented within them. By visibly straining to render coherent social progress and narrative unity, social-problem novels often play up, rather than minimize, aspects of society that resist assimilation.

By drawing on the strategies of realism, historical fiction, and the social-problem novel, novels of the recent past underscore how difficult it is to rely on linear historical narrative. This book adds to the criticism on these novels by emphasizing extradiscursive factors that impede social or formal coherence; I argue, that is, that such novels pursue contradictory representations of society, not to shore it up, but to delimit the plausibility of reforming projects. Intensifying the fraught nature of historical representation, such novels turn out to be poetry's equal as a vehicle for exploring the gaps between our fantasies about historical causation and the experience of change over time.

I argue throughout *Lost Causes* that meaning fails in historical narratives, not because of ideology, but because of factors that elude discursive elaboration. For example, if history and realism cannot comfortably coexist,[35] then how are we to interpret an incoherent novel with an historical theme? Must we read such a novel as a "history," aspiring to unity, and respond to it by "countering" those aspirations? Instead, I demonstrate in each chapter that there are conceptual advantages to the incoherence of some Victorian historical fictions. Specifically, when we recognize that narratives—whether normal or "counter"—cannot make society coherent, then we grasp that the demand for coherence is fraudulent. This view, the various chapters demonstrate, is paradoxically alive to history and historical change—indeed, with apologies to Rushdie, this is one of the ways newness enters the world.

EPILOGUE

Psychoanalysis in the Nineteenth and Twenty-First Centuries

The Future History of the Victorian Novel

What I have tried to suggest throughout this book is that we seem to believe in Victorian historicism more than key Victorians did themselves, or at any rate, we seem to believe that the Victorians believed in historicism. However, Victorian writers' historical consciousness could frequently be interestingly fraught with ambivalence and internal contradiction, in ways that are arguably closer to their own experience of historical change. In other words, whatever they professed to believe, Carlyle, Dickens, Brontë, and Eliot (all of whom of course believe different things) produce texts that seem closer to historical experience than the self-conscious arguments made on their behalf. In short, while these writers may have believed they were arguing historically, our own belief that they were striving toward historicism, combined with our own wish to do justice to marginalized voices, has blinded us to these writers' real interest, which lies in capturing the baffling temporality of self-conscious historical change. If we suspend briefly the relentless imperative to historicize, I have tried to argue, we can find in Victorian literature powerful tools, not only for understanding historical change, but also for grasping how limited our understanding of such change must be in our own time.

This book's original title was *Lost Causes: Psychoanalysis and Victorian Literature,* which was a bit misleading inasmuch as the book doesn't spend that much time on psychoanalysis. But that subtitle did offer both a specific conceptual promise and a bit of gallows humor, which are worth sketching briefly. As I have argued throughout the book, in both Victorian

literature and psychoanalysis we find an innovative, and still poorly understood, representation of causality, one which is arguably more interesting than the historicist methods currently used to interpret the literature. On this account, true causes are primally lost, never to be satisfactorily linked up with the effects that they determine; while this loss can be unsettling and even pathogenic, it is also what allows for change, whether in persons, discourses, or even cultures. This version of causality offers an internal resistance to historicism, a supplement to historical argumentation without which historicism risks sterile aridity.

The joke is less abstract: Defending the psychoanalytic account of *anything,* much less a nonsexual topic such as history or causality, seems a bit of a lost cause these days, especially outside of English or cultural studies departments. Outside the academy, the clinical efficacy of psychoanalysis is either openly ridiculed or simply bypassed by pharmacological interventions. Inside the academy, the influence of historicist theories, as well as theories rooted in identity politics and the self-inflicted wounds of reductive psychobiographical approaches, have lessened Freud's influence significantly. In 1978, Richard Altick could survey the field of Victorian criticism and note that "Apart from the continuing work of a few experts, the psychoanalytic approach seems to have passed the zenith of its promise" (19). While it is a striking coincidence that 1978 also saw the first United States publication of Jacques Lacan's *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis,* it would be hard to deny the essential truth of Altick's claim: For while the "return to Freud" has reinvigorated psychoanalytic studies of literature and culture over the past twenty-five years, Victorian studies has largely found Lacan's "gnomic propositions" rather more baffling than illuminating.[1] While psychoanalytic approaches—and often quite brilliant ones—to Victorian fiction continue to be published and to be well reviewed, one could hardly make the case that there has been a great upsurge in psychoanalytic criticism.[2] I want to suggest that psychoanalysis's future depends on recognizing that the historically popular elements of psychoanalytic criticism—sex, sexuality, and the perversions; symbolism; the stages of development—distract us from more interesting and useful arguments about the relationship between time, causation, and being. This distraction, perversely enough, turns out to repeat the structure of repression itself; a structure that we find schematized in many contemporary works, ranging from glossy pulp like *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003) to such neo-Victorian fictions as William Gibson and Bruce Sterling's *The Difference Engine* (1991), Tom Stoppard's *The Coast of Utopia* (2002), and Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002).

In *The Matrix Reloaded,* the nonhuman information trafficker known

as the Merovingian makes a long speech about "the only real truth; causality. Action, reaction. Cause and effect" (69). Overriding Morpheus's human insistence on choice, the Merovingian arranges a demonstration, in which a piece of cake that he has written forces a young woman into an intense burst of erotic feeling. He describes the way "each line of the program creat[es] an effect, like poetry" (69). Lost on the Merovingian—who is, after all, a program—is the key difference between code and poetry: code's effects are, even in massively complex computer programs, relatively straightforward. When a program calls a function or a subroutine, there is no confusion about what happens. For literary language such as poetry, however, this straightforward relationship between cause and effect no longer obtains, nor does the relationship between the author's intention and the experience of the poem's audience. The Merovingian only grasps poetry, code, and causality at the level of meaning. He insists, "Our only hope, our only peace is to understand it, to understand the why. Why is what separates us from them" (70). The conviction that causes can be referred to meanings is the root of the Merovingian's strength—it facilitates his trafficking in information—but it is also what prevents him from being able to stop Neo's revolutionary attempts to end the war between humans and machines.

While it perhaps seems absurd to move from the sober realities of Victorian social-problem texts—and especially the moral seriousness of writers like Carlyle and Eliot—to an ephemeral movie (and a disappointing sequel at that!), this scene foregrounds the way sex, causality, and understanding are repeatedly yoked together. In *The Difference Engine,* Gibson and Sterling contrast revolutionary, manifesto-driven claims for historical narrative with more fluid, emergent crystallizations borrowed from chaos theory. In so doing, they unwittingly borrow from Carlyle. In Stoppard's *Voyage* (the opening play in *The Coast of Utopia*), the sisters Liubov and Varenka discuss the mechanics of sex, while the object of Liubov's desire discusses Kant's discussion of causality (17–18). What all of these texts point to, time and again, is the way that sexuality and causality are metaphorically entangled—what they have in common is a recognition of enigma, and the limits of our ability to find meaning in our lives. In Victorian fiction and in psychoanalysis, this enigma is a resource for psychic and political change, a guarantor that the symptoms, social or otherwise, afflicting us today are alterable, possibly even for the better.

Notes

Notes to Introduction

1. It is not hard to find testimonies, from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, vouching for the importance of historical consciousness for the nineteenth century, and I discuss some later in the introduction. Michel Foucault famously called the period "the Age of History" (*Order* 217), and Jerome Buckley's *The Triumph of Time* documents how far-reaching such consciousness could be.

2. Suzy Anger's excellent introduction to her recent anthology, *Knowing the Past,* begins by connecting Strachey's witticism with recent debates on epistemology (1).

3. The clearest articulation of this lament in Arnold is the "Preface" to *Poems* (1853).

4. Here I adapt slightly a point Charles Shepherdson makes in *Vital Signs: Nature, Culture, Psychoanalysis:* He points out that the fact that we understand sexuality discursively opens sexuality toward history, rather than toward nature, without reducing sex to an effect of discourse (6–7).

5. Psychoanalysis has a cognate set of fantasies that I discuss in the opening sections of "The Time of Interpretation."

6. Reading private and public experience as "incommensurate" bears a clear debt to Christopher Lane's discussion of "Victorian asymmetry" (*Burdens* 1–43). Stephen Jay Gould also invokes asymmetry to explain the failure of biologically inspired Victorian historiography: "Not only as an anomaly of human history, but also as a signature of nature, pasts can't imply futures because a pattern inherent in the structure of nature's materials and laws—'the great asymmetry' in my terminology—too often disrupts an otherwise predictable unfolding of historical sequences" (211).

7. See Copjec 68.

8. In "Revisiting 'Mr. Bennett,'" I argue that this obstinate instinct fleshes out Bennett's interest in the mutual foundering of subjective and social experience.

9. Arguing from a hermeneutic point of view, Anger takes a similar point of view. See especially 7–14.

10. Fredric Jameson explains that after 1848 the historical novel "takes the external world as a mere dead decorative spectacle. . . . and yet which at the same time paradoxically uses that decorative background as the pretext for a host of *projections* of contemporary psychological states (i.e., ennui, anxiety, neurosis), but also contemporary philosophical issues and concerns, into a past in which they have no place" ("Introduction" 3).

11. Armstrong argues that the early nineteenth-century novel attempts to subjectivize its readers, rather than engage in political reform. Brantlinger (*Spirit*), Jameson, and Lukács all claim that the Victorian novel withdraws from political engagement

beginning in 1848. Catherine Gallagher (*Industrial*) argues that novelists after the 1850s begin to emphasize moral, rather than political, representation.

12. A task performed admirably by Jann and Dale, as well as the various contributors to Anger's *Knowing.*

13. Jim Reilly comments that "Nietzsche's fearsome rhetoric would hardly be exaggerated if, as Foucault suggests, the nineteenth century has impaled itself on the paradox whereby history is seen both as the very 'mode of being of empiricity' and as 'no longer compatible with representation'" (20).

14. Reilly discusses Nietzsche's belief that the nineteenth century has been "ruined by history" on 18–19.

15. As Hayden White explains, in "place of a sequence of cause-effect relationships as the model for viewing the evolution of any given biological or social phenomenon, Nietzsche substituted the notion of a set of retroactive confiscations" (*Metahistory* 363).

16. White explains that "Foucault rejects the authority of both logic and conventional narrative. His discourses often suggest a story, but they are never about the same 'characters,' and the events that comprise them are not linked by laws that would permit us to understand some as causes and others as effects" (*Content* 108).

17. Bruce Robbins has recently suggested that more attention should be paid to continuity rather than discontinuity, and provocatively argues that there is a "hidden antiprogressive continuity that helps explain the relatively smooth transition from an Arnoldian to a Foucaultian regime in Victorian studies and that might also raise some suspicions about the new dispensation" (174–75). In part, the confusion about continuity and discontinuity is encouraged by Foucault. In an interview cited by Robbins, Foucault goes on to claim that "History has no 'meaning,' though this is not to say that it is absurd or incoherent. On the contrary, it is intelligible and should be susceptible of analysis down to the smallest detail—but this in accordance with the intelligibility of struggles, of strategies and tactics" ("Truth and Power" 114). Discontinuity is introduced, not necessarily in the past itself, but by conceptualizing interpretation as struggle.

18. In developing this emphasis on fantasy, I have been significantly influenced by Joan Scott's recent essay, "Fantasy Echo." Scott argues that fantasy echo names "a set of psychic operations by which certain categories of identity are made to elide historical differences and create apparent continuities. . . . It does not presume to know the substance of identity, the resonance of its appeal, or the transformations it has undergone. It presumes only that where there is evidence of what seems enduring and unchanging identity, there is a history that needs to be explored" (304).

19. As Hardy had already written in "Hap" (1866): "Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain, / And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan" (11–12).

20. For an important discussion of Foucault's model of causation, see Copjec 5–14, and below.

21. For this notion of the "extradiscursive" see Lane "Poverty" 453, and on this term's difference from ideological appeals to some prediscursive arena of existence, see Tim Dean's *Beyond Sexuality,* especially his insistence that Lacan terms this "resistance or negation *within* language" the real (18). Finally, for the orthodox Lacanian explanations about why this is not just deconstruction, see Miller "*A* and *a* in Clinical Structures" and Zizek *Sublime* 153–58.

22. Copjec mounts her argument against "Foucault"; it's clear from her description of his argument that she's discussing mainly *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality,* volume 1.

23. Copjec almost acknowledges this (6–7), arguing that Foucault's work in the mid-1970s prevents his overall project from succeeding. Christopher Lane's *Burdens* and "The Experience of the Outside" are indispensable works for anyone considering the relationship among Foucault, Lacan, and Victorian studies.

24. Within literary criticism, the loosely defined movement known as "new historicism" owes a significant debt to Foucault and has profitably urged literary scholars, particularly in Renaissance and Victorian studies, to reconsider the relationship between text and context. Yet practitioners of new historicism have been famously reluctant to explain their theoretical aims, or exactly how new historicism differs from old. Even in a recent articulation, *Practicing New Historicism* (2000), Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt claim the mantle of Johann Gottfried Herder's cultural analysis:

> Poetry [for Herder] is not the path to a transhistorical truth . . . but the key to particular historically embedded social and psychological formations. . . . Herder's brilliant vision of the mutual embeddedness of art and history underlies our fascination with the possibility of treating all of the written and visual traces of a particular culture as a mutually intelligible network of signs. (7)

Greenblatt and Gallagher here acknowledge how the new historicism leans upon the old, and in such a way that explains how both Foucault and Herder could be among their chief influences: For new historicism, the crucial interpretive gesture is the insistence on reading culture as a "mutually intelligible network of signs," as a glorious chain of "mutual embeddedness." Greenblatt and Gallagher actually go farther than conventional Foucauldian analyses in asserting this embeddedness, dismissing critics who argue that art might not be governed entirely by "semantic necessity" (11). This confidence in the efficacy of reference—words are *required* to refer to a meaningful context—is perhaps the distinguishing characteristic of new historicism.

25. The idea of deferred action is notoriously difficult. The most useful introduction is Jean Laplanche's "Notes on Afterwardsness," which makes the connection between time and language explicit: deferred action "is inconceivable without a model of translation: that is, it presupposes that something is proposed by other, and which is then *afterwards* retranslated and reinterpreted. . . . It's impossible therefore just to hold a hermeneutic position on this—that is to say, that everyone interprets their past according to their present—because their past already has something deposited in it that needs to be deciphered" (222).

26. See "Direction" Fink 252 ("La direction" 627).

27. Versions of this argument may be found in "The Natural History of German Life," in the famous Chapter Seventeen of *Adam Bede* (1859), and in the Prologue to *Felix Holt.*

28. For Shaw, although mimesis is obviously crucial to realism, it is not an end in itself. Instead, he argues, the "narrative apparatus of realism involves us in emotional and cognitive activities that allow us to experience what it would be like to come to grips with the way history moves" (35).

29. In his introduction to *Gulliver's Travels,* Scott explains that "a marked difference between real and fictitious narrative [is] that the latter includes only such incidents as the author conceives will interest the reader, whereas the former is uniformly invested with many petty particulars, which can only be interesting to the narrator himself. Another distinction is, that, in the course of a real story, circumstances occur which lead neither to consequences nor to explanations; whereas the novelist is, generally speaking, cautious to introduce no incident or character which has not some effect in forwarding his plot" ("Jonathan Swift" 157).

30. Alluding to *Adam Bede,* Rosemary Jann helpfully links history and nineteenth-century realism: "The proliferation of quotidian detail authenticated this [shared historical] consciousness as it made the past habitable by imagination. In its 'faithful representing of commonplace things,' the Victorian narrative history aimed at asserting the authority of the ordinary in the same way as did many novels of the period" (210).

31. For related critiques of Lukács, see Fleishman 11, and especially Shaw *Forms* 41–46.

32. The expectation that social-problem novels yearn for transparency is of course most influentially articulated in Patrick Brantlinger's *The Spirit of Reform: British Literature and Politics, 1832–1867* (1977). Brantlinger shows that what animates Victorian fiction is the idea that "literature is or can be an instrument of social amelioration, at the same time that it is shaped by social events" (27).

33. In *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832–1867,* Catherine Gallagher emphasizes this dilemma: social-problem novelists "take no sly satisfaction in formal reflexiveness because their polemical purposes, the same purposes that lead them to question the novel's form, also lead them to make excessively naïve mimetic claims for it. Even as they probe the contested assumptions of their medium, they try to insist that their fictions are unmediated presentations of social reality" (xii). Gallagher's formulation leaves unexamined the possibility that there might be a reason to claim mimetic representation as an aesthetic aim, especially when that representation proves impossible to sustain.

34. In this respect, my project owes a large debt to Bodenheimer's *The Politics of Story,* which conceptualizes the social-problem genre as principally about social fantasy, rather than about social reality as such. Bodenheimer argues that the genre "points to a middle-class crisis of self-definition: insofar as the social-problem novels can be treated as a group, they display conflict about the nature and diversity of a newly empowered and newly fragmented middle class as they attempt to reimagine the roles that it should play in the maintenance of social order" (5).

35. Walter Scott takes this position in a variety of places, including his commentary on Jonathan Swift.

Notes to Chapter 1

1. For instance, in his essay on "Biography" (1832), Carlyle urges contemplation of "how impressive the smallest historical *fact* may become, as contrasted with the grandest *fictitious event*" (54, emp. in original).

2. In *The French Revolution* (1837), Carlyle lists "Nature, Universe, Destiny,

and Existence" as equally useful names for the "grand unnamable Fact in the midst of which we live and struggle" (13).

3. Mill makes a similar point about *The French Revolution,* arguing that Carlyle makes his readers "*acquainted* with persons, things, and events, before he suggests to us what to think of them. . . . This done, his logical propositions concerning the thing may be true, or may be false; the thing is there, and any reader may find a totally different set of propositions in it if he can; as he might in the reality, if *that* had been before him" ("Review" 61, emp. in original).

4. The best sustained discussion of Carlyle's inventive power is Dale, who provides a helpful overview of the relationship between Carlyle's historiography and German romanticism (*Victorian Critic* 15–88). Bigelow anatomizes Carlyle's concept of the unconscious, which he borrows from German romanticism. Recently, Vida provides a sustained recent discussion of Carlyle's early work in light of German thought; the classic reference is Harrold.

5. In recent years, theorists have articulated as a general problem of narrative Macaulay's difficulty in establishing a secure difference between fictional and historical narrative. For example, White famously explains that "narrative is not merely a neutral discursive form that may or may not be used to represent real events in their aspect as developmental processes, but rather entails ontological and epistemic choices with distinct ideological and even specifically political implications" (*Content* ix; *Metahistory*'s argument about the "emplotment" of history is also relevant). From White's perspective, we cannot overlook as simply ornamental the latter half of the phrase "historical narrative"; instead, we must recognize the structuring demands that narrative places on the historical field.

6. As White explains, Carlyle "made of the historical field and the historical process a panorama of happening in which the stress is on the novel and emergent, rather than on the achieved and inherited, aspects of cultural life" (*Metahistory* 149).

7. As Lacan puts it in *Seminar II*: "the object of the human quest is never an object of rediscovery in the sense of reminiscence. The subject doesn't rediscover the preformed tracks of his natural relation to the external world. The human object always constitutes itself through the intermediary of a first loss. Nothing fruitful takes place in man save through the intermediary of a loss of an object" (*Seminar II* 136/*Le séminaire II* 165). Two things are worth emphasizing here: The first is that the subject does not so much remember the past as recreate it, in part because what the subject remembers is the wrong thing: "In man, it is the wrong form which prevails" (*Seminar II* 86/*Le séminaire II* 109). The second point is that conceptualizing analysis as the restoration of the past is wrongheaded. If the restoration of the original object were even possible, it would spell the death of desire. As Lacan will argue in the seminar on anxiety, "the subject must fail, necessarily, so that its desire is not suffocated" (Harari 99). Every object is a re-found object, but happily, not the original one.

8. For recent overviews of the Macaulay-Carlyle debates, see Isaacson and Sorenson. Isaacson explains that "Macaulay's expansive, ambitious program for the writing of history provided Carlyle with a convenient foil against which to express his own evolving historiography" (29). Sorenson attributes their differences to rivalry as much as philosophical contention (although he concedes that it is a factor, too), but emphasizes that both "wanted to open up the past to an audience

that had turned away from the privileged discourse of gentlemanly chroniclers to the more visceral language of journalism" (42). For Sorenson, "in *The French Revolution* and [Macaulay's] the *History of England* the press of 'marginalized' life is felt in the style, description, documentation, and interpretation" (42). George Levine's *The Boundaries of Fiction* offers a useful assessment of Carlyle's and Macaulay's achievements in *Sartor* and *History;* he explicitly considers the two in relation to each other on 16–18 and 79–85.

9. G. P. Gooch's *History and the Historians in the Nineteenth Century* narrates the emergence of the Whig version of history, which properly begins with Henry Hallam's *Constitutional History of England from the Accession of Henry VII to the Death of George II* (1827). See Gooch 282–307, especially 292–95. Also see Parker 9–13. For a conservative polemic against the Whig version, see Butterfield.

10. "On History Again" explains that the benefit of historical portraiture is a kind of "inspiration" rather than mimetic representation, and that such portraits "urge [the reader's] mind to complete the picture, and evolve the meaning thereof for itself" (57). And in *Past and Present,* Carlyle argues that it is the "enigmatic" feature that a portrait discloses, rather than certainty (45).

11. Michel Foucault coins the phrase "repressive hypothesis" in his *The History of Sexuality,* Volume I, to describe the hydraulic conceptions of sexuality he attributes to Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse. In *History,* see 10–12. The most important discussion of the "repressive hypothesis" is the opening of Christopher Lane's *The Burdens of Intimacy,* especially 3–7. In "Loving Civilization's Discontents," I also address the limits of Foucault's account (172–75).

12. *Historical Sketches* is a posthumous collection of Carlyle's notes that his brother, Alexander Carlyle, published. It comprises the notes and sketches that Thomas Carlyle wrote while researching his biography of Cromwell, which appeared in 1845.

13. In "Signs of the Times" (1829), Carlyle explains that "there is a science of *Dynamics* in man's fortunes and nature, as well as of *Mechanics.* There is a science which treats of, and practically addresses, the primary, unmodified forces and energies of man, the mysterious springs of Love, and Fear, and Wonder, of Enthusiasm, Poetry, Religion, all which have a truly vital and *infinite* character" (68).

14. In a brilliant and scrupulous reading of Carlyle's *Chartism* (1839), Plotz argues that Carlyle willfully misreads the rational, coordinated mass actions of the Chartists as an outburst of a primal mob mentality. In so doing, Carlyle deprives the Chartists of political agency, substituting in its place an unhistorical aesthetic or psychological "truth" about the need for order (136–48). However, in *The French Revolution* at least, Carlyle stages not only the inarticulateness of the mob, but also how even the most well-thought-out and just political action can misfire, even as it partially accomplishes its aim. And in *Past and Present,* he claims that the Chartists were in fact the most articulate voice in England.

15. The standard, and still invaluable, analysis of Carlyle's rhetorical patterns is Holloway; of most interest in this context is 61–75.

16. Bidney devotes his analysis of archetypal fire imagery to Carlyle's *Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841).

17. Culviner offers the most helpful discussion of heroism in *The French Revolution;* he suggests that the heroic approach may not be the most successful

way to approach this earlier text.

18. Plotz connects Le Bon and Carlyle through the latter's *Chartism* (1839), a work that represents crowds in ways similar to *The French Revolution* (4–5).

Notes to Chapter 2

1. On Dickens's anachronism as an organizing principle rather than a slip, see Tillotson *Novels* 109–15. Peter Ackroyd remarks that "the London of [Dickens's] novels always remains the London of his youth" (100).

2. In writing of an "asymmetrical" relationship between history and experience, I draw on Christopher Lane's "Victorian Asymmetry" (*Burdens* 1–43).

3. Patrick Brantlinger has recently characterized Dickens's ghostly philosophy of history as a "grotesque populism" (61), that is, as a deeply ambivalent populism which manifests its ambivalence by representing the popular as grotesque. Brantlinger's powerful reading does illuminate Dickens's politics more than the familiar claim that the novelist is a sentimental radical. However, I want to argue that Brantlinger overlooks the extent to which, for Dickens, the ghostly and the uncertain are what make history itself possible.

4. Although allegory traditionally implies a one-to-one correspondence between registers of meaning, the proliferation of examples that all mean the same thing indicates that such a model does not apply here. The pressure Paul de Man brings to the concept of allegory is relevant, however. See particularly "Reading and History" (66–67), where de Man also argues that a "dialectic of understanding, as a complex interplay of knowing and not-knowing, is built into the very process of literary history" (58). Although de Man writes of "literary history" in this passage, at other moments in this well-known essay he connects literary-historical practice with history as such.

5. Ackroyd writes that "Dickens suggests that the strongest dreams are those which create a kind of allegory of the world, that dreams are, in that sense, at the root of all fiction" (378–79). While I agree with this claim, it is important to acknowledge that Dickens does not represent these "allegorical" dreams as the "strongest" dreams, but simply as those in which he is willing to concede some relationship between the past and the present.

6. My language here alludes to the Freudian/Lacanian principle of *Nachträglichkeit,* or "deferred action." As Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis explain, "It is not lived experience in general that undergoes a deferred revision, but, specifically, whatever it has been impossible in the first instance to incorporate into a meaningful context. The traumatic experience is the epitome of such unassimilated experience" (112). I discuss deferred action at greater length in my Introduction.

7. At least since Steven Marcus's classic essay, "Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case History," critics have been attentive to the interplay between historiography and psychoanalysis. Marcus's powerful reading of the Dora case as a historical narrative should not obscure psychoanalysis's more fundamental opposition to narrative meanings—or, perhaps more precisely, psychoanalysis's interest in the kinds of failures that thwart narrative, although we often defend those narratives to the cost of our well-being.

8. Alenka Zupancic explains this point through the figure of Oedipus, suggest-

ing that the particulars of Oedipus's answer to the Sphinx's riddle are less important than his willingness to risk an answer. The Lacanian inference is that "the subject actually *gives* something—he must give or offer his words; thus he can be *taken at his word*" (203, original emp.).

9. Indeed, this openness to history, rather than the more sober injunction to duty, constitutes his real inheritance from Carlyle; I take up Carlyle's version of history in Chapter 1. Elliot Gilbert provides an excellent discussion of Carlyle's "passionate anachronistic vision," which denies "the view that human history consists of a series of events linked by a superficial causality and that the way to preserve and communicate that history is to present those events as far as possible in the order in which they actually occurred and to look with disdain upon all but logical explanations of the connections therein" (253).

10. For a different reading of secrecy in Dickens, see Miller, especially 192–220. My account is more compatible with Christopher Lane's recent critique of secrecy in contemporary queer theory (224–45, esp. 239–42).

11. Slavoj Zizek's *For They Know Not What They Do* (1991) explains the "catastrophic consequences" of revealing "what should remain unspoken if the existing intersubjective network is to retain its consistency" (11, 12).

12. Standard treatments of anti-Catholic prejudice in Victorian England include Norman; Arnstein; Klaus; and Paz. Monod has a fascinating discussion of Dickens's personal hostility to Catholicism (192). For discussions of the Gordon Riots, see Babington; De Castro; Hibbert; Rudé *Crowd* and *Hanoverian.*

13. Butt and Tillotson explain that "the events of 1836–1841 make the novel almost journalistically apt. The Poor Law riots, the Chartist risings at Devizes, Birmingham, and Sheffeld, the mass meetings on Kersal Moor and Kennington Common, and most pointed of all, the Newport rising of 1839 with its attempt to release Chartist prisoners—all these . . . gave special point in 1841 to 'a tale of the Riots of '80'" (82). For additional discussion of the contemporary political significance of *Barnaby,* see Rice "Politics."

14. In "The Time of Interpretation: Psychoanalysis and the Past," I discuss the way psychoanalysis handles the distinction between memory and history proper.

15. Psychoanalytic critics have not failed to emphasize Barnaby's discovery of his father. Lacanian-oriented critics such as Michasiw and Sadoff have tended to read Barnaby as psychotic. While their elucidations of the paternal role, or, more properly, its foreclosure, in paranoia have been useful to me, I am not sure that the Lacanian father—that is, the signifier of maternal desire—is absent from Barnaby. Mrs. Rudge is clearly marked by desire: The desire that Barnaby and his father not meet. That this desire should depend on Barnaby's ignorance of his father does not necessarily mean that the father has been absent.

16. Natalie McKnight, as part of her argument that "Barnaby's history recapitulates the history of the treatment of the insane, as Foucault presents it in *Madness and Civilization*" (90), reads this paragraph as a kind of silencing and punishing of Barnaby. It is, she finds, an attempt to normalize him that is more restrictive than incarceration itself, because it implants within him the values of productivity and hard work. The extent to which Barnaby's story recapitulates Foucault's argument is open to question—Dickens does not, after all, try to turn Barnaby into a bourgeois, or even into a farmer, reporting instead that "his love of freedom and interest in all that moved or grew, or had its being in the elements, remained

to him unimpaired" (Chapter the Last: 634).

17. The most unequivocally evil characters in *Barnaby,* Sir John Chester and Gashford, are ancillary figures in the novel; moreover, Chester is such a transparent caricature of Lord Chesterfield that Dickens cannot draw upon him in the same way as he does the other main characters. For a full expression of this view, see Saintsbury (qtd. in Hawses' *Barnaby* 675–76). By contrast, Magnet argues that, by attacking Lord Chesterfield so vehemently, Dickens is trying to prop up the cultural role of the superego (84–99).

18. For a useful discussion of the function of these analogies in Scott's historical fiction, see Duncan (222), although he attributes Dickens's revision of Scott to a misreading on the former's part (for a similar argument, see Newman 172). Also see Marcus's seminal account of *Barnaby*'s father-son pairs for a useful discussion of analogy, as well as, more generally, Daleksi's account of analogy in Dickens.

19. For the standard discussion of Dickens's ambitions on this score, see Butt and Tillotson.

20. Alison Case explains that Dickens "rejects . . . precisely the qualities which define Scott as a historical novelist: namely, his ability to construct plots and characters as representations of historical process and consciousness" (129). Yet she goes on to assert that "it is the sense of being in the grip of the past, whether historical, personal, or literary, that Dickens most wants to escape in *Barnaby Rudge,*" and that "Dickens's treatment of the subject seems to leave no room for any consciousness of the past which is not 'retrogressive'" (141, 42).

21. For example, the novel starts with two histories that are untrue—John Willett's account of Elizabeth staying at the Maypole and cuffing a story, and Solomon Daisy's misleadingly gripping account of the Haredale murder. Likewise, Sim Tappertit, Varden's apprentice, plots a vengeance justified by a bizarre belief in the ancient privileges of apprentices, and the Protestant Association elicits violence through misguided appeals to history.

22. For some critics this instantly disqualifies *Barnaby* as a historical novel: see Lindsay; Butt and Tillotson.

23. McKnight exemplifies such claims, arguing that "Barnaby, Gordon, Hugh, and the mob they lead are all striving to find a voice by lashing out at the surfaces and conventions that have kept them mute and marginalized" (88). This formulation obscures the radically different relationships of Barnaby, Gordon, and Hugh to their mob—including the extent to which they are even aware that they are part of a mob. In addition to McKnight, Lindsay and Hollington also read the novel in these terms. Lindsay claims that "Barnaby and Tappertit . . . make up together what Dickens feels the motive force of the revolt: that which is limited to particular circumstance and the sense of personal wrong, and is treated humorously, satirically, and that which holds the pure human aspiration and is treated poetically, sympathetically" (103). Such readings as Lindsay's and McKnight's miss the "actual formation of an alliance between the two extremist factions, the militant Chartists and the anti-Catholic Ultra-Tories," which is the novel's key political insight into the 1840s (Rice "Politics" 60).

24. This criticism is explicitly formulated by Hollington, who argues that *Rudge* "seeks conservatively to reinstate authority rather than undermine it. . . . It seems Dickens is unwilling or incapable of imagining any freedom from psychic repression" (14). By contrast, John Kucich astutely observes that Dickens is uninterest-

ed in *psychic* repression in his early fiction, including *Rudge*—though he is clearly interested in the ways political repression can produce mob violence (213–14).

25. For a discussion of *Rudge*'s ghosts that emphasizes Dickens's view of the imagination rather than historical process, see McMaster 12–13.

26. Near the novel's end, Barnaby comes to resemble his spectral father: "Passive and timid, scared, pale, and wondering, and gazing at the throng as if he were newly risen from the dead, and felt himself a ghost among the living, Barnaby—not Barnaby in the spirit, but in flesh and blood, with pulses, sinews, nerves, and beating heart, and strong affections" (79:711). It is striking that Dickens's vibrant proliferation of bodily tissues, apparently intending to confirm Barnaby's liveliness, contradict the list of adjectives at the sentence's beginning. Read temporally, this organization could suggest that Barnaby recovers his physical prowess as he and Gabriel make their way to the latter's house. The tension between the two parts of the sentence also corresponds structurally to the status of the other living ghosts in the novel—his father was pale, ghastly, and terrifyingly alive, for instance. The sentence registers Barnaby's return, but paradoxically his return from life.

27. Duncan notes that Ainsworth and Bulwer-Lytton "undertook what might be called a re-gothicization of the historical romance. . . . suggest[ing] that 'history'—the public affairs of great folks—is a glossy but empty pageantry, and the fiery currents of life flow underground, in populous warrens and secret labyrinths" (213–14). Dickens can be included in this re-gothicization as well, although his ghosts work to very different effect from Ainsworth's.

28. To understand the force of Dickens's vision, it may be helpful to compare it with W. H. Ainsworth's *Guy Fawkes* (1841), an exactly contemporary historical novel also promulgating tolerance for Catholics. In Ainsworth's novel, Guy Fawkes is plagued with supernatural visions—including the ghost of a saint—warning him of certain disaster if he proceeds with his plot. Ainsworth deploys the ghostly to indicate that Fawkes mistakenly acted out of ambition. For a further discussion of the distinctive appeals to the supernatural in Dickens and Ainsworth, see Schroeder 31.

29. For a useful overview of how Derrida's recent turn to "hauntology" can help us read the Victorians, see Julian Wolfreys's *Victorian Hauntings* (and especially, on Dickens, see chapters one and four of this work).

Notes to Chapter 3

1. For criticism of *Shirley* that emphasizes industrial conflict, see Plotz 154–93, and Webb 121–61. E. P. Thompson discusses *Shirley* in his chapter on the Luddites in *The Making of the English Working Class* (472–602).

2. Writing to William Smith Williams, Brontë enthuses that, were she to meet Forçade, her "impulse would be to say, 'Monsieur, you know me, I shall deem it an honour to know you. . . . the subtle-thoughted, keen-eyed, quick-feeling Frenchman, knows the true nature of the ingredients which went to the composition of the creation he analyses—he knows the true nature of things, and he gives them their right name" (Wise *Lives* III:41). And she confides to Ellen Nussey that Forçade "follows Currer Bell through every winding, discerns every point, discriminates every shade—

proves himself master of the subject and lord of the aim" (*Lives* III:42).

3. Sally Shuttleworth concisely describes this analogy: "Both the labour and marriage markets are overstocked. Middle-class women and mill workers are alike made redundant, transformed from valued producers into worthless commodities by the operation of economic factors over which they have no control" (*Charlotte Brontë* 184). John Plotz argues that the relationship between women and workers is not analogous, but that the novel shows how middle-class women's flight towards privacy is produced by the threat of the mob.

4. For accounts emphasizing *Shirley*'s paternalism, see Bodenheimer; Webb.

5. Wendy Parkins has recently noted the tendency to read *Shirley* as though it were a "transparent allegory" (27), a phrase she borrows from Roland Barthes. Paul Kenny makes a similar argument.

6. See Lane "Charlotte Brontë." My argument in general owes a clear debt to Lane's reading; I shall return to his argument at specific moments below.

7. Sigmund Freud was fond of this story, which he called "kettle logic," using it in both *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900[1899]) and *Jokes in Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905). For a related discussion of Moore's apparently inexhaustible list of reasons not to help the workers, see Lane 206–7.

8. For instance, Patrick Brantlinger has recently argued that, because *Shirley* represents the working classes as intelligent, the novel is caught in a double bind: "it is not clear why, assuming that Luddism was not in their interest, the workers should fall prey to the outside agitators. On the other hand, if Luddism was in their interest, and the workers knew this, they wouldn't have needed outsiders to rise them to action" (*Reading* 114). I am trying to suggest that *Shirley*'s theory of causation cannot be equated with responsiveness to ideology.

9. Plotz argues that "the real strength of *Shirley*" is "the way it is striving to contain within the confines of the novel a potentially disruptive rival. That rival is the claims for representation that working-class crowds forcefully asserted throughout the 1840s" (171).

10. *The Professor* and *Villette,* in particular, also showcase a different kind of conflicting interpretation, one that tends to mediate between secrecy and the intensification of desire—and even to use repression as a mode of this intensification. This is a fascinating dynamic, but one that proceeds quite afar from this chapter's focus. For a full discussion of this idea, see Kucich 34–113.

11. I discuss this theory of realism, and its evolution from Walter Scott's writings on the novel, in my introduction.

12. In a letter to Williams, Brontë proclaims that "Details, situations which I do not understand and cannot personally inspect, I would not for the world meddle with, lest I should make even a more ridiculous mess of the matter than Mrs. Trollope did in her 'Factory Boy'" (Wise *Lives* II:184).

13. For a superb discussion of *Coriolanus* and antisocial aspects of human nature, see Lane 210–11. Other relevant discussions of the relationship between the play and the novel include Arnold and Patterson.

14. At a crucial moment in her argument, Armstrong misattributes this line to Caroline, and further insists that "Brontë was not being the least bit ironic in having her heroine say this" (217). Had Caroline said this, the scene would indeed take on a disciplinary valence of the sort Armstrong describes.

15. I discuss "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" at greater

length in my introduction.

16. Lane is especially interesting on the surplus violence that the workers voice; see 207–8.

17. Patterson argues that *Shirley* is "a fable of industrial relations that is triply layered in historical retrospect and proceeds by historical analogy, a method to which the frontal presentation of *Coriolanus* is at once the key and the professional statement of intent" (149).

18. Brontë herself had always admired the Duke of Wellington. For a telling recollection from Brontë's childhood, see Gordon 28.

Notes to Chapter 4

1. Eliot's relationship with positivism is famously complex. For helpful discussions, see Vogeler; Semmel 8–11; and Graver 4–10.

2. Martha Vogeler's excellent biography of Harrison, *Frederic Harrison: Vocations of a Positivist,* details his involvement with the biography (293–94).

3. For a full consideration of Eliot's painterly metaphors, see Witemeyer, especially 33–44.

4. Harry Shaw explains that realist novels have never been as interested in so-called representational transparency as its various critics and defenders have alleged. See particularly *Narrating* 38–89.

5. Eliot and Harrison's exchange is motivated by his reading of *Felix Holt,* suggesting that Eliot's reference to "pity and terror" is a self-quotation: Many people, she writes, experience "some tragic mark of kinship in the one brief life to the far-stretching life that went before, and to the life that is to come after, such as has raised the pity and terror of men ever since they began to discern between will and destiny" (Introduction: 10).

6. In his most recent novel, *Thinks . . .* (2001), David Lodge revisits the terms of Harrison and Eliot's debate. In *Thinks . . . ,* a cognitive scientist dismissively refers to grief, with its concomitant "excessive" outbursts of affect, as a sign that the "virtual machine" of consciousness is broken. His conversational foil, a novelist whose husband has recently died, refuses to believe that grief is a breakdown at all. In their conversation, the scientist and novelist explicitly raise the distinction between pictures and diagrams, as well (68–69). Connecting Lodge's novel with the Harrison/Eliot debate suggests that fiction may be motivated by nonrecuperable aspects of experience. In other words, in both cases the novelist's interest in painful thoughts is not to integrate them into an otherwise uplifting narrative, but to explore how the persistence of those thoughts deforms and even shatters our complacent everyday sense of identity and self-transparency.

7. Ashton sees this passage emerging from Eliot's reading of Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830–1833) and "the optimistic materialism of [Charles] Bray and [Charles] Hennell" (75). For an extended unfolding of this passage in its relation to Eliot's career, see Bonaparte *Will.* Dale (*In Pursuit*) and Shuttleworth (*George Eliot*) establish the broad context of the nineteenth-century birth of scientific empiricism, or "positivism" in that term's widest sense. Beer's excellent *Darwin's Plots* scrutinizes Eliot's relationship with evolutionary biology. McCaw similarly locates the passage in relation to nineteenth-century British historiography, and in

"Determinism" Levine establishes Eliot's intimate familiarity with the relevant philosophical arguments, especially those of Mill.

8. Li puts this argument most generously, arguing that while Eliot accepted the organic metaphor, she saw no need to elevate it into an all-encompassing theory (194). Williams gives the argument a particularly caustic form: Eliot's position is "that of a Carlyle without the energy, of an Arnold without the quick practical sense, of an anxiously balancing Mill without the intellectual persistence" (108).

9. Amanda Anderson's recent *The Powers of Distance* (2001) usefully explains that "for Eliot acts of distancing produce a more primary effect, which is psychological: the underdevelopment of the moral faculties, particularly the faculty of sympathy" (11).

10. Eliot recycles this synesthetic image to similar effect in *Adam Bede* (1859), where her narrator says that the "secret of our emotions never lies in the bare object but in its subtle relations to our own past: no wonder the secret escapes the unsympathising observer, who might as well put on his spectacles to discern odours" (200).

11. For an extended discussion of Eliot's complex invocation of Wordsworth and "the peasant," see Roazen; also see Pinney "Authority" for a helpful discussion of this passage as evidence of Eliot's skepticism about progress.

12. For particularly explicit versions of this tendency, see Andres; Rosenberg "George Eliot"; Rosenberg "Historicizing."

13. Kate Millett makes this point with characteristic pungency: "George Eliot lived the revolution . . . perhaps, but she did not write of it" (139). And it is worth acknowledging that nothing is less like the world of a George Eliot novel than Mary Ann Evans's escape from being the daughter of a Tory land-agent and her transformation into a great novelist. Her father, Robert Evans, was "suspicious of all forms of 'enthusiasm,' took both his politics and his religion from Arbury Hall [estate of the Newdigate family, for whom he served as land-agent], never troubling his head with questions of doctrine" (Haight 8; Ashton 11–16). In this chapter, I am trying to suggest that there are conceptual reasons for Eliot's approach that cannot be reduced to bad faith or "a little Toryism by the sly" (Eliot "Sad Fortunes" 3–4).

14. Writing of the increasing sense of interconnectedness in the nineteenth century, Eliot states: "Within lives still vigorous there have been changes such as the First Reform Bill & the Repeal of the Corn Laws, which have given a keen experimental sense that public action is also a private affair. And there is the better understanding of disease which makes obedience to general sanitary measures a double education in the ideas of continuity & solidarity" (Pinney "More Leaves" 372). Eliot implicitly concedes here that we cannot *know* whether public events determine private ones, but can only "sense" that they may be related. She defends this position vigorously, though, exclaiming, "As if the question whether personal identity can be proved were more weighty than my experience that what my past self felt & did is affecting my present self!" (Pinney "More Leaves" 370). For Eliot, everything will hinge on this "experience," and whether or not her characters are capable of taking up a different position with respect to it.

15. Examples of such political criticisms are almost too numerous to mention. For *Felix Holt,* a useful overview of the overwhelmingly negative Marxist and materialist critical response to the text is provided in Perkin 125–38. Well-known

instances of critics lamenting George Eliot's conservatism in *Felix Holt* include Bamber; Brantlinger *Spirit* 230–35 (where Eliot's organicism is assimilated to Spencer's); and Williams *Culture* 102–9. For influential feminist perspectives on Eliot, see Showalter *Literature,* esp. 125–32; Millet 139, 155; Gilbert and Gubar 443–535; Booth 204–35. Booth puts this particularly bluntly: "Eliot . . . openly begs her social questions: Which misogynist is Esther Lyon to marry? Which fate is better for the workers in the short run: brute subjection or brute rebellion?" (205). Staten provides a useful abridgement of and rebuttal to similar criticisms of *Middlemarch.*

16. Oscar Wilde skewers such providentialism in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), as Miss Prism defines fiction for her pupil, Cecily Cardew: "The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means" (II: 341).

17. For a discussion of this passage's origin in George Eliot's astonishment at the inflated rhetoric of the 1830s, see Graver *George Eliot* 289.

18. As Eliot's narrator puts it in *Middlemarch,* "Mortals are easily tempted to pinch the life out of their neighbour's buzzing glory, and think that such killing is no murder" (II: xxi: 205).

19. The key modern critics of Felix as a match include Bamber; Brantlinger *Spirit;* and Gallagher *Industrial.*

20. While Victorian critics denounced Eliot's deferred narrative, modern critics have praised the same tendency. In a formulation I have found immensely helpful, Rosemarie Bodenheimer explains that in *Felix Holt,* "stories . . . reproduce the view of action as anticlimax, revealing a perpetual frustration of anticipated relationships between thought, action, and consequence" (211). Similarly, Robert Caserio finds "an arbitrary relationship between what is done and narrative reasonings about what is done that always threatens to return action to the form of accident. And this constant threat to the significance of action, which in its turn threatens to return meaning itself to the form of accident or mere nomination, is also offered by Eliot as most plausibly representative of 'the real'" (211).

21. There isn't space enough for a proper consideration of *Daniel Deronda,* which is of course Eliot's most well-developed account of progressive organicism in history. But *Deronda* can be such a novel because it is aspirational, whereas *Holt* and *Middlemarch* are so self-consciously novels of England's past, and thus attempt more seriously to explain the present.

22. Gillian Beer brilliantly connects Eliot's refusal to specify originary moments to the novel's complex array of web imagery (153–65). J. Hillis Miller's influential essay, "Narrative and History," also argues that the narrative is not organized around beginnings or endings.

23. I am not seriously suggesting that Brooke or Casaubon represents tendencies in organicist thinking, of course—only that they are clear, and when played against one another, comic demonstrations of error in historical thinking.

24. It is interesting to note here that in Eliot's manuscript, the "Prelude" is contained within Volume I, "Miss Brooke." Such a bibliographic detail can only be suggestive, rather than definitive, but it may buttress my point that the narrator of the "Prelude" is voicing Dorothea's fantasies, rather than her own. For a discussion of the manuscript, see Beaty *Middlemarch.*

Notes to Epilogue

1. For "gnomic propositions," and Lacan's self-conscious manipulation of aphorism, see *Seminar VII* (129).

2. Nor has time disproved Jameson's witticism that "the only people still seriously interested in [Freudian criticism] are the Freudians themselves" (*Political* 65).

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Index

Ackroyd, Peter, 109n1, 109n5
Adam Bede (Eliot), 67–68, 87, 105n27, 106n30, 115n10
Ainsworth, William Harrison, 15, 112n27
Altick, Richard, 101
Anderson, Amanda, 115n9
Andres, Sophia, 115n12
Anger, Suzy, 103n2, 103n9
Armstrong, Nancy, 9, 69–70, 103n11, 113n14
Arnold, Margaret J., 113n13
Arnold, Matthew, 2, 97, 103n3, 104n17
Arnstein, Walter L., 110n12
Ashton, Rosemary, 82, 114n7, 115n13
Austen, Jane, 15

Babington, Anthony, 110n12
Bamber, Linda, 116n15, 116n17
Barnaby Rudge (Dickens), 38, 39, 40, 44, 45, 49–59, 112n26
Beaty, Jerome, 93–94, 116n24
Beer, Gillian, 114n7, 116n22
Bennett, Arnold, 3
Bidney, Martin, 108n16
Bigelow, Samuel, 107n4
Bodenheimer, Rosemarie, 106n34, 113n4, 116n20
Bonaparte, Felicia, 114n7
Booth, Alison, 116n15
Brantlinger, Patrick, 74, 88, 93, 103n11, 106n32, 109n3, 113n8, 116n15, 116n19
Brontë, Charlotte, 2, 61–77, 100. See also *Jane Eyre; The Professor; Shirley; Villette*
Buckle, Henry, 13
Buckley, Jerome, 103n1
Bulwer Lytton, Edward, 15, 4, 48, 112n27
Burke, Edmund, 30, 81
Butt, John, 110n13, 111n19, 111n22
Butterfield, Herbert, 108n9

Carlyle, Thomas, 2, 18–37, 94, 100, 102, 106n1, 108n13, 110n9. See also *The French Revolution; Historical Sketches;* "On History"; "On History Again"; *Past and Present; Sartor Resartus*
Case, Alison, 111n20
Caserio, Robert, 116n20
Champillion, Jean-François, 27
Comte, Auguste, 78–80
Copjec, Joan, 9–10, 47–48, 103n7, 104n20, 105n22, 105n23
Coriolanus (Shakespeare), 69–71, 75
Cross, John, 79
Culviner, Thomas, 108n17

Dale, Peter Allan, 104n12, 107n4, 114n7
Daleski, H. M., 111n18
Dallas, E. S., 63
Daniel Deronda (Eliot), 78, 93, 116n21
Dean, Tim, 104n21
De Castro, John Paul, 110n12
de Man, Paul, 104n4
Derrida, Jacques, 52, 59
Dickens, Charles, 2, 15, 16, 32, 38–60, 100. See also *Barnaby Rudge; A Tale of Two Cities*
The Difference Engine (Gibson and Sterling), 101, 102
Discipline and Punish (Foucault), 8–9
Disraeli, Benjamin, 16
Dor, Joël, 11

Duncan, Ian, 53, 111n17, 112n27

Eagleton, Terry, 61
Eliot, George, 2, 14, 18–19, 20, 30, 78–99, 100, 102, 115n13, 115n14. See also *Adam Bede; Daniel Deronda; Felix Holt; Middlemarch; The Mill on the Floss; Romola; Silas Marner*
Eliot, T. S., 25

Faber, Michel, 101
Felix Holt (Eliot), 78, 80, 83, 86–93, 95, 98, 105n27, 114n5
Fleishman, Avrom, 106n31
Forçade, Eugène, 61, 112–13n2
Foucault, Michel. 6–9, 103n1, 104n14, 104n16, 104n17, 104n20, 105n22, 105n23, 105n24, 110n16. See also *Discipline and Punish; History of Sexuality,* vol. I; "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History"; *The Order of Things*
The French Revolution (Carlyle), 18, 19, 20–21, 26–37, 38, 50, 107n2, 108n14
Freud, Sigmund, 10, 11–12, 24, 39, 40, 43, 50, 59, 109n6, 113n7

Gallagher, Catherine, 9, 47, 49, 104n11, 106n33, 116n19. See also *Practicing New Historicism*
Gaskell, Elizabeth, 11
Gibson, William, 101
Gilbert, Elliott, 45, 110n9
Gilbert, Sandra, 116n15
Gooch, G. P., 108n9
Gordon, George, 49
Gordon, Lyndall, 114n18
Gould, Stephen Jay, 103n6
Graver, Suzanne, 84, 114n1, 116n17
Greenblatt, Stephen, 9, 10, 105n24. See also *Practicing New Historicism*
Grey, Charles (Earl), 75–77
Gubar, Susan, 116n15
Guy Fawkes (Ainsworth), 112n28

Haight, Gordon, 115n13
Hardy, Thomas, 104n19
Harrison, Frederic, 78–81, 114n5
Harrold, C. F., 107n4
Hayles, N. Katherine, 31
Hazlitt, William, 71
Herder, Johann Gottfried, 105n24
Hibbert, Christopher, 110n12
Historical Sketches (Carlyle), 27, 108n12
The History of Sexuality, vol. I (Foucault), 8–9, 108n11
Hollington, Michael, 111n23, 111n24
Holloway, John, 108n15
Hutton, R. H., 91, 93

Isaacson, Saul, 107n8

James, Henry, 91, 93
Jameson, Fredric, 103n10, 103n11, 117n2
Jane Eyre (Brontë), 61, 67, 68
Jann, Rosemary, 104n12, 106n30
Jones, Jason B., 103n5, 103n8, 108n11, 110n14

Kenny, Paul, 113n5
Klaus, Robert, 110n12
Kucich, John, 112n24, 113n10

Lacan, Jacques, 10, 12, 13, 40, 43, 44, 59, 72, 101, 104n21 107n7, 109n6, 110n15, 117n6
Lane, Christopher, 62, 71, 75, 103n6, 104n21, 105n23, 108n11, 109n2, 110n10, 113n7, 113n13, 114n16
Laplanche, Jean, 105n25, 109n6
Le Bon, Gustave, 35
Lewes, George H. 69
Levine, George, 108n8, 115n7
Li, Hao, 92, 115n8
Lindsay, Jack, 111n22, 111n23
Lodge, David, 114n6
Lukács, Georg, 16, 103n11

Macaulay, T. B., 13, 20, 21, 22, 25
Mackay, Robert, 82

Magnet, Myron, 111n17
Marcus, Steven, 54, 109n7, 111n17
Marcuse, Herbert, 108n11
Marx, Karl, 82
Mason, Michael, 93–94
The Matrix Reloaded (Wachowski and Wachowski), 101–2
Merivale, Herman, 30, 31
McCaw, Neil, 114–15n7
McGowan, John P., 38, 49
McKnight, Natalie, 110n16, 111n23
McMaster, Juliet, 54, 112n25
Michasiw, Kim Ian, 110n15
Middlemarch (Eliot), 24, 78, 83, 86–87, 93–98, 116n18
Mill, John Stuart, 30, 107n3
The Mill on the Floss (Eliot), 85
Miller, D. A., 8, 110n8
Miller, J. Hillis, 116n22
Miller, Jacques-Alain, 104–5n21
Millet, Kate, 115n13, 116n15
Monod, Sylvère, 110n12

"Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (Foucault), 6–7

"On History" (Carlyle), 22–23, 24, 26
"On History Again" (Carlyle), 22, 23–24, 108n10
The Order of Things (Foucault), 9

Paine, Thomas, 29
Parker, Christopher, 108n9
Parkins, Wendy, 113n5
Past and Present (Carlyle), 19, 20–21, 36–37, 108n10, 108n14
Patterson, Annabel, 113n13, 114n17
Paz, Denis G., 110n12
Perkin, J. Russell, 116n15
Pinney, Thomas, 115n11
Plotz, John, 66, 74, 108n14, 109n18, 112n1, 113n3, 113n9
Pontalis, Jean-Bertrand, 109n6
Practicing New Historicism (Gallagher and Greenblatt), 9, 10, 105n24
The Professor (Brontë), 67, 113n10

Reich, Wilhelm, 108n11
Reihl, Wilhelm Heinrich von, 83
Reilly, Jim, 16, 97, 104n13, 104n14
Rice, Thomas Jackson, 110n13, 111n23
Roazen, D. H., 115n11
Robbins, Bruce, 104n17
Romola, 79, 80, 95
Rosenberg, Brian, 115n12
Rudé, George, 110n12
Rushdie, Salman, 17

Sadoff, Dianne F., 110n15
Saintsbury, George, 111n17
Sartor Resartus (Carlyle), 24, 27–28, 34, 46
Schroeder, Natalie, 112n28
Scott, Joan, 104n18
Scott, Walter, 14–15, 38, 53, 106n29, 106n35, 111n20
Semmel, Bernard, 114n1
Shakespeare. See *Coriolanus*
Shaw, Harry E., 14, 95, 105n28, 106n31, 114n4
Shepherdson, Charles, 103n4
Shirley (Brontë), 61–77
Showalter, Elaine, 116n15
Shuttleworth, Sally, 113n3, 114n7
Silas Marner (Eliot), 79
Smith, Adam, 62, 64–65
Smith, William, 37
Sorenson, David R., 107–8n8
Spencer, Herbert, 13
Staten, Henry, 116n15
Sterling, Bruce, 101
Stone, Thomas, 40–42
Stoppard, Thomas, 101, 102
Strachey, Lytton, 1–2, 4
Sutherland, John, 15

A Tale of Two Cities (Dickens), 39, 39, 44, 45–49
Thompson, E. P., 112n1
Tillotson, Kathleen, 14, 109n1, 110n13, 111n19, 111n22
Timko, Michael, 46
Trollope, Frances, 68

Vida, Elizabeth, 107n5

Villette (Brontë), 61, 67, 68, 113n10
Vogeler, Martha S., 114n1, 114n2

Walpole, Horace, 50
Webb, Igor, 112n1, 113n4
Wellesley, Arthur (Duke of Wellington), 75–77
White, Hayden, 23, 104n15, 104n16, 107n5, 107n6
Wilde, Oscar, 116n16
Williams, Raymond, 115n8, 116n15
Williams, W. S., 112n2, 113n12
Witemeyer, Hugh, 114n3
Wolfreys, Julian, 112n29
Wordsworth, William, 81, 85

Zizek, Slavoj, 59–60, 105n21, 110n11
Zupancic, Alenka, 110n8

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