

Modern Literature II

1800-1922

I. Rise of the Sciences

[The World at War, episode 24: 22.02-22.42]

It's unquestionably one of the most iconic moments of the Second World War: the Trinity test just before dawn on July 16, 1945. Out of the darkness a sudden flash of light, a brightness, then the famous billowing mushroom cloud lifting upward that announces our entry into the atomic age. And, immediately after, an image almost equally well-known: Robert Oppenheimer, director of the Manhattan Project that produced the first atomic bomb, recalling years later what it was like for those who witnessed the first atomic blast. His furrowed face, Oppenheimer wiping away his tears, reciting Vishnu to Arjuna in the Bhagavad-Gita: "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds." At no moment in 20th century history, arguably, would science ever be more immediately present—or more important—to human affairs and human consciousness. Suddenly we all became aware of how life could suddenly come to an end. I remember, when growing up, being told what to do in the event of an atomic bomb attack, the familiar yellow-and-red signs for bomb shelters. As Heidegger once said, we were all living in the shadow of the bomb, which had irrevocably altered our sense of Dasein, of being-in-the-world. At the same time, we were all equally aware of how it was science that had gotten us there. Science, then, was what determined human life, the conditions under which it would

have to be lived, the sense of what was possible and not possible. But if that was the case then and in other (and how different) ways since, it might be worthwhile to ask how it was that science got there, how it achieved this sort of primacy in the human scene, and the kind of effect that primacy has had on literature. In recent years, in fact, the science-literature relationship has gotten increased attention. Understandably: the prestige of the sciences continues to be high, while literature is going down. Unfortunately, this has also affected the way that relationship gets talked about. Because of the prestige of the sciences, there's pressure to show literature is "in the know," that it's au courant with the latest scientific developments in its time. As a result, the science-literature relationship becomes almost exclusively about literature trying to mirror the scientific thinking of its period. I want to suggest a somewhat different model for this relationship. Looked at more closely, I would argue the science-literature relationship goes through more of a cycle, with literature initially mirroring but later rejecting science and finally ending with a parody of it. And the reason, I suggest, is that science is closer to fashion than we think: what's new at first looks pretty hip, pretty flashy, and everybody wants a piece of it. But with time, any way of thinking becomes more vulnerable to critique. Its weaknesses—even to outsiders—become more apparent. And that's when we get first, attack or rejection, and then finally parody.

[Hôtel-Dieu, photo 1]

[Hôtel-Dieu, photo 2]

For any attempt to explore the impact of science on modern life, however, the natural place to start has to be the turbulent years of the French Revolution and the First Empire, witness to the beginnings of modern medicine. And if we wanted to place it specifically, we might trace it to the Hôtel-Dieu, first and foremost of the research hospitals in Paris. Situated next to the cathedral of Notre Dame, it could accommodate 2,500 patients—a figure that, in times of emergency, could rise as high as 4,800. What you see in the photos isn't the original Hôtel-Dieu, a large, rambling medieval structure much of which burned down in the eighteenth century. In fact, the present complex (of which I show the front entrance and central courtyard) goes back only to 1877. Situated on the original site, however, it at least gives us a sense of place. But we also need to know the circumstances. And here it's important to point out how modern medicine emerged out of the turbulent circumstances of the Revolutionary era. Because it was the Revolution and the subsequent ascendancy of Napoleon that first made possible what we might call the beginnings of modern warfare, warfare on a scale not seen before. Specifically, with the citizen-armies of the Republic and Napoleon's capacity to conscript or draft in huge numbers, we now get casualties on a different order of magnitude from anything Europe had previously witnessed, putting immense pressure on military hospitals to cope. Under this pressure, a new group of military surgeons would rise to prominence in the Imperial armies: Larrey, Desgenettes, Coste, Percy. Forced to deal with enormous casualties and minimal time for treatment, they developed new tactics for dressing wounds. The success of

their methods, in turn, led to new discoveries and insights about the way the body functioned. Meanwhile, chaos in the hospital scene in Paris and elsewhere brought about by Revolutionary reform gave surgery its chance to wrest primacy away from traditional medicine: because it was more effective in treating disorders, surgery gained rapidly in respect while the reputation of medicine declined. As a result, many of the best and brightest young doctors, like Xavier Bichat, chose to train under surgeons like P.J. Dessault rather than under physicians. And because surgery was more clinical in practice than medicine, the new medicine took on a very clinical style: lots of observation in the hospital wards, lots of medical experiments. At the same time, French medicine also got a boost from the new secular attitude of the State, which permitted and even authorized autopsies of patients who had died in the hospitals.

The upshot of all this was a new interest in the physiological processes that sustained life. And the young medical researcher who benefitted as much as anybody from the change in medical practices was Xavier Bichat. His Recherches physiologiques sur la vie et la mort (Physiological Researches on Life and Death) was epoch-making. Based on a huge number of experiments on living animals and on autopsies of the human dead, it brought a wealth of new knowledge about the processes by which life is sustained to visibility. But Bichat wasn't just a researcher: he also had a strong interest in larger questions about the essence of vitality, and how that essence might be defined. His successor, François Magendie, was more purely experimental. And that meant even more data on the various physiological processes. Finally, we get Claude Bernard. Coming after Magendie,

his researches on the pancreas, liver and nervous system and, above all, his development of the notion of a milieu intérieur or internal environment of the body, would bring French medicine to its apex around the middle of the nineteenth century.

With that, we now turn to the impact the spectacular rise of French medicine was to have on French literature—as well as on literature elsewhere. And here the first author that comes to mind is Balzac. It's natural we should think of Balzac first: his brilliant young doctor Horace Bianchon, who figures in various places throughout the Comédie humaine, is clearly modeled on Bichat. But the work that I think displays better than anything else the impact of Bichat and the new medicine on Balzac is one of his less well-known Etudes philosophiques, with the somewhat mysterious title La Peau de chagrin—roughly, The Wild Ass's Skin. It's a wonderful story, a fable almost. A young man (Raphael de Valentin) comes to Paris in search of his fortune. And, like a lot of other young men who came to Paris during the nineteenth century, he discovers that making a fortune there isn't so easy. But Paris (then & now) is a wonderful place if you've got money—so many pleasant ways to spend it. Well, one day Raphael en route to an appointment wanders into an antiquary's shop, to kill time. While in the shop he notices one odd item: a small piece of shagreen leather with a curious inscription in some exotic language like Arabic or Sanskrit. He asks the shop owner about this item. “Oh, that” says the owner. “You can have that for free. But I should tell you there's a condition attached to it. Whoever owns it will see every wish of his or hers come true. But with every fulfilled wish, the piece of leather will shrink a bit. And when it's shrunk down to nothing, you'll die.” A pretty scary proposition. But there are so many tempting

things in Paris that finally Raphael decides he'll take it anyway. Once he's got it, he immediately wishes for all the things you'd expect him to wish for: a big bank account, a nice house (a real luxury in Paris, even in those days!), a whole load of other amenities. And with every wish, the leather or skin shrinks a bit. Interestingly, the one thing that doesn't cost Raphael is his wish for a wife—since he and a young woman he knows were already in love, it seems there's no resistance to be overcome. Unfortunately, as Raphael notices, even after all these big wishes he's made, the skin continues to shrink. Worried, he takes the skin to a number of experts: a well-known botanist (who's totally unable to identify it) and even a celebrated engineer (who tries unsuccessfully to stretch it out using a powerful hydraulic press). Beginning to panic, Raphael now decides he'd better get out of Paris—too many temptations there, too much stress. So he takes himself off to a health spa in the countryside—and promptly runs into trouble by getting into an argument with a visitor there, which necessitates his having to fight a duel. Of course he manages to kill the guy, but the wish to do that takes a huge amount of what's left of his skin. Now desperate, Raphael decides he'd better go and live in some secluded farmhouse far away from everyone. But after some time there he finds he's too bored—life doesn't seem worth living anymore. So he finally resolves to go back to Paris. Once more in the city and slowly dying, he consults all the best doctors, who offer totally different diagnoses. Only the young Horace Bianchon, though, seems to know: he tells Raphael it's not a matter of any particular illness but rather a malady of will (volonté)—which is to say: a loss of vital energy or the life force, which once used up can't be recovered. So finally Raphael dies.

In all this, Balzac appears to have been thinking of Bichat and his effort to separate vitality from purely chemical properties. Because Bichat refused to equate vitality with the purely chemical, Balzac could posit a psychophysical system of vital energy. What's crucial here is that because life can't be reduced to the purely chemical, there can be intangible, unseen forces associated with it—which is what allows for something like will in the sense of a vital energy. In this way, Bichat—and, following him, Balzac—can be said to have given the nod to vitalism, a belief in the uniqueness of the vital property.

There's a distinct shift, however, when we come to Flaubert and his relation his relation to the rising position of medicine in human affairs. Flaubert, as some of you probably know already, was the son of a surgeon, which meant he (like Proust later) was a lot closer personally to the medical establishment than Balzac. And—maybe for that very reason—I can't help feeling that when writing about medicine Flaubert looks a bit as if he's trying to settle a score. In any case, what we find in Madame Bovary is clearly an attack on the rising new science. Charles, husband of Emma Bovary, is stupefied by the medical programme and passes his medical exam only by memorizing the questions. Later, persuaded by Homais the pharmacist (probably with ulterior motive), Charles tries to cure Hippolyte Tautain of a club foot and makes a horrible mess of it. Poor Tautain has to have an amputation, the whole operation is a horrible failure. Dr. Canivet gets called in for advice and pointedly criticizes what he calls “Paris inventions” (a moniker for Paris medicine) as the source of the trouble. As he sees it, all those Paris surgeons have gotten too arrogant, believing they can fix

anything by surgical intervention, believing they can even reverse the course of nature. At the end of the novel, finally, Flaubert gets even more explicit. After Emma's poisoned herself, Dr. Larivière, "an eminent practitioner from the school of Bichat," attends her. But his efforts to do anything for her—despite the vaunted status of Paris medicine—are unavailing, and she dies. Now in fact Paris typically preached expectant medicine or careful watching rather than drastic intervention. No matter—Flaubert doesn't care. Clearly, what we have here is a very pointed rejection of the new science and its supposed powers.

George Eliot is more complicated—as we might expect. The passage I'm thinking of, from Middlemarch, offers what I'm inclined to call a kind of oblique attack or critique. In other words, it doesn't go after Bichat or French medicine the way Flaubert does. Nonetheless, there's a nuance, a whiff of suggestion that something isn't quite right:

This great seer [Bichat] did not go beyond the consideration of the tissues as ultimate facts in the living organism, marking the limit of anatomical analysis; but it was open to another mind to say, have not these structures some common basis from which they have all started The work had not yet been done, but only prepared for those who knew how to use the preparation. What was the primitive tissue? In that way Lydgate put the question—not quite in the way required by the awaiting answer; but such missing of the right word befalls many seekers.

(p. 146)

Years ago Robert Greenberg showed that at the time of writing Middlemarch George Eliot was getting brought up to speed by G.H. Lewes on the work of Claude Bernard (Lewes describes her as somewhat shaky on this). More recently, the topic has been revived by Lawrence Rothfield. What all these commentators seem to have missed, however, is the anomaly of George Eliot's writing about Bichat when medical research has clearly moved on to Claude Bernard.

Yes, you can say it's a historical novel, so it has to stick to its time period. Nonetheless, I can't help finding it strange that George Eliot should talk so conspicuously of Bichat's failure to isolate the fundamental or basic vital constituent, which isn't tissue but the cell. Note how Bichat's failure gets passed on to poor Lydgate, who (as the narrator says) doesn't ask the right question (looking for a more basic kind of tissue instead of something much smaller, like the cell) and so doesn't get the right answer, hence doesn't make the big discovery. What this kind of historical hindsight/perspective does, in effect, is to cast the shadow of failure over Lydgate's aspirations—condemned by the future to fail in the past.

And that can't help but cast a shadow over the medical enterprise in a larger way—as if to say that whatever looks good at the moment will, at some future date, be superseded by further research and hence become obsolete. In other words, sic transit gloria mundi. So it isn't as if George Eliot allows the narrative itself to criticize Lydgate or, by implication, French medicine. But if the narrative doesn't put forward this critique, it's only because it leaves that role to history.

Finally, with Henry James we get something like parody.

In his Portrait of a Lady Daniel Touchett, at a fairly early point in the narrative, is dying. His son Ralph is, nonetheless, cautiously optimistic because he's managed to secure the services of the great Sir Matthew Hope to attend his father. But it all comes to nothing: Daniel Touchett dies anyway. And even before that happens, Sir Matthew has already intimated to Madame Merle that he's powerless to help Ralph's father, that there's nothing to do except wait for the inevitable end. We might see this as a parody of the expectant "watchful waiting" posture of French medicine after Bichat: what good is this expectant posture if the patient's just going to die anyway? Perhaps because of his experience with his father, or perhaps for other reasons, Ralph seems to get progressively more cynical about the powers of modern medicine. Later in the novel, he thinks of going down to Sicily to improve his failing health. But his real objective is to see his cousin Isabel in Rome. His friend Lord Warburton offers to accompany him. Quite predictably, they get stuck in Rome. After a while the two friends somewhat shamelessly confess their motives (they're both in love with Isabel). Warburton wonders whether Rome is good for his friend's health, whether Ralph should get the doctor's consent for staying there. To which Ralph answers: "The doctor's consent will spoil it. I never have it when I can help it." Finally, at the end of the novel, Ralph himself is dying. His mother gets Sir Matthew Hope to attend him, but Ralph by this time secretly believes the local doctor's in fact better (so much for research medicine!). So he asks his mother to tell Sir Matthew he's already dead, hoping he won't

be bothered by the great man's attentions anymore (instead, his mother simply tells Sir Matthew her son dislikes him!). As before, however, it doesn't matter anyway: Ralph dies, regardless of which doctors are attending him. So once more James can make his point about the powerlessness of modern medicine to effect any good for its patient.

[Solvay Conference, 1911]

[Solvay Conference, 1927]

[Einstein & Bohr]

We now pass to a different science and a different time, one with which you're undoubtedly more familiar. I suspect a number of the faces in the photos here will be familiar as well. The first Solvay Conference (1911) brought together many of the best and the brightest of early 20th century physics: Henri Poincaré, Marie Curie, Konrad Lorentz, Max Planck, Ernest Rutherford, and a figure we've all come to know (standing second from right), then in his younger years. By the time of the 1927 Solvay Conference (said to be possibly the finest collection of scientific talent ever assembled—by the simple criterion of having more Nobel Prize winners than ever convoked anywhere else). By now the young physicist whom we saw at Solvay 1911 has moved center stage. And the person who would later become his biggest rival appears seated at the end of the second row, right. Finally,

in a photo from (I believe) the 1950s we have Einstein and Bohr engaged in one of their endless arguments about the viability of quantum theory. I hope this brief pictorial history will suffice—I've dispensed with any fuller account, thinking that what we're addressing now will at least be better known than the rise of modern medicine in 19th century France. So without further ado we now pass to the question of its impact on literature.

Here in fact our story goes back to an episode that happened in 1870, but retold from the vantage point of 1905. Specifically, we're looking at the passage in The Education of Henry Adams in which Adams describes the experience of witnessing the death of his sister, Louisa Kuhn:

He found his sister, a woman of forty, as gay and brilliant in the terrors of lockjaw as she had been in the careless fun of 1859, lying in bed in consequence of a miserable cab-accident that had bruised her foot. Hour by hour the muscles grew rigid, while the mind remained bright, until after ten days of fiendish torture she died in convulsions.

. . . . Death took features altogether new to him, in these rich and sensuous surroundings. . . . The hot Italian summer brooded outside, over the market-place . . . and, in the singular color of the Tuscan atmosphere, the hills and vineyards of the Apennines seemed bursting with midsummer blood. . . . even the dying woman shared the sense of the Italian summer, the soft, velvet air, the humor, the courage, the sensual fulness

.

Impressions like these are not reasoned or catalogued in the mind; they are felt as part of violent emotion; and the mind that feels them is a different one from that which reasons; it is thought of a different power and a different person. The first serious consciousness of Nature's gesture—her attitude towards life—took form then as a phantasm, a nightmare, an insanity of force. For the first time, the stage-scenery of the senses collapsed; the human mind felt itself stripped naked, vibrating in a void of shapeless energies, with resistless mass, colliding, crushing, wasting, and destroying what these same energies had created and labored from eternity to perfect. Society became fantastic, a vision of pantomime with a mechanical motion; and its so-called thought merged in the mere sense of life, and pleasure in the sense. The usual anodynes of social medicine became evident artifice. Stoicism was perhaps the best; religion was the most human; but the idea that any personal deity could find pleasure or profit in torturing a poor woman, by accident, with a fiendish cruelty known to man only in perverted and insane temperaments, could not be held for a moment. For pure blasphemy, it made pure atheism a comfort. God might be, as the Church said, a Substance, but He could not be a Person.

(pp. 288-89)

Adams knew the late 19th century physics of Ernst Mach, and gleaned what he could from Karl Pearson's Grammar of Science and other sources.

What's significant here is the way he chose to represent one of the most painful

and intimate experiences of his life (and we know the death of his sister Louisa in the Education is really just a stand-in for an even more private and painful episode he simply couldn't bear to write about—the suicide of his wife, Clover) by recourse to an analogy from modern physics. Simply by using it for something so private, so personal, it offers unequivocal testimony about the extent to which that physics had begun to make itself felt.

Perhaps the most fascinating instance of the science-literature relationship in 20th century literature, however, is one we still know almost nothing about. In George Painter's old biography of Proust (I'm unable to find out anything more in the recent biographies by Jean-Yves Tadié and William Carter) we're told that when Benjamin Crémieux pointed out to Proust some apparent anachronisms in Le Côté de Guermantes, he replied they were due to "the flattened form my characters take owing to their rotation in time" (p. 336). We know Proust made strenuous efforts to get an essay by the mathematician Camille Vettard on "Proust et Einstein" published in the NRF (where it finally appeared in August 1922), and that he set great store by it. But in the absence of any further information, we can only speculate about what specifically he had in mind. I want to call attention to just one instance that might yield some sense of the potential or possibility here. Late in the Recherche, Marcel believes at one moment that he's seeing Saint-Loup exit from a hotel of somewhat doubtful reputation where he's also seen Baron Charlus before:

Something nonetheless struck me that wasn't his face which I didn't see, nor his uniform hidden in a greatcoat, but the extraordinary disproportion between the number of different points through which his body passed and the small number of seconds during which this exit, which had the air of a sortie attempted by someone besieged, was executed. Of a sort that I thought of, if I didn't recognize him explicitly—I don't say by the figure, nor the svelteness, nor the allure, nor the quickness of Saint-Loup—but by the kind of ubiquity that was so special to him. The soldier capable of occupying in so little time so many different positions had disappeared without having seen me in a cross-street, and I stood wondering whether I should or shouldn't go into this hotel whose modest appearance made me strongly doubt whether it was Saint-Loup who had exited from it.

(IV: 389)

Here I only want to call attention to one point: the soldier “capable of occupying in so little time so many different positions”—this is, after all, exactly what movement in relativity theory is all about. And if we think about the movement of characters through spacetime as in a sense the real subject of the Recherche, it offers a glimpse of some fascinating possibilities for Proust's use of relativity theory in different ways in his novel.

Finally, for an instance of how 20th century physics has become a subject of literary parody, we might look at Don DeLillo's wonderfully funny

novel White Noise. Here I just want to look briefly at an episode from part II (“The Airborne Toxic Event”) where Jack Gladney discovers he’s gotten exposed to a deadly form of toxic waste, Nyodene D.

His question-and-answer session about it with a SIMUVAC expert at the emergency site shows him at his best as the artful dodger (pp. 138-41). It’s too long to quote entire, but maybe the best part comes at the very end, when Jack begins to realize the seriousness of his situation:

You are said to be dying and yet are separate from the dying, can ponder it at your leisure, literally see on the X-ray photograph or computer screen the horrible alien logic of it all. It is when death is rendered graphically, is televised so to speak, that you sense an eerie separation between your condition and yourself. A network of symbols has been introduced, an entire awesome technology wrested from the gods. It makes you feel like a stranger in your own dying.

I wanted my academic gown and dark glasses.

(p. 142)

We hardly know if he’s serious or not. What seemingly was tragedy has in this parody become positively baroque in its possibilities.

II. The Urban Scene

[Louis Malle, Elevator to the Gallows: 26:49-27:49]

Essentially, the urban scene is about relationships between people who—most likely—don't know each other. So we have Jeanne Moreau, in probably the best-known moment from Louis Malle's film, wandering the streets of Paris at night, waiting for a lover who's never going to come because he's accidentally locked in an elevator on leaving the scene of a crime. As a result, she has to endure the pressure of all those pedestrians who'll naturally look at her, try to read her secret, try to entice her into a tryst. Meanwhile, in the background, a trumpet solo by the young Miles Davis, its soft, plaintive, melancholy wail fully and perfectly expressive of the urban loneliness of all those who never manage to find the people they're supposed to meet while having to fend off everybody else.

Three years ago I gave a talk at the Beijing Foreign Studies University (Beiwai) on "The City in Modern Literature." For that talk (the result of an impromptu invitation) I assembled in a hurry some images of 19th century Paris that showed the gradual evolution of its cityscape from the narrow, cramped streets of the 1830s to the wide boulevards of the later part of the century. I talked about the impression produced by these city streets on the inhabitants (as reflected in French literature), and of how the sense of distances and of the traversability of Paris gradually changed

over time. So when I started to prepare for this talk on the urban scene I initially thought I'd use much of the same material and perspective. Almost immediately, however, as I began to explore the impact of Victorian London on its literature, I fell under the spell—like so many people before me—of Henry Mayhew, and specifically of his great work London Labour and the London Poor. In this exemplary achievement of 19th century journalism, more than perhaps anywhere else, the voices of the nameless many spoke vividly to me across the years. Because Mayhew didn't just summarize but instead made an effort to faithfully transcribe exactly what he heard from the people he interviewed, we get their situation as they themselves saw it, which meant that Mayhew's text preserved for all time their sense of their relationships with other city people. And as I delved deeper and deeper into Mayhew, I gradually came to realize that this was what mattered most for 19th century London—this was what the urban scene of that time and place was really all about. It occurred to me too, as I read these accounts by the people themselves of the hardships of their lives, that it was precisely the hugeness of the city itself and the unknowability sheer size forced on those who lived and worked there that made possible the kind of relationships I was seeing, relationships that don't so much involve intersubjectivity but rather a shockingly brutal use or exploitation of people in ways that suggest they're seen as objects or things rather than as people.

[Mayhew, crippled nutmeg-grater seller <illus.> (PPT 2:2)]

I want to begin with one of the most poignant instances from Mayhew vol. I, of a crippled street-seller of nutmeg-graters. I give first part of his own account of his situation, followed by that of a friend:

Often after I've been walking, my limbs and back ache so badly that I can get no sleep. Across my lines it feels as if I'd got some great weight, and my knees are in a heat, and throb, and feel as if a knife was running into them. When I go up-stairs I have to crawl upon the back of my hands and my knees. I can't lift nothing to my mouth. The sinews of my hands is all contracted. I am obliged to have things held to my lipe for me to drink, like a child. I can use a knife and fork by leaning my arm on the table and then stooping my head to it. I can't wash nor undress myself. Sometimes I think of my helplessness a great deal.

“His privations have been great,” adds my informant. Only two months back, being in a state of utter destitution and quite worn out with fatigue, he called at the house of a person (where my informant occupied a room) about ten o'clock at night, and begged them to let him rest himself for a short while, but the inhuman landlady and her son laid hold of the wretched man, the one taking him by the arms and the other by the legs, and literally hurled him into the street. The next morning,” my informant continued, “I saw the poor creature leaning against a lamp-post, shivering with the cold, and my heart bled for him; and since that he has been living with me.”

(I, 330-33)

Here note the way the landlady (“inhuman,” as the informant aptly says) and her son treat the crippled nutmeg-seller, tossing him as they would garbage into the street with no further concern about it. This sort of objectification of people is something we’ll see increasingly as we continue our exploration of Mayhew. Note, too, how the informant comes to feel sympathy for the nutmeg-seller: it’s presumably because the poor guy (object-like) was hardly able to move from the spot where he was tossed, and yet (shivering, hence human) is so obviously suffering at the same time.

A bit later in vol. I of Mayhew we come across something we’ll see often both in his work and elsewhere—evidence of a desire to know everything that’s happening in the city. Here it takes the form of a comprehensive table of street traffic in London:

[PPT 2:3, 2:4]

We might wonder why anybody would want to know so exhaustively about street traffic in London. For a number of reasons, possibly (sanitary conditions, traffic patterns indicating which streets get heavy pavement use, future street planning). But what’s significant about this desire for comprehensive knowledge of what’s happening in the city is that ultimately it seems to

go beyond any particular motives. And that suggests that while it might be related to the kind of Foucauldian impulse behind Bentham's Panopticon, it's arguably even broader. In other words, knowledge of a totality seems by itself to convey power. And possibly not just because it involves knowledge of the inhabitants (Foucault's point) but even more because it's linked to a formative impulse (city building) for the future.

I now return to my earlier theme of objectification, this time with a couple accounts from vol. II of young boys employed as chimney sweepers:

"A lad was ordered to sweep a chimney at Wandsworth; he came down after endeavouring to ascend, and this occurred several times before he gave up the point; at last the journeyman took some straw or hay, and lighted it under him to drive him up: when he endeavoured to get up the last time, he found there was a bar across the chimney, which he could not pass; he was obliged in consequence to come down, and the journeyman beat him so cruelly, to use his own expression, that he could not stand for a fortnight.

The fire had been lighted as early as two o'clock the same morning, and was burning on the arrival of Griggs and his little boy at eight; the fire-place was small, and an iron pipe projected from the grate some little distance, into the flue.... He [Griggs] had no sooner extinguished the fire than he suffered the lad to go down [from the top of the chimney]; and the consequence, as might be expected, was his almost immediate

death, in a state, no doubt, of inexpressible agony. The flue was of the narrowest description, and must have retained heat sufficient to have prevented the child's return to the top, even supposing he had not approached the pipe belonging to the grate, which must have been nearly red-hot.... Soon after his descent, the master, who remained on the top, was apprehensive that something had happened, and therefore desired him to come up; the answer of the boy was, 'I cannot come up, master; I must die here.' An alarm was given in the brewhouse, immediately, that he had stuck in the chimney, and a bricklayer who was at work near the spot attended, and after knocking down part of the brickwork of the chimney, just above the fire-place, made a hole sufficiently large to draw him through. A surgeon attended, but all attempts to restore life were ineffectual.

(II, 350-51)

As with actual slavery, mixed motives seem to be at work here. Clearly, employers who use these boys as chimney sweepers presumably stand to profit from their labor. So losing the boys might involve financial loss to the employers, if they're not able to hire others quickly. Nonetheless, even stronger motives seem to be impelling them, so that they force the boys to perform tasks resulting in harmful and even fatal consequences. In the first instance, it's almost as if the boy's being asked to perform an impossible task is simply a pretext, disguising the employer's real wish to beat the boy. Obviously it's not just punishment for having failed to do something —when the boy can't work for 2 weeks his disability or injury might even pose

a problem for his employer. Likewise in the second instance it's hard to believe the employer doesn't know what's going on: either inhalation of smoke and fumes, or the unbearable heat of the chimney plus the grate, or both together, were bound to kill him. It's also hard to believe the master becomes "apprehensive that something had happened" only after sending the boy down: if the master's on top of the roof you can't help thinking he himself would feel the heat coming up from the chimney. Notice too how, in the attempt to rescue the boy, the master hardly seems to be involved—instead, it's almost as if he's disappeared from the scene, nor do we hear anything about his remorse for having sent the boy down.

One significant aspect of 19th century urban life as cities became increasingly crowded was the difficulty—if not impossibility—of doing anything without being observed by somebody else. Nowhere was this more evident than with the group known as sewage-hunters.

[PPT 2: 5]

You try to get rid of something—or perhaps you simply lose it—and thanks to these people, it resurfaces. In vol. II of London Labour and the London Poor Mayhew gives an incredible list of the items sewage-hunters would turn up. But sewage-hunters also attest to another, grimmer aspect of 19th century city life: sanitation, or, more frequently, the lack of it. Even Mayhew himself can't help talking about the growing problem of metropolitan sewage in London:

There has been, also, an increase of sewers in the metropolis, because an increase of streets and inhabited houses.... Another matter has too, of late years, added to the amount of sewage—the abolition of cesspoolage in a considerable degree, owing to the late Building and Sanitary Acts, so that foecal and culinary matters, which were drained into the cesspool (to be removed by the nightmen), are now drained into the sewer.

ordinary daily amount discharged into the river: 9,502,720 cubic ft.

annual amount: 3,650,000,000 cubic ft.

(II, 388)

Here Mayhew merely harks back to the celebrated account by Edwin Chadwick:

Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain, 1842.

The case for London was especially fearful, with Chadwick commenting on how cholera and dysentery were resulting from no sewage removal, and how (to save expense) London cesspools had had no cartage (removal) for years (pp. 116-17). At this point in time it's hard even to imagine the extent of the filth, and its pervasiveness.

Chadwick's report had caused a scandal when it first appeared, leading to cries for sanitary reform. Sooner said than done, however. In some ways sanitary reform became, for the Victorian period, a kind of rallying point for all the different kinds of social reform possible: because it's so simple, because the condition it attacked was so extreme, because the consequences of doing nothing were so clearly harmful, it becomes a way of trying to alter life as the most basic level.

Yet even here, despite all the publicity, it's still possible years later (as we'll soon see) for Dickens to talk about the same situation.

Meanwhile, I want to look at one more instance of objectification in the urban scene, one that sheds light especially on the sinister link between objectification and labor. Here I'm thinking of the group charged with unloading coal from the boats that docked on the London quays:

[PPT 2:6]

This group, consisting of workers called coal-whippers, found itself peculiarly subject to exploitation. In vol. III Mayhew explained how that exploitation worked:

The coal-whippers, previous to the passing of the Act of Parliament in 1843, were employed and paid by the publicans in the neighbourhood of the river, from Tower-hill to Lime-house. Under this system, none but the most dissolute and intemperate obtained employment; in fact, the more intemperate they were, the more readily they found work. The publicans were the relatives of the northern shipowners; they mostly had come to London penniless, and being placed in a tavern by their relatives, soon became shipowners themselves.... When a ship came to be "made up," that is, for the hands to be hired, the men assembled round the bar in crowds and began calling for drink, and outbidding each other in the extent of their orders, so as to induce the landlord to give them employment.... When the men returned from their work they went back to the

public-house, and there remained drinking the greater part of the night.... The consequence of this was... that frequently, on the publican settling with them after leaving the ship, instead of having anything to receive, they were brought in several shillings in debt....

(III, 235-36)

It's a pernicious system: in order to work, you have to drink, and once you start drinking it becomes addictive. Even the publicans (= pub-owners) are just part of the system, having been placed in London by the shipowners who are perhaps the real source of the evil. Here we might say that the logic of labor as Marx described it seems to have gone horribly awry: instead of work resulting in an accumulation of capital, we have a situation where more gets consumed (i.e., in drink) than produced. But it gets worse—because rather than just resulting in a deficit, what we really have is a situation where the source of that deficit (addiction to drink) is precisely what fuels a never-ending labor cycle: drink \Rightarrow work \Rightarrow drink, and so on indefinitely.

It's high time now to see the impact all these conditions have on Victorian literature. And here I can think of no better example than a seemingly minor episode from David Copperfield, one which however—as is typical of Dickens—turns out to have important ramifications later in the novel. I'm thinking of the episode in which David Copperfield, seemingly unaware of what he's doing, follows a young woman he recognizes down to the Thames river. First, take a look

at the illustration.

[PPT 2:7]

And now, the text:

As if she were a part of the refuse it had cast out, and left to corruption and decay, the girl we had followed strayed down to the river's brink, and stood in the midst of this night-picture, lonely and still, looking at the water....

I think she was talking to herself. I am sure, although absorbed in gazing at the water, that her shawl was off her shoulders, and that she was muffling her hands in it, in an unsettled and bewildered way, more like the action of a sleep-walker than a waking person. I know, and never can forget, that there was that in her wild manner which gave me no assurance but that she would sink before my eyes, until I had her arm within my grasp.

At the same moment I said "Martha!"

She uttered a terrified scream, and struggled with me with such strength that I doubt if I could have held her alone. But a stronger hand than mine was laid upon her....

"Oh, the river!" she cried passionately. "Oh, the river!"

"I know it's like me!" she exclaimed. "I know that I belong to it.... It comes from country places, where there was once no harm in it—and it creeps through the dismal streets, defiled and miserable—and it goes away, like my life, to a great sea, that is always troubled—and I feel that I must go with it!"

(pp. 580-81)

Note the seemingly irresistible pull taking the young woman downward toward the river, which appears to be the central motif here. Like Chadwick, Dickens knows all about the river as receptacle of all the sewage of London. So at the very outset the young woman's compared to the "refuse" the river washes ashore. Hence the logic underlying the movement in this episode: the river casts Martha ashore, but eventually will take her back. And indeed her movements, "more like the action of a sleep-walker than a waking person," seem purely instinctive. In other words, she instinctively wants to go down to her destruction. Just as she's about to throw herself into the river, however, David grabs her by the arm, simultaneously calling out her name: "Martha!" The name is significant. On first seeing it, I couldn't help feeling its vaguely Biblical, even specifically New Testament ring.

As it turns out, Martha's a sister of Lazarus, whom Jesus resurrects from the dead (John 11: 1-44). In fact, on first seeing Jesus, Martha even says: "I know he would not have died if you had been here." Whereupon Jesus tells her Lazarus will rise from the dead. And when she takes this to mean only at the last day, Jesus makes the well-known assertion ("I am the Resurrection and the Life. . .") to which Dickens would recur with telling effect at the end of A Tale of Two Cities. The same sense of supernatural agency occurs here, as David Copperfield says "A stronger hand than mine was laid upon her" to prevent her from drowning herself.

Literally, it's that of Daniel Peggotty, but metaphorically Dickens obviously means to suggest divine intervention. We're not done yet, though, with the river motif.

Martha says “It comes from country places, where there was once no harm in it—and it creeps through the dismal streets, defiled and miserable—and it goes away, like my life, to a great sea. . . .” Reformers like Chadwick were well aware that using the Thames to drain away street filth meant contamination of London’s drinking water. And even the coal-whippers complain to Mayhew about it. Hence Martha’s talking about the river on its passage through London as “defiled and miserable.” So the only acceptable end would appear to be getting taken away to the great sea, that oceanic feeling Dickens himself (in Dombey and Son) and later Freud would equate with the final deathward passage. Nonetheless, thanks to David Copperfield and Daniel Peggotty, it doesn’t quite happen. Instead, a new logic takes over: if the river was clean once, it can, by sanitary reform, become clean again. And likewise for Martha: contaminated by urban forces, she can likewise be saved by other urban forces. The closeness, the proximity of things within the urban scene opens up the possibility that someone might be watching over her.

We now fast-forward roughly 50 years, to the end of the century and a different place: Paris, rather than London. It’s no accident that when Lambert Strether first arrives in Paris (Henry James, The Ambassadors), he feels an irresistible impulse to walk. And so he does, from the Tuileries on the Right Bank all the way down to the Jardin du Luxembourg in the 6th, on the other side of the river. From 1850 to 1870 (and later) Paris under the Baron Haussmann and Napoleon III had gone through a remarkable transformation, which saw it pass

from a city of narrow, cramped medieval streets and crowded *quartiers* to the wide avenues with which we're now familiar. As a result, Paris had become more visible, more graspable as a totality. I've recently been reading about the "Haussmannization" of Paris. You can find excellent background on the history of it in the pioneering work by David Pinkney, [Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris](#). And for a detailed sense of what's happening architecturally, François Loyer, [Paris Nineteenth Century: Architecture and Urbanism](#) is exemplary. What these sources and others make clear is that by the time Lambert Strether arrives (1902/03) it's a changed city. So while London, as Sir John Summerson shows ([Georgian London](#) and [The Architecture of Victorian London](#)), made only meager efforts at a modern structuring, Paris had redefined itself. Small wonder, then, that after Strether walks through the heart of Paris he's led almost irresistibly to seeing it as one vast, gleaming totality:

His greatest uneasiness seemed to peep at him out of the imminent impression that almost any acceptance of Paris might give one's authority away. It hung before him this morning, the vast bright Babylon, like some huge iridescent object, a jewel brilliant and hard, in which parts were not to be discriminated nor differences comfortably marked. It twinkled and trembled and melted together, and what seemed all surface one moment seemed all depth the next. It was a place of which, unmistakably, Chad was fond; wherefore if he, Strether, should like it too much, what on earth, with such a bond, would become of either of them?

(I, 89)

One reason why Strether finds it hard to discriminate parts of this totality is that Haussmann and his architects had imposed a relatively uniform style on all the avenues they revamped: so you've got, typically, buildings of roughly the same height (4-5 stories), with a particular style of roof, similar window trim and a uniform treatment of buildings where streets came to an end in some larger square. The upshot is a Paris of imposing vistas, one where it's now possible to see for great distances, all the way to some major architectural landmark or monument. And this had made, in effect, for a different way of taking in the city. So while mid-19th century London, the London of Dickens and Mayhew, was all about relationships between people crowded together into an involuntary intimacy in which everything you do is watched or observed even without your suspecting, the Paris of Strether and Chad Newsome is about people and their relationships in distinct, particular places. Chad's place on the Boulevard Malesherbes, for instance, is on one of those boulevards redone by the Haussmann builders, while Mme de Vionnet's apartment, in a building off the street which you access through a porte cochère, suggests a distinctly older quarter. And even when Strether enters her apartment, there's very much a sense of interior structuring, provided by the sequence or succession of rooms through which they pass. My point, then, is that the transformation of Paris under Haussmann had made for a different way of seeing not only the city but the people in it: from now on, people are placed by where they live, within a larger structuring that constantly encourages the inhabitant or visitor to project a totality. And this is part of a new effort at

dominance through knowledge or omniscience. In fact, Victorian cities (other than London) were making a similar effort: as Asa Briggs points out in Victorian Cities, almost all the major 19th century English cities had a particular building designed to be the highest point, from which each city in its entirety would be visible (pp. 73-74). But only in Paris was that goal of visibility most fully realized.

I can touch on the urban scene in Modernism only briefly. Specifically, I want to call your attention to the magnificent evocation by Hart Crane of a New York landmark, Brooklyn Bridge:

Through the bound cable strands, the arching path
Upward, veering with light, the flight of strings,—
Taut miles of shuttling moonlight syncopate
The whispered rush, telepathy of wires.
Up the index of night, granite and steel—
Transparent meshes—fleckless the gleaming staves—
Sibylline voices flicker, waveringly stream
As though a god were issue of the strings. . . .

(The Bridge, VIII: “Atlantis”)

What I can't help noticing here is the effort to transform a modern structure

(Brooklyn Bridge) into something distinctly older, the celebrated Romantic motif of the Aeolian harp. Yet the idiom remains decisively modernist, decisively 20th century. So we have “Taut miles of shuttling moonlight” that “syncopate” (echoes of jazz) the “whispered rush.” And the materials involved (“granite and steel”) are, likewise, emphatically modern. So even if what finally issues from this bridge are “Sibylline voices,” we can nonetheless see these as very much a 20th century creation, committed to the forging of a poesis not backward-looking to the Romantic era but one very much meant for the modern age.

III. Plaisirs/Pleasures

[Visconti, The Leopard: 221:13-221:26, 240:17-240:47, 242:34-242:44]

In terms of culture or ideology, pleasure (after classical antiquity) is very much a 19th century creation. Yes, the eighteenth century knew pleasure. But there's still a guilty feeling about it. The countess or marquise who raved over the pleasure of ice cream comes to mind: "a pity that eating it isn't a sin!" So we have the waltz, an 18th century German invention, but one that really begins to take off only in the early 19th century, the era of Byron. Here you have one of the most beautiful re-creations of what the waltz might've looked like in its prime, depicted by Luchino Visconti at the end of The Leopard as a last farewell to Sicilian aristocracy. It isn't just the splendor of the palace or fancy dress (though having these doesn't hurt), it's above all the elegance of movement. We might well ask how long it's been since we've seen elegance associated with pleasure. . . .

When I started to think about doing a talk on pleasure I couldn't help wondering whether it made sense to discuss pleasure as having a history. As you've already no doubt noticed, the framework of these 6 talks is basically historical. With the rise of the sciences or the urban scene, that obviously makes sense. But whether

pleasure can be talked about as having a history is still a question. After all, we still experience pleasure from many of the things that gave people pleasure in the nineteenth century. So we might wonder whether it's legitimate to impose a historical framework here at all. Nonetheless, I'm going to try to talk about pleasure historically. What this will mean is presenting a sequence or succession of different forms of pleasure, and then asking what historical significance we might be able to find in the occurrence of any or all of these at a given historical moment or time. To explain why I give a split French/English title: one of the points I'll be trying to make is that the modern ideology of pleasure is in many ways a French invention. When I first started to think about it, in fact, I soon came to realize that in a lot of mid-19th century British or or American literature, pleasure appears only marginally. And certainly nobody seems very eager to talk about it. So it's only because of authors like Baudelaire that we get anything like an aesthetics, or an ideology, of pleasure. Nonetheless, by the end of the nineteenth century it's pretty clear that pleasure is very much in place as something to be talked about. All the same, we need to be careful not to confuse pleasure with aestheticism. Yes, there's an aesthetics of pleasure, but that isn't the same thing as aestheticism defined as a pursuit of beauty. You can have pleasure without beauty, even if the reverse isn't quite true. And the fact that pleasure didn't have to involve beauty made it a different kind of category, one that was somehow outside the realm of what we call values. And that in turn made it in some ways even more dangerous: because it was unplaceable, unclassifiable, pleasure could show up anywhere, unexpectedly, thereby posing a challenge

to any and all systems of value. Hence too, we might say, the source of its appeal.

The first form of pleasure I want to talk about is gambling. Gambling is very much an 18th century form of pleasure. It starts with the aristocracy (especially in England), who have (1) lots of money and (2) nothing to do with their time. This is important: the real background to gambling in its 18th century context is boredom, or ennui. And this is why gambling particularly took off in England. In France, to earn your aristocratic distinction, to get people to respect you, you had to look clever in conversation. Hence all the salons where people—notably, both men and women—would try to practice or hone their wit. In Germany there were other forms of culture, like music-making (Frederick the Great was a pretty good flute-player). But in England, where the aristocracy had little to do other than politics or hunting, people got bored pretty easily. After all, you can't hunt at night. And listening to long political speeches after dinner can be a real strain. So the famous gambling houses (or hells, as they were sometimes called) arose in London. And people would lose fabulous sums there. I remember reading about the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, who started off with an income of £60,000 a year (probably equivalent to \$5,000,000 - \$7,000,000). After a few years of gambling, they'd managed to reduce their income to just £10,000 a year. Keep in mind, too, that this is all interest or revenue from property—think how much they had to lose of the principal in order to have only that

amount of interest income! So we might wonder why they did it. Byron—who didn't start off as an aristocrat but only became one later, thereby making him, probably, much more insightful about the group and its ways—offers in his Detached Thoughts a pretty good answer:

I have a notion that Gamblers are as happy as most people—being always excited;—women—wine—fame—the table—even Ambition—sate now & then—but every turn of the card—& cast of the dice—keeps the Gambler alive—besides one can Game ten times longer than one can do anything else.— When Macco (or whatever they spell it) was introduced I gave up the whole thing—for I loved and missed the rattle and dash of the box & dice—and the glorious uncertainty not only of good luck or bad luck—but of any luck at all—as one sometimes had to throw often to decide at all.

(9: 23)

Here the point seems to be that any outcome that can cause one to wait in suspense is better than no outcome at all. So Byron can talk in Don Juan about the pleasures of winning and losing. And paradoxically, losing might be even more fun than winning, since it might yield an even bigger thrill (the thrill of going into debt, of having to borrow money somewhere, of everything connected with trouble and uncertainty). Once again, we need to see all this against a background of boredom or ennui. If you've got a lot of money, winning some

more isn't likely to produce any big thrill (especially if you can't even think of ways to spend it anyway). But losing money—if that might mean getting into trouble with creditors, having to conceal a debt from a wife or husband, could produce a much bigger frisson. Presumably that's also why Byron prefers dice to Macao, a somewhat drawn out card game. What he wants to feel, clearly, is uncertainty. With dice (hopefully) there's no skill involved—it's pure chance. No mind games, no trying to figure out what anybody else is thinking. Clearly, too, gambling doesn't involve anything like moral values. In terms of moral value, it's presumably better to win than to lose your money (unless it's going to some charity rather than the bank or the croupier). But the possibility of a complete separation between the excitement of gambling (which, as we've seen, could even be increased by losing) and moral values meant that pleasure had become a kind of free radical, capable of attaching to anything and as a result much more exciting. . . .

While gambling is the favorite late 18th century pastime, the waltz might well figure as the dominant early 19th century passion. People couldn't get enough of it, everybody wanted to do it. Even Byron (hindered by his clubfoot) asked about his prospective wife: “does Annabella waltz?” At this point in time, we might well wonder how it ever got to be so fashionable. Nowadays, nobody knows how to waltz unless they've taken classes in what's called ballroom dancing, and typically the people who do that are of an older generation.

Well, unfortunately I didn't learn when I was young, nor have I felt sufficiently attracted in more recent years to take ballroom dancing classes.

As a result I came to grief on a particular occasion some years ago. Having unwisely agreed to be best man at the wedding of a friend, I found myself being asked to waltz by the bridesmaid. Her feeling seemed to be that we "ought to try to set a good example." Alas, we did exactly the opposite: we couldn't seem to get our steps in sync at all, and blundered around in a horribly awkward fashion on the dance floor (as it turns out, she didn't know how to waltz either).

Nonetheless, I found this experience unexpectedly useful years later when I was doing research on Byron and the world of the English aristocracy (memorialized in the later cantos of Don Juan) during his time. What I realized from my awkward dance episode was that the waltz (which looks so easy when you see it in the older movies) depends not only on a knowledge of the appropriate steps but on the partners being perfectly in sync. And since people don't always dance with people they've partnered before, this means learning—or adjusting—very quickly. In other words, it's all about how well, or how quickly, you're able to get into a rhythm with other people. That's why someone like Fabrizio, the Prince of Salina, is congratulated by Angelica Sedara on being an excellent dancer—it suggests he gets the hang of how to be with her very quickly, and even manages the timing and coordination of moves so as to make her dancing with him an exhilarating exercise. In other words, it's on some level an exercise in getting to know other people, in what we might call intersubjectivity. That's why Byron asks about his prospective wife if she knows how to waltz.

What he really wants to know is: is she good with other people? I also realized some other things from my unfortunate dance episode as well. I'm from that 1960s generation whose form of dance meant you never touched the other person. So when I was asked to dance by the bridesmaid, I experienced an unexpected sensation from having her hand in mine and my hand around her waist.

I suspect all those early 19th century people probably felt likewise when the waltz initially burst onto the scene. If you look at a film like Abel Gance's Austerlitz you'll notice Napoleon and his court going through the steps of what appears to be a kind of minuet. Significantly, partners barely touch each other, and most of the moves they undertake are performed separately, rather than together (they seem to come together only at the beginning and end of each dance). So it must have been quite a thrill when partners could hold each other as they do in the waltz.

This, then, was part of the pleasure: at a time of minimal physical contact between people of opposite sexes, the waltz no doubt had a subtly erotic quality.

Even much later in the century, Mme Arnoux in Flaubert's L'Education sentimentale comes to a startling realization when Frédéric Moreau kisses her on her exposed wrist rather than her gloved hand on meeting her by chance at a ball. "Il m'aime, il m'aime," she says to herself. Finally, one other aspect of the waltz seems worth pointing out. If you watch the Prince and Angelica in The Leopard or, more recently, Count Almásy and Katharine Clifton in The English Patient, you'll see that people have a lot of time to talk while they're waltzing. And that's important anytime when circumstances don't make for easy one-to-one access between men and women.

Because what it makes possible is the pleasure of intimacy. Intimacy,

specifically, between two people who otherwise might not have the chance to get to know each other. Taken together, then, what all these aspects of the waltz point to is a discovery of pleasure from intersubjectivity. So if gambling (late 18th century pleasure) is in many ways a solipsistic activity, what the waltz ushered in was a new era in which individual awareness or consciousness becomes interwoven with that of others. If pleasure depends on crossing some abyss of uncertainty or unknowability, getting to know others—and even getting into intimacy with others—might well yield pleasure from a sense of crossing what might well seem the ultimate boundary of unknowability.

[PPT 3: 2]

What you're looking at here is a photo of a restaurant, in Paris. At one point, it was one of the 3 or 4 most celebrated eating places in the French capital. Its fame goes back to the nineteenth century. So Proust, who refers to a number of the restaurants that were fashionable around the turn of the century, has a mention of Lapérouse in his Recherche. Sadly, it fell into neglect some decades ago. Recently, however, thanks to a much-needed facelift, it's now restored to the way it looked in the days of its former glory. It's of interest to us here because of the role it played in the emergence of a new pleasure, one that was very much a 19th century Paris discovery: gastronomy. What people suddenly realized was that culinary pleasure was about a lot more than just food. In fact, food

was just the beginning. That's why restaurants came into play. Because in restaurants, even more than in your own home, you could control all the factors that played a role in arriving at what we call culinary pleasure. And as we look at this interior shot of Lapérouse, we can actually see quite a few of these on display. Note, first, our location: one or two stories above street level, just high enough to get a little distance from the street noise, but still close enough to be able to take in the bright human scene with all its bustle and activity, which can be pleasant when you're just an onlooker. Next, the lighting: plenty of daylight, but not too bright, just enough to gently caress the impeccable white table linen, its folds softly falling. And, so that we don't have dark corners, a bit of interior lighting, but always warm, yet restrained. Next, the spacing of the tables, at an adequate distance from each other. And finally, the table itself with just the right number of accessories. Clearly, then, before we even get to the food, a lot of other matters come into play.

But while the early 19th century Paris restaurant scene no doubt helped to heighten awareness of cuisine, gastronomy as a comprehensive analysis of all the factors involved in culinary pleasure might be said to have come about through the appearance of a single book: Brillat-Savarin, Physiologie du Goût (1826). In this 2-volume work, Brillat-Savarin exhaustively studies all the things you need to think about: number of guests, setting, kinds of dishes and the sequence in which they're to be served, wine/food pairings, what to do for the end of the meal, even the hour at which guests should arrive and leave—in other words, all the conditions necessary for the ultimate “plaisir de la table.” His recipe

for success:

no more than 12, well-lighted/sufficiently warm room, limited no. of dishes,
wine of best quality, food most substantial \Rightarrow lightest, wine most lampant (oily,
fiery) \Rightarrow most perfumed, coffee boiling hot, liqueurs esp. selected by host,
dinner as end of day, no one leaves before 11 pm but all by midnight.

(I, 343-45)

What's significant here is the interplay of all the different factors. Food has to be matched with the right wine, of course, but just as important—maybe even more so—is the sequence, moving from heavier to lighter. In subtle ways the mindset of the diners also seems to matter: so you want enough people to make for a lively conversation but not a crowd, and you want them to be comfortable, at their ease (warm, well-lighted room). A sense of time matters as well: so dinner at the end of the day because you don't want anybody worrying about having to go anywhere else, but not protracted to such a late hour as to cause fatigue.

In a sense, we might think of gastronomy (in the terms defined by Brillat-Savarin) as the beginning of modern pleasure: unlike gambling, it's not a simple pleasure, and unlike even the waltz, it reaches out beyond another person to a much larger sphere. So just as most of our experiences involve more than a relationship to just one other person, this kind of pleasure,

you might say, reaches us where we live and are. But it does that in other ways as well. Brillat-Savarin knows culinary pleasure isn't just about the sensory or the physical, that it's in fact much more affected by our mindset or our mood. In other words, he's very much aware of how even what's supposedly purely physical can depend much more than we realize on our subjective state. So gastronomy tries to shape all those factors affecting subjectivity, not restricting itself to food alone. Because he tries to take all these factors into account, Brillat-Savarin, despite his 18th century taste, is in many ways forward-looking.

Not surprisingly, then, perhaps the best illustration I can think of for gastronomy as Brillat-Savarin envisioned it comes not from his own time but from a novel published three-quarters of a century later. Here I'm thinking of Henry James, The Ambassadors, and specifically of the scene where Strether has lunch with Mme de Vionnet:

It was on this pleasant basis of costly disorder, consequently, that they eventually seated themselves, on either side of a small table, at a window adjusted to the busy quay and the shining barge-burdened Seine; where, for an hour, in the matter of letting himself go, of diving deep, Strether was to feel he had touched bottom. He was to feel many things on this occasion, and one of the first of them was that he had travelled far since that evening in London... when his dinner with Maria Gostrey... had struck him as requiring so many explanations. He had at that time gathered them in, the explanations—he had stored them up; but it was at present as if he had either soared above or sunk below them.... How could he wish it to be lucid for others, for

any one, that he, for the hour, saw reasons enough in the mere way the bright clean ordered water-side life came in at the open window? —the mere way Madame de Vionnet, opposite him over their intensely white table-linen, their omelette aux tomates, their bottle of straw-coloured Chablis, thanked him for everything almost with the smile of a child, while her grey eyes moved in and out of their talk, back to the quarter of the warm spring air, in which early summer had already begun to throb, and then back again to his face and their human questions.

(II: 13-14)

Here we see, in effect, so many of the factors touched on by Brillat-Savarin: the people, the food, the time, the mood. In fact, the restaurant where Strether and Madame de Vionnet find themselves might very well be Lapérouse. And that would help us to fill in so much more of the picture. James says only “a wonderful, a delightful house of entertainment on the left bank — a place of pilgrimage for the knowing, they were both aware, the knowing who came, for its great renown, the homage of restless days, from the other end of the town.”

Of the famous Paris restaurants at the turn of the century (the Café Anglais, Lapérouse, the Tour d’Argent, maybe the Ritz) only 2 are located on the quays of the Left Bank, and of these only Lapérouse is at a level allowing one to take in fully the waterside activity of the “shining barge-burdened Seine.” In any case, what we have here is the interplay of many different factors: color (the intensely white table linen, the straw-colored wine), the vivid, sensual appeal of the scenery (the Seine, the warm spring air),

flavor (the omelette aux tomates), and finally, of course, the human intimacy. Gastronomy, then, isn't just about food. Ultimately, it's about our receptivity to the entire dining scene, our capacity to take in and appreciate all the aspects of it, all the complexity out of which it's composed. In that respect, you might say, it shows itself as a distinctly modern pleasure, by the way it forces us to take pleasure specifically in its complexity.

[PPT 3:3]

The final form of pleasure I want to talk about is also a Paris invention, as suggested by its French name: *flânerie*. Literally, it means strolling. But the larger overtone is one of wandering, specifically through a city. More than anyone else, the French poet Charles Baudelaire was probably the one responsible for coming up with this particular pastime. Baudelaire cast himself in his poems as a *flâneur* because he liked the hint of apparent aimlessness about it, which he wanted to oppose to the always purposeful activity of the bourgeoisie. As Baudelaire saw it, aimlessness itself conveyed pleasure because it meant a release from the constant pushy, go-getter mentality. This release from such drivenness, in turn, was what allowed someone to be fully immersed in the feeling of leisure. But leisure, for Baudelaire, isn't quite the same as idleness in the sense of inactivity. Rather, it's a kind of creative aimlessness that's only apparently aimless. On some deeper level, in other words, there's a kind of formative impulse behind all the apparent aimlessness, the *flânerie* that looks like aimless wandering

which is really a gathering of impressions for some as-yet-undisclosed use in the future. So Baudelaire can say “J’ai grandi par le loisir” (I’ve grown through leisure). In fact, then, flânerie is really a form of creative play. And once again, perhaps one of the best places to see this is in James’s Ambassadors. After the tension of his meeting with Mrs. Newsome’s other “ambassadors,” rising to a climax in his ugly confrontation with Sarah Pocock, Strether can at last feel the release of a temporary escape from Paris into the countryside, the leisure of no longer being on duty and finally just having his time to himself:

He observed in respect to his train almost no condition save that it should stop a few times after getting out of the banlieue; he threw himself on the general amiability of the day for the hint of where to alight.... It made its sign, the suggestion—weather, air, light, colour and his mood all favouring—at the end of some eighty minutes; the train pulled up just at the right spot, and he found himself getting out as securely as if to keep an appointment.... the poplars and willows, the reeds and river.... fell into a composition, full of felicity.... Moreover he was freely walking about in it. He did this last, for an hour, to his heart’s content.... It was a wonder, no doubt, that the taste of idleness for him shouldn’t need more time to sweeten; but it had in fact taken the few previous days; it had been sweetening in truth ever since the retreat of the Pococks. He walked and walked as if to show himself how little he had now to do; he had nothing to do but turn off to some hillside where he might stretch himself and hear the poplars rustle, and whence—in the course of an afternoon so spent... —he should sufficiently command the scene to be able to pick out just the right

little rustic inn for an experiment in respect to dinner.

(II, 246-47)

Notice here how, even as he's just apparently wandering, Strether's in fact shaping his course, forming a whole scenario in his mind. So what looks like pure flânerie is in fact actually a preliminary, a prelude to art. In this respect, we might say, flânerie, like so much else in Baudelaire, looks forward to Modernism.

The apparently aimless wandering that's really a gathering of impressions is also the organizing of these into an ordered whole: "these fragments I have shored against my ruins" (Eliot, The Waste Land) becoming the movement of a modern poesis.

IV. Crime

[Melville, Le Cercle Rouge: 93:46-95:01]

[Dassin, Rififi: 20:32-21:42]

I want to start with two cinematic views of crime, which both have the merit of exposing the close link between crime and the urban scene—a link that’s especially important for France. You might call these the view from the rooftop and the view from the street. In fact, the two films are circumstantially connected. For years, Jean-Pierre Melville had wanted to make a film based on an elaborate jewel heist. But when Jules Dassin preempted him by coming out with a film based on a very similar plot, Melville decided to shelve his idea for a while. Ultimately, Le Cercle Rouge appeared more than a decade later. Both films are about an ingenious heist perpetrated on a famous jewelry establishment adjacent to the Place Vendome. In the first video excerpt, we get a view from the rooftop, as two of the thieves prepare to break into the jeweler’s from above. In the second, we get the view from the street, with the head thief taking his protégé through the paces by asking him to list, from memory, all the shops on the Rue de la Paix occupying the block where the heist will take place. What the two excerpts show is how crime is based on a detailed knowledge of the urban scene. In both instances, the thieves know exactly the layout of the place they’re trying to rob. Their success depends on their

ability to exploit features of the urban location of the shop (connectedness to other buildings, early morning city routine) which they know intimately.

My main point in this talk, however, will be to try to show how the depiction of crime in 19th century literature involves crossovers—from crime into normal society and then the reverse, normal society into crime. A somewhat similar point was made decades ago in the field of urban studies by Louis Chevalier, with his classic study Laboring Classes, Dangerous Classes. Chevalier showed how the 19th century Paris bourgeoisie tried to assimilate the working class of Paris to the criminal class, as a way of distancing itself from that group. But what happens in literature is slightly different: rather than erect a barrier, authors seem to be more interested in transgressing it. As a result, it becomes increasingly difficult to tell the difference between what's criminal and what's normal. And this is precisely what the authors have in mind: a deliberate blurring of the boundaries as a way of getting us to ask what moral behavior really consists of. By showing criminal classes engaged in activity whose logic is strikingly similar to that of normal society, literature induces us to wonder whether there's really any essential difference between us and people we took to be so very different from ourselves. Likewise, by showing how easy it is for normal society to get into what we'd normally think of as criminal behavior, authors are able to show how easy it is to slip, becoming what we thought we'd never be. And that in turn forces us to think about other people who've slipped, and

whether they're as culpable as we thought they were. The upshot of all this is something like a reassessment of values. Rather than thinking of these as absolute (i.e., linked to something eternal, unalterable), the nineteenth century seems to be moving toward a notion of these as merely human and hence relative. As we think of different social groups with different codes of behavior, then, we might likewise think of people having different moral values where no one set has absolute primacy. So what Nietzsche envisioned in his late years as a "Revaluation of All Values" had in fact in various ways already been taking place throughout the nineteenth century.

I want to start with the "Memoirs" of François-Eugène Vidocq, possibly the best-known criminal of the early 19th century. This master-criminal, a thief but never a murderer—as he himself proudly says—decides at some point to give up the life of crime for that of a police informer. Predictably, given his talents, it isn't long before he becomes chief of the secret police in Paris. "It takes one to know one," and if that's true there couldn't have been a better chief than Vidocq, who clearly knew every trick in the book. Unfortunately his "Memoirs" are something of a tangle, the first volume (according to Vidocq) having been somewhat rewritten by someone else during a period when he had no access to it, and the last being clearly the work of romancier who doesn't even bother to have Vidocq tell his story in the first person. Nonetheless, from volumes 2 and 3 it's possible to extract at least a couple episodes that seem to have the stamp

of authenticity.

The first of these involves someone named Watrin (note the similarity to Balzac's Vautrin), the most celebrated counterfeiter in Paris. It's almost impossible to catch him, because his movements are so elusive that no one can ever amass any evidence of his criminal activity. But Vidocq figures it out. The trick is to follow him so as to find out where he lives. Then Vidocq takes up as a lodger in the same tenement (this way he can keep better track of Watrin's constant comings + goings). And that's a trick Vidocq employs repeatedly. Everybody has to live somewhere. And the thing about criminals is that, just like ordinary people, they usually have a particular neighborhood, a quartier, they favor. So you first have to find out their quartier, then their exact apartment building, and then take up residence in the same place. In other words, you have to live with him, be with him, so as to get to know his movements and ways. Once Vidocq's managed to track Watrin, he has opportunities to nab him. Nonetheless, the counterfeiter almost gets away, squeezing into a closet on the stairs of his apartment building where he's physically inaccessible. But Vidocq outsmarts him by pretending (quite audibly) to go down the stairs so that Watrin will think he's gone. And that's how he finally manages to get him.

My second Vidocq story is about another famous Paris criminal named Saint-Germain, one who's got a whole gang of robbers. This gang's very professional—they do their work very quickly and efficiently. So the only way Vidocq can catch them in the act is to become part of their gang. But that's not so easy. Paris gangs, as it turns out, have their own slang, their own argot, which police

infiltrators usually don't know. In addition, they're always on the lookout for informers. So Vidocq has to disguise himself and get accepted into their gang. In that way, too, these thieves are like normal people: they've got their own social group, and have ways of sniffing out any outsiders who might be trying to gain entry into their group. But even after Vidocq's done that, it's not over. Because someone like Saint-Germain is always suspicious of new accomplices, he insists at one moment that the whole gang has to stay together until they've committed the robbery (i.e., no chance for anyone to get away and rat them out). A problem for Vidocq. But he gets around it by contriving to have his wife bring refreshments (beer) for the group, then slipping a message to her when he embraces her. As a result of his message, she follows him incognito and he can then drop her a message about the location of the crime. In this way the police, informed by her, are finally able to catch Saint-Germain's gang in the act.

Balzac's Vidocq look-alike (= Vautrin = abbé Carlos Herrera = Jacques Collin) appears in a number of places throughout the Comédie humaine, but perhaps most memorably in Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes. In effect, there are 2 "courtesans" in the novel: Lucien de Rubempré (of Illusions perdues fame) as the "courtesan" of Jacques Collin, and Esther Gobseck as the "courtesan" of the Baron Nucingen, banker and wealthiest person in Paris. Here my point is that Balzac has the arch-criminal Jacques Collin coming off no worse than the Baron Nucingen (and possibly better). Unlike the Baron, Jacques Collin arguably feels a genuine love for his "courtesan" Lucien, who is in many ways

Collin's own creation. Together they use Esther Gobseck to squeeze money out of the Baron, who's become infatuated with her after just a fleeting glimpse. Lucien needs a lot of money (60,000FF to pay off debts + 1,000,000FF to redeem the Rubempré property so he can marry Clotilde de Grandlieu). But the Baron Nucingen doesn't really care about Esther Gobseck: after he makes love with her, she commits suicide. Arguably, there's love everywhere in the novel except between Nucingen and Esther: between Jacques Collin and Lucien, between Lucien and Esther Gobseck. Yes, Jacques Collin and Lucien "use" Esther to raise money, but only because they have no other way to raise such an enormous sum. And no one quite anticipated Esther's suicide, which comes about partly because of what she feels for Lucien. But the Baron's "use" of Esther is no different from his use of many other people and things on his way to becoming the richest man in Paris. Of course, there's an element of heartlessness in every instance of "use": Jacques Collin has to "use" Lucien because he loves him as an embodiment of the self he could never be. But Balzac's point, I take it, is that all these instances of "use" aren't terribly different from each other, whether by the ultra-respectable banker or the arch-criminal, and that, if anything, Jacques Collin comes off as marginally better.

I want to shift now to the Victorian scene and, specifically, to how crime is deeply linked to identity issues. Basically, my argument here is that when you're not sure of who or what you are, it's a lot easier to stray from normalcy or

social respectability over to criminal activity. And the author who I think exemplifies this best is Wilkie Collins. Partly because he sees identities or selves as very fluid anyway, Collins was well suited to making this point. But I think it's also significant that Collins chose to make it especially with women. Maybe it's because women in Victorian society have a harder time trying to create their own identity (they're barred from most jobs and other forms of activity by which people create their own identity). In any case, it seems that once women slip or somehow lose their social identity, they enter into a kind of free fall from which it's even harder to get that identity back. And if they have to do it themselves, the ways open to them can look awfully close to what we now think of as unethical, if not criminal, activity.

The first Collins novel I want to use to make this point is the highly intriguing No Name. It starts off with a secret: Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Vanstone weren't legally married (because of his prior marriage). As soon as he finds out about his first wife's death, he and Mrs. Vanstone hurry to repair the omission. But before he can remake his will, he unfortunately dies in an unexpected train accident (these plot twists Victorian novels are made of), which sadly leaves his daughters disinherited (since he wasn't legally married to Mrs. Vanstone at the time they were born, they don't technically have the Vanstone name). So now all the money passes to a miserly uncle, Michael Vanstone, who has absolutely no intention of giving them anything. Norah, passive, is willing to just take what comes, but Magdalen, the younger daughter, isn't. So after Michael Vanstone dies (pretty quickly), she pursues his son Noel Vanstone, hoping to marry him

under a different name and so get the family fortune back. Unfortunately she's found out by Virginie Lecomte (Lecount), the very sharp housekeeper of Noel. These two (Magdalen and Virginie) now play a deadly cat-and-mouse game with each other, Magdalen trying to find a pretext to send Virginie off and Virginie looking for a way to expose her. Finally Magdalen manages to get Virginie off and marries Noel, but Virginie comes back and manages secretly to expose Magdalen so that Noel cuts her out of his will. Feeling the pressure from Magdalen, however, Noel dies prematurely. His money then passes to an Admiral Bartram and from him to his son George, who marries Norah. So all the money eventually comes back to the Vanstones, and Norah, who's done nothing, actually manages to accomplish more toward that end than Magdalen, who's only saved at the end by her marriage to a Captain Kirke.

What I find significant here is the way Magdalen—after losing her Vanstone identity—seems to be willing to engage in immoral and virtually criminal activity to achieve her objective. So she forces herself into the Vanstone household under a disguise, seduces the hapless Noel, is even willing to marry him for the money and doesn't seem to mind hurrying him off to his death just so she can come into the Vanstone fortune. Of course we feel sorry for her and Norah—their being disinherited seems incredibly unlucky and undeserved. But is it really right that Noel Vanstone should be squeezed and pressured into dying just so Magdalen can come into money? After all, he hasn't done anything to her to deserve such a fate: if he doesn't want to give her the money, that's legally his business (I'm not sure

we'd all be terribly eager to do this either). More important, I'm not sure Collins feels quite right about it himself. In effect, he's got Magdalen going all the way around the barn while her sister (who's been just sitting still) gets in first anyway. In fact Magdalen doesn't seem to be doing terribly well by the end of the novel: sick, haggard, depressed, she's lucky to be rescued by Capt. Kirke. So if this is supposed to be a crime and punishment story, she doesn't exactly look good. Nonetheless, she is saved at the end, probably because the point is that her fall from moral grace was essentially brought about by her loss of identity, more than anything in herself. For Collins, then, the point is that loss of identity can make anyone in normal society vulnerable to moral weakness and worse.

I see the same point being made slightly differently in a later Collins novel, The Law and the Lady. Valeria (Brinton) Woodville signs her name incorrectly on the marriage register (Woodville rather than Brinton)—perhaps an augury of trouble to come. In fact, though, she's not alone, since the person she's marrying, Eustace Woodville, is himself signing under a false name, his real name being Macallan. The reason for his concealment of his real name: an earlier notorious trial for the poisoning his wife, Sara Macallan. When Valeria finds out about all this (from Eustace), she vows to clear his name of the murder/"Not Proven" verdict that's hung over him ever since, not so much for herself but for Eustace and her child (V.'s now pregnant). To do that, she has to question a key witness and player in the events leading up to Sara Macallan's death, the (aptly named) Miserrimus Dexter. Miserrimus, as it turns out, was more involved than anybody

realized, being himself in love with Sara Macallan and eager to discredit her her husband so as to advance himself. Unfortunately, Miserrimus Dexter's mental state is deteriorating, and under pressure from Valeria's questioning it goes downhill even faster. But even though she feels pity for his wickedness (because we all share it), she's still determined to try to squeeze the info out of him. At the end, a recovered letter from Sara Macallan explains the reasons for her suicide (not feeling love from Eustace), and Dexter's involvement in that (his showing her Eustace's diary) also comes out.

Here, though, we have once again a situation where a young woman resorts to somewhat unethical activity to prove her point. Her putting the squeeze on Miserrimus Dexter is clearly the cause of his going down faster, nor does she seem terribly concerned. As in No Name, this is a case where all the agency—and hence, potentially, any responsibility or blame—clearly comes from the young woman rather than the ailing or hapless man. No doubt Valeria looks less culpable than Magdalen Vanstone—she's not doing it for money, and not (at least so she says) for herself but for husband and child (always sacred in the Victorian moral framework). And Dexter is clearly guilty on some level, since his showing Sara Macallan Eustace's diary was partly what helped to precipitate her suicide. Nonetheless, I suspect Collins isn't entirely easy about Valeria's doings. As in No Name, justice finally comes about not because of what she does (at least not directly) but via another route. And that would seem to suggest her activity isn't morally so praiseworthy—otherwise it ought to have more efficacy. Nonetheless, it isn't her fault. After all, Valeria

is—like Magdalen Vanstone—a person with No Name, since the name for which she gives up her own (quite willingly, it would seem) isn't even the real name of her husband. In that respect, we might see her—and her husband—as existing in a kind of no man's land: the name not being genuine suggests that their identity isn't either. And that to some extent might seem to justify her effort to clear her husband. Still, what Collins seems to want to show is how loss of identity can precipitate people into a moral no man's land where anything goes and anything seems (but maybe isn't) justified in the effort to gain back that identity. And, finally, how loss of identity can lead to unwitting crossovers from normalcy to criminal activity.

If all the crossovers so far from normalcy to criminal activity have taken place somewhat unconsciously, it's interesting to look at one now that's distinctly more deliberate. Here what I have in mind is Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Lady Audley's Secret. The story starts off with an attractive young governess named Lucy Graham marrying Sir Michael Audley. But Lucy Graham, as it turns out, was married before to George Talboys (as Helen Talboys). For years they struggled with poverty, until Talboys finally leaves for Australia, hoping to find gold there. When GT at last returns from Australia (having struck it rich there), he learns of Helen Talboys being dead. Talboys and his friend Robert Audley (nephew of Sir Michael, barrister) visit Sir Michael, but Lady Audley avoids meeting George, who mysteriously disappears on the estate. Robert Audley (being a barrister) begins to put the pieces together, and discovers

that Lady Audley = Helen Talboys. Feeling the heat of suspicion, Lady Audley sets fire to the inn where Robert Audley is staying, trying to kill him—but he survives. When he's finally able to confront her, Lady Audley claims insanity (later verified by Dr. Mosgrave), and that desertion was necessary for herself + child (Georgey, son of GT). So she gets off: RA has Lady Audley institutionalized in Belgium as Madame Taylor. Later, when he visits her there, Lady Audley confesses to RA that she killed GT by pushing him down a deserted well. But in fact GT survives (according to testimony from Luke Marks, a caretaker), and after going to New York, returns and is reunited with RA.

So here we have someone (Lady Audley) supposedly normal who's quite willing to commit any number of heinous crimes with no qualms at all. And unlike Magdalen Vanstone in No Name, she's hardly even made to suffer. Of course, her claim of insanity is just a ploy (anyone who's that good at pretending can fake anything). Not surprisingly, Lady Audley's Secret was a runaway bestseller in Victorian England. You can just imagine all the readers, scandalized but titillated, wondering: how can she not feel anything? Significantly, Lady Audley doesn't even feel it for her own child, whom she abandons to very indifferent care (ultimate Victorian evidence of unredeemability) so she can look single and available for Sir Michael Audley. Nor do I find it at all surprising that Braddon doesn't give us any kind of psychological analysis of Lady Audley, any attempt at even a glimpse of interiority. In fact, it's exactly what we should expect. The whole point of Lady Audley isn't the psychological analysis of a criminal à la Crime and Punishment

but rather a kind of moral in-your-face dare. Lady Audley looks normal, talks normally, and—in her everyday doings—acts normally. In other words, we can't rule her out right away as mentally unsound, or unable to assess things properly. Braddon's question to the reader, then, might be something like this: if Lady Audley looks so normal, who are we to say she isn't normal? And if she is normal, who are we to judge her as morally culpable when she's trying to do away with her husband George Talboys or, later, his friend Robert Audley? Obviously she doesn't see anything wrong with what she's doing (notice she never shows any sign of repenting, and even tries to justify many of the things she's done, like deserting her husband). So if we say she's "normal" we then have to claim some kind of superior vantage point in order to judge her attempts to do away with people as morally culpable. And that's awkward because we can't claim to be inside her head—thanks to Braddon, we're distinctly lacking in the proper feel of interiority. In earlier Victorian literature, typically, one of two things would happen: (1) criminal confesses, repents error of his/her ways, or (2) criminal by other acts shows himself/herself to be pathological. Which is to say: error in moral judgment, or psychological weakness. This, then, is a new departure, given that Braddon doesn't offer either. And the result is that we now have to think about whether criminal activity is really different from normalcy, or whether it's in some sense just an extension of normalcy. In other words, after watching people cross over from normalcy to crime unwittingly, we eventually have to ask whether it's all that different if they do it willingly. Or we could just take moral refuge in the fact that all

these instances are fiction.

I want to end, however, with an example of moral crossover that's actually true, the sad history of Oscar Wilde's late days. In his De Profundis letter Wilde describes, first, his shocking discovery that he himself is that criminal other he always thought of as so terribly different from himself, and, second, his attempt to deal with this discovery:

I will begin by telling you that I blame myself terribly. As I sit here in this dark cell in convict clothes, a disgraced and ruined man, I blame myself. In the perturbed and fitful nights of anguish, in the long monotonous days of pain, it is myself I blame.

(p. 38)

When first I was put into prison some people advised me to try and forget who I was. It was ruinous advice. It is only by realising what I am that I have found comfort of any kind. Now I am advised by others to try on my release to forget that I have ever been in a prison at all. I know that would be equally fatal. It would mean that I would be always haunted by an intolerable sense of disgrace, and that those things that are meant for me as much as for anybody else... would all be tainted for me... To regret one's own experiences is to arrest one's own development.

(pp. 99-100)

Initially, when he first finds himself in jail, Wilde probably can't believe it. So he has to look around at his dark prison cell, see himself in his prison clothes, to get himself to believe he's now what he appears to be—"a disgraced and ruined man." Because if he believes he's that, he then has to admit he's become the criminal other he always thought of as just not having the same kind of moral awareness as himself. Once he's taken all this in fully, however, he then has to figure out what to do about it. It's here that Wilde comes to what he seems to consider a genuine insight. At first, he says, people told him to forget who he was. Presumably their thinking was that if he saw the contrast between what he was before (in his glory days) and what he is now, he'd find it too painful. But he rejects that advice. Instead, he says, it's only "by realising what I am that I have found comfort of any kind." In other words, he has to be able to accept what he's become. Here he talks about "realising what I am": what he means by "realising," I think, is something like making it real to himself. Externally, objectively, he's a prison inmate, a convict. And maybe at first he tries to resist that. But it's always there. So it's only when he finally accepts it, internalizes it, that he can feel he's really come to grips with his circumstances, his condition. But there's more. Now when he's about to be released some people are telling him: forget you ever were here. But that too, he says, would be a mistake. Because if he forgot he'd then be "haunted by an intolerable sense of disgrace" since on some level he'd know he'd merely forgotten. So the only way to deal with it is to consider all these things that have happened to him as "experiences" in his own development.

In other words, they're all part of time, events whose sequence makes up private memory, which is inseparably linked to his sense of himself. Thinking about these aspects of his past life as "experiences" helps to float them.

As a result, there's no longer any absolute condition of normalcy or crime.

Nor is it even a matter of crossing over from one to the other. Instead, he can think of both normalcy and crime with the conditions that accompany these as just "experiences" that have helped to form his own consciousness. So at the end of the Victorian era we find a gradual shift away from even moral relativism, to something like an even more encompassing sense of what we might call extreme subjectivity.

V. Empire

[PPT 5:2]

First exhibited in 1840, The Slave Ship was J.M.W. Turner's passionate protest against slavery. The story is that Turner painted it after reading Thomas Clarkson's History and Abolition of the Slave Trade. In it, Clarkson tells a gruesome tale: in 1781, the captain of the slave ship Zong apparently ordered 133 slaves thrown overboard while at sea just so his company could collect insurance money. No doubt the vermillion red surrounding the sun is by itself almost sufficiently expressive, but in case you don't get the point Turner portrays a number of slaves still in chains struggling to stay afloat in the churning water, mixed with sharks who are already beginning to scent their prey. In the distance, the masts of the ship are plainly visible because all the sails are completely furled—a typhoon is coming on. Typhoon, sharks, the churning sea itself—for the poor slaves, it's just a question of what gets them first. Nonetheless the captain isn't taking any chances, so the slaves remain manacled while being tossed overboard. It's an instance of what seems to have happened so often with slavery, the captain simply not feeling the slaves at all, his sole concern being to make absolutely sure they drown so that his ship owners can collect the insurance money.

Essentially, empire is all about being able to use others instrumentally.

By that I mean seeing people as objects merely, rather than as possessing consciousness or subjectivity, and so using them the same way you might use machinery or other inert things to achieve a goal. I think Hardt and Negri in Empire are too influenced by the current business model of empire: the international corporation. To me, that kind of empire works on a merely aggregative principle, and for that reason is still relatively superficial: it doesn't have much effect on individual consciousness or subjectivity. For the deeper sense of empire, however, I think we need to look elsewhere. The funny thing about instrumental use of others, though, is that it doesn't have to involve actual slavery. So while actual slavery was abolished fairly early in the 19th century throughout the British Empire thanks to the efforts of abolitionists like Wilberforce, we continue to see plenty of instances in Victorian fiction of similar exploitation. In fact, as many Victorian authors were quick to notice, any society that involves a social hierarchy makes the instrumental use of others possible.

Inevitably, having a social hierarchy implies a power dynamic of some kind. Nobody really likes being underneath anybody else. So anytime you have a social hierarchy, it has to be constantly reinforced. To reinforce it, though, those who belong to the lower classes have to be compelled to do what people of the upper classes want. In this way, people of the lower classes are forced to recognize their inferior position—rather than doing what they themselves want, they do what others (i.e., those who belong

to the upper classes) want. In 19th century England, this power dynamic becomes evident in various ways. In the most extreme instances (e.g., the “Peterloo” massacre), there’s even a resort to something like military force. Otherwise, there’s the more subtle pressure of the law, which protects property and hence wealth. And, obviously, wealth itself can easily become a means of enforcing the social hierarchy in all kinds of ways. And since the social hierarchy is pervaded throughout by a power dynamic that’s constantly in force, it then becomes possible for those who control it to use others (those below them) instrumentally. From this standpoint, you might say, empire comes about simply by the spread or extension of a social hierarchy to new places. In particular, those who live in colonial places can be exploited by those occupying the imperial center. So the social hierarchy of England gets extended to India and elsewhere. Because of the wholesale use of colonial others instrumentally, however, it’s inevitable that at some point self-consciousness or awareness of the injustice of this instrumental use would ensue. And that’s how we come to have in Victorian literature some reflection on the power dynamics that made empire possible.

Of the various Victorian authors, perhaps no one reflected more astutely on the power dynamics inherent in a social hierarchy, and hence in empire, than Thackeray. Nowadays we mostly know him through Vanity Fair—a pity, since this isn’t where his analysis of the dynamics of power is best on display. Partly because it’s a historical novel and partly because it largely

tells the story of upstarts like Becky Sharp (modeled on Valerie Marneffe of Balzac's Cousine Bette), Vanity Fair isn't in the best position to tell the story of how people get morally corrupted by power and dominance. Fortunately, Thackeray takes care to tell that story elsewhere. And as I've tried to trace it, I have to confess to finding myself increasingly interested in Thackeray. We've all known that Thackeray's very good at social critique. But it's even better when he applies his critical acuteness to an analysis of the social hierarchy and the power dynamics by which it's sustained. And even though most of that analysis is to be found in his fiction, there's at least one other place where Thackeray steps away from his fictional pose to look at the matter directly. Here I'm thinking of his Snobs of England, published just around the same as Vanity Fair. He begins with a definition of a snob and, implicitly, of snobbery:

He who meanly admires mean things is a Snob—perhaps that is a safe definition of the character.

(p. 8)

To understand what's involved here, however, we first need to know what "meanly" admiring something would consist of. A simple way to put it, I think, would be: taking a low view of it, looking at it in a way that's debasing to the viewer. And when we apply this to "mean" (= low) things, the sense is something like: taking a low or debasing view of something that's in itself

debasement. All this comes out much more clearly in Thackeray's analysis of an actual case:

I am told that in a kingdom where there is a German King-Consort [Portugal], whenever the Consort takes the diversion of shooting among the rabbit-warrens of Cintra, or the pheasant-preserves of Mafra, he has a keeper to load his guns, as a matter of course, and then they are handed to the nobleman, his equerry, and the nobleman hands them to the Prince, who blazes away—gives back the discharged gun to the nobleman, who gives it to the keeper, and so on. But the Prince won't take the gun from the hands of the loader.

As long as this unnatural and monstrous etiquette continues, Snobs there must be. The three persons engaged in this transaction are, for the time being, Snobs.

1. The keeper—the least Snob of all, because he is discharging his daily duty; but he appears here as a Snob, that is to say, in a position of debasement, before another human being, (the German Prince,) with whom he is only allowed to communicate through another party. A free Portuguese game-keeper, who confesses himself to be unworthy to communicate directly with any person, confesses himself to be a Snob.

2. The nobleman in waiting is a Snob. If it degrades the German Prince to receive the gun from the game-keeper, it is degrading to the nobleman in waiting to execute

that service. He acts as a Snob towards the keeper, whom he keeps from communication with the Prince—a Snob towards the Prince, to whom he pays a degrading homage.

3. The King-Consort of Portugal is a Snob for insulting fellow-men in this way. There's no harm in his accepting the services of the keeper directly; but indirectly he insults the service performed, and the two servants who perform it; and therefore, I say respectfully, is a most undoubted, though royal SN—B.

(p. 15)

Significantly, all 3 of the people involved here figure as snobs in Thackeray's book. In effect, the keeper doesn't do anything. But presumably he figures as a snob because he accepts a routine in which he's not allowed to hand a gun to the king directly. So even though he isn't debased by performing a debasing act, he's still debased by accepting the way this act has to get performed. Interestingly, too, Thackeray sees the nobleman-in-waiting as a snob vis-à-vis both the king and the keeper. At first glance we might think he's only debased by having to hand the gun to the king, when the keeper should've done it. But Thackeray also insists on his being a snob vis-à-vis the keeper, presumably because his preventing the keeper from giving the gun to the king is debasing by the way it forces the nobleman to take the king's position too seriously. Finally, the king is a snob (as Thackeray sees it) not because someone else has to hand him his gun, but because of his forcing this to be done according to a protocol that's debasing

to both the nobleman and the keeper. So all 3, as it turns out, are implicated in snobbery.

For Thackeray, the problem with snobbery lies in its psychological consequences. Obviously nobody suffers any physical harm from having to hand over a gun, or from not having to do it. Instead, the problem seems to lie in the psychological consequences of not being thought good enough to do it, or of thinking someone else isn't good enough to do it. The keeper's debased because he accepts his not being thought good enough to do it. The king's debased because he thinks someone else isn't good enough to do it. And the nobleman's debased because he thinks someone else isn't good enough to do it, which means he has to perform the service himself—which is debasing to him because he shouldn't have to perform this service, and wouldn't have if he thought the keeper good enough to do it. Now in this analysis it's pretty clear why both the keeper and the nobleman are debased—they're both forced to think less well of themselves than they should. What isn't so clear is why the protocol's debasing to the king. After all, he gets 2 other people to take him as superior to themselves. To see why Thackeray sees his role as debasing, then, we have to look elsewhere in his work.

[PPT 5:3]

What we have here is an illustration from what might well be in many ways Thackeray's finest novel, The Newcomes. This is a typical Victorian multiplot novel, with too many plot strands to pursue them all fully here. Instead, I want to focus on just one, involving Col. Thomas Newcome, who after years of service in India has come back to England. Shortly after he gets back, he goes to a party where he meets someone he knew in India: Rummun Lall. Now before Col. Newcome arrives at the party, Rummun Lall is getting treated not only with respect but even as a big-deal personage, somebody to whom even the English aristocracy have to defer. The reason for that is, simply, money: Rummun Lall's a banker and—because of all the schemes in which he's involved—one of the richest people in India. But Col. Newcome doesn't buy into any of that: because he's been in India for years, where Rummun Lall is known to be a somewhat shady businessman, the Colonel not only won't defer to him but even—as you can see in the illustration—treats him somewhat contemptuously. All he says is: "What Rummun, you here?" Now at first glance this sort of behavior might seem to implicate him in snobbery. Interestingly, though, I don't think Thackeray sees it that way. And the reason I suspect he doesn't is because the Colonel (from his long years of service in India) knows all about Rummun Lall's shady business dealings there, which he finds absolutely repellant. So it isn't so much because he believes in his own superiority to Lall that the Colonel treats him badly—it's because he doesn't like what the guy's all about, and doesn't feel anybody engaged in shady business practices should get

a lot of respect. In other words, it's not because he thinks he himself is superior to Lall, but because he doesn't think Lall should be associating with any decent people that he's so uncivil.

Nonetheless, things take a different turn a bit later in the novel, which is what makes the Col. Newcome story so interesting for my purpose. Col. Newcome goes back to India, ostensibly because his expenses in England were too high, but really because he wants to raise more money for his nephew Clive to be able to marry Ethel. Once back in India, however, he gets involved in one of Rummun Lall's shadiest ventures, the Bundelcund Bank, buying stock shares that yield a huge profit. Significantly, it's at this point that the Colonel starts to go downhill morally. Nor is it surprising that he now professes to think well of Rummun Lall. In effect, what he's now doing is using Lall instrumentally. Of course, it's all for Clive. Nonetheless, using Lall has a corrupting effect on the Colonel. As he gets rich, he starts to bully people like Barnes Newcome, the nasty nemesis and rival to Clive. Throwing his money into an election campaign, he actually runs against Barnes Newcome for a seat in Parliament. But in other ways, too, he's starting to impose himself on people. And the source of the trouble is the money he's getting from Lall's bank, which makes all of this possible. The fact that the Bundelcund Bank is based in India is, I think, not accidental. It suggests that Col. Newcome's way of using Lall is representative of what the British Empire—or any empire—does on a larger scale. What Thackeray wants to say, I would argue, is that this way of using others is the foundation of empire but also what's likely to take it down

in the end. Unlike some people, then, I don't believe Thackeray's being critical of India here. The key point isn't Rummun Lall's shady business practices but rather the Colonel's willingness to make use of these. Rummun Lall is what he is, and there are people like him everywhere. In other words, it isn't a slight on India especially. But the Colonel's having been in India for all those years (and even, perhaps, symbolically, his going back there) is precisely what makes it possible for him to succumb to the temptation of using others instrumentally, which brings about his—fortunately only temporary—moral downfall. What Thackeray's trying to say, then, is that the ultimate source of trouble isn't India or people like Rummun Lall, but the notion that they can be used instrumentally, which comes about—imperceptibly, perhaps—from the experience of empire.

If Thackeray offers very much an early Victorian perspective on empire, the later Victorian take, exemplified by someone like Wilkie Collins, is quite different. Thackeray was indignant about the instrumental use of others (at least as it figured within the British Empire). Collins, by contrast, seems much more resigned to what he appears to regard as inevitable. His concern is to explore how that instrumental use of others leads to a different kind of relationship with those others, one where the others we use somehow become internalized within ourselves and hence lead to a different kind of interiority or subjectivity. Here I want to look particularly at The Moonstone, in which Collins offers what's probably

his deepest and most sustained treatment of the issue.

The story starts off in an almost fabular way, with a precious diamond called the Moonstone apparently being stolen at the storming of Seringapatam by John Herncastle. At the same time, he's also cursed by the dying Indian soldier whom he appears to have murdered to get the stone. Herncastle's will bequeaths the Moonstone to Rachel Verinder (niece of Lady Julia Verinder, sister of Herncastle). Some time after, the Moonstone is stolen from Rachel Verinder. Her comment: "My Diamond is Lost." Commentators have, I think, quite rightly pointed out the erotic connotations here, the way this symbolically suggests Rachel's loss of virginity. But so far no one's fully followed up all the implications of that symbolism. In other words, if the storming of Seringapatam is one kind of violation, Rachel's loss of virginity is merely another: what goes around comes around. So the storming of Seringapatam = Indian loss of innocence, and prepares the way for Rachel's loss of innocence. Once the stone has been stolen, we apparently have to be prepared for an endless cycle of theft—or at least until the stone's restored to its rightful place. In fact, Rachel (as it turns out) literally sees Franklin Blake take the Moonstone from a drawer in her room while sleepwalking. Significantly, the novel describes her emotion while she witnesses the theft as one of indignation/anger, but also love.

In the later part of the story, involving recovery of the Moonstone, the key role is played by Ezra Jennings, Dr. Candy's assistant. A curious-looking guy, his piebald hair is apparently (according to a theory of the time) a sign of miscegenation. He's also said to have a gipsy complexion. In the MS., it seems, Collins originally had "nigger's complexion," but changed it to avoid

confusion—Jennings is supposed to be from the East. In any case, what's very clear is that he's supposed to belong to one of those subaltern populations of the British Empire whose people can be used instrumentally. He also has, supposedly, a tarnished reputation as a doctor, but one he's unable to do anything about—suggestive of racism of some kind. Significantly, a strong mutual trust quickly develops between Franklin Blake and Jennings. Nor is it hard to see why: despite being English and white, Blake is definitely an outsider to the Verinder circle, someone on whom it might well try to impose its sense of social superiority. In that respect, he's not so different from Jennings as we might initially think. Now Jennings has gradually been working out a theory of the unconscious, and he employs it to partly explain Franklin Blake's conduct. His belief is that Blake has taken a dose of laudanum—and it turns out this is actually the case, Dr. Candy having secretly administered it in response to Blake's complaint of sleeplessness. Jennings hypothesizes that what the laudanum has done is to release or trigger some subconscious impulse Blake was feeling, one that prompted him to go into Rachel Verinder's bedroom. (—I know all this looks pretty obvious from a Freudian perspective, but we have to remember The Moonstone is pre-Freud). In fact, Collins is at pains to emphasize the correctness of what Jennings is saying, and to do that he even refers to the medical theory of Carpenter and Eliotson. To prove this hypothesis, Blake while asleep re-enacts his taking of the Moonstone under the influence of laudanum which Jennings administers.

What we have here, I suggest, is something like multiple levels of

interiority. with different outsiders being used instrumentally while being psychologically internalized in the process. So first we've got Franklin Blake vis-à-vis Rachel Verinder. His entry into her bedroom at night while she's supposedly asleep might seem a bit obvious in light of Freud, but it takes on a new twist if we think of him not only as outsider but also as subaltern—hence someone she's capable of using instrumentally to fulfill an auto-erotic wish: notice her mix of indignation/anger and love, which presumably involves pleasure (this from the Collins who used to take Dickens for sex holidays in Paris!). But if Blake offers one form of subaltern being internalized within Rachel Verinder, we get a second with Ezra Jennings being used instrumentally by Blake. By his insight into what's going on with Blake while he's sleeping, and by his ability to force a re-enactment of that process with a laudanum dose, Jennings is in effect “inside” Blake just as Blake was “inside” Rachel Verinder. And—as with the relationship between Blake and Verinder—there's a suggestion Jennings is here being used instrumentally, sacrificed to bring about a disclosure of what actually happened and hence recovery of the Moonstone. Ultimately, the point I take Collins to be trying to make here is that every instrumental use of subaltern others provokes or prompts an involuntary internalizing of that other. Nor is it accidental that all this stuff keeps happening at night. The upshot seems to be that the more you use others instrumentally, the more they get inside you, so that finally all your interiority will consist of nothing but that other. So Rachel Verinder will finally marry Franklin Blake. And the only reason Jennings doesn't remain inside Franklin Blake is because Jennings has to die off—no doubt because

(unlike Blake) he's too dangerous an outsider from a "proper" Victorian standpoint. Nonetheless, despite all the efforts made to keep the Moonstone in England, it eventually goes back to the place from which it came, a process Collins seems to see as inevitable.

[PPT 5: 4]

Initially, I didn't think I'd be talking about Jacob Riis and his How the Other Half Lives here—the place for it seemed to be in my discussion of the urban scene. But as I read it, and as I looked at all the photographs by Riis reproduced in the Dover edition, I couldn't help feeling there was something odd about his whole perspective on the poor of New York. I think the best way to put it is that they're treated as outsiders, in effect as foreigners. Of course, many of them are: the Chinese, the Czechs, the Irish, the Jews, and all the other ethnic groups he talks about. But the African-Americans or Blacks also figure as one of these "foreign" groups, and surely most—if not all—of these people were born here. For that reason I've reproduced his photograph of what he calls "street arabs" (i.e., homeless boys), even though these are most likely wholly native as well. The point is, there's a tendency on Riis's part to think of all these groups as foreigners, outsiders. And even though he isn't consciously

thinking of how they might be used instrumentally, there's a way in which even reform, which he thinks about a lot, always has to come to these groups from elsewhere, from some source other than themselves.

So even though Riis isn't thinking about instrumental use, you might say that in his notion of reform it seems as if these different groups will somehow get shaped or formed instrumentally, without perhaps much consulting of their own subjectivity. I'm not saying I think Riis is necessarily to be criticized or blamed. And my only real reason for introducing him here is to show how, at the end of the nineteenth century, the whole notion of empire has taken an inward turn. Clearly New York isn't a colonial territory. Nonetheless Riis can't help thinking of it as foreign as he looks at all the different ethnic groups occupying it. What it points to, I would suggest, is an inherent tendency of empire: that interiority (or what's inside) keeps getting more and more occupied by outsiders until finally, arguably, the outsider perspective will have completely subsumed all interiority.

VI. Literary Rivalry

[PPT 6:2]

[PPT 6:3]

[PPT 6:4]

For this last talk I'm going to do something different from what I've done in all the earlier talks of this series. So far, each of the talks for Modern Literature II has revolved around a topic that stretches chronologically for most of the period 1800-1922. This time, I'm going to focus exclusively on Modernism. The reason for my doing that is to present an idea I've recently had about how the Modernist era might be organized or structured. A couple years ago, when I was preparing for my initial Modern Literature series, I happened to read or look at some of the recent surveys of Modernism. In doing that, I couldn't help noticing that most of these seemed to give relatively little thought to how the whole period might be conceptually structured. I realize that because of the international scope of Modernism it's a bit harder to get traction on this period than it might be, say, for earlier epochs of 19th century literature. The prevailing or current notion seems to be that rather than talking about a single monolithic form of Modernism we should recognize a plurality of Modernisms in this period. In itself that's all well and good, and it certainly goes some way toward making us more receptive

to a number of movements or tendencies that might be active in this period.

My own engagement with Modernism goes way back to my undergraduate days.

At that time, High Modernism clearly enjoyed a hegemony over this period.

People were still trying to understand the conceptual scheme behind The Waste Land

or Ulysses, and if anyone thought about Virginia Woolf, or D.H. Lawrence,

or anyone else, there was usually an effort, subconscious or otherwise, to assimilate

these authors to what we now call High Modernism. Since that time, there's been

a lot of change in the Modernist landscape. Many of the forgotten writers of

the 1930s and 1940s have been resurrected, and some of the other people who used

to be loosely associated with High Modernism (Gertrude Stein, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle),

Langston Hughes) have come in for a lot more attention independent of their

connection with that movement. Nonetheless, there hasn't been much effort

to provide an overall structure for this period, and even influential recent surveys

(like that of Michael Levenson) seem largely content to just add more figures

to the Modernist array. So when I started thinking about Modernism again, I thought

it high time for me to find out a bit more about the Bloomsbury group, which

I'd been only vaguely aware of in my early Modernist days. And as I got deeper

into the work of people like Roger Fry, Clive Bell, E.M. Forster, some of

the lesser known Virginia Woolf stuff, and even John Maynard Keynes, I couldn't

help feeling that here was a group that seemed to have some internal coherence

of its own (quite apart from their longtime personal association with each other),

and that furthermore seemed quite different in fundamental ways from what

we call High Modernism. So I began to feel that maybe it wasn't quite right to try

simply to assimilate this group to High Modernism—after all, they don't by and large share that formalist sense of an art work as composed of fragments or pieces more or less opaque in themselves that have to be connected conceptually. Then it occurred to me that maybe it might make more sense to see it as a competing Modernist group. And then I started looking around to see if other people or groups might be treated the same way. So gradually I evolved an idea of seeing the Modernist era as structured by a rivalry between different groups, each having its own very different agenda. The following talk is an attempt at working out this idea.

I want to start with the 3 images you initially see for this talk: they loosely represent the 3 Modernist groups I'll talk about:

(1) reactive

(2) Bloomsbury < knowability of world out there >

(3) High Modernism < chaos, creation of new formal order >

I'll begin by saying a bit about the 3 images. The first, a photo, shows a group of WWI soldiers in the trenches. Note that, although a few soldiers are making a somewhat painful effort to smile, on the whole the group doesn't look

terribly happy. And no wonder: covered with mud and grime as they are, life doesn't seem particularly pleasant. For many people, World War I came as a shock. It was different from anything they'd known before, and dying happened brutally quickly and unexpectedly. As a result, some people (Siegfried Sassoon or Wilfred Owen, for example) tried in various ways to register the shock. And so a literature arose which might be described as reactive. It consists of authors trying to register the shock not only of the War, but also, on a larger scale, of the ways modern life has become radically different from what we knew before, and of how hard or painful it is to adjust. The second image is of a Cézanne still-life, one of his many paintings of fruit on a table. The exact subject isn't especially important—either to Cézanne or to us. What's important is the attempt to convey something of the essence of these fruits, a sense of their volume, of their palpability as objects. That's what Cézanne is all about, and that's what makes him so much a favorite of Roger Fry, the leading art critic and one of the most influential members of the Bloomsbury group. What this group believed in, above all, was the knowability of the world out there. Like the first, purely reactive Modernist group, they too knew something of the difficulty of modern life, of all the challenges brought by modernity. But unlike the first group, they believed this brave new world of modern life was knowable, and that by knowing or understanding how it worked, you could come to redeemability. The third image is of a Picasso painting, from his Cubist period. Once again the subject's unimportant—but this time it's not easy to say even what that subject might be. What's important, though, is the breakup or fragmentation of the material

into various aspects of things—quite often you get what looks like a guitar or violin, scraps of print, parts of other objects like fruit or some of those typical still-life objects, and even—occasionally—the suggestion of a perceiving eye. This perceiving eye is there for a reason. Its presence is meant to say that while the brave new world of modern life comes to us all broken up into fragments or pieces because it's inherently chaotic, the perceiving eye—and, ultimately, the mind which it symbolizes—is what holds it all together, makes possible the creation of an order which is what a work of art is all about. And that, essentially, was the programme of High Modernism: attempting to create order out of a world it believed—especially after WWI—to be essentially chaotic rather than essentially knowable, yet believing that if it could somehow create order out of these chaotic fragments, it could nonetheless bring that world if not to redeemability then at least to something bearable.

Of the authors who might fall into the first, reactive Modernist group, I've chosen to go with D.H. Lawrence. Unlike Sassoon or Wilfred Owen, Lawrence didn't write very much about World War I, but he did try to address many of the other aspects of modern life that made it shocking to those used to what had existed before. In The Rainbow, a story of various people but mostly of one young woman named Ursula Brangwen, Lawrence focuses on a number of the most shocking aspects of modernity. One of these is the savage, essentially amoral nature of children (the new generation), who no longer have

the moral values of their predecessors. As a schoolteacher, Ursula comes into contact with all this in a particularly shocking way when she has to beat a schoolboy just to keep her classroom from spiraling out of control:

She knew if she let go the boy he would dash to the door... So she snatched her cane from the desk, and brought it down on him. He was writhing and kicking. She saw his face beneath her, white, with eyes like the eyes of a fish, stony, yet full of hate and horrible fear.... In horror lest he should overcome her, and yet at the heart quite calm, she brought down the cane again and again, whilst he struggled making inarticulate noises, and lunging vicious kicks at her. With one hand she managed to hold him, and now and then, the cane came down on him. He writhed, like a mad thing. But the pain of the strokes cut through his writhing, vicious, coward's courage, bit deeper, till at last, with a long whimper that became a yell, he went limp.

(p. 370)

The whole experience is shocking because at the heart of it there's something like pleasure in subduing this boy, inflicting pain on him. "In horror lest he should overcome her" she says to herself, but what she has by beating him down, conversely, is the pleasure of overcoming him. Note, too, the presence of something like a rhythmic quality in the beating: "she brought down the cane again and again. . . ." And the way it moves, strangely, to what almost seems like a kind of sexual climax: "till at last, with a long whimper that

became a yell, he went limp.” Beating, in other words, as a kind of sadomasochistic pleasure.

Prepared by this, we’re then able to recognize many of the same emotions as they come to Ursula in her relationship with her lover Anton Skrebensky. As in her beating of the schoolboy, there’s the pleasure of overcoming someone else. But this time it’s even more extreme, since what’s involved isn’t just overcoming Skrebensky but even, on the subjective level, the pleasure of annihilating him completely:

She took him in the kiss, hard her kiss seized upon him, hard and fierce and burning corrosive as the moonlight. She seemed to be destroying him. He was reeling, summoning all his strength to keep his kiss upon her, to keep himself in the kiss.

But hard and fierce she had fastened upon him, cold as the moon and burning as a fierce salt. Till gradually his warm, soft iron yielded, yielded, and she was there fierce, corrosive, seething with his destruction, seething like some cruel, corrosive salt around the last substance of his being, destroying him, destroying him in the kiss. And her soul crystallised with triumph, and his soul was dissolved with agony and annihilation. So she held him there, the victim, consumed, annihilated. She had triumphed: he was not any more.

(p. 299)

Here what Ursula experiences is the shock of realizing it’s somehow more

pleasurable to destroy Skrebensky by loving him, by overwhelming him through the force of her passion, than it is to love him. Nor is it just a physical, sensual pleasure. Instead, the real pleasure seems to come from knowing she's destroyed his subjectivity, his ability to feel that his love's stronger than hers, by proving the opposite to him. And her shock is finally less about her discovery of her capacity for destructiveness than it is about the pleasure involved, and the discovery that that pleasure is somehow linked to a feeling of fecundity.

While the reactive Modernist group is all about trying to adjust to the shock of modern life, the Bloomsbury group, I would argue, believed it was possible to do better. Last winter, as part of my exploration of this group, I spent some time reading John Maynard Keynes's General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money.

As a sequel to Ricardo, it gives one a lot to think about in terms of trends or tendencies. Because unlike Ricardo, Keynes isn't interested in the kind of tight, really elegant theoretical model Ricardo offers. Instead, you can't help getting the feeling that Keynes is quite willing to make any ad hoc adjustments necessary to his theory, to ensure all the explanatory ground is fully covered.

At bottom, I think, it all came from a deep belief that the workings of the economy (except, maybe, some of the stock market vagaries) are fully explainable.

And that came from a broader belief that the world out there is knowable. But for the Bloomsbury group perhaps the most influential voice in many ways was that of Roger Fry. These days we've sadly lost sight of how important he was in his time. For instance, it's interesting to know that he was for some years

the curator of the Metropolitan Museum in New York, and J. Pierpont Morgan's advisor when Morgan was the driving force behind the effort to build up that magnificent collection. Fry was also the mind behind the Post-Impressionist show at the Grafton Gallery in London that (as Virginia Woolf somewhat pompously says) changed human nature. Well, it probably didn't quite change human nature, but it certainly did something to change the way art was perceived. And if Fry was a major force behind the effort to change the perception of art in England, the driving motive behind Fry was something he'd gotten a glimpse of in the Post-Impressionist painters:

Now, these artists do not seek to give what can, after all, be but a pale reflex of actual appearance, but to arouse the conviction of a new and definite reality. They do not seek to imitate form, but to create form; not to imitate life, but to find an equivalent for life. By that I mean they wish to make images which by the clearness of their logical structure, and by their closely-knit unity of texture, shall appeal to our disinterested and contemplative imagination with something of the same vividness as the things of actual life appeal to our practical activities. In fact, they aim not at illusion but at reality.

(Vision and Design, p. 167)

In other words, what the post-Impressionist painters are trying to do is to get at, and convey, the essences of things. But that assumes the essences of things are knowable. And that was what Fry believed. The fruit depicted in a Cézanne

still life really is a particular kind of volumetric mass, plastically shaped in a particular way, with a particular kind of color tint and textural feel to its surface. This doesn't mean that Fry thinks we'll get to know everything there is to know about the atomic structure of an apple by looking at a Cézanne painting. But in the sense of giving us what that apple is as a thing, as an object, Fry clearly believes the Cézanne painting is capable of rendering it. As he says: “. . . shall appeal . . . with something of the same vividness as the things of actual life” Another way to look at the matter would be to ask what Fry thinks is the difference between Post-Impressionism and Impressionism. And here I can think of no better source than Virginia Woolf's Roger Fry, which is also, incidentally, extremely useful for insight into her own work:

The contrast between the two groups has been gradually becoming apparent.... The difference may be explained by their approach to the thing seen. The older men are all more or less impressionists, that is to say, they approach nature in order to analyse it into the component parts not of the thing seen but of the appearance.... But the younger men, really going back to an earlier tradition, carry the analysis further, penetrating through values to their causes in actual form and structure.

(p. 114)

The “component parts” of an appearance consist of aspects of our perception of it. In other words, they go back to us, to our way of seeing or looking at things.

But the “causes” of these visual or perceptual “values,” which Fry says can be found in “actual form and structure,” go back to the things themselves. For Fry, Post-Impressionist painters think about those things themselves, and how they produce those “values” in the mind by which we get a sense of what they are. Or, to put it another way, they study or look for the properties that make these things knowable for what they are.

In a very different sense, knowability is also, I think, the key theme in the work of E.M. Forster. From a High Modernist perspective, Forster can be pretty difficult to talk about. Clearly, he doesn't have the kind of brilliant virtuosity, the narratological fireworks of a Joyce or even the multiple perspectives of a Ford Madox Ford. But if we see him from a Bloomsbury standpoint, where the crucial issue is a desire to make sense of the world out there, it all becomes much easier. In effect, trying to make sense of things, coming to knowledge or awareness of the way things really are, is what Forster's characters are all about. So we've got Philip Herriton forced to go down to Italy with Caroline Abbott because his ex-sister-in-law Lilia Herriton has committed the indecency of falling in love with a young Italian named Gino after her husband's death, and even—further indecency!—had a child with him. While down in Italy, however, Philip meets Gino and comes to see Lilia's situation, and her love for Gino, much more sympathetically because he now comes to a knowledge of the passion and other circumstances of place and social scene that made it possible. More comically, we have, in Forster's slightly later novel A Room with a View, Lucy Honeychurch supposedly

in love with and engaged to the totally prim and proper Cecil Vyse, but discovering on a trip to Italy (the place in Forster where all these discoveries are made) a passion for the young George Emerson, who's much more passionate about her. Nonetheless, once back in England, she goes on pretending, until finally Mr. Emerson (George's father) has to point out to her how she's been "lying" to Cecil, to George, to Mr. Beebe, to practically everybody—but most of all to herself. Fortunately, thanks to this timely heads-up, Lucy does come to knowledge or awareness of how things really are. How the same theme would work in Forster's later and more complex novels, Howard's End and A Passage to India, is of course a more complicated story, one I have to defer to some other time. But hopefully these brief remarks on two earlier novels will give some sense of how it might be worked out.

Since I've discussed High Modernism in much more detail in my initial "Modern Literature" series, I also want to touch on it just very briefly here. We might think of a line near the end of The Waste Land where the speaker sums up what's been going on quite neatly: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins." Or, in slightly more elaborate fashion, consider the well-known passage from Hart Crane, "The Broken Tower":

And so it was I entered the broken world
To trace the visionary company of love, its voice
An instant in the wind (I know not whither hurled)

But not for long to hold each desperate choice

Like the speaker of The Waste Land, the narrative voice of “The Broken Tower” also seems to see the world as broken up, fragmented, so that any attempt at order is perhaps only precariously transient. Nonetheless, the notion of its being possible to trace “the visionary company of love” suggests that, underlying the chaos, some deeper tendency toward communion might well be working to make that order possible.

