Modern Literature 1800-1922

A Brief Cultural History

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Preface

The text you have here originated as a sequence of 8 talks delivered at Beijing

University, Beijing Normal University, and Beihang University in the fall of 2013.

Despite the overall title, they're not by any means meant to offer a comprehensive

survey of the period in question. What I wanted to do, rather, was to focus on what I

perceived as key topics or concepts that might be said to dominate 19th and early

20th century cultural history. In treating these, I had 2 larger objectives. First, I wanted

to show the payoff from an interdisciplinary approach that looked at a given topic

from a variety of perspectives, each showing how that topic got developed within

a particular field. Second, I wanted to propose a larger narrative that would span

the entire period. In many recent & current studies, I felt, a sense of that larger narrative

was often in danger of being lost. To retrieve it, we need to ask all the hard questions

about relationships between forces and circumstances, and specifically about causal

connectives, that informed so many of the great 19th century historical projects.

To ask these questions doesn't of course imply certainty about the answers. But it does

imply that to propose answers seems meaningful, insofar as it allows us to arrive at

a sense of structure we wouldn't otherwise have.

In preparing and delivering these talks, I've incurred many obligations which I'd

like to mention briefly here. First, my warm thanks to the organizers at the different

material (biographical & otherwise) on the working methods of James Joyce.

In a different vein, I owe the photos of Home House and Wynn House (both in London) to the hospitality of A.J. Stuart Smith, manager of Home House, and to the custodian of Wynn House, who generously made possible my time at these two landmarks of Georgian architecture.

Finally, for assistance in innumerable ways beyond those mentioned here, I'm grateful, as always, to Cara Ryan.

References to Powerpoint (PPT) slides within the text take the following form: PPT 2:1 = PPT 2 (i.e., the 2nd PPT set of the PPT attachments), slide 1. Title page for the entire lecture sequence, and individual title pages for the PPT sets (which correspond to the talks they accompany) don't count in my enumeration.

References to works cited in the text, by chapter:

Chap. 1

Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit. Tr. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Pr., 1977)

Chap. 2

The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo, ed. Pierro Sraffa & M.H. Dobb (Cambridge UP, 1951)

Lord Byron, The Complete Poetical Works vol. V: Don Juan, ed. Jerome McGann (Oxford: Clarendon Pr., 1986)

Chap. 3

<u>The Works of John Ruskin</u>, ed. E.T. Cook & Alexander Wedderburn. [Library Edition] (London: George Allen, 1903-12)

Chap. 4

Søren Kierkegaard, <u>Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments</u>. Tr. Howard Hong & Edna Hong. vol. 1: Text (Princeton UP, 1992)

Herman Melville, <u>Pierre</u>. Ed. Harrison Hayford et al. (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1971)

Charles Dickens, <u>Little Dorrit</u>. Ed. Harvey Sucksmith (Oxford: Clarendon Pr., 1979)

Chap. 5

J.A.M. Whistler, <u>The Gentle Art of Making Enemies</u>. Rpt. New York: Dover, 1967

<u>The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde</u>, ed. Ian Small. Vol. IV: Criticism, ed. Josephine Guy (Oxford: Clarendon Pr., 2007)

<u>The Works of Walter Pater</u>. [Library Edition] (London: Macmillan, 1910)

Chap. 6

Henry James, <u>The Golden Bowl</u>. [New York Edition] 2 vols. (London & New York: Scribner, 1909)

Chap. 7

T.S. Eliot, <u>Collected Poems 1909-1962</u> (New York: Harcourt, Brace 1970)

James Joyce, <u>Ulysses</u>. [The Corrected Text] Ed. Hans Walter Gabler et al. (New

York: Random House, 1986)

Chap. 8

Marcel Proust, <u>A la recherche du temps perdu</u>. Ed. Jean-Yves Tadié et al. (Bibliothèque

de la Pléiade) 4 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1987-89)

I. The Quest for an Absolute

The start of the nineteenth century is a time of great beginnings. In what was then

a relatively obscure work, a contemporary writer put it quite well:

Besides, it isn't hard to see that our time is a time of birth and of transition to a

new era. Spirit has broken with the world that it up to now lived in and represented,

and is of a mind to submerge it in the past, and in the work of its own transformation.

Indeed, it is never at rest but always engaged in moving forward… The frivolity as well

as boredom that disrupt the existing order, the vague presentiment of something

unknown, are harbingers that something else is in the wind. The gradual crumbling

that didn't change the physiognomy of the whole will be cut short by the sunrise,

which in a flash will reveal the shape of the new world.

The writer was G.W.F. Hegel. The text, his preface to the <u>Phenomenology of Spirit</u>.

Legend has it he penned the preface the night before Napoleon defeated Prussia

at the battle of Jena in 1806. In fact, it took Hegel much longer—the preface wasn't

finished until early 1807—but he did (as he himself says in a famous letter)

see Napoleon riding through the streets of Jena the day before the battle took place,

the "world-soul on horseback." No doubt, as Hegel, lost in the crowd, watched Napoleon

riding past, he must've had the sense of "something in the wind," of an impending

dramatic change about to revolutionize the world. Of course, at this distance in time,

we can only imagine what it's like to feel yourself on the threshold of such a pivotal

moment. But if we can't access it directly, we need to approach it indirectly,

through other sources. And to do that, we need to look elsewhere.

Thinking, then, about other media from the same period that offer other

ways of accessing the experiential, we could probably do worse than turn to another

contemporary work in which something of this sense of dramatic change in process

seems to be conveyed: Beethoven's Piano Concerto no. 5 in E flat Major,

Op. 73, nicknamed the "Emperor":

[PPT 1.1, Beethoven piano con. 5, 1st mvnt, opening: Gilels/Szell/Cleveland]

From the massive opening orchestral chord (1st in a sequence of 3) with the piano

in accompaniment, it's clear that we've embarked on a great voyage of discovery,

something the ensuing ornamental passagework by the piano does nothing to dispel.

But perhaps the most striking feature of the passage is precisely that the whole

of it is something more than just rhetoric: that in fact it forms the foundation of

a remarkable development. For the same 3 chords (with different piano decoration)

will return at the start of the 1st movement recapitulation. Yet even this is only a start.

Because the entire opening is merely a prelude to the main theme, which only

emerges many measures later. But once it does emerge, it, too, becomes subject to

a similar kind of development. As the eminent Beethoven scholar Barry Cooper

so nicely puts it in his recent Beethoven biography: "The main theme of the first movement is decorated by a turn, but this figure is then developed symphonically, reappearing well over a hundred times during the movement and providing one of the finest examples of Beethoven's habit of treating a seemingly decorative figure as a main motif for development" (Beethoven, p. 197). From all these instances, we can infer a hidden or tacit principle of development. And that principle is that nothing is lost. Everything, in other words, will ultimately be taken up again. And not only taken up but elaborated on, worked out more fully—which is to say: made into material for development.

To get the fullest sense of how development works in Beethoven, however, we need to fast forward to the end of the 1st movement of the "Emperor," where he brings matters to a magnificent close:

[PPT 1.2, Beethoven piano con. 5, 1st mvnt, conclusion: Gilels/Szell/Cleveland]

Almost any listener will immediately recognize a device Beethoven employs even more memorably in the last movement of his 9th symphony: the gradual progession of a march-like theme from pf to ff, which is accompanied by a gradual increase in instrumentation and likewise an increase in the complexity of the theme. But the end of the 1st movement of the "Emperor" is a bit different: instead of the progressive "onward & upward" quality of the march-like theme we get a kind of "falling" theme, the initial piano sequence touched ever so lightly and with plenty of sustaining pedal, then, once other orchestral elements begin to accompany,

repeated downward scale progressions that are always dynamically amplified as they

near their end. Of course, once you've gone down, if you want to do it again you

need to go up first. Interestingly, the way Beethoven does it is to give the piano

a "boost," so to speak, from the orchestra: for every "upward" movement

the piano is accompanied by a strong push from woodwinds + other orchestra sections,

but the "downward" scale progressions that follow these tend to be performed by

the piano alone, or so highlighted that it appears to be playing alone. It's as if

the piano needs orchestral help to overcome the force of gravity every time it tries

to ascend, whereas the downward scale progression comes naturally. Then, just before

the end, Beethoven gives the piano an opportunity to do one last downward scale

progression which really announces the end, as it were. What are we to make of

all this? I suggest that the downward turn is meant to convey the force of

necessity. And if we think of its repeated appearance toward the end of the movement,

we can read it as an attempt on Beethoven's part to frame his movement as one that

comes to a necessary close. Finally, if we look back on the whole 1st movement from

beginning to end, the fact that it should end this way can't help but imply that he

wants us to see it all as a single instance of necessary development.

But if Beethoven's "Emperor" offers one instance of necessary development,

it would be highly significant if we could find others in fields far removed. That would

give us some reason to think of the concept of necessary development as perhaps

characteristic of the period as a whole. Here, however, I don't just want to suggest

it was something "in the air." No—I think we can make a much stronger claim. First of

all, because the concept of necessary development isn't one of those vague notions

like a pantheistic concept of God, or a concept of social or class hierarchy. Instead,

it's very explicitly <u>formal</u>: you can see exactly how it works in a Beethoven score.

And that means it can be grasped much more fully and hence might be

transferred in very tangible ways from one field to another. In other words, I think

we can see it as exerting an active influence on thinking within a given field.

So an idea of necessary development emerges within a given field and, because

it's formal, can be grasped and applied to a very different field. In this way, then, we

get fields in an interactive relationship to each other. Furthermore, because an idea

like that of necessary development is formal, it has the capacity not just to influence

thinking within a field but even to structure that entire field. Here, then, we obtain

a sense of the power or significance such a concept might have. It remains for

us to ascertain whether such applications in fields so very different from that of

Beethoven's "Emperor" can in fact be found.

　　But if we want to see fields within the Romantic era as interactive, it

makes sense to look at those which tangibly affect each other. Earlier, we

caught a glimpse of Hegel, lost in the crowd, watching Napoleon ride past on

his way to the plateau above Jena. Unquestionably, Napoleon was on everybody's

mind during the years that followed those of revolutionary turmoil. And the way

Napoleon impressed himself on the collective mind of Europe above all else

was by war. In the early years of the nineteenth century, as we know, the <u>Grande</u>

<u>Armée</u> achieved victory after victory and, in the process, changed the map of

Europe. And at the heart of that process, making it all possible, lay a new idea of

military tactics, one by which these victories were achieved. So it would be

significant if here, at the very eye of the storm, we could discern something of that

same concept of necessary development which we've already witnessed

with Beethoven.

[PPT 1.3, from David Chandler, The Campaigns of Napoleon]

Here the 1st point to make about Napoleon's battle scheme is that it

involves a narrative or story. As he himself once said: "every battle has a beginning,

a middle, and an end." At first glance all this might seem too obvious, hence

not worth talking about. Of course every battle has a beginning, middle, & end:

a battle is an event that takes time, and so has a duration. But any event with

a duration will have a beginning, middle, & end. Yet while this seems to be true

invariably for some events (the growth cycle of a plant, for instance), it doesn't have

to apply to battle categorically. In fact, we know of an instance where Frederick

the Great noticed his opponent attempting to shift formation, attacked

him just at the moment of formation-shift, and so managed to create confusion

and ultimately to disrupt the enemy formation. Here, then, we don't have a distinct

beginning/middle/end but just the interruption of a process (formation-shift)

which produces a decisive outcome. So by asserting the need for a definite

beginning/middle/end, Napoleon appears to be saying a battle doesn't just have

a duration but a distinct shape. What kind of shape, though, would this be?

Typically, we think of the middle of a story as consisting of complications,

which the end has to resolve. But if the middle is about complications, we might

say a story doesn't just have linear sequence. Instead, complications means

a story gets bigger, more involved—and that would imply it has a development

of some kind. So now we have a hint of the same idea we found earlier in

Beethoven. A musical motif, no matter how seemingly casual, doesn't just get

put out there. Instead, it gets taken up, and becomes thereby the subject or object

of a development. As a result, more elements get drawn into the story. And that

means that when we finally arrive at the end the outcome will be more massive

in effect, because more elements were involved.

   The 2nd point to make about this battle-scheme is that it has to involve

not just development, but something like <u>necessary</u> development. Any time you

have complications you're obviously increasing the potential for uncertainty.

In other words, the more complications, the harder to ensure a particular outcome.

Yet clearly the outcome, no matter what the complications are, is always supposed

to be the same. And that suggests there has to be a <u>necessary</u> link between

complications and outcome—regardless of what the particular variations are,

the outcome always has to be victory for the Napoleonic forces. But that in turn would

seem to imply the necessity of a particular outcome is somehow built into the

complications, that collectively what these complications do is to <u>necessitate</u> the

desired outcome. Put in another way, we might say what Napoleon does is to

<u>defer</u> the end or outcome, by allowing complications to arise during the middle

phase. Clearly the rationale for this is to try to bring about a bigger payoff:

the more elements or enemy forces you can manage to draw into your game,

the bigger your victory will be. More involvement, a bigger "draw," is all very well and good. But the bottom line is still the same: no matter how fancy or involved the development, you still have to win. And so we come to the question of what in the exact unfolding of Napoleonic maneuvers makes that possible.

In phase 1 of the Napoleonic scheme, the key move has to do with the placement of his advance guard. Typically, before a battle, Napoleon would tend to leave a single corps out in front by itself, seemingly unprotected and hence vulnerable to enemy attack. The temptation, for the enemy commander, is to attack and overwhelm this apparently solitary corps and so improve his odds for the major battle ahead by reducing Napoleon's numbers. And that's precisely what Napoleon wants him to think. Because as soon as the enemy commander jumps at the bait, so to speak, Napoleon will then immediately rush up all his nearest corps to support the one under attack. But they won't just support it from behind, like a reserve—instead, these other corps extend the front by deploying on either side of the corps under attack, which almost forces the enemy to commit more troops just to avoid being overwhelmed by a flank attack on either side of the corps initially committed. So here we can see quickly and almost inevitably a minor skirmish escalates into major conflict. Once the enemy commander opts to go after Napoleon's single corps, it's almost impossible to avoid committing more troops—the quick appearance of Napoleon's support corps forces the enemy commander to throw in more troops just so his own initial attack group won't be lost. As a result, the enemy gets more and more firmly locked into engagement. Now while from appearances so far the playing field might look roughly even,

it really isn't—after all, Napoleon himself carefully selected where the engagement would take place, which will have unforeseen but extremely important consequences.

In phase 2, the most important moves are precisely those that can't be seen by the enemy: the end-around move by the enveloping force that will later attack the enemy flank and thereby force a formation-shift, and the gathering of the "masse de décision" (ominous name) behind Napoleon's right flank. Here's where the advantages of Napoleon's choice of ground for the battle become evident. Because, typically, he will have chosen ground with a slight rise that will help to conceal his end-around move. Nonetheless, he doesn't simply leave it to the rise of ground to do all the work of concealment—his use of a cavalry screen is meant to ensure the enemy doesn't manage to figure out what's going on. Nor does he leave the enemy a lot of time to think about it, either. Instead, he keeps the enemy busy by pressing forward with those corps already engaged (which blocks off any kind of withdrawal or redeployment on the enemy's part), and by bringing a fresh corps into play at the right end of his line, which forces the enemy to commit reserves to meet what could otherwise develop into a dangerous flank attack. In this way, all the enemy troops get committed, which is crucial for phase 3 of the attack. Because now the enemy won't be able to bring up any reserve to meet the unexpected moves Napoleon intends to make in phase 3. But the enemy commitment of its last reserves was largely necessitated by the pressing forward of Napoleon's already engaged corps and by his introduction of a new corps on his right flank. To have failed to respond to either of these

moves would have led to a serious weakening of the enemy position. So while

the concealed moves of phase 2 prepare for the outcome of phase 3, the mounting

attack by the rest of the Napoleonic corps more or less forces a step-up in

commitment from the enemy.

In phase 3, the key moves are the sudden enveloping attack by the concealed

Napoleonic corps (which forces a hurried formation-shift by the enemy) and, once

the enemy line has gotten overextended, the powerful thrust by the "masse de

décision" aimed at just the spot where the enemy line is weakest. These moves

virtually necessitate the outcome of the whole affair. Once the surprise envelopment

gets underway, the enemy has no choice but to shift formation. Not to do that

would result in an immediate collapse of his entire line, with the new Napoleonic

corps able to attack the enemy from behind. But once the enemy commander's

opted to extend his line so as to meet the surprise attack on his rear, there's no way

he can possibly hope to have enough troops to resist the powerful attack on

his weakened front by the "masse de décision." And, to ensure the complete breakdown

of any resistance, Napoleon even precedes the frontal attack by his "masse de

décision" by a massed artillery bombardment that can't help but sweep away any last

attempt to preserve formation in face of the new attack. But if the 2 key moves of

phase 3 inevitably bring about a breakthrough by the "masse de décision," it should

now be equally clear how the ground for these was largely prepared by what came

before. Specifically, it's the extension of the front and its reinforcement that really

pin down the enemy and force a commitment of reserves, which makes possible

the unopposed end-around maneuver (Napoleon called it the "manoeuvre sur les

derrières," the "maneuver on the rear"). In this way, then, the particular complications

of the middle help to necessitate the end.

Finally, it seems only appropriate that we should come back at the end of

our journey to where we began—which is to say, to Hegel and, specifically,

to his preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit. After all, he was the one who, lost

in the crowd at Jena, watched Napoleon ride past and felt the world-historical

significance of what was to come: the breakdown of the old, and the beginning of

a new order. So we might ask whether it's possible to discern a similar process

in the Phenomenology: the establishment of what we might call a necessary

development.

We begin with a preliminary remark and its clarification. 1ˢᵗ, the preliminary

remark, from the Preface:

In my view, which can be justified only by the exposition of the system itself,
everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as Substance, but
equally as Subject.

Actually, what the text literally says is: "not as Substance, but equally as Subject."

In other words, everything looks forward proleptically to the end, to its final

phase as Subject. Then, the longer exposition:

…the living Substance is being which is in truth Subject, or, what is the same, is
in truth actual only in so far as it is the movement of positing itself, or is the mediation
of its self-othering with itself. This Substance is, as Subject, pure, simple negativity,
and is for this reason the splitting up of the simple; it is the doubling which sets up
opposition, and then again the negation of this indifferent diversity and of its opposite
[the immediate simplicity]. Only this self-restoring sameness, or this reflection in
otherness within itself—not an original or immediate unity as such—is the True. It

is the process of its own becoming, the circle that presupposes the end as its goal, having its end also as its beginning; and only by being worked out to its end, is it actual.

(A.V. Miller trans., slightly modified)

By way of clarification, we might consider the following schema:

[PPT 1.4, Substance ⇒ Subject]

Briefly, in positing or asserting itself—in beginning to exist, you might say—Substance

becomes something different from what it was in its original, inchoate state, becomes

something other than its initial self. But in this process of self-othering it's no longer the

same as itself. To really become itself, then, it has to negate both diversity (its difference

from itself) and its original state of immediate simplicity. The way it does that is by

a process of self-relation through which it discovers the sameness within its difference

at each stage from itself. In this way, it comes back to itself, but now as Subject

rather than Substance.

    After this brief, compressed précis, what Hegel does next is to try to explain

the process. Once again, as before, he offers a preliminary remark:

The True is the whole. But the whole is nothing other than the essence consummating itself through its development.

Then, the exposition of development as a process:

For mediation is nothing beyond self-moving self-sameness, or is reflection into self, the moment of the 'I' which is for itself pure negativity or, when reduced to its pure abstraction, <u>simple becoming</u>. The 'I,' or becoming in general, this mediation, on account of its simple nature, is just immediacy in the process of becoming, and is the immediate itself.

Here the key point to emphasize is "self-moving self-sameness." By which Hegel means, roughly, that Substance moves itself—in other words, that its change, its process of becoming, isn't impelled by anything other than itself. This point is crucial, because it's what makes possible its self-sameness within that process of self-moving. It moves itself, and so changes, but in this change, this transformation, because the movement comes from itself, it always remains the same as itself, in effect because it <u>carries itself</u> or its content in its movement from what it was before to what it becomes next, which is what Hegel calls the process of simple becoming. Hegel considers this process simple becoming because in that process the whole of Substance is transformed, with nothing left over, left behind. But all the while—because it's taken its whole self with it—Substance retains its self-sameness. By way of illustration, we then get an example, which crucially helps to explain what Hegel means by negativity:

Though the embryo is indeed <u>in itself</u> a human being, it is not so <u>for itself</u>; this it only is as cultivated Reason, which has <u>made</u> itself into what it is <u>in itself</u>. And that is when it for the first time is actual.

But if all this works to clarify the process of becoming or development, what Hegel still hasn't made clear is <u>why</u> that process occurs—in other words, what drives it, what makes it happen. Only when he does that do we begin to get a sense

of what makes this kind of development necessary. And because of both the subject

of that development—nothing less than the "I" or self—and because of its quality

or nature as a necessary development, we'll see how this Hegelian scheme would

ultimately become the model for so much of the thinking about development

in the West for the first half of the nineteenth century. First, however, as before,

a preliminary remark:

What has just been said can also be expressed by saying that Reason is <u>purposive activity</u>.

And now for the exposition:

…purpose is what is immediate and <u>at rest</u>, the unmoved which is also <u>self-moving</u>, and as such is Subject. Its power to move, taken abstractly, is <u>being-for-self</u> or pure negativity. The result is the same as the beginning, only because the <u>beginning</u> is the <u>purpose</u>; in other words, the actual is the same as its Concept only because the immediate, as purpose, contains the self or pure actuality within itself. The realized purpose, or the existent actuality, is movement and unfolded becoming; but it is just this unrest that is the self; and the self is like that immediacy and simplicity of the beginning because it is the result, that which has returned into itself, the latter being similarly just the self. And the self is the sameness and simplicity that relates itself to itself.   (pp. 9-12 for all the above passages)

Here the key point is result = beginning because beginning = purpose.

Beginning = purpose means that "the immediate [i.e., the beginning], as purpose,

contains the self or pure actuality within itself." How does it do that? It does that

because the self or pure actuality that it contains within itself consists of the drive

toward purposive activity. In other words, even within Substance, the initial,

inchoate state of what will ultimately become Subject, what we already have is

the drive that will finally lead it to actualize itself as Subject. Nor is this drive

something separate from Substance, i.e., something injected into it or imposed on it

from without. Instead, what Hegel says is that purpose is "what is immediate and

at rest," which identifies it with Substance. But what makes that identification

possible? For Hegel, the key point is that Being and thought aren't ultimately different

from each other. On the contrary, he sees them as different aspects of Substance.

So instead of a static sense of what is, we get a sense of ontology, of being or the

essence of things as inherently poised to move. In effect, its essence is a potency

that's poised to move because that essence isn't just the ground or being of what is, but

the purposive force that produces becoming. Put in another way, we might say that

thought is purposive activity because in order to realize itself it can't just be, it

has to think itself. And because thought and being are fundamentally identical,

that means that being, too, has to become in order to realize itself. So the process

by which it becomes itself can be seen as one of necessary development, because

all it does in this process is to become what it was inherently. Here, then, we

get a glimpse of the force of the Hegelian model: because it could say that what

the "I" became was something inherently within itself, the process by which it

became that could come to be seen as the model for all development. So it was that,

at the very end of the nineteenth century, Nietzsche could look back at this Hegelian

model and talk in his Ecce Homo about "how one becomes what one is."

His work offers eloquent testimony to the force of that model, and to why it

would prove so difficult to overcome.

Schema for the entire lecture series:

[PPT 1.5]

This schema will, hopefully, give some idea of the entire trajectory of the series.

I'll have more to say about it in later talks, but for now, briefly, you see the beginning

with Substance $\Rightarrow$ Subject, followed by the primacy of subjective over objective

as we move toward 1850 (the mid-century, & center-point of the schema). Ca. 1850

we witness a split between subjective & objective (Subjective $\neq$ Objective), then an

internalization of the objective within the subjective (symbolized by o & s), which will

lead to a fragmentation of the objective and its complete containment within

consciousness by the end of the 19th century (blue shaded portion). Afterward, when

we come to Modernism, we get a new ordering of these fragments of the objective

within consciousness, which we can interpret as experiences = temporal moments,

hence fated to pass away. Modernism tries to preserve these through a spatial

ordering, which more broadly described becomes a spatialization of time.

II. Romantic Negativity

For all its aspiration and even its undoubted achievement, the Romantic era

has its downside. After the turbulent years of the French Revolution, and the even

greater turmoil caused by the Napoleonic wars, Europe in the wake of Waterloo

began to slide toward a conservatism equally extreme, one marked by horrible and

violent excesses. In recent years, we've become increasingly familiar with the Peterloo

massacre and other instances of working-class rebellion in England and elsewhere,

all brutally suppressed. Less well known, however, is the failure of the contemporary

intellectual quest. In fact, the search for a kind of absolute principle which we've

already seen instances of would continue in the later years of the Romantic period—

but with less success. Specifically, the failure of David Ricardo and his peers in the

Radical reform group to frame a viable theory of absolute value would have significant

consequences. Set against the background of working-class protest against intolerable

work conditions, it becomes part of a larger failure of the reform effort. But my

thesis is that it has other consequences as well. In particular, I would argue that

the failure to frame a theory of absolute value within political economy helps to produce

a kind of vacuum or void within the matrix of values or beliefs by which a period

is defined. And that vacuum or void within the space of its values leads to a form of

negativity, a kind of negative activity by which concepts of value, rather than

being produced, are questioned and ultimately reduced to their purely physical or

material base, at which point they become meaningless and hence are brushed

away. If we see the start of the Romantic era as one that gave rise to idealism,

it might be equally apt to see the close of the period as defined not by

scepticism but by nihilism. But not because either scepticism or idealism was set

explicitly against idealism. Rather, my sense is that the failure of idealism (in the

form of an inability to frame a theory of absolute value in political economy)

spawned a kind of vacuum or void within the collective matrix of values.

Consciousness or awareness of that vacuum or void—which doesn't have to imply

a specific awareness of failure within the realm of political economy—is what

then leads to nihilism or negativity. And an example of that which we'll look at

in some detail is Byron.

We begin, however, with David Ricardo. Between Adam Smith and Marx,

he ranks, indisputably, as the most important figure in the history of political

economy in the West. By way of introduction, we can hardly do better, I think, than

to take a quick look at his portrait, by Thomas Phillips of the Royal Academy:

[PPT 2. 1]

Self-possessed, thoughtful, perceptive, he stands out in a striking way from

all the Romantic authors you see at the National Portrait Gallery in London—simply

put, next to him all the rest look just faded or dull by comparison. His personal

history was no less remarkable: of Portuguese-Jewish ancestry, born in Amsterdam, coming to London at an early age, he rose from a start with virtually no assets to become, after Waterloo, one of the wealthiest men of the British Empire. And then he walked away from it all, to devote himself completely to political economy and to efforts to improve the condition of the working class in England.

To think of Ricardo in his time, then, is to think of London in the years after Waterloo. A cityscape by Alexander Naysmith, entitled A prospect of London, seen from the Earl of Cassilis' privy garden, with Waterloo Bridge beyond (1826), can help us visualize it:

[PPT 2.2]

Note the neoclassical style, as well as the symbolism of Waterloo Bridge, commemorative of the event that made possible the prosperity depicted here. Later, by 1865, we'll see how drastically all this has changed. Shortly after Waterloo, Ricardo made his entry into the field of political economy. In On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation (1817) he brought a new theoretical elegance to the field. So instead of the lengthy, chatty commentary of Adam Smith on real-life affairs we get simplified examples (the Ricardian model, in effect), from which all inessential circumstances have been stripped away. But Ricardo didn't just change the style of political economy. He also changed its perspective. From the rational framework of Adam Smith we move to a brave new world in which economic situations no longer play out in the way we might expect. A world

that's less about people making financial arrangements for gain than about

the strange autonomy of money, whose behavior might better be described in terms of

a kind of physics than what we think of as finance.

To get a sense of what this brave new world is like, we might begin

with the same paradox that lured Ricardo himself into thinking about political

economy. But first, a preliminary remark from On the Principles of Political Economy

and Taxation about fixed and circulating capital:

A brewer, whose buildings and machinery are valuable and durable, is said to employ a large portion of fixed capital: on the contrary, a shoemaker, whose capital is chiefly employed in the payment of wages, which are expended on food and clothing, commodities more perishable than building and machinery, is said to employ a large proportion of his capital as circulating capital. (I: 31)

Next, a description of how these different forms of capital work:

But a rise in the wages of labour would not equally affect commodities produced with machinery quickly consumed, and commodities produced with machinery slowly consumed. In the production of the one, a great deal of labour would be continually transferred to the commodity produced—in the other very little would be so transferred. Every rise of wages, therefore, or, which is the same thing, every fall of profits, would lower the relative value of those commodities which were produced with a capital of a durable nature, and would proportionally elevate those which were produced with capital more perishable. A fall of wages would have precisely the contrary effect. (I: 39-40)

With these remarks we now move to the paradox itself:

It appears, then, that in proportion to the quantity and the durability of the fixed capital employed in any kind of production, the relative prices of those commodities

on which such capital is employed, will vary inversely as wages: they will fall as wages rise. It appears too that no commodities whatever are raised in absolute price, merely because wages rise; that they never rise unless additional labour be bestowed on them; but that all commodities in the production of which fixed capital enters, not only do not rise with a rise of wages, but absolutely fall. (I: 62-63)

As a way to unpack what's going on here, consider 2 diagrams that try to represent the process visually:

[PPT 2.3]

{PPT 2.4]

The 1st diagram gives our normal, pre-Ricardo perspective: any given product + increase in wages (symbolized by red cart) = increase in price (bigger red cart). The 2nd diagram tries to represent Ricardo's perspective: increase in wages (again, symbolized by red cart) will lead to increase in price (bigger red cart) only if the product is of a kind that needs a lot of circulating capital (wages $\Rightarrow$ labor) to be applied to it. If not (black cart), the product will actually lose, relatively speaking, in value. It will lose in value because the cost of those products to which circulating capital is applied has to go up, hence compared to these products it will cost proportionately less than it did before. To make the point more clearly, I show in PPT 2.4 the fraction of the red cart product that would correspond to the black cart (fixed capital). Once upon a time, we might suppose, the red cart (product to which circulating capital is applied) and black cart (fixed capital) were the same. But then, the red cart cost went up with more circulating capital/labor applied to it, while the black cart cost remained the same.

Note, however, that—as Ricardo points out—no products rise in absolute price or

value just because wages rise. Wages might rise just to keep up with prices,

or because an employer's decided to be generous to his/her workers. In other words,

a wage increase doesn't <u>necessarily</u> mean the equivalent of that increase (i.e., in

labor) is being applied to any given product. What is absolute, though, is the fall

in the value of a fixed capital product when wages rise. And that's because once

wages rise it will always cost proportionately less of that wage to buy a fixed capital

product than before.

     We can sum up all this by saying that what Ricardo wants to assert

is the <u>relativity</u> of economic value. From the standpoint of political economy,

things have value only in relation to other things, never by themselves. It's like

relativity physics: we can talk about the movement of any given object only

in terms of its relation to some reference point. Without that reference point, we'd have

no way of knowing whether the object was really moving or not. Likewise

with Ricardian political economy: you can measure the value of a product only by

observing how it interacts pricewise with other products. For Ricardo, however,

this isn't an entirely desirable state of affairs. Because, as he himself puts it:

…if the reward of the labourer were always in proportion to what he produced,
the quantity of labour bestowed on a commodity, and the quantity of labour which that
commodity would purchase, would be equal, and either might accurately measure
the variations of other things: but they are not equal; the first is under many
circumstances an invariable standard, indicating correctly the variations of other
things; the latter is subject to as many variations as the commodities compared with it.
(I: 14)

In other words, a labourer might do a given amount of work, but, because of

particular economic circumstances, that work could be worth more or less (in terms

of what it can buy) than under other circumstances. Especially disturbing, of course,

are those circumstances where it turns out to be worth less.

The solution, as Ricardo saw it, was to try to make labor the real standard

of value. Thus in On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation:

The value of a commodity, or the quantity of any other commodity for which it
will exchange, depends on the relative quantity of labour which is necessary for
its production, and not on the greater or less compensation which is paid for that
labour. (I: 12)

From the standpoint of political economy, however, making labor the standard

of value is easier said than done—not least because of the kind of economic

relativity pointed out by Ricardo himself. The problem is that any standard has to be

objectively measurable. But once you try to measure something economically,

you inevitably get into the kinds of gyrations or fluctuations Ricardo himself

described in the paradox discussed above. In other words, given the kind of relativity

physics Ricardo established as the framework of political economy, it gets to be

very hard to verify anything like absolute movement, or absolute value. Any

measurable standard of value has to be ascertained in relation to other objects of

value. And given how these are bound to fluctuate in value, it becomes difficult

to show that any measurable quantity doesn't fluctuate as well.

It was precisely this relativistic aspect of Ricardian political economy

that would make Ricardo's quest for a measure of absolute value vulnerable to attack.

In fact, only a couple years after the publication of <u>On the Principles of Political</u>

<u>Economy and Taxation</u>, Thomas Malthus found the weak spot in Ricardo's definition

of labor as absolute value. In a letter to Ricardo, he opens with an innocent-looking

example:

If we suppose half an ounce of silver on an average to be picked up by a days
search on the sea shore, money would then always retain most completely the same
value. It would always on an average both cost, and command the same quantity of
labour. The money price of labour could never permanently either rise or fall; and
the accumulation of capital in all cases where capital was used and the same quantity
of labour employed, would shew itself in a fall of prices owing to the diminished rate
of profits. Corn alone would rise in money price on account of the increased quantity
of labour required; but the rise would be inconsiderable, and strictly limited by
the diminution of <u>corn</u> wages which the labourer could bear.

Then the knife-thrust:

Under these circumstances I should like to know from you how the profits of stock
would be <u>regulated</u>. They could not evidently be regulated by the rise in money wages of
labour, because labor would not alter in money value. (10 Sept. 1819, VIII: 64-65)

Here the problem is that capacity to collect the same amount of silver every

day <u>fixes or freezes</u> the price of labor. Since silver <u>is</u> money there can't be any wiggle

room about its price or value, and hence not about the value of the labor that gathers

it. But that in turn means there can't be any increase in wages, because labor will

<u>always</u> be worth the same amount—as measured by the amount of silver a person

can collect at the seashore on any given day. Malthus goes on to suppose

capital will accumulate in the hands of the employer (because he/she never has to give

workers a raise), and that will show itself in a fall of prices since workers (who can

never exceed a fixed salary level) don't have enough money to buy up all the items being

produced, which will in turn force producers to lower prices in the hope of selling more

and so restoring their falling rate of profit. At the same time, he points out that only

corn (meaning grain) is likely to go up in price—because as population goes up

(remember Malthus = author of the <u>Essay on the Principle of Population</u>), it'll get harder

to produce enough corn to feed everyone. But even here, the price can't go up too

much, because workers (who often get paid in corn directly) can't get by on much less

corn or they'll starve. Taken together, these conditions point to a virtually static

economy, which is fine for Malthus the conservative Tory parson, but not for Ricardo

whose whole aim was to see the lot of the workers improve.

    Unable to come up with an answer to Malthus, Ricardo then found himself

in free fall. He tried to buy time by claiming that even if a worker gathered the same

amount of gold or silver every day, the amount of time necessary to bring it to market

would vary. But he knew it was no use: even if he managed to show that the price

of gold or silver might vary, that didn't really help his case—the real problem was that

he couldn't show labor as the determining force behind value. If the market

conditions on gold or silver varied, that merely meant the workers' pay might vary

as well. And that certainly didn't prove the quantity of labor to be the source of

value—in fact, quite the contrary.

Having run up against a brick wall in his effort to come up with an example

that would prove the quantity of labor to be the determinant of value, Ricardo then tried,

in a later paper on "Absolute Value and Exchangeable Value" (unfinished, significantly,

when he died), to define an absolute standard of value abstractly:

The only qualities necessary to make a measure of value a perfect one are, that
it should itself have value, and that that value should be itself invariable, in the same
manner as in a perfect measure of length the measure itself should have length and
that length should be neither liable to be increased or diminished…. (IV: 361)

In other words, a measure of value like the metric bar: like the metric bar,

it should exist in the real world, and at the same time it should offer an absolute

standard of value. Such a measure, however, was not to be found.

Finally—and even within the very same paper—Ricardo had to concede

defeat:

It must then be confessed that there is no such thing in nature as a perfect measure
of value… (IV: 404)

His concession meant that, for the later Romantic period, where there ought

to have been a concept of value, there was, instead, something of a vacuum or void.

And that void would in turn have consequences. If we see Ricardo's quest for

an absolute measure of value in political economy as an attempt to concretize

what had been an abstract absolute in his predecessors, his failure has the double

effect of blocking any possible return to an abstract principle, while at the same

time committing his own period to an all-or-nothing quest within the real

world: of people struggling to earn enough to survive, of social protest and its brutal

repression, of massive discrepancy between those who have and those who don't—in

other words, the world of post-Waterloo England.

But if Ricardo unwittingly helped to create a vacuum or void within

the realm of values in post-Waterloo England, it would fall to a young British poet

to feel and convey a sense of what that vacuum or void felt like. Typically,

we associate Byron with efforts at political and social protest. In some of his deepest

verse, however, composed in his last years, he would return to the world he knew best,

the life of the English aristocracy, in an attempt to probe the existential consequences

of an absence of value. It was in the last 3rd of his unfinished epic <u>Don Juan</u> that he

specifically attempted to recall in detail the social practices of that aristocratic world he

had forever left behind:

His morns he passed in business—which dissected,
    Was like all business, a laborious nothing,
That leads to lassitude, the most infected
    And Centaur-Nessus garb of mortal clothing,
And on our sophas makes us lie dejected,
    And talk in tender horrors of our loathing
All kinds of toil, save for our country's good—
Which grows no better, though 'tis time it should.

His afternoons he passed in visits, luncheons,
    Lounging, and boxing; and the twilight hour
In riding round those vegetable puncheons
    Called 'Parks,' where there is neither fruit nor flower
Enough to gratify a bee's slight munchings;
    But after all it is the only 'bower,'
(In Moore's phrase) where the fashionable fair

Can form a slight acquaintance with fresh air.

Then dress, then dinner, then awakes the world!
 Then glare the lamps, then whirl the wheels, then roar
Through street and square fast flashing chariots, hurled
 Like harnessed meteors; then along the floor
Chalk mimics painting; then festoons are twirled;
 Then roll the brazen thunders of the door,
Which opens to the thousand happy few
An earthly Paradise of 'Or Molu.'

There stands the noble Hostess, nor shall sink
 With the three-thousandth curtsey; there the Waltz,
The only dance which teaches girls to think,
 Makes one in love even with its very faults.
Saloon, room, hall o'erflow beyond their brink,
 And long the latest of arrivals halts,
'Midst royal dukes and dames condemned to climb,
And gain an inch of staircase at a time.
       (canto XI, sec. 65-68)

For a sense of what that world was like, even a brief glimpse of some of the

few surviving "private palaces" (Christopher Sykes) in London can be useful.

Specifically, take a look at Home House and Wynn House, two of Robert

Adam's finest achievements, which would have entertained many of the privileged

few of Regency England:

[PPT 2.5, Home House staircase]

[PPT 2.6, Home House music room]

[PPT 2.7, Home House music room]

[PPT 2.8, Wynn House façade]

[PPT 2.9, Wynn House interior]

Next, a few remarks on the aristocratic routine described by Byron. The favorite place for the "fashionable fair" to "form a slight acquaintance with fresh air" was Hyde Park. Typically, they would enter by Apsley Gate and ride up Rotten Row, the main horse-and-carriage avenue. But it wasn't about the exercise. Instead, the main aim of the beautiful people here was to see and be seen. Hence their merely "slight" acquaintance with fresh air. It was at night, though, that the fashionable world really came to life. And the place where the privileged few went to dance was Almack's. Here and at aristocratic residences you might see ballroom floors decorated by chalk imitations of famous paintings. Of course it's all terribly wasteful—once people begin to dance, the chalk drawings would obviously get rubbed out and disappear. There's a sense that much of the ballroom décor, like the chalk drawings, is rather ephemeral—witness "ormolu," a cheap metal designed to look like bronze. Although Byron (with his clubfoot) usually didn't dance, he took a particular interest in the waltz. Unlike other dances, its moves allowed for more flexibility, hence alertness, good timing, and quick thinking by dance partners. The implication is that other dances, because much more routinized, are by comparison dull. Finally, the most famous party of the decade was the Burlington House masquerade Ball on July 1, 1814, designed to celebrate the fall of Napoleon. According to reports by some of those who went, it took nearly 4 hours to get there due to the huge press of carriages. And of course once you got there, with all the crowd, it presumably took a long time to get up to the main floor, given that you could only ascend "one inch of staircase at a time." Taken together, what we get from all these details is the picture of a pretty frivolous lifestyle, lots of tinsel, and

underneath a yawning emptiness.

   For that reason, it shouldn't come as a surprise that Byron and so many

others of his set took to gambling. The real problem was boredom or <u>ennui</u>—the sense

that nothing mattered, that no activity was inherently meaningful. In a later canto

of <u>Don Juan</u> Byron asks:

But 'why then publish?'—There are no rewards
    Of fame or profit, when the world grows weary.
I ask in turn,--why do you play at cards?
    Why drink? Why read? –To make some hour less dreary.
                                        (XIV. 11)

By contrast, gambling seemed attractive because what happened at the gaming

table could force you to sit up and take notice. So Byron says:

I think that were I <u>certain</u> of success,
    I hardly could compose another line:
So long I've battled either more or less,
    That no defeat can drive me from the Nine.
This feeling 'tis not easy to express,
    And yet 'tis not affected, I opine.
In play, there are two pleasures for your choosing—
The one is winning, and the other losing.
                                        (XIV. 12)

In other words, Byron will continue to pursue the Nine (i.e., the Muses =

poetry) just because it gives him something to do, helps to make "some hour less

dreary." But what really gives him incentive is uncertainty about whether

his stuff will be successful, which makes writing like gambling. In Byron's time,

people lost huge fortunes in gambling: dandies like Scrope Davies and Beau

Brummell went bankrupt and had to flee England to avoid creditors, while the Duke

and Duchess of Devonshire saw their income go from £60,000 to £8,000 a year because

of debts from gambling losses. Nonetheless, gambling made you feel alive—precisely

because you didn't know what might happen to you. As Byron observes, "In play,

there are <u>two</u> pleasures for your choosing—The one is winning, and the other

losing."

  At the end of <u>Don Juan</u> matters take a significantly different turn,

largely because Juan meets someone quite unlike anyone he's ever met before—

a young woman named Aurora Raby. There's been a lot of discussion in Byron

scholarship about whom she's modeled after. My own guess is that Byron based her

on his wife, Annabella Milbank or Lady Byron. We know that in his last years,

while living in Italy and Greece, Byron thought a lot about the failure of his marriage,

about how it had gone wrong, & the why and where. I think he came to feel

its failure was something fated to be, that it was part of the human condition he shared

with everyone else. Hence the peculiar turn he gives to his description of Aurora

Raby:

Early in years, and yet more infantine
  In figure, she had something of sublime
In eyes which sadly shone, as seraphs' shine.
  All youth—but with an aspect beyond time;
Radiant and grave—as pitying man's decline;
  Mournful—but mournful of another's crime,
She look'd as if she sat by Eden's door,
And grieved for those who could return no more.
            (XV. 45)

This sense of something no longer possible, I would argue, is what helps to

bring about, by way of response, the glimpse of an ideal:

And certainly Aurora had renewed
    In him some feelings he had lately lost
Or hardened; feelings which, perhaps ideal,
Are so divine, that I must deem them real:--

The love of higher things and better days;
    The unbounded hope, and heavenly ignorance
Of what is called the world, and the world's ways;
    The moments when we gather from a glance
More joy than from all future pride or praise,
    Which kindle mankind, but can ne'er entrance
The heart in an existence of its own,
Of which another's bosom is the zone.
                              (XIV, sec. 107-108)

Significantly, Byron can no longer find the ideal within himself. And that, I

would suggest, is part of the legacy of the failure by Ricardo and others to find a

verifiable source of value either in political economy or elsewhere. Instead, Byron can

only locate the ideal in an external other ("Of which another's bosom is the zone"),

but one from whom he's now permanently separated. It attests, I think, to his

awareness of an absence or lack of value within the world in which he moves that

Aurora Raby is, in effect, only a symbolic presence. But unlike the symbolism

of the earlier Romantic era, this symbolism is no longer founded on concrete existences,

but rather on something close to the exact opposite—a yearning for something or

someone who embodies precisely what can't be found anytime or anywhere,

because he or she is only a subjective expression of the yearning for what can only

be imagined, but never possessed.

III. The House of Life

With the midpoint of the nineteenth century, 1850/51, we come to a watershed

moment in the cultural history of the West. Here it's useful to recall once more the

schema from lecture 1:

[PPT 3.1]

What marks the mid-century point as decisive is the split that occurs somewhere

around 1850/51 between the subjective and objective (i.e., Subjective ≠ Objective).

Up to that point, we've seen a growing inability to hold together that fusion of

subjective and objective posited by Hegel in his movement of Substance ⇒ Subject.

Instead, what we get is at best S ⇒ S/O ⇒ $\underline{S}$, which is to say Substance that
$$O$$
leads to a separation between subjective and objective (S/O) that in turn becomes

the primacy of subjective over objective, even as they remain in some sense

precariously held together despite increasing tension. So we saw how the absolute

principle (necessary development) of the early Romantic era becomes, first,

the failure to find a more concrete measure of value in the material sphere of

political economy and then the essentially subjective ideal of Byron. But by the

mid-century, even this kind of essentially subjective ideal (which assumes the primacy

of subjective over objective where both still coexist within the same sphere) is no longer sustainable. So now we get the subjective/objective split, where subjective ≠ objective.

If the subjective/objective split is what marks the mid-century, then the Janus-face that hovers over this moment, looking both forward and backward, is John Ruskin. On the one hand Ruskin distinctly looks backward, to the kind of symbolism we find in the early Romantic period, where natural objects reveal (as Coleridge put it) the "translucence of the Eternal in and through the Temporal." The "natural supernaturalism," in other words, of Thomas Carlyle. It's the belief in this kind of symbolic relationship between natural objects and a kind of immanent divine presence that makes possible the project of Modern Painters. It only makes sense to spend 5 volumes talking about organic forms if you believe they somehow express a divine order within things. Because the kind of organic forms Ruskin is talking about in Modern Painters aren't really just defined by a necessary relation between their parts (as Kant would have it). Instead, they're clearly shot through with a kind of luminescence, a splendor that can come only from a belief that these organic forms, these natural objects, are expressive of something beyond what they are. Yet even as Ruskin was turning out one volume after another of Modern Painters (most of which hardly discuss painters at all), he was also engaged in a very different kind of project, one that would take shape in the 3-volume work called Stones of Venice that appeared in 1851. And this, you might say, is the other side of the Janus-face. This is the face that looks forward to what would become, increasingly, the tendency of the later nineteenth century.

In Stones of Venice what Ruskin put forward was a kind of constructivism that

had nothing to do with nature, one based on purely formal architectural

principles that could be combined to create the churches and palaces of Venice.

It was, then, no accident that Ruskin called his work Stones of Venice: he

meant, I take it, to refer specifically to those building blocks this new constructivism

would employ, out of which it would create new, distinctly human edifices.

But the constructivism doesn't end with Ruskin. At almost exactly the same time

Ruskin was finishing Stones of Venice, a massive new structure of cast-iron and glass

went up in London that would go far beyond anything he had in mind in his study

of the architecture of Venice: the Crystal Palace, or—to call it by its more technical

name—the building designed to house the Great Exhibition of 1851. Ruskin would

recoil from it in horror, as he did from so much of the later 19th century work

he had done so much to anticipate and even to spawn. Nevertheless, we can find

at the heart of it the same kind of constructive principle we find in Stones itself:

the sense that a small number of architectural motifs can be combined and

multiplied almost indefinitely to create an entire structure. At the end, we'll see

how this same principle has a long afterlife, extending even into the late

twentieth century. In Stones, however, Ruskin didn't just anticipate late 19th and

even late 20th century constructivism. He also—and this is another aspect of

his Janus-face—looks forward to the increasing subjectivism of late 19th century

painting, and specifically its preoccupation with color as an element independent

of linear definition and even of any kind of figural specificity altogether. In this he

wasn't alone—Turner, you might say, was there before him. But the presence of

a similar color preoccupation in Stones, and the way in which it gradually comes

to achieve autonomy from anything like Nature, or natural objects, offer a distinct

hint of what is to come, and specifically of what we'll find when we look at

Whistler, Wilde and Pater. Yet Ruskin would savagely reject Whistler, even

though the groundwork of so much of what we find in Whistler was already there

in Turner. Take it as one more index of the difficult and complex process by

which a new formative principle comes to be.

It's now time to turn to Ruskin's Venice. And for that we can do no better,

I think, than to look at how Ruskin himself introduces it:

Now we can see nothing but what seems a low and monotonous dockyard
wall, with flat arches to let the tide through it;--this is the railroad bridge, conspicuous
above all things. But at the end of those dismal arches there rises, out of the wide
water, a straggling line of low and confused brick buildings, which, but for the many
towers which are mingled among them, might be the suburbs of an English
manufacturing town. Four or five domes, pale, and apparently at a greater distance,
rise over the centre of the line; but the object which first catches the eye is a sullen
cloud of black smoke brooding over the northern half of it, and which issues from
the belfry of a church.
    It is Venice.
                (Works IX, 415)

Here Ruskin seems firmly determined to give no more to Venice than

what's strictly necessary—the minimalist perspective, you might say, on what

first catches the visitor's eye. And yet, in retrospect, we can see it all as quite

deliberate. Because what Ruskin wants to emphasize is precisely what Venice

has in common with the ugliest English manufacturing town: that both are

cities built from the same general constructive principles, so that what distinguishes

Venice from Manchester or Sheffield isn't that its formative principles are so much better but simply that in Venice they were developed further, until they became something like aesthetic architecture.

Nonetheless, they all begin in the same way, and that's precisely what Ruskin wants to emphasize in his discussion of what he calls the theory of the Arch Line. Consider his illustration, in <u>Stones</u>, of several forms of stone arches:

[PPT 3.2]

If you look carefully, you'll notice how these 3 forms of arches manage the stress of overhead weight in a progressively more complex way. The 1st is a simple plinth that stretches from one pillar over to the other, placed so as to support all the weight above. The 2nd makes use of 2 plinths propped against each other. Here the stress management is more sophisticated: because of the angle, all the burden of the weight above flows away on either side of the central point. Finally, the 3rd form, the arch, is the most sophisticated of the 3 because it works to distribute the burden of the weight over the whole curve of the arch. So much for pure functionalism.

What Ruskin now goes on to show is how pure functionalism becomes art. Look at his next illustration, where he surveys different arch forms:

[PPT 3.3]

Of all these, the most perfect, he says (if I remember correctly) is the middle arch in the 3rd row up from the bottom. Clearly, it's an exercise in the connoisseurship of arches. Note how the point where the middle arch in the 3rd row breaks upward is neither too high nor too low, but exactly where it ought to be aesthetically. In a typical Ruskin marriage of form + function, this is probably the best shape in terms of an even distribution of stress or weight, but also the form that appeals the most to the eye. Out of forms like these, Ruskin can then go on to construct an entire church or palace in the Venetian Gothic style. And the fact that he can do this proves any edifice can be reduced to a few basic architectural motifs + a constructive principle. Nor do we find any reference in all this to Nature, or the imitation of Nature. In contrast to <u>Modern Painters</u>, the aesthetic of <u>Stones</u> is distinctly moving toward complete autonomy.

　　With his treatment of color in the same work, however, Ruskin would push this tendency much farther. After a full discussion of architectural forms or motifs in vol. I, Ruskin moves on in vol. II to talk about the use of color in St. Mark's Basilica. Significantly, he begins by pointing out the relative neglect of color in aesthetic appreciation:

The perception of colour is a gift just as definitely granted to one person, and denied to another, as an ear for music; and the very first requisite for true judgment of St. Mark's, is the perfection of that colour-faculty which few people ever set themselves seriously to find out whether they possess or not. For it is on its value as a piece of perfect and unchangeable colouring, that the claims of this edifice to our respect are finally rested…. It possesses the charm of colour in common with the greater part of the architecture, as well as of the manufactures, of the East; but the Venetians deserve especial note as the only European people who appear to have sympathized to the full with the great instinct of the Eastern

races.

At first it seems almost as if Ruskin just wants to highlight one of the more

esoteric architectural qualities. But then he goes on to say: "For it is on its value

as a piece of perfect and unchangeable colouring, that the claims of this edifice to

our respect are finally rested." What??? After all that discussion of wall and pier

bases, cornices, capitals, and roofs, to be told that only color matters? What's

going on here? Clearly Ruskin's moving away from the marriage of form + function

that dominated vol. I. But it isn't just about a shift to a different architectural principle.

Although it's possible to see color as a kind of architectural ornament, we can also

see how it might be possible to consider it quite independently of architecture

altogether.

Later, in fact, Ruskin offers just that—a discussion of color that's more

or less independent of architecture:

The fact is, we none of us enough appreciate the nobleness and sacredness of
colour. Nothing is more common than to hear it spoken of as a subordinate beauty.
Such expressions are used for the most part in thoughtlessness; and if the speakers
would only take the pains to imagine what the world and their own existence would
become, if the blue were taken from the sky, and the gold from the sunshine, and
the verdue from the leaves, and the crimson from the blood which is the life of man,
the flush from the cheek, the darkness from the eye, the radiance from the hair,--if
they could but see, for an instant, white human creatures living in a white world,--
they would soon feel what they owe to colour. The fact is, that, of all God's gifts
to the sight of man, colour is the holiest, the most divine, the most solemn. We speak
rashly of gay colour and sad colour, for colour cannot at once be good and gay. All
good colour is in some degree pensive, the loveliest is melancholy, and the purest
and most thoughtful minds are those which love colour the most.

We might almost be reading Melville's famous meditation on whiteness and color in"The Whiteness of the Whale" from <u>Moby-Dick</u>, published, significantly, the very same year as <u>Stones of Venice</u>. When Ruskin speaks of the "nobleness" and "sacredness" of color (and, later, of color as "the holiest, the most divine, and the most solemn" of God's gifts), he clearly has something more in mind than just architectural ornament. Specifically, I would argue that by shifting his perspective to color on natural objects what Ruskin wants to put forward is a new concept of symbolism. It's different from the symbolism of <u>Modern Painters</u> because it has nothing to do with the organic, or with the forms found in nature. Instead, Ruskin seems to be working around to a more subjective notion of symbolism. After all, color exists only in the perceiver's eye. And that would suggest Ruskin believes the source of the sacredness of color comes ultimately from the mind itself, rather than from God or nature.

And perhaps it's this latent implication that leads to the final discussion of color in <u>Stones</u> vol. II, where the primacy passes from color in nature to color considered purely by itself—in other words, color arrangement or harmony:

We are to remember… that the arrangement of colours and lines is an art analogous to the composition of music, and entirely independent of the representation of facts. Good colouring does not necessarily convey the image of anything but itself. It consists in certain proportions and arrangements of rays of light, but not in likeness to anything. A few touches of certain greys and purples laid by a master's hand on white paper will be good colouring; as more touches are added beside them, we may find out that they were intended to represent a dove's neck, and we may praise, as the drawing advances, the perfect imitation of the dove's neck. But the good colouring does not consist in that imitation, but in the abstract qualities and relations of the grey and purple.
(<u>Works</u> X, 215-16)

I remember years ago being in the Prado in Madrid, face to face with a
Velasquez portrait of one of the royal princesses, and noticing that the whole
painting wasn't really about any royal princess at all, but just about a particular kind
of color harmony between different shades of vermilion red and gray. It's the
same principle here. Notice how careful Ruskin is to emphasize that the use of
color is <u>not</u> representational: "entirely independent of the representation of facts…
does not necessarily convey the image of anything but itself." And obviously,
once he puts forward the analogy between color arrangement and musical
composition, any sense of color as representational disappears completely. Later,
we'll see how the same idea gets taken up by Whistler in his <u>Nocturne in Black</u>
<u>and Gold</u> and his <u>Nocturne in Blue and Gold</u>—2 works Ruskin would violently,
and very publicly, criticize. Here, however, he's obviously not worried (as he will
be later) about representational likeness at all. On the contrary, he even goes on
to suggest that the real base of a master painter's depiction of a dove isn't the attempt
to portray its likeness at all, but rather an effort to create a particular color arrangement
of gray and purple. His sense that the painter was primarily interested in "the abstract
qualities and relations of the grey and the purple" shows that this color harmony,
in Ruskin's mind, has now acquired complete autonomy, to the extent that it—
rather than the natural dove—becomes the formative principle behind the painter's
work.

   In watching how Ruskin moves from color as architectural ornament to
color as a completely independent formative/compositional principle, we might very

well suspect he didn't get there just by himself. Specifically, we might wonder

about the possible influence of a painter Ruskin acknowledged more frequently

than anyone else as his master and idol—J.M.W. Turner. As a way to pursue this further,

consider these watercolors of Venice from Turner's late years:

[PPT 3.4]

[PPT 3.5]

[PPT 3.6]

[PPT 3.7]

I've tried to arrange these in a sequence determined roughly by the time of day they

might conceivably represent. So we begin with PPT 3.4 which looks like dawn.

Note the low, straggling line of buildings at the skyline, much as described by Ruskin

in his initial approach to Venice at the end of <u>Stones</u> vol. I. These are indistinct

enough—just a blue wash, really—but even more so are the boats in the foreground,

indicated only by single curved reddish-brown strokes that are even allowed to "bleed"

a bit. Likewise the sky shows some reddish squiggles as well. What stands out most

is the relative faintness of all the colors, which makes the whole just a delicate color

blend. PPT 3.5 is the most distinctly representational of the lot, because it shows

a few facades in some detail. Nonetheless, even here the dominant note is the color

contrast between the bluish-green of the left half v. the light, sandy tint of the right:

a contrast between the sea in shadow and the palaces lit up by the midday sun.

PPT 3.6 is again a light-dark contrast between the pale yellow middle left, above

the skyline, and all the rest in darker violet-blue. Here, though, the feeling once again distinctly of color washes. The sea, which makes up the bottom half of the composition, is after all nothing but blue color washes of varying darkness and intensity, yet all of the same tonality. Meanwhile the upper half (i.e., the sky) offers a very similar violet-blue wash, just a bit lighter, with some of it even allowed to delicately permeate the pale yellow portion of the middle left. Thus the whole composition becomes a study in tonality as much as color, with one tone allowed to infuse the whole throughout. Finally, PPT 3.7 displays a signature Turner motif: sunset. To it, everything else is clearly subordinated. So the lower half foreground is hardly colored at all, while the buildings come across as nothing more than a purple blur. The center, and focal point, is a small, but concentrated blood-red wash, against a luminous yellow background. We'll come back to Turner's sunset later when we discuss Whistler and Wilde. But for now, note that even here, no circular disk to indicate the sun—just a bright red color wash to show where its light is gradually disappearing.

But if Ruskin could accept and even embrace the move in late Turner toward composition defined purely by color, what he couldn't accept was the very different face of London that emerged just as Stones was being finished: the Crystal Palace.

[PPT 3.8]

[PPT 3.9]

Designed by Sir Joseph Paxton to house the Great Exhibition of 1851, it consisted entirely of cast-iron and plate glass. Its innovative quality lay in its being composed of modular sections made to fit together so that they could be manufactured elsewhere and then brought to Hyde Park where they were quickly combined to form an enormous structure. Any rain that might fall on the structure was easily channeled into gutter patterns within the cast-iron frame so that it could quickly run off. Meanwhile, the glass allowed sunlight to pass through everywhere so that exhibits had no need of any other illumination. And, to prevent overheating, open spaces at various places in the structure helped to provide ample ventilation. PPT 3.9 shows what it was like on the inside: luminous, airy, and with plenty of space for the enormous crowds who visited the Exhibition to wander around at their leisure. Altogether, then, it was a great success, one of those moments in the history of architectural design that looks forward to so much of what is to come. Nonetheless, Ruskin hated it. And yet, ironically, it's distinctly possible to see the Crystal Palace as simply another expression of the same kind of constructivism we find in Stones of Venice. Like the architecture described in Stones, it consists of just a few architectural elements or motifs capable of being endlessly combined. And, like the Venetian palaces Ruskin wrote about, it, too, married form and function in its architectural motifs. The fact that Ruskin found himself absolutely unable to accept it points, I think, to the way formative principles work historically: not by a single forward impulse, but often by a movement that simultaneously displays both a backward and a forward tendency.

So it was that a backward look at the Venetian palaces of the late Gothic period could yield a formative principle that would also help to produce the most forward-looking structure of London in 1851, the Crystal Palace. Later we'll see how in other ways Ruskin was equally unable to anticipate or to accept implications of the color doctrine that he espoused in <u>Stones of Venice</u> when these came to expression in the work of J.A.M. Whistler and, subsequently, Impressionism.

Meanwhile, however, we have time for just a quick look at one of the late 20th century developments of the constructivist model first put forward by Sir Joseph Paxton in the Crystal Palace: the Hong Kong-Shanghai Bank, designed by Sir Norman Foster.

[PPT 3.10]

[PPT 3.11]

Like the Crystal Palace, the Hong Kong-Shanghai Bank was designed by Foster in the form of modular sections that could be quickly assembled (given its downtown Hong Kong location, a very good idea—just as the quick assembly potential of the Crystal Palace, for reasons of economy and minimal disturbance, was equally good for its time). Of course, the Bank is quite a bit taller than the Crystal Palace—hence the need for more steel structural support framing it (parenthetically, though, I should mention that on a recent visit to Hong Kong, standing just across the street from it, I failed even to recognize it until it

was pointed out by my more observant wife, so dwarfed has it become by even taller edifices). Nonetheless, we can see very much the same idea at work: the minimalist steel-glass construction, designed to allow the maximum amount of light to enter in, and so arranged as to give the same kind of spacious, airy, and luminous feel. It attests, we might say, to the potential force, even in a distant aftertime, of the formative principle espoused by Ruskin in 1851.

IV. The Problem of Time

In many ways, if we look at Western cultural history from a perspective

defined by the Romantic concept of development, 1850 might well figure as the last

good year of the nineteenth century. Consider what happens that year. Among

the many novels published, we have one by Dickens that he always considered

his favorite: <u>David Copperfield</u>. Of course, the Dickens scholarship will be quick

to claim the reason <u>David Copperfield</u> was his favorite was that he put so much of

himself into it. But I think there's also a deeper, less obvious reason. If we look

carefully at all his later novels, we can say that in no work after <u>Copperfield</u> do we

ever again see what might be described as an example of perfect development,

where an individual fulfills his/her promise and fully becomes what he/she ought

to be. That, I think, was for Dickens the magic of <u>David Copperfield</u>. Despite

his orphan background, despite horrible schoolmasters and questionable

companions like Steerforth, despite his child-wife Dora, despite all these and many

other circumstances that could easily have led him astray, David Copperfield

somehow manages to survive them all and to become, in the end, someone

whose growth cycle comes to a proper climax morally and emotionally. All the later

novels, you might say, are about great expectations that never quite come to

fruition: about people who fail to meet the right person at the right time and so

waste themselves on the wrong people, about people fed on false rumors who base

all their hopes on these, and about people who squander their lives away for lack

of a meaningful objective. But in Copperfield, for once, it all comes out right.

And that might lead us in turn to ask why it never comes out right anywhere

else.

One answer I would like to propose is a shift, somewhere around the

middle of the nineteenth century, from subjectivity to intersubjectivity. Consider

this diagram, which shows, by stages, the population growth of London:

[PPT 4.1. Roy Porter, London: A Social History]

As you can see, from the end of the eighteenth century to the 1830s there isn't

all that much difference. But from the 1830s to the 1870s, the increase is massive—

more than double, at a quick glance. And, to get a sense of what that meant

physically or materially, take a look at this 1863 depiction of the city:

[PPT 4.2]

It's by David Roberts, a Royal Academy painter, and is entitled St. Paul's, from

the Thames, Looking West. I'm sure you all recognize the haze rising from all

quarters of the city: it's not just London fog. Then as now, it meant one thing: too

many people. Too many people, in turn, might help to explain how we get from

subjectivity to intersubjectivity. Too many people means people getting in your

face (as we say), preventing you from focusing on your own thoughts and wishes,

forcing you to take account of them in all the ways you live and move. And that's how we get instances of skewed or arrested development. When people are forced to deal with others, to think about others and about their relationship to those others, that's when we have intersubjectivity. For now, let's leave it defined only in this loose, intuitive & casual way. The fuller implications of what I mean by intersubjectivity will come out when we look at mid-19th century fiction in detail. For the moment, though, I simply want to suggest that intersubjectivity gets in the way of individual subjectivity, and hence of individual development. And that, you might say, is why we no longer have any instances in 19th century fiction of perfect development or becoming roughly after the mid-century. But large changes like this don't happen overnight. In fact, the ground for these will have had to have been prepared long before.

Specifically, I want to suggest that it was prepared in terms of theory by a solitary thinker living in a city (Copenhagen) that was hardly overcrowded at all: Søren Kierkegaard. In putting him forward I don't mean to claim Kierkegaard was read by Dickens or Melville or anybody else at that time. He wasn't. But what Kierkegaard was thinking about the Hegelian model of development is reflective, I would argue, of what a lot of other people were thinking, both in Germany (Feuerbach et al., which then passes on to George Eliot and hence to the English Victorian scene) and elsewhere. My reason for turning to him, then, is just that he puts matters more incisively, and in more detail. In particular, I want to turn to his Concluding Unscientific Postscript, the major work in which Kierkegaard voices, more fully than anywhere else, his argument against Hegel.

Most of it comes in a section of the book entitled, significantly, "Truth is

Subjectivity." We can pick it up at the point where Kierkegaard introduces the

Hegelian notion of thinking and being as identical, which makes possible

(as we've seen), the movement Substance$\Rightarrow$ Subject. Here is Kierkegaard's

take on it:

> Whether truth is defined more empirically as the agreement of thinking with being
> or more idealistically as the agreement of being with thinking, the point in each case
> is to pay scrupulous attention to what is understood by being and also to pay attention
> to whether the knowing human spirit might not be lured out into the indefinite and
> fantastically become something such as no <u>existing</u> human being has ever been
> or can be….
> (p. 189)

In other words, Kierkegaard doesn't buy Hegel's thinking = being. And since

he doesn't buy that, his notion of individual development will obviously be

different. So where Hegel has development end with a Subject that is, in effect,

just Substance continuously transformed, Kierkegaard doesn't believe this sort of

continuity is possible.

Another way to put it would be that Kierkegaard doesn't believe

subjective = objective. Subsequently he explains why:

> Subjective reflection turns inward toward subjectivity and in this inward
> deepening will be of the truth, and in such a way that, just as… when objectivity
> was advanced, subjectivity vanished, here subjectivity as such becomes the final
> factor and objectivity the vanishing. Here it is not forgotten, even for a single moment,
> that the subject is existing, and that existing is a becoming, and that truth as the
> identity of thought and being is therefore a chimera of abstraction and truly only
> a longing of creation, not because truth is not an identity, but because the knower

is an existing person, and thus truth cannot be an identity for him as long as he exists. If this is not held fast, then with the aid of speculative thought we promptly enter into the fantastical I-I that recent speculative thought certainly has used but without explaining how a particular individual relates himself to it, and, good Lord, of course no human being is more than a particular individual.

<div align="right">(pp. 196-97)</div>

For Kierkegaard, then, we can never have I = I because the subjective I is always

changing, and is always subjective. I = I, however, is an objective statement—which

is to say, a statement made about an abstract category or concept. If we think about

this statement abstractly, it's true in the same way that A = A is true. But if we try

to apply it to an individual person, it's no longer true because no individual person

can fit a large, abstract category like the "I." Instead, Kierkegaard says, we can

never forget that "the subject [i.e., an individual person] is existing, and that existing

is a becoming." Kierkegaard goes on to assert that "because the knower is an

existing person… truth cannot be an identity for him as long as he exists." Here

the implication is that existing and the kind of identity-relation truth is supposed

to involve are somehow inimical. But why should that be? To answer this question,

we need to recall, first of all, that for Kierkegaard existing = becoming. So a subject

or individual person who exists is one that's constantly in the process of becoming.

By being constantly involved in the process of becoming, however, that individual

person isn't able to verify for himself or herself the kind of stable identity-relationship

a statement like I = I would presuppose. So "truth would not be an identity for him

as long as he exists." What isn't yet clear, though, is why an individual person

has to be constantly involved in the process of becoming. Yes, we do change over

time. But why shouldn't there be moments when we can embrace a statement

like I = I as true? Here we need to come back to what Kierkegaard says at the outset: "Subjective reflection turns inward toward subjectivity and in this inward deepening will be of the truth, and in such a way that, just as…. when objectivity was advanced, subjectivity vanished, here subjectivity as such becomes the final factor and objectivity the vanishing." In other words, as subjective individuals we tend to feel, and because we're subjective (i.e., possessing something like individual consciousness or awareness) our mind's eye turns inward (i.e., toward our own feeling or experiencing) and hence to an awareness of our own subjectivity. Kierkegaard sees this process as one that "in this inward deepening will be of the truth"—presumably because the more we get into it, the more aware we become of our own feeling/ experiencing. But the more we do that, the more we enter into a state of pure subjectivity, turned inward and hence away from anything like the conditions necessary for objectivity. So objectivity (a state of mind where we consider statements like A = A) disappears, yielding to subjectivity.

The fact that Kierkegaard links this inward "deepening" or awareness to truth introduces the issue of how he defines knowledge, which is all about linking our mental state to what we believe to be true. In a later passage, Kierkegaard explicitly takes up the issue with a discussion of what he means by "essential knowing":

All essential knowing pertains to existence, or only the knowing whose relation to existence is essential is essential knowing. That essential knowing is essentially related to existence does not, however, signify the above-mentioned abstract identity between thinking and being, nor does it signify that the knowledge is objectively related to something existent as its object, but it means that the

knowledge is related to the knower, who is essentially an existing person, and that all essential knowing is therefore essentially related to existence and to existing.
  (pp. 197-98)

But if all essential knowing is fundamentally linked to existing, then we can

say essential knowing = subjectivity, because existing = becoming, and becoming

is all about that process of becoming aware of our own feeling/experiencing which for

Kierkegaard = subjectivity. So Kierkegaard can refuse the Hegelian thinking =

being as too abstract—not, in other words, the kind of thing we perceive as we get

into a deeper awareness of what we experience and feel—and likewise the notion

that knowledge is "objectively related to something existent as its object." For that

to be true, the individual person (i.e., the "something existent") would have to

possess the knowledge of his/her inner processes objectively, i.e., in the same

way we know A = A to be true. But that isn't the way we know our own

inner processes. Instead, we only know these by becoming aware of them

through that inward turn of reflection—which is to say, by subjectivity. So Kierkegaard

can say that "knowledge is related to the knower, who is essentially an existing

person." Knowledge, then, comes about because of who and what we are

specifically in our individuality, as people who through subjectivity come to

awareness of the processes by which we experience and feel.

    This absolute dependence of knowledge on who and what we are

individually leads Kierkegaard, in turn, to insist on an absolute either/or separation

between thought and existing:

If existing cannot be thought, and the existing person is thinking nevertheless, what does this mean? It means that he thinks momentarily; he thinks before and he thinks afterward. His thinking cannot attain absolute continuity. Only in a fantastical way can an existing person continually be <u>sub specie aeterni</u>.

<div align="right">(p. 329)</div>

We can't think our own existing, Kierkegaard would say, because thinking

is a kind of activity that occurs in a timeless condition or state. A = A isn't affected

by what we experience or feel from one moment to the next. And when we think

about it, we abstract from what we are to look at this proposition from a sort of

eternal perspective. Existing, by contrast, is all about what happens from one

minute to the next. So when we're existing we can't stop the clock: existing is

precisely the sense of things passing, which we register through all the ways we

experience or feel. If we exist at all in the way Kierkegaard wants to define it,

then we ourselves are necessarily moving from one minute to the next in a process

of constant change or becoming because what we experience or feel just doesn't

remain the same. And so we ourselves "become" as well.

　　If we apply this Kierkegaardian belief about the absolute either/or

split between thinking and existing to 19th century fiction after the mid-century,

my argument is that it turns into a sense of temporal discrepancy, which

typically means: a sense of being too late. This sense of being too late comes about

because characters within the fiction try to understand their situation, try to grasp

who and what they are. And as they do that, they realize that what they're able

to grasp, to see objectively, is no longer what they are. To be able to see

themselves objectively means, in effect, to freeze time. But time—and the

themselves—move on, even as they're making the effort to freeze it. Hence

the discrepancy. And here we see how their sense is different from that of the

Romantic era. Hegelian development or becoming is all about a perfect

synchronicity between thinking and existing. We exist and think at the same time,

and what we experience or feel, our whole process of becoming, is always

completely accessible to thought. This perfect transparency of existing to thinking

is based on a belief that being and thought are identical. In Hegelian becoming

we take everything we are with us as we change or move, and what we bring

is always accessible to thought. But as existing after the mid-century becomes

increasingly subjectivized, that link between being and thought is precisely

what's no longer there.

A good place to see the post-Kierkegaardian split between existing

and thinking is in Melville's 1852 novel Pierre. In Moby-Dick Ahab, and perhaps

to a lesser extent Ishmael, might still feel the rightness of his own process of

development, a belief that things happened when they were supposed to happen,

in the fullness of time. For Pierre, the protagonist of Melville's next novel,

it's different. At one moment in the novel, he gets under a massive rock called

the Memnon Stone, and lies there for a long time completely motionless. It's one of

those passages in the novel that I think has never been adequately explained. I

suspect that what he's doing is trying to make thinking and existing connect.

Typically, existence goes by too quickly, because it's always on the move. But by

lying motionless under this huge stone, he's trying to slow things down, so as to

reconnect with his essence (in French, after all, his name Pierre means stone).

And if he could do that, he might then be able to figure out what's going on inside

himself. Unfortunately, it doesn't work. So Pierre moves on. Specifically, to

a deeper and more entangled relationship with his half-sister Isabel.

Significantly, we get the pivotal episode in that relationship from a multiple-time

perspective in which it's presented both within a present-tense framework and

retrospectively:

Now this first night was Pierre made aware of what, in the superstitiousness of
his rapt enthusiasm, he could not help believing was an extraordinary physical
magnetism in Isabel. And—as it were derived from this marvelous quality thus imputed
to her—he now first became vaguely sensible of a certain still more marvelous power
in the girl over himself and his most interior thoughts and motions; --a power so
hovering upon the confines of the invisible world, that it seemed more inclined that
way than this; --a power which not only seemed irresistibly to draw him toward Isabel,
but to draw him away from another quarter—wantonly as it were, and yet quite
ignorantly and unintendingly; and, besides, without respect to any thing ulterior,
and yet again, only under cover of drawing him to her. For over all these things, and
interfusing itself with the sparkling electricity in which she seemed to swim, was an
ever-creeping and condensing haze of ambiguities. Often, in after-times with her,
did he recall this first magnetic night, and would seem to see that she had then
bound him to her by an extraordinary atmospheric spell—both physical and
spiritual—which henceforth it had become impossible for him to break, but whose
full potency he never recognized till long after he had become habituated to its sway.
This spell seemed one with that Pantheistic master-spell, which eternally locks in
mystery and muteness the universal subject world, and the physical electricalness
of Isabel seemed reciprocal with the heat-lightnings and the ground-lightnings
nigh to which it had first become revealed to Pierre.
                            (p. 151)

The reason for this split-time perspective, I suggest, is a desire to show

how Pierre can never quite manage to grasp the present until it becomes past.

In other words, he's always too late—which is to say, he can only see

his circumstances objectively when it becomes too late to act on these.

So the text subtly mixes past and present: "Now this first night was Pierre made

aware…" but later: "he now first became vaguely sensible of…" In effect,

the overall frame is past-tense, but into that the narrative will intrude with present

tense so we realize how it's all being experienced. Later in the passage, the split-time

perspective becomes even more evident: "Often, in after-times with her, did he

recall this first magnetic night, and would seem to see that she then had bound him

to her by an extraordinary atmospheric spell… which henceforth it had become

impossible for him to break, but whose full potency he never recognized till long

after he had become habituated to its sway." Even here, the experiential present

tense still has force: "and would seem to see…" Yet the overall past-tense

framework makes it clear that any attempt to make the present objective (i.e.,

to overcome the thinking/existing split) is always too late: "whose full potency

he never recognized till long after…" Of course, this present/past or

thinking/existing split has significant moral consequences, as Pierre never quite

manages to retrieve what he does under an initial purely subjective impulse.

And that's why the split turns into a sense of temporal discrepancy, of

always being too late.

    We see this sense of being too late developed even more extensively

in what has gradually come to be recognized as perhaps the finest Dickens novel

--Little Dorrit. It comes up already fairly early, i.e., soon after Arthur Clennam's

return from China, when he goes to look up Flora Casby (now Finching), his

early love. His meeting with her is one of painful disillusionment, but only

when he gets back to his own place is he able to put it all together:

When he got to his lodging, he sat down before the dying fire…and turned his gaze back upon the gloomy vista by which he had come to that stage in his existence. So long, so bare, so blank. No childhood; no youth, except for one remembrance; the one remembrance proved, only that day, to be a piece of folly.

It was a misfortune to him, trifle as it might have been to another. For, while all that was hard and stern in his recollection, remained Reality on being proved—was obdurate to the sight and touch, and relaxed nothing of its old indomitable grimness—the one tender recollection of his experience would not bear the same test, and melted away. He had foreseen this, on the former night, when he had dreamed with waking eyes, but he had not felt it then; and he had now.

(pp. 157-58)

Notice here how Dickens introduces the same split between thinking and existing that we saw earlier in Kierkegaard. Arthur Clennam had already anticipated in thought (when he "dreamed with waking eyes") how it would turn out. But it's only when he experiences it that it comes to him in full force: "he had not felt it then; and he had now." Significantly, even his ability to anticipate disillusionment doesn't really lessen the pain. Because of the split, thought or objectivity can't replace subjectivity, the level on which we really live.

Later in the novel, Arthur Clennam's disappointment over Minnie Meagles is in some ways even more complex. Because in this case it isn't just a past love which he discovers to have no real basis. Instead, his love for Minnie Meagles is very much present-tense. Yet even here, he turns out to be too late, because she's already agreed to marry the wastrel Henry Gowan. So Clennam has to give her up. And the way he does it gives a new twist to the thinking/existing split:

She wept, as she tried to thank him. He reassured her, took her hand as it lay
with the trembling roses in it on his arm, took the remaining roses from it, and put it
to his lips. At that time, it seemed to him, he first finally resigned the dying hope
that had flickered in nobody's heart, so much to its pain and trouble; and from that
time he became in his own eyes, as to any similar hope or prospect, a very much older
man who had done with that part of life.

<div align="center">(p. 327)</div>

Here Clennam becomes "nobody" from his own perspective, and that shift

from a subjective I to an objective "nobody" is in effect the shift from existing

to thinking. Kierkegaard had said that we can't do both simultaneously, and we might

surmise that the reason Clennam suddenly passes over from one to the other is to

avoid the pain he would feel if he continued to exist subjectively rather than to think.

To be "nobody" is, then, to cease to exist subjectively, to relinquish the individual

subjective I. This sudden shift from existing to thinking also produces a corresponding

shift in his time perspective as well. Note how "at that time… he first finally

resigned the dying hope…" "First finally"—it's almost an oxymoron. And the reason

for it, I would argue, is that it mixes 2 time perspectives—present & future. "First"

points to a future objective perspective, in which Clennam has given up on love.

"Finally" is present perspective, in which Clennam, still subjectively existing,

has to struggle with his pain. But it's the future, objective perspective that takes

over: "from that time he became… a very much older man who had done with that

part of life." Obviously he isn't chronologically any older yet. But by projecting

himself objectively into the future, he tries to take himself in thought into that

objective framework where his present existential pain will no longer matter.

As part of this process, Clennam then performs one final symbolic act of

renunciation: he takes the roses he gave Minnie Meagles, which she then gave back

to him, and casts them on the river:

When he had walked on the river's brink in the peaceful moonlight, for some half-an-hour, he put his hand in his breast and tenderly took out the handful of roses. Perhaps he put them to his heart, perhaps he put them to his lips, but certainly he bent down on the shore, and gently launched them on the flowing river. Pale and unreal in the moonlight, the river floated them away.
    The lights were bright within doors when he entered…. While the flowers, pale and unreal in the moonlight, floated away upon the river; and thus do greater things that once were in our breasts, and near our hearts, flow from us to the eternal seas.
     (p. 330)

We know that Dickens often left part of the significance of key passages to

be conveyed by an illustration. And here, almost exactly halfway through the novel,

we might well guess that's what he's done when we look at the "Phiz" Browne

rendition of the scene:

[PPT 4.3]

Note the extremely sharp bend in the river, right where Clennam is standing.

It's as if Browne (and Dickens) wanted to convey that this moment marks a kind

of turning point in the novel. From now on, time will flow or move in a different

way. On to death, ultimately, because that's what oceanic imagery ("the eternal

seas") typically signifies in Dickens (witness the end of Paul Dombey in <u>Dombey</u>

<u>and Son</u>, who sees the reflection of flowing water—the Thames—on the wall

of his bedroom just before he dies). But before that, it will bring Arthur Clennam

to Amy Dorrit.

Yet even here, perhaps because of all that's happened to him, Clennam

can't simply accept Little Dorrit's love. Instead, when he goes to debtor's prison

due to the apparent failure of his company and falls dangerously ill with fever,

he still won't let Little Dorrit help him unless she's willing to resume her old

dress and her old ways, before she and her father came into a family fortune. In other

words, Clennam won't accept Little Dorrit unless they can go back to their old

relationship, when he had money and she didn't. Here we might argue that the reason

they have to revert is that their old relationship is the only one Arthur Clennam can

objectively recognize, and hence accept. Any newer relationship would cast him

on dangerous existential waters, in which he can't remove his emotions—or hers—

to a safe, objective distance but instead will have to deal with them as they are.

And that's a challenge for which he's now too broken by disappointment, the sense

of always being too late, to accept. So it's up to Amy Dorrit to resume the burden

of the past:

She looked something more womanly than when she had gone away, and the
ripening touch of the Italian sun was visible upon her face. But, otherwise she was
quite unchanged. The same deep, timid earnestness that he had always seen in her,
and never without emotion, he saw still. If it had a new meaning that smote him
to the heart, the change was in his perception, not in her.
    She took off her old bonnet, hung it in the old place, and noiselessly began,
with Maggie's help, to make his room as fresh and neat as it could be made, and
to sprinkle it with a pleasant smelling water. When that was done, the basket
which was filled with grapes and other fruit, was unpacked, and all its contents were
quietly put away. When that was done, a moment's whisper dispatched Maggie
to dispatch somebody else to fill the basket again… These various arrangements
completed, she took out her old needlecase to make him a curtain for his window;

and thus, with a quiet reigning in the room, that seemed to diffuse itself through the else noisy prison, he found himself composed in his chair with Little Dorrit working at his side.
                    (p. 737)

Nonetheless, despite Amy Dorrit's effort to make things just as they were

before, even she can't prevent an eruption of the existential present within the

apparent past. And this because what Clennam now feels for her is different

from what he felt before—not just affection, but love: "If it had a new meaning that

smote him to the heart, the change was in his perception, not in her."

    Even this feeling, however, can't simply be accepted: it, too, must be

subsumed into a kind of complex past-present relationship where Clennam can

say that because he didn't recognize and accept his own feeling for her in the past

(when she was poor and he wasn't), he can't accept it now when the circumstances

are changed:

"If, in the bygone days when this was your home and when this was your dress, I had understood myself (I speak only of myself) better, and had read the secrets of my own breast more distinctly; if, through my reserve and self-mistrust, I had discerned a light that I see brightly now when it has passed far away, and my weak footsteps can never overtake it; if I had then known, and told you that I loved and honoured you, not as the poor child I used to call you, but as a woman whose true hand would raise me high above myself, and make me a far happier and better man; if I had so used the opportunity there is no recalling—as I wish I had, O I wish I had!—and if something had kept us apart then, when I was moderately thriving, and when you were poor; I might have met your noble offer of your fortune, dearest girl, with other words than these, and still have blushed to touch it. But as it is, I must never touch it, never!"
                    (p. 739)

Here it isn't just because Clennam thinks it would look dishonorable for him

to accept her love now, when she has money (i.e., he could appear to be accepting it for the wrong motives)—if that were the case, he shouldn't have any problem accepting her help, since it's precisely the duty of the wealthy to help the needy. Instead, note how he says "if I had then known, and told you that I loved and honoured you, not as the poor child I used to call you, but as a woman whose true hand would raise me high above myself…" But how exactly could Clennam do that? After all, the "poor child" is exactly what Amy Dorrit was at that time. In other words, Clennam conflates past and present in an impossible way: he would have had to love her as she presently is in a past or earlier time in order to accept her love now. Which is to say: only if he could've proleptically known what she would become and if he had been able then to love her future self can he accept that self in the present. The reason for all this, I suggest, is that only in this way can he place himself objectively vis-à-vis his love for her. So the past would've had to be the future. Ironically, Clennam does in a way get his wish: Amy becomes poor again, while he becomes rich. And then he can accept her love, and marry her. Clearly, though, not because he's overcome his problem with the past, but only because the past has managed to become the future.

V. From Impressionism to Expressionism

The later nineteenth century displays the primacy of subjective over objective. And nowhere was this more evident than in music. If the Romantic era was largely dominated by Beethoven, the period after his death and that of Schubert (1827/28) marks a distinct shift in fashion. Beethoven, after all, had been about development, the relentless unfolding of a musical theme taken to the most complex form possible. After his death, there's a change in the wind. Music becomes less goal-driven, less purposive, less about what it's going after. Instead, what we now have is the dominance of mood, the expression of a subjective state or perspective that doesn't think it has to be going anywhere. Now the fashionable people are Chopin, Berlioz, and Liszt. Paris, rather than Vienna, becomes the new musical center. And the salon, rather than the concert hall, is often the favorite venue.

Of all the kinds of pieces played there, perhaps none was better suited to it than the nocturne: moody, introspective, given up to a seemingly aimless musical wandering in which a theme figured only occasionally, it was the perfect medium for reverie, symptomatic of the new subjective turn around mid-century. Although originally developed by the English composer John Field, it was unquestionably perfected by Chopin. Here we have one from his later years, very much in the Paris salon style:

Notice, first of all, the very desultory opening, a chord sequence that almost

seems like a kind of aimless wandering over the keyboard, with the sort of improvisatory

quality of someone just sitting down to play. Immediately after, however, Chopin

launches into the main theme, which then gets subjected to endless modulation

with an almost hypnotic effect. The Chopin scholar Jim Samson observes somewhere

that if we think of various note-sequences as forming a natural harmonic progression,

Chopin would typically begin not with the 1st note but in the middle. This in medias

res quality of his work gives it a kind of seamless style. In contrast

to someone like Beethoven, whose pieces typically have a distinct beginning,

middle, and end, Chopin often allows his main theme to weave in and out of

the score. And that we might see as the musical equivalent of expressing a mood.

Moods, after all, come & go, without any seeming reason or motive. In addition,

Chopin passes constantly from minor key to major, & back again to minor. As opposed

to a distinct major or minor intervention, then, what we have is something

much more like random drift. And this, too, we might take as expressive

of mood: going from dark to light, then back to dark again not from any firm

musical motive but just because. Altogether, it attests to the primacy

of the subjective. Subjectivity is all about mood shifts, changes of color

or perspective, wandering, reverie. And the way Chopin allows his music

to follow a similar movement makes it less about a particular theme than about

passing from one sequence to the next. Because of this back-and-forth

quality, the piece becomes less about where it is overall than about where

it is at any given moment. And that's precisely how we might

define mood. In its use of transition from what's neither clearly here nor there

to another place that's equally vague or unspecifiable in order to create a particular

mood, the style developed by Chopin would have significant aesthetic

consequences.

    One of the best instances where we see its influence at work might

be in the two Nocturnes produced by the American painter J.A.M. Whistler during

his early middle years. We start with the Nocturne in Blue and Gold, subtitled

Old Battersea Bridge:

[PPT 5.2]

In this work (given its title) Whistler might well have had Chopin in mind.

Note how we have the same kind of transition from a place that's neither here

nor there to one equally unspecifiable, transposed from the musical sphere

to its visual equivalent. So the blue of the water shades off into violet, while the blue

of the sky is mixed with a muddy gray. On top of that, the boat in the foreground

and the bridge itself are merely other shades of blue—just somewhat darker. Even

the shower of gold stars behind the bridge glimmers with only minimal

luminosity. Altogether, then, these different colors create an effect that's as seamless

as the Chopin nocturne, where we're only barely aware of the transition from one color

to the next. We've seen that Chopin manages the passage from minor to major

quite effortlessly, and in Whistler we get pretty much the same. By

his reduction of the star shower to a minimal glimmer we hardly feel

the difference between light and dark. Note that the sky isn't any brighter than

the water—in fact, the water in the left half is probably the single brightest spot

of the whole composition. The fact that Whistler muddies the upper half of the sky

with a dirty gray makes the patch of sky closest to the water the brightest portion of

sky anywhere, making the transition from water to sky or vice versa even easier.

Visually, then, the movement from one color to the next is just like the minor/major

transition in Chopin, which ought to make possible the same kind of mood shift.

Except, of course, that in painting we take it all in pretty much simultaneously.

As a result, instead of a mood shift we get a seamless color blending whose effect

is to create a single overall mood. It's also been pointed out that the bridge,

as depicted by Whistler, is much taller than it is in reality. And that, too, is very

much in keeping with the subjective slant of the work.

Whistler carries the subjectivism of the <u>Nocturne in Blue and Gold</u> to an

even further extreme in the slightly later <u>Nocturne in Black and Gold</u>. Here we have

a work whose "representational" quality (if we can call it that) is even fainter:

[PPT 5.3]

At a quick glance, it isn't even easy to say what's going on here. If we

didn't know the subject was supposed to be fireworks on the Thames, we'd

be hard pressed to arrive at that from what we're given here. Whistler has

clearly amped up the subjectivism of the earlier Nocturne: where the boatman

in the foreground of that work is still definitely recognizable, the shadowy

figures in the foreground of the later Nocturne are hardly recognizable as figures

at all. In part this is because they blend right into the beach in the foreground.

The figure on the left, for instance, is nothing more than a slightly darker wash

superimposed on the muddy sand-tint of the ground. As a result, the figure seems barely

there—a kind of ghostly presence, in effect. And maybe that's precisely what

Whistler wants us to think. From a phenomenological standpoint, the figures definitely

fade into insignificance compared to the visual impression produced by the fireworks.

And that's exactly why they become ghostly presences. Note that the figure on the

right produces a split-wash impression: darker when seen against the river background,

lighter when seen against the beach in the foreground. Of course the focal point

of the work is the place at the river's edge from where the fireworks are being shot off.

Yet here too we see the same subjectivism at work visually: the firing of fireworks

at the water's edge portrayed by a thick smear of bright yellow paint, while the eye

glances upward from that to a cluster of light blue-gray washes that figure as the light

and smoke produced by these fireworks. But for Whistler these are only part of

the total impression. Above all, what seems to interest him is a visual dynamic that

involves the upward thrust of the blue-gray washes against the downward fall of

a golden shower of points that presumably represent the fireworks themselves.

Significantly, however, neither the firing at the riverfront nor the downward fall of

the fireworks themselves is depicted all that clearly, so that what we're really

left with is just the contrast between upward thrust and downward fall. And that,

I suspect, is exactly where Whistler wants us to be: left with an impression

of _movement_, which is what the eye registers more than anything else. In this way,

we might say, the visual reinforces the subjective perspective.

Years later, partly in response to Ruskin's extremely public attack on

the two _Nocturnes_, Whistler would attempt to justify the subjectivism of these

works, and specifically their non-representational nature. His most elaborate

defense comes in his famous "Ten O'Clock," later reprinted in _The Gentle Art of_

Making Enemies:

Nature contains the elements, in colour and form, of all pictures, as the keyboard contains the notes of all music.

But the artist is born to pick, and choose, and group with science, these elements, that the result may be beautiful—as the musician gathers his notes, and forms his chords, until he bring forth from chaos glorious harmony.

To say to the painter, that Nature is to be taken as she is, is to say to the player, that he may sit on the piano.

That Nature is always right, is an assertion, artistically, as untrue, as it is one whose truth is universally taken for granted. Nature is very rarely right, to such an extent even, that it might almost be said that Nature is usually wrong: that is to say, the condition of things that shall bring about the perfection of harmony worthy a picture is rare, and not common at all.

This would seem, to even the most intelligent, a doctrine almost blasphemous. So incorporated with our education has the supposed aphorism become, that its belief is held to be part of our moral being, and the words themselves have, in our ear, the ring of religion. Still, seldom does Nature succeed in producing a picture.

The sun blares, the wind blows from the east, the sky is bereft of cloud, and without, all is of iron. The windows of the Crystal Palace are seen from all points of London. The holiday-maker rejoices in the glorious day, and the painter turns aside to shut his eyes.

How little this is understood, and how dutifully the casual in Nature is accepted as sublime, may be gathered from the unlimited admiration daily produced by a very foolish sunset.

(pp. 142-44)

For Whistler, art <u>has to be</u> non-representational because Nature is just the repository of the elements from which art will create. Significantly, Whistler turns to music—rather than literature—as his model or analogy for visual art (think about what Walter Pater will say just a few years later, in <u>Appreciations</u>: "All art aspires to the condition of music"). Once Whistler has managed to establish music as the basis for thinking about visual art, the move to art as non-representational becomes fairly easy. Obviously, music doesn't represent. But, just as obviously, it has its own internal criteria, which govern the way notes are combined. So once Whistler has managed to establish Nature = keyboard, it seems fairly clear that it's up to the artist to "pick, and choose." Otherwise it's as if he's just sitting on the piano (i.e., not doing anything with the musical elements at his disposal) rather than playing it. And if visual art is like music, its internal criteria will look a lot like those of music, where harmony is the most essential quality. For that reason, Nature per se isn't likely to work (i.e., we can't just represent Nature), because in Nature things rarely harmonize. So Whistler can say "Nature is very rarely right" because "the condition of things that shall bring about the perfection of harmony worthy a picture is rare." In the last part of this passage, he gives an example of the ugliness of Nature, of things as they are. The sun shines, the wind blows away all the clouds, and then we get to see London with all its industrial-age construction, the Crystal Palace most of all. At the end, Whistler even takes a shot at Turner, with his talk of "how dutifully the casual in Nature is accepted as sublime," which leads to the unlimited admiration produced by "a very foolish

sunset"—presumably because Whistler sees the colors of which it's composed as discordant, hence not producing the kind of pictorial harmony he's looking for. But if the sunset isn't right, what is?

After giving an example of the ugliness that's out there, Whistler goes on to convey, in a kind of artistic prose that distinctly looks forward to Oscar Wilde, his own sense of the way things should be:

And when the evening mist clothes the riverside with poetry, as with a veil, and the poor buildings lose themselves in the dim sky, and the tall chimneys become campanili, and the warehouses are palaces in the night, and the whole city hangs in the heavens, and fairy-land is before us—then the wayfarer hastens home; the working man and the cultured one, the wise man and the one of pleasure, cease to understand, as they have ceased to see, and Nature, who for once has sung in tune, sings her exquisite song to the artist alone, her son and her master—her son in that he loves her, her master in that he knows her.
(p. 144)

Here we see all the conditions that for Whistler made the two Nocturnes into art. With the advent of evening mist, the riverside becomes poetical as all its discordant colors begin to blend together, just as they do in the bluish-gray skyline we see in the Nocturne in Blue and Gold. Likewise with the way the "buildings lose themselves in the dim sky": we've already noticed how in both Nocturnes there isn't all that much separation between river and sky in terms of either color or brightness, so that this gravity-defying act becomes quite possible. The same might be said about the way the "warehouses are palaces at night": visually, after all, palaces are just architectural forms, and at night all these forms look more or less alike. As in Chopin, the seamless blend or the effortless passage from one tone to

the next is everything. The only thing Whistler doesn't talk about is where all

this is going. I suspect Ruskin's attack had made him highly sensitive to the issue

of professionalism. The last thing Whistler wants to admit, at this point, is any whiff

of the arbitrary or subjective in his color choices. Instead, he stresses the "science"

of grouping or arrangement, which will include the science of color choices so as to

achieve visual harmony. But when the waterfront blurs at night to a uniform

blue-gray color so that "buildings lose themselves in the dim sky," we're clearly

no longer concerned with architectural or structural specificity. On the contrary:

such a color, with its muted softness, could easily become expressive of a mood. In that

respect, there's definitely a hint of subjectivism in the air.

    With Oscar Wilde, we get not only subjectivism but something more—a sense

of how the later nineteenth century was to move specifically from Impressionism to

Expressionism:

    <u>Vivian</u>. … Where, if not from the Impressionists, do we get those wonderful
brown fogs that come creeping down our streets, blurring the gas-lamps and changing
the houses into monstrous shadows? To whom, if not to them and their master, do we
owe the lovely silver mists that brood over our river, and turn to faint forms of fading
grace curved bridge and swaying barge? The extraordinary change that has taken
place in the climate of London during the last ten years is entirely due to this particular
school of Art. You smile. Consider the matter from a scientific or metaphysical point
of view, and you will find that I am right. For what is Nature? Nature is no great
mother who has borne us. She is our creation. It is in our brain that she quickens
to life. Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it,
depends on the Arts that have influenced us. To look at a thing is very different from
seeing a thing. One does not see anything until one sees its beauty. Then, and then
only, does it come into existence. At present, people see fogs, not because there are
fogs, but because poets and painters have taught them the mysterious loveliness
of such effects. There may have been fogs for centuries in London. I dare say there
were. But no one saw them, and so we do not know anything about them. They did
not exist until Art had invented them…. The white quivering sunlight that one sees

now in France, with its strange blotches of mauve, and its restless violet shadows, is her latest fancy, and, on the whole, Nature reproduces it quite admirably. Where she used to give us Corots and Daubignys, she gives us now exquisite Monets and entrancing Pisaros. Indeed there are moments, rare, it is true, but still to be observed from time to time, when Nature becomes absolutely modern. Of course she is not always to be relied upon…. Nobody of any real culture, for instance, ever talks now-a-days about the beauty of a sunset. Sunsets are quite old-fashioned. They belong to the time when Turner was the last note in art…. However, I don't want to be too hard on Nature…. when Art is more varied, Nature will, no doubt, be more varied also. That she imitates Art, I don't think even her worst enemy would deny now. It is the one thing that keeps her in touch with civilized man….

    <u>Cyril</u>. …. But even admitting this strange imitative instinct in Life and Nature, surely you would acknowledge that Art expresses the temper of its age, the spirit of its time, the moral and social conditions that surround it, and under whose influence it is produced.

    <u>Vivian</u>. Certainly not! Art never expresses anything but itself.

<div align="right">(pp. 95-96)</div>

Wilde begins by talking about what we see. And what we see is, to a large

extent, conditioned by art. Since Impressionism is into fog, we're now able to see

fogs in London. In particular, we see "lovely silver mists that brood over our

river, and turn to faint forms of fading grace curved bridge and swaying barge."

As a result, we have climate change—but not, however, of the sort familiar to us

these days. Instead, this sort of climate change comes about because we're seeing

something different from what we saw before. And what we see is determined by

a single criterion: "one does not see anything until one sees its beauty" (if only

that were true!). So people see fogs not because they exist but because "poets

and painters have taught them the mysterious loveliness of such effects."

Nonetheless, fogs do seem to exist independently of our seeing them. So Vivian can

say: "There may have been fogs for centuries in London. I dare say there were.

But no one saw them, and so we do not know anything about them. They did not

exist [= they weren't perceived] till Art had invented them." At this point,

significantly, the passage begins to shift. Vivian starts to talk about natural appearances

that seem to be essentially created by art (i.e., not just perceived by it): "The white

quivering sunlight that one sees now in France, with its strange blotches of mauve

and its restless, violet shadows, is her latest fancy." These are very "painterly"

appearances, you might say (esp. the "strange blotches of mauve"). To which Vivian

sees fit to add: "and, on the whole, Nature reproduces it quite admirably." So now

the relationship between Art and Nature seems distinctly changed: if Nature

reproduces what Art's already put forward, then Art isn't just calling our attention

to something that's already there. Instead, Art now becomes the vanguard,

Nature the rearguard. So even though "sunsets are quite old-fashioned" aesthetically,

Nature goes on producing these. Playfully, Vivian then takes this to an

extreme: "However, I don't want to be too hard on Nature…. when Art is more

varied, Nature will, no doubt, be more varied also." Heady stuff, no doubt.

No wonder Cyril then tries to qualify it, by suggesting that if Art is independent

of Nature and even somehow able to create Nature, it still has to come from

somewhere itself. As possible sources he puts forward "the temper of its age, the spirit

of its time, the moral and social conditions that surround it…" To all this,

however, Vivian gives a defiant brush-off. "Certainly not!" And then: "Art never

expresses anything but itself." So here we have it: Art is completely independent

of Nature, even invents Nature, and what it produces comes entirely from

itself. But if that's true, what we have to infer is that Art, for Wilde, comes

from the mind alone—which is to say: it's completely subjective. But not only

that. Since earlier we were told that beauty alone is the criterion of what

we see, it seems clear that Art doesn't just invent a world. Beauty, after all,

is expressive: what's beautiful produces an effect. And since it comes from the

mind alone, it then must be expressive of that mind, of its subjective state.

In this way, then, we might be said to move from Impressionism (which is

primarily about perception or seeing) to Expressionism.

In tracing out this trajectory from Impressionism to Expressionism I

want to say something, finally, about Walter Pater. At first glance this might seem

a bit odd: Pater, after all, usually gets discussed <u>before</u> Wilde, who frequently and

generously acknowledged him as one of his precursors. And that for the early

book that made Pater's fame: <u>Studies in the History of the Renaissance</u> (or, to use

its later title, <u>The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry</u>). But Pater continued

to develop, even if much of his later work is less well known. Ironically,

we might say that as Wilde went from obscurity (classical studies) to celebrity

(author of the most successful plays in London) to infamy (trial and imprisonment),

Pater moved in the opposite direction, from notoriety (<u>The Renaissance</u>) to

obscurity. Nonetheless, at the end, he was doing interesting work that's particularly

relevant to what I have to say here about the movement from Impressionism

to Expressionism. So I want to look at one of his least well-known essays, "Art

Notes in Northern Italy," published in 1890 and reprinted only posthumously by his

student C.L. Shadwell in <u>Miscellaneous Studies</u>. In this essay, Pater surveys some

pretty obscure (even today) Lombard painters. One of these, however, seems

particularly to have caught his eye. Reading between the lines, we can sense

a real identification on Pater's part with this painter. And so his description of the

painter's work becomes in effect an expressionist work, expressive of the

aspirations of Pater himself:

Before this or that example of Moretto's work, in that admirably composed
picture of Saint Paul's Conversion, for instance, you might think of him as but
a very noble designer in grisaille. A more detailed study would convince you that,
whatever its component elements, there is a very complex tone which almost
exclusively belongs to him; the "Saint Ursula" finally, that he is a great, though
very peculiar colourist—a lord of colour who, while he knows the colour resources
that may lie even in black and white, has really included every delicate hue whatever
in that faded "silver grey," which yet lingers in one's memory as their final effect.
For some admirers indeed he is definable as a kind of really sanctified Titian….
As a matter of fact, at least in his earlier life, Moretto made no visit to Venice,
developed his genius at home, under such conditions for development as were
afforded by the earlier masters of Brescia itself…. It is, however, as the painter
of the white-stoled Ursula and her companions that the great master of Brescia
is most likely to remain in the mind of the visitor…. In the clearness, the
cleanliness, the hieratic distinction, of this earnest and deeply-felt composition,
there is something "pre-Raphaelite"; as also in a certain liturgical formality
in the grouping of the virgins—the looks, "all one way," of the closely-ranged
faces; while in the long folds of the drapery we may see something of the severe
grace of early Tuscan sculpture—something of severity in the long, thin,
emphatic shadows. For the light is high, as with the level lights of early morning,
the air of which ruffles the banners borne by Ursula in her two hands, her
virgin companions laying their hands also upon the tall staves, as if taking share,
with a good will, in her self-dedication, with all the hazard of battle. They
bring us, appropriately, close to the grave of this manly yet virginal painter,
born in the year 1500, dead at forty-seven.
<div align="center">(pp. 102-04)</div>

Two things, briefly, to point out. For anyone familiar with Pater's earlier

work in <u>The Renaissance</u>, I suspect this essay will come as something of a surprise.

What we don't see at all here is any trace of what marked the earlier work

so memorably—the emphasis throughout on the sensuousness of Renaissance art. Instead of dwelling on the softness of Titian or Giorgione, Pater has passed to someone much more austere. And in his appreciation of Moretto, note that what he stresses most is the formal purity and elegance, rather than the air or atmosphere. Second, notice how at the end Pater in effect does nothing less than to re-create, from a painting, the conditions or circumstances of actual life. The level light of early morning, the air that ruffles the banners—these are after all only imagined and depicted by the painter. In this sense, what Wilde proclaimed in "The Decay of Lying" (from <u>Intentions</u>) has indeed come to pass: what we have here is art, not copying external reality but creating it, and in the process not expressing anything about its time or place or circumstances, but only itself. And in its expression of itself, which is in fact a double re-creation (Moretto re-created by Pater) completing the trajectory begun by Whistler, by which we move from Impressionism to Expressionism.

We return to the overall schema:

[PPT 5.4]

As we move into the 2nd half of the nineteenth century, the primacy of subjective

over objective doesn't just remain one of $\frac{\text{subjective}}{\text{objective}}$. Instead, what we get might be

better described as a <u>subjectivization</u> of the objective. The objective, in other words, is

no longer sustainable by itself: it now gets internalized <u>within</u> the subjective. Earlier,

as we saw, there was a brief interlude of intersubjectivity, in mid-late Victorian

fiction (ca. 1850-70). But even intersubjectivity isn't really sustainable. The main

problem is that the fundamental relationship of being = thinking can no longer be

envisioned after the Romantic era. Maybe it has to do with an increasing

preoccupation with development or becoming on the side of thinking. In any case,

the upshot is that once thinking is strongly associated with becoming in an

existential way, it gets to be very subjectivized (as in Kierkegaard). Or, conversely,

we might say that being becomes very existential, and then can no longer be

equated with thinking because thinking employs abstract concepts. For a sense of

what the objective internalized within the subjective might look like, think of

Wilde's claim that we create the world. If the world exists only within the mind,

the mind has to create it in order for it to exist objectively.

VI. Toward an Aestheticism of Form

As we move toward the end of the nineteenth century, things get simpler

in some ways. There's less emphasis on subjectivity, and on how the subjective

perspective colors our perception (even though subjectivism is, arguably,

getting even more entrenched, or deeper). Instead, we now observe the primacy of

simple forms. A good example of it might be Johannes Brahms's Intermezzi Op. 117,

no. 1:

[PPT 6.1, Wilhelm Kempff interpretation]

The opening theme is disarmingly simple. Brahms called the whole set of

these Intermezzi "a lullaby to my sorrows," and that's just what the opening theme

sounds like—a lullaby. In fact, it's not quite so simple, as I discovered when I

decided to try to play it the summer of last year. Almost every other note in the

initial sequence is a chord, and when you have to sustain the legato tone

throughout all the chord shifts it gets a lot trickier. Nonetheless, the initial

impression this theme makes on a listener is, I think, still valid: despite all the

technical complications, it's meant to sound simple & easy. After the initial

statement of the theme there's a kind of drastic slowdown (ritardando), as if we

were approaching the limit velocity of light in relativity physics (where mass

becomes almost infinite). Then a development section, a lot of it seemingly

minor-key and in the lower registers (a kind of dark rumbling), which often

curiously doesn't appear to really go anywhere, followed by a return

to the main theme, now elaborated just slightly, and then gradual movement

toward a very quiet close. So it really is, despite a few complications,

pretty simple after all. Yet the few complications—plus many we can barely

detect but which are nonetheless very much there—give the piece a richness

which is a hallmark of late Brahms pieces. I remember last fall, when I was

in Beijing teaching the fall semester, hearing the tune over and over in my mind.

It has, undeniably, that kind of haunting quality. Once you've heard it and

become captivated by the tune, you want to play it over and over again, in order

to catch every inflection, every nuance. And gradually the whole seems to take

on a kind of symbolic value. It's easy to see how Brahms might've come to think

of it as having, for him, a kind of existential significance, a consolation or

compensation for many things that had gone wrong in his personal circumstances.

Likewise the development section can also take on a kind of extra-musical

significance. The seemingly aimless, meandering quality of the movement,

its appearing not to really go anywhere, might come to symbolize passages in our lives

where, in retrospect, we seem to have been wandering, not getting anywhere,

lost. Then the sudden, abrupt return to the main theme could almost figure as a kind

of reawakening, a return to earlier aspiration. These are just some of the possible

ways the piece seems to possess an extra-musical value—hence my attempt

to tease them out. What they show, I suggest, is that a relatively simple form can

easily take on, through just a few complications or development of some kind,

a sort of symbolic value.

   We see something of the same sort at work in Henry James's last

finished novel, <u>The Golden Bowl</u>. Before we look at the text itself, I want to call

your attention to one of the wonderful frontispieces for the New York Edition

of the novel, entitled "Portland Place":

[PPT 6.2]

There's a story to tell about these frontispieces. Apparently James hated

the typical style of illustration, which usually involved a very literal depiction of selected

episodes from a novel by some very second-rate painters. But for the New York

Edition, Scribner's managed to persuade him to consent to frontispieces for

each volume, and James came up with the innovative idea of photographs that would

be suggestive rather than literally representative. These were provided by a young

American art photographer, Alvin Langdon Coburn, who had impressed James

during his American visit in 1905. Of all Coburn's frontispieces for the New York

Edition, "Portland Place" is I think one of the very best. Simple and striking, it can

have—especially if you're lucky enough to see it in a large-scale print—a stunning

effect on the viewer. The solitary, dark form of a receding two-wheeler carriage

that occupies the center of the photograph is almost a silhouette. And the luminous

haze that lights it up from behind only serves to intensify that effect. Here we have

the kind of fog or mist Whistler and Wilde talked about, into which building

facades seem to dissolve. Yet the fog or mist isn't the primary impression this

frontispiece conveys. Instead, we get just enough architectural detail of the buildings

on either side of the street for them to loom as massive presences. Relatively

simple forms, you might say—and for precisely that reason, all the more

imposing. In fact, all the essential motifs of the photograph come across

as simple but monumental: the two-wheeler carriage, the looming façades on either

side, the street itself. And because of the way the street recedes from our view,

everything appears to converge dramatically in the very center of the photograph,

a center we can't quite make out because of the luminous mist. So here we have

simple forms and a sense of primary movement. But because of the way the movement

is embodied by a receding two-wheeler reduced almost to a silhouette against

the luminous mist, the image takes on a kind of symbolic value. The distance

toward which it recedes is an unknown place. And the grandeur of the street enhances

the significance of the movement, which takes on the character of something more

than a mere mundane carriage-ride, hints at possibly a more important kind of journey.

At the same time, maybe because the principal forms are all so simple,

the few bits of visual detail we get stand out all the more: the isolated pedestrian

or carriage, the architectural specificity of a façade, the long horsewhip beside the

driver. These are the kinds of things we might notice if we were in the carriage,

the sort of fleeting impressions you get in driving past a particular spot or

place. In that sense, they have very much a phenomenal, experiential quality.

And it makes sense that they're precisely what stand out against the few simple

forms that occupy most of the space. Because these are what figure most

strongly from a subjective perspective.

From our brief survey of the Brahms piece and the Coburn frontispiece we've gleaned a number of points that will prove useful when we look at The Golden Bowl. I list these here:

[PPT 6.3]

I want to comment on each of these briefly before we discuss The Golden Bowl itself:

1. reliance on simple archetypal forms, take burden off author to create meaning

By the end of the nineteenth century, there's a sense that a lot of the big cultural moves have already been made. A kind of creative fatigue seems to set in: why bother to create new forms when there are already so many out there? As a result, there's a temptation to use those forms that already exist: they can do the work as well as any others. Above all, there's a tacit agreement that what we really want these forms to do is just to hold the insights we hope to convey. But for that, any receptacle that organizes material for listeners, viewers or readers around some sort of structure should be more or less adequate. Against a subjectivist background into which all material tends to dissolve, any kind of formal structure becomes meaningful.

2. tendency of these forms/motifs to acquire symbolic value

Even ordinary objects we use can easily come to have symbolic value for us

through association or memory. But if that's the case, how much more true for

cultural forms or motifs. James himself was well aware of this: elsewhere he talks about

the "accumulations of expression" that cluster around an old English country

house. The point is, associations accumulate. And once that accumulation

has reached a certain point, objects or motifs become meaningful independently

of any particular association. Given the extreme extent of late 19th century

subjectivism, there's a tendency for experiences to disappear because they're

constantly being replaced by new experiences. This is where forms are useful:

they offer something to which we can connect these experiences.

3. once burden is off creation of form, possible to concentrate on inflection

This is where late 19th century art really has a chance to excel. It's like theme

and variations: once you decide just to adopt a fairly simple form or theme,

it becomes possible to weave a virtually unlimited number of variations around it.

This is also where subjectivism pays off. If late 19th century art couldn't avoid

internalization of the objective, it could at least make a virtue of necessity.

What subjectivism does is to make possible an almost endless number of

nuances. Because these are all contained within an individual subjectivity,

it's possible to pass from one to another almost effortlessly—just as Chopin does

in a minor/major shift, or Whistler a color transition. Since it's all internal, there

isn't the same pressure to objectify it just to convey it to someone else. At the same

time, associations or nuances accumulate. Adoption of a simple form makes it

possible to stack these (so to speak) one on top of another. So we get a new level

of complexity we couldn't otherwise hope to achieve.

4. phenomenal detail, impressions

If late 19th century art is deeply grounded in a subjective perspective,

phenomenal or experiential detail and impressions become all the more natural.

Simply put, everything else gets reduced to the experiential level,

because we find it difficult to accept anything else as real. And our low tolerance

for anything else is precisely the result of our extreme subjectivism.

Years ago I remember comparing the description Henry James gives of

the Paris Notre Dame cathedral in <u>The Tragic Muse</u> to his later one in <u>The Ambassadors</u>.

I was amazed by the difference: so much less detail in <u>The Ambassadors</u>, but so

much more expressive. And that's because in the later novel he no longer worried

about giving an overall picture of the cathedral. Instead, he concentrates on

Strether's impressions, and the "air of the long aisles and the brightness of the many

altars" says all he needs to say.

5. indeterminacy

Given the late 19th century reliance on already-existing forms, it isn't surprising

to see the art repeatedly falling into indeterminacy. By that I mean the kind of drift

or meandering we find in the development section of the 1ˢᵗ intermezzo of

Brahms's Op. 117. Simply put, the kind of development we saw in Beethoven

or Hegel was very, very difficult. It involved the gradual but relentless unfolding of

a process where every moment had to carry the feeling of necessity. I suspect that

at the end of the century things just break down. People can no longer sustain

the kind of pressure necessary to bring that sort of development about. For that, you

have to believe thinking = being or subjective = objective, which since the time of

Kierkegaard is no longer possible. Without it, however, it becomes difficult to believe

in development. Because development is conceptually tied to necessity, and

necessity is what no longer seems evident once we get into extreme subjectivism.

As a result, development in Brahms isn't what it was in Beethoven: the relentless

movement toward an envisioned goal. Instead, for Brahms it's simply an

activity.

6. resolution

If late 19ᵗʰ century subjectivism opened up the dangers of indeterminacy,

it also made apparent the need to resolve. Indeterminacy can't go on forever because

of the inherent potential for serious formal breakdown. The kind of development we

find in late Brahms is development only if it comes to an end, only if something

gives it coherence and closure. Otherwise, as a story without an end, it becomes less

and less a story and more and more the progressive unraveling of one. But finding

a way to end a story isn't easy. For Op. 117 no. 1 Brahms opted to end by

a reprise of the opening theme. For a novel like <u>The Golden Bowl</u> this kind of

solution isn't quite possible. Instead, the novel has to find a way to end that

will feel like a genuine ending, a way that offers real closure. Formally

speaking, that means the problem to which the novel gives rise has to be resolved.

Given the extreme subjectivism of late 19th century art, however, this isn't

easy because there's nothing inherent within the subjective perspective to make

resolution feel necessary. On the contrary: the tendency of subjectivism (like that of

mood shifts) is to go on indefinitely. Hence the need for the novel to have a

larger overall form.

One easy way to describe the larger form of <u>The Golden Bowl</u> would be

to see it as having essentially a "V" shape. It starts off with the Prince's marriage

to Maggie Verver, followed by her father's marriage to Charlotte Stant, the

Prince's former lover. Right away, the potential for breakdown of the marriages

is apparent, and a lot of the 1st half of the novel follows the two pairs as they

gradually slip downward into chaos, culminating in the open infidelity of

the Prince and Charlotte. The 2nd half of the novel is all about the steep, difficult

climb back to order, as Maggie (once she's discovered her husband's unfaithfulness)

works to restore the two marriages. So here we have a simple, archetypal form

(descent into chaos, restoration of order) which gives structure to the entire novel.

James scholarship has, I think, sometimes lost sight of this simple structure

in its sympathy for the Prince and Charlotte. But when a structure this simple

gives shape to the entire novel on such a massive scale, the implied significance

of that structure is undeniable. From a subjective perspective, it's possible

to read what happens in all kinds of ways. But at the end of the day what ultimately

gives a shape to the entire narrative is perhaps what matters most, since

it's within this larger structure that all the moment-by-moment subjective

possibilities have to be contained.

Right away, James makes it clear he intends to exploit

the symbolic value of archetypal forms or motifs in his novel. If from a plot

standpoint the novel has the simple shape of a "V," notice how it's equally simple

in terms of perspective: vol. I = The Prince, vol. II = The Princess. The opening

passage takes us straight into the Prince's perspective:

The Prince had always liked his London, when it had come to him; he was one
of the Modern Romans who find by the Thames a more convincing image of the
truth of the ancient state than any they have left by the Tiber. Brought up on
the legend of the City to which the world paid tribute, he recognized in the present
London more than in contemporary Rome the real dimensions of such a case.
If it was a question of an <u>Imperium</u>, he said to himself, and if one wished, as a
Roman, to recover a little the sense of that, the place to do so was on London Bridge,
or even, on a fine afternoon in May, at Hyde Park Corner. It was not indeed to either
of those places that these grounds of his predilection, after all sufficiently vague,
had, at the moment we are concerned with him, guided his steps; he had strayed
simply enough into Bond Street, where his imagination, working at comparatively
short range, caused him now and then to stop before a window in which objects
massive and lumpish, in silver and gold, in the forms to which precious stones
contribute, or in leather, steel, brass, applied to a hundred uses and abuses, were
as tumbled together as if, in the insolence of the Empire, they had been the loot
of far-off victories.
       (I, 3)

Here, we might say, the <u>Imperium</u> is the simple, larger archetypal motif with symbolic

value—it covers both London and Rome and everything in either of these places.

It covers both London and Rome because both of these cities are all about

conquest—as is the Prince himself, on a smaller scale (conquest of a marriage

partner). So subjective and objective correspond exactly in this case,

which is another reason why it's so easy for the Imperium to take on a larger

symbolic value. But James doesn't let it rest there. He has the Prince wandering

specifically into Bond Street, known for its jewellers' shops—a hint perhaps of

the wealth the Prince has figuratively conquered by managing to get engaged

to marry the daughter of an American millionaire.

    A bit later in the novel, we get treated to another instance of

a motif with symbolic value, this time one that takes us even deeper into

the Prince's subjective perspective:

He remembered to have read as a boy a wonderful tale by Allan Poe,
his prospective wife's countryman—which was a thing to show, by the way,
what imagination Americans could have: the story of the ship-wrecked Gordon
Pym, who, drifting in a small boat further towards the North Pole—or was it
the South?—than anyone had ever done, found at a given moment before him
a thickness of white air that was like a dazzling curtain of light, concealing
as darkness conceals, yet of the colour of milk or of snow. There were moments
when he felt his own boat move upon some such mystery. The state of mind
of his new friends, including Mrs. Assingham herself, had resemblances to
a great white curtain. He had never known curtains but as purple even to
blackness—but as producing where they hung a darkness intended and ominous.
When they were so disposed as to shelter surprises the surprises were apt to
be shocks.
        (I, 22-23)

Here it's no doubt significant that the Prince can't remember whether

Pym was drifting toward the North or South Pole (the South, actually)—an

index of his disoriented state of mind. But the visual and/or sensual detail

in this passage is even richer than in the opening of the novel: the "thickness

of white air that was like a dazzling curtain of light, yet of the colour of

milk or snow." It makes sense that as James gets us deeper into the Prince's

subjectivity he should intensify the sensual aspect of the motif. In fact, the operative

principle might be: the most material, objective aspect = most expressive of

a subjective state. And that precisely because the most material, objective aspect

we can think of in a late 19th century work like this one is always very much contained

within a larger framework of subjectivity.

But perhaps the best, most extreme example of the kind of thing I'm

describing is one that appears close to the end of vol. I:

And so for a minute they stood together as strongly held and as closely confronted
as any hour of their easier past even had seen them. They were silent at first, only
facing and faced, only grasping and grasped, only meeting and met. "It's sacred,"
he said at last.
   "It's sacred," she breathed back to him. They vowed it, gave it out and took
it in, drawn, by their intensity, more closely together. Then of a sudden, through this
tightened circle, as at the issue of a narrow strait into the sea beyond, everything
broke up, broke down, gave way, melted and mingled. Their lips sought their lips,
their pressure their response and their response their pressure; with a violence that
had sighed itself the next moment to the longest and deepest of stillnesses they
passionately sealed their pledge.
                              (I, 312)

So Charlotte and the Prince, having come to the moment when they can't

see any viable alternative, decide to resume their affair. And perhaps the most

remarkable aspect of the passage is the way it mixes physical, sensual detail

with motifs of purely symbolic value. Significantly, the remark that they stood "as strongly held and as closely confronted as any hour of their easier past even had seen them" is both physical and something more. Likewise, when they're described as "only facing and faced, only grasping and grasped, only meeting and met," it's not clear who's doing what—nor is it meant to be. The physical ambiguity points to a reciprocity, a dissolving of barriers. But if the movement through "this tightened circle, as at the issue of a narrow strait into the sea beyond" is purely figurative, the sequel ("everything broke up, broke down, gave way, melted and mingled") is not only figurative but sensory, experiential— it seems meant to convey, simultaneously, the sensations they actually feel. And certainly the sequel to that is even more purely physical. But the whole passage is also of immense significance for the larger structure of the novel, as the moment of total breakdown of everything the marriages are supposed to represent.

I want to say just a brief word about indeterminacy in The Golden Bowl, before passing on to the conclusion. In recent years it's struck me that some of the finest moments in the novel are precisely those where it's unclear whether the movement of the work can go on: when Adam Verver begins to hesitate, at Brighton, about whether to make his proposal to Charlotte as the two of them walk along the embankment by the ocean, or when Maggie, deep in vol. II, begins to wonder about whether she's ever going to manage to restore either her own marriage or her father's. I've said that this kind of indeterminacy is essentially overdetermined by the subjectivism of late 19th century art. But

it remains a testament to the quality of James's art that these episodes or

passages in which that indeterminacy plays itself out should be among those

most sensitively and most subtly rendered in the entire novel.

    The conclusion of the whole work revolves around a passage very

little noticed, close to the end of the novel. Adam and Charlotte Verver come to say

goodbye to Maggie and the Prince, just before leaving for America. And in their

last meeting, father and daughter are for just a moment briefly together:

… and then felt the slow surge of a vision that at the end of another minute or
two had floated her across the room to where her father stood looking at a picture,
an early Florentine sacred subject, that he had given her on her marriage. He might
have been in silence taking his last leave of it; it was a work for which she knew
he entertained an unqualified esteem. The tenderness represented for her by
his sacrifice of such a treasure had become to her sense a part of the whole infusion,
of the immortal expression; the beauty of his sentiment looked out at her always,
from the beauty of the rest, as if the frame made positively a window for his
spiritual face: she might have said to herself at this moment that in leaving the
thing behind him, held as in her clasping arms, he was doing the most possible
toward leaving her a part of his palpable self….
    "It's all right, eh?"
    "Oh my dear—rather!"
    He had applied the question to the great fact of the picture, as she had spoken
for the picture in reply, but it was as if their words for an instant afterwards symbolised
another truth, so that they looked about at everything else to give them this extension.
She had passed her arm into his, and the other objects in the room, the other pictures,
the sofas, the chairs, the tables, the cabinets, the "important" pieces, supreme in their
way, stood out, round them, consciously, for recognition and applause…. The two
noble persons seated in conversation and at tea fell thus into the splendid effect and
the general harmony: Mrs. Verver and the Prince fairly "placed" themselves, however
unwittingly, as high expressions of the kind of human furniture required aesthetically
by such a scene. The fusion of their presence with the decorative elements, their
contribution to the triumph of selection, was complete and admirable; though to a
lingering view, a view more penetrating than the occasion really demanded, they
also might have figured as concrete attestations of a rare power of purchase. There
was much indeed in the tone in which Adam Verver spoke again, and who shall say
where his thought stopped? "<u>Le compte y est</u>. You've got some good things."
                                      (II, 359-60)

If the scene toward the end of vol. I where the Prince and Charlotte embrace marked a fusion of the figurative with the physical, the present scene, in a very different way, does the same: the picture Maggie looks at might very well be an image of the Christ, the <u>vera icon</u> or true image, but in this rendition it passes seamlessly into that of Adam Verver. Not, however, his physical but his spiritual face, the face of the giver who's had to sacrifice his affection for his daughter to the higher goal of preserving the two marriages. And it's perhaps equally fitting that the last word, practically, should be expressed by a simple French phrase: "<u>Le compte y est</u>." It's what a shopkeeper says when the cost or balance of a bill is fully paid. "The sum is right," we might say. Within the extreme subjectivist framework, it's this sort of simple phrase or motif that's ultimately the most expressive.

VII. The Genesis of High Modernism

Modernism emerges from the attempt to address a problem produced by

late 19th century subjectivity. That problem is transience: the fact that things pass

away. For the late nineteenth century, because of its extreme subjectivism,

this becomes a problem because of the way it reduces all external objects to

sensation or impression, the imprint they make on the mind. The problem with

sensations or impressions is that, inevitably, they disappear. And once they

disappear, there's nothing left. As we've seen, late 19th century art tried to solve

this problem by resorting to simple archetypal forms or motifs, to which it

could attach sensations or impressions via memory and so manage to preserve

these. But since even these forms or motifs exist only within our individual

subjectivity (i.e., through our reception of them), they too become just experiences

like everything else and hence prone to dissolve within the constant process

of subjectivity. Modernism tried to address this problem in a radical way.

Instead of just accepting the transience of experiences, it tried to get around it

by treating these spatially. In other words, it tried to spatialize time. The problem

with time, from a Modernist perspective, was that once you accepted its linear

sequence you tacitly acquiesced in the transience of all experiences. So rather than

just live time sequentially, Modernism tried to spatialize it by relating different

moments to each other within a spatial framework. Its idea was that if you could

manage to relate all these different moments from the past (either individual or collective) to each other, you could then arrive at an underlying pattern to these that would resist the ravages of temporal transience. An analogy would be the process by which we remember a tune. If we try to hold onto each note individually as a sensory experience (without thinking about its relation to any others), it's likely to slip away very quickly, a random sound within a much larger ocean of noise. But if we perceive each note as part of a tune or sequence, it's easy to remember them all. And so with our sensations or experiences. Once we can fit them into a meaningful pattern (whose essence is spatial rather than temporal), we acquire a new way to retain them individually.

More broadly, we might say late 19th century art, from Impressionism to Brahms and Henry James, had managed (as a result of its extreme subjectivism) to dissolve all that we took away from the external world into tiny bits of objective phenomena within an ocean of subjective consciousness. But these tiny bits of objectivity could only float for so long, before they went under or dissolved into chaos. And that meant the time was ripe for a new kind of art, one that would take up all these bits of objectivity (i.e., sensations + impressions) and give them a formal arrangement.

So we come to the moment of High Modernism, which is to say somewhere around the year 1922. For over a decade, the Modernist movement had been preparing for that moment. So we have experiments in trying to create a new style, experiments with fragmentary material, experiments with seeming randomness (to see how far you can stretch the boundaries).

And then, somewhere around 1922, it all begins to come together. Suddenly

there's a sense of larger patterns into which we might fit all these fragmentary

pieces. This, then, is what the cultural landscape might've looked like

at that time, seen from the perpective of someone (T.S. Eliot, for example)

looking for a way to put it all together:

[PPT 7.1]

As you can see, this is essentially a somewhat simplified version of the overall

schema I showed for my 1st talk. The key difference is that under several pivotal

points in time (1850, 1900, 1922) I've grouped some of the sources Eliot

associated with that period. So under 1850, for instance, we get Baudelaire and

Charles Dickens. Yes, F.H. Bradley's a little anachronistic here. But what links all

of these sources (for Eliot) is that they're all associated in some way with the

relationship between the self and its double, or some other. Likewise, what

links the sources grouped under the year 1900 is the use of music as a theme

(so even though Spenser's anachronistic for such a list, he figures there nonetheless).

Finally, the 1922 list features sources concerned with order or arrangement,

fitting things into some sort of pattern, with mythic patterns figuring quite prominently.

Obviously, these groupings aren't purely historical (hence the anachronistic sources

under each of the different pivotal years). But they represent what we might call

a sense of possibilities. What this kind of arrangement also does is to allow for

a kind of "layering" effect, or stratification. With some exceptions, the sources

hark back to the historical moment with which they're associated (even the 1922

sources, though so much older, represent the cultural preoccupations of 1922).

By grouping them in this way, Eliot can then represent "layers" of cultural

history within The Waste Land. As a result it doesn't just recover time, but does it

in a way that preserves the structure of historical time. Nonetheless, there's a key

theme for all the sources associated with a given moment. So it isn't just an

impersonal, neutral list—instead, it should convey a sense of meaningful

pattern. And when taken altogether, there should be a sense of the relation of

these different groups of sources to each other, which will in turn help to create

the larger structure of the poem. Hence my use of double bars or vertical lines for

1922, to signify that what we have here is specifically a formal arrangement of

all these cultural/historical sources.

    With that, it's now time to turn to the larger structure of The Waste

Land. Consider this schematization of the poem:

[PPT 7.2}

{PPT 7.3]

What I've tried to do here is briefly to characterize each section or subsection

of the poem (numbers = line numbers in the text). The result is a more or less

comprehensive "map" of the entire text. From this "map" what emerges, somewhat

surprisingly, is that it's actually possible to connect all these sections or subsections

of the poem to each other. So material from section I of The Waste Land turns out

to be connected to material that appears in sections II or III, and even in section

V (in PPT 7.3 I've tried to connect topics or motifs from section I to those of

section V directly, but it should be understood that if we drew these lines of

connection through the middle sections we'd pick up a great deal of relevant

material there as well. The trick here is that material from section I rarely connects

to other material from section I—instead, you need to move on to section II or

III (or even later) to find a connecting link. In that sense, you might say, the

arrangement is "spatial" rather than temporal. In order words, if you try to read

the poem temporally or sequentially, it makes no sense: what you get is material

that seems totally unconnected to what comes before or after it within the same

section. But once you begin to think about it in terms of connecting links to

material in other sections, the whole poem begins to come together. This kind of

"spatial" arrangement is often credited to Ezra Pound, who after he cut much of

section IV pointed out to Eliot that Phlebas the Phoenician from that section

links up with the drowned Phoenician sailor from section I. But I suspect a lot of

this stuff was already in Eliot's mind anyway. While Pound cut a lot from

section IV, many other sections of the poem survived his editorial work largely

intact, and when Eliot wrote section V he did most of it in one uninterrupted

period, yet it goes together with what came before quite well. In other words, the

connections were unconsciously already there.

    If we look specifically now at the topics or motifs Eliot introduces,

a few recurrent preoccupations emerge. To begin with, there's the anxiety about

sexual impotence. If we survey the entire poem, it's surprising how often

this appears, frequently in a way that isn't always easy to discern. It's implied,

for instance, in the memoirs of the Lithuanian countess early on, and becomes

more explicit with the speaker and the hyacinth girl ("Yet when we came back,

late, from the hyacinth garden, / Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could

not / Speak, and my eyes failed…"). It's also implied, however, by the "modern

nerves" episode from section II (drawn, by the way, from Eliot's own relationship

to his 1st wife Vivien, with whom he was having problems of impotence at the

time). But it also comes up in the form of sexual relationships that are skewed

in other ways. The rape of Philomel by Tereus, for instance, appears as part of

the Elizabethan décor in section II and then recurs, more briefly, in section III,

while the relationship of Queen Elizabeth to the Earl of Leicester is set among

a number of seemingly lower-class relationships in section III. What links all of

these instances isn't just impotence—after all, there's plenty of sex in some

of the examples I've described, likewise in the typist's affair with the "young man

carbuncular" of section III—but a lack of birth, procreation. A second major

theme is that of the quest, which shows up in the <u>Tristan</u> material from section I

and then reappears with the <u>Tempest</u> material from sections III & V and the

Chapel Perilous episode (i.e., quest for the Holy Grail) from section V. A third

major theme is contemporary cultural/social decay, not just in Eastern Europe

(as Eliot himself points out in his note to section V) but everywhere. It starts

with Madame Sosostris and her Tarot card pack in section I and recurs in

virtually every section all the way up to the end. We might see it as, in effect,

the contemporary background to the poem. When <u>The Waste Land</u> first appeared,

what struck readers most were the antique and mythological references. But

in fact well over half the poem consists of all the contemporary material Eliot

managed to weave into the text throughout, which has become much more

noticeable to people like ourselves at some distance in time. And mostly what

it conveys is the depressed state of post-WWI Europe.

If we put all these concerns together what we get is something like

an anxiety about birth or creation, but probably not in the literal sense given

the simultaneous presence of the quest motif. And that this anxiety doesn't have

to do with any distant past comes out through the sheer abundance on every

level of contemporary references. What are we to make of this? The fact that

the anxiety about birth or creation is linked to the quest motif suggests that

this is really an anxiety about creation on some higher level, one that has to be

pursued as an activity (as opposed to a simple event). In addition, the strong presence

of the Holy Grail material implies that religious belief is somehow necessary,

a hint reinforced by inclusion of the post-Resurrection New Testament episode

involving Christ and his disciples on the journey to Emmaus. And of course

the recreation of the entire Passion narrative in section V plays a major role here

as well. At the same time, this sort of belief has to be distinguished from

superstition, which there's a great deal of as well. Nonetheless, the kind of belief

required isn't really for religion per se—if that were the case, there wouldn't

need to be so much emphasis on the quest motif throughout. We know, too, that

the motif of the quest or journey bulked even larger in the original draft of the poem,

much of section IV (cut by Pound) having been taken up by a kind of Odyssean

voyage.

I suggest that the best way to make sense of all this is to see

The Waste Land as a poem about the process of poetic creation. The anxiety

over birth or creation is really an anxiety about the creation of a poetical

work, specifically the long Modernist poem. This we know to have been an anxiety

that had occupied the Modernist movement for years. To make good on their

claims about the superiority of the new Modernist style over their predecessors,

they were going to have to produce a long poem, something to set against

Idylls of the King or The Ring and the Book. And for years that anxiety had been

gradually building, through the wartime period and after. No doubt it was there

for Eliot as he sat, night after night, facing the sheets of blank paper before

taking a forced vacation as a way out of his nervous breakdown. Perhaps, too,

it might've been the nature of his personal anxiety that prompted him to frame

the problem as one of sexual impotence. The famous line from Matthew Arnold

came back to haunt him, and Pound, repeatedly: "caught between two worlds,

one dead, the other powerless to be born." But it was also, I think, a special

insight that led Eliot to use the quest motif as a symbol for poetic creation. After

all, the Holy Grail, in the Arthurian epic, is never found (except by Galahad,

who then gets removed from the human sphere). So the search for the Grail

remains, in effect, an ongoing activity. And that, I would argue, is how Eliot wanted

to see the Modernist long poem—not so much as a finished work, but more as an

activity. The Modernist long poem, in other words, is all about the poetic process,

the process of poetic creation by which we try to weave all the disparate material

that makes up our lives into a work of art.

As evidence of my thesis, we might look at one strand of the poem which we so far haven't discussed. Up to now, most of the material that the poem addresses has consisted of life experiences, with occasionally some references to earlier cultural sources (yet that material, too, often consisting merely of a narration of earlier life experiences). Only at the end of the poem do we get a more obvious sense of these cultural sources as fragments. But, scattered throughout the poem, there are, periodically, references to poetry itself:

[PPT 7.4]

If we think of The Waste Land merely as a poem about sexual impotence or about the depressed state of post-war Europe, it isn't clear what we should make of these passages. But if we see the poem as centrally concerned with the whole process of poetic creation, these references become much more transparent. Specifically, I want to call your attention first of all to the "Shakespeherian Rag" of section II, where we might see Eliot as trying to offer in a "Ragtime" version that emphasizes its flashy rhythm. But this is, of course, what poetry is about on one level—rhythm. At the same time, we see a nascent "anxiety of influence": the difficulty of overcoming the burden of the past, of doing better work than one's cultural predecessors like Shakespeare. In section III Eliot makes use of Spenser's "Epithalamium" and then even seems to refer to it explicitly: "This music crept by me upon the waters." Notice how here the speaker is still passive:

the music (poetry) crept by him upon the waters = he isn't actively engaged

in trying to create a poem yet, but inspiration seems to come to him nonetheless.

On the other hand, it might simply be a fragment of the Spenser (or some other

poetry) that he's hearing, rather than necessarily anything of his own.

By section V, however, he's definitely more actively engaged: "Shall I at least

set my lands in order?" A lot of what comes after is clearly about fragmentation:

"London Bridge is falling down…" and "these fragments I have shored against

my ruins." Toward the end, however, there's a hint of how things might come

together: "Why then Ile fit you" (from Kyd's Spanish Tragedy, meaning Hieronymo

will adapt his play to suit the relevant circumstances) and the final commands

from a Upanishad: give, sympathize, control. Taken collectively, these 3

commands might well represent the entire poetic process. To give is necessary

because without that there isn't the openness to the world that makes poetic

creation possible. Sympathy is the process by which we reach out to others, take

them into ourselves. And finally control is how we impose order on all

the fragments we've assembled.

    But The Waste Land doesn't just talk about the process of poetic

creation. We've seen how the quest motif can be found throughout, from the

Tristan material in section I to the Holy Grail allusion in section V. So the entire

poem can be seen as a kind of quest for what will make the Modernist long poem.

But because poetry, as Modernism sees it, is more activity than finished product,

this quest for the Modernist long poem is, simultaneously, the poem itself:

the "process" of the poem is the process by which all those "fragments I have

shored against my ruins" are brought together, and the theme of the poem is the

potential for genesis out of these sources. In that sense, you might say,

The Waste Land is both text and meta-text: it's a text that talks about itself.

And in the process of talking about itself, what it really does is to create

itself.

From The Waste Land we pass to another equally important High Modernist

text that spatializes time in a somewhat different way: Joyce's Ulysses. Unlike

Eliot, Joyce didn't try to deny temporal sequence. In fact, Ulysses even talks about

events more or less in the order in which they happen. On top of that, Joyce

actually gives us a great deal of the subjectivity of his 2 main characters. Which is to

say: he allows his characters to experience time, the passing of thoughts, feelings,

sensory impressions. And that would imply he doesn't try to avoid the problem

raised by late 19th century subjectivism. But if he deliberately allows this problem

to arise within his novel, we might well ask how he manages to address it.

Consider this schema as a way of representing his strategy:

[PPT 7.5]

Here the two double-strand red lines stand for the plot-lines or time-lines

of Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom. You'll notice how they curve around

each other in what might be described as a "double helix" shape until they

finally come together close to the top of the schema. By that I want to show

how although they're moving in the same direction temporally (blue arrows =

upward movement = forward progress or flow of time) their paths don't actually

cross until they meet at the maternity hospital. Note also the one other

horizontal line that cuts across the upward flow of time: the moment of

Lord & Lady Dudley's cavalcade, around 3pm in the afternoon. This could

be considered a significant point in the narrative, not so much because of

the cavalcade itself, but because Joyce employs it as a reference point to "place"

virtually every one of his characters: at the moment the cavalcade passes

through the streets of Dublin we're told exactly where every character is, and what

he or she's doing.

    In a way, we might say that what the cavalcade episode (episode 10,

"Wandering Rocks") does points to what Ulysses does throughout: it "freezes" time.

By that I don't mean it stops the flow of time, the process by which one moment

gives way to the next. On the contrary. But what it does (if we can describe it this

way) is to freeze the flow itself. Here we might think of instant replay as an analogy.

Instant replay doesn't stop the action (of a game, or whatever). On the contrary—the

whole point is to let us see that action again. So what we see in instant replay is

precisely the flow of the action, or, in effect, of time. But because of the potential

for endless "replays" of a specific event, it's as if that event is frozen in time.

The whole point of normal time, by contrast, is precisely that we don't get to replay

any given moment or event. Instead, it moves on, inexorably, to the next moment

or event. So whenever we have the capacity to look at any given moment again,

to "replay" it (so to speak), we're no longer feeling what gives time its distinctive

quality—the inexorability of its movement, its constant passing away. Nonetheless,

it isn't as if Joyce "replays" the action of a given episode in <u>Ulysses</u> over and over. So if we get the feeling of the flow of time being frozen in <u>Ulysses</u>, we might ask how exactly he manages to achieve it.

One way, I suggest, is by his compression of all the action of the novel within a single day: June 16, 1904. Right away, Joyce makes it clear this is a very typical day in the life of Dublin, not much different from most other days. That in turn means the actions or events that mark this day are largely <u>repeatable</u> (remotely like those of instant replay), which has the effect of making time essentially cyclical. But cyclical time is already moving away in one respect from time as we largely know it today: if an event gets repeated over and over (as it did, presumably, in the medieval agricultural cycle), we no longer sense the inexorable passing away of a given moment, no longer have the feeling that we can never experience it again, the feeling of its uncapturability, its unrepeatability.

A second way Joyce manages to freeze time is by his use of reference points or points of comparison. Let's suppose he devotes a certain amount of space to telling us what Stephen Dedalus was doing at a given moment of the day. Typically, at a later point, he'll then go on to tell us what Leopold Bloom was doing at that same moment. The use of Bloom as a reference point helps to fix or place Stephen's action (and vice versa). Once we have each as a reference point for the other, the moment or event in which each is engaged will no longer just disappear into the onward flow of time. Instead, we'll always be able to locate it, place it precisely. Normally it's difficult to place any moment very precisely: usually, we're very much caught up in what we're doing, focused on the action

or process in which we're involved. Having an external reference point ("at the moment Stephen was doing this, Bloom was doing that") is like treating a moment <u>spatially</u> rather than temporally: we're no longer so interested in the process or event going on at that moment, but rather how it can be placed or located by other things happening at the same time. For that reason, I like to think of my schema (PPT 7.5) as the equivalent of a "cylinder" of time: if we imagine it as a 3-dimensional space, every point within it (which would correspond to what some character in <u>Ulysses</u> is doing at a given moment) can be related to any other point within the cylinder. In this fashion, all the actions of all the characters get placed "spatially."

A third way Joyce freezes time is by the use of what we might call large, almost archetypal processes in the novel. Perhaps the biggest one might be the father's quest for his lost son, which spans virtually the entire book. We know Leopold and Molly lost a son years ago, which Bloom occasionally still thinks about. So when Bloom sees Stephen at the maternity hospital and (on noticing his drunken, helpless state) tries to look after him, it's as if he's the archetypal father trying to recover his lost son. And that, I suspect, is where the significance of the novel would seem to lie for Joyce: in the way we enact or carry out these large, archetypal processes. In other words, it isn't about being able to establish parallels or correspondences between every episode in <u>Ulysses</u> and a similar one in Homer's <u>Odyssey</u> (even though Joyce himself did that). All of that can easily be described as mere scaffolding. In fact, the meaning or significance of Bloom's quest for his lost son isn't to be found in the <u>Odyssey</u> or in any other classical

text. It lies, rather, in the way such a process transcends any of its individual

instances, whether in the <u>Odyssey</u> or elsewhere. What Joyce realized, I would

argue, and what he tried to convey in <u>Ulysses</u>, is that these larger, archetypal

processes, because they happen over and over again, transcend time. And that

means they transcend everything we lose in time. Bloom will never recover his son

Rudy, but by helping Stephen he recovers his lost son on another level. In this way,

then, we get beyond subjectivism and the inexorable passing away of things

in time. These larger, archetypal processes are in one sense timeless, precisely

because they happen over and over again. And, set against the extreme subjectivism

of so-called stream of consciousness, which by itself can never hope to recover

the losses of any given moment, that repeatability is precisely their virtue.

VIII. Modernism in the Fullness of Time

It's well known that during World War I, when he was working on the

Recherche, Proust was listening to a lot of chamber music by César Franck, then

relatively unknown, who had died a little over twenty years before. He even hired a

quartet (the Quattuor Poulet) to play privately for him, as attested by his maid

Céleste Albaret. But he also heard a lot of other chamber music as well. I want to play

for you an excerpt from another work he's known to have heard at the

time:

[PPT 8.1. Beethoven, String Quartet no. 14 in C sharp minor, Op. 131. Budapest
 Quartet]

Unless I'm mistaken, you won't necessarily recognize it right away as

Beethoven. In fact, it's the opening to the 1st movement of his String Quartet no. 14

in C sharp minor, Op. 131. I suspect the weird key signature throws us off

first of all (Beethoven wrote to a friend: I'm not crazy when I put in all those C sharps,

trust me!). But it isn't just the weird key signature. Perhaps the most striking quality

of this 1st movement is that initially it hardly seems to have any kind of theme

at all. Instead, we get first 1 musical voice, then a 2nd, then a 3rd. But it's as if each

additional voice just gives a new inflection to an ongoing stream of sound (the

long sustained notes seem to go on and on) that appears to rise to a small climax

every now & then but otherwise just keeps moving. And that apparent absence

of any clear theme makes us only more aware of the movement of the work.

In fact, it's actually a fugue. But maybe the adagio tempo, plus the expectation

of something like sonata form, are what combine to throw us off. In that

respect, it's actually rather like César Franck's stuff, where it's often pretty

difficult to discern a theme as well, so that we likewise focus on the movement

of the piece rather than what it expresses melodically. And this gives me a chance

to explain why I wanted you to hear the Beethoven. Unless I'm mistaken, you

not only didn't recognize it as Beethoven, but very possibly took it (as I would have

done) for something distinctly more modern—like César Franck. I suspect we're

not the only ones to have thought this. Specifically, Proust probably had the same

thought as well. In him, however, it proved very fertile. I would argue that it

led him to a profound insight, one that would have far-reaching consequences for the

entire Recherche.

    To see what that idea was, we can now turn to his description of Swann

listening to the Vinteuil sonata. Notice how this passage focuses not on the theme

but (as with our experience of Beethoven) on the movement of the work:

With a slow rhythm it directed him first here, then there, then somewhere
else, toward a noble, unintelligible and precise happiness. Then all of a sudden,
from the point at which it had arrived and to which he was preparing to follow
it, after an instant's pause, it abruptly changed direction, and with a new movement,
more rapid, slender, melancholy, incessant and gentle, it drew him along with it
toward unknown perspectives. Then it disappeared. He longed passionately
to see it a third time. And it reappeared in effect, but without speaking to him
more clearly, causing him even a pleasure less profound. But, having returned

home, he had need of it: he was like a man into whose life a woman passing by, whom he has seen for a moment, has just introduced the image of a new beauty that gives to his own sensibility a greater value, without his even knowing if he can ever see again the one whom he already loves and of whom he does not know even the name.

(I, 207)

One reason why Proust focused on the movement of the Vinteuil sonata

(rather than its theme)—apart from the frequent difficulty of discerning a theme

in works of this kind—was that in music it's the movement rather than

the theme that best conveys the passing of time. And the passing of time

is, of course, the big concern of the entire Recherche. Specifically, the movement

of a musical work makes us more aware of it because when we attend to it

we become more aware of sequence (the sequence of notes, for instance)

as a sequence of events we experience, or even, simply, as a sequence of experiences.

And that's exactly how we might describe time. Beethoven I think was very much

aware of this meta-level dimension of music, its ability to get us to experience

pure sequence or movement, and in his late works especially I would argue

he often makes us aware of it by reducing his thematic material in some stretches

to a minimal level. So when Swann listens to the Vinteuil sonata he's experiencing

or feeling time passing, especially once he notices a phrase he wants to hold onto

which nonetheless disappears, leaving him still yearning for it. In particular,

we might say, he feels the elusiveness of the phrase, the way that it—like some

moments or experiences—leaves us wanting to stop time so we can hold onto these

permanently. What Swann discovers, then, in listening to the Vinteuil sonata,

is the problem of time, the way it's always passing, the inexorable necessity

of that passing, and how it keeps us from holding on to any of our experiences,

no matter how significant or desirable they might be.

Nonetheless, there's another point that needs to be made about

this description. I suspect Proust deliberately wanted it to remind his readers

of a celebrated 19th century text:

The deafening street around me was screaming.
Tall, thin, in deep mourning, majestic grief
A woman passed by, with a fastidious hand
Raising, swaying her skirt-border and hem;

Agile and noble, with her statuesque leg,
Myself, I drank, contorted like an eccentric,
In her eye, livid sky where the hurricane springs up,
A sweetness that fascinates and pleasure that kills.

A lightning-flash… then night! –Fugitive beauty
Whose glance suddenly caused me to be reborn,
Shall I not see you again except in eternity?

Elsewhere, far from here! Too late! maybe <u>never</u>!
For I don't know where you flee, you don't know where I go,
O you whom I would have loved, o you who knew it too!

The poem is "À une passante" ("To a female passerby"), the poet Charles

Baudelaire. Later in the <u>Recherche</u>, the narrator will offer explicit appreciations

of some of Proust's great 19th century predecessors. So we get a commentary

on the tower where Fabrice is imprisoned in the <u>Chartreuse de Parme,</u> as symbolically

expressive of his spiritual aspiration. Or an even more extensive and wonderful

gloss on the House of Death in Dostoevsky's <u>The Idiot</u> and in <u>Crime and</u>

<u>Punishment</u>. In the present instance, Proust doesn't name his predecessor.

But the treatment is the same. What Proust does here is to <u>renew</u> the earlier text

by his recapitulation of it within his own work. When Baudelaire spoke of

"une passante," he presumably had in mind some nameless woman on a Paris

street. For Proust, the "passante" is an elusive musical phrase Swann hears

while listening to a performance of the Vinteuil sonata. Nonetheless, Proust is able

to apply the psychology of the observer in "À une passante" to Swann's

experience in the <u>Recherche</u>: the same quest for something beautiful and

elusive, the same longing or yearning for it precisely <u>because</u> it's elusive and hence

impossible to possess. In that sense, we might say what Proust does is to

recover the experience of the speaker of "À une passante." What that speaker

experienced was a feeling of longing for a woman he knew he could never

possess. And the reason he can't is the unlikelihood he'll ever see her again.

So the only way he could possibly have any hope would be by being able

to repeat his encounter with her. But that's impossible precisely because of the nature

of time itself, the inexorable passing of any given moment, its unrepeatability.

What Baudelaire's speaker really experiences, then, is, in effect, the slipping away

of time, the evanescence of the moment. And that's exactly what Proust

tries to emphasize in his account. Significantly, he even has the elusive phrase

reappear so Swann can hear it a second time. Hearing it a second time doesn't,

however, solve Swann's problem: because his whole aim is to hold onto the phrase,

its repetition only points to what's really at issue: the fact that it, like time,

inevitably passes away. But if Swann can't quite manage to hold onto the theme

or phrase, there is, nonetheless, something Proust (and we) can manage to take away

from this whole affair. By his comparison of Swann to the speaker of "À une

passante," what Proust does is to recover the experience of a past moment.

Recovery of the experience of a past moment is, however, tantamount to recovery

of that moment itself. Since a moment, as part of time, is defined by its passing

into the next moment, the only way we arrive at any sense of it is by our

experiences, since without these we would have no perception of time passing

at all. In that respect, then, the content of any given moment = what was

experienced in that moment. So by his recovery of the experience of the speaker

in "À une passante," what Proust recovers is the essence of a past moment.

More generally, we might say what he recovers is lost time.

     To appreciate the significance of this move, we need to see it in

its larger context. Once again, consider the general framework I presented in my

1st talk:

[PPT 8.]

Simply put, as long as people could believe being = thinking, everything

was fine. Being = thinking was what made 19th century development possible.

Development was graspable conceptually—which is to say, by thought—and if

that process of development carried being with it, you could then understand

your own self-development, or the development of your own subjectivity. But

somewhere around the mid-century, as we've seen, things began to go awry.

Kierkegaard & others (representative, I suggest, of a larger trend) could no longer

believe being = thinking, which meant thought & being (existence) now had

to go their separate ways. This subjective/objective split would lead in turn to

the primacy of subjectivity over objectivity, and eventually to subjectivity

consuming objectivity. So now we don't have a world out there anymore, only

what can be internalized (i.e., phenomena, impressions) within the individual

consciousness. And once we've reached that point, we inevitably set up

the problem facing late 19th century consciousness: the problem of extreme

subjectivism, brought about because all our sensations or impressions eventually

disappear. In other words, the problem of time. That in turn led to High Modernism

and its attempt to spatialize time, as a way of preserving it. This spatial treatment

of time meant a conversion of temporal moments into a spatial structure where

they could all exist simultaneously, by virtue of their relation to each other.

The problem with this was, you had to believe in the structure. Eliot, Joyce and

their successors did everything they could to shore it up: a mythic framework, combined

with an imposing array of cultural references and cross-references. Yet

for many it just didn't work. After all, if individual experiences fail to yield any

strong feeling of inherent significance, it's hard to see why they should do so

collectively, or why their relationship to each other should produce what they

seemed to lack intrinsically.

In contrast to the sort of spatial perspective on time adopted by Eliot

and Joyce, Proust took a different route altogether. One way to describe the spatial

perspective of High Modernism would be to say that it tried to deny the problem

of temporality, which is transience. People like Eliot and Joyce thought that if

you could show how individual experiences fit into a larger framework

created by their relation to each other, you could somehow get around the transience

or passing away of those individual experiences. To do that, however, you'd have

to deny the ultimate importance of the experience itself. For Eliot and Joyce,

experiences matter only insofar as they can be related to other experiences. Proust

felt differently. If for Eliot and Joyce experiences become meaningful only

to the extent that you can subsume their individual subjective aspect by

fitting them into a larger objective framework, Proust on the other hand intuitively

felt that the kind of objectivity Modernism was after could only be found

precisely by plumbing individual consciousness until you reached the extreme

limit of subjectivity. And the reason he believed that had to do with something

he'd noticed about the relation of present to past experiences. Specifically, in the case of

Swann listening to the Vinteuil sonata, what he experiences reproduces what

Baudelaire had talked about in "À une passante." And that in turn meant we could

in principle recover the content of past experiences qua experiences (i.e., in

terms of how they felt). But if that were possible, there would then be no need

to deny subjectivity, or our sense of the transience of our experiences. We try to deny

transience only because we're afraid of the consequences—afraid we have

no way around it, that it would mean our inability to preserve what we value

most, and hence that we'd be completely vulnerable to the ravages of time. But

if it could somehow be shown that subjectivity doesn't have to reduce to the complete

and utter transience of all sensation + impression and hence to an inherent lack

of meaning in our experiences, then our outlook might be quite different.

To show that, however, Proust knew he'd have to demonstrate that the resemblance between what the speaker of "À une passante" experiences and what Swann experiences in hearing the Vinteuil sonata wasn't just accidental, that you could, if you probed more deeply, potentially find the same sort of resemblance between any number of our own experiences. And if you could show this, what you would then have shown was the potential recoverability of what we typically consider as irrevocably lost time. The story of how Proust manages to do this through a chance discovery by his narrator is the story of the final volume of the Recherche.

To show how Proust gets there, I thought it would be useful to try to trace the sequence of inferences by which the narrator eventually arrives at his final insight, which in turn gives structure to the entire novel. I summarize these here as briefly as possible, & will then comment on each point individually:

[PPT 8.3]

1. unequal paving-stones $\Rightarrow$ Venice, sense of immortality: why?

It all starts for the narrator with an unusual experience in the courtyard of the Guermantes hôtel. Warned by a coachman's cry of the oncoming Guermantes carriage, he instinctively steps backward. As he does so, he stumbles against one of the uneven paving-stones in the courtyard, and instantly has what

Proust calls an involuntary memory (composed of blissful sensory impressions of

azure sky, sunlight, the Baptistry) which takes him back to a moment,

decades earlier, when he had the same sensation: in Venice. And, all of a sudden,

without knowing why, he feels a sense of immortality. But rather than just

let it go, he's determined this time to probe his experience until he can explain

to himself why a mere sensation of uneven paving-stones should yield an

irrepressible feeling of immortality.

2. past = present (essence des choses, apprehension of)
                         (un peu de temps à l'état pur)
                         (no fear of death)

Basically, the reason the narrator suddenly has an irrepressible feeling of

immortality is that he's discovered past = present. In other words, he's discovered

that a given moment from his past and the present one are experientially

identical. At first glance it might seem odd that such a discovery would make him

feel immortal—you'd think he'd want to feel his life extending forward

indefinitely, rather than backward. But the whole point of his discovery is that he

now knows it's possible to recover lost time. So the fundamental problem of

time from a human perspective—that things pass away and can't be recovered—

now disappears. Significantly, the narrator says that this kind of experience

gives him an apprehension of the "essence des choses" (essence of things).

Normally, we think of essence as a stable category associated with being rather than

with anything associated with time. But this is where Proust's subjectivism comes

out. As he sees it, the closest we come to things is through our experience of these.

So the essence of things is nothing other than the core of our experiences.

That's why the narrator can talk about "a little bit of time in the pure state" (un peu

de temps à l'état pur). This pure state of time = the essence of time = time without

the experience of transience, time in which past & present can be identified

as purely experiential. Living with time at that kind of ground-level, the narrator

no longer has any fear of death, because for him this ground-level time doesn't

have any gap or break anywhere but goes on continuously.

3. necessary to interpret sensations, convert to spiritual equivalent (work of art)

Even though the narrator now sees that all past time can potentially be recovered,

he doesn't want to let it rest at that. Instead, he's quite aware of the evanescent

quality of all sensation: yes, we can experience again a sensation (i.e., a moment)

we had years ago, but this present sensation, too, will disappear. So when

the narrator says it's necessary to interpret sensations, I take him to mean that

we have to understand what the implications of his experience in the courtyard

of the Guermantes hôtel are. Specifically, we have to understand that these

sensations can be recovered or recaptured, but to do that in a permanent way we

have to convert them to what the narrator calls a spiritual equivalent. For him

the spiritual equivalent = a work of art. It's spiritual because its element is thought

rather than sensation. What makes thought more spiritual than sensation

is precisely that it's more permanent. But once we know a sensation <u>can</u> be

recovered, it's just a matter of finding the proper way to describe it so that we can experience it again. And that's the role of the work of art.

4. necessity by which impression comes to us = reality

When he talks about sensations as the essences of different moments of past time and hence as the essences of things (essence des choses), Proust is well aware that his viewpoint is open to charges of extreme subjectivism and hence of mistaking what's purely subjective for the world out there. To guard against that, he insists that the necessity by which impressions come to us = reality. What he means by this is that we don't have a choice: we feel a particular sensation or impression not because we want to feel it but because it's forced on us by something outside ourselves. And that, for Proust, is what makes it objective. Notice here how he specifically talks about necessity. It would be distinctly possible—and Proust, as a former student of philosophy with Darlu at the Lycée Condorcet, would've been well aware of that—for us to be deceived by some external agency or circumstances (like Descartes's malin génie or evil demon) about what we're seeing or experiencing. But when we necessarily experience something, that means it's in some sense really there.

5. reality = rapport between sensations and memories (souvenirs) we have of objects

In one respect, Proust could say that reality = sensations or experiences.
But this would be to simplify slightly. Because in trying to put together our
picture of what's out there, we don't just go on our most recent sensations or
experiences. My feeling about the reality of the desk or table where I'm
sitting, for instance, is based not just on the feel of its present hardness as I
type on a keyboard placed on it, but on all the countless times I've felt it
before, times when I've had to maneuver around it, put books on it,
and so on. Just as we ourselves aren't simply what we are at this moment but
rather a composite of what we've been during all the moments that go to make
up our lives, so likewise with all the things that go to make up what we call
the world out there—they, too, must be composed not just of our current
impressions but of all the impressions we've had in the past. Note here the word
"rapport" which Proust employs to describe the link between present
sensation and past memory. In a neutral sense, a rapport is simply a relationship.
But for Proust there's more to it. Because after all it's we ourselves who form
that relationship. Without us, without the work of the mind, that relationship
simply wouldn't exist. At the same time, since Proust claims this relationship
between present sensation and past memory = reality, he obviously believes
there's an inherent or intrinsic link between past and present. So when we form
that connection between sensation and memory, we're not simply indulging
in a subjective whim. Instead, Proust clearly sees this as a <u>necessary</u>
activity.

6. "and I understood that all these materials of the work of art, they were my past life" ["et je compris que tous ces matériaux de l'oeuvre littéraire, c'était ma vie passée….]

Just as linking past memory and present sensation is for Proust a necessary activity, so the gathering together of all the past moments of his life to form a work of art was for him a similar and equally necessary activity. Earlier we've seen that the narrator talked about the need to interpret sensations, to convert them to a spiritual equivalent which is for him the work of art. But what he doesn't say there is how this is to be achieved. I believe, though, that the linking of past memory to present sensation offers a clue. Proust, as I've just said, saw that as a necessary activity. For him it was necessary to make sense of the world out there, which, in his subjectivist perspective, is tantamount to creating the world out there. In a similar way, however, we might say that the linking of past to present within a work of art is equally necessary. Its necessity comes from the fact that this is how he can make sense of his life, which for him is just as vital or important as making sense of the world out there. And if he can do that, he can then preserve it from the transience of time. In the final analysis, then, it isn't just our capacity to recover past moments by re-experiencing them that saves the past from being lost. Instead, for Proust, it's the discovery of a connection between all the past moments of his life, the discovery that these can be so arranged as to yield something like a pattern or theme (like that of a musical work) that gives them permanence, by making them graspable as a formal arrangement by the mind. In this way, then, High Modernism could at last claim to have found

an objectivity within the very heart of subjectivity itself.