The 'Invisible Hand' and British Fiction, 1818–1860

Adam Smith, Political Economy, and the Genre of Realism

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Contents

Abbreviations

BH	Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, ed. George Ford and Sylvère Monod (New York: Norton, 1977)
HA	Adam Smith, 'The Principles which Lead and Direct Philosophical Enquiries; Illustrated by the History of Astronomy', in *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, ed. W. P. D. Wightman and J. C. Bryce (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980)
HT	Charles Dickens, *Hard Times: For These Times*, ed. Fred Kaplan and Sylvère Monod (New York: Norton, 2001)
IPE	Harriet Martineau, *Illustrations of Political Economy*, 25 vols (London, 1832–34)
MB	Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life*, ed. Macdonald Daly (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996)
MOTF	George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. A. S. Byatt (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003)
NA	Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ed. Marilyn Butler (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995)
TMS	Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), reprinted in paper from the Oxford edition of 1976
VF	William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, ed. Peter Schillingsburg (New York: Norton, 1994)
WN	Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner, 2 vols (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981), reprinted in paper from the Oxford edition of 1976

Introduction: Capitalist Moral Philosophy, Narrative Technology, and the Boundaries of the Nation-State

Some economic ideas are too interesting to be left to economists. This book proposes to unpack the implications of one such idea: Adam Smith's 'invisible hand', a metaphor little noted at the first publication of *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776, but one that has since come to stand in for almost all there is of capitalist moral philosophy. Though a long-lasting and hard-working metaphor, Smith's 'invisible hand' metaphor dissolves away, when you try to analyse it, into a surprisingly fragile and self-contradictory set of perspectival viewpoints. But I believe there is a reason for the metaphor's longevity: it suggests an ironic mode of social action in which the results of individual actions are displaced to some indefinite spatial and temporal distance, creating by implication an unimaginably complex and detailed web of moral causality. The discipline of political economy, as it developed after Smith, generally accepted Smith's optimistic take on this moral complexity, suggesting that free-market policies spontaneously led to prosperous and stable social orders in ways that could not be controlled or even known in detail by the state, but could be easily ascertained in retrospect. In the twentieth century, defenders of capitalism (like Friedrich Hayek) suggested that the very incalculability suggested by the 'invisible hand' metaphor proved the superiority of capitalist to socialist economic regimes.

However, I will argue here that the political-economic reading of the 'invisible hand' metaphor was and has remained prematurely narrow, and that the metaphor is actually compatible with many other possible ironic outcomes. According to Karl Polanyi, we owe to economic theory the discovery that there can be 'laws governing a complex society. Although the emergence of society in this new and distinctive sense happened in the economic field, its reference was universal.'[1] While economists unfolded the 'amazing regularities and stunning contradictions' of the new science,[2] the idea of individual actions being refracted ironically through a whole complex society and back again was absorbed by literary authors as well. But the use they made of this fantasy

of social holism – which I will call 'invisible hand social theory' – was much broader and more morally ambiguous, suggesting that while vice could comically lead to virtue as in Smith's metaphor, altruistic actions might also tragically lead to disaster. At the same time, they sometimes defended the unironic traditional moral outcomes of selfish actions leading to bad social outcomes and altruistic actions leading to a more virtuous society. This model of causality differs from the 'wheel of fortune' idea of luck or accident because it depends on an imagined social system in which people are linked together via unpredictable networks of cause and effect. Literary authors also stripped from economic theory the ideological assumption that government action in particular was always doomed to be undone by unintended consequences, imagining that disastrous unintended consequences might result from all kinds of human actions, individual or collective – or that the unintended consequences might be good, as Smith suggests in the case of the canny merchant.

Many of the longer and more complicated social novels that were increasingly written during the nineteenth century, in Britain and elsewhere, can be seen as attempts to come to grips with this new idea of moral consequences that do not end with individual salvation or damnation (as in the Christian moral template) but radiate outwards to affect everyone else in a particular society. But these novels sometimes had problems with endings, reflecting an ambiguity in the original metaphor about the ultimate limits of any action's effects. Adam Smith's economic argument is not actually very specific about whether the benefits of any one self-interested economic action ultimately accrue to the merchant's nation, or to some other geographic entity like the merchant's city or the whole world. This uncertainty about borders is not foregrounded in classical political economy, but its effects can be traced in realist novels that insist on the importance of the nation as the ultimate horizon of its inhabitants' moral actions, while also gesturing ambiguously to foreign threats, wars, financial systems, and colonial relations that complicate that image. The temporal aspect of Smith's metaphor is equally obscure, for he names no specific time within which the invisible hand will have supposedly turned the self-interested merchant's action into a social benefit, and in fact there is no guarantee that those results will not create new unintended consequences of their own. When realist novelists tried to depict this new ironic and complex society, they had to play with old genres and create new plot shapes to take into account the tension between traditional plots with satisfying endings, and a vast and alien society that not only contained the novel's scene of action but extended incalculably around, before, and after it.

The link between political economy and the realist novel in the early nineteenth century is in part, I suggest, a formal and aesthetic one, in which imaginary social holisms are created in one realm of intellectual life and then taken up in another; but in which the literary response to this model is richer, more varied, and ultimately more morally complex. We can trace some of the differences between economics and the novel by noting some

of these novels' shifting genres, as they transform the optimistic ironies of Smith's model of social interconnection through the use of different moods and tones, from the wry tolerance of an omniscient overview to bitter rage at unseen injustices, scientific distancing from individual suffering, or an excess of sympathetic identification, often ending with a characteristic mood of tortured irony that I think signals an awareness of the possible incompatibility between the story of the novel's characters and the multiplicity of different perspectives contained in their vast society. This multiplicity of perspectives is in fact implied by the metaphor of the invisible hand itself, as I will show in Part I: as Smith describes it, the 'invisible hand' is only comprehensible as an unstable composite of the mutually exclusive points of view of sovereign and merchant, both of which are visible to an omniscient theorist who is able to understand each position's constitutive ignorance. These epistemological constructs and gulfs, necessary to any imagination of an inconceivably complex social unity, are worked out in fiction through the dynamic interplay between the 'worm's-eye view' of the characters and the 'bird's-eye view' of the narrator, who alternately embraces his own omniscience to point out unseen interconnections, and undercuts it by means of witty scepticism or explicit partiality for one or more of the novel's characters.

My argument that realist fiction both draws on and improves Smith's understanding of social complexity is thus an intervention in two fields: the history of political economy and studies of Victorian novels. On one level it should be clear that seeing the moral philosophy of capitalism as an aesthetic construct is a form of ideology critique that participates in a tradition of capitalist critique dating back at least to Marx. But I also find the 'invisible hand' metaphor beautifully suggestive in its balance between aesthetic, moral, and economic models of value, and am fascinated by its delicate mechanisms of moral reconciliation. This utopian fantasy of a virtuous and free self-organizing system has been intermittently more and less attractive for centuries, and I believe it deserves more attentive analysis. While economists seldom theorize about aesthetics, literary critics often consider economic influences in their analyses of literary works, and so my readings of novels in Part II are indebted to generations of scholars, from Ian Watt to Mary Poovey and Catherine Gallagher, who have linked the rise of the novel with either capitalist rhetoric or the economic upheavals of British industrialization. Within this field, I am suggesting a new approach that is historically informed by specific works of political economy as it evolved after Smith, but also foregrounds the narratological, epistemological, and moral links between these two rival ways of representing complex social systems. In the irony and fragility of the social worlds depicted in these novels, and their combination of overwhelming detail with tragic ignorance, I feel a connection with our own era of networked effects, fantasies of infinite social interconnectedness, and unintended consequences. Yet these novels do a better job than most of our social media in dramatizing how

individual moral choices can be tragically or comically distorted when they are refracted through a vast, exciting, but fundamentally unknowable social system.

Because I discuss Smith's work extensively in the first part of this book, let me sketch out some of this argument's economic implications first, and then turn to its relation to contemporary Victorian and literary studies. Some economic historians are irked by the relative prominence of the 'invisible hand' metaphor in current discourse, and especially with its resurgent use after the Reagan–Thatcher return to the free-market ideals of the early nineteenth century, pointing out its relative insignificance in Smith's writings (where it is used only three times) and the fact that it did not become really popular until the twentieth century. Emma Rothschild is among those who find the metaphor's use today oddly disproportionate, a moment of irrationality in what is otherwise a sensible Enlightenment system.[3] My argument is that the metaphor's prominence today is no accident, and even though it was not in as much common use during the nineteenth century, the structure of moral causality it imparted to the discourse of political economy was extremely influential, and did crucial work in making economic theory appear to be at least partly compatible with Christian ethics. For unlike some other economic systems, capitalism depends on activating large masses of individuals to act in certain ways while eschewing other behaviours: they must be persuaded that their individual hard work will be rewarded, and that the success of others will ultimately benefit them, so the wealthy should not be envied or attacked. The idea that capitalism can be virtuous is taken for granted today, but in the early days of political economy it was by no means clear that the selfish actions of merchants could be seen as moral as well as useful. Therefore the 'invisible hand' metaphor – the only place in *The Wealth of Nations* where capitalism's ironic transformation of vice into virtue is suggested – does crucial work not only in making capitalism acceptable to the masses, but in making it function smoothly by forestalling complaints about its apparent injustices.

My use of the word 'capitalism' is also open to historical debate, since the idea that capitalism is a system and not merely the actions of a group of 'capitalists' dates from the mid-nineteenth century, long after Smith's death.[4] It is probably to Marx's and Engels's hostile reading, rather than to British political economy, that we owe the idea that capitalism is a coherent system that can be attacked or defended – an idea that gained strength in the twentieth century with the rise of a series of rival economic systems (socialism and communism) that posited themselves explicitly against laissez-faire capitalism. However, it is Smith and not Marx who is revered as the founding father of the economic system associated with British industrial might. Smith's work is surrounded today with an aura of partisan political theology that makes it both more appealing and more challenging an object of study, since *The Wealth of Nations* has taken on the status of a sacred document

among defenders of free trade, though superseded in part and seldom actually read.[5] In reaction, Smith is sometimes personally blamed for all the excesses of the industrial, monopoly, finance, and postmodern capitalist systems of the last 250 years. But my question is: if capitalism (understood as a certain relationship between employers, wages, and labour) is the product of a centuries-long economic and social upheaval dating back to the Middle Ages,[6] why should Smith get the credit for 'founding' it? Smith did create the first systematic explanation of the workings of the market as it would function when freed from political 'interference', and may be said to have contributed to the modern discipline of political economy by applying Enlightenment methodology – the formulation of rational laws which explain a multitude of observed phenomena – to economic data, as he had done to construct an empirical system of ethics in his 1759 *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Yet, while admitting that Smith's status within capitalist discourse is somewhat disproportionate when seen from a strictly historical perspective, I suggest that this elevated status is a sign that the cultural work done by the metaphor of the 'invisible hand', in particular, is replicated nowhere else in the popular discourse of economics. The fantasies of holism that are today contained within the term 'capitalism' are also implicit in the phrase 'invisible hand', and I argue that the resulting 'invisible hand social theory' is crucial to any system that morally defends individual economic transactions, especially actions that seem to destroy social value as well as create it.[7]

The invisible hand metaphor shows up three times in Smith's work, as I will discuss more fully in Part I: first in his 'History of Astronomy' essay, written sometime during the 1750s, then in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in 1759, and finally in *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776. This latest and most famous use of the metaphor appears in a passage about a merchant who

> intends only his own gain, ... [but] is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the publick good.[8]

It is probably the uncanny construction of agency in this passage that has done the most to lubricate the rough transition within political economy from Christian to capitalist morality. This phrase has often been interpreted to mean not only that the selfish actions of merchants accidentally contribute to the public good, but that economic self-interest is *the engine that produces* the public good. Note that Smith's description is constructed negatively (the result of intending one's own gain is not 'always the worse') but

interpreted positively (selfish actions do more good than unselfish ones). The invisible hand achieves these effects by establishing a veil of ignorance between economic cause and effect – the merchant *thinks* he is being selfish, but he is *really* promoting the good of all. Also, crucially, this formulation sidesteps the question of who (or what) is controlling the system to produce this positive outcome. Being merely the unforeseen outcome of predictable human economic choices, it might be described as an effect without a cause. The invisibility and beneficence of this hand has led many commentators to assume that the hand belongs to God, or at least Providence, which would fit with Smith's own philosophical deism.

What is certain is that no human will, whether of an individual or a government, controls the hand. The invisible hand produces the appearance of order without intervening in personal choice, thus preserving both free will and social stability. It possesses the dubious ontological status and prescriptive value of a 'natural law' – a term describing a rule whose rationality entails both its necessity and one's freedom to conform to it. Thus the invisible hand both does and does not exist – and both does and does not determine individual actions. The invisible hand is often treated as an optimistic protector of freedom, but it could equally arrange matters in a more gloomy or deterministic way, giving rise to the paranoid suspicion that the market is really controlled by 'them', or will inevitably conclude in a Weberian 'iron cage' of rationality.[9] There is an appealing epistemological modesty about the invisible hand theory's acknowledgement of human ignorance and social complexity, but there is also a premature leap of faith in its conclusion that the selfish and partial endeavours of private investors are always more blessed than those of governments or other kinds of agents.

The established reading of the invisible hand metaphor has been that the markets function with the same benevolence as a secular God, and therefore free trade makes for moral social policy.[10] In Part I, I will examine the historical sources of the invisible hand metaphor in Smith's work, and describe the scholarly argument about what Smith may or may not have intended by it. Smith knew that his postulation of a beautifully efficient system that produces both wealth and morality would be extremely appealing to both philosophers and business leaders, and charts his own ambivalence about his desire for this beautiful system in his recurrent warnings about the delusions pursued by 'men of system'. Though Smith's system is not normally represented in graphic form, as opposed to a machine, factory, or diagram, it does imply several spatial elements, such as the physical distance between the individual merchant and the presumed social beneficiary of his actions, and the different epistemological standpoints from which the capitalist system as a whole is visible or hidden. This section further traces Smith's impact on British politics from his early Francophile radicalism to his posthumous adoption by Burkean conservatives, and the increasingly pessimistic use of Smith by both utilitarians and Christian economists to limit charity to the

poor. Between 1776, when Smith wrote *The Wealth of Nations*, and the publication of John Stuart Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* in 1848, the new science of political economy was a subject of intense intellectual and public interest in Britain, advocating the subjects of poor law reform, industrial development, anti-slavery legislation, population control, the dismantling of the protectionist Corn Laws, and sometimes the settlement of new colonies in a theoretical language that usually supported the interests of the rising capitalist class.

Meanwhile, Smith's hint that capitalist morality is no mere individual affair but requires the theoretical positing of a larger interconnected social system was not followed up vigorously within the tradition of classical political economy, but rather picked up by cultural critics such as Thomas Carlyle, who railed against the collapse of feudal bonds of social responsibility, and political radicals like Marx, who sharpened the inherent ironies of political economy by combining it with Hegelian structures of negation. This section concludes that invisible hand social theory's success derives in part from an unresolvable ambiguity in the original metaphor about whether there is or is not a central directing intelligence behind the invisible hand's benevolent operation. The central distinction here – one that I argue Smith's text leaves unresolved – is between what we would today call an 'emergent' system made up of uncoordinated impulses that only appears organized from a distance, and the idea that God or possibly some devious elite is really pulling the levers.[11] In Part II, I will argue that these two readings of the invisible hand correspond roughly to two different literary genres: the realist novel that pulls together and interprets random social events but is resigned to the relative insignificance of the individual; and the Gothic novel in which a mysterious conspiracy, with roots in the unknowable past, torments an innocent protagonist. The protagonists in Gothic novels must learn a paranoid style of interpretation to track down the malefactor, but then are rewarded with the perverse pleasure of increased personal significance, since some malevolent divinity has designs on them alone.

The literary analyses that make up Part II of this book, as I suggested above, draw upon a long literary critical history of imagining possible relations between capitalism and the novel, of which the three strongest strands are probably the liberal, the Marxist, and the scholarly project known as New Economic Criticism, which aims to reread political economy in a critical historical context. My approach shares elements of all of these, but stresses aesthetic and epistemological as well as historical links between the discourses. By the 'liberal' approach I mean attention to (though not necessarily celebration of) the novel's constitutive individualism and its historical co-incidence with the rise of capitalism, as was first seen in Ian Watt's 1957 *The Rise of the Novel*, which argues that it was only with the early eighteenth century that the two most important social preconditions of the novel are achieved: 'the society must value every individual highly enough to consider

him the proper subject of its serious literature; and there must be enough variety of belief and action among ordinary people for a detailed account of them to be of interest to other ordinary people, the readers of novels'.[12] Watt reads Defoe's Robinson Crusoe as a model *homo economicus* who incarnates an ideal of hard-working self-responsible behaviour that is fostered by both Protestantism and industrial capitalism. Two important recent examples in this tradition are Jane Smiley's 2005 *Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Novel*, which claims that the novel is 'inherently liberal' because it 'embraces the rights and obligations of individualism', and Nancy Armstrong's 2005 *How Novels Think*, which argues that novels have to displace their protagonists from positions of comfort to create a plot, but in doing so redefine individuality as something both excessive to and constitutive of the social order.[13]

The Marxist line of criticism is similarly historical, but tends to focus on the limitations of the novel's epistemological alliance with an individual protagonist, while celebrating the novel's ambition to relate individual experience with social structures. Georg Lukács's *The Historical Novel* (written in German but first published in Russia in 1937) argues that in the novels of Walter Scott, the protagonists are deliberately mediocre in order to dramatize the 'totality of certain stages of history'.[14] Raymond Williams's groundbreaking *Culture and Society 1780–1950* (1958) is considered a founding text of the subdiscipline of cultural studies, but *The Country and the City* (1973) is his most eloquent and coherent book of materialist literary criticism, arguing that the novel evokes and constructs 'knowable communities' while grounded in historical situations of increasing social opacity.[15] In America, the most influential work of Marxist novel criticism has probably been Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* (1981), which combines structuralism and psychoanalysis with historicism to chart the dialectical struggle between utopian romanticism and bourgeois *ressentiment* in Balzac, Gissing, and Conrad, focusing on narrative points of view and positions of ideological blindness.[16]

Within studies of Victorian British literature, there has in the past two decades been a very specific transformation in the understanding of the relation between political economy and the realist novel. For many years, literary critics identified with contemporary opponents of political economy, seeing in their romantic protests a foreshadowing of the modernist rejection of industrial mass culture.[17] Critics of the industrial novel did discuss nineteenth-century economic theory but mostly as a sideline to the history of industrialism.[18] But in the 1990s, literary critics began rereading the classics of political economy not only to enrich their knowledge of economic theory beyond their readings of Marx, but to engage with the study of economics as it is currently practised. The *New Economic Criticism* anthology, published in 1999, includes sections on the symbolic analysis of money, economies of authorship, and criticism of neoliberal economics and can probably be said to have influenced a decade of intensive interest

in Victorian economic theory. Fuelled by the critical historicisms of the past few decades, Victorianist scholars have opened up a whole new range of economic history for consideration by literary critics, including writers previously not read in this field such as Whately, Ricardo, and Jevons. Regenia Gagnier's work on the role of desire in aestheticism led to a fruitful investigation of marginal utility theory, and her 2000 book *The Insatiability of Human Wants* opened out from readings of fin-de-siècle artists to larger questions of progress, reproduction, and hero-worship. Mary Poovey's work in this field has been especially prominent, from her 1994 article in *Aesthetics and Ideology* through her 1998 book *A History of the Modern Fact* and 2008 *Genres of the Credit Economy,* as well as her 2003 sourcebook on the financial system in nineteenth-century Britain. Her historicist focus on the rhetorical construction of economic authority has influenced much excellent recent work, including Claudia Klaver's analysis of Ricardian rhetoric in *A/Moral Economics*, and Gordon Bigelow's analysis of Irish political economy in *Fiction, Famine, and the Rise of Economics in Victorian Britain and Ireland*, both published in 2003. Literary critics have entered into a more productive dialogue with the many historians of political economy, as in Philip Connell's 2001 *Romanticism, Economics, and the Question of 'Culture',* a brilliant debunking of the Romantic poets' supposed opposition to political economy that shows a debt to the work of intellectual historian Stefan Collini. The introduction to Catherine Gallagher's 2006 *The Body Economic* provides a useful overview of this recent boomlet in economic history, adopting the practice of 'taking political economy seriously as a discipline and not implying that it was merely a form of early industrial capitalist apologetics' to trace various biological imperatives of pleasure and scarcity.[19]

My new suggestion about how to combine the aesthetic and the critical dimensions of novel theory is inflected by our distinct historical moment of globalizing capitalist technology, with its combination of fantasies of dissolving boundaries with anxiety about foreign infiltration and a general constriction of sympathy for strangers.[20] This moment of technological and state boundlessness may be peculiarly suited to a phenomenological approach that focuses – like many novels – on the perplexing gulf between individual and collective points of view. Postmodernity has not been kind to the novel, or to literary criticism in general, reducing their cultural prominence within a media world that now includes film, television, advertising culture, and the internet. Yet despite this expanding horizon of knowledge no one has suggested that now, at last, we have enough information to (for example) run a successful centrally planned economy. In fact, we cannot even reliably predict which movies will become hits, despite all the furious energies of Hollywood spin – in this business, famously said screenwriter William Goldman, 'nobody knows anything'.[21] The collapse of Soviet communism and the rise of personal computing have contributed to our moment of neoliberal churn that combines overwhelming amounts of

information with a sense of helplessness, paranoia, and confusion. Finding a moral purchase on this experience is made even more difficult by the incomprehensibly complex web of business interconnections that can turn a miscalculation in the American mortgage market into an international financial crisis.

Even if the *scope* of this information expansion is unprecedented, the *kind* of experience it represents is not completely new. Dizzying feelings of moral uncertainty about economic growth and collapse are charted from the beginning of the industrial age, as are its correlates of *ignorance* and *irony*: the awareness of personal ignorance about one's true place in an extensive and perplexing social order, and the irony that results from the interplay of individual intentions and unintended consequences throughout that social order. Therefore I will be focusing on novels of the early industrial age, mostly from about 1810 to 1860, to show how the often-comic moral puzzles that confront their characters dramatize an increasing sense of ungraspable social complexity that connects their era with ours. While these moral puzzles are often solved by reference to a nation-state within whose boundaries far-flung moral effects become meaningful, the novels' characters are usually aware that their problems also have some kind of international component, whether that be international finance or an encroaching cosmopolitan foreigner like Napoleon. Like no other form of cultural expression, extended narratives can describe what it feels like to live within a free-market society in which the existential conditions of human ignorance are exacerbated by our inability to grasp invisible causes and effects of the market organization, and individual agency must struggle against a mysterious form of social determination that works through co-opting desire. Within this imaginary structure, they work out some of the personal moral consequences and behavioural transformations that are implied but not really developed in classical political economy. It is important to note, however, that while novels respond to this structure of feeling they also resist it, depicting moments when selfishness leads not to public welfare but to private torment, or when the market undermines hard work in favour of unprofitable speculation. Because of their extended and intricate aesthetic form, novels can uniquely represent the moral challenges of living in a complex capitalist society, and in doing so they tease out the positive and negative implications of the moral theories implied in classical political economy.

Like political economy, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novel was increasingly ambitious in its appetite for total knowledge, reflecting and synthesizing current events like the French Revolution as well as intellectual obsessions like Gothic irrationality, women's rights, and evolution. But there are two key differences between novels and other forms of sociological inquiry: first of all, novels are explicitly fictional. That novels that claim to be entirely imaginary can nevertheless unlock legitimate knowledge of the

world is an established paradox in literary criticism. A subset of novels that call themselves 'realist' openly embrace this contradiction by being set in a world that appears to have some kind of objective historical existence, and could conceivably be contiguous with the reader's own world.[22] However, almost every novel aspires to some kind of psychological realism, even those that employ defamiliarizing techniques like stream-of-consciousness. When Virginia Woolf argues in 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown' that the mere accumulation of realistic details, such as the descriptions of flour mills and suburban developments in the opening of Arnold Bennett's *Hilda Lessways*, is less important than the mystery of the lady sitting opposite her on the train, she is making a profoundly humanist observation about the real existence of inner experience. Perhaps even more distinctive than this agglomerative drive, however, is the novel's distinctive epistemological format, which models social experience as it might look to a single individual, both synchronically at a single moment and diachronically as it unfolds over time. The novel's focus on the individual point of view is both its strength and its weakness in this regard: its strength, because it can depict the relation between 'knowledge' in general and a subject who not only knows but feels, decides, and acts on that knowledge, thereby creating and changing it; its weakness, because individual mortals suffer from an inevitable limit on the amount they can know. As individual subjects, we can never actually know society as it exists in its totality.

My focus on the deliberately constructed complexities of these nineteenth-century realist novels within a given horizon of perception follows in the tradition of the early Lukács, whose *Theory of the Novel* describes the novel form as inherently ironic and melancholic. Though the Victorian realist novel was rejected by many modernist critics, beginning with Henry James, for its clumsy structure, obvious didacticism, and complacent optimism, there has recently been a resurgence of interest in the genre for various reasons.[23] Realism fits our current critical mood of interest in the historical and political contexts of the novel form, and has been the subject of articulate defence most notably by George Levine, Harry Shaw, and Pam Morris. Some defenders of realism, such as the late Lukács and Jameson, find the realist habit of foregrounding the economic circumstances of a novel's protagonists to be compatible with the Marxist project of interpreting cultural activity as the superstructure over the base of an economic 'reality'. My engagement with capitalism here is both more and less explicit than in the work of these critics: where a Marxist reader will see the novel's plot as determined by economic relations which are hidden by capitalist ideology, I think that novels are also linked to the economy through their engagement with the economic fantasy articulated openly in theories of free-market society. And while some part of this engagement takes the form of explicit discussion of economic matters – whether by covertly naturalizing existing economic arrangements or by pointing out ways that invisible social

connections undermine capitalist arguments (such as by showing the secret connections between workers and employers) – they also work through the moral problems of free trade by elaborating the theory's underlying message that life in a complex society involves chance, risk, irony, folly, and possibly determinism by impersonal forces. In doing so they help the reader create a mental model of (and possibly cope with) this difficult new reality, but also lodge a protest against its moments of random or intentional cruelty.[24]

Some of the formal aspects of the realist novels analysed in Part II are responses, I argue, to interpretive problems of Smithian invisible hand social theory – specifically, its ambiguity about space, time, and national boundaries. Smith's volume is called *The Wealth of Nations*, but to persuade his British readers to abandon mercantilist tariff barriers he had to argue that free trade would primarily be good for Britain as a nation, whatever its benefits for humanity as a whole. In fact free-trade theory is remarkably unclear on this basic point: whether free trade gives the whole nation a comparative competitive advantage, whether only a part of the nation benefits from these policies, or whether all nations benefit from lowering their tariff, which would thus indirectly benefit one's own nation though not perhaps give it any distinctive advantage.[25] The whole point of invisible hand social theory is that selfish capitalist activity results in some ironic and unplanned trickle-down benefit to strangers, but it does not specify whether those strangers are only the ones located nearest to the economic activity, or whether they might live in some other part of the country or even abroad. In fact, though most of Smith's polemic is directed towards British practices, the merchant-hero of the invisible hand passage happens to be based in Amsterdam.[26] As discussed further in Part I, this paradigmatic merchant likes to keep his money near home because of his own epistemological limitations – he is simply more likely to invest where he knows the terrain. So the members of the public who will benefit are likely to be located near him spatially, and if the merchant feels at home in a particular nation he will perhaps invest more often within the boundaries of that nation. But there is no certainty that *every* citizen of a nation will benefit from the merchant's actions, and the merchant's 'home bias' vanishes if the merchant is part of an international corporation (or banking family like the Rothschilds) at home in many countries. Political defences of free trade (then and now) usually blandly refer to 'public' or even 'national' benefits that will accrue to unspecified persons, without closer tallying of the precise winners and losers from every transaction.

The social benefits promised by invisible hand social theory thus rest upon a series of unintentional effects, distant in space and time, derived from any particular economic transaction. But just as Smith's theory does not explain the particular links in the chain that connect each cause to an effect, it does not specify whether any spatial boundary marks the limit of those effects or whether they just continue infinitely outward. In many British novels this

ambiguity is disguised by the historical accident that Britain was the first country really to benefit from free trade, and so by the mid-nineteenth century free trade was associated with the success of British industrial power. But the moral universe suggested by political economy, which offered such a complex model of social interaction to these novelists, is not merely limited to the British nation but extends in shadowy fashion to include an unknown number of foreigners. This unresolved spatial uncertainty creates the characteristic mood of tortured irony in British novels around this time period: an oscillation between the official mood of social optimism and some kind of alternate perspective that is necessary to comprehend the system's ironic complexity but also introduces a note of doubt. The alternation between Gothic and realist genres in *Northanger Abbey*, the split between omniscient and first-person narration in *Bleak House*, the strain between free will and determinism in *The Illustrations of Political Economy*, the hostile impasses of *Hard Times*, the conflicted desire to continue the novel infinitely outward in *Vanity Fair*, and the excessively sympathetic narrators of *Mary Barton* and *The Mill on the Floss* are all, I argue, innovative responses to the unresolvable spatial and temporal confusions produced by invisible hand social theory.

My readings of nineteenth-century British novels in the four chapters of Part II are organized around this essentially narrative dilemma, and hence are focused less on the novels' relation to industrial or economic history (though I do analyse this crucial context) than on their structural reliance on ways of understanding the social world that are derived implicitly from the invisible hand metaphor. For there are many epistemological and moral implications of the invisible hand metaphor that help sustain the fantasy of a complex self-organized society but are not always articulated within the discourse of political economy. These categories or tropes, which I will sketch briefly here, are all aspects of invisible hand social theory that are not just economic, but derived in part from the Christian opposition between fallible individuals and an omniscient God, though re-mapped onto a purely secular field of individual versus collective knowledge, or worldly cause and effect. The novels I discuss often make use of these tropes in an attempt to reconcile Judeo-Christian moral imperatives with perplexing worldly complexity within the framework of a naturalistic narrative in which God does not intervene. These ways of understanding the world include such categories as *omniscience*, an overview of the whole society that is available to no living human but can be constructed by the use of an omniscient narrator as well as by the theorist of political economy. Another is the *ignorance* both of individual characters in a realist novel and of the state actors in any free-trade theory, which in that theory is assumed to be politically more significant and persuasive than the economic theorist's lack of knowledge, or the lack of knowledge of any private merchant or company. The organization of society around the doctrine of *unintended consequences* seems to offer an open-ended vision of contingency and chance in a way that is meant to

encourage the risk-taking behaviour of the capitalist, although it is also used to shackle the actions of other kinds of collective agencies.

These three categories can be blended in the quasi-divine figure of *Providence*, a perspective or agent which combines knowledge of all human affairs with arrangement of those affairs so that what seems to be an evil event (say, the Lisbon earthquake of 1755) is revealed as dispensing hidden benefits. But while Providence is supposedly evidence of divine goodness, the trope of unintended consequences can be either positive or negative, implying possibly that society is organized to succeed but also that the unknowability of the future might undermine *all* human aspirations, including the capitalist's, or even that a bad government's actions might have future benefits. Equally amoral are the invisible hand's implications that society is unknowably *complex*, and that it is organized in some kind of *spatial totality* within which the effects of any social action can be determined. For Smith this totality was the nation (as in 'the wealth of nations'), but he recognized that even when the boundaries of a nation were as geographically clear as those of the island of Britain (though further complicated by the inclusion of Ireland in the pre-1801 Kingdom of Great Britain), those boundaries were made visible by the existence of other similar nations, and that much of the trade that established the nation's wealth was carried out internationally, thus blurring the idea that all beneficiaries of the merchant's action must be in the same nation as the merchant. I believe that the implication that capitalism exists within and over a certain kind of geographical space, derived from the inference of moral action over a distance, has been far more politically difficult than generally realized – perhaps because classical economic theory persistently fudges the question of whether this benefited social space is a national one or a cosmopolitan global one. And then just as spatiality, or some kind of physical remove between the selfish merchant and the unintended beneficiary of his selfishness, is implicit in the invisible hand metaphor, so there must be a period of time that elapses between the action and its effect. The temporal version of the spatial overview is *hindsight*, a form of omniscience available to the secular eye because theoretically many of the effects of any action have been revealed to the historian (or, proleptically, will be available to some future historian).

It will probably already be clear to the literary critic how some of these categories map onto different narrative technologies, though they also overlap in numerous ways. The omniscient narrator, the subject of Chapter 2, was developed in several forms over the course of the eighteenth century, but it is in the works of Jane Austen in the first two decades of the nineteenth century that it is linked most explicitly to the moral consequences of individual ignorance. I will be focusing here on Austen's first novel, the 1799 Gothic parody *Northanger Abbey* (published in 1818), in which the narrator self-consciously mediates between the determinist world of

Gothic novels and the supposed freedom of her protagonist Catherine Morland, thus complicating the novel's major key of Smithian optimistic realism with a humourous minor key of suppressed paranoia. This chapter then compares the perfectly knowing Austenian narrator to the flawed double narrators of Dickens's 1853 *Bleak House* – the angry omniscient narrator and the virtuous but scarred young girl Esther Summerson – to show how the interaction evokes a total pattern of cause and effect in much the same way as Smith's text calls forth a dynamic moral programme by positing, and then resolving, a contrast between the ignorant merchant and the wise economic theorist. Chapter 3 confronts the question of economic ideology more openly by posing the predetermined morals of Harriet Martineau's 1832 *Illustrations of Political Economy*, written to popularize classical political economy, against their apparent refutation by Charles Dickens in the angry 1854 anti-utilitarian novel *Hard Times*. While clashing over the social consequences of industrialization, these narratives also engage with invisible hand social theory implicitly through the relation between their narrative structures and the idea of Providence, which is supposed to dispense poetic as well as economic justice. Though Providence is supposed to lead to happy endings, neither of these economic tales actually reconciles human desire with economic outcome. Chapter 4 focuses on the satiric potential of the theory of unintended consequences in William Makepeace Thackeray's 1847–48 *Vanity Fair*, in which Regency society is depicted as relying as much on unstable international finance as on the hypocritical appearance of virtue. With its sprawling extended structure, sudden reversals, and self-ironizing narrator, this novel's depiction of economic life as chaotic, fragmented, and opaque seems closer to the modern idea of networked economy as a 'complex adaptive system' than with the rational models of economic choice that were orthodox at the time.[27] Thackeray's social world of random encounters, self-moving agents, and paradoxical order is consistent with Smith's construction of a liberty-preserving system – and his twentieth-century defender Friedrich Hayek – but instead of focusing on social harmony Thackeray stresses the system's inherent potential for anarchy and vice. The final chapter discusses two women writers whose attempts to mediate between individual experience and social whole led them to construct controversially 'sympathetic' narrative voices that compensate, through intense identification with their characters, for the coldness of the dominant synoptic overview. The narrator of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* has the difficult task of representing the 'correct' middle-class response to workers' demands while relating a sensational and powerfully emotional story of suffering that completely undermines the 'rational' part of the narrator's voice. And in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, the narrator's identification with the heroine Maggie Tulliver has been troubling to critics since the book's publication; but the novel also contains, in the form of a dialectic between

irony and earnestness, a complicated critique of readers who insist on emotional distance from a novel's characters.

My argument thus takes the central insight of Jameson's *Postmodernism* – that late capitalism's vast scope, and its permeation of all available lifeworlds, create a sense of historical, spatial, and social disorientation – and extends it back into the early years of capitalist moral systems. Invisible hand social theory is already implicitly spatial in its displacement of the effects of moral actions from the agent onto some remote person, or onto 'society' itself. Jameson imagines three different kinds of space that correspond to different stages of capitalist development: market society calls forth the secularized grid of abstract space, imperialism creates a split between individual experience and the absent and unrepresentable colonial system, and late capitalist space is schizophrenic and fragmented.[28] He thus connects modernist form with the economic moment of global imperialism, but the moments of turbulence and comedy I trace in earlier novels are responding not just to the achieved fact of imperialism but to the possibility of vast cosmopolitan chains of moral connection that is already implied in Smith's theory. I see these moments of fragmentation and code-switching most vividly in these novels' juggling between realist and Gothic genres – in their understanding that each genre contains an implicit theory of the relation between individual cause and social effect, and also that neither genre suffices to depict the complexity of real social life.

The most systematic critical response to the problem of the moral distance between the cause and effect of economic actions written during the nineteenth century is probably Marx's theory of commodity fetishism, developed in Book I of *Capital*. Marx argues here that the tendency to abstract and aggregate producers and consumers in any large economy is compounded by capitalism's focus on the commodity's exchange value, with the result that both labour and labourers, the source of economic value for Marx as for Smith, are occluded and undervalued. I share with Marx and Jameson a concern that the complexity and opacity of capitalist exchange diffuses the sense of moral penalty for greedy and exploitative behaviour that might have been a little easier to grasp in a simpler social system. Those who cannot understand the system's dynamic complexities, whether expressed in a nineteenth-century trade union law or a twenty-first-century credit default swap, are vulnerable to being cheated without realizing it. But neither Marx nor Jameson argue that the system is really immoral in a traditional sense: it enables human weakness and usually benefits the powerful, but it is not the fault of any one particular fat cat.[29] The main difference between the theoretical and the narrative approach to the moral challenges of capitalism is that novels must apportion individual blame and virtue at the same time as they trace the diffusion of any action through the social network; so there may be villains whose victims are complicit, and virtuous intentions undone by others' folly. The narrative always registers the difference

between individual experience and the aggregate phenomenon of which that experience forms a part. Novels are less successful, though, in advocating any consistent political response to that phenomenon: *Hard Times* may make you hate Bounderby, but it does not offer you any clear way of fighting him, especially since this particular malefactor is dead by the end of the novel.

Capitalism is both a national and an international structure: while the capitalist fantasies I will analyse here are usually explicitly committed to the welfare of their authors' respective nations, they are also unable definitively to bracket out the idea that capitalism might bring instability as well as wealth from abroad. British novels tend to be a little more strongly committed to the promises of the new economic order, and perhaps are more vividly self-conscious about the paradoxical connection between this optimistic future and the failures that may lead up to it – but the literature of many countries at this time contains an element of ludic dismay at the uncontrollable nature of the new society, and a search for intellectual and emotional ways of erecting boundaries against it. In the Conclusion to this volume, I speculate incompletely about how other national responses to invisible hand social theory are affected by their dates of industrialization and relation to British economic power. Yet a heightened anxiety about whether or how to police the national boundary is something common to all capitalist societies – that is, all relatively open societies that seek to build wealth through trade rather than walls.

In his 1982 work *The Limits of Capital,* the social geographer David Harvey works within Marx's *Capital* to show how capitalism gives rise to structural contradictions that eventually make it unsustainable. But Marx is also the source of some of the most lyrical-Gothic descriptions we have of nineteenth-century capitalism, with its ability to overcome all obstacles and force its way into every unexploited niche. Marx was writing at the end of an era of free trade while Smith was writing at its beginning, but neither Marx nor Smith could envision the uses to which their theories would be put. Robert Merton, in his 1936 article about the law of unintended consequences, mentions that Marx's own works might ironically have saved capitalism: '[A]t least one of the consequences of socialist preaching in the nineteenth century was the spread of organization of labour, which, made conscious of its unfavorable bargaining position in cases of individual contract, organized to enjoy the advantages of collective bargaining, thus slowing up, if not eliminating, the developments which Marx had predicted.'[30] This book was inspired in part by the 1989 collapse of the Berlin Wall, with its dramatic demonstration that capitalism creates a certain kind of imaginary moral space that may or may not overlap with the boundaries of a particular nation. The very strangeness of that moment in which one nation seemed to collapse into another nation – a nation that was also in some way itself – served not only as an apotheosis of capital's fantasized power

to make solid things melt into air, but as a reminder that the distinction between national boundaries and economic boundlessness is not always quite as visible. It may be that capitalism is inexorably destined to vanquish most physical spaces on the globe – that economic forces are destined to undermine all national boundaries – but our ability to predict the future is probably no better than that of Marx or Smith; whether capitalism is destined to slowly improve the welfare of the human race, lead it to utter catastrophe, or both, cannot yet be definitively ascertained.

Part I
Reading Adam Smith

1

Imaginary Vantage Points: The Invisible Hand and the Rise of Political Economy

In eighteenth-century British aesthetics, landscape painting came to embody a set of important social values, serving among other things as catalogue of country house styles, elegy for lost civilizations, and creator of the cult of unspoiled Nature. But as John Barrell has argued, the ideal of visibility, of viewing a whole landscape scene at once from a distant location, also implies a certain class position. Especially at the beginning of the century, gentlemen of landed property justified their political power as magistrates through their disinterested ability to view their whole society from a distance. Any 'specific profession, trade, or occupation', it was presumed, 'might occlude [the gentleman's] view of society as a whole'. To take part in society, then, is to be partially blind to its workings, according to much eighteenth-century social philosophy.[1] This paradox troubled Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* particularly in regards to the role of philosophy itself. On the one hand he boasts of the philosopher's leisure to survey his society: 'These varied occupations present an almost infinite variety of objects to the contemplation of those few, who, being attached to no particular occupation themselves, have leisure and inclination to examine the occupations of other people. The contemplation of so great a variety of objects necessarily exercises their minds ... and renders their understandings, in an extraordinary degree, both acute and comprehensive' (*WN* II, 783). On the other hand, since philosophy is not labour, it produces no value and must be considered economically 'unproductive' along with the work of 'churchmen' and 'opera-singers' (*WN* I, 331).

In this chapter I would like to focus on the dream of social visibility offered by Smith's economic theory, which is the first systemic overview of the economic revolution that accompanied industrialism in Britain. But just as a landscape may be coherent from one point of view and confusing from another, this overview is dependent on the construction of a distinct social vantage point. Smith's idea of the comprehensive disinterested philosopher

is a figure of leisure, like the disinterested gentleman, but unlike him he has no distinct political power. In fact Smith is sceptical that any single person, such as a sovereign, might be in a position to make specific economic decisions for every member of the polity. What the philosopher discerns is the outline of the social machine in general – and unlike the gentleman, he is able to pass this disinterested knowledge along to others. This idea that strenuous defamiliarization from one's environment (or 'disembeddedness') is a prerequisite for economic knowledge thus has its roots in the political power of landed property in the eighteenth century, which perhaps explains some of the bitter controversy that has swirled around it from *Hard Times* to the rise of rational choice theory.[2] In *The Wealth of Nations* there are thus two implicitly alienated positions from which to view the whole society: that of the philosopher or theorist, who intuits the larger structure of justice, and the sovereign, who must be persuaded by the theorist to refrain from action. Yet the sovereign is not the book's only implied audience: the individual economic agent, as well, may need to be persuaded that his ignorance of the social welfare of his selfish actions is compatible with their benefits to his society. Three (or perhaps four) interrelated subject positions are therefore required to make moral sense of capitalism: a sovereign who sees the whole of society and has some power to intervene, a philosopher or theorist who also sees the whole of society but urges the sovereign not to intervene, and an individual split into two parts: a self-interested *homo economicus* who seeks his own financial advantage, and a theoretically more sophisticated political subject who has been persuaded by the philosopher that such self-interest is morally defensible. This lattermost subject position, the enlightened capitalist subject, is not strictly necessary to the functioning of the system, but the system will not function as smoothly if individuals deny the benefits of self-interest, for example if they think it conflicts with the traditional Christian injunction to altruism. Thus a great deal of effort was expended in the early years of capitalism to persuade workers and political bodies that this peculiarly paradoxical form of capitalist self-interest was not un-Christian (as will be discussed further in Chapter 3). Smith's description of capitalism is, like a novel, a fantasy of meaningful social order as constructed by the overlapping interactions between different socially located points of view – and hence novels can function as effective rivals and supplements to this vision of capitalism, as I will be arguing in later chapters.

At stake in this complicated rhetorical manoeuvre is the status of economic 'law' as a scientific fact, independent of the human will, which can be established through disinterested observation. Smith's definition of economics in terms of 'natural laws', an idea that he borrowed from the French physiocrats, implied that these laws could not be controlled by human politics, and as a result the study of these economic laws has increasingly become separated off from the study of political institutions. This progressive separation of

economics from politics has continued up to the present: today's academic economists make politics even less their object of study than did the 'political economists' of the nineteenth century. The claim of purely 'economic' science to be based on a natural law increases the rhetorical impact of its anti-government conclusions by implying that human political institutions are 'artificial' and unnecessary obstacles to this law's free and vigorous working. The definition of these economic laws then becomes as objective and scientific a process as the discovery of the laws of motion – and, as I will discuss below, both Smith and the utilitarian moral theorists were attracted to the simplicity of Newtonian physics. It should be added however that Smith himself did not separate economics out from the other disciplines in this way, but drafted *The Wealth of Nations* as part of a greater explanation of social order, which considers aesthetic response and political regulation as well as economics.[3] Samuel Fleischacker argues that Smith deliberately based his conclusions not on abstract principles but on common-sense observations of daily social life.[4] Rather than reading *The Wealth of Nations* as a simple factual exposition of economic reality, we should recognize it as an imaginative synthesis of social, scientific, and moral discourses based on the underlying principle of the 'invisible hand'. This metaphor only appears a total of three times in Smith's work – once (and most famously) in *The Wealth of Nations*, once in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and once in the essay on the 'History of Astronomy'.[5] But it serves as a convincing illustration of the teleological (and potentially deist) principles that govern Smith's 'system of natural liberty', and is often used to summarize Smith's economic doctrines.[6] J. Ronnie Davis observes that 'no simile, metaphor, or phrase of any kind in Smith's published works has been the object of more inquiry than his reference ... to an "invisible hand" '.[7]

The vividness of Smith's image – an economic order arranged magically by some presumably very large but also mysteriously unknowable hand to produce universal prosperity – may explain its popularity, but has also led to continuing controversy among economists. It is suspected that the image of an invisible and beneficent agent is a remnant of eighteenth-century providential theology, or that it breathes an improper suggestion of mysticism into what should be the entirely empirical study of economics.[8] Emma Rothschild, for example, suggests that the invisible hand is 'un-Smithian' because at the time invisibility carried a connotation of superstition, and that Smith meant it merely as 'an ironic but useful joke'.[9] While Rothschild implies that the irony makes the phrase less representative of Smith's thought, Fleischacker thinks that irony of a particularly slippery and ambiguous kind, what Wayne Booth calls 'unstable irony', is pervasive in *WN*: 'The irony is sometimes obvious, ... but on other occasions it can be hard to tell whether Smith is being ironic or not. ... There are also moments that partake of the ambiguity and plain description entailed by Smith's general outlook on the world.'[10] Jacob Viner argues not just that the metaphor itself

is important, but that its metaphysical overtones are crucial: 'Adam Smith's system of thought, including his economics, is not intelligible if one disregards the role he assigns in it to the teleological elements, to the "invisible hand".'[11] So while some theorists seek to minimize the role of the invisible hand in Smith's works, the consensus seems to be that its prominence in later economic discourse does indicate something crucial about Smith's work, or as Minowitz puts it: 'Although the invisible hand surfaces only once in *Wealth of Nations*, the book is pervaded by the prospect of an unseen agency – perhaps an unseen intelligence – that constructively channels the behavior of self-interested individuals and should deter political elites from being overly intrusive.'[12] The point is also made that Smith's philosophy of social behaviour is not merely a description of really existing conditions, but a vision of free and harmonious conformity to natural law – that is, it is not so much a description of capitalism as a *prescription* for its creation, with a strong flavour of the ideal. Rajani Kanth writes that this prescriptive quality of this theory of capitalism distinguishes Smith from his followers: 'He was arguing for an epoch yet unborn; they, perhaps not unmindful of the same lofty ends, but by virtue of circumstance, found themselves defending already well defined class interests and entering the political fray directly. It is in this regard that we might term Adam Smith the first – and last – Utopian capitalist.'[13]

The utopian element of Smith's philosophy continues to attract popular attention, although it may also strike us as banal and out of date since so much of what he foresaw has come to pass. Under these circumstances it may seem difficult to defamiliarize Smith's text to the point where we might recover the strangeness and instability of his most-cited metaphor. One of the most interesting recent analyses is that of economist William Grampp, who describes nine different competing economic interpretations of the invisible hand metaphor, ranging from price equilibrium to Hayekian social order to the morality of competition in general (and then suggests a tenth, which I will discuss below). The kinds of interpretive difficulties that are problematic to economists, of course, are like catnip to literary critics. I think the productive difficulties and ambiguities of the metaphor are themselves significant: in fact, I will argue that the metaphor of the invisible hand marks a logical flaw in Smith's system, where his goal of imagining an economic sphere separate from specific human societies had to fail, and where he had to paper over the breach with an aesthetic image. This point of failure, which must be expressed in terms of metaphor because it cannot be logically proved, is the transformation of economic self-interest (i.e. profits for business) into public welfare (the 'universal opulence which extends itself to the lowest ranks of the people' (*WN* I, 22)). Since no one (not the theorist, sovereign, or individual) can detect this moment of moral displacement and transformation, Smith's system requires a perpetual leap of imagination to keep it intact. However, because of its ability to bear multiple

and quasi-contradictory meanings, this metaphor performs a useful political function. While functioning as a placeholder for ethics in capitalism (since it explains the system's overall benevolence), it also creates an image of the system itself, unified through the operation of one intention, or at least the appearance of one, behind the multiplicity and chaos of economic appearances. The image thus created of a grand unified system has, as Smith himself theorized, a certain intellectual beauty which in turn encourages profit-seeking behaviour. While the invisible hand's attraction is initially ethical, its aesthetic dimension exerts an attraction of its own that tends to reify and reinforce both Smith's vision of capitalism and, perhaps, capitalism itself.

I suggest that Smith recognized that this metaphor was troublesome – that it was unempirical, incautiously vivid, and revealed the logical weakness of some of his other assertions – but that he also found it fascinating and that it may have served him as a kind of guiding image, as it would serve many of his commentators. This would explain not only the metaphor's rarity in *WN*, but the fact that Smith chose to recycle it from earlier texts. In fact *The Wealth of Nations* contains many fewer direct references to a benevolent Higher Deity than did his earlier *Theory of Moral Sentiments* – which makes the invisible hand metaphor all the more apparent by contrast.[14] While this metaphor and the teleology it implies are indeed central to Smith's works, Smith does not intend it to imply that only economically selfish actions contribute to the common good, as some of his later followers have assumed.

The exposition that follows will begin with a discussion of the place of the invisible hand in *The Wealth of Nations*, and then turn to some of its historical antecedents, in the French physiocrats and in Smith's earlier works, as well as some of its after-effects in later political economy. In doing so I would like to foreground the interaction in Smith between the organizing function of self-interest and his aesthetics of conceptual systems such as astronomy and economics. The link between self-interest, the beauty of formal systems, and the 'invisible hand' model of natural law in Smith, I will argue, is essentially phenomenological – that is, based on perceptions of patterns in the natural and social world, which inevitably centre on the perceiving consciousness. The limitations of individual subjects' perceptions lead ironically to social benefits that are indistinguishable from the appearance of providential design. It is well known that Smith's idea of social order in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is based on the imagined composition and introjection of several different points of view, but I will be arguing here that this kind of composite perspectivalism also plays an important though less explicit role in *The Wealth of Nations*, and that it implies the construction of a politically bounded space within which moral actions lead to detectable effects. While Smith constructs political economy as the mastery of a spatial field, instantly comprehensible at a single glance, his invocation

of indirect moral benefits also implies a temporal dimension – the time that elapses between the selfish act and its unintended effect.

This chapter is thus focused on Smith's particular use of the invisible hand metaphor: what influenced him, what he might have intended, and how it was immediately received. Most academic work on the problem of invisible hand social theory has been focused on this kind of textual question, and hence this chapter benefits from decades of scholarly speculation about the history of economic theory. This might be a useful moment to remind the reader, however, that one of my larger arguments in this study is that invisible hand social theory is not just an *economic* idea, and that we should not limit its possible meanings to those emphasized by Smith or his economic followers. In later chapters I will explore how the idea of a morally enriched space unfolding over time in ironic and unpredictable ways was adopted and elaborated in realist novels, as well as in economic theories that seem to have little to do with Smith.

The Wealth of Nations: natural liberty, negative liberty, and the invisible hand

Although *The Wealth of Nations* may have been the first systematic text of political economy, this new discipline was not created out of a void.[15] *The Wealth of Nations*'s appearance of originality can also be read as a function of its transitional and indeed simplifying role between the old discourses of moral and political philosophy and the new ones of political economics and, indirectly, aesthetics. The new science of economics only becomes possible when moral, political, and aesthetic considerations can be excised from the abstract object of study, which is the circulation of capital. Albert Hirschman claims that *WN*'s 'advance' was really a retreat – Smith simply bypassed centuries of debate about the role of avaricious self-interest as a possible 'check' to other (vicious) passions, and collapsed all the motivating passions of human behaviour into the desire to better one's material condition. After Smith, 'the noneconomic drives, powerful as they are, are all made to feed into the economic ones and do nothing but reinforce them'.[16] Along similar lines, John Guillory argues that although *The Wealth of Nations* itself was a book of moral philosophy, it also laid the groundwork for that discipline's eclipse. Smith 'solved' moral philosophy's problem of reconciling public good to private interest by appealing to an essentially aesthetic concept of the harmony between supply and demand (or production and consumption). But he then had to found this harmony on a theory of production based on labour and utility, excluding the 'useless' work of art, which then has to define itself as worth 'more' than its mere commercial value. This exclusion 'marks the point of the irrevocable disengagement of political economy from aesthetic questions, and thus its emergence as a separate discourse. Aesthetics, on the

other hand, continues to name a set of questions or a subdiscourse within the larger discourse of philosophy, from which it had no reason to detach itself, and never did.' Political economy and aesthetics are, in effect, 'separated at birth'.[17]

The invisible hand metaphor, I argue, represents and performs on a microcosmic scale those disciplinary transitions that have been identified with *The Wealth of Nations* itself. Guillory claims that Smith's political economy is founded on an aesthetically conceived projection of social harmony, which then redefines its origin in exclusively economic terms. Smith thus occludes the original aesthetic nature of his economic equilibrium by substituting for it an economic and material 'cause' – the harmony of supply and demand. This material 'cause' in the realm of production is in fact an 'effect': the retrospectively arranged effacement of the aesthetic moment in capitalism. As it functions in Smith's text, the invisible hand metaphor represents an analogous reversal of cause and effect – or rather it represents the Smithian social order as an effect *without* a cause. That is, the desired effect – social and economic harmony – is produced by leaving things alone, by the refusal of government or any body representing the public interest to interfere with the economic transactions which will produce that harmony. The invisible hand both invites and defers the question of agency (who or what is responsible for the social order) by replacing it with the concept of 'natural law'. In my reading of the invisible hand, I will attempt to show that the concept of natural law depends on a reification of the limits of knowledge, or the limits of what is visible either to an individual or to a sovereign. This reification results from a reversal of individual and public perspectives – that is, a shift in the horizon of knowledge from individual knowledge to a general theoretical oversight, which then reframes the individual understanding of economic activity. The theorist may have lost sight of the individual economic transaction by understanding it in the form of an abstraction, but he has gained the knowledge that the ignorance of the various human agents does not preclude the workings of the system. The invisible hand represents a kind of social 'mirror stage', in which an atomized social body recognizes itself as a whole.[18]

So let us examine the relation in *The Wealth of Nations* between the invisible hand and what Smith elsewhere describes as the 'system of natural liberty'. Here, in a nutshell, is Smith's prescription for the ideal social order:

> All systems either of preference or of restraint, therefore, being thus completely taken away, the obvious and simple system of natural liberty establishes itself of its own accord. Every man, as long as he does not violate the laws of justice, is left perfectly free to pursue his own interest his own way, and to bring both his industry and capital into competition with those of any other man, or order of men. The sovereign is completely discharged from ... the duty of superintending the industry of

> private people, and of directing it towards the employments most suitable to the interest of the society. (*WN* II, 687)

This system of natural liberty places Smith squarely in the camp of laissez-faire, or free-trade, economic theory (though, again, he is not doctrinaire in this position). But this is so far only half a description, limited to what must *not* be done to achieve social harmony. Smith clearly does not believe that a release from governmental regulation would result in either workers' idleness or social anarchy – there is still some kind of regulation going on, as there is some 'natural' spur to industry. The spur to industry Smith locates in the universal human characteristic of 'self-interest', which he interprets as a ceaseless activity of economic self-improvement. The regulatory activity that 'establishes itself of its own accord' is identified most concretely by Smith as the 'invisible hand' in the following passage:

> As every individual, therefore, endeavours as much as he can both to employ his capital in the support of domestick industry, and so to direct that industry that its produce may be of the greatest value; every individual necessarily labours to render the annual revenue of the society as great as he can. He generally, indeed, neither intends to promote the publick interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it. By preferring the support of domestick to that of foreign industry, he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an *invisible hand* to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the publick good. (*WN* I, 456, emphasis added)

But the invisible hand described in this passage does not do all the work we would expect of a universal regulatory agency. First of all let us consider that, when analysed as rhetoric, the invisible hand does not 'arrange' events harmoniously, nor 'prohibit' detrimental outcomes, but rather 'leads' the merchant to promote an end that he did not intend. There are many ways of leading an action: for example in Exodus (13:21–2), the Lord leads the Israelites with a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night. This provided them with a directional goal, which they then chose (more or less) to follow. When you draw a straight line with the help of a ruler, the ruler is also 'leading' your hand, by preventing your pencil from deviating from the line you have chosen to draw. The CEO of a company 'leads' it by organizing the relation of departments to each other, by buying and

selling, hiring and firing, and so on. The President of the United States 'leads' the nation with a combination of executive decision and personal charisma, which ideally inspires the citizenry to follow him or her. Smart elementary school students 'lead' their class by providing a standard of excellence for the others to measure up to. Dog owners 'lead' their dogs for walks on leashes, though the dogs may end up leading their owners instead.

What all these forms of leadership have in common is that the followers know clearly who or what is leading them, and often have a choice whether to follow that leader. The invisible hand leads in none of these ways. The merchant in this case has no idea that he is being led by an invisible hand. He may or may not envision the social harmony that Smith envisions – more importantly, his actions are not undertaken *directly* to create that social harmony. The passive voice here ('is ... led by an invisible hand') complicates the issue further, because the invisible hand does not seem to take an active part in the arrangement of that order, but rather shapes it more subtly, perhaps without even 'intending' it itself. If Smith had said that 'the invisible hand leads' the merchant to perform a certain action, it would have implied that the hand was pulling or pushing the economic activities themselves, or perhaps even that merchants were intentionally following the invisible hand, as if it were a divine pillar of fire. But if we read it in light of its syntactical function, the invisible hand is only a subsidiary principle of the main action, which is the merchant's pre-existing choice to sell his goods near home. In short, the imputation of agency and control in the invisible hand's ability to 'lead' is severely limited by the fact that the person it leads has no awareness or intention of 'following', as well as by the passive grammatical construction of that leadership, which further diminishes its 'activity'.

So what does the invisible hand actually do? By describing it as a 'hand', Smith invokes the idea of the hand as the physical embodiment of the will, as instrument of a preconceived productive (or destructive) action, in a way he would not if he had referred to an 'invisible pattern' or even an 'invisible force'.[19] At the same time, he cancels out that instrumental image by the fact that: a) the hand does not act directly, but only manifests itself by means of the free choices of economic agents, and b) it does not even influence those choices, because the agents cannot perceive it. We are left with two possible descriptions of the invisible hand's mode of operation. One is that the invisible hand is something built into the divine or natural tendency to 'truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another' (*WN* I, 25), which is what is assumed to be the result of a 'free' action – the invisible hand does not manifest itself, after all, if the people stop agitating to improve their lifestyle. This would be consistent with the 'Watchmaker' theory of creation, which argues that God is nothing more than a divine Watchmaker, who sets up the cosmos as if he were winding a giant watch, and then leaves it alone

so that it may run without interference.[20] This mechanistic theory had been most prestigious during the late seventeenth century, and although it had since fallen somewhat out of fashion, we shall see that mechanistic theories (like that of Descartes) exerted a lingering influence on Smith. The drawback of this explanation is that it reduces its human subjects to automata driven by the single passion of self-interest – which conforms neither to Smith's hypothesis nor to his observations. Smith was interested in creating a moral defence of economics in the name of liberty, not in declaring that God had intended for humans to be selfish. Furthermore, if God had intended the social order to be driven by economic self-interest, his will had by no means been present at every point in history; Smith makes it clear that the division of labour which leads to economic prosperity had arisen by a 'very slow and gradual' (i.e. historical) process (*WN* I, 25), which calls into question the notion of a divine order present since the beginning of time, and even implies that some day the order created by the invisible hand might come to an end.

The other possibility is that the invisible hand is not a real influence at all, either on men's actions or on their effects, but merely a pattern that emerges when those actions are regarded in the aggregate from a distance. This pattern bears all the signs of divine intent, in that it creates beneficent order from selfish chaos – except that it preserves the absolute freedom of individual actions. This view has the advantage of both harmonizing with the religious idea of a divine plan – since practically speaking there is nothing to distinguish the capitalist order from the divinely planned one – and entirely dispensing with the need for divine intervention. Smith's economic order is a formal mimicry of divine Providence that is fully compatible with secular materialism. What this solution depends on, however, is the impossible simultaneity within capitalist subjects of two conflicting points of view: that of the individual, who sees nothing beyond his immediate gain, and that of the sovereign, who sees nothing but the society as a whole. Each of these subject positions depends, at this level, on the exclusion of the other's particular knowledge. It is the individual's *ignorance* of the good of the whole (the fact that he 'generally ... neither intends to promote the publick interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it') that makes possible the reconciliation of his freedom with that public good. The sole difference between acting with benevolence for oneself (i.e. self-interest) and acting with benevolence for others, in fact, is that we cannot survey or control the results of any actions whose effects are meant to diffuse into the general population. However, Smith presumes that we know what is best for ourselves. He does not say that benevolence is *bad* for the economy, merely that he does not *know* (and presumably, neither do we) of any good that has come of it. The merchant may in fact intend some vague social good, but it is more important here that he obey his immediate interest in keeping his trades close to home.

If the individual's limited subject perspective justifies self-interest, the limited perspective of the ruler or government justifies restraint. A governing or overseeing body cannot presume to know what is in the self-interest of each of its individual members – it merely accepts *that* it cannot know their interests. So the 'duty' from which the 'sovereign is completely discharged' (in our earlier quote) is one in which

> in the attempting to perform which he must always be exposed to innumerable delusions, and for the proper performance of which no human wisdom or knowledge could ever be sufficient[.] (*WN* II, 687)

For this reason it is best that the sovereign refrain from introducing regulations on commerce that restrict the natural flow of goods and services; while he may thus succeed in diverting resources from one industry to another, he cannot thereby increase the nation's overall wealth (*WN* I, 453 ff.).[21] However, it is only from his vantage point – that point of one with a view of the whole system – that one can detect the emerging pattern of prosperity created by the invisible hand. Indeed, the individual must have such a pattern in mind when he acts, even if he acts in his own self-interest, if he wishes to construct a moral defence of his actions, for without the view of the whole which the invisible hand affords, his actions would appear to be merely greedy and possibly destructive. So we are presented with the paradox of an individual who is enjoined to act in the most self-interested way possible to increase the speed and volume of the national economy and thereby its wealth, but who cannot let that general goal influence his actions, because by doing so he *might* slow down the creation of wealth without bringing about any attendant good. Similarly, the sovereign must allow his subjects total freedom in their economic activities if he wants to achieve *his* ultimate goal, which is (again, presumably) the wealth of his entire nation. At the same time, Smith hedges his bets by admitting that although he might possess insight into the perspectives of both the individual and the sovereign, this insight also has its limits: the invisible hand only works 'generally' or 'frequently', the opposite result does not 'always' happen, and not 'much' good is done by those who act benevolently. Smith's model of 'natural liberty' has become more what we might call a 'negative liberty' – a freedom that arises from the limitations of knowledge.[22]

While this model requires both the individual and the sovereign to assume that the other is privy to knowledge they themselves can never have (although they do have a model of the other's *kind* of knowledge via the theory itself), it also requires them to assume that their interests are the same: 'the [individual's] study of his own advantage naturally, or rather necessarily leads him to prefer that employment which is most advantageous to the society' (*WN* I, 454). Or again, 'What is prudence in the conduct of every private family, can scarce be folly in that of a great kingdom' (*WN*

I, 457). But notice that Smith's analysis depends on an idea of the social good which is limited to the nation-state, conceived as a political entity with which its citizens may identify, and does not extend to all humans. The chapter in which the phrase 'invisible hand' occurs (IV. ii) deals with 'Restraints upon the Importation from foreign Countries of such Goods as can be Produced at Home', with the predictable advice that there be no such restraints. The national good depends here on the individual's extension of his sphere of self-interest to include the rest of the nation, defined as the place where he feels 'at home'. Smith asserts that the individual merchant would rather keep his capital close to home than establish far-flung trading routes among different countries, because he can keep it better under surveillance. For instance if an Amsterdam merchant has trading posts in Lisbon and Königsberg, he feels 'uneasiness ... at being separated so far from his capital', and routes the goods through Amsterdam, so that he may have 'some part of his capital always under his own view and command', rather than sending the goods directly between the cities (*WN* I, 454–5). To save himself from the necessity of a second loading and unloading, he 'endeavours always to sell in the home-market as much of the goods of all those different countries as he can', and thus converts his foreign trade into a home trade.

> Home is in this manner the center, if I may say so, round which the capitals of the inhabitants of every country are continually circulating, and towards which they are always tending, though by particular causes they may sometimes be driven off and repelled from it towards more distant employments. (*WN* I, 455)

So capital spent in the name of self-interest gravitates (the Newtonian imagery is not accidental) automatically back to the physical locality in which it is spent. An added advantage of domestic trade is that the merchant 'can know better the character and situation of the persons whom he trusts, and if he should happen to be deceived, he knows better the laws of the country from which he must seek redress' (*WN* I, 454). This is the example which Smith uses to demonstrate that the merchant who seems to be merely self-interested is actually 'led by an invisible hand' to contribute to the prosperity of domestic industry. But, in this instance, the invisible hand is really nothing more than the merchant's sense of being at home in a particular nation-state, so that he 'naturally' avoids foreign trade where he might be out of his depth. Smith here seems not to get the point of foreign trade, which is that it is often carried on by foreigners, or alternatively, that a local merchant might easily hire foreigners (who feel more 'at home' abroad) to work for him. The invisible hand will not shore up the wealth of the individual nation if merchants operate in (say) an international cartel, or a multinational corporation that feels 'at home' in many countries. Where

Smith depicts 'trust' as foundering on inevitable cultural differences, the creation of the multinational company redefines the issue of trust between nations as one of surveillance within the company. Rather than redistributing funds within a local area, such arrangements of capital have the potential to distribute wealth freely across international boundaries, and thus refute Smith's argument that capital will remain within national borders when freed from regulation by national governments.[23]

In fact, Smith was quite concerned with the relation between national defence and free trade, and Grampp argues (this is his promised 'tenth interpretation') that the benefits promised by the invisible hand have less to do with public welfare in general than with the nation's military preparedness in particular: '[F]ree trade, the impartial reader would (correctly) suppose, implies the free movement of capital and the export of some of it. The danger of capital's being exported (if it is a danger) is unfounded, he says. The invisible hand keeps it at home. That is the beneficial end it promotes and is the only end he explicitly names.' So the unintended benefits of the invisible hand are not moral in the sense of ultimate redistributive justice (i.e. the poor eventually benefit), but on a national level: 'The riches of the nation, then, are the product of self-conscious, self-interested effort. The power of the nation, including its military power, is a consequence, unintended but fortunate, of this effort and is the work of the invisible hand.'[24] However, this benefit seems fairly flimsy, since it depends on the assertion that the merchant only keeps his capital at home if doing so produces 'equal or nearly equal profits' (*WN* I, 454) to what it would produce if spent abroad, so if foreign trade were more profitable than domestic the tendency of money to stay at home would vanish. Smith counters this presumption only by suggesting that the merchant values 'having some part of his capital always under his own view and command' (*WN* I, 454–5) so much that he is willing to pay the surcharge of routing foreign trade through his home port before re-export. But this leaves open the question of whether the nation would still benefit from foreign trade if it were not always routed through a central warehouse of some kind, or if the merchant were not a person but a corporate firm with more than one pair of eyes. Adding to the ambiguity is the fact that the merchant in the 'invisible hand' passage is not even a British merchant, but located in the cosmopolitan trading space of Amsterdam.

Both the self and the nation are imagined by Smith according to a two-dimensional spatial model in which self-interest increases with physical and cultural proximity. Smith's models of selfhood and national identity are organized around a perceiving subject, who understands most clearly things that are closest to himself, and perceives more dimly things which are farther away.[25] Thus far, his definition of self-interest has much in common with the concept of 'sympathy' which he outlines in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, for (as will be discussed below) sympathy also increases

with increasing proximity. But overlapping with this understanding of the limitations of individual perception is Smith's assertion that there is also a point of view from which one can perceive the system (or the nation) as a whole. This perspective, characterized by the viewpoint of the sovereign (and available to the reader of Smith), reveals the general outlines of the system, though not its individual data points. The 'nation's' subjectivity shares some of the individual's traits of self-interestedness – it wants to increase its own wealth, for example, and not that of other states – but the Smithian vision of the whole *discourages* it from acting openly in accordance with that interest. Whereas the individual is set free to pursue his interest by the awareness that though he is ignorant of the consequences of his actions they will benefit others as well as himself, the sovereign's awareness of his ignorance of his subjects' self-interest is what keeps him from direct action. The individual creates wealth, while the sovereign sees but cannot micromanage the aggregate improvement that results. In effect, the sovereign's perspective – impotent but all-knowing – becomes a stand-in for divine omniscience. But as we have seen, the individual must be able to *imagine* and internalize the sovereign's perspective of the whole (which he can only do through the mediation of the theorist) to justify his self-interested actions. So while the individual's and sovereign's viewpoints are radically incompatible, each of them contains a moment of the other's perspective insofar as they imagine themselves as part of a larger capitalist moral theory.

These two perspectives, which we might call the worm's-eye view (of the individual with knowledge of his immediate surroundings) and the bird's-eye view (the sovereign's and theorist's view of the aggregate outlines of society), correspond to some extent to Smith's methodological options.[26] *The Wealth of Nations* contains both inductive and deductive components – that is, both fact-gathering empiricism that then attempts to reach a generalization, and preconceived generalizations that then attempt to prove themselves by facts. But the results of these two methods are slightly at odds with each other.[27] The remnant of rational theism in *WN* that leads Smith to consistently stress the optimistic outcome of natural economic laws (and which was entirely in accord with the beliefs of his peers) may be said to bear the traces of his deductive 'bird's-eye view' of the whole. His 'worm's-eye' survey of the facts, however, is more pessimistic, indicating that even Smith believed there were limits to the beneficial power of the invisible hand. For example, even though the division of labour in general increases the prosperity of society, it also has a detrimental effect on spirits of those whose labour is so divided:

> The man whose life is spent in a few simple operations ... has no occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention ... He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become. The

> torpor of his mind renders him, not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgment concerning many even of the ordinary duties of private life ... and unless very particular pains have been taken to render him otherwise, he is equally incapable of defending his country in war. (*WN* II, 782)

And he admits that 'to expect ... that the freedom of trade should ever be entirely restored in Great Britain, is as absurd as to expect that an Oceana or Utopia should ever be established in it' (*WN* I, 471). In fact there are several places in *WN* where Smith describes merchants as acting in selfish ways that do *not* benefit the nation, such as when they combine to lobby the government for special privileges:

> The interests of the dealers ... in any particular branch of trade or manufactures, is always in some respects different from, and even opposite to, that of the publick. ... The proposal of any new law or regulation of commerce which comes from this order, ought always to be listened to with great precaution, and ought never to be adopted till after having been long and carefully examined, not only with the most scrupulous, but with the most suspicious attention. It comes from an order of men, whose interest is never exactly the same with that of the publick, who have generally an interest to deceive and even to oppress the publick, and who accordingly have, upon many occasions, both deceived and oppressed it. (*WN* I, 267)[28]

The reconciliation of these two seemingly contradictory conclusions – the idealist/deductive and the realist/inductive – must take place once again in the realm of perception. As Alec Macfie summarizes: 'At the individual level, in day to day contacts, reason may effect little. But on the [bird's-eye] level of historical time, and in the broad development of societies and their institutions it may be possible to discern the slow influence and unfolding of reason.'[29] The work of the invisible hand may not be detected at all by the individual, unless he already possesses the theoretical knowledge to look for it. To the knowledge which is inaccessible because of the subject's spatial location, then, we must add the knowledge which is inaccessible because of its temporal location; for the harmonizing effects of the invisible hand only emerge after a delay, and are never visible at the moment of their causation. The individual can never see the ultimate effects of his actions, and the sovereign can never separate the particular cause of any social effect from the impenetrable web of individual causes.

The belief that capitalism leads to social harmony thus rests on a series of paradoxes which might be said to enrich the theory aesthetically though they undermine it logically. Smith equates the interests of the individual

and the society but also founds his system on the inevitable difference of their points of view – the very difference that makes the fiction of the invisible hand possible. The invisible hand turns out to depend on a 'fallacy of composition' – the illogical belief that what is good for a single member of a group is good for the whole group.[30] Smith's system would not in fact work if the bird's-eye view (the sovereign's or theorist's) were simply equivalent to the sum of all the worm's-eye views (of individuals), because in that case the sovereign could arrange a centrally planned social order that maximized the social benefit for all citizens. As it is, each worm/individual realizes quickly that its own self-interest conflicts, at least in part, with the self-interests of others. This competition is the engine that spurs innovation and prevents complacency, and it cannot easily be replaced by altruism or cooperation ('I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the publick good'). The incompatibility between the sovereign and the individuals is not just based on what they can know, but on what they desire.

The problem of deduction versus induction in *WN* is related to this tension between Smith's assertion that the individual is a 'microcosm' of the social order, and his admission that individuals and groups have profoundly different goals, and are not mere reflections or subsets of each other. Smith uses the invisible hand to prove that the interests of individuals and the social order are equivalent, but its very mechanism works against that belief. In order to function as a 'hinge' between the interests of individuals and that of the group, the invisible hand must perform two contradictory functions at once: collapse public morals with private interests, and radically divide the public from the private ability to know those interests. The invisible hand creates this hinge between public morals and economic interests by connecting the image of a 'whole' system to a principle of 'micro-order'.[31] Capitalist order depends on a notion of the imperceptible minutiae of its social and economic transactions, extending outwards in a subtle network which can never be comprehended in its totality or recreated by any centralized decision: what Dugald Stewart in 1793 called 'the intricate and often the imperceptible mechanism of political society'.[32]

The system's cohesion depends on micro-order, and its morality depends on the cohesion of selfish actions and public prosperity. But that means its morality ultimately depends on the postulation of two realms which cannot be simultaneously verified – on the concrete interests of individuals, which are undetectable from the sweeping perspective of the sovereign; and on the view of the whole system as moral, which is undetectable from the individual's standpoint.[33] The invisible hand might be said to function as a kind of 'catatrophic anamorph' – an optical illusion popular in the seventeenth century that produced two different images depending on the perspective of the observer.[34] That is, the invisible hand is composed of an irreconcilable perspectival duality – it represents that which is imperceptible both to the individual and to the sovereign. Even as economic knowledge advances,

it recedes to mark a horizon (or rather, two horizons) beyond which nothing can be known. If this incommensurability cannot be overcome logically, it can be papered over by an imaginative leap which only the theorist can make: the postulation that *both* these receding horizons of ignorance – the individual's ignorance of how morality arises from selfishness, and the sovereign's ignorance of his subjects' individual interests – are the same, and that therefore laissez-faire economics is moral.

So the invisible hand is more central to Smith's system than a mere providential ornament – or rather, if you excise it from Smith's system, you must also relinquish the pretence that the economic system he describes is moral, as well as its claim to be a unified system in the first place. It represents the theoretical power to project oneself out of one's limited situation and synthesize various viewpoints to provide an overview of the whole. The viewpoint constructed by theory combines the sovereign's ability to see the whole system with an understanding of the principles that drive individual self-interest. (As Smith makes clear in *TMS*, our moral sentiments also depend on our ability to imagine our situation from other points of view – i.e. on our ability to theorize.) We might also see the invisible hand as a kind of 'god-of-the-gaps', a term which refers to the early scientific practice of assigning anything that cannot be explained by science to the workings of the Divine Will.[35] In this case, the gap between selfish actions and the moral social order must be bridged by an appeal to our inability to know the vastness of the social order (which is not the same thing, to be sure, as an appeal to its providential order). The connection between the political and economic realms is posited, but it is not *visible*: no one human perspective can be imagined which can see both every individual transaction, and the whole social order.

Smith's system depends, then, on a kind of conceptual mapping which compresses a large amount of economic data into a few understandable and implicitly visualizable generalizations. Smith was not the first to construct an economic system based on this kind of holistic mapping, an advance that is usually credited to the French physiocrats. But when Smith encountered their economic writings during his trip to France in the 1760s, he was perhaps more receptive to them because of his earlier study of mechanistic cosmology from the Greeks to Newton, and his partiality to the Cartesian theories of matter which influenced the physiocrats. Descartes hypothesized that the physical universe was full of subvisible particles, or 'ether', which flowed around objects in a series of vortices, and accounted for motion without recourse to a distressing 'gap' between cause and effect. The following sections trace this Cartesian theory of material space from the physiocrats to Smith's writings on the history of astronomy. This influence persists in *TMS*, where Smith synthesizes cosmology with morality by asserting that morality depends on an imaginary shift in subject position, or 'sympathy', which results in an illusion of social holism.

The physiocratic model: geometry and surveillance

The physiocrats make their appearance in economic literature chiefly for inventing the slogan *laissez-faire, laissez-passer*, which would later become the unofficial motto of proponents of free trade. Although Smith quarrelled with their focus on agriculture and their implicit apology for centralized power, he also became celebrated for popularizing their principal polemic conclusion. Defences of Smith's empiricism (for example those by Fleischacker and Rothschild) tend to downplay the deductive elements of his economic conclusions, many of which are inspired by the physiocrats' love of overviews, circles, and diagrams. Yet as my argument here implies that the morality of Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (as opposed to *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*) derives from its implied overview of the system as a whole, I would like to examine the physiocrats' influential attempt in their *Tableau Économique* to map the French economy from a purely abstract point of view. What there is of deductivism in *The Wealth of Nations*, as well as the idea of a bird's-eye systemic overview, is derived from Smith's interest in physiocratic doctrine.

While free-trade doctrines made their first systematic appearance in the eighteenth century, it is possible to trace various elements of their spirit back to antiquity – even though the Greek and Roman economies were based on slavery, and consequently infertile ground for doctrines of individual freedom. Jacob Viner detects a breath of free trade in Roman sayings about 'following nature', such as Horace's maxim: 'You may drive nature out with a pitchfork, but it will always return.'[36] The economic policies of early modern nation-states were mainly mercantilist, the goals of which were to acquire gold and silver (from colonial mines, for example) and to keep it within national boundaries by regulating foreign trade. In England, meanwhile, the economic pamphleteers of the seventeenth century laid the basis for the imagination of a free market and 'natural' economic laws, which later served as a foundation for Scottish economics.[37]

But the first systematic defence of freedom of trade took place in France, in the latter days of the *ancien régime*. François Quesnay, physician to the court and to Madame de Pompadour, turned his attention late in life from the circulation of the blood to the circulation of wealth, and published a series of economic tracts on 'rural philosophy' in the 1750s.[38] The founding of his 'school' is often dated to a momentous 1757 meeting with the younger Marquis de Mirabeau, whom Quesnay persuaded that agriculture was the source of all wealth. After the formation of this alliance, Quesnay quickly gathered more disciples (including A. R. J. Turgot, P. Mercier de la Rivière, and P. Dupont de Nemours) who became known for their fervour and commitment. They called themselves *économistes*, but their creed was also known as 'physiocracy', which means 'rule of nature' – indicating not only their belief in natural law, but their distinctive claim that agriculture is the source of all wealth. While

their mercantilist predecessors believed that wealth was based on the rapacity that secured for the nation the richest flow of goods from colonies or other countries, the physiocrats located the source of wealth in production. But by this they meant not industrial production – which they considered 'sterile', a mere reorganization of wealth – but agriculture. Whatever the farmer invested in the land, in seed and water, was paid back many times over by the productive forces of nature. (The farmer's labour played little or no part in the creation of value.) Smith, who encountered the physiocrats at the height of their prestige in Paris in 1766, shared their abhorrence of mercantilism and adopted their famous slogan of *laissez-faire, laissez-passer* (although this is never mentioned explicitly in his works) to express his belief that government interference was inimical to the creation of wealth.[39]

In France, physiocratic doctrine fell quickly out of favour. Turgot was named Minister of Finance in 1774, but after he attempted to push through a physiocratic programme abolishing internal customs and imposing a single tax on land, he managed to alienate most of French society and was overthrown after two years in office. The publication of *The Wealth of Nations* in the same year hastened the end of physiocracy because of Smith's ridicule of the idea that commerce and industry were 'sterile' factors in the production of national wealth. Hence Smith's work, not that of the physiocrats, would be the economics of the industrial age. But Smith also called the physiocrats the 'nearest approximation to the truth that has yet been published upon the subject of political oeconomy' (*WN* II, 678), and admired Quesnay enough to wish to dedicate *The Wealth of Nations* to him – a plan which was only prevented by Quesnay's death.[40] For what he owed to the physiocrats – along with their advocacy of free trade – was their comprehensive vision of the economy as a separate sphere of its own, with its own internal laws.

This model of a functioning cyclic economy was most vividly illustrated in Quesnay's famous innovation, the *Tableau Économique* (Figure 1). In demonstrating that capital spent on agriculture travels through every level of society before returning to its source, the *Tableau* (first published in 1758) provides a simplified bird's-eye view of the entire economy. A sum of 400 livres advanced to agriculture produces an equivalent return, of which 200 livres is returned to the 'productive' class of farmers, and 200 redistributed to the 'sterile' commercial class. Wealth thus circulates in symmetrical zigzags between the *classe souveraine* of landowners, the *classe productive*, and the *classe stérile*. As long as expenditures are 'balanced' healthily between these three, and capital is always returned to its source in agriculture, the system will reproduce itself; if not, returns will decline geometrically towards zero. The *Tableau* suggests the idea of a total output or social product (the value derived from grain), which automatically distributes itself throughout the social body.[41] All of this total is reinvested into the parallel processes of production and distribution, which ultimately cancel each other out, producing a state of harmonious balance.

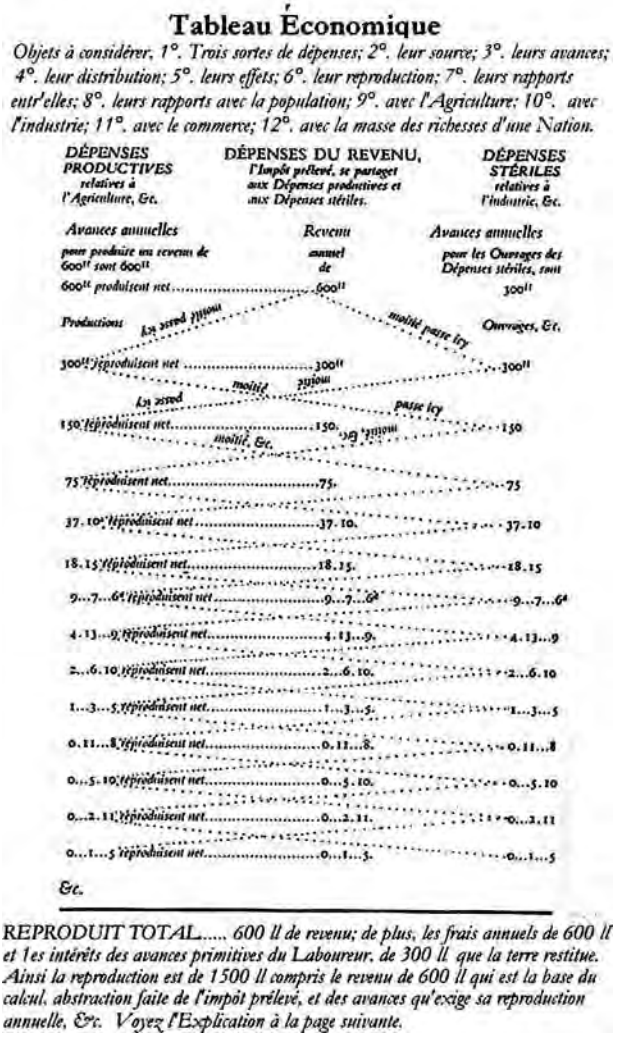

Figure 1.1 Quesnay's *Tableau Économique*

This economic model – a homeostatic balance of competing forces, maintained by circulation – had much in common with contemporary physiology. As a physician, Quesnay had gained renown for refuting Jean Baptiste Silva's claim that blood tended to rush away from any wound towards the part of the body farthest removed from the incision. Quesnay's experiments with tubes of tin and water pumps demonstrated that this was false, and he

concluded that the incision might be made anywhere that was convenient for surgeon and patient. Further, Quesnay's idea that blood divides into two major flows after leaving the heart (he ignored the pulmonary artery) resembles his unconventional bifurcation of capital flow between only two classes – and Quesnay's (mistaken) conviction that the pulsations of arteries helped propel the blood forward, while veins were merely passive, is analogous to his distinction between 'productive' and 'sterile' classes.[42] As his model of the human body was mechanical (following Descartes), so was his model of the economy – although the substance that flowed through it was wheat rather than blood. Actually, Quesnay was only the second person to apply the metaphor of circulation to economic life: the first was an Irish expatriate merchant named Richard Cantillon, whose *Essai sur la Nature du Commerce en Général*, published in 1755, contained several chapters on the circulation of money in a state.[43] In the *Tableau*, Quesnay adopted Cantillon's proposal that an increase in the velocity of circulation actually increased the amount of money in circulation.[44]

Although Quesnay believed that natural law existed, he also supported a strong centralized monarchy to keep the nation on its straight and narrow economic path. The role of this monarchy would be rather to remove impediments from the system's smooth functioning than to intervene in the economy – and yet, the system could never be trusted to reach equilibrium on its own. Smith later took Quesnay to task for his overly prescriptive diagnosis of the economy:

> Some speculative physicians seem to have imagined that the health of the human body could be preserved only by a certain precise regimen of diet and exercise, of which every, the smallest, violation necessarily occasioned some degree of disease or disorder proportioned to the degree of the violation. Experience, however, would seem to show that the human body frequently preserves, to all appearance at least, the most perfect state of health under a vast variety of different regimens ... [T]he healthful state of the human body, it would seem, contains in itself some unknown principle of preservation, capable either of preventing or of correcting, in many respects, the bad effects even of a very faulty regimen. Mr Quesnai, who was himself a physician, ... seems to have entertained a notion ... [that] the political body ... would thrive and prosper only under a certain precise regimen, the exact regimen of perfect liberty and perfect justice. He seems not to have considered that in the political body, the natural effort which every man is continually making to better his own condition, is a principle of preservation capable of ... correcting ... the bad effects of a political oeconomy, in some degree, both partial and oppressive. (*WN* II, 673–4)

Here we see where Smith's physiologism differs from Quesnay's: Smith begins with an assumption of the system's fundamental health, while Quesnay

begins by assuming its fragility. Smith's 'unknown principle of preservation', or self-interest, is at work bettering its surroundings even under conditions somewhat less ideal than those depicted in the *Tableau*.

The *Tableau*, at any rate, was great propaganda for natural law: in his *Philosophie Rurale*, Mirabeau claimed that civilization was based on three great inventions: writing, money, and the *Tableau Économique*.[45] But unfortunately, the *Tableau* does not really work. Quesnay even had to write a letter explaining the *Tableau* to Mirabeau himself, upon hearing that he was 'still bogged down in the zigzag'.[46] The *Tableau*'s apparent simplicity comes at the expense of mathematical accuracy: it disregards transactions within each class, and ignores specific patterns of consumption.[47] But the *Tableau* is not meant as a literal description of the French economy. It represents, rather, the harmonious system as it could be, if only certain conditions were met (for example, if farmers' children remain in the countryside, if luxury is discouraged, and taxes do not gum up the works). The *Tableau* represents the vision of capitalism imposed from the top down, under a monarchy that can maintain a natural equilibrium by force. It projects an ideal economy, which is extrapolated from real conditions, but still 'presupposed' the capitalist transformation it was supposed to 'promote'.[48]

The *Tableau* thus represents a series of paradoxes frozen in visual display. While its innovation is to depict the economy in static form, it does so by insisting on circulation and growth. It confuses the free market as cause of the system's smooth functioning with the free market as effect of the centralization of power. But this tendency to conflate cause and effect, description and prescription, may be inherent in any search for the eternal patterns behind shifting phenomena: that is, in any attempt to define a natural law. The recourse to schematized visual representation is almost inevitable here to represent both the essential, simplified quality of natural law and its multiply interlacing manifestations. Making this pattern visible to the intellect involves a suppression of actual economic data – and a replacement of the empiricist eye with the geometrical 'overview'.[49] As Quesnay writes:

> the *zigzag*, if properly understood, cuts out a whole number of details, and brings before your eyes certain closely interwoven ideas which the intellect alone would have a great deal of difficulty in grasping, unravelling, and reconciling by the use of the method of discourse. Moreover, these ideas themselves would be very elusive if they were not fixed securely in the imagination by the *Tableau*. ... [I]t will be very easy to picture them as a whole in their order and interconnection at a single survey, so that we can contemplate them at our ease without losing anything from sight and without the mind having to worry about putting them in order.[50]

Geometry is not just an aid to abstraction here: it *is* abstraction. There are historical reasons for the physiocrats' abstract tendencies – notably, they

wished to retain the favour of the king, and once their reformist suggestions were rebuffed (Mirabeau was even thrown into prison at one point), they recast their analysis in universalist guise.[51] But there is also reason to suspect that the idea of the economy as a geometrical form preceded any actual gathering of economic statistics. Quesnay's work was dominated by the idea of the circle – from his love for Cartesian physics, which holds that all matter moves along a circular path, to the circulation of the blood, to the circular flow of economics – and at the close of his life, after he abandoned economics, he took up mathematical research into the geometry of the circle.[52] The *Tableau* represents a single cycle of one year, from the proprietors' distribution of wealth in the spring, to their regathering of produce at harvest time. In fact, the 'zigzag' of the *Tableau* might well be seen as a hybrid of this originary circle and the binary division of the circulation of blood in the body into two forms of conduits, 'active' and 'passive'.

The physiocrats' method can thus literally be described as 'circular reasoning'; rather than inductive fact-gathering, their aim was to establish the rationality 'behind' material phenomena by the strategic use of deductive argument based on a predetermined conclusion. Their conflation of the visible and the rational was most manifest in the doctrine of 'evidence' by which they justified their conclusions. Following Descartes's logic of the 'clear and distinct', Quesnay defines evidence as 'a certainty so clear and manifest in itself that the mind cannot refuse it'.[53] This simple trust in the immanence of truth was ridiculed by his contemporaries, including Galiani, who wrote that 'It has appeared evident to the economists that the evidence of their evidence would render evident to all nations the evident advantage of free exportation of grain and that all nations would adopt it. Not a single nation has done so.'[54]

Despite his withering critique of their conclusions, Smith was favourably impressed with the physiocrats' methodology, and he shared their love of unifying principles and frictionless flows. Smith adopted the physiocrats' vision of a system spread out over the whole surface of a nation – and one in which the time between cause and effect is frozen into visual immanence – though he believed the system's engine was self-interest rather than the growth of grain. Like Bentham's panopticon, the physiocrats' attempt to survey the workings of the economy hides an apology for a mechanism of centralized power. Smith wanted to remove this element of overt coercion and stress the inherent freedom of economic exchange. Nevertheless, as he could not rid himself entirely of deductive *a priori* conclusions, and wanted to assert the predictability of the system's behaviour, his system inherited from the physiocrats' mechanical universalism this possibility of coercion – the determinism of the teleological overview – which remains submerged in the appearance of freedom. The invisible hand is to Smith's system what surveillance and geometry are to the physiocrats' – an image of the system seen 'from the outside' that asserts freedom while establishing order,

but that is at the same time somehow immanent within that system. The invisible hand is thus that point in Smith where the heritage of mechanical determinism is in the greatest tension with the notion of the 'freedom' of the system as a whole.

The 'History of Astronomy' and the scientific imagination

It might sound paradoxical to trace Smith's implicit providentialism – the central interpretive problem of the invisible hand – to progressive Enlightenment science, which had supposedly thrown off all connection with theology. But, in fact, much natural philosophy of the time retained a theistic component: Bacon, Boyle, Descartes, and Newton all left room for a certain kind of Providence in their models of the universe, mechanistic as they were.[55] The latter two, especially, influenced the development of Smith's self-regulating economic 'machine'.[56] Smith is often compared to Newton because of his use of a single principle to connect disparate phenomena, in addition to his status as founder within his discipline. And Smith consciously modelled his intellectual project on Newton's to some extent – although Hume, in his 1739 *Treatise of Human Nature*, had been the first to claim the use of Newton's experimental method in the 'moral sciences'.[57] But Smith retained a special regard for Descartes, even though his theory of vortices had long since been discredited. This theory explained motion as a continuous process physically conducted by minuscule, all-pervasive particles in circular motions (or vortices). Descartes is singled out for praise in Smith's early essay the 'History of Astronomy', one of the few incomplete projects that Smith did not have burned before his death, and the location of one of his three uses of the phrase 'invisible hand'.

How do we explain Smith's fascination with an outmoded theory of physics? The answer seems to be that Smith was concerned not so much with the scientific 'truth' of these systems as with what their methods revealed about the human imagination. While the 'History of Astronomy' purports to be about the history of science, its interest to scholars today – and, one suspects, the reason Smith withheld this essay from the flames – is its elaboration of what Smith held to be the fundamental principles of philosophical inquiry. 'Philosophy', he claims, 'is the science of the connecting principles of nature.'[58] As such, philosophy obeys not only the laws of nature, but the laws of the imagination, which is driven to create overarching causal explanations for puzzling, discordant events. Smith took this lesson to heart in his later works; his own systems of ethics and economics explained large amounts of data by means of a few simple principles, and hence were arranged to be easily grasped by the imagination. (The popularity of his works – and especially of a few key phrases like 'the invisible hand' – attests to the success of Smith's didactic strategy.) But insofar as his systems were 'scientific', Smith must have understood them, too, as synthetic products of the

imagination, rather than absolutely true reflections of nature. Christopher Herbert cites this 'brilliant' essay as evidence for Smith's anthropological understanding of the structure of science itself, calling it a 'deconstructive analysis' that only 'mask[s] its potentially devastating implications for every branch of social science by its apparent reference to physical science only'.[59] So Smith's understanding of the role of imagination in science and philosophy[60] can help us explain his peculiar aesthetics of systematicity, as well as the ambiguous shadow of Design in his works. This essay shows that Smith saw the human desire for narrative as an innate category, much as Kant would later see the categories of time, space, and extension as constitutive tools of human understanding.

The essay begins on a phenomenological note, with a distinction between wonder, admiration, and surprise. Wonder is produced by anything uncommon (such as a comet or eclipse), whether we have been warned of its coming or not – while we are surprised at things we have seen often (like a friend) but did not expect to see at that particular time. And we may admire something, like 'the beauty of a plain or the greatness of a mountain' (*HA* 33), even though it offers nothing new or surprising at all. Admiration (being a calm, contemplative sentiment) is usually pleasurable, but wonder and surprise can cause distressing palpitations: a 'suspension of the breath', a 'swelling of the heart', and, in the case of a sudden shock:

> the passion is then poured in all at once upon the heart, which is thrown, if it is a strong passion, into the most violent and convulsive emotions, such as sometimes cause immediate death; sometimes, by the suddenness of the extacy, so entirely disjoint the whole frame of the imagination, that it never after returns to its former tone and composure, but falls either into a frenzy or habitual lunacy; and such as almost always occasion a momentary loss of reason, or of that attention to other things which our situation or our duty requires. (*HA* 39, 34–5)

As it turns out, these sentiments are relevant to the production of scientific truth as well as its reception. Smith, in strikingly original fashion, sees the whole history of science as the attempt to increase the pleasurable sentiments of admiration while decreasing the unpleasant moments of wonder and surprise.

Whenever a comet appears in the heavens, or a naturalist finds a strange fossil, or a lodestone attracts a small piece of iron, the imagination is thrown into a state of 'uncertainty and anxious curiosity' (*HA* 40). It cannot fit the new event into its preconceived world-view, and perceives a 'gap' between the event and its context. Most of the time, this gap is already bridged over by habit: 'When two objects, however unlike, have been observed to follow each other, ... they come to be so connected together in the fancy, that the idea of the one seems, of its own accord, to call up and introduce that

of the other' (*HA* 40). They 'fall in with the natural career of the imagination ... There is no break, no stop, no gap, no interval' (*HA* 41). This stress on the metonymic habits of the mind, which gradually imagines causality into being, resembles Hume's famous critique of causality and perception.[61] But if this chain is interrupted, we are faced once more with the originary intellectual stimuli of surprise and wonder. Faced with the mysterious lodestone, we 'gaze and hesitate, and feel a want of connection', until we imagine something like Descartes's 'invisible effluvia' nudging the iron along, and 'thus take off that hesitation and difficulty which the imagination felt in passing from the one to the other' (*HA* 42).

The purpose of science, then, is to 'sooth[e] the imagination' (*HA* 46):

> [B]y representing the invisible chains which bind together all these disjointed objects, [philosophy or science] endeavours to introduce order into this chaos of jarring and discordant appearances, to allay this tumult of the imagination, and to restore it, when it surveys the great revolutions of the universe, to that tone of tranquillity and composure, which is both most agreeable in itself, and most suitable to its nature. (*HA* 45–6)

Science is driven forward not by the pleasure of creative discovery, or even the need to survive, but by the simple desire to eliminate the itch of curiosity. Curiosity can be entirely sealed over by habit, but habit can also revert to curiosity whenever someone with different habits comes along. This is the crucial difference between habit and science: both soothe the imagination, but the latter is a secondary phenomenon that arises after everydayness has been defamiliarized. For example, brewers treat the daily sequence of their activities as self-evident, whereas a visitor to a brewery might perceive nothing but chaos. If a philosopher visited the brewery, however, he might use this initial chaotic impression to form a mental 'chain of invisible objects', and link together the brewers' scattered activities.[62] By long attention to causal chains and connecting principles, philosophers have learned to be professionally curious: to see obscure distinctions and gaps, in matters like 'the elasticity [and] cohesion of natural bodies' (*HA* 45), which most people would regard as perfectly obvious and unworthy of investigation. So a perpetual supply of fresh intellectual irritation is, literally, the philosopher's stock in trade.

If this is really an essay about the role of surprise and wonder in philosophy, though, why bring astronomy into it? Astronomy provides the most obvious subject for Smith's exposition because it had made the greatest advances since antiquity, and hence provided the widest range of paradigms. But more particularly, astronomy is the science that relies most on visual order. Whereas biologists disturb (or kill) their specimens in the act of trying to see their inner workings, and geologists focus on phenomena which are either too big and slow-moving to see, or have to be carefully excavated

from deep in the earth, astronomers can practise their trade with a simple optical device, and without disturbing their objects of study. Astronomy resembles geometry in its construction of an abstract visual order – indeed, the regular passage of the stars across the heavens may well have inspired the invention of mathematics. Moreover, the heavens present themselves to our vision as a 'magnificent spectacle' that evokes not only admiration but awe. If Smith had merely written a history of philosophy, he would have had to do without the concrete illustrations of his principles of contiguity and association. Instead, he used astronomy as a visual model for philosophy, and for the combination of abstraction, beauty, and self-evidence that he considered most desirable for a theoretical system. Moreover, astronomy possessed the scientific virtues of empirical falsifiability and a real-world relevance that philosophers (and economists) never cease to envy.

There follow, after Smith's introduction, synopses of four major astronomical systems: the celestial spheres of Platonism, Copernican heliocentrism, Cartesian vortices, and Newton's theory of gravitation. Each system managed to soothe the imagination for a time, but then became unwieldy; so many spheres were needed, after a while, to account for the motion of all the celestial bodies that 'this system had now become as intricate and complex as those appearances themselves, which it had been invented to render uniform and coherent' (*HA* 59). However, Smith's point is not just that astronomy keeps discarding its errors and approaching perfect knowledge. He is more concerned with these systems' inherent plausibility and coherence than with their increasing accuracy – that is, he treats them as works of art, to be judged by their formal unity and pleasing effect. While the Copernican system was undoubtedly an advance, for example, it also had to overcome the natural tendency to imagine the earth as stationary rather than whirling about at high speed (*HA* 91). Because he downplays the issue of 'truth' here, Smith's essay has been compared to Popper's and Kuhn's philosophies of science, and especially to Kuhn's theory of 'paradigm shifts'.[63] One of the effects of this strategy, though, is to create a certain dramatic tension between Descartes's system and Newton's in his exposition. For while the Cartesian vortices are the most vivid illustration of Smith's connective philosophy, Newton's system is undoubtedly better science.

In Descartes's cosmological theory, outlined in his 1664 *Le Monde, ou Traité de la Lumière*,[64] an invisible ether fills in all the space between visible solid objects, leaving no 'gap or interval'. Motion is explained as a series of greater and smaller circular flows, which carry the planets along in 'an immense whirlpool of ether, much as soap bubbles are whirled about by the water spiraling down through a bathtub drain'.[65] The matter pushed before any moving body flows backwards to fill in the newly empty space behind it, 'as we may observe in the swimming of a fish'.[66] The system thus offered a way out of the Copernican problem of the cause of the earth's motion, which was in harmony with the imagination's most powerful reflex, the conjunction of

'motion after impulse'.[67] The imagination, in other words, prefers to interpret cause and effect as the result of physical contiguity – something 'pushing' something else – and so is naturally mechanistic. In fact, Descartes's system bore a great deal of resemblance to the atomistic physical theories of ancient Greece, which Smith had also studied in his youth. Granted, a Prime Mover was still needed to infuse Descartes's cosmos with an initial quantity of motion, but after that point all motion was easily explained in terms of invisible effluvia – even disconcerting kinds, like magnetism. As Vernard Foley notes, Descartes's system 'does give an explanation which reduces the surprise of seeing an object move without a visible mover operating upon it'.[68]

Smith was perfectly aware that all this was nonsense; but 'tho it does not perhaps contain a word of truth', he allowed that 'we justly esteem [it as] one of the most entertaining Romances that has ever been wrote'.[69] The beauty of the Cartesian system simply sweeps the beholder away:

> when the world beheld that complete, and almost perfect coherence, which the philosophy of Des Cartes bestowed upon the system of Copernicus, the imaginations of mankind could no longer refuse themselves the pleasure of going along with so harmonious an account of things. (*HA* 97)

What Descartes had in fact achieved was the satisfaction of a deeply rooted craving for *narrative*. When Smith compares Descartes's physics to a 'Romance', he is merely describing the sum of precise causal explanations, an overall system of meaning, and a certain 'pleasure' taken in their exposition, which may originate as contemplation but can quickly intensify into passionate interest. We can even detect something of the classic novelistic plot – with its opposing interests (motion and inertia), smooth succession of events, and 'familiar' but still pleasurable harmonious ending – in the following description of Descartes's 'invisible chain':

> Des Cartes was the first who attempted to ascertain, precisely, wherein this invisible chain consisted, and to afford the imagination a train of intermediate events, which succeeding each other in an order that was of all others most familiar to it [the imagination], should unite those incoherent qualities, the rapid motion, and the natural inertness of the Planets. (*HA* 92)

The problem with Descartes, alas, was that he had never really observed the heavens. Newton's system had the advantage that it had been empirically proven to be true. The end of Smith's essay is devoted to Newton, but it feels somewhat grudging in comparison to his evident fondness for Descartes – reminding one, in this context, of his later liking for the faulty

but intellectually beautiful *Tableau Économique*. For the whole point of the theory of gravity is that it operates 'at a distance', with *no* physical intermediary between cause and effect. For this reason, many philosophers initially resisted Newton's theory of *actio in distans* as 'either a miracle or a blasphemy', or at least a reversion to Aristotle's 'occult' properties of matter.[70] It certainly reintroduced a distressing 'gap' into the imagination of cosmic order. Foley sees evidence of Smith's 'internal resistance' to Newton in his 40-year failure to complete the section on Newton, as well as his tendency to praise Newton by denying that he can be criticized (Foley, *Social Physics*, 33–4).

Yet many elements of Smith's system are often attributed to Newton, such as his mechanistic analogies and Smith's comparison of 'natural price' to a centre of gravity balancing the forces of supply and demand (*WN* I, 75). Like Newton, Smith attempts to explain a complex order on the basis of a few simple principles. The invisible hand itself can be seen as a kind of *actio in distans*, seemingly intervening between causes (merchants' selfish actions) and effects (universal harmony), in ways that are rather inferred than perceived. What Smith liked about both of them, it seemed, was the visionary simplicity of their *style*, rather than the development and proof of their systems. Smith is more concerned with apparent than actual causes: for example, in the case of natural price, the natural price does not exert any 'real' attraction on the market price, but is merely the illusion of a median point around which the market price circles.[71] The influence of style would account for Smith's persistent Cartesian bent, even when the subject is apparently Newton. For instance, in his lectures on aesthetics, Smith praises the 'Newtonian method' of exposition:

> It gives us a pleasure to see the phaenomena which we reckoned the most unaccountable all deduced from some principle (commonly a wellknown one) and all united in one chain, far superior to what we feel from the unconnected method[.][72]

But then he instantly adds that 'Des Cartes was in reality the first who attempted this method.' Smith gives the impression that while the system of Descartes impressed itself forcibly on his imagination, that of Newton insinuated itself despite his efforts, so that

> even we, while we have been endeavouring to represent all philosophical systems as mere inventions of the imagination, ... have been insensibly drawn in, to make use of language expressing the connecting principles of this one, as if they were the real chains which Nature makes use of to bind together her several operations. (*HA* 105)

Philip Mirowski credits Smith, *par contre*, with the 'smuggling of Cartesian economics into the backyard of Newton'.[73]

Between Newton, Descartes, and all the other physical systems, the 'History of Astronomy' essay overflows with invisible causes. On the one hand, invisible substances 'appear' whenever astronomers describe celestial motion; so we have the 'transparent' (*HA* 54) but solid spheres of the Greeks, the 'invisible effluvia' of Descartes, and the dismayingly invisible connection of gravity between objects. As we progress through the systems, physical causality becomes increasingly less material (from solid, to fluid, to insubstantial), though it retains its physical existence. On the other hand, we have the 'invisible chains' of the imagination itself – which create the appearance of causality where none exists in nature. This chain-forming tendency of the imagination, which lies behind our pleasure in narrative and system-building, is actually a *hatred* of invisibility – we hate gaps, and imagine, or 'make visible', connections to fill them in. This may sound like a mere intellectual reflex or habit, but it is also a necessary step in the creation of cosmological systems. For Smith, the two kinds of invisibility come together in Descartes – the invisible physical cause, which theory 'makes visible'; and the imagination's hatred of the void, which his theory makes literal.

The opposition between Cartesian and Newtonian cosmologies suggests two different interpretations of the 'invisible hand': a Cartesian 'hand' would be a material intervention in the economy, physically connected with the objects it 'pushes', while a Newtonian 'hand' would be an equally real, physically existing principle of economic equilibrium, which operated by attraction and repulsion, without ever 'touching' consumer or producer. But the essay's own use of the phrase 'invisible hand' (the first of three times this phrase occurs in Smith's work) is in the context of a more superstitious cosmology – and I would argue that the invisible hands mentioned in Smith's later works have much *less* physical existence than either a Cartesian or Newtonian cosmology would suggest. The invisible force of gravity exists, but the invisible hand does not. Only pagans and idol-worshippers believe in a real 'invisible hand'. However, scientists should pay attention to these primitive illusions because they give us crucial information about the way humans apprehend and organize scientific knowledge. In the 'History of Astronomy', the invisible hand is the first hallucination of foolish pagans, who tremble at the irregularities of nature:

> Does the earth pour forth an exuberant harvest? It is owing to the indulgence of Ceres. ... The tree, which now flourishes, and now decays, is inhabited by a Dryad, upon whose health or sickness its various appearances depend. ... Hence the origin of Polytheism, and of that vulgar superstition which ascribes all the irregular events of nature to the favour or displeasure of intelligent, though invisible, beings, to gods, daemons, witches, genii, fairies. For it may be observed, that ... it is the irregular

> events of nature only that are ascribed to the agency and power of their gods. Fire burns, and water refreshes; heavy bodies descend, and lighter substances fly upwards, by the necessity of their own nature; nor was the invisible hand of Jupiter ever apprehended to be employed in those matters. (*HA* 49)

The invisible hand here is a creation of the imagination's natural 'indolen[ce]' (*HA* 86) and easy reliance on habit, before that indolence gets turned to scientific purposes. The savages' reliance on habit blinds them to all the really interesting scientific possibilities around them (such as the mystery of gravity). When their habits are interrupted, they infer an anthropomorphic agency, a mythical 'hand', which rains down favour or displeasure on them. Ironically, while this mythical hand (as it solidifies into religion) diverts them from scientific knowledge, that disruption of habit which forced the imagination to create the hand also represents the first of those estrangements from their environment which will, eventually, lead to the production of scientific knowledge.

Smith is more dismissive of this invisible hand than he will be about the invisible hand in *WN*. Here it refers to a superstitious and animistic belief from which Smith clearly distances himself. This invisible hand also operates in a capricious and random fashion, where the invisible hand in *WN* co-exists with social order. While the savage mind in this essay separates apparently natural events from the apparently random ones caused by the invisible hand of Jupiter, the 'civilized' economic theorist of *WN* has learned that apparently irregular economic events are really regular, but only *appear* random and chaotic. Alec Macfie argues that the invisible hand here has nothing to do with the invisible hand of *TMS* and *WN*, but that Smith merely remembered the 'pithy, forceful phrase' for use in later works.[74] But we might argue that the superstitious element of the invisible hand here is retained to a certain extent in Smith's later uses of the metaphor, where it is transformed into the ambiguous but talismanic function of human ignorance in the complex societies of which they are a part. Rather than a figure created purely by pagan ignorance, it becomes in *WN* a figure for the theorist's knowledge of the mutually constructed ignorance of the individual and the sovereign, which produces a predictable but illusory effect, *as of* an invisible hand. The superstitious moment persists, but it is that of the naive businessman or factory worker, to whom all economic activity appears random, and who cannot guess at its underlying laws.[75] It might be said that this superstition also persists in later classical economics through the reification of the invisible hand into the much less subtle and ironic 'iron law of wages'. As Herbert points out, Smith's critique here is directed at the 'ghostly or magical character' eventually taken on by all human explanatory systems – but it is also an ironic preview of the ways his own over-suggestive metaphor would be mystified.[76]

Beauty, utility, and subjectivity in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*

We have seen how invisible hand social theory draws upon the physiocrats' geographic holism and tendency towards abstract, frozen, and spatialized social overviews, as well as on the phenomenological system-building of the 'History of Astronomy', with its acute awareness of human ignorance, delusion, and love of intellectual beauty. The 1759 *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith's first major work of social theory, is perhaps best known for its argument that sympathy is the basis of ethical behaviour, and for describing conscience as an 'impartial spectator' that arises from desiring others' approbation while observing that their point of view differs from one's own. While critics have spent much energy trying to reconcile Smith's account of sympathy here with the primacy of self-interest in *WN*, my reading of *WN* foregrounds one of the commonalities between the two texts: namely, their reliance on what I call 'composite perspectivalism' to explain the complex and ironic effects of social actions.

The invisible hand in this text, however, seems to have more in common with the savages' 'invisible hand of Jupiter' in the 'History of Astronomy' than with the subtle providential agent of *WN*, in that it describes an obvious delusion. As in the 'History of Astronomy', the phrase 'invisible hand' occurs here in a discussion of the attractions of conceptual systems, described here as the 'beauty' of utility. The system analysed in this work, though, is not the cosmic order but the social order, one much less accessible to physical vision. And where in the 'History of Astronomy' Smith speaks earnestly of the delights of systems, here his observations are marked by a kind of melancholy sarcasm. For the pleasure we take in perceiving things that *look* useful, observes Smith, is often greater than the actual use we derive from them, so that we end up valuing appearance over utility after all.

> When a person comes into his chamber, and finds the chairs all standing in the middle of the room, he is angry with his servant, and rather than see them continue in that disorder, perhaps takes the trouble himself to set them all in their places with their backs to the wall. ... To attain this conveniency he voluntarily puts himself to more trouble than all he could have suffered from the want of it; since nothing was more easy, than to have set himself down upon one of them, which is probably what he does when his labour is over. What he wanted therefore, it seems, was not so much this conveniency, as that arrangement of things which promotes it. Yet it is this conveniency which ultimately recommends that arrangement, and bestows upon it the whole of its propriety and beauty. (*TMS* 180)

In effect, we value orderly appearances over the supposed goal of efficiency. The same irony applies to our love of greater arrangements of utility, like 'those institutions which tend to promote the public welfare' (*TMS* 185).

Our estimation of the utility of governments is overwhelmed by our awe at the regularity of their functioning.

> The perfection of police, the extension of trade and manufactures, are noble and magnificent objects. The contemplation of them pleases us, and we are interested in whatever can tend to advance them. They make part of the great system of government, and the wheels of the political machine seem to move with more harmony and ease by means of them. We take pleasure in beholding the perfection of so beautiful and grand a system, and we are uneasy till we remove any obstruction that can in the least disturb or encumber the regularity of its motions. (*TMS* 185)

Smith adds that this 'spirit of system' sometimes creates its own political convictions:

> we sometimes seem to value the means more than the end, and to be eager to promote the happiness of our fellow-creatures, rather from a view to perfect and improve a certain beautiful and orderly system, than from any immediate sense or feeling of what they either suffer or enjoy. (*TMS* 185)

And in fact this image of the beautiful machine of government can be turned to good use because of its inherent persuasive power: while a description of a system of government in which the populace are better clothed and fed might

> make no great impression[,] ... [y]ou will be more likely to persuade, if you describe the great system ... which procures these advantages, if you explain the connexions and dependencies of its several parts, their mutual subordination to one another, and their general subserviency to the happiness of the society[.] (*TMS* 186)

This passage shows Smith's clear awareness of the rhetorical uses and abuses of systematic thinking – so it is interesting to imagine what Smith might make of today's aestheticized and holistic celebrations of capitalism as a perpetual motion machine.

The beauty of systems can be deceptive, then, because it causes us to lose sight of individual facts in our awe at the whole. And this same deception – the mistaking of beautiful means for useful ends – occurs whenever we consider the wealth of others. For we do not value that wealth for keeping off the sun and rain, filling our stomachs, or the actual happiness it produces, but for its grandeur and *appearance* of fulfilled desire:

> We are ... charmed with the beauty of that accommodation which reigns in the palaces and oeconomy of the great; and admire how every thing

> is adapted to promote their ease, to prevent their wants, to gratify their wishes, and to amuse and entertain their most frivolous desires. If we consider the real satisfaction which all these things are capable of affording, by itself and separated from the beauty of that arrangement which is fitted to promote it, it will always appear in the highest degree contemptible and trifling. But we rarely view it in this abstract and philosophical light. We naturally confound it in our imagination with the order, the regular and harmonious movement of the system, the machine or oeconomy by means of which it is produced. (*TMS* 183)

However, it is this deception – the conflation of the actual pleasures of wealth with their appearance in the eyes of others – that founds the prosperity of nations. In *WN*, recall, wealth is created chiefly by our ceaseless desire to better ourselves, and by the division of labour that increases the power of production. In *TMS*, it is created by a cruel trick on 'the poor man's son', who is spurred to ambition by his admiration of the pleasures of wealth, only to discover on his deathbed that they are no more than 'trinkets of frivolous utility' (*TMS* 181). But then, Smith observes caustically,

> it is well that nature imposes upon us in this manner. It is this deception which rouses and keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind. ... It is to no purpose, that the proud and unfeeling landlord views his extensive fields, and without a thought for the wants of his brethren, in imagination consumes himself the whole harvest that grows upon them. ... The capacity of his stomach bears no proportion to the immensity of his desires, and will receive no more than that of the meanest peasant. The rest he is obliged to distribute among those, who prepare, in the nicest manner, that little which he himself makes use of, among those who fit up the palace in which this little is to be consumed, among those who provide and keep in order all the different baubles and trinkets, which are employed in the oeconomy of greatness; all of whom thus derive from his luxury and caprice, that share of the necessaries of life, which they would in vain have expected from his humanity or justice. ... The rich only select from the heap what is most precious and agreeable. They consume little more than the poor, and in spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity, though they mean only their own conveniency, ... they divide with the poor the produce of all their improvements. They are led by an *invisible hand* to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants, and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of the society, and afford means to the multiplication of the species. (*TMS* 183–4, emphasis added)

This passage contains several interwoven arguments, but we can immediately see the differences between this invisible hand and the one described in *WN*. First, it is introduced just after the accumulation of wealth is described as a deception: the individual is deceived by the pleasures of observing the grandeur of the system of wealth, and the efficacy with which wealth appears to satisfy desires. It appeals both to his sense of beauty and to his sense of utility. This beauty of utility itself has a *use*, but it is simultaneously described as *useless*. The use of this systemic beauty is to drive capital accumulation as well as indirectly inspiring public spirit. But what it produces, apart from the material sustenance of human beings, is really useless.

> How many people ruin themselves by laying out money on trinkets of frivolous utility? What pleases these lovers of toys is not so much the utility, as the aptness of the machines which are fitted to promote it. All their pockets are stuffed with little conveniencies. They contrive new pockets, unknown in the clothes of other people, in order to carry a greater number. They walk about loaded with a multitude of baubles, in weight and sometimes in value not inferior to an ordinary Jew's box [presumably a pedlar's], some of which may sometimes be of some little use, but all of which might at all times be very well spared, and of which the whole utility is certainly not worth the fatigue of bearing the burden. (*TMS* 180)

And yet it is just this love of vain toys that drives prosperity. Smith's attitude towards the Bauble is deeply ambivalent – it symbolizes the fact that utility is created by useless luxury spending, and thus that the whole system is actually founded on an *aesthetic* base: that is, on the valuing of beauty over utility, and form over function. Smith suggests that a scientific attitude towards this phenomenon would be to appreciate how important the appearance of beauty, status, and order are to human beings, but also acknowledge that a system based on such vain sentiments can result in weird structural inefficiencies.

In fact, most of what a rich man possesses is useless, even if it is not a small clever gadget, but a solid palace, vast stores of meat and wine, and soft fabric cushions. This is because his stomach is in fact limited – 'the eye is larger than the belly' (*TMS* 184) – and he cannot consume much more than any other person. Nor can he sleep more than others, or be more sheltered from the rain, once these basic desires have been satisfied. Smith here reduces desire to its least common denominator, which is the pleasure of the physical body. The desires fuelled by the mind and eye vastly overreach these limits, but their infinitude is driven in part by their inevitably diminishing returns. Syed Ahmad describes the 'two invisible hands' in this passage as being the limitation of the landlord's stomach (as a metonymy for the rest of his physical body), which prevents him from eating (i.e. consuming) all the produce of his lands; and the landlord's residual selfishness, which

impels him to turn over the unconsumed produce to others that they may furnish him in return with new luxuries.[77] What these both have in common, though, is that it is the excess of beauty over utility, and a confusion of means and ends, that drives the economy. The 'deception' of the invisible hand in this passage can thus be described as a beautiful illusion of utility, which produces useless luxuries, but then usefully spreads wealth among the populace. But the beautiful illusion of utility has a political as well as an economic function: it produces the useless love of conceptual systems, which then usefully increases public spirit.

In *WN*, Smith does no more than follow his own prescriptions for creating a popular economic theory that also does some political good. We may assume that although he was aware of the moral limits of laissez-faire and economic egotism, he did believe that it was better for the nation than mercantilistic regulation, and did want his book to be consulted by economic authorities. (If his views came, after his death, to serve narrow class interests and utilitarian ethics, these must be recognized to a certain extent as a distortion.[78]) The invisible hand is presented in less satirical a light in *WN* because Smith is attempting to deceive *his readers*. The invisible hand is therefore his *own*: that of the author of a didactic work whose purpose was to persuade its readers of the beauty and practicability of its principles. In constructing a vast systemic work of economics, containing a great number of factual references, as well as a sense of the overall complexity of their interactions, which can nevertheless be conceptually reduced to a few simple principles, Smith appeals to the reader's awe at both the grandeur of large systems, and the 'mutual subordination' and 'general subserviency' which orders these multiple transactions. But where in *TMS* Smith can afford to point out, and even to lament, the discrepancy between conceptual means and useful ends in economics, in *WN* his goal is to make use of this discrepancy, and hence he must refer to the invisible hand without apparent irony. It has been pointed out that Smith's theory of economic ambition as inspired by the beauty of the system displays a lack of psychological awareness, since this kind of conceptual beauty is only really available to philosophers.[79] But Smith displays a very good psychological awareness of his potential readers – philosophers, businessmen, and statesmen, who were probably quite capable of responding to the beauty of intellectual systems. I would note, at the same time, that a theory that celebrates the individual's knowledge over the sovereign's ignorance might be appealing to any reader who thinks he knows better than the government. Rothschild says that Smith would have agreed with Coleridge that 'the meanest of men has his Theory: and to think at all is to theorize'.[80]

Smith therefore not only diagnosed the importance of the aesthetic apprehension of utility to economics, but he made use of it as a didactic and rhetorical device. Rothschild notes, too, that the 'use' of the invisible hand is primarily political: 'Its political importance consists, in fact, in its public

loveliness, or in its potential to dissuade people from the use of other, more oppressive hands.' She goes on to claim that this function has since been superseded (although it remains 'highly evocative'), but she has inadvertently pointed to the fact that the invisible hand's political significance is due to its aesthetic characteristics (or 'loveliness'). While she argues that the invisible hand is 'the *sort* of idea [Smith] would not have liked', we have seen that it is just the sort of idea he *did* like, although he suspected that its appeal was more to the imagination than to the facts, and that its moral side effects were less than wholly desirable.[81]

Gender, virtue, and the 'Adam Smith Problem'

Critics have in general found it difficult to separate the moral irony of the invisible hand[82] – Smith's cynical observations on the degrading quality of mechanical labour, and the frivolity of the desires that lead to wealth – from Smith's 'straight' use of the invisible hand, related to his desire to promote an economics based on self-regulation and freedom from government interference. The apparent discrepancy between *TMS* and *WN* – between *TMS*'s description of the sympathy that affects moral sentiments, and *WN*'s pragmatic doctrine of economic self-interest – has also given rise to a whole subgenre of critical literature. At the end of the nineteenth century, several German critics claimed that the two books were so irreconcilable that Smith must have undergone a 'change of heart' between the composition of the two works (an *Umschwungstheorie*), and this scholarly problem is often called 'das Adam Smith Problem' after their usage.[83] Many recent scholars however explain these seeming discrepancies by appealing to the facts that both volumes contain a mix of pragmatic observation and idealized prescription, and that both *TMS* and *WN* were probably planned as part of a larger science of human nature (which would have included the jurisprudence), as well as to the argument that the non-efficacy of benevolence in economic affairs does not rule out sympathy as a powerful motivating passion in other spheres of public life. In addition, Smith had an opportunity to re-edit *TMS* late in life, for an edition which appeared in 1790, and did not make any substantive changes in the argument – which implies that he had not changed his mind over the years about the social passion of sympathy.[84] But declaring the 'Adam Smith Problem' to be a 'pseudo-problem based on ignorance and misunderstanding'[85] has not put an end to scholarly speculation about the differences between Smith's early and late major works; it has merely increased the variety of positive connections critics find between them.

As Russell Nieli argues, the more successful of these attempts have been those which emphasize that the 'sympathy' which grounds moral sentiments in *TMS* is not at all the same as benevolence, and that it does not rule out self-interested action as a virtue.[86] Smith's discussion of sympathy in *TMS* affords a valuable insight into the role of subjectivity in the functioning of

the invisible hand. As the invisible hand in *WN* arises through a combination of the limited vision of the individual, whose capital circulates around its 'home' centre, and the theoretical leap of imagination that joins his perspective to that of the sovereign, so sympathy in *TMS* mediates between individual consciousness and the social realm that is organized around it. Smith derives both his sense of individual limits and his definition of virtue from the Stoic counsel of self-control:

> Every man, as the Stoics used to say, is first and principally recommended to his own care; and every man is certainly, in every respect, fitter and abler to take care of himself than of any other person. Every man feels his own pleasures and his own pains more sensibly than those of other people. The former are the original sensations; the latter the reflected or sympathetic images of those sensations. The former may be said to be the substance; the latter the shadow. (*TMS* 219)

But the individual does feel the pleasures and pains of others as his own, because of his ability to imagine changing places with them, and to project himself in effect out of his own body:

> By the imagination we place ourselves in [our brother's] situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. (*TMS* 9)

Our ability to feel sympathy increases with the proximity and familiarity of the other person to ourselves in what Nieli calls 'spheres of intimacy' – from the vivid sensations of our own body, we naturally feel the sensations of our housemates, or members of our immediate family, nearly as vividly, and then sympathize in an ever-weakening degree through cousins, nieces, and nephews, inhabitants of our neighbourhood and town, and eventually the whole country. Smith stops at this point – he does not think it possible to extend the chain of sympathy to, say, the victims of Chinese earthquakes (*TMS* 136) or any other nation or catastrophe too far off to be perceived (though perhaps this claim would have been more complicated if Smith had lived in the age of the global 'media village').

At the same time, as a consequence of our movement of sympathy, we defamiliarize our own perspective on the world and construct an image of what we might look like from the outside. This invariably comes as something of a shock, since our estimation of our own importance must shrink into proportion with how we imagine we are viewed by others: 'Though every man may ... be the whole world to himself, to the rest of mankind he is a most insignificant part of it' (*TMS* 83). Through the restoration of

proportion, we come to view our actions as we imagine an 'impartial spectator' might. We cannot endeavour to judge our actions without projecting this spectator to a certain physical remove:

> As to the eye of the body, objects appear great or small, not so much according to their real dimensions, as according to the nearness or distance of their situation; so do they likewise to what may be called the natural eye of the mind: and we remedy the defects of both these organs pretty much in the same manner. In my present situation an immense landscape of lawns, and woods, and distant mountains, seems to do no more than cover the little window which I write by, and to be out of all proportion less than the chamber in which I am sitting. I can form a just comparison between those great objects and the little objects around me, in no other way, than by transporting myself, at least in fancy, to a different station, from whence I can survey both at nearly equal distances, and thereby form some judgment of their real proportions. Habit and experience have taught me to do this so easily and so readily, that I am scarce sensible that I do it[.] (*TMS* 134–5)

From this physical distance arises the idea of moral proportion, 'by sympathy with the approbation of this supposed equitable judge' (*TMS* 110). Conscience is the impartial spectator taken to an infinite distance – that is, to the perspective of the Divine Judge – and then introjected as a 'man within the breast', which enables morality to transcend mere social mirroring, so that we can feel an action is wrong even though everyone around us believes it to be right.

Smith's idea of moral action is thus based not just on the embeddedness of the individual within a complex society, but on the fragmentation of the individual point of view between the feeling of his own passionate interests and the dispassionate consideration of those interests from both a local and an infinitely distant point of view. So the argument of *TMS*, like that of *WN*, relies on a gap between individual and social points of view that is covered over by an imaginative projection and then remapping of the field of social interaction. The projection of the impartial spectator's field of view, as in *WN*'s postulation of the sovereign's view, provides an image of social totality that reorganizes the desires of the individual. But in practice, the gap between economics and virtue, between action at a distance and personal behaviour, was often solved by making use of the category of gender, which Smith mostly ignored. Russell Nieli shows that in Smith the problem of gender is implicit in the problem of spatial distance, suggesting that the Adam Smith Problem can be solved via the concept of progressive emotional distancing, which sets a clear boundary between the depersonalized exchanges of the marketplace and the intimacy of family and home.[87] The invisible hand regulates exchanges in the impersonal and anonymous world of economic

transactions, which is characterized by 'distance', but one's immediate proximity is ruled instead by what recent critics have gendered as the 'feminine' influence of imaginative sympathy, and in which non-equivalent exchanges (such as gifts, or unpaid labour) based on benevolence can be imagined.[88] The separation of economics from virtue is reflected in the separation of the commercial (masculinized) from the domestic (feminized) spheres, which were consolidated along gender lines over the course of the eighteenth century.[89] While self-interest and 'freedom' were established as the defining characteristic of public life, moral virtue was consigned to the domestic sphere, which functioned as a 'shadow economy', in which the bonds of sentiment, self-sacrifice, and stable hierarchy remained in force.

This private sphere of the family, whose affairs can only be known by a few individuals, makes up at least part of that vast network of personal and business interconnections which falls outside the realm of perception, either by the individual or by the sovereign, and makes up that shadowy ignorance out of which arises the illusion of the invisible hand. And is it not possible that the continual influence of private benevolence has something to do with the emergence, out of that shadowy ignorance, of a harmonious and prosperous nation-state whose social classes are unified as a family despite their varying stations? This fantasy of social and economic harmony modelled on the loving domestic sphere, and posited as a feminized moral alternative to the depredations of the male, public commercial ethos, would become a powerful gendered fantasy of the Victorian era – a subject that will be considered in several chapters below.[90] It bears repeating, however, that Smith's own theories of virtue were not as clearly gendered along these lines, and he praises both the public and the private, or what we might call martial and benevolent realms of virtue. While he complains in *WN* (II, 781–2) that degrading industrial work might sap the martial vigour of the workers, he is also a consistent defender of sociability, sympathy, and benevolence. Underlying the economic system of *WN* is the presumption that self-interest is not only something that can be harmonized with virtue, but is itself a kind of virtue, especially when considered from a classical perspective. Thus Smith attacks Mandeville's 1724 *Fable of the Bees*, with its argument that private vices lead to public virtues, by critiquing its definition of the term 'vice'. In *TMS* he compares Mandeville's 'licentious system' unfavourably both to the 'ancient systems, which ... seem chiefly to recommend the great, the awful, and the respectable virtues, the virtues of self-government and self-command; fortitude, magnanimity, independency upon fortune, the contempt of all outward accidents, of pain, poverty, exile and death', and to the 'benevolent system' of 'the soft, the amiable, the gentle virtues', as well as a third system of 'prudence only ... caution, vigilance, sobriety, and judicious moderation' (*TMS* 306–7). Rather than endorsing one of these systems, however, his complaint is that each neglects the virtues recommended by the others, concluding that an ideal system might

endorse 'both the amiable and respectable virtues' (*TMS* 307). Albert O. Hirschman's *The Passions and the Interests* points out that Smith's foundation of society on the virtues of trade is merely the culmination of a century of moral philosophy defending the idea of *doux commerce*, starting with Montesquieu.[91] Smith's protest against Mandeville is that he exaggerates every human pleasure into an extravagant vice: 'Wherever our reserve with regard to pleasure falls short of the most ascetic abstinence, he treats it as gross luxury and sensuality. ... [A]ccording to him, ... there is vice even in the use of a clean shirt, or of a convenient habitation' (*TMS* 312). Smith defends the aesthetic pleasures of 'the love of magnificence, a taste for the elegant arts and improvements of human life, for whatever is agreeable in dress, furniture, or equipage, for architecture, statuary, painting, and music' (*TMS* 313), accusing Mandeville not, like Mandeville's other critics,[92] of celebrating vicious pleasures but paradoxically of a puritanical asceticism.

It is perhaps indicative of Smith's uneasy relation to Mandeville that he is not only 'the only contemporary philosopher [apart from Hutcheson] who is considered at length' in *TMS* but that his attack comes from such an unusual direction.[93] Mandeville's basic argument that public prosperity is founded on vicious personal behaviour ('Thus every Part was full of Vice, / Yet the whole Mass a Paradise') has often been seen as a forerunner of Smith's own paradoxical argument in *WN* that self-interest can found a moral economy,[94] and Smith allows that Mandeville's 'lively and humorous, though coarse and rustic eloquence ... in some respects border[s] on the truth' (*TMS* 308, 313). Halévy goes so far as to conflate their basic arguments: 'The economic doctrine of Adam Smith is the doctrine of Mandeville set out in a form which is no longer paradoxical and literary, but rational and scientific.'[95] They differ mainly in the emphasis of their moral visions, Smith seeing a harmony of different kinds of virtue spreading from individual action to social whole, while Mandeville stresses the moral discontinuity between self-indulgence and social order. Winch notes that in Mandeville, 'the intervening comma in the subtitle, *Private Vices, Public Benefits*, was left to do a great deal of the work',[96] but the intervening stages between personal action and public effect are not really specified by Smith either. I would suggest that this particular moral problem is untheorizable within political economy; so varied and inconceivable are the effects of any single action that we are forced into the realm of speculation, where a novel's focus on the limited individual case can be paradoxically much more precise in imagining how the moral effects of any action might radiate outwards. Laurenz Volkmann notes that Mandeville's motto of private vices, public benefits 'may remind any literary historian of Alexander Pope's famous dictum that "all partial evil is universal good" ', which is a persistent problem in moral philosophy.[97] Smith's awareness that his moral conclusions about the benefits of capitalism were general ones that might not be true in every case is reflected not only in his warnings against excessively detailed systems, but in his admission – rather startling

considering the future course of his discipline – that 'I have no great faith in political arithmetick' (*WN* I, 534). This was an omission his Ricardian and Benthamite successors, in particular, were all too willing to remedy.

From utility to utopia: Smith's disciples and disciplines

While scholars generally agree that Smith is the 'founder' of classical political economy, they differ on the question of whether later economists really embody his ideas about laissez-faire or represent a substantial divergence from them. Since Smith died in 1790, it is not clear what he would have thought about the French Revolution, which established the political spectrum of 'right' and 'left' within which his ideas were ultimately interpreted. In fact, Smith may not even have fully registered the significance of the imminent industrial revolution, which was to have such transformative effects on British society in the decades after his death. Though his economic theories were mainly directed against eighteenth-century mercantilism, they were eagerly adopted in the coming decades and centuries by political factions that did not exist when Smith was writing. Thus far we have traced the original textual contexts of Smith's three uses of the phrase 'invisible hand': the contemptuous reference to pagan belief in *HA*, the delusion of the wealthy turned to comic benefit in *TMS*, and the apparently less ironic reference to the 'home bias' of international traders in *WN*. As perhaps foreseen by Smith, the image's didactic power gradually increased over the following decades, to the point that in the modern age it has become the most vivid emblem of Smith's moral philosophy.[98]

Of the many compelling stories told by historians about how Smith's reception changed during the 1790s, that crucial revolutionary and reactionary decade in British and European politics, I will discuss three here. One, a story told by Emma Rothschild in *Economic Sentiments*, has to do with the metamorphosis of Smith's political reputation from genteel Enlightenment sage to radical Francophile, and then back to a conservative worthy of Edmund Burke's regard. Rothschild suggests that Dugald Stewart's biography of Smith, published in 1793, played a large part in this political shift. A second, suggested by Karl Polanyi in *The Great Transformation*, argues that early political economy took an unnecessarily gloomy turn as a result of the failed poverty-management policies known as the Speenhamland system, and thereby abandoned all pretence of social compassion. I would add that Smith was not a utilitarian, and the Benthamite appropriation of political economy in the early nineteenth century transformed its tone, methodology, and political aims. A third historical narrative, emblematized by Malthus's role as an Anglican clergyman, charts the impact on economic theory of the swift rise of evangelical sentiment in British politics around 1800. Many Christian political economists who responded to this spiritual revival prioritized individual suffering as a path to conversion rather than

either a Smithian sympathy or the increase of worldly goods – but they were also attracted to the suggestive theology of the 'invisible hand'. In all three cases Smith's rationalist optimism is adapted to the concerns of a darker and more pessimistic age – and hence all these lines of intellectual development are more likely to foreground the Gothic possibilities of constraint, despair, and suffering that are repressed in Smith's optimistic version of invisible hand social theory.

Rothschild's book – a prominent example of the larger reconsideration of Smith's work in history, political theory, and literary criticism that has been taking place in the past decade or so – reads Smith as a theoretician of enlightened sociability rather than as a chilly exponent of *homo economicus*.[99] It manages to solve a question that puzzled the Victorian socialist Beatrice Webb in 1886: 'The Political Economy of Adam Smith was the scientific expression of the impassioned crusade of the 18th century against class tyranny and the oppression of the Many by the Few. By what silent revolution of events, by what unselfconscious transformation of thought did it change itself into the "Employers' Gospel" of the 19th century?'[100] Rothschild shows that when Smith died in 1790, his work was considered radically Francophile – so dangerous, in fact, that in the Scottish sedition trials of 1793 a farmer and clergyman were transported for invoking Smith's views. Smith's language of 'freedom', as well as his systematic institutional critique, were considered inflammatory in the overheated reactionary atmosphere immediately following the French Revolution. Rothschild argues that Dugald Stewart's 'Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith' is a canny attempt to salvage Smith's reputation, but that it does so by introducing a distinction between political and economic freedom that does not exist in Smith's writings. (This might mean, incidentally, that it is to Stewart and not to Smith that we owe the great disciplinary separation of political economy from moral philosophy and aesthetics that has so often been blamed for economic theory's intellectual narrowness.) Stewart argues that while commercial and industrial freedom might safely be used as instruments of increasing the national wealth, political freedom does not really fall within the scope of political economy. The effect of this intervention was profound: Coleridge reports that by 1798 an acquaintance switched the name of his boat from 'The Liberty', which carried a whiff of sedition, to 'The Freedom', which sounded much less 'jacobinical'.[101] Meanwhile in Paris, Smith was praised for his devotion to political freedom, but not for his dangerous ideas about free trade in grain, which had been so disastrous for Turgot.

The relation between Smith and Edmund Burke is significant not just for intellectual historians but because of its lasting political relevance. As Winch puts it:

> During the last decades of the twentieth century, the belief that an harmonious relationship can be established between Smithian economic

> liberalism and Burkean conservatism has been revived and disseminated. By combining the two positions one arrives at a spontaneous economic order that is the unintended outcome of individual choices, and a legal and governmental regime that respects custom and tradition while being protective of those 'little platoons' – the family, the Church, and other voluntary associations – that are thought to be essential to social cohesion and even nationhood. With little exaggeration one could say that this amalgam of Smith and Burke furnished the heady mixture of doctrines that fired the conviction politics of a recent British Prime Minister and her closest intellectual advisers.[102]

Rothschild shows how counterintuitive this alliance would have seemed during the immediately post-Revolutionary days, and how subtly over the course of the decade Burke came to adopt Smith's optimism about free trade and industrial development. During the 1795–96 minimum wage debate, Smith's ideas were cited both by Samuel Whitbread in support of such legislation, and by William Pitt against it. Rothschild argues that Whitbread's reading of Smith as supportive of some regulations in favour of workers is closer to the text of *WN* than Pitt's more simplified and idealistic argument in favour of the 'unassisted operation of principles'.[103] Because Pitt won the debate, this interpretation of Smith became dominant; thus Burke's harsh posthumous pamphlet *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* (1800), with its pronouncement that the interests of the farmer and labourer are always the same and the starving children of the poor are a drain on the state, was taken as an exposition of Smith's own views. Rothschild laments the lingering result of this debate, which was to collapse 'all the different Smiths ... into the simple prescription of economic freedom'.[104] Winch in *Riches and Poverty* goes in even greater detail into the many faults and fissures between Smith's and Burke's views of political economy, showing how Smith was closer to Paine in his scorn for colonies and distaste for primogeniture and other relics of antiquity.[105]

However, Smith and Burke do seem to have shared an interest in the moral centrality of the 'little platoon' of friends and family in contradistinction to the state. Burke notes famously in his 1790 *Reflections on the Revolution in France* that 'To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country, and to mankind.'[106] Smith derived his focus on the 'little department' (*TMS* 292) from the ancient Stoics, though as we have seen he is also critical of the Stoic posture of emotional 'indifference'. In Burke, the 'little platoon' is the guardian of religious and aristocratic traditions against the violent and capricious state, but Fleischacker argues that Smith's view of what we might call civil society is even less utopian than Burke's, seeing in him instead a broadminded willingness to 'tinker'

with the incentives of small groups: 'Smith's striking philosophical idea is to see that *radical political change works through conservatism*, through gradual changes that conserve even as they transform. This is neither a Burkean presumption in favour of tradition over conscious planning, although it may often look like it, nor, of course, either a Benthamite or a Rousseauvian fondness for the wholesale restructuring of society.' Fleischacker argues that a 'left Smithian' political position – a position foreclosed by intellectual history, though it seems to capture some of the current American mood of liberal pragmatism – might combine a certain modesty towards the project of social improvement, grounded in history and common sense, with a willingness to 'nudge their society toward change in at most a few, very carefully thought-through respects', as well as patience with the slow unfolding of such improvement.[107]

With both Smith and Burke it may also be said that this focus on the specific experience of individuals and small groups overlaps felicitously with the liberal individualism of the realist novel. Fleischacker's vision of Smith as a fine-grained and tolerant empiricist leads him to the conclusion that 'Smith's intellectual progeny' can be found less among political ideologues of any stripe than 'among novelists and essayists like E. M. Forster or George Orwell, with a dispassionate eye out for the telling detail, the quirky particulars that give texture to human life'.[108] Imraan Coovadia claims that the following attack on the 'man of system' in *TMS* influenced George Eliot's tales of ambitious figures (Lydgate, Bulstrode, Casaubon) whose great plans are thwarted:[109]

> He [the 'man of system'] seems to imagine that he can arrange the different members of a great society with as much ease as the hand arranges the different pieces upon a chess-board. He does not consider that the pieces upon the chess-board have no other principle of motion besides that which the hand impresses upon them; but that, in the great chess-board of human society, every single piece has a principle of motion of its own, altogether different from that which the legislature might chuse to impress upon it. (*TMS* 234)

This 'chess-board' passage provides a useful point of comparison to Burke's *Reflections*, since Smith 'likely ... had the French Revolution in mind' when he added it to his final revision of *TMS* in 1790.[110] Burke's particular take on the idea of unintended consequences may be less secular, liberal, or tolerant than Smith's, but I think his relative pessimism is closer to the mood of later Victorian realist fiction than is Smith's enlightened comedy. Burke displays a similar awareness of the incalculability of political actions, though his goal is not to attack political institutions as Smith's was (in *WN* at least), but to defend them. Here the principle that society is too complex to predict the consequences of any action is directed to the additional purpose of

combating political innovation, which would be revived in the twentieth century as a critical weapon against programmes as diverse as Keynesianism and federal desegregation:

> The science of constructing a commonwealth, or renovating it, or reforming it, is, like every other experimental science, not to be taught *à priori*. Nor is it a short experience that can instruct us in that practical science: because the real effects of moral causes are not always immediate; but that which in the first instance is prejudicial may be excellent in its remoter operation; and its excellence may arise even from the ill effects it produces in the beginning. The reverse also happens; and very plausible schemes, with very pleasing commencements, have often shameful and lamentable conclusions. In states there are often some obscure and almost latent causes, things which appear at first view of little moment, on which a very great part of its prosperity or adversity may most essentially depend.[111]

Interestingly, Burke's theory of unintended consequences is a little more flexible than its twentieth-century variant, focusing both on excellent effects that seem immediately prejudicial and on ill effects that result from laudable actions; later conservative philosophy would defend the former as the spontaneous, decentred, and beneficial invisible hand of capitalism even while foreseeing only ill effects from novel government initiatives. But Burke does not actually make this distinction: his analysis could equally refer to entrenched government bureaucracies that succeed and massive corporations that fail. Burke sees the inevitable limitations of the individual point of view as a trap unique to political planning, but – perhaps because the *Reflections* is about politics and not economics – he does not elaborate on ways that economic plans might also lack a desirable humility about the vanity of all human intentions. Hence the following passage is meant to criticize ambitious politicians, but could theoretically apply to capitalists or anybody who confuses their own self-interest with that of the whole society:

> Confounded by the complication of distempered passions, their reason is disturbed; their views become vast and perplexed; to others inexplicable; to themselves uncertain. They find, on all sides, bounds to their unprincipled ambition in any fixed order of things. Both in the fog and haze of confusion all is enlarged, and appears without any limit.[112]

In aiming to promote reverence for the status quo and combat the appeal of codified bills of rights, Burke dramatizes the shadowy unknowability and multiplicity of society in this striking passage:

> These metaphysic rights entering into common life, like rays of light which pierce into a dense medium, are, by the laws of nature, refracted

> from their straight line. Indeed in the gross and complicated mass of human passions and concerns, the primitive rights of men undergo such a variety of refractions and reflections, that it becomes absurd to talk of them as if they continued in the simplicity of their original direction. The nature of man is intricate; the objects of society are of the greatest possible complexity; and therefore no simple disposition or direction of power can be suitable either to man's nature, or to the quality of his affairs. When I hear the simplicity of contrivance aimed at and boasted of in any new political constitutions, I am at no loss to decide that the artificers are grossly ignorant of their trade, or totally negligent of their duty. ... If you were to contemplate society in but one point of view, all these simple modes of polity are infinitely captivating. ... But it is better that the whole should be imperfectly and anomalously answered, than that, while some parts are provided for with great exactness, others might be totally neglected, or perhaps materially injured, by the over-care of a favourite member.[113]

In this last sentence, Burke sees bills of rights as invitations to the abuse of power by special interest groups, implying once again the superiority of organically evolved and inherited social arrangements to purpose-built ones. Burke's view of society as a 'dense medium' only imperfectly penetrated by the rays of enlightenment is an interesting prefiguration of Dickens's drama of urban murk, though as we will see Dickens identifies instead with the rays of sunlight struggling to reach those lost in the fog.

If Smith would not have agreed with Burke (or Burkeans) that political innovations were doomed to fail, he might have been equally uncomfortable with the Ricardian 'iron law of wages' or the Benthamite Poor Law of 1834, each of which claimed to be applications of Smithian doctrine. While Smithian political economy is generally optimistic and harmonious, those who followed him in the early nineteenth century reached much gloomier conclusions about the inevitability of class conflict, scarcity, extinction, and even the moral value of suffering. As political economy grew in prestige and struggled to establish itself as a political and philosophical force, it inevitably responded to unforeseen social changes and fragmented into competing schools, all of which somewhat confusingly claimed Smith as their illustrious forefather. Those who wish to separate Smith from his cruder, crueller, or more abstract disciples generally fall into two schools: those who blame Thomas Malthus's *Essay on Population* (1798; 1803) for turning political economy into a defence of desperate survivalist competitiveness that minimizes working-class suffering; and those who blame David Ricardo's 1817 *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* for mathematizing political economy into an abstract and dehumanized system.[114] Literary critics, on the other hand, have in the past tended to conflate the whole discipline with the most mechanical aspects of Bentham's felicific calculus, as Dickens does

in *Hard Times* – an association given added critical pungency by Foucault's identification of Bentham's panopticon as the model for the disciplinary surveillance of modern civil society. But I would like to spend a little more time here on Karl Polanyi's unjustly neglected historical argument, which instead blames the dour paradoxes of post-Smithian political economy on the failure of the 1795 Speenhamland system of outdoor poor relief.

Polanyi's narrative of the social dislocations of the 1790s stresses the absolute unpreparedness of contemporary observers for the cataclysmic social dislocations that accompanied the capitalist commodification of the labour market. Speenhamland was actually a paternalistic attempt to compensate for the cruelties of that market, relieving the distresses of wandering paupers by establishing a minimum living wage to be subsidized by the parish.[115] Its goal was not only to help the poor, but to protect the squirearchy from waves of newly proletarianized and mobile urban workers. But in practice the law's effects were 'ghastly': the existence of a de facto wage subsidy together with the equally paternalistic Combination Laws of 1799 pushed down wages to the level that workers were forced to accept relief to survive.[116] This enforced pauperization of the entire working class, with their attendant downward mobility and loss of self-respect, had a profound effect on social thinkers of the following decades: 'Neither Charles Kingsley nor Friedrich Engels, neither Blake nor Carlyle, was mistaken in believing that the very image of man had been defiled by some terrible catastrophe.' In retrospect the social shock of immiseration was brief, and followed by decades of relative prosperity. But since it was at just this time, around 1800, that the science of political economy was being formulated, Polanyi argues that its uncharitable approach towards the poor is essentially a historical accident: 'in the case of the economists it was singularly unfortunate that their whole theoretical system was erected during this spate of "abnormalcy," when a tremendous rise in trade and production happened to be accompanied by an enormous increase in human misery – in effect, the apparent facts on which the principles of Malthus, Ricardo, and James Mill were grounded reflected merely paradoxical tendencies during a sharply defined period of transition.'[117]

Though the dismal turn in political economy is usually identified with Malthus's pessimistic argument about the inevitable disparity between geometric population growth and merely arithmetic increase in food production, Polanyi points out that Joseph Townsend's slightly earlier *Dissertation on the Poor Laws* (1786) – which antedates Speenhamland but responds to the same crisis of mass impoverishment – contains an even more vivid fable about the unanticipated social equilibrium created by the forces of competition.[118] Like Defoe's pamphlet, Townsend's brief tract elaborates on the dark side of charity relief – indeed, it might be a more plausible antecedent than Smith for the idea that laws meant to do public good can backfire. Townsend's basic argument, that 'These laws, so beautiful in theory,

promote the evils they mean to remedy, and aggravate the distress they were intended to relieve,' is illustrated with reference to the legendary history of the goats and greyhounds of Juan Fernandez island in the South Pacific (the largest island of a small archipelago that is also known as Robinson Crusoe's island). Supposedly, the island's discoverer released two goats on the island, whose descendants multiplied until they filled the entire island, but 'from this unhappy moment they began to suffer hunger' so that the weakest died out. Thus the population of goats fluctuated in response to the food supply, 'nearly balancing at all times their quantity of food. This degree of aequipoise [sic] was from time to time destroyed, either by epidemical diseases or by the arrival of some vessel in distress.'[119] The addition of a new element to this equation might have destroyed the balance, but in fact merely reinforced it:

> When the Spaniards found that the English privateers resorted to this island for provisions, they resolved on the total extirpation of the goats, and for this purpose they put on shore a greyhound dog and bitch. ... [I]n consequence, as the Spaniards had foreseen, the breed of goats diminished. Had they been totally destroyed, the dogs likewise must have perished. But as many of the goats retired to the craggy rocks, where the dogs could never follow them, descending only for short intervals to feed with fear and circumspection in the vallies, few of these, besides the careless and the rash, became a prey; and none but the most watchful, strong, and active of the dogs could get a sufficiency of food. Thus a new kind of balance was established.

While anticipating Malthus's and Darwin's visions of economic and evolutionary equilibrium, this fable also contains an implicit ecological moral about the introduction of invasive species. But faced with the specific problem of the starving poor, Townsend draws the harsh conclusions that their natural improvidence helps regulate their numbers, and also that 'it is only hunger which can spur and goad [the poor] on to labour; [even though] our laws have said, they shall never hunger'.[120] Townsend's reduction of the moral problem of human society to a question of animal management, in which society is founded not on political order but on the simple instinct of hunger, paves the way for the replacement of Smith's humanistic legacy with the abstractions of *homo economicus*.

In Polanyi's view, the Speenhamland legislation did as much as the terrors of the French Revolution to turn the new science away from codifying human solidarity.[121] But it is also political economy that discovered that society exists and has its own puzzling laws:

> A world was uncovered the very existence of which had not been suspected, that of the laws governing a complex society. Although the

> emergence of society in this new and distinctive sense happened in the economic field, its reference was universal.
>
> The form in which the nascent reality came to our consciousness was political economy. Its amazing regularities and stunning contradictions had to be fitted into the scheme of philosophy and theology in order to be assimilated to human meanings. The stubborn facts and the inexorable brute laws that appeared to abolish our freedom had in one way or another to be reconciled to freedom. This was the mainspring of the metaphysical forces that secretly sustained the positivists and utilitarians. ... Hope ... was distilled out of the nightmare of population and wage laws, and was embodied in a concept of progress so inspiring that it appeared to justify the vast and painful dislocations to come. (84)

Smith's general optimism might not have appeared to be justified given the social disasters of early industrialization, so early political economy elevates the hope in earthly progress to the urgent status of a law. Apart from this tendency to mystical dogmatism, economic theory's model of social complexity prefigures that of the other social sciences in its general interest in examining 'social interactions for global outcomes beyond the awareness of those involved'.[122] This question – the moral and intellectual problem of social complexity – is something I will continue to pursue in future chapters, especially Chapter 4.

The third of my historical observations about the development of political economy in the 1790s has to do with the rise of evangelical Christianity and its dramatic concern with human suffering. One might have thought that, following the example of Christ's feeding of the multitude in the miracle of the loaves and the fishes, the evangelicals would have increased the political pressure for poor relief, as they had begun pressing for the abolition of slavery, but for a complicated set of historical reasons this movement tended instead to discourage government intervention in the domestic economy. Adam Smith was rather gnomic about his own religious beliefs; though notorious in his lifetime for his defence of Hume's atheism,[123] he was otherwise silent about his own faith or lack thereof. The multiple references to the divinity of Nature in *TMS* are consistent with some form of deism, though these references are markedly diminished in the later *WN*. It is therefore easy to assume that Smith's work is not only secular but that it marks the last disciplinary attempt to fuse economics with even a residual form of theology, and certainly if you trace the history of classical political economy through Malthus, Ricardo, and the Mills the movement is towards greater abstraction and philosophical radicalism. However, there have been several recent scholarly examinations of the early nineteenth-century phenomenon of 'Christian political economy' – one that, in contradistinction to later nineteenth-century Anglican socialism, was 'strongly favourable to private property rights, free and competitive markets, the institutions of marriage

and wage-labour, and a high degree of social and economic inequality'.[124] Since literary historians have tended to read this period through Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society*, which traces the development of a romantic cultural reaction to commercial life through such figures as Wordsworth, Carlyle, and Ruskin – thus setting up a basic opposition between liberal utilitarians and the somewhat more Tory romantics – the acknowledgement of a conspicuously ethical and conservative economic tradition poses a bit of a conundrum.[125] But the recent rise of historicism in literary scholarship, together with the reconsideration of Smith by historians, has restored this erstwhile forgotten movement to the history of political economy. I will not have space here to delve deeply into this early tradition of Christian economics, but will provide a brief résumé of arguments by the historians A. M. C. Waterman and Boyd Hilton.

The transitional figure in these debates is once again Malthus rather than Burke. Rather than focusing on the gloomy theorist of scarcity, Hilton and Waterman consider Malthus in his role as Anglican clergyman – despite his notorious heterodoxy on the question of family planning. In *Revolution, Economics, and Religion*, Waterman argues that the secularization of later eighteenth-century thought has been overestimated, and that given the continuing pragmatic fusion of English church and state (what he calls the *ancien régime*), there was great pressure to find some reconciliation between established Anglicanism and political economy. The resulting works of such prominent clerics as William Paley, J. B. Sumner, Edward Copleston, Richard Whately, and Thomas Chalmers assumed, unlike later economists, that political science still needed to be reconciled somehow with the reality of ecclesiastical power.[126] Christian political economy argued that 'The impossibility of achieving social progress by legislation is evidence both of "design" – in the creation of the self-regulating economy – and of the moral and religious need of Christians to practise charity and compassion.'[127] Waterman reads Malthus as a defender of property rights (though a relatively liberal one, stressing the possibilities of self-restraint rather than external force) against Jacobins like Godwin, and therefore as part of a 'brief transition between "*ancien régime*" and the "secular society" that [Christian political economy] helped to create'.[128] Boyd Hilton in *The Age of Atonement* focuses less on the persistence of the institutional church than on the rise of evangelical fervour, pairing Malthus's *Essay on Population* with Wilberforce's 1797 *A Practical View of Christianity* as landmarks in evangelical thought. Deeply impressed by the experience of war and scarcity in the 1790s, these English evangelicals focused on the Passion of Christ, the soteriological experience of sin and redemption, whereas later nineteenth-century Christian socialists turned increasingly to the humanist experience of Christ's Incarnation. (After 1840, says Hilton, 'even some evangelicals, who had always made a particular fetish of the Cross, began to stress the Christmas message more than that of Easter'.) Hilton distinguishes between moderate evangelicals,

who believed that 'Governments should interfere with men's lives as little as possible, so that men can exercise "self-help" – the only means to salvation, both spiritually and economically – in a world beset with temptation, and meant for trial and judgment' and a more extremist group that believed in subordination to worldly authority.[129] Both groups tended towards laissez-faire, but stressed the moral necessity of suffering and poverty in a way that would be alien to later free-traders.[130]

These three stories about political economy's evolution after Smith take us only as far as the first decade of the nineteenth century, yet already point towards the anti-humanist turn in economic science that was to call forth such indignant responses from Carlyle and Dickens. Economic science had been the first to describe the moral paradoxes of individual and collective social actions; but it would henceforth turn its attention to aggregates and generalities, leaving open the moral problem of how it might look and feel for individuals to act according to these general laws in an unpredictable finance-driven society. While Smith has a comic and optimistic view of a society structured by unintended consequences, the metaphor of the invisible hand does not explicitly foreclose the possibility that such a society could also go frighteningly out of control. The Gothic undercurrents of invisible hand social theory may be expressed within political economy by an increasingly dark focus on scarcity and suffering, but British economic theory, at least, continued to defend the essential benefits of laissez-faire until the second half of the nineteenth century. The British novels I will be reading in the following chapters – *Northanger Abbey*, *Bleak House*, *The Illustrations of Political Economy*, *Hard Times*, *Vanity Fair*, *Mary Barton*, and *The Mill on the Floss* – are all riven in different ways by this tension between an expressed allegiance to a providential model of optimistic social outcomes and a more or less suppressed awareness of the disasters, errors, and vices also present within their complex society.

Part II

Early Nineteenth-Century Novels and Invisible Hand Social Theory

2

Omniscient Narrators and the Return of the Gothic in *Northanger Abbey* and *Bleak House*

In the preceding chapter, I argued that Smith's invisible hand functions through the use of a spatialized 'double perspective' that combines the knowledge of the helpless sovereign with the moral agency of the limited individual economic (and moral) agent, the limits of each position being comprehended by a theorist with a view of the whole. In this chapter and the ones that follow, I will be examining some of the ways that novelists writing in the years of political economy's first flush of prestige (roughly 1800–50) adopted similar techniques in order to dramatize the unpredictable fates of moral actions in complex societies. Like Smith, they tried to imagine the invisible order that lurked behind the chaos of visible details, and constructed stories composed of several different perspectives to do so. They heightened the dramatic irony of the epistemological distance between author and characters to both tragic and comic effect. In doing this they adopted some of Smith's mordant awareness of folly and delusion as well as his assertion of generally optimistic outcomes. In this chapter I will focus on two novels that respond to the difficulties of representing multiple points of view in complex societies by inventing uneasy and yet dialectically vibrant composites of genres and narrative perspectives.

Smith's cultural influence in the years following his death is thus visible not just in the new discipline of political economy, but in the more general influence of his epistemological approach to the moral dilemmas of human agency in a complex society. In political economy this question is usually closed off (if it is asked at all) by the invocation of invisible hand theory, with its providential overtones. Traditional Christian theology (until Niebuhr) addresses itself mainly to individual sin and redemption, leaving open the question of the unintended *social* consequences of either good or evil actions. Into this breach steps the realist novel, with its imaginative capacity for moral experiment and problem-solving. Smith's attention to concrete detail and search for underlying order, his dramatization of individual ignorance, and

attempt to construct naturalistic models of human behaviour are all features of this kind of novel as well. Smith's three epistemological positions of freely acting individual, restrained sovereign, and knowing theorist correspond roughly to the distinction between characters and narrator, though the omniscient narrator combines the powers of the sovereign and the theorist and the characters' freedom is only apparent, since the system is ultimately controlled by an author. However, in Smithian political economy the question of unintended consequences is always answered optimistically – that is, the individual search for advantage will always translate into national prosperity – whereas in the realist novel there is a much wider range of outcomes. Realist novels can also describe the individual steps between individual action and larger social outcome in much more detail than Smithian theory, trying to pinpoint the exact moment in time and space when good intentions lead to bad results as well as the opposite – or admitting that such moments are difficult to determine. The difficulty of assigning blame for bad outcomes in novels reinforces a Smithian humility about planning, since human intentions are so often undone by unforeseen complexities in the world around them, whether those take the form of natural disasters or the hidden grudges of minor characters. But usually in realist novels the ironic reversal of the invisible hand is combined with some degree of moral predictability: selfish actions *can* lead to social disruption, and good characters *do* win out over obstacles. The more a realist novel can recreate the confounding complexity and unpredictability of individual experience, the more authoritative its promises of resolution.

The first fully elaborated theory to describe the link between economics and literature was the Marxist claim that all cultural systems are reflections of a material reality, or superstructures depending on an underlying 'base': an argument which can take many more nuanced forms, but basically assumes that on some level money relations are more real than cultural fantasies. More recent culturalist theories have sought to reverse this order not by restoring a Hegelian idealism, in which human ideas create the world, but through Foucault's more critical and materialist concept of 'discourses'. Discourses are like ideologies, but they construct a socially apprehended truth rather than just occluding it; thus an argument can be made that a discourse about something apparently trivial like domesticity or poetry is not just a supplement to some more real kind of official political power, but can actually help create and administer that power. Foucauldian culturalist arguments work well when describing modern systems of governance that rely on the consent of the governed, though they can tend to replace ideological certainty with a kind of fatalist gloom, seeing the subtle tentacles of power in every apparent act of rebellion. Without really disagreeing with either of these approaches, I would like to take a somewhat more pragmatic approach to this question, seeing economics and literature as two important and asymmetrically related ways of understanding complex societies.[1] The strength of economics is its

presentation of the aggregate case and its promise to see society from some distant and total point of view. But the ethical model it offers in the form of the invisible hand is, as we have seen, rather slippery. If you raise the self-interest implied in the invisible hand social theory to an explicit dogma, the delicate balance between intention and accident on which Smith's moral conclusions rest is undone, and one is left with a shallow and rigid construction of human subjectivity as purely self-interested.[2] My reading of the irony of the invisible hand is (as you will recall) slightly different from Emma Rothschild's: she sees the invisible hand as an 'ironic but useful joke' that is not really important to Smith's system, whereas I see it as a central placeholder for moral theory in that system, though one that is very hard to codify or pin down. With its finer focus, literature is better than economics at modelling what it feels like to act within a social field of far-reaching and unpredictable consequences – although it too must be somewhat partial and disappointing in this regard since its results cannot be reliably generalized beyond any particular case. As to whether aesthetics or economics takes priority in general, I would suggest both that the idea of an economic social order, with its reciprocal relations between part and whole, is heavily dependent on a formal idea of aesthetic holism;[3] and that literature can, among other things, think through problems that economic theory suggests but leaves incomplete.

My argument is thus predicated on the idea that the formal shapes of novels, the boundaries of nations, and the imagined cosmopolitan dynamics of transnational economic systems like capitalism (but also industrialism, communism, and imperialism) are all related fantasies about spatial relations that cannot be completely seen with the naked eye. These spaces are not simply equivalent, or related as micro to macrocosms, and they rely on different scales of historical unfolding; but each constructs spatial parameters for shared human stories within which complicated causes and effects can be understood in a secular framework. One precedent for this kind of comparison can be found in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, which makes the anthropological argument that the space-time of novels, like that of newspapers, helps citizens imagine themselves as a connected society. As Anderson writes, 'the old-fashioned novel … is clearly a device for the presentation of simultaneity in "homogeneous, empty time", or a complex gloss on the word "meanwhile" ', and this 'idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history'.[4] Though this society is most conventionally described as that of the nation, it could be mapped onto other spatial entities such as a city (in Anderson's account, the city of Manila in José Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*), a region, an empire, or any undefined space that opens up between anonymous participants in economic exchanges. In terms of international spaces more work has probably been done on the imperialist novel than on the international capitalist novel, since imperial relations are more

easily located on conventional political maps than is the amorphous moral space of capitalism. Fredric Jameson, for example, argues compellingly in 'Modernism and Imperialism' that modernist novels are unable to 'grasp the way the [economic] system functions as a whole' because the life-worlds of the 'colonies over the water ... remain unknown and unimaginable for the subjects of the imperial power'. I would add only that the repressed 'formal symptoms' of inaccessible international space that Jameson detects in modernist writings are present as well in Victorian realist works, where capitalism is sometimes represented as a national problem responsive to purely nationalist solutions (as in the British industrial novels of the 1840s and 1850s), but usually with a haunting sense that the system might extend beyond the borders of one country's readership.[5] The industrial novels were written during an age when it was still possible to imagine the problems of capitalism as being 'solvable' within the borders of one country; but as the system becomes ever more thoroughly globalized it has become almost inconceivable to imagine how the readers of any one nation – much less many nations – could be brought together to fight for a common political solution.[6]

In these accounts, the narrative technologies of the omniscient narrator and the transformation of simultaneous events into a linear sequence (or simultaneous space into causal time) are themselves at least partly constitutive of the idea of a common society. In this chapter I will be focusing on the omniscient narrators constructed in two works – Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818, written 1799) and Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853) – that seem to take place within secure national boundaries, but are also constantly threatened by ambiguously located Gothic forces. Each of these novels is a stylistic outlier to a certain extent within the writer's oeuvre: the tone of *Northanger Abbey* is significantly more parodic and self-referential than the lofty voice of other Austen novels, and *Bleak House* is famously Dickens's only novel in which narrative duties are shared between an omniscient narrator and one of the characters – the virtuous but limited heroine Esther Summerson. What I referred to above as the 'tortured irony' of British works during this time period manifests itself in the novels' perilously fragile happy endings, each of which foregrounds the fact that happy endings are only a temporary effect achieved from a very limited point of view. The novels' playful relation to genre – they both oscillate between a sober, realistic point of view and a ludic, Gothic voice – represents a complex understanding of capitalist society's ambiguous moral space, and, I will be arguing, their awareness that Smith's 'invisible hand' cannot be definitely described as either harmoniously impersonal or dangerously embodied.

Both novels also interrogate capitalist moral space by creating remarkably ignorant (yet lovable) female protagonists, thus dramatizing and gendering the difference between the masculine theorist of the 'bird's-eye view' and the feminized limitations of the 'worm's-eye view' that sees only itself

and its own needs. *Northanger Abbey* might be said to lie closer in spirit to Smithian comic irony, though the masculinized omniscience of the narrator is achieved by a rather audacious gender impersonation, and the novel also dramatizes the unexpected kinds of detours that lie between the expectations of a happy ending and its achievement. In *Bleak House*, however, comic stoicism is thrown considerably out of balance by the narrator's angry attack on the social system he describes, and the extreme fragility of the happy ending that rewards its long-suffering female protagonist. The blind ignorance that conduces to the self-conscious comic happiness of characters in *Northanger Abbey* thus contributes to miserable dysfunction and stagnation in *Bleak House*, a novel in which no character ever really makes sense of the system in which they are embedded and injustice leads unironically to more injustice. *Bleak House*'s innovative narrative form, split between a godlike perspective made angry by its inability to intervene and a self-abnegating female outsider who has unforeseen effects on those around her, dramatizes the incompatibility between the different perspectives that are otherwise supposed to create the effect of social harmony.

In both cases, the narrative technologies of their literary genre lend the novelists a spatial freedom in the imagination of social totality that is denied to writers of political economy, enabling them to hover near their subjects or race upwards towards a panoramic overview, channelling the perspectives of multiple subjects including those of other genders, the mentally limited, and the divine. They thus take the moral structure imagined by invisible hand social theory, with its subtle fusion of different social perspectives, and zoom in on its composite parts while freely examining its repressed Gothic undercurrents. By juxtaposing Smith's comic conclusions with alternate kinds of stories – horrifying incarceration, unintended contagion, culpable irresponsibility – they expand the implications of the unintended results of individual action, calling attention to the multiple outcomes made visible by what we might call the 'moral horizon of genre'. The idea of 'genre' here refers both to the epistemological assumptions that seem to divide economic 'stories' of scientistic political economy from literary works, and to the patterns that distinguish different kinds of literary genres (realist, Gothic, sentimental) from each other.

From the characters' points of view, unintended consequences do not simply resolve in social harmony but reveal, disturbingly, that they are located in different kinds of stories than they first imagined. In both novels, this formalist concern is significantly translated into geographical terms: Catherine Morland must decide whether the continental Gothic has any place in a nominally realist England, and Dickens's narrator wishes strenuously to limit the effects of the characters' actions to England's national borders. Each novel thematizes the visibility of English geography by likening its basically flat geography to the rationality of its society: Austen's characters discourse on the picturesque, while Dickens's narrator swoops

'as the crow flies' over England's flattest eastern counties. However, in each case the correlation between physical geography and its emotional representation is complicated by partial perspectives and discontinuities between interior and exterior spaces. The fact that the individual point of view is represented in each novel by a limited, ignorant, but also lovable female is also significant. Smith's imagined society is wholly masculine, but the novelists show how knowledge becomes gendered when embodied in social life, using women's marginal social position to celebrate both the importance of non-abstract, socially positioned forms of knowledge, and the way that romantic love and altruism transform individual self-interest. Since both heroines are empowered by affection (rather than theory) to know more than they think they do, they present a kind of solution to the 'Adam Smith Problem', supplementing the social perspectivalism of Smith's *Wealth of Nations* with the focus on personal sympathy analysed in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. But while Catherine Morland's *idiot savant* role is comically charming, the moral and political weight Dickens places on Esther's particular kinds of self-limitation creates a cognitive dissonance that has caused many critics to reject her character as strained and implausible. The novelists' constant oscillation between a 'masculine' social overview and a 'feminine' embodiment of limitation also means that any synthesis between them is implicitly androgynous.

Free indirect discourse and the comedy of Gothic anxiety

It might be said that insofar as Austen's work aspires to knowledge of a social totality, that totality is achieved almost entirely in the formal rather than the geographical sense. That is, the omniscience of the narrator who frames so many of Austen's works is perhaps only possible because these works deal with single families, small isolated towns, and what Raymond Williams calls 'knowable communities'.[7] The biographical introduction that Henry Austen appended to his sister's first (and posthumously published) edition of *Northanger Abbey* in late 1817 quotes one of her letters that compares a friend's 'manly, vigorous sketches' with her own 'little bit of ivory, two inches wide, on which I work with a brush so fine as to produce little effect after much labour'.[8] This coy minuteness of focus has both frustrated historicist scholars and goaded them onward towards the reward of making the counterintuitive conclusion that Austen's seemingly narrow scope really masks some larger political engagement, whether secretly reactionary or self-critical, with slavery or feminism or with the economic transformations represented by the upwardly mobile gentry. It also represents a complicated and ironic relation to gender, as evinced by the comparison of her 'little' works to the 'manly, vigorous' sketches of others – for a crucial experience of reading Austen (or of being one of her heroines) is the discovery of 'larger' moral patterns beneath apparently trivial surfaces, with the implicit

analogy being that women can learn a great deal of important knowledge even though they lack the physical or cultural mobility of the gentleman. Austen's novels seem to speak from the position of the 'equal, wide survey' that John Barrell identifies as the property of the eighteenth-century gentleman, but without the combination of leisure and power that is implicitly required to achieve the gentleman's social privilege.[9]

While Austen is not the first to use an omniscient narrator in British fiction, her narrator's impersonality and restraint set her voice apart from that of the earlier Fielding, with his jocular and intrusive narrator, or Richardson, with the staged empiricism of his epistolary form. According to Ian Watt, Austen

> owes her eminence in the tradition of the English novel [to] her successful resolution of these problems. ... Her analyses of her characters and their states of mind, and her ironical juxtapositions of motive and situation are as pointed as anything in Fielding, but they do not seem to come from an intrusive author but rather from some august and impersonal spirit of social and psychological understanding.[10]

James Thompson's 1996 *Models of Value* provides a valuable reading of varying interpretations of Austen's omniscient narrator, comparing Watt's teleological reading of literary history, which creates the illusion that Austen has 'suture[d] personal and social into one whole', with Wayne Booth's argument that Austen's aspiration towards totality leads from the construction of an epistemological position to an implicitly moral conclusion: 'It is a choice of the moral, not merely the technical, the angle of vision from which the story is to be told.'[11] The particularly impersonal voice created by Austen's omniscient narrator, then, is a crucial moment in literary history that marks its naturalization of the separation between private and public through the very act of transcending them: 'historically the novel accrues its cultural power or interest from violating the boundaries it is at the same time drawing: making the private public, as Watt phrased it'.[12] The impersonal restraint of the narrator, as much as her omniscience, works to organize the future domain and cultural value of the novel.[13]

Where most critics see Austen's narrator as purely godlike, D. A. Miller reads traces of melancholy in the distance between perfect narrator and all-too-human characters. Miller's remarkable 2003 *Jane Austen: or The Secret of Style* both spatializes and re-personalizes Austen's narrator, seeing her narrative voice as not only distinctively 'extraterritorial' (75) but also oddly pathetic, revealing traces of abjected personal identity in the very aspiration to objectivity that makes postmodern critics uneasy.[14] For those who most admire the supreme confidence of the narrator are those who might not otherwise possess it: unmarried women, the ill, or the queer male who discovers too late that a knowledge of Austen's writing signifies 'Woman'.

The fusion of private and public voices here comes through a shared social desire: Austen's narrator possesses 'an ability not just to attract marginal or malformed subjects who need to take shelter in an image of universality and absoluteness, but also to combine with central ideological elements of a culture invested in such an image for itself'.[15] In contrast to the narrators of Fielding and Thackeray, who seem 'hardly more than a poetically licensed exaggeration of the kinds of empowered knowledge that are already possessed, already displayed and exercised, by various men in the nonfictional world: a learned magistrate, say, or a gossipy clubman', the Austen narrator speaks in the Neuter voice of a 'ghostly No One'.[16] The narrator refuses embodiment in the novels' social systems, in which to be a woman would mean taking up a fixed location within the marriage culture, either as married or as unmarried. To do so, however, involves a 'double nonrecognition, the objects of which are the fictive old maid who figures in the novels [invariably seen as silly] and the real old maid who has written them', but whose wisdom and independent judgment are reflected in none of them. In Austen's determination to achieve an impersonal voice Miller sees 'a failed, or refused, but in any case shameful relation to the conjugal imperative'.[17]

Miller sees the pathos of embodiment not only in the narrator's self-transcending voice, but in the typical plot of the Austen novel, in which heroines begin by flaunting their superiority to circumstances only to be humiliated into recognizing that they do (and must) love and thus be reduced to mere personhood. He compares Austen's narrator to W. F. J. Schelling, whose deity is 'a perfection in perverse need of imperfection to assert itself', in her depiction of characters who at first resemble the narrator but then invariably suffer some kind of fall. In order to achieve the rewards of social happiness, Austen's heroines must recognize their failures and limitations, whether through Elizabeth Bennet's realization that she loves the man she has spurned or Catherine Morland's embarrassment at being caught making up lurid stories about General Tilney. These humiliations might seem 'simply an emotional mystification that helps a woman bear the loss entailed on her social integration, and even prefer it to anything else', but Miller sees them as complementary stages in a dialectic of shame. While the characters are forced to renounce their perky independent 'style', they also find its loss a relief, since the older they get the harder it becomes to sustain. If they maintain their style past its sell-by date, they risk the fate of Mary Crawford in *Mansfield Park*, whose apparent immunity to shame is punished by her long, long wait for a husband. Meanwhile, Miller imagines the style of the narrator being maintained at the cost of the increased 'stringency of its refusal to realize the author personally', effacing so much of herself that she writes jestingly about hypochondria (in *Sanditon*) when deathly ill.[18]

Miller thus implies that Austen's omniscient narrator seduces through an act of narrative cross-dressing in which the desiring reader achieves pleasure

through the mimicry not just of God, but also of a subject whose social and gender position frees them from the shame of desire. A similar gesture of impersonation characterizes what Miller calls the most 'pointed' and 'intimate' feature of the omniscient narration: 'free indirect style, in which the narration's way of *saying* is constantly both mimicking, and distancing itself from, the character's way of *seeing*. Both forms are Austen's greatest and most recognized contributions to culture, but they are also her weirdest, and her least assimilable.'[19] Free indirect discourse consists, briefly, in rendering a character's thoughts in the third person, so that the narrator seems suddenly to take on that character's passions, arguments, and epistemological limitations. In Roy Pascal's words, this kind of narrator 'enjoys the privileges of a disembodied intelligence that has access to the secrets of heart and mind and can be ubiquitous'.[20] Here is a classic example from *Sense and Sensibility* (except for the first and third sentences which might also be simple narration):

> Mrs. Dashwood did not at all approve of what her husband intended to do for his sisters. To take three thousand pounds from the fortune of their dear little boy, would be impoverishing him to the most dreadful degree. She begged him to think again on the subject. How could he answer it to himself to rob his child, and his only child too, of so large a sum? And what possible claim could the Dashwoods, who were related to him only by half blood, which she considered as no relationship at all, have on his generosity to so large an amount. It was very well known, that no affection was ever supposed to exist between the children of any man by different marriages; and why was he to ruin himself, and their poor little Harry, by giving away all his money to his half sisters?[21]

It is clear that these cannot be the narrator's sentiments – we are not seriously meant to believe that 'poor little Harry' will be impoverished by this gift, nor that half-siblings never care for one another. This is Mrs John Dashwood's own voice, but when it is reported in the third person it undergoes a subtle change. Whether it represents Mrs Dashwood's exact argument, or its general drift, the distance that is established between character and narrator is more than enough to turn that gentlewoman's narrow selfishness into a caricature. While we are clearly meant to condemn her for her hypocritical greed, this distanced tone places her sins in an ironic light, suggesting that we readers need not fall prey to Marianne Dashwood's error of being overpowered by grief and rage at the immediacy of the affront. Nor are we forced to weather every quiver of an Evelina's consciousness, for this is emotion recollected in tranquillity. Austen does not leap into the narrative to point out Mrs Dashwood's nastiness for us, as that would have increased our sense of immediacy: instead her indirect method creates a sense of temporal disjuncture. Somehow enough time has passed that the

moral failings of Mrs Dashwood's personality have been exposed, tallied up, and judged. The ironic voice of Austen's narrator shades here into outright sarcasm – the narrator's anger being implied in the distance between her view and that of Mrs Dashwood – before withdrawing again into the reflective voice of omniscience.

Yet another mode of Austenian narration is what Gerard Genette was the first to call 'focalization', or the narrator's ability to establish intimacy with a favoured protagonist without renouncing the privileges of third-person omniscience. Focalization is a general tendency in a narrative to follow the point of view of a single character, sometimes sharing that character's cognitive limitations. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan points out that the implicit relation of focalization is a spatial one between a 'bird's-eye view' and that of a limited observer, although she also wishes to broaden the concept to include 'cognitive, emotional, and ideological orientation'.[22] While these techniques are both ways the narrative voice approaches that of the character, I believe one might make a distinction between the way focalization in Austen establishes sympathy for the character by bringing her voice and personality closer to that of the narrator's, and the way free indirect discourse dramatizes the subtle difference between the voices. Whereas, for example, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* is focalized through the point of view of several different characters, Austen usually focuses on one heroine, concentrating the reader's sympathy on her plight. Both techniques involve a narratorial ventriloquism: in focalization, the character is brought insensibly closer to the narrator, whereas free indirect discourse only works if the narrator's sarcasm dramatizes her distance from the character in question.

It is in Austen's complex narrative voice, with its easy shifts between reserved impassivity and the intimate approach to the individual's point of view, alternately sympathetic and sardonic, intimate and omniscient, that I see the closest parallel to Smithian political economy. For paradoxically it is the distance between the narrator and the characters that creates the most convincing sense of the unity of Austen's narratives, or as Miller puts it: 'the Austen Novel crystallizes that unalloyed antithesis between narration and character which even now makes it look like the Platonic form from which every later nineteenth-century English novel has both derived and declined'.[23] Although Austen's work does not directly reference Smith or political economy, critics have argued that as a widely read person of the early Regency, Austen was probably aware of some of the contemporary rage for economic discourse.[24] Yet we need not argue that Austen read Smith to acknowledge the similarities between their narrative strategies, though the analogy is to Smith's imaginary system of capitalism rather than to his work *The Wealth of Nations*. Remember that Smithian moral theory is predicated on the simultaneous comprehension of several mutually exclusive points of view: the self-interested merchant, who would act in defiance of the public interest even if he were able to know it; the sovereign, whose view of the

whole system keeps him from comprehending the interests of every one of its individuals; and the theorist, whose assertion of the invisible hand frees the merchant to be selfish and persuades the sovereign to restrain his desire to intervene in the economy. The perspectival construction of invisible hand social theory might even be said to anticipate some of the narratological innovations that Watt credits to Austen (such as free indirect discourse) in its direction that we both imagine and distance ourselves from the point of view of different kinds of strangers.

Austen resembles Smith also in her construction of an omniscient social overview that is for all intents and purposes completely naturalistic (that is, it functions independently of supernatural intervention), though it seems to conform ultimately to the priorities of divine Providence. Peter Knox-Shaw points out that 'As far as religion goes, it is clear that Jane Austen died a believer, but she ranks among the least proselytizing of Christian novelists.'[25] It is certainly striking that for all the clergymen (such as the flippant Henry Tilney) that populate her novels, and despite the prominence of traditional marriage in their plots, they feature very little discussion of theology or religious belief. The characters almost never consider their fates in terms of God's will or divine intervention, and the narrator scarcely encourages the reader to do so. This naturalistic horizon places the novels squarely within the genre of realism, which aims to depict characters acting freely within the realm of psychological probability rather than as puppets of the all-powerful narrator. And as we have seen, Smith's invisible hand enables his own founding vision to be presented as a description of natural law through the claim that when people act like capitalists they are acting spontaneously rather than at the goading of a supernatural force.

And yet both that supernatural force and that all-powerful narrator persist in capitalism and the realist novel – all the more effectively once they have withdrawn behind the veil of benevolent discretion. Austen does not always share Smith's generosity or his optimism that selfish actions will be made right, but her implied long-term view permits her to suggest moral certainty. In the same way the invisible hand encourages one to reread present vices in the light of their potential future benefits, as if the future has already happened. Both discourses construct their sense of pleasing holism from their implied freedom to range over space and time, encompassing both apparently trivial details and a foreknowledge of the system's moral outcome. And they do so under the emblem of restraint: the restraint of Austen's narrator, who judges without intervening,[26] and the restraint of the sovereign who defers his power to intervene in economic affairs to the superior wisdom of the theorist. The authority to organize the system is renounced – seemingly dispersed among a variety of self-motivated actors – but the result is always appealingly comic. Indeed, both of these moral narratives have resulted in the lingering fetishization of the authors who withdraw into their perfect systems, whether the acolytes be 'Janeites' or worshippers of Adam Smith.[27]

But this comforting effect of totality and closure may also be related to the use of certain perspectival tricks. Poetic justice is not entirely complete in Austen's narratives, for not every selfish character (such as Mrs Dashwood) is punished. Virtue however is usually rewarded, which removes some of the sting one feels at the flourishing of wickedness, and permits the reader to forgive the villains with remarkable grace. At the same time, the stories' final images of domestic couples are made possible only by the purging of disruptive characters like John Willoughby, Lucy Steele, and Henry Crawford. The very fragility of this triumph tips us off to the selectivity of Austen's focus; of *Mansfield Park*, Pascal says that 'it is as if the beam of the narrator's attention is focused sharply upon Fanny, [and] less brightly upon Edmund, while the other characters are placed in the penumbra at varying distances from the centre, the distance being inversely proportionate to their role in the story and the sympathy which they are allowed to claim'.[28] If the same story had been told from the disgraced Maria Bertram's point of view, one might well have questioned the ultimate stability of the marriage plot. The narrator's ability to slip in and out of the characters' thoughts – with its concomitant increase in moral irony – is also facilitated by Austen's prudent limitation of her characters to a small group of similar people whose decisions are based on subtle changes in their inner life, and whose voices are not all that different from her own. Though it is the narrator of *Sense and Sensibility* who reproves Marianne's emotionalism, it might just as well be her very mature sister Elinor.

The illusion of totality is just as jury-rigged in Smith's system. Where Austen depends on an easy and unmarked alternation between the voices of character and narrator, Smith's invisible hand is only made 'visible' through the conflation of two incompatible points of view. The slippage between the selfishness of the individual agent and the interests of the sovereign is equally unmarked, though in fact the difference between their views is even more marked than that between Austen's narrator and characters. Where Austen's narrator can read the characters' thoughts, neither Smith's sovereign nor the theorist can read the interests of the individual merchant: at least in the realm of 'domestick industry', in which 'every individual, it is evident, can, in his local situation, judge much better than any statesman or lawgiver can do for him'.[29] This limitation on the statesman's knowledge is the surest barrier to government intervention in the economy. On the other hand, from the individual's point of view the overall morality of the system is not visible; to detect this, one would need to occupy the position of that very statesman or lawgiver. If we are then to accept that the merchant is actually a moral creature and not entirely a selfish worm, we must imagine that he is able to identify first with a merchant who is deliberately not acting in the public good (upon whom he should ironically model his actions), and next with a statesman, lawgiver or theorist who can see the good of the whole but not of the individual parts. He simultaneously adopts two points

of view, each of which explicitly excludes the other. This mechanism is not entirely congruent with that of free indirect discourse, in which the narrator always has the upper hand. It does, however, resemble the convention of realist narrative that the narrator pretend not to know how the story will turn out, and that he must sometimes, in order to increase the impression of total knowledge, identify with a character of limited awareness.

One reason I would like to focus here on *Northanger Abbey*, with its only partially deflationary parody of the Gothic novels of the 1790s, is that I believe it exposes an anxious underside to the project of omniscience that is carried out so seamlessly in other Austen novels. Its genre, which dabbles with the Gothic before re-establishing its realist credentials, resembles the metaphorical structure of the invisible hand with its canny invocation and then deferral of supernatural agency, but rather than simply covering over that ambiguity it revels in the dialectical juxtaposition of perspectives natural and supernatural, as well as domestic and foreign, or 'inside' and 'outside' the system of naturalistic probability. As I argued in the previous chapter, some of the rhetorical success of the invisible hand metaphor is due to its ambiguity about the involvement of divine Providence in the capitalist system: if you wish to believe that Providence is directing the system of social irony to a beneficent outcome, you are free – but by no means required – to do so. In *Northanger Abbey*, this confusion comes in the form of a vacillation between the terrifying pleasure of a paranoid narrative and the assertion of a commonsensical optimism that is meant to be reassuring, as well as identified with the 'hereness' of both the characters' location in England and modernity in general. *Northanger Abbey* thus prefigures the mood of early nineteenth-century political economy, in which resolute cheerfulness is meant to overcome lingering anxieties about social collapse – but also points towards the more paranoid, Gothic, and determinist theories of capitalism that would develop in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, from Max Weber's anxiety that capitalist rationality would inextricably develop into an 'iron cage' to Horkheimer and Adorno's belief that Enlightenment undoes itself in a logic of its own creation. The anxiety expressed in these theories that capitalism is really a kind of alien machine is, I believe, implicit in the moral structure of Smithian capitalism, though it may conflict with its explicit mood. For if capitalism *might* be organized by an intention that directs the invisible hand, who is to say that that powerful figure will always be benevolent? Smith's invisible hand theory reassures the reader that despite the disturbingly selfish appearance of capitalist activity, there is really nothing to worry about. But in *Northanger Abbey*, this optimistic interpretation is interwoven with the possibility that the social world is as selfish as it appears, and powerful people really are out to get you. Where Smith's moral theory implies a Gothic interpretation of capitalism that would not be articulated for many decades, Austen's novel both articulates the Gothic underside of narrative omniscience and allows it to persist despite its comic outcome.

In a 1999 article, Stefan Andriopolous makes an extensive comparison between Smith's invisible hand and the invisible hand that often intervenes in Gothic novels, beginning with Walpole's 1764 *The Castle of Otranto*. He argues that in early Gothic novels the phrase is used to describe a supernatural intervention, like the kind mocked in Smith's 'History of Astronomy' essay. In the 'didactic and sentimental' later Gothic, however, the term is naturalized somewhat to refer to a Providence that intervenes by means of apparent accidents, as in Eliza Parson's *The Castle of Wolfenbach* (1793), in which the villain's crimes lead to his detection, or Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), in which 'Emily and Valancourt, who abstain from any active pursuit of their interests, finally gain happiness, while Montoni, who does pursue his own interest, reaches the very opposite of his intentions'.[30] Andriopolous compares these more subtle but also more didactic Gothic novels with Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, in which the invisible hand similarly overrules the selfish intentions of the wealthy man by placing limits on the amount he can physically eat. Though in *WN* the figure appears completely secular, Andriopolous argues that its 'naturalization of supernatural agency ... remains incomplete', leaving an embarrassing rhetorical surplus that would haunt the early years of political economy. He thus reads the invisible hand's excision from early economic textbooks, or its relegation to a footnote, as symptomatic of a desire to suppress an alternate reading of *The Wealth of Nations* as itself a 'Gothic novel' in which capitalism is haunted by a mysterious agency rather than defined by scientific necessity.[31]

If early political economy is anxious about the genre of the knowledge it represents (which could be either religious providentialism or scientific law), *Northanger Abbey* self-consciously calls attention to the importance of genre by conspicuously switching between them. In her introduction to the Penguin edition of the novel, Marilyn Butler argues that *Northanger Abbey* is a playful education in the contingencies of knowledge production: 'Genres are for adults what games are for children (and adults too), special systems which provisionally reduce reality to order, and make conclusions possible. Henry shows Catherine, who at this point only half hears him, that the mind orders the world through genres, lives in them, and plays between them.'[32] The story of *Northanger Abbey* focuses on impressionable young Catherine Morland, who first learns to interpret the world through the Gothic novels she devours with her false friend Isabella Thorpe, and then is disabused of her vivid fantasies by the more sensible Henry Tilney, who assures her that such activities as patriarchal abductions, imprisonment in secret chambers, and the discovery of incriminating manuscripts in forgotten chests are not likely to happen in modern England. The genre of realist writing thus seems to supersede the outmoded Gothic in much the same way as it would in the literary fashions of the early nineteenth century – or as scientific economics would claim to supersede religious fantasies. But

there is another interpretation of the novel's events in which realism only *seems* to vanquish the Gothic, but is really undercut by the persistence of a legitimately paranoid interpretation of everyday life. So Henry is correct that his father probably did not murder his mother and there are no mouldering skeletons within the walls of the familial Abbey, but there *are* unseen dangers for Catherine Morland that threaten her happiness: John Thorpe's 'abduction' of her in his carriage despite her entreaties to stop; Isabella's entrapment and swift abandonment of Catherine's brother James; General Tilney's unnerving flattery of Catherine which is based purely on misinformation about her likely inheritance; and the event that genuinely does shock the novel's characters – General Tilney's rude expulsion of Catherine the minute he finds out his mistake, forcing her to find her way across the countryside alone and practically penniless. The novel is thus not only a satire of the Gothic that mocks its exaggerations of 'real' life, but a parody of the Gothic in which Gothic torments are present in somewhat miniaturized form – as well as retaining some of the disturbing interpretive lessons of the Gothic, such as the reality of patriarchal power and the constant possibility of deception and betrayal.[33] The novel's 'realist' lesson can be interpreted in terms of a clearly marked vacillation between the genres of comedy (in which virtue and young love triumph) and Gothic paranoia, whose tragic ending is perhaps only temporarily defeated.

The novel's playful code-switching, its alternate attack on and embrace of sentimental convention, begins with the characterization of the heroine Catherine Morland as both likable and extremely foolish. It turns out, in this novel, that sentimental fictions work just as well if the heroine's innocence is taken to such an extreme as to be almost ludicrous. By mocking Catherine at the story's outset as the opposite of the usual romantic heroine – 'often inattentive, and occasionally stupid', 'not remarkable' in learning, 'noisy and wild', and hating 'confinement and cleanliness' until slightly feminized as a teenager by a love of nice clothes – the narrator spoofs the reader's own desire to sympathize with a worthy heroine, calling attention to the artifice of conventional sentimental fiction (*NA* 13, 14). However, if Catherine's general good health, her common sense, and unremarkable provincial upbringing make her less likely to resemble the typical high-strung and threatened Gothic heroine, it does not prevent identification with her as a typical realist heroine. The distance between knowing narrator and ignorant character is more dramatically marked here than in other Austen novels, where the intimate approach of focalization is made easier by the knowingness of the heroines (such as Emma Woodhouse or Elizabeth Bennet) and their resemblance to the narrator. But though in other circumstances Catherine's lack of social knowledge might make her a shallow or dull heroine, there are several factors here that are meant to make her more appealing. First, her naiveté and basic goodness of heart serve as comic foils to the follies of Bath society, since Catherine seems at first unable to distinguish the lies that proliferate

around her. Her chaperone, Mrs Allen, is just as ignorant as Catherine but made almost unbearable by her obsession with the latest fashions and habit of parroting the last phrase uttered by her husband, whereas Catherine is at least interested in the outside world. Catherine's trusting nature also dramatizes the sly nastiness of her so-called friend Isabella Thorpe, who professes eternal friendship only to flirt with Catherine's brother, whom she will then throw over for Captain Tilney. Catherine's seeming inability to detect lying and posturing (such as John Thorpe's crude boasting about his carriage and horses) sets her apart from the mocking narrator, but we share Catherine's horror at the crude manipulations of her so-called friends, and her attraction to the more elegant and witty Tilney siblings.

The second way that the narrator complicates our relation to Catherine's ignorance is by lampooning both other characters' attraction to it, and our own. It is clear that the romantic interest, Henry Tilney, is much smarter than Catherine – and yet this disparity furthers the comic marriage rather than otherwise. This charm is dramatized in a scene in which Catherine goes for a simple walk with the Tilneys but is quickly overwhelmed by their sophisticated concept of the picturesque:

> Here Catherine was quite lost. She knew nothing of drawing – nothing of taste – and she listened to them with an attention which brought her little profit, for they talked in phrases which conveyed scarcely any idea to her. The little which she could understand however appeared to contradict the very few notions she had entertained on the matter before. It seemed as if a good view were no longer to be taken from the top of an high hill, and that a clear blue sky was no longer a proof of a fine day. She was heartily ashamed of her ignorance. (*NA* 99)

The satire here seems at first to be against Catherine for being so clueless, but then turns against the jargon of the picturesque itself. So far this passage shows Catherine in her role as *idiot savant* and comic foil. However, the narrator then steps in to remind the reader that Catherine's artlessness is actually quite powerful in a social sense, and that it might work on us as well as on the Tilneys:

> [However, Catherine's was a] misplaced shame. Where people wish to attach, they should always be ignorant. To come with a well-informed mind, is to come with an inability of administering to the vanity of others, which a sensible person would always wish to avoid. A woman especially, if she have the misfortune of knowing any thing, should conceal it as well as she can. ... But Catherine did not know her own advantages – did not know that a good-looking girl, with an affectionate heart and a very ignorant mind, cannot fail of attracting a clever young man, unless circumstances are particularly untoward. (*NA* 99)

Now, the most evident objects of the satire are the vanity of human beings' faith in their own knowledge, the vanity of men in particular, and conduct manuals for young ladies which might counsel modesty and reticence on what seem like moral grounds but whose effect is in fact either oppressive or slyly instrumental. Given the demand that women attract others by appearing ignorant, why wonder that so much energy is channelled into disguising knowledge? Isabella Thorpe's knowingness is only partial because she has learned the overt part of this dictum – the usefulness of pretending ignorance to gain one's ends – but is only skilled enough to fool the genuinely ignorant, such as Catherine and her brother, whereas none of the worldly Tilneys are ever fooled. Catherine's ignorance here is represented as a rare blossom doomed to fade – more quickly than her youthful looks – for despite her resistance to learning she will in fact be forced to do so by the events of the narrative. Fortunately Isabella's lessons in worldly deceit are less compelling than the lesson in love Catherine learns from Henry; when she announces that 'I have just learnt to love a hyacinth,' Henry flirtatiously replies that 'The mere habit of learning to love is the thing; and a teachableness of disposition in a young lady is a great blessing' (*NA* 151, 152). In teaching her while making fun of her, he is unwittingly falling in love.

So while part of Catherine's appeal is in her honest virtue when compared with the false sophistication surrounding her, even more effective is her ability to serve as a comic 'straight man' for the somewhat more genuine sophistication of the Tilneys, the narrator, and the reader. In his understanding of 'trivial' Gothic conventions and social games, as well as his genuine interest in more 'serious' questions of politics and history, Henry Tilney comes the closest to the narrator's position of playful knowledge, to the point that he may almost be said to threaten the narrative's fragile sympathy with the nominal protagonist Catherine. Hence his conversations with Catherine instantly make the novel more interesting, for they permit the reader to reconcile sentimental identification with the heroine with the narrator's mocking distance from her ignorance (since Henry is both the smartest person in the book and the one most attracted to Catherine). The narrator makes fun of Henry's vanity in falling for her, of course, but thus tweaks the reader and possibly even herself. The reader's ability to fall in love with the stupid heroine is itself an act of knowledge, since it requires recognizing the vanity and ineradicable human subjectivity inherent in that possession of knowledge. As the narrator varies between omniscient overview and personal intervention, so the reader recognizes her emotional investment in her own cleverness – and hopefully is able to laugh at it and so achieve distance from that knowledge. The novel thus permits the reader to forgive herself for identifying with the sentimental heroine, just as it ultimately forgives Catherine for her over-investment in the Gothic.

As in Smith, then, the unintended consequences of human vanity in this novel are basically positive, though they can only be understood as positive from a slightly elevated subject position. Catherine's dark Gothic suspicions may seem to be superseded by the comic, optimistic outcome. However, as I have suggested, the novel ironizes that point of view as well by reintroducing the Gothic genre as if it were itself an unkillable Gothic villain. For while the Tilney siblings' sympathetic knowledge transcends the Thorpes' shallow games, they are themselves pawns in a game not entirely of their own devising. General Tilney may not have actually killed his wife, as Catherine at first fantasizes, but he does semi-convincingly represent the oppressive Gothic patriarch. With his combination of military prestige, political power, and role as active improving landowner, he reduces his daughter Eleanor to the sad resignation of the imprisoned while attempting to manipulate Henry's affections for financial reasons. There is also a hint, as Butler suggests, that he has absorbed and dispossessed the whole surrounding village: 'Tenants and smallholders are nowhere to be seen: the gardeners work as employees within the General's walls, their former status ironically remembered by Austen's wording: "The walls seemed countless in number, endless in length; a village of hot-houses seemed to arise among them, and a whole parish to be at work within the inclosure." '[34] When he suddenly throws Catherine out of Northanger Abbey, letting her find her own way home, Eleanor admits that 'my real power is nothing' (*NA* 196), and the only recourse the Morlands have is private social censure: he 'had acted neither honourably nor feelingly – neither as a gentleman nor as a parent' (*NA* 204). It is true that his cruel intentions are ultimately subverted by none other than the boastful John Thorpe: for by telling General Tilney that Catherine was an heiress he himself was sure to wed, he excites the General's desire to dominate John and claim Catherine for himself, setting the stage for Catherine's innocent social rise. The novel ends happily because Henry already has a living and hence can defy his father: 'He felt himself bound as much in honour as in affection to Miss Morland, and [believed] that heart his own which he had been directed to gain' (*NA* 215). In emphasizing the establishment's ability to thwart the desires of the young, the novel makes a concession both to the Gothic and to the nascent genre of realism. But foregrounding the question of genre (is it realism, comedy, romance, or Gothic?) makes somewhat arbitrary an outcome that, if this novel's realism were less self-conscious, might be presented as natural. If the Gothic has once unexpectedly returned from repression, it might certainly do so again. The 'anxieties of common life' may not ever be quite free of the 'alarms of romance' (*NA* 175) – two categories that the novel first sets up as oppositions, and then allows to infiltrate each other.

Perhaps the most critically vexed question regarding the novel's genre is its explicit relation to national geography. Henry's lecture to Catherine about the limits of the Gothic, when he realizes she suspects General Tilney

of having murdered his wife, is represented as a lecture about the nature of Englishness:

> 'Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? ... Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you – does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing; where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay every thing open?' (*NA* 172)

England is thus a country that is home to certain genres and not others – to a realism based on probability, not the Gothic of Italy or other barbaric Catholic countries. Our reading of this passage determines our political approach to this novel: if we read it literally, the novel will seem more conservative in its suggestion that England represents enlightened justice while other countries represent the horrors of the past. Since Henry's point of view seems closest to the narrator's, we might be tempted to bring the novel's irony to a halt at this passage, reinforcing a sensible English patriotism. If this were the case, the passage about England being a nation of 'spies' might seem oddly carceral, though meant to be reassuring.

But most critics see here what Patrick Parrinder calls a 'subtly undermining irony', especially given Catherine's subsequent resolve to reject the whole Gothic genre, which is also clearly ironized:[35]

> Charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, ... it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the midland counties of England, was to be looked for. Of the Alps and Pyrenees, with their pine forests and their vices, they might give a faithful delineation; and Italy, Switzerland, and the South of France, might be as fruitful in horrors as they were there represented. Catherine dared not doubt beyond her own country, and even of that, if hard pressed, would have yielded the northern and western extremities. But in the central part of England there was surely some security for the existence even of a wife not beloved, in the laws of the land, and the manners of the age. Murder was not tolerated, servants were not slaves, and neither poison nor sleeping potions to be procured, like rhubarb, from every druggist. (*NA* 174)

The overstatement here gives the game away. On the one hand, it can be generally stated that during the 1790s England is not as violent as revolutionary France; there are no tumbrels, guillotines, or regicides. But Catherine's

lingering doubt about the 'northern and western extremities' of her own country makes the whole passage ridiculous (a tendency underlined by the use of the comic-sounding word 'rhubarb' in the last phrase). Catherine's insistence that the daylight of reason shines only on the flattest 'midland' parts of England is evidently meant as premature, especially since the novel takes the possibility of English riots very seriously: when Catherine refers to the upcoming publication of a new Gothic novel as 'something very shocking indeed ... in London' (*NA* 100), the normally reliable Eleanor Tilney hears a reference to the real Gordon riots of 1780.

The flatness of the midlands landscape is linked in nineteenth-century realism not just to the monotony of a certain kind of lower-middle-class experience, but politically to other flat countries of Protestant Northern Europe, a link George Levine sees as inspired by a certain kind of visual representation: 'Notoriously, the pictorial analogue most frequently implied by the Victorians is not the sublime of Claude, Poussin, or Turner, but Dutch realism; landscapes barely varied by the slightest rise, flatlands and cows and peasants and northern skies whose sun throws its sharpest lights indoors, on the fustian colors of work and domesticity.'[36] This link between realism and landscape implies a certain relation between visibility and the kind of experience one might be led to expect, say, in a novel of a certain genre. In a flat landscape, you can see for a long way: you see the road before you and can be confident there are no banditti around the next corner. This confidence reinforces one's sense of safety in a way that resembles the disciplinary effects of Bentham's panopticon but is not precisely equivalent: you assume others can see you, but you can also see all the other people in the landscape. There may be 'voluntary spies' everywhere, but this reinforcement of civil society is reassuring rather than (as in Foucault) paranoia-inducing, because you are not locked alone in a cell and there is no permanent or structural difference in power between the watcher and the watched; rather, crime is reduced literally through a 'neighbourhood' watch operating on a local scale. There may indeed be a structural analogy to the panopticon's disciplinary overseer in the figure of the omniscient narrator – so that reading novels in which newspapers and roads are mentioned persuades the reader that a corresponding civic-minded oversight exists – but there are also real newspapers and roads on the level of the individual members of the society, which enable them to watch each other and are in practice rather more effective than the novel's assurance of safety. The part of Henry's reading that the novel supports – which is almost all of it – militates against a Foucauldian or paranoid reading of omniscient surveillance in favour of the sense of established and visible community.[37]

In realism, then, at least as Henry represents it and Catherine prematurely accepts it, there may be occasional unforeseen bumps in the road but the arrival of new characters is well signalled and not entirely unexpected, and you will never see a mountain (or another genre) just appear out of nowhere.

Mountainous places by contrast correspond to non-realist genres because their topography reduces visibility: they resist modernity as well as mobility, permitting the persistence of a repressed savagery which they might at any moment spring upon the unwary traveller. The emotional effect of the corresponding literary genre of the Gothic is a debilitating shock, or at least an acute sense of distress. Christopher Miller argues that *Northanger Abbey* is instead about the emotional impact of surprise, in which Catherine's delight in novelty is valorized above the closed-off knowledges of the Thorpes and even the Morland parents. This kind of realism might correspond with what we might call a genre of the picturesque, with its sense of a constantly pleasing and startling line of beauty, as Karl Kroeber puts it: 'The picturesque found reward in the mild surprises of continuities of transformation, including those of the perceiver, as when a traveller advanced on a curving mountain road offering continually shifting vistas, or a low-lying mist gradually dissipated to reveal features of a landscape it had shrouded.' Kroeber notes that the picturesque is formulated to maximize the appeal of a specifically English landscape of well-worn subtlety: 'Instead of the Grand Tour of foreign countries by a few aristocrats, multitudes of gentry-class lovers of the picturesque became tourists in their native land, moving shorter distances and more quickly, and focusing their attention less on what was stable, either in a landscape or architectural grandeur, than evanescent variations in light and shade in natural prospects or temporal corrosions of architecture.'[38]

The picturesque thus seems to inculcate a pleasant, perhaps somewhat melancholy state of mind peculiarly adapted to England's pleasant climate and landscape, neither boringly exposed nor constantly shocked. But even if we see in the picturesque a modulation of the totally visible rationality of Henry's realism, it might be premature to identify this novel's balance between Gothic and realism entirely with the picturesque. For insofar as the novel encourages identification with Catherine, it must take seriously her emotional responses of desire, fear, and anger; and even if it mocks sentimental novels that excessively exploit these identificatory reflexes, it registers that Catherine does care more about her own life than we observers do. So a scene that seems delightfully picturesque to the reader, such as Catherine's increasingly desperate attempt to escape from the Thorpes' carriage ride, may be genuinely terrifying from Catherine's point of view: from the outside it looks frivolous and trivial, but on the inside there are looming crags and fearful abysses. With its reliance on the psychological truth of individual self-centredness, realism demands that the character care about his or her current emotional situation, usually more so than the reader. Catherine Morland does learn, eventually, to achieve some distance from her emotions, but the undesirability of total distance (that is, perfect stoicism) is illustrated through the plight of Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*, who tries to stifle her need for love though she is fortunately betrayed at the end by

her lingering passion for Wentworth. So while I think there are elements of the picturesque in the novel's generally light-hearted comedy and surprising twists, the part of the novel that identifies with Catherine's inner life must take the heightened emotions of the Gothic more seriously.

This discontinuity between inside and outside can be applied as well, I think, to the novel's geographical schema. So in Catherine's case, the sensible and passionate states of mind do not just succeed each other temporally, but are both present simultaneously, though in discontinuous spheres; when she listens to Henry's advice about the Gothic, she is learning to see how she looks from the outside, though of course she does not therefore give up her special partiality for him. Similarly, the relation between English realism and Italian Gothic is not really comparable to simple spatial contiguity, or even historical succession, but is more like containment, with the Gothic nested inside realism.[39] The appeal of Henry's nationalism notwithstanding, the novel thus incorporates generic perspectives both inside and outside a traditional concept of Englishness. Peter Knox-Shaw sees in Catherine's musings about geography the legacy of a controversy about Italian travel guides beginning with Samuel Sharp's 'jaundiced' 1766 *Letters from Italy*, which was countered in Joseph Baretti's 1770 *Journey from London to Genoa* with the liberal idea that 'it is in your country as in all others'. He notes that Radcliffe agrees basically with Sharp in depicting Italy as anarchic and out of date, while singling out Holland and England as 'countries which best exemplify the happiness that springs from the civilizing effects of trade'. One might then expect Austen, in the novel's general critique of Radcliffe, to be agreeing with Baretti that England is just like Italy. But Knox-Shaw thinks that Austen's point here is 'elusive': her 'empiricism' implies a partial ratification of Henry's view that England really is different because of its education and laws.[40] Claudia Johnson takes a more critical view of the Radcliffean distinction between Italy and England, arguing that Henry participates in its distortions: 'He is, in fact, a perfect reader for Radcliffe's particularly evasive brand of escapist thrills about the horrors that occur in safely remote Catholic countries.' The Italian Gothic actually exists in England, Johnson suggests, but is only visible to those who, like Catherine, can feel the effects of power in their social marginalization: her 'position of powerlessness and dependency give[s] her a different perspective on the status quo'. I would say that Catherine's affective relation to the Gothic is expressed, in formal terms, as if she carried Italy around inside of her while moving in an exterior world marked as English. In Johnson's view, the nationalist argument about England versus Italy serves as a metaphor for the way society looks from different points of view, a polyphony dramatized by the novel's generic instability: 'Austen's enterprise is not to scold her characters, ... but rather to expose the perspectivity of various discourses and to demonstrate how stock figures, expressions, and paradigms are not faithful or innocuous representations of reality, but rather

themselves are constructions, which promote certain agendas and exclude others.'[41]

The fragile dialectic of Catherine's point of view is perhaps most complexly represented in the scene in which, when forced out of Northanger Abbey, her sense of distress seems to unmoor her entirely from her surroundings. As her carriage travels the humiliating path from Gloucestershire to her Wiltshire home in the town of Fullerton, her identity seems to unravel. On the first stage of the journey her carriage takes her from Northanger Abbey along part of the road to Woodston, where Henry has his living, thus rendering her feelings of bitterness 'more severe by the review of objects on which she had first looked under impressions so different. Every mile, as it brought her nearer Woodston, added to her sufferings, and when within the distance of five, she passed the turning which led to it, and thought of Henry, so near, yet so unconscious, her grief and agitation were excessive' (*NA* 201). This separation is, to her, like the separation of death: whereas Henry has thus far been guiding her pleasantly into knowledge and intimacy, he is now trapped *without knowing it* in an ignorance that seems more profound than her own first stage of blissful naiveté. Instead of his vision of an England made bright by roads and newspapers, Catherine now sees her surroundings through a dark fog of separation and helplessness. Her disorientation and isolation increase as the journey continues, cutting her off from her surroundings: she is prevented 'from noticing any thing before her'; 'no object on the road could engage a moment's attention'; and 'after the first stage she had been indebted to the post-masters for the names of the places which were then to conduct her to it; so great had been her ignorance of her route'. Her approach to her childhood home, where she should be on more secure ground, appears to make her even more profoundly lost. She is filled with dread by sights that should be reassuring – including the 'well-known spire' of Salisbury Cathedral, whose association with an ancient sense of Englishness is probably increased by its proximity to Stonehenge (*NA* 202–3). And though her family is just as welcoming to her as they once were, she now feels cut off from them by her allegiance to an impossible love; her inability to speak about it seems to lock her in a domestic prison of silent misery, much as the former Mrs Tilney must have felt at Northanger Abbey. Her 'philosophic' mother's sensible advice – which is probably justified from a strictly empirical point of view – that 'it is ten to one but you are thrown together in the course of a few years; and then what a pleasure it will be!', is consistent with Henry's clear-eyed dismissal of the Gothic but is now displayed as lacking empathy to an almost cruel extent. When Mrs Morland hilariously comforts her daughter by saying 'you always were a sad little shatter-brained creature', she seems more tactless even than the narrator was at the beginning of the novel, especially given that the narrator cannot comfort her as a mother should (*NA* 205, 206). Where Catherine suffered from an excess of imagination, her mother suffers from a deficit,

so is as surprised as Catherine ever was when a chastened Henry shows up in her drawing room to propose to her daughter. Imagination, sympathy, love, hate: such things are not visible in Henry's view of 'newspapers and roads', which is thus revealed as inadequate preparation for life's surprises. The comic reconciliation of inside and outside that ends *Northanger Abbey*, as it does all other Austen novels, thus represents not just the satisfaction of a young girl's unlikely desire, but an adjustment of excessive 'English' empiricism to allow for the unjustified loyalties and partial views that bind society together.

Yet even as it stages the final reunion of Catherine and Henry, the novel simultaneously emphasizes the artificiality of its own sentimental conventions. The narrator mocks the lovers' temporary anxiety by comparing it with readers' certainty of a happy ending, as these readers 'will see in the tell-tale compression of the pages before them, that we are all hastening together to perfect felicity'. The self-consciousness of this happy ending is further underlined by the sudden appearance of a long-time lover for the melancholic Eleanor, and his Cinderella-like 'unexpected accession to title and fortune' which 'remove[s] all his difficulties' along with smoothing the way for Henry to marry the less well-born Catherine – and, further, the narrator's trivializing explanation that, as 'the rules of composition forbid the introduction of a character not connected with my fable', this lover is the very same whose 'negligent servant' left behind the washing bill that the curious Catherine earlier found in her bedroom's secret cabinet (*NA* 217, 218). Claudia Johnson sees in the heightened irony that surrounds this ending an acknowledgement of the fact that, in real life, Gothic terrors are not so swiftly swept under the carpet: 'Austen draws attention to the artificiality, rather than the *vraisemblance*, of the conclusion, and implies in the process that the damage wrought by the likes of General Tilney is in fact not resolvable into the "perfect felicity" of fiction, and that the convention of the happy ending conceals our all-too-legitimate cause for alarm.'[42] Austen actually permits more of the Gothic to survive than Radcliffe's novels do, since Henry's debunking of Gothic convention is subtly undermined by the suggestion that a happy ending is somehow as unrealistic as it is pleasurable.

For all this novel's comic likenesses to the moral plot of invisible hand social theory – its ironic optimism about unintended consequences, dramatic differentiation of the points of view necessary to envision them, and requirement that moral agents see themselves both from the outside and with awareness of their own necessary self-interest – it thus permits an alternate and darker reading of social forces than in Smith's economic theory. The Gothic terrors invoked by the novel – its persistent imagery of entrapment, masculine oppression, and lingering historical barbarism – are not so completely dispelled that the reader would feel confident in ignoring them. The novel refuses to lapse entirely into sentimental convention,

but maintains its sense of ironic distinction between the different genres and plots that have been evoked: the sentimental, the comic, the romantic, the Gothic. It is this refusal to settle for one plot that both annoys readers like Jan Fergus, who sees it as an immature flight from commitment, and pleases those like George Levine, who reads it as a prefiguration of realism's essential dialogism. Levine argues that the 'monstrous' forces of 'romance, energy, [and] aspiration beyond the congealing limits of ordinary life into a more flexible and pluralist experience' are contained in this novel but not foreclosed: 'they live at the formal heart of her fictions, balanced delicately against her own incisive ironies, parodied but not dismissed'.[43]

The geographical and psychological limitations implied in Austen's own jesting about her 'little bit of ivory' are thus undone (as you knew they would be) by the novel's distinctively polyphonic genre. When Catherine decides whether to read her own life as a Gothic or a realist story, she is effectively reaching a conclusion about the whole society in which she finds herself embedded; and when she learns to distrust Isabella but rule out murder, she is gaining a sense of the shape of her own ignorance. Simultaneously the omniscient narrator, with her mobile expansion and contraction of focus, alternating between distance and intimacy, implies the existence of a perspective (whether divine, historically knowing, or choral) far beyond that of any individual. And the narrator's evident combination of mockery and care for her main character ends up both emphasizing the importance of self-interest, and encouraging her (and the reader) to see beyond it. Austen may depict a group of characters small enough to approximate Burke's 'little platoon', but the generic assumptions about the kind of moral actions they can envision within different national spaces expand the novel's implicit scope not only to the edges of the Channel, but beyond.

Dickensian omniscience and the narrator incarnate

In *Bleak House* there is no such ambiguity about the possibility of Gothic terror: the novel opens with a depiction of England as a totally opaque and terrifying kind of space. In contrast to Henry Tilney's transparent nation in which 'newspapers and roads lay every thing open', *Bleak House* is set in a fog that creeps not just over the tidal marshes but into the heart of British institutions:

> Fog everywhere. ... Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. ... Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little 'prentice boy on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds.

> ... And hard by Temple Bar, in Lincoln's Inn Hall, at the very heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery.[44]

This omniscient narrator's co-extensiveness with the fog gives him a dramatic power to penetrate spaces unbeknownst to their inhabitants. Where Austen caresses and gently schools her protagonist like a wayward child, here the fog 'pinch[es]' the poor child, slithering in uncomfortable physical proximity between his toes. The fog's inescapable intimacy is painful to the characters: drawn inwards with the necessity of breath, it infiltrates the aged lungs of the pensioners, and pervades the very tobacco of the captain's pipe to poison his one daily pleasure.

But despite his power over the nooks and crannies of London's physical structure, this narrator is dramatically isolated. What the narrator 'sees' is opacity, a structure that thwarts visibility and understanding, problematizing the point of view from which such a social unity might be visible. No simple bird's-eye view could include the inside of the skipper's pipe bowl as well as the wondering chance people hidden on the bridges. Though the citizens of London are unified by this atmospheric event down to the common air they breathe, they can no more see that the Greenwich pensioners are also thus affected than they could draw a metaphorical link from their own confusion to the heart of the larger social opacity that Dickens will come to define through the Court of Chancery. This court is not just related to the city through metonymy, as an example of the way things are jumbled up in the fog, but is the origin of the city's moral disease: Chancery is the chancre and cancer (yet striking out by chance in its blindness, arbitrarily) that spreads through England's paralysed body. Thus it is not just the physical opacity of the air that obstructs its inhabitants from seeing what the narrator sees, or their earthbound inability to fly, but their inability to understand the social history that ties them together. The narrator's frustration at their ignorance drives, I think, some of the suppressed violence of this scene, with its urge to shake the sleepers awake by pinching their toes and pushing into their lungs.

The unstable clash between the bird's-eye view of all society and the worm's-eye view of the ignorant individual recalls the dual genres of *Northanger Abbey*; however, in *Bleak House* Dickens will stage this disparity even more dramatically by assigning each genre a different narrator. The distinctive alternation in this novel between the angry omniscient narrator of the opening passages and an exceedingly humble and limited female narrator, Esther Summerson, resembles Austen's awareness of the difference between the outer and inner view of individual action, but is complicated by the fact that the two narrative voices supplement each other's knowledge without ever being aware of the other's point of view. While the narrator's position is caricatured by the all-knowing Tulkinghorn, who gets murdered halfway through the novel, Esther struggles to assert her particular vision of

the proper ratio between self and other against the monstrously abstract and ethically distorted perspectives of Skimpole and Mrs Jellyby, while gradually accepting that she is not just a disembodied eyeball, but is an individual herself with distinctive needs and rights.

Dickensian omniscience, especially in the later and more complex novels, strains to encompass as many different and possibly mutually exclusive points of view as possible. For Raymond Williams, Dickens's omniscient narrators are creative responses to the difficulty of describing urban experience, given the gulf between the mysteries of inner life and the 'increasing skepticism, disbelief, in the possibility of understanding society'. It is the increasing size and interrelationship of society that creates a 'crisis of the knowable community' – that is, the problem 'of finding a position, a position convincingly experienced, from which community can begin to be known'. Dickens thus stresses the moral ambition of the omniscient voice, a 'total vision' of society that is ultimately progressive, if dialectically complicated.[45] Peter Garrett's *The Victorian Multiplot Novel* sees the divided narrators of *Bleak House* as emblems of a more self-conscious tension that runs through all Dickens's novels – between the desire for a comprehensive spatial vision of the whole, and a temporal understanding of the drama of individual life.[46] This struggle is reflected within the structure of Dickensian omniscience itself: the 'sudden descent from the elevated perspective' that offers a wide array of social knowledge but one linked with ambivalence and even violence; and a 'movement toward escape or transcendence' that renounces 'synoptic comprehension' for the perspective of the isolated individual. But this flexible point of view turns back on itself when characters imagine being pursued by their own narrator, as Esther's nightmare vision of being a bead in a fiery necklace expresses 'the terror of being assimilated into a vast impersonal system'.[47] Richard Maxwell also foregrounds the possibility of mental terror in Dickens's project of urban omniscience, wondering whether the heightened state that makes possible different narrators' moments of visionary intensity is in fact sustainable, or might degenerate into anxiety: a plunge into hallucinatory darkness or a mere 'cumulative ... drifting' overwhelmed by specificity.[48] The urban experience that undergirds Dickens's omniscience thus gives rise to a narratorial voice that is more ambitious and extensive than Austen's, but also more anxious and paranoid.

The moral ambiguity of this desire for total urban knowledge is usefully crystallized by Dickens's invocation of the demon Asmodeus, a figure from Alain LeSage's satirical tale *Le Diable Boîteux* (The Limping Demon) (1707, 1726) who lifts off the housetops of Madrid to reveal the follies within. As Arac points out in *Commissioned Spirits*, Dickens is not alone in his use of this figure: Bulwer-Lytton wrote a series of journalistic sketches in 1832 called *Asmodeus at Large*, Carlyle takes an 'Asmodeus's Flight' to see Paris from the rooftops in the French Revolution, and there was even a popular

periodical in the 1830s and 1840s called *Asmodeus in London*. But where the demon's tale is 'truly a devil's eye view, that of a destructive satirist with neither sympathy nor a wish to reveal a complex system of social interrelation, preferring the cynical exposure of individuals', Dickens continually tries to use his visionary powers for good.[49] Here is the most relevant passage from *Dombey and Son* (1848):

> Oh for a good spirit who would take the house-tops off, with a more potent and benignant hand than the lame demon in the tale, and show a Christian people what dark shapes issue from amidst their homes, to swell the retinue of the Destroying Angel as he moves forth among them! For only one night's view of the pale phantoms rising from the scenes of our too-long neglect ... Bright and blest the morning that should rise on such a night: for men, delayed no more by stumbling-blocks of their own making, ... would then apply themselves, like creatures of one common origin, ... to make the world a better place![50]

Raymond Williams memorably uses this passage to reinforce his argument about Dickens's basic desire for social progress.[51] Yet the idea of using demonic powers for good ends has something perilously Faustian about it, revealing Dickens's ambivalence about the unpredictable power of the public opinion he seeks to awaken. The imagery of the sun here, like that of the sun that blasts vengefully into the chamber of the slain Nancy in *Oliver Twist* (1837), combines the power of ideal vision with that of energetic intervention. Here is one image for the novel's desired social power: the 'white magic' of sunshine that functions, like the invisible hand, spontaneously and without apparent agency in its transformation of knowledge into social justice.[52] But Dickens also acknowledges that omniscience can be a kind of black magic, like the avenging 'shadow' he envisioned at the outset of his journal *Household Words*, telling John Forster that 'I want to suppose a certain SHADOW, which may go into any place ... a kind of semi-omniscient, omnipresent, intangible creature ... I want him to issue his warnings from time to time, that he is going to fall on such and such a subject; or to expose such and such a piece of humbug ... [it will] loom as a fanciful thing all over London ... a sort of previously unthought of Power going about.'[53] It is all very well to imagine that justice will come about as automatically as a sunrise, but the moment Dickens's project takes on a distinctive agency it creates the possibility of anxiety – in this case, anxiety about just the kind of confusion of public with personal score-settling that Dickens would later critique in the figure of Madame Defarge. (Sunshine, by contrast, can be angry but it can never be mistaken, since it functions as a sign of vision fused with moral justice.[54]) The urban mob in *Oliver Twist*, as J. H. Miller points out, begins as irrationally hostile to young Oliver, only to be turned in the end into a powerful force for good as it hounds Sikes to his death

– rather like a utopian inversion of the French Revolution, which began with a search for justice but ended (as Carlyle depicts) in senseless violence.[55] Dickens invokes apocalypse and revolution constantly in *Bleak House*, as in his fantastic warning that the 'world of fashion and the Court of Chancery are ... sleeping beauties, whom the Knight will wake one day, when all the stopped spits in the kitchen shall begin to turn prodigiously!' (*BH* 10–11).[56] Arac notes the many narrative parallels between *Bleak House* and Carlyle's *The French Revolution*, which Dickens carried with him everywhere after it was published in 1837: in Carlyle's book 'There is no final ending. The irony created by this gap between a disillusioning plot and a visionary means of representation furnishes one of the work's most striking sources of power,' a description that applies to *Bleak House* even more than to *A Tale of Two Cities*, the more obvious novel about the French Revolution.[57] Arnold Kettle notes that though this is 'a revolutionary novel, ... there are no revolutionaries in it', making what Robbins calls an 'Althusserian' point about the difficulty of changing the structural obstacles of modern life, and 'vision of history as process without a subject'.[58] We might say that Dickens combines an urgent desire to bring about social justice through the medium of public outrage rather than the state – we can't wait for the invisible hand to save Jo! – with a Burkean nervousness about the unintended consequences of any such mass agitation.

The power of omniscience is thus, when translated into the novelist's vision, a kind of automatically persuasive power much like that of the Smithian economic theorist. However, as Richard Maxwell points out, Dickens rejects as delusional the systematic knowledge offered by political economy in this passage from *All the Year Round*: 'The law of supply and demand is not to fall under my critical eye. It is my simple business to keep my eyes wide open ... Per-centages, averages, and all the hocus-pocus of statistics are only mists, fogs, curtains, and sleeping-draughts.'[59] What makes the novelist's power beneficent, as opposed to that of the economist, is thus that he *retains* the interventionary power that Smith would have the sovereign renounce, and so can redirect his actions if circumstances change. His assumptions about social justice are also more secular – or perhaps simply more Old Testament – than Smith's: rather than coyly renouncing governmental action because human knowledge cannot approximate God's, Dickens justifies human intervention as the mimicry of a wrathful God. What, then, will make these interventions just when human revolutions have failed, and political economy is an inhuman enchantment that leads to moral blindness and sloth? I would argue that Dickens's secret weapon here – something Smith's sovereign lacks – is constant feedback from an epistemological supplement, the second narrator Esther Summerson. Having a second narrator helps overcome the tension Maxwell describes as inherent to Dickensian omniscience: 'To understand London comprehensively is to detach oneself from the immediacy, the humanity, of lived experience; to

see with one's own eyes is to give up the possibility of omniscience for a limited but compassionate perception.'[60] It is not only her worm's-eye point of view, which contributes fine-grained information that might be lost to a grand overview, but her acute moral judgment about the characters around her, as well as her ability to act in what *would* be her own self-interest if she were not so completely selfless, that makes her such a necessary supplement: while the omniscient narrator inflames public sentiment, Esther's suspicion of Jacobin generalizations and the 'rapacious benevolence' of wholesale charity guides that sentiment into pragmatic, site-specific, and non-revolutionary channels (*BH* 93).[61] In the absence of a personal, particular sovereign to fix the nation, the novel posits the sovereign power of public rage invoked by the omniscient narrator that is then harnessed and guided by the acting individual: bird's-eye and worm's-eye view working together to create social harmony. The Dickensian revolution is carried out in Esther's name – even though, and paradoxically *because*, she refuses all forms of collective public action. The result, politically, is the endorsement of individual efforts at reform without any overarching plan, vision, or statist action – even though the novel also registers this project's limitations through its partially tragic ending.[62] Esther's humble marginality makes her a very different kind of social agent from any sovereign – she is ennobled by her actions and creates a little circle of happiness, but in general those who seek to do good for others in this novel have to content themselves with very meagre returns.

The two alternating narrators of *Bleak House* set the novel apart from all other Dickens novels, which are narrated either by some variant of this omniscient narrator or by an autobiographical 'I' as in *David Copperfield*. The sudden switch to Esther's voice, in which she recounts her history as a young girl of uncertain parentage trying to make her way in the big city, happens after two chapters of the omniscient narrator's description of fog-bound London and precedent-mired Chesney Wold. For the rest of the novel the point of view switches abruptly between them every few chapters, with no sign that either narrator is aware of the other: Esther describes the people around her and her struggle to find love, while the omniscient narrator hovers over the city following various characters like Jo the street sweeper and Mr Tulkinghorn the secretive lawyer (some of whom meet Esther while others do not), and railing against the intransigence of poverty and injustice. Whatever the reasons for this split narration (and critics have been divided over the years, though recent critics are somewhat more forgiving of Esther's desperate cheeriness), the effect is both to enrich the two narrative points of view and to decentre each of them. Oddly, the omniscient narrator never sees Esther from the outside, contributing to the impression that despite the two narrators' general agreement on moral questions there are gaps and subtle contradictions between their stories. Jacob Korg notes that 'modern readers … cannot escape the sense that the split in Dickens's narrative

produces a corresponding fissure in the vision presented by the novel', while Robert Donovan argues that 'to deprive the novel of its specious center, to provide it with a new perspective which, like stereoscopic vision, adds depth, is an important function of the omniscient point of view'.[63] It is this 'oscillati[ng]' narrative form, as much as the novel's attempt to depict a morally self-contained society, that reveals an engagement with Smith's moral vision.[64] The bird's-eye view and the worm's-eye view of Smithian theory are not only both represented here as different kinds of narrative voice, but the difficulty of joining them together in a single point of view is dramatized even as the narrator strains to raise the level of his commentary to that of the theorist. Katherine Williams sees the incongruity between the two narrators as a sign that the novel rejects monoperspectival 'panoramic realism' in favour of a denser, more occluded, and in fact 'postmodernist' view of society:[65]

> It is the promise of perfect transparency, of sight without limit, of compass without boundary, of knowledge without effort, of clarity without doubt, that I believe Dickens rejects in *Bleak House*. ... Indeed, transparency cannot exist except as a metaphor that ignores, rather than solves, the opacity of reality, where in time and space things overlap. In space, all objects, neighborhoods, and sites crowd one another on the vertical plane and bury one another on the horizontal plane. Over time, systems persist beyond their usefulness; new technologies and objects emerge, but do not always eradicate old ones. People live disproportionate and uneven lives, often impinging unseen or unseeing on other lives.[66]

However, the fact that the two voices agree on so many points implies that a theoretical synthesis between them, perhaps constructed from the reader's point of view, is certainly conceivable.[67] In a pattern we will see elsewhere in Dickens, some elements of political economy's structure of social knowledge are adopted (the superiority of individual knowledge, the renunciation of statist coordination, the unknowability of the effects of any action), but then twisted back into a somewhat more conventional moral structure that privileges personal moral accountability.

In Smith, a bird's-eye view is shared by the sovereign and the theorist – it is the theorist who persuades the sovereign not to intervene – but in the world of this novel there is no sovereign who might even want to intervene. The sovereign's agency and societal overview are split between the two narrators, with Esther taking the former and the omniscient narrator the latter; neither of them have the sovereign's worldly power, though the omniscient narrator occasionally appeals to 'Your Highness' in the manner of a lawyer appealing to a judge (*BH* 403). In Walter Scott's *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818) the peasant Jeanie Deans appeals to Queen Charlotte for justice, but no reassuring fairy-tale Queen arrives to help Esther or

Jo: instead we get the frozen figure of Lady Dedlock, the mother who does not even realize her child still lives, and the deluded philanthropist Mrs Jellyby, who cares more about her foreign charity projects than the children who tumble in the dirt around her. The England of *Bleak House* is one in which the retreat of the aristocracy has left not a humming commerce but an anarchic wreckage – though there is not much nostalgia for an England run by such selfish and limited (though honourable) figures as Sir Leicester. (In Austen, by comparison, the decline of the aristocracy merely provides an opening for middle-class girls to marry up, and the monarchy is too stable to merit further attention.) Dickens is no Burkean mourning the death of Marie Antoinette: at home in Gad's Hill he painted his library walls with a false set of books entitled *The Wisdom of our Ancestors* on which were engraved the titles 'I. Ignorance. II. Superstition. III. The Block. IV. The Stake. V. The Rack. VI. Dirt. VII. Disease'.[68] Still, the present has an aspect of abandonment in which the place of a moral centre is taken by an unholy bureaucracy that resembles Horkheimer and Adorno's nightmare of reason devolved into empty rationality. Parliament is represented here as a meaningless ritual observed by interchangeable political parties, the 'Lord Boodle and Sir Thomas Doodle' contending with 'William Buffy ... Cuffy ... Duffy ... [and] Fuffy' over Sir Leicester's barren dinner table, and Dickens's distaste for the institution he covered as a young reporter is amply attested by his political journalism (*BH* 145).[69] The rising young ironmaster Rouncewell eventually wins entrance to Parliament, but this event affects nothing else in the plot. The closest the novel comes to identifying a sovereign figure is the Lord Chancellor, inadequate surrogate parent to Esther, Ada, and Richard, who sits opaquely at the centre of the fog. If the narrator could make himself heard by the Chancellor, he might advise him *not* to let matters have their way but to try to be more responsible to those immediately around him, at least – and perhaps even think about whether his functions are useful to the nation at large. In the absence of a morally engaged central authority, what results is not comic optimism but the automatic and soulless functioning of residual structures of governance, extending themselves beyond the comprehension (or lifetime) of any single individual and crushing their chances for self-determination.

Dickens never takes Adam Smith on directly in this novel; as will be discussed in the next chapter, *Hard Times* is the novel that engages most explicitly with political economy, and there it is identified less with Smith than with the discipline's less generous practitioners Malthus and Bentham (though one of Gradgrind's younger children is named Adam Smith).[70] However, a suspicion of laissez-faire is everywhere in this novel, and in much of Dickens's work.[71] Perhaps the difference between them is more historical than ideological, since one writes before and the other in the middle of the industrial revolution – Smith imagines a society in the process of being built, while Dickens sees a society already neglected and ruined.

Similarly, Dickens's emphasis on personal responsibility is not so different from Smith's stress on individual self-reliance. *Hard Times*, written immediately after *Bleak House*, is dedicated to Thomas Carlyle, and the narrator's anger in both novels seems to have much in common with Carlyle's attack on do-nothingism, waste, and lack of Christian charity. As in Carlyle, Dickens's language gets increasingly florid and excessive as it approaches the mysterious absence at the heart of laissez-faire: the sovereign's will to self-restraint that becomes, when writ large, a general abdication of responsibility for others' misfortunes. Dickens's fictional genre enables him to recount even more powerfully the cautionary tale told in Carlyle's *Past and Present* of the Irish widow who, by infecting those who failed to help her, proved her sisterhood with them; but he is also faced with the dramatic problem of making visible what is in fact an empty structure of deferral and denial.[72] 'Nobody's Fault' was the original title of the book that eventually became *Little Dorrit*,[73] but it could equally describe the murky and random origins of the evil that haunts the characters in *Bleak House*: the lost wills of Jarndyce v. Jarndyce; the fact that Hawdon did not die in the West Indies as thought by Mr George but mysteriously lived on as Nemo (or 'Nobody') just long enough that his handwriting unwittingly causes Lady Dedlock's death; the fact that Jo infects Esther who was only trying to help him, and in fact may have been infected himself by the insufficiently buried body of Nemo, who was Jo's only friend.

There is no central villain in this story to whom the entire chain of events can be traced – as in Smith, the source of social power is frustratingly diffuse. The Lord Chancellor sits at the heart of the fog, but never does anything himself to excite the characters' rage. The Dedlock family lawyer Mr Tulkinghorn comes closer to serving as a conventional villain, but in fact his crime is only in trying belatedly to uncover a hidden crime, and his motives for doing so are inscrutable, like his clothes that absorb light rather than reflecting it. 'Mute, close, irresponsive to any glancing light, his dress is like himself' (*BH* 14). This black hole of secrets corresponds to the inadequacy of his motivations for driving a plot this voluminous – as indicated by the late plot twist in which he himself is murdered, diverting the story's energy into the search for a new villain. Though the maid Hortense is eventually revealed as his killer, her crime of revenge is in fact equally trivial in comparison to the enormity of the evil represented. The robed figure of Allegory that points dramatically from Tulkinghorn's ceiling at some nameless thing below is first an empty signifying gesture, and then comes, by accident, to point at Tulkinghorn's fallen body; but this is not the narrative's real secret either.[74] Unlike in earlier tales like *Oliver Twist*, in which Fagin and Sikes are first promoted as villains and then killed off, *Bleak House* never finds an adequate figure of guilt to blame for the novel's proliferating evils. The difficulty of representing personal responsibility in a complex society is one of the factors that forces the plot to divide and wreathe backwards

and forwards, in an attempt to depict all the causal links between actions and their social effects. Dickens's description of laissez-faire here is not so different from Smith's, though he sees it as a nightmare of deferred agency rather than a utopia. But he also inverts the moral conclusions of invisible hand social theory in at least three further ways – first and most obviously by showing a vicious system corrupting individual personalities rather than tracing social causality from individual vice to collective virtue. Jarndyce v. Jarndyce creates a dark circle of irresponsibility emanating outwards from its inscrutable centre, the missing will that is surrounded by the lawyers' parasitical selfishness: 'How many people ... [it] has stretched forth its unwholesome hand to spoil and corrupt, would be a very wide question' (*BH* 8). The narrator warns that 'even those who have contemplated its history from the outermost circle of such evil, have been insensibly tempted into a loose way of letting bad things alone to take their own bad course, and a loose belief that if the world go wrong, it was, in some off-hand manner, never meant to go right' (*BH* 9). From the systemic perspective, laissez-faire is an 'unwholesome hand' that leads to 'shirking and sharking' on every level of society (*BH* 9). At the end of the novel, John Jarndyce dismisses the idea that any benefit could possibly derive from Chancery's institutionalization of self-interest, observing that Richard Carstone 'no more gathers grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles, than older men did, in old times' (*BH* 715).

At the same time, the mystery that structures Esther's story is that Lady Dedlock is her secret mother, and so this plot does posit a single moment whose effects have radiated out over time to create the present disorder. But it is not quite as clear that either the causes or the effects of this act – the illicit conception of Esther – are entirely virtuous or vicious, so I would count the moral ambiguity of the Lady Dedlock plot as a second reworking of invisible hand social theory. In contrast to Esther's punitive and hysterical godmother who wishes to see the entire affair as sinful – thus stealing the baby Esther, breaking off contact with her sister, and raising Esther to believe she was unworthy of life – the reader blames the godmother for her deliberate cruelty while pitying the other characters whose culpability is in part determined by a series of accidents. The future Honoria Dedlock and Captain Hawdon indeed conceived Esther out of wedlock, but it is not clear why they didn't marry – Captain Hawdon seems to have feigned his own death for obscure reasons, and he was apparently already out of the picture when Honoria was courted by Sir Leicester. And the nemesis that descends upon Lady Dedlock seems disproportionate to her crime, stemming as it does from Tulkinghorn's mistaken belief that he represents the Dedlock interests more authentically than Sir Leicester, who in fact loves and would forgive her.[75] Tulkinghorn is more to blame than Lady Dedlock for Sir Leicester's bereavement. As for Esther, the sense of guilt she carries with her is clearly an irrational encumbrance that threatens to stifle her ability to contribute to others' happiness. Though the Dedlock mystery plot revolves around the

unintended consequences of a single action, it represents neither the simple poetic justice of evil actions leading to evil consequences nor the Smithian moral irony of individual selfishness leading to public welfare. Jarndyce expresses this equivocation – the possibility that the wards might escape their fate – when he muses that 'it must be somewhere written that the virtues of the mothers shall, occasionally, be visited upon the children, as well as the sins of the fathers' – a maxim which complicates his later pessimism about the possibility of gathering grapes from thorns (*BH* 211). The principle of beneficent intervention into history here is represented as feminine and maternal, which is in keeping with Esther's project to spread small amounts of love around her – but it takes on a rueful irony in light of Lady Dedlock's traumatic influence on her daughter.

While the omniscient narrator depicts these larger plots, in which either ambiguous responsibility or outright irresponsibility creates circles of damage spreading outwards through society, Esther's narrative represents a very localized struggle against any such overpowering 'hand', whether the dead hand of her past or the 'unwholesome hand' of Chancery. When confronted with the violent bungling of the social crusader Mrs Pardiggle (whose destructive effects parody the invisible hand when she 'overturn[s], as if by invisible agency, a little round table at a considerable distance with my workbasket on it'), she reacts by deliberately limiting her personal project to her immediate environment: 'I thought it best to be as useful as I could, and to render what kind services I could, to those immediately about me; and to try to let that circle of duty gradually and naturally expand itself' (*BH* 95, 96). Her belief that virtuous actions lead to virtuous effects thus represents a third revision of invisible hand social theory, one whose apparent Christian conventionality is problematized by the novel's multiple perspectives, but also clearly endorsed by contrast with the selfish delusion around her. Even Harold Skimpole pays acerbic homage to the 'perfect working of the whole little orderly system of which you are the centre', which is based on a principle of 'responsibility' for those immediately around her (*BH* 468). Esther's humble system of knowledge, tact, and personal care rebukes not only Skimpole's dilettantism but Chancery's formidable negligence and the shrill bands of charity workers who mean to do well but only create resentment. Her philanthropic project is allied with Jarndyce's insofar as both are based on personal knowledge of individual cases. It must be said, however, that despite their local knowledge and exemplary personal humility, they fail in the execution: Esther is infected and nearly killed by the itinerant boy she tries to help, and Jarndyce funds a variety of hacks and hangers-on (including Skimpole) in addition to his somewhat more successful projects to rescue Esther and the wards in Jarndyce. Here Dickens rejects Smith's comic view of vice leading to virtue in favour of a more tragic sense of the distance between cause and effect, depicting the best of human intentions undone by unforeseen circumstances and the fallenness of the world in general.

The moral and narrative burden placed on the figure of Esther is thus very great – too great, as many critics have argued. Whereas Austen maintains the reader's sympathy for the slight figure of Catherine Morland by deflating the reader's vain search for identification, *Bleak House* strains to elegantly reconcile its conflicting claims: first, that Esther's supremely important work may save the English nation, but second, that the key to Esther's success is her unselfconscious humility and ignorance of her project's importance. The omniscient narrator does not acknowledge his distance from the protagonist, as Austen does through flexible narrative focalization, but combines apparent blindness to Esther with a consumingly common project. (Bert Hornback, for instance, traces several places where Dickens edited Esther's narrative to make it more closely conform to words used by the omniscient narrator.)[76] It is Esther's awkward combination of knowledge (which makes her local philanthropic project viable) with ignorance (which maintains her feminine virtue), however, that strikes most readers as unnatural. W. J. Harvey speaks for many critics when he asserts that 'Esther's goodness is most acceptable when she is least conscious of its effects radiating out to impinge on others.'[77] George Brimley, in an 1853 review, was one of the first to mock her character:

> With delightful naïveté she writes down the praises that are showered upon her on all hands; and it is impossible to doubt the simplicity of her nature, because she never omits to assert it with emphasis. This is not only coarse portraiture, but utterly untrue and inconsistent. Such a girl would not write her own memoirs, and certainly would not bore one with her goodness till a wicked wish arises that she would either do something very 'spicy', or confine herself to superintending the jam-pots at Bleak House.[78]

Harvey agrees with the basic problem of Esther's 'insipidity and dullness', but sees it as a necessary failing given the dazzling complexity of the rest of the story: 'This viewpoint is no Jamesian dramatization of a particular consciousness; Esther is as lucid and neutral as a clear window. ... Were Esther to be complicated the novel would have to be correspondingly simplified and the Dickens world depopulated. Who would wish it so?'[79]

Seen from a psychological point of view, however, Esther's self-abnegation is less a narrative necessity than a sign of the lingering effects of her childhood trauma, and I believe to see her merely as a transparent window is to radically underplay the *Bildungsroman* plot of her struggle for love and identity, which Dickens may have meant as a response to *Jane Eyre*.[80] Alison Case is among those critics who wonder if Esther's narration is so damaged by self-suppression and an inability to distance herself from her earlier foolish self that it indicates mental illness – though she admits this would make the 'narrative trajectory of the book almost unrelievedly dark'.[81] Audrey

Jaffe describes Esther's characteristic combination of knowledge and ignorance in terms of the psychoanalytic concept of 'denegation', a combination of denial and negation that confirms what it apparently denies. Thus Esther's claim that her schoolmates 'said I was so gentle; but I am sure *they* were!' clearly confirms her own gentleness (*BH* 26). Jaffe elaborates that 'As character, denying that she knows, Esther invites readers to feel that they know her better than she knows herself ... Rather than signifying the absence of knowledge, [denegation] is a strategy for evading the responsibility that attends the ownership of knowledge.'[82] Part of the problem here, as both critics recognize, is Dickens's difficulty in constructing a female narrator: whereas David Copperfield displays mastery over his first-person narration, Esther's trustworthiness depends on her not being perceived as wily or manipulative: in this time period, 'credibility for female narrators tends to be associated with unself-consciously embodying or reflecting social truths'.[83] Though both men and women have misguided 'Missions' for the public good in this novel, the women's are clearly more monstrous – intensifying Smith's observation that 'I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the publick good' by superadding onto it a distaste for self-conscious and demanding females (*WN* I, 456). Kimberle Brown on the other hand praises Dickens for his 'empower[ment]' of female readers through identification with a female voice, foregrounding Esther's simmering passions (especially for Ada) instead of her attempts at self-repression. Brown argues that Esther's persona is actually a sophisticated theatrical construction that calls forth readerly identification by means of a somatic language of tears, sighs, and joyful exclamations. Rather than interrupting identification, Esther's emotional energy thus contributes to Dickens's project of social reform by channelling the urgent intimacy of sexual feelings. Calling the omniscient voice 'cinematic' in distinction to Esther's 'theatrical' narrative, Brown claims that the two narratives 'work together – the cinematic voice allowing the distancing necessary for analytical pleasure and Esther's voice allowing a sentimentality that urges action'.[84] What I called above the 'moral horizon of genre' is reflected here in the two narrators' different styles of performative emotionality (the omniscient narrator's impotent anger versus Esther's sentimental passion) as well as different horizons of knowledge.

The problem of gender in *Bleak House* is thus also a problem of spatial distance, a configuration of different kinds of visibility over a spatial field. Esther's search for love is, as Brown notes, an exchange of gazes in which she is gradually able to see herself as an actor as well as a spectator. At the beginning of the novel Esther is unable to locate herself as an individual within the larger society; failing to see herself as one person among others, she inappropriately directs her energies to a universal collectivity. As in Austen, the split between individual and universal knowledge is gendered, with a woman's ignorance paradoxically becoming a certain kind of moral

privilege, since neither Catherine nor Esther are blinded by inappropriate kinds of book-learning from responding authentically to the people around them. But Esther feels all the epistemological limitations of the worm's-eye point of view with none of its selfish advantages. Where Catherine Morland is never deceived about her love for Henry, Esther has to fight through many levels of self-abnegation even to admit she cares for Woodcourt. Esther's profound other-directedness gives her powers of moral vision that other characters lack: like the narrator, she sees that Mrs Jellyby's obsession has damaging effects on the Jellyby children, and instantly hates the vile Mr Vholes. She clearly serves as the novel's moral centre, a fact recognized by the many characters who come to esteem and love her. But paradoxically, the closer she comes to a sympathetic view of those around her, the more she seems to have relinquished her own right to exist in the world – which means inevitably to take up space others might have occupied, and to prefer some people to others.[85]

So while Dickens's attempt to depict her feminine selflessness can come across as strained and sentimental, he also acknowledges her self-destructive impulses, and depicts her journey to psychological maturity as the exchange of an inappropriate universalism for a more selfish kind of personal love.[86] There is an obvious element of masochism in her belief that 'submission, self-denial, [and] diligent work' might mitigate what her godmother considered the great crime of her existence, and in her shocking 'burst of gratitude to the providence of God', when confronted with her long-lost mother, that 'I was so changed [disfigured by scars] as that I never could disgrace her by any trace of likeness' (*BH* 19, 449). Her terror at her own existence comes to a head after her traumatic encounter with Lady Dedlock: first she tells herself 'that it was wrong, and not intended, that I should be then alive', but then after many sleepless hours 'seized with an augmented terror of myself', she comes to her senses and admits 'that I could not have been intended to die, or I never should have lived; not to say should never have been reserved for such a happy life' (*BH* 453–4). This inability to admit that she has a right to take up space in the world nearly leads to a repeat of her mother's crime of marrying someone she does not love, when she accepts the fatherly Jarndyce's proposal out of a combination of despair and gratitude. This loveless marriage would threaten the purity of the domestic life that the novel suggests as a cure for the nation – as well as the reader's identification with Esther, which is crucial for the novel's larger reforming project.

It is only by acknowledging that she loves Woodcourt – and that he loves her back – that Esther is able to reconcile her larger moral goals with her individual desires. She thus adds a crucial supplement to her original modest resolution to 'be industrious, contented, and kind-hearted, and to do some good to some one, and win some love to myself if I could' by falling in love *herself*, which the narrative depicts as healthier than marrying out of mere gratitude at being loved (*BH* 20). In fact, Esther's character distortions

reveal the difficulty of conforming to the same kind of moral code that might be endorsed by an omniscient narrator, who sees actions in their entire social context but cannot act within them. At the story's beginning Esther suffers from an *excess* of distance from herself, and has to learn that as a person among others, she has a right to her own happiness. Esther's narration ultimately dramatizes an incompatibility between the bird's-eye and the worm's-eye point of view: moral agency requires seeing things *both* from others' perspectives and from one's own, a synthesis that leads to appropriate economic action in Smith but results here in emotional paralysis. In *Northanger Abbey* the difference between the view of social life from inside and from outside is figured as a difference between genres: living in English society *looks* like a realist novel, but *feels* like a Gothic novel. In *Bleak House*, however, English society is depicted as Gothic by the 'outside' narrator while Esther's sensible judgments of those around her are meant as its realist correction. The disparity between the two points of view in this novel foregrounds the problem of achieving an appropriate sense of the proper relation between self and society that balances sympathy for others with attentiveness to one's own needs. Interestingly, Esther's moral journey is the opposite of the one enjoined upon the reader by the omniscient narrator: instead of speculating on the moral connections that spiral outwards to link the 'many people in the innumerable histories of this world, who, from opposite sides of great gulfs, have, nevertheless, been very curiously brought together', Esther starts from a position of complete other-directedness and must move inward to establish a right-ordered domestic sphere of her own (*BH* 197).

Esther's progress towards maturity is thus depicted as a correction of her original confusion between inside and outside, private and public spheres. Since she cannot see herself from the outside at first, her character seems 'devoid of irony', bringing the reader uncomfortably close to her.[87] Jaffe describes this position as a 'subject-object' confusion that places her, like the omniscient narrator, 'everywhere and nowhere at once'. Thus the difference between personality and impersonality cannot be simply mapped onto the difference between the novel's first-person and third-person narrators: as Jaffe points out, 'that difference already exists within' Esther.[88] Insofar as Esther lacks self-consciousness of her internal divisions, the reader reads her complexity as symptomatic and resists the pressure to emulate her moral virtue: in Kroeber's terms, her character lacks the 'self-testing … flexibility' and playful distancing that would help readers turn the specific scenes depicted in novels into useful 'patterns of awareness useful for orienting' future behaviour.[89] Ironically it is through the trauma of her facial scarring that Esther learns to feel comfortable with others' gaze, at first avoiding both her mirror and Ada's affection but eventually 'put[ting] up [her] veil' before both Guppy and Woodcourt, forcing them to look upon her (*BH* 477, 548). Yet although the chapter Esther narrates after her mother's death is

significantly entitled 'Perspective', its repetition of the phrase 'I proceed to other passages of my narrative' where one might expect a proper expression of grief indicates that she has not in fact worked through the loss, remaining trapped in melancholia; and her last words, in which she denies others' reports of the return of her beauty with a coy ' – even supposing – ', suggest a continuing reluctance to view herself from the outside (*BH* 714, 770). The omniscient narrator, however, evolves even less than Esther does, retaining a frustrated inability to intervene in the scenes it describes. This narrator is never successfully integrated into the rest of the narrative, but rather vanishes to let Esther stammer the novel's final words. J. Hillis Miller describes this unresolved narrative structure as a kind of rabbit-and-duck optical illusion: 'the narrative seems like one of those Gestaltist diagrams which can be interpreted in either of two ways, and alternates between one apparent pattern and another as the mind projects one or another structure to unify the dispersed fragments'.[90]

Esther's struggle to integrate her public and private selves, her personal feelings and her duty to the outside world, is depicted as a necessary step towards her ultimate philanthropic project of founding and nourishing a nuclear family. So while Dickens attacks Smithian self-interestedness on two levels – first by disagreeing that individuals serve society best by acting in their own self-interest, and then by depicting the sovereign's knowing restraint as the institutionalization of cynical laziness – he does suggest that a certain kind of self-interest is integral to proper moral action. However, Dickens finds it more difficult to envision a functioning public-sphere philanthropy that might be a masculine complement to the feminized nuclear family. Bruce Robbins sees this problem of balancing personal and impersonal interests in Dickens's ambivalence towards professionalism, which combines the 'politically dangerous territory outside humanist "experience" ' with the 'potential advantages of learning to understand and act in a dispersed global system'.[91] Most professionals in *Bleak House* seem to have been transformed into monsters, from the skulking Mr Tulkinghorn to the vampiric Vholes: even the genial Conversation Kenge reveals a sinister plan 'to spread the cement of his words on the structure of the [unjust legal] system, and consolidate it for a thousand years' (*BH* 741). The knowledge-gathering professional who might be associated with a public bureaucracy – the all-knowing detective Mr Bucket, whose desire for omniscience could have turned him into a useful authorial surrogate – is in practice completely divorced from any idea of the public good, serving Mr Tulkinghorn's pointless revenge schemes as vigorously as he pursues Esther's lost mother. Meanwhile Mr Jarndyce's project of personal philanthropy, meant to compensate for the ravages of Jarndyce v. Jarndyce, is revealed to be quite limited in its beneficial effects. He manages to save (the already-perfect) Esther, but his rather indiscriminate response to requests for funds inevitably encourages parasitical 'committees for getting in and laying out money' as well as

dangerous monomaniacs like Mrs Jellyby and Mrs Pardiggle (*BH* 92). Yet Richard Carstone fails because he cannot find a suitable profession, and Allan Woodcourt perfectly combines professional skill with social justice: 'could [Richard] have chosen Allan Woodcourt's limited but systematic professional action instead of a heroic but foolhardy confrontation with Chancery', Robbins argues, 'he could have done more good to others as well as saved his own life'. Robbins finally sees the novel's recourse to the 'Victorian gospel of work' as an 'evasion of ultimate questions about the system' – and even a form of 'nihilism'.[92]

While Esther and Mr Jarndyce represent two virtuous attempts to synthesize public and private kinds of vision, many of the novel's other characters suffer from failed, partial, and vicious attempts at a synthetic moral vision. With Skimpole and Mrs Jellyby in particular, these failures of vision block the fusion of personal self-interest and knowledge of an invisible social whole that would lead in Smithian theory to a healthy society. The problem with these two characters is an inappropriate calibration of the proper relation between self and society: both of them see their own problems from too distanced a view, but in a way that paradoxically inflates their own self-importance to block their view of others. Harold Skimpole's persistent irresponsibility seems merely to put a light-hearted spin on laissez-faire, prettying it up through aesthetic distance and irony – but then is revealed in a somewhat heavy-handed way to be complicit with slavery and negligent homicide. When Esther meets him, she is confused by his 'speaking of himself as if he were not at all his own affair, as if Skimpole were a third person, as if he knew that Skimpole had his singularities, but still had his claims too, which were the general business of the community and must not be slighted' (*BH* 66). He enters the narrative as a kind of charming con man, dexterous at extracting support from the orphans as well as from Jarndyce, but his self-distancing gradually takes on more sinister overtones. He turns his daughters into helpless playthings, introduces Vholes to his victim Richard for a small fee, and turns the fatally ill Jo out on the streets. When he claims to be 'truly cosmopolitan', it is only to refuse the duties of citizenship in any particular nation, and he quickly adds this astounding observation: 'Take the case of the Slaves on American plantations. I dare say they are worked hard, I dare say they don't altogether like it, I dare say theirs is an unpleasant experience on the whole; but they people the landscape for me, they give it a poetry for me, and perhaps that is one of the pleasanter objects of their existence' (*BH* 227). This travesty of a bird's-eye view renounces not only the personal location that would require him to take responsibility for his own actions, but the divine compassion that Dickens feels should result from Asmodean vision.

Dickens's depiction of Mrs Jellyby's failed philanthropy has been even more interesting to recent critics because of its combination of anti-feminism with an apparent attack on imperialism. In a chapter called 'Telescopic

Philanthropy', the young protagonists visit Mrs Jellyby's house expecting shelter for the night, only to be confronted by a dirty household in which neglected children fall downstairs while the cook dumps an 'almost raw' dinner on the table. This disorder is traced entirely to Mrs Jellyby's absorption in a colonization project 'with a view to the general cultivation of the coffee berry – *and* the natives, – and the happy settlement, on the banks of the African rivers, of our superabundant home population'; although Mr Jellyby is also present, his stunned passivity and later bankruptcy are framed as inevitable results of his wife's bad housekeeping (*BH* 40, 35). It is in response to Mrs Jellyby's misplaced priorities that Esther formulates her moral project 'to begin with the obligations of home, ... [as] while those are overlooked and neglected, no other duties can possibly be substituted for them' (*BH* 61). The omniscient narrator reinforces this prioritization of the domestic over both the public sphere and the empire by railing against the neglect of the 'ordinary, home-made [savage]' Jo, who is 'not softened by distance and unfamiliarity', and whose uncomprehending presence sitting 'on the door-step of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts' is meant as a scathing reproach (*BH* 564, 198). It is thus unsurprising to hear that Mrs Jellyby's project to sponsor the colony of 'Borrioboola-Gha', ends in comic ruin, 'in consequence of the King of Borrioboola-Gha wanting to sell everybody – who survived the climate – for Rum' (*BH* 768).[93] Impervious to all forms of feedback, Mrs Jellyby then turns her attentions to another crackpot scheme: 'the rights of women to sit in Parliament' (*BH* 768). Meanwhile her daughter Caddy, depressed by her mother's neglect, renounces the public sphere and informally apprentices herself to Esther in hopes of learning to be a useful housewife.

Physical contiguity and visibility – what Robbins calls a 'politics of presence' – is therefore central to Dickens's reformist project.[94] In an 1848 article on a failed Niger expedition, Dickens had written that

> The stone that is dropped into the ocean of ignorance at Exeter Hall, must make its widening circles, one beyond another, until they reach the negro's country in their natural expansion. ... Gently and imperceptibly the widening circle of enlightenment must stretch and stretch, from man to man, from people on to people, until there is a girdle round the earth; but no convulsive effort, or far-off aim, can make the last great outer circle first, and then come home at leisure to trace out the inner one.[95]

In this allergy to action at a distance, Dickens seems to hearken back to the same Cartesian theories of motion that Smith found so appealing in the 'History of Astronomy'. But while embracing an essentially stoic idea of caring for those immediately around one (Burke's 'little platoon'), he does also extend it to include the nation as a whole, retaining an appearance of Burkean modesty by contrasting this field of action with the yet larger one

of the empire. James Buzard points out that the expansionist narrative geography of *Bleak House*, which originally seems to connect widely disparate spheres in unexpected relations of cause and effect, is also strictly limited to the boundaries of the nation: '*Bleak House* treats the island-nation as an airtight container. ... Each particle of moral poison will carom off the inside surface of the outer boundary of the nation, to do its dreadful work throughout the interior.'[96] Dickens has thus inherited a Smithian view of moral cause and effect as essentially national – so that the benefits of sensible economic action remain within the borders of a national 'home', despite the nation's imbrication in a foreign system of trade defined as distant and invisible.

In defining the nation as 'home', Dickens increases the significance of Esther's moral project even while apparently circumscribing women's proper role. Mrs Pardiggle – a bad philanthropist like Mrs Jellyby – fails to help the brickmaker's family because her 'much too business-like and systematic' approach is blind to the subtle emotional truths that Esther, the system's epistemological supplement, immediately notices: 'the woman seemed to turn her face towards the fire, as if to hide her bruised eye ... [Ada and I] both thought that Mrs. Pardiggle would have got on infinitely better, if she had not such a mechanical way of taking possession of people' (*BH* 98–9). Mrs Pardiggle is actually present in the same room with the people she wants to help, but her excessively removed systemic overview keeps her from an efficacious perception – unlike Esther, who claims her 'comprehension is quickened when my affection is' (*BH* 18). This combination of perception with sentiment is, of course, also the novel's implicit argument for the social efficacy of its own genre of knowledge: like Esther, the novel itself can only affect one person at a time – the reader – but hopes, by inspiring affection, also to bring about some (vague) kind of reform. Yet Esther's theatrical performance of sympathy complicates the novel's 'politics of presence' because while Esther is caring only for those she meets, the omniscient narrator is trying to enlarge its readers' sympathies to a larger community, including other British citizens who would otherwise be hidden from them in the darkness of Tom-All-Alone's. If the novel's implied reader responds to the omniscient narrator's urgency, he or she will be inspired by the overview of England's difficulties to care for the humble and neglected citizens around them – thus occupying the same epistemologically composite position as Smith's merchant individual, but seeking to benefit their national 'home' by acting with the traditional moral selflessness instead of ironic selfishness. However, the novel's inevitable absence from the real scene of charity – which can only be gestured at through the exemplarity of Esther's particular sensitivities – places it in something like Mrs Jellyby's difficult imaginary social position. Though the novel does not plan or direct its readers' reformist operations like Mrs Jellyby – leaving those to the discretion of the reader's more locally refined sensibilities – it too is asking for moral action on behalf of a place (England) that must be mostly conjured up through imagination.

Dickens's two narratives here, with their awkwardly related yet roughly parallel unfolding, thus create something of the same fantasy of an unseen nation as do the newspapers in Benedict Anderson's description of the imagined national community, whose randomly juxtaposed articles are implicitly related through shared time and national space. But in their dramatizations of the difficulties of unifying personal perspective with systemic overview, the two narratives of *Bleak House* are much more specific than any newspaper article about what moral agency in such a complex society might feel like and how it might go astray. In order to counteract the total systemic despair depicted in the novel's Chancery scenes, Dickens drew a bright line between the nation's problems and those of the rest of the world in a way that now strikes materialist commentators as artificial. He also, as Erik Lorentzen points out, 'effectively articulates a politics of unlimited deferral, since it becomes rather difficult to imagine him ever satisfied [enough] with matters at home' to contemplate, say, a campaign of international human rights.[97] Yet in his depiction of philanthropists who combine excessive attention to a systemic overview (even Christianity, in the case of Mr Chadband) with blindness to local conditions – and of humble reformers who narrowly avoid suicide because of their excessive selflessness – Dickens does dramatize the warping power that individual viewpoints and systemic overview exert upon each other. Though the two narrators do not acknowledge each other, their passions are informed by their inference that the other's viewpoint must exist but that they cannot live up to its demands: Esther's desire to be perfectly modest and good must be continually reiterated, while the omniscient narrator's desire for moral intervention is never satisfied, because no one in the novel responds to his voice.

In *Northanger Abbey* the tension between the personal perspective on a perplexing society, and an omniscient overview that cannot access crucial moments of emotional intensity, is presented as a clash between Gothic and realist genres that fuels the novel's unstable comedy. In *Bleak House*, the tension between these perspectives is more often smoothed over by sentimentality or left openly unresolved. But that is not to say there is no comedy in *Bleak House*, merely that the comedy is more ... combustible. Robbins describes two kinds of comedy in Dickens – the comedy that mocks the professions, and a comedy of general *aporia* – but he also thinks neither is really politically significant.[98] I would argue, however, that the scene of Krook's spontaneous combustion from excessive alcoholism is a third kind of comedy – as well as being one of the greatest and most outrageous scenes in Victorian literature – and that it does point towards a revolutionary outcome, though not a welcome one. This is the comedy of sudden and radical collapse, not so different from the scene at the end of *Little Dorrit* in which the Clennams' rickety house suddenly collapses into its rotted foundations. Part of the comedy comes from the

vivid disgust felt by Jobling and Guppy when they realize the source of that nasty smell:

> 'Why, I have noticed myself that there is a queer kind of flavour in the place to-night ... I suppose it's chops at the Sol's Arms.'
>
> ... Mr. Snagsby sniffs and tastes again, and then spits and wipes his mouth; 'I don't think – not to put too fine a point upon it – that they were quite fresh, when they were shown the gridiron.'
>
> ... 'What in the Devil's name', [Guppy] said, 'is this! Look at my fingers!'
>
> A thick yellow liquor defiles them, which is offensive to the touch and sight and more offensive to the smell. A stagnant, sickening oil, with some natural repulsion in it that makes them both shudder. (*BH* 394, 401)

Meanwhile another source of comedy comes from the hyperbole with which the omniscient narrator bursts onto the scene to imagine the metaphorical extension of this ghoulish and improbable fate to all parts of British society:

> 'Plenty will come in, but none can help. ... Call the death by any name Your Highness will, ... it is the same death eternally – inborn, inbred, engendered in the corrupted humours of the vicious body itself, and that only – Spontaneous Combustion, and none other of all the deaths that can be died.' (*BH* 403)

In this final passage, the narrator comes across as a crazed combination of sideshow barker and prosecuting attorney, tripping over his own shoes in the final absurd 'deaths that can be died'. In fact Krook's death has a lot in common with the Marxist fantasy of revolution, deriving as it does from all the secret and system-sustaining kinds of social nastiness suddenly bursting into the open – though unlike Marx, Dickens has no additional fantasy of a rational utopia emerging full-fledged from the collapsed contradictions of the old world. This is merely the pleasure in seeing the apocalyptic destruction of a society that richly deserves it. The novel's many apocalyptic hints and undercurrents – as well as the tragic death of many of the main characters – substantially qualify Esther's apparently constructive and happy ending. There is no happy view of the system from above; it is only the worm's-eye view that can achieve a limited kind of happiness. The splitting of the narrative function in this novel thus has the same effect as does the return of the Gothic in *Northanger Abbey*: it serves as an acknowledgement that every human story of individual triumph and disaster is a partial one when seen in its larger social context, and that only an essentially arbitrary choice of narrative focus gives it such a meaningful shape.

3

Providential Endings: Martineau, Dickens, and the Didactic Task of Political Economy

In the previous chapter, I showed how Austen and Dickens responded to political economy's ambiguous moral heritage through formal arrangements of visibility and obscurity, their shared ambition to map whole societies, and their recognition of partial, fragmented, and composite points of view. The industrial novels discussed in this chapter – Harriet Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832–34) and Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854) – are in contrast more literally engaged with economic issues and take open polemical stances for or against its ways of knowing. They also share a confidence that realist novels can have a political impact – a confidence that tended to ebb away from novels during the rest of the nineteenth century, as fiction either accepted its role as entertainment (as with sensation and mass-market fiction) or aspired to the status of an amoral chronicle of consciousness (as may be said about the works of Flaubert, James, and Conrad). But in addition to their thematic discussion of industrial economics, these industrial novels also display some of the formal traces of engagement with the moral ambiguities of complex capitalist society – a tortured irony that is visible less in the composition of complex points of view than in the contortions of their plots as they reconcile the providential and sentimental demand for a happy ending with their didactic critiques of existing society.

During the turbulent decades between the death of Adam Smith in 1790 and the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, political economy became wildly fashionable in England but was also attacked both by traditional cultural critics and by desperate and radicalized workers. Making study of this time period rather tricky is the fact that Victorian political divides line up hardly at all with today's political arguments about economic theory: not only is nineteenth-century liberalism pro-capitalist, but the particular influences of established Anglicanism, pre-Marxian socialism, Tory monarchists, Whig landowners, and utilitarian radicals have no real modern correlates, especially in America.[1] Among the many writings that contributed to this vigorous debate we may

count first of all the economic works of Thomas Malthus and David Ricardo, but also Bentham's utilitarian philosophy (which inspired the related organizations the Political Economy Club, Lord Brougham's Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, and University College London, which was founded in 1826); Coleridge's culturally conservative reaction against Godwin; poet laureate Robert Southey's attacks on Malthus; Thomas De Quincey's Tory defence of Ricardo; the didactic works of Martineau, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Marcet; the arguments of propagandists like the utilitarian radical James Mill and the Ricardian Whig J. R. McCulloch; the co-operative philosophy of industrialist Robert Owen; empirical surveys by Henry Mayhew; Thomas Carlyle's 1829 essay 'Signs of the Times' and 1843 *Past and Present*; much of the later Dickens; the 'Manchester School' of William Cobden and John Bright, with the mass rallies of the manufacturer-backed Anti-Corn-Law League; and any number of tracts, essays, learned treatises, and radical manifestos.[2] The genre of 'industrial novel', which peaked in England between the 1830s and 1850s, must be seen in this context of a larger social debate about the costs and benefits of industrial capitalism.[3] But these novels also represent perhaps the first moment in literary history when novels aspire to be taken as seriously as economic descriptions of society – an aspiration they still rather defiantly maintain. At the same time, political economy was not yet taught in universities so its defenders sought legitimacy from the broader reading public.[4] That public had failed to respond to Ricardo's dry and abstract style, so a wide range of apologists tried more accessible methods, including fiction, to convince readers that the discipline was moral as well as mathematical. Since realist fiction and economics are related but asymmetrical discourses, this encounter was somewhat uncomfortable for both and quickly left behind: economists abandoning popular outreach as the discipline was accepted in government and universities, and novelists rejecting the constraints of didacticism in search of more realistic methods. Nevertheless it is possible to argue that both fiction and economics gained in public prestige as a result of this temporary overlap in subject matter.

The novels discussed in this chapter take openly divergent attitudes about the morality, adequacy, and general truthfulness of the early Victorian discourse of political economy – Martineau subordinating her fiction explicitly to the 'truths' of political economy, while Dickens angrily criticizes both her fictional method and her cold-hearted ideology. But I will also be arguing that Dickens's use of fiction to create a sense of political urgency is on some level inspired by Martineau's earlier example, and that the gloomy ending of *Hard Times* is a complex response to her necessitarian determinism (an element of her Unitarian faith) – which is itself not completely orthodox political economy. Both authors express their attitudes towards political economy implicitly in religious terms – at once on the individual level where virtue is rewarded while vice is punished, and on a more complicated and inscrutable collective level on which a trustworthy Providence mediates

between short-term disasters and a divinely ordained salvific end. On the individual level it may be possible to apportion moral credit and blame, but within a providentially constructed system at least some of that agency must be ceded to an unknowable higher power, leaving the world below in a confusing or confounding state that Dickens's hero Stephen Blackpool sadly describes as 'aw a muddle'.[5] Hence neither Dickens's nor Martineau's works feature unequivocally happy endings, though Martineau insists that the harsh fates of her individual characters represent the best possible outcome in terms of natural law, while Dickens blames providential fictions like Martineau's for mangling the lives of his characters.

Because of its religious overtones, the idea of Providence occupies an ambiguous place in both classical economics and the realist novel: Victorian economics was eager to establish itself as an amoral modern science, while realist novels eschew supernatural machinery although they may depict religious characters and even adhere to traditional pieties. But much of the work of economic popularization – as well as the struggle against the disruptions of industrialization – was expressed in terms designed to harmonize more explicitly with popular religious beliefs such as divine Providence. Mark Taylor argues that Smith's invisible hand is descended from the Calvinist idea that God has a secret plan whose causes remain hidden to humans, and continually intervenes to exert his creative power in the world, though as discussed above Smith's invisible hand itself is cannily agnostic, providing providential rewards and benefits without the divine apparatus of Providence itself.[6] Among the secular political economists, McCulloch made particular use of providential narratives in his descriptions of the increasing perfections of economic theory.[7] Similarly, a long heritage of Puritan allegory was largely submerged within the novel tradition after Fielding, as Damrosch argues, though the belief that 'life was providentially ordered' was shared by 'most novelists for the next century and a half'. For Damrosch, Fielding's 1749 *Tom Jones* marks a 'terminal moraine' dividing narratives (such as Defoe's) that strain humourlessly to reconcile divine Providence with human fictions from realist narratives (like Austen's) that paper over the tension by means of a comic narrator capable of playing self-consciously with fiction's formal elements.[8]

Hannah More's ballad 'Turn the Carpet, or The Two Weavers', one of her widely disseminated *Cheap Repository Tracts* (1795–98) sometimes described as 'the earliest examples of industrial fiction', provides a useful contrast with Martineau's work in its evangelical approach to the obscure causes of economic inequality.[9] More's vision of society as a carpet that is tangled on one side but orderly and meaningful from a higher point of view (and one ideally open to all in a future afterlife) is especially ingenious given the chronic dissatisfaction of handloom weavers increasingly dispossessed by industrial methods. In this tract the weaver Dick complains of his hard earthly lot, but is reassured by his colleague John that God's Providence

superintends over all.

> 'In spite of what the Scripture teaches,
> In spite of all the parson preaches,
> This world, (indeed I've thought so long)
> Is rul'd methinks, extremely wrong.
> 'Where'er I look, howe'er I range,
> 'Tis all confus'd, and hard, and strange;
> The good are troubled and oppress'd,
> And all the wicked are the bless'd.'
> Quoth John: 'Our ign'rance is the cause
> Why thus we blame our Maker's laws;
> *Parts of his ways* alone we know,
> 'Tis all that man can see below.
> 'See'st thou that carpet, not half done,
> Which thou, dear Dick, hast well begun?
> Behold the wild confusion there,
> So rude the mass it makes one stare!
> [...]
> Quoth Dick, my work is yet in bits,
> But still in every part it fits;
> Besides, you reason like a lout,
> Why, man, that *carpet's inside out*.'
> Says John, 'Thou say'st the thing I mean,
> And now I hope to cure thy spleen;
> This world, which clouds thy soul with doubt,
> *Is but a carpet inside out*.
> 'As when we view these shreds and ends,
> We know not what the whole intends;
> So when on earth things look but odd,
> They're working still some scheme of God.
> [...]
> 'But when we reach that world of light,
> And view these works of God aright;
> Then shall we see the whole design,
> And own the workman is divine.
> 'What now seems random strokes, will there
> All order and design appear;
> Then shall we praise what here we spurn'd,
> For then the *carpet shall be turn'd*.'
> 'Thou'rt right', quoth Dick, 'no more I'll grumble,
> That this sad world's so strange a jumble;
> My impious doubts are put to flight,
> For my own carpet sets me right.'[10]

More, a high Tory and evangelical Anglican, here solves the problem of social complexity by simply asserting that the worldly order is beyond human understanding. Unlike Dickens who adopts the Asmodean point of view to root out abuses, More assumes that the imagined projection of a higher point of view would quell dissent. Martineau's didactic task is somewhat more complicated than More's, since she wants workers to understand earthly laws rather than accept their ignorance of the world's 'sad ... strange ... jumble'. Yet, as we will see, her political recommendations for the working class to adapt themselves to existing inequalities are not so different from More's.[11]

If Martineau's tales differ from More's in their secularism, their explicit allegiance to the liberal principles of political economy also sets them apart both politically and epistemologically from the industrial novels of the following decades. Not fitting into either the disciplinary tradition of abstract economic theory, the Christian tradition of personal religious improvement, or a literary tradition that increasingly defined itself against the mechanized world of economic theory, Martineau's work fell between the disciplinary cracks and was unread for most of the twentieth century. However, in the last few decades Martineau has been rediscovered as part of the general historical turn in literary scholarship, as well as growing interest in women writers.[12] The transitional nature of Martineau's tales makes them today something of a literary curiosity: historically very important, but formally unplaceable: Deborah Logan describes Martineau's work as 'a short-lived but immensely influential literary hybrid that provided an essential stage' in the development of both realism and social theory.[13]

In general, the later industrial novels champion concepts of justice and individual responsibility that are much more Christian in tone – defending the weak and blaming the greedy – than political economy's aloof moral ambiguity. Like Martineau, they base these conclusions about human behaviour on a secular epistemology rather than religious orthodoxy. But they also dramatize the difference between their fictional methods and Martineau's, arguing that their personal observations are more inductive and empirical than political economy's deductive abstractions, and hence more accurate depictions of social reality. The industrial novel generally laments that industrial culture is marred by selfish and ignorant class conflict, and concludes that this industrial culture can be reformed by incorporating more sensitivity to the individual point of view – a task to which narrative fiction is uniquely suited. The tension between unreliable generalizations and reliable specifics is visible for example in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, which at one point digresses into a description of the economic causes of a strike, but then returns to apparently more solid ground with the comment: 'so much for generalities. Let us now return to individuals.'[14] Gaskell also engages in a complicated disavowal of economic knowledge in her 'Preface' to this novel, claiming to 'know nothing of Political Economy'

in order to claim that *Mary Barton* represents truth (i.e. experience) rather than dogma; she adds that 'if my accounts agree or clash with any system, the agreement or disagreement is accidental' (*MB* 38). Her claim to know 'nothing' is clearly false, if we are to believe her analysis of class conflict in the Manchester strike. But it allows her to veil her controversial attack on industrial abuses by seeming instead to attack the political-economic idea of truth as abstract system, and to naturalize her political purpose as a desire to represent social truth.

The industrial novels display in heightened form a conflict common to all realist writing: the struggle to represent the truth while disavowing didacticism. The success of these novels' political aims depended on their insistence that they were merely revealing the existing social chasms that divided the nation. Novels were expected to 'impel the soul to aspire after goodness', but also to shun the sermon's preachiness.[15] Above all, contemporary critics said, the novelist should avoid 'a definite didactic aim; there may be little moralising and no formal exhortations – the less of either the better'.[16] In the *North British Review*, one reviewer rejected a series of religious novels because novels should begin 'in living sympathy' with social questions, rather than with 'theory'.[17] Even Martineau, as we will see below, finds it important to distance her tales from earlier moral tracts, or 'books of the *trap* kind', and assert that her illustrations are not mere 'catechisms'.[18] To reconcile the necessity of moral uplift with the depiction of violent and squalid class conflict, many industrial novels develop a kind of rhetorically intensified mimesis we might call deixis, or an urgent plea that the reader see and accept the story as the literal truth.[19] In *Mary Barton* again, the narrator assumes that describing the horrors of working-class life will lead naturally to a political response in the reader:

> It is so impossible to describe, or even faintly to picture, the state of distress which prevailed in the town at that time, that I will not attempt it; and yet I think again that surely, in a Christian land, it was not known even as feebly as words could tell it, or the more happy and fortunate would have thronged with their sympathy and their aid. (*MB* 85)

In professing to be overwhelmed by the difficulty of describing this external reality, the narrator both suggests that the distress is not something merely invented, and tries to shame the reader into a galvanic response of 'sympathy and aid'. This deictic moment overcomes the tension between didacticism and mimesis by simply combining them in an urgent pointing gesture. Something of the same tautological urgency shows up in Dickens's 1841 'Preface' to the third edition of *Oliver Twist*, in which he defends his depiction of the prostitute Nancy by arguing that 'It is useless to discuss whether the conduct and character of the girl seems natural or unnatural, probable or improbable, right or wrong. IT IS TRUE.'[20]

In Martineau's work, the moment of deixis is more complicated: rather than pointing at an urgent injustice that might conceivably be seen with the physical eye, her stories are meant to point beyond themselves towards the realm of abstract economic law. Martineau's explicit aim, as expressed in the 'Preface' to the series, is to convince her readers of the economic principles of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and Thomas Malthus, 'which, if generally understood, would gradually remove all the obstructions, and remedy the distresses and equalize the lot of the population' (*IPE* I, viii). This subordination of lived experience to an abstract law provided an easy target for future generations of realist writers, who according to George Levine's dialectical theory of the realist tradition are always seeking an excessively didactic or conventional forebear to posit themselves against, making their own work appear more genuine by comparison.[21] Martineau's embrace of predetermined truths seems to contradict one of the basic elements of realist writing, which is to dramatize the freedom of the individual protagonist, or at least the struggle between freedom and determinism. The clipped and closed narrative shape that results makes them paradoxically less convincing to later readers than if they had been more morally complex. Martineau's claim that fiction was a mere handmaiden to the superior discipline of economics seems to contradict the realist's argument that fiction has its own epistemological superiority.

It is possible to argue that stories that merely 'illustrate' an abstract law do not really count as novels: How are we to read a novel that has a law, and not a human being, as its hero? In this chapter, though, I will be arguing both that Martineau's fictional strategies are one possible response to the structural ironies of invisible hand social theory, and that the difficult and unsustainable fusion they enacted between inductivism and abstract law had the effect of increasing the legitimacy of realist fiction as well as of classical economic theory. The *Illustrations* may be antirealist in their defence of law over unpredictable experience, but they also contain a defence of humble everyday detail, subject matter often associated with realism. Even more effectively, in asserting that her fiction is no more or less than a form of political economy, Martineau constructs both discourses as 'moral science[s]' with equivalent access to ontological truth – though fiction may have the upper hand epistemologically, since political economy is too 'obscure', 'abstract', and 'unattractive' to 'teach the science to the great mass of the people' (*IPE* I, ix). Martineau's stories gain authority from access to the abstract laws of economic theory, but also insist that theory cannot be realized in social life without fiction.

Martineau's influence is visible, I will argue, even in Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*, a novel that in every other way seems to be an explicit attack on Martineau's description of the relation between economic law, fiction, and truth. The relation between these works is dialectically complex: both the *Illustrations* and *Hard Times* can be called moral fables, strongly didactic

even though they claim to reject the idea of didactic fiction – but *Hard Times* is meant to be a refutation of Martineau's style of fable.[22] At the same time, Dickens's story is haunted by as strong a Nemesis as are Martineau's tales, though the law that pursues the characters is not economic law but the human need for imagination. In Dickens, the political power of realist fiction derives from its superiority to economic systems, rather than its equivalence to them. Some of this novel's famous difficulties, the range of its social and philosophical critiques, and its attempt to embody those critiques in fictional practice, stem from its agonistic relation to Martineau's confident parables.

Both Martineau's and Dickens's industrial novels thus engage in a double polemic: an urgency about the pressing political needs of the nation combined with a claim that fiction is a legitimate way of discovering social truth. The claim that fiction communicates a distinct and otherwise inaccessible kind of knowledge can be traced back through the 'secret' letters of Richardson's *Pamela* (1740–41), with their privileged access to the inner struggle against unbending social codes; as we have seen, Jane Austen's novels recreate this access to female interiority through narrative focalization. Emily Rena-Dozier locates a further source for the epistemological authority of realist fiction in More's *Cheap Repository Tracts*, which through their insistence on surveilling the poor opened a way for women in particular 'to speak from a position unmarked by passion, sentiment, or sensibility, and thus from a position of greater abstract authority'.[23] To this authority the industrial novels add class awareness, and thereby gain in political topicality: Joseph Childers notes that once the representation of the poor, a theme 'that until the mid nineteenth century had been routinely ignored – or at best romanticized – in literature move[s] to the heart of a narrative, the result must be a politicizing of the aesthetic'.[24] The industrial novels were not simply realist narratives – Rosemarie Bodenheimer has identified pastoral, romance, and historicist strains in them – but their claim to moral authority was largely based on their presumed depiction of a real social situation.[25] Neither Martineau's nor Dickens's work can easily be described as realist – their characters and situations are too obviously didactically overdetermined – but they both insist that their novels depict the reality of social relations. What they disagree about is whether immutable human desires or providential scientific laws are more germane to that reality.

Martineau's fusion of economic law with the realist plot was an experiment that none of the other industrial novelists cared to repeat; they rejected both her wholesale acceptance of political economy and her formal subordination of narrative to a predetermined set of morals. But if they dismissed her politics, they inherited both her belief that fiction could serve as a broadly galvanizing political force and her assertion that fiction was a form of moral science, a laboratory in which to gauge the human effects of social policy. I would like to turn now to an examination of the *Illustrations*

themselves, which both fall short of and exceed Martineau's stated project to illustrate contemporary economic theory. They also behave like other realist novels at least in one way: by defending the depiction of humble everyday life against the representations of a more conventional predecessor. The *Illustrations*' subtle revolt against the romantic silver-fork novels of the 1820s would lead Martineau, within five years, to the rather different fictional technique of *Deerbrook*.

Fiction as science: Martineau's defence of realism and her gloomy excesses

With its critique of utilitarianism and melodramatic defence of fiction, *Hard Times* continues to be widely read and taught, in part as a defence of humanistic ways of knowing. Martineau's *Illustrations* on the other hand were little read during the twentieth century: they exemplify what Elaine Freedgood calls the 'short-acting text' whose popularity is ensured by the very topicality that denies them later canonical access.[26] In a way this fate is a tribute to her work's success – for the capitalist principles it avows have become so deeply ingrained into Anglo-American society that we can no longer see their original critical force. They greet us as banal truisms, whereas Gaskell's and Dickens's industrial novels seem more vital simply because the utilitarian principles they criticize are still both prestigious and controversial. The fusion of art and science in Martineau's work thus poses a unique critical challenge, for the mechanisms of her attempt to construct self-evident fictional truth continually threaten to disappear themselves into self-evidence.

The stories that launched Martineau's career owe their success to their innovative genre. Their plots are always arranged in reference to some aspect of political economy, which is revealed as universal by the stories' settings in many different countries and historical epochs. At the end each tale features a handy 'summary of Principles Illustrated', such as 'The increase of population is necessarily limited by the means of subsistence' (*IPE* VI, 200). A tale about a British village in South Africa is used to illustrate the fact that the division of labour makes progress more efficient, a tale of intemperate poverty reveals the disastrous effects of public charity, well-run factories are shown to lead to social harmony, and so forth. Coming just at the time of the 1832 Reform Bill, the economic ideas Martineau expounded were highly controversial, reflecting the growing dominance of industry over agriculture, and the imminent rejection of a centuries-old system of outdoor poor relief in favour of a supposedly more rational workhouse system. Martineau's didactic intervention in politics was welcomed by many middle-class reformers, and she was deluged with Blue Books by Members of Parliament, or industrialists who had a particular axe to grind.[27] Martineau argues explicitly in her Preface that her tales carry the force of truth, and her

goal is not mainly to please the reader: 'We declare frankly', she says, 'that our object is to teach Political Economy' (*IPE* I, xi–xii). In her *Autobiography*, she claims that what she was writing was not really fiction at all, but a mere 'illustration' of the true natural laws of economic regulation, and downplays the extent to which her own powers of invention contributed to the subject matter or moral of each of the tales. 'It was necessary', she admits, 'to have some accessories, – some out-works to the scientific erection, but I limited these as much as possible; and I believe that in every instance, they really were rendered subordinate.'[28] What there is of interest in her fictions comes, she implies in the Preface, from the 'utility and beauty of the science' of political economy – an intellectual beauty which presumably will be revealed as the beauty of a law visible behind daily experience, once her fictions have trained us to see it (*IPE* I, vii). Her project is to replace both the shock of narrative surprise and the difficulty of economic writing with the easy and predictable: 'we trust that it will be found that as the leading principles come out in order, one after another, they are so clear, so indisputable, so apparently familiar, that the wonder is when the difficulty is to come, – where the knotty points are to be encountered' (*IPE* I, xii). The pleasure of recognition helps accomplish the ideological replacement of the dismayingly chaotic everyday with the rational order of economic law. The telling sign of truth, here as in René Descartes, is the conflation of visual immanence with rationality as the clear and distinct – once readers see this kind of truth, they cannot choose not to see it.

There is something both appealing and slightly repellent about this apparently perfect fit between form and content, art and science. The series's first readers must have found it both comforting and persuasive in its assurances that the tales contained no dangerous surplus of pleasure over utility, while of course being a lot more fun to read than straight political economy. Catherine Gallagher on the other hand alleges that the stories' deductive nature almost erases them as fiction: if one takes Martineau's project literally, 'one should ... be able to read the *Illustrations* backward, beginning with the principles at the end and deducing from them a narrative of particular facts'.[29] In fact, Martineau did compose her stories by starting with the 'summaries of Principles' and then embodying 'each leading principle in a character'.[30] My argument here is based on the assumption that Martineau's project is not quite the mere technical illustration it claims to be, and is inventive and personal in several ways. At the same time, it is important to recognize that the work's quality of formal frozenness is inseparable from political economy's aspiration to the status of natural law. The erasure of temporality in Martineau's deterministic parables attests to the deductive element in Smith's own work, the spatial overview he inherited from the physiocrats' *Tableau Économique* but then softened with a certain degree of inductive modesty. It is also not irrelevant that the attempt to base fiction on a scientific ground should end up illustrating the science of political

economy (rather than, say, physics or chemistry), since political economy and the realist novel share the intellectual project of describing human behaviour in terms of the relation between concrete anecdote and a broader system of observation and analysis – or to put it in economic terms, between micro and macro levels.[31] Martineau later abandoned both the deductive and the imaginative aspects of these early fables; the journalistic 1837 *Society in America*, for instance, is driven by a fascination with empirical detail rather than a need to create a compelling narrative. In fact she admits in her *Autobiography* to her 'utter inability to make a plot', adding that 'the only thing to be done, therefore, is to derive the plot from actual life'.[32] It is possible that if the science of sociology had existed in the 1830s, Martineau would have made use of its techniques: in fact, her 1838 *How to Observe Manners and Morals*, begun immediately after her completion of her political economy tales, is considered a pioneering work of sociological methodology.[33] Over the course of her career, Martineau's intellectual convictions developed from strict Unitarianism to philosophical atheism, and her work on political economy might be said to represent a transitional stage between metaphysics and empiricism in which natural law is used to unify overarching systems with observed detail.

But if her fiction is really subordinate to her economics, if science comes first, why did she choose to represent these truths in narrative form? This decision almost sank her project when the economist James Mill told her publisher that her method of 'exemplification ... could not possibly succeed', and that she should rewrite her work in straight didactic form.[34] She refused, and later remembered how that day, miserable and hungry, she had 'sunk to the lowest point of discouragement about [her] scheme'.[35] That evening she wrote the Preface to her series, and the text bears traces of the day's argument: on the one hand, it wraps itself in the authority of political economy, of which she contends, 'Can any thing more nearly concern all the members of any society than the way in which the necessaries and comforts of life may be best procured and enjoyed by all?' (*IPE* I, iv). While arguing for the truth of the science, however, she attacks its method of self-presentation, saying that:

> It is very natural that the first eminent book on this new science should be very long, in some parts very difficult, and, however wonderful and beautiful as a whole, not so clear and precise in its arrangement as it might be. This is the case with Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, – a book whose excellence is marvellous ... but which is not fitted nor designed to teach the science to the great mass of the people. (*IPE* I, ix)

In essence, she argues that political economy is unlikely to realize its principles unless the vast majority of the population can understand them. One might ask whether a science whose laws are void unless they are believed

and practised by the majority can really be a science instead of a politicized ritual. But Martineau claims that because economics is a 'moral science', it is best communicated in parable form. She thus adopts the religious convention of using narrative for didactic purposes, as in the parables of the New Testament, but creating instead the first secular industrial novels (*IPE* I, xi). In Martineau economic law is both materialistic and providentially structured; her stories serve as a transition between the didacticism of More's religious fables, Maria Edgeworth's tales of good and bad land management (such as the 1812 *The Absentee*), and their most direct inspiration, Jane Marcet's 1816 'Conversations on Political Economy', and the more obliquely moral plots of later realist novels.[36] George Eliot's 1861 *Silas Marner*, for example, shares Martineau's materialism but not the insistence on natural law, invoking Providence instead in the assumption that morality might be made visible by an omniscient narratorial perspective.[37]

Martineau's Preface reveals how the didactic imperative of free-market economics – which, unlike other economic systems like slavery or mercantilism, will not work unless the majority are persuaded it will work – intersects with the desire to see which drives realist fiction. Other scholarly books 'give us ... [the] history [of the science], they give us its philosophy; but we want its *picture*. ... We cannot see why the truth and its application should not go together – why an explanation of the principles which regulate society should not be made more clear and interesting at the same time by pictures of what those principles actually are doing in communities. ... Once more we must apply the old proverb, "Example is better than precept" ' (*IPE* I, x–xi). While assimilating to her project all the epistemological and even ontological truth claims that political economy had laboriously made for itself, Martineau also argues that fiction is a more viable way of realizing its moral principles than science, and in a way that fiction is truer – clearer, more beautiful, and more efficacious – than science. What is more, fiction has a political advantage as well as an epistemological one: unlike a neutrally observed case study, a didactic narrative aspires to exemplarity, which April Alliston argues 'begins to *create* factual truth according to its own model', and can lead to the reader's imitation of the characters' actions, just as 'young men shot themselves in yellow vests that matched Werther's'.[38] Fiction has the double benefit, then, of both being true and helping to create a new kind of truth. We might say that Martineau was able to turn the tension between these two ways of knowing, the economic and the narrative, into an intervention in British economic practice that also defends the nascent genre of realist fiction.

Which brings us to ask: do these stories offer pleasure as well as instruction? Do they, in fact, qualify as art? Or are they, as she herself assures us, mere servants of a greater scientific truth? The *Illustrations of Political Economy* do contain some unevenness of tone and style, and occasional lapses into improbably long dialogues about taxation or poor-law reform – but

in this they merely anticipate the later industrial novels of the 1840s and 1850s, which also struggled to negotiate between reformist fervour and the pledge to depict things as they really are.[39] The *Illustrations* baffle the new-historical suspicion that complicity with the ruling order lies just beneath any profession of subversion; they openly proclaim sympathy with capitalist principles, which, if they counted as radical at the time, no longer seem so.[40] Yet we need not therefore accept Martineau's claim that these stories are precisely equivalent to the science they illustrate; like any other form of fiction, they contain elements that cannot be reduced to either a summary of their principles or their author's stated intention. First of all, for all their improbabilities, Martineau's tales become amusing through the sheer variety of their imagined settings. One of them, *The Charmed Sea* (vol. 13), opens with a file of despairing Polish prisoners being led by their Russian captors into exile in Siberia, where they are forced to reinvent currency out of mammoth bones. Another, *Cinnamon and Pearls* (vol. 20), tells the tale of a renegade Ceylonese conch diver who flees with his betrothed under a terrible curse, and ends up suffering from elephantiasis, all due to the abuses of the British East India Company's monopoly system. Others deal with the oppression of the Irish by the British, the effect of the French Revolution on local wine production, and the sturdy women of a remote Scottish island, whose economy consists of peat, fish, and seaweed (but whose society is subject to unfortunate Malthusian pressures). Gillian Thomas praises the antislavery tale *Demerara* (vol. 4), set in Guyana, claiming that 'the scene in which the slaves "accidentally" botch the rescue of the overseer Horner from the flood so that he is drowned in a rushing torrent to the accompanying cheers of his apparent rescuers gives the reader an insight into the moral vortex of a slave-owning society infinitely more eloquent than the sentimental appeal made in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) a few decades later'.[41] Martineau's British tales tend to focus on the humble people, the farmers, small traders, and orphan children, who may be said to have felt the disruption of industrialization the most acutely, and she does not stint in her depiction of their sufferings. Indeed – and this arguably displays a certain excess of fictional energy – she may stress them more than her stated principles require.

Perhaps her most-analysed tale is the one that deals overtly with industrial unrest. *A Manchester Strike* (vol. 7) not surprisingly concludes that going on strike is a mistake that leads to ruin for the workers. But to contextualize, none of the other industrial novels supports striking either: *Mary Barton* and *Hard Times* both foreground the figure of the outside union agitator who comes to stir up the honest workers and lead them to perdition. *A Manchester Strike* is relatively even-handed in its distribution of praise and blame – some masters are honest but others are cruel, and some workers are demagogic, but others possess great moral integrity, like William Allen, the workers' chosen spokesperson. Martineau represents class conflict as inevitable and

even justified, but over time the workers are doomed to be crushed because of their employers' superior strength. The sympathetic William Allen is forbidden to work in the factories because of his role in the strike, and ends his days sweeping the streets with a broom and a water cart. It is a strangely ambivalent tale, for on the one hand the workers would have avoided much misery if they had not gone on strike, yet on the other the workers had no real alternative but to strike. Martineau's personal twist on the rhetoric of political economy comes from her particular form of Unitarianism, a philosophical outlook called necessitarianism which held that the world is determined by universal natural laws that exclude human free will.[42] Thus Providence assures, through the natural laws that govern the economy, that all temporary suffering is ultimately for the good of society, but there is no way of evading or modifying those economic laws. The point of her *Illustrations* is to help her readers resign themselves to the inevitability of the capitalist system and work with it rather than against it. At the end of her series, in a volume entitled *The Moral of Many Fables*, her rather feeble advice is that 'we must mend our ways and be hopeful; or, be hopeful and mend our ways' (*IPE* XXV, 140).

As a result of her necessitarianism, Martineau's tales are often even gloomier than would be warranted by political economy alone, a fact which she herself admits: 'My fables have all been melancholy, ... [but] as in every other department of moral science, we must enter through tribulation into truth' (*IPE* XXV, 1). (Note that by 'moral science' here, she might be taken to mean both political economy and fiction itself.) Gallagher's reading of *A Manchester Strike* points out that in fact the strike didn't need to fail so utterly: there was a moment when the workers had won some of their demands, but then they sabotaged their success by pressing for too many concessions.[43] Klaver describes the strained and self-contradictory quality of this story as a clash between the discourses of sentimentalism and political economy: the reader is supposed to learn about strikes' inevitable failures, but instead remembers the loss of little Martha's pet bird.[44] In another story, *Briery Creek* (vol. 22), in which a Joseph Priestley-like philosopher has been exiled to backwoods America, one is surprised to discover that the good, perfectly hard-working Arthur, who has been contrasted with the decadent ex-aristocrat Temple, does not get to reap the benefits of his work, but instead dies of a random fever. Of course, Temple does not get away with his decadence, for he ends up fleeing his creditors – in other words, evil is always punished, but good is not always rewarded. Gallagher refers to this quality of Martineau's writing as her 'tragic vision', which clashes oddly with the 'tone of contented acceptance in which ... tragedy is narrated'.[45] This tragic vision qualifies as an artistic choice; Martineau's strategy is to represent no more and no less than her abstract principles require (what Gallagher calls 'deductive' realism), but the tales themselves create a distinctive fictional space. This may seem an obvious point, but it is overlooked surprisingly often by critics who

accept Martineau's strategic denial of what she would later call 'the liberty of fiction' at face value, and equate her utilitarian world-view with complete predictability.[46]

The tragic accidents that creep into Martineau's stories might also be seen as an acknowledgement of Smith's doctrine of unintended consequences, but one in which the good of the whole, rather than being ironically created by individual selfishness, is often the cause of individual misfortune. The strained cheerfulness that grates on Gallagher may also be read as Martineau's own solution to the contradictions between the ideal harmony of invisible hand social theory and the real world of random sorrow. Necessitarian theology clearly comes down on the deterministic side of Smith's ambiguous invisible hand metaphor – creating a narrative in which causes lead directly to effects with no accidental, ironic, or self-undermining results. Martineau's stories however occasionally contain accidents, though they are always tragic in contrast to Smith's comic ones. Martineau's depiction of the human will thwarted by the working of impersonal quasi-divine laws is markedly gloomier than Smith's ironic transformation of merchants' selfishness into a widespread increase in wages. So while Smith hedges the question of providential harmony, Martineau's theodicy of the marketplace splits human experience into deterministic economic law and random unfortunate events: harmony is possible if one conforms to the laws, but conformity is no guarantee of happiness.

While Martineau's writing is basically deterministic, or monocausal, it also contains other pressures, including a polemic in favour of representing the humble in fiction. At the outset of her series, she explicitly disavows fiction that is merely didactic, even while arguing that the value of her fiction is to reveal a preordained truth.

> We trust we shall not be supposed to countenance the practice of making use of narrative as a trap to catch idle readers, and make them learn something they are afraid of. We detest the practice, and feel ourselves insulted whenever a book of the *trap* kind is placed into our hands. It is many years since we grew sick of works that pretend to be stories, and turn out to be catechisms of some kind of knowledge which we had much rather become acquainted with in its genuine form. (*IPE* I, xi)

If today we read the *Illustrations* as a kind of moralizing tract, in Martineau's eyes her works were far more valid as fiction than other kinds of moralizing tracts. A narrative should not be a 'trap', she implies, but rather the site of living example, something far clearer and perhaps in the case of 'moral science' even truer than dry precept. Her stories will not 'pretend to be stories', but will really be stories.

An even more striking defence of the realism of her subject matter comes hidden at the end of volume 11, *For Each and For All*, which defends the

principle of individual competition against the (presumably Owenite) idea of cooperation. It is also the most traditionally romantic of the stories, since it tells the story of the self-supporting actress Letitia who marries the aristocratic Member of Parliament Henry F— (his name is rendered by a dash, as in any society novel), and has to overcome the disdain of her new high-society peers, who suspect her of marrying for money. Most of the novel relates how Letitia settles into her married life and conducts a series of conversations with those around her. But at the end, the characters reflect on their own narrative situation, and whether their lives, and implicitly Martineau's *Illustrations* in general, make good stories or not. Letitia has just asked Henry to recap his maiden speech before Parliament, which of course has consisted of a long discussion of economic principles:

> 'But Henry [she breaks in], where is the eloquence of all this? ... It seems more like a lecture than a speech.'
>
> 'And so it was [he replies]; but these are days when, to the people, naked truth is the best eloquence. They are sufferers; they look for a way out of their sufferings; and the plainest way is to them the fairest.' (*IPE* XI, 166–7)

This makes a good defence of Martineau's project, and political economy in general – though with slightly different valences. By 'plain' truth, Henry means expository political economy. Likewise, Martineau's fiction might be considered so plain and unadorned that it almost reduces itself to an expository genre – though we have seen how Martineau fought to make her *Illustrations* fiction rather than exposition. Henry and Letitia then turn to discussing this very question – what the best form of narrative art should be in these times – and conclude it is not only the life of the poor and unglamorous, but also the mundane parts of their own story, the unromantic intervals between exciting events, the part which other kinds of novels than Martineau's would not have thought worth recording. Keep in mind here that realistic depiction of everyday life was not at all in literary fashion: in fact Martineau's own novel *Deerbrook*, written in 1839 about the lives of provincial middle-class women, was rejected by a publisher because it was too much like the 'familiar life of every day', and not exciting or lofty enough. 'Youths and maidens in those days looked for lords and ladies in every page of a new novel,' Martineau commented acerbically years later.[47] This kind of writing would not find a mass audience until the end of the 1840s, so the following passage comes across as very much ahead of its time:

> [Letitia observes,] 'The true romance of human life lies among the poorer classes; the most rapid vicissitudes, the strongest passions, the most undiluted emotions, the most eloquent deportment, the truest experience are there. These things are marked on their countenances, and displayed by

> their gestures; and yet these things are almost untouched by our artists; be they dramatists, painters, or novelists. ... This is wrong; for life in its reality cannot become known by hearsay; and by hearsay only is there any notion of it among those who feel themselves set above its struggles and its toils: that is, by the greater part of the aristocracy.' (*IPE* XI, 168–9)

Fiction should not linger on the foibles of the aristocracy, not for any particular political reason but, ironically, because aristocrats are not passionate enough. The defence of depicting the poor and humble is that their lives are actually more romantic than those whose experiences are cut off from those of the majority. Realism, the depiction of 'life in its reality', focuses naturally on the poor because their experience is more exciting and direct than tales that claim, in their depiction of aristocratic life, to be romances. Letitia's husband continues with a further critique of contemporary romance:

> 'Our painters of life ... take Love, and think it more becoming to describe a Letitia going to the altar with a lord F— , than a weaver and his thoughtful bride taking possession of their two rooms, after long waiting and anxiety. They take Bereavement, and think it the same thing if they describe the manly grief of an Ormond for his gallant Ossory, or the silent wo [sic] of a poverty-stricken widow for her laborious and dutiful son. ... There is no harm in all this, provided the mighty remainder is not overlooked, which is at the bottom of the most portentous heavings of society, – which explains all that is to many unaccountable in the doings of the world they live in.' ...
>
> 'Yes [Letitia replies], let humble life be shown to [the rich] in all its strong and strange varieties; not only in faithful butlers and housekeepers, – in pretty dairy-maids and gossiping barbers. Let us have ... working men and women, in the various periods of their struggles through life. In the meanwhile, these people should in fairness know that the aristocracy are less aware than is supposed, – less than they will be, – of what is being done and suffered on each side of their smooth and dull path.' (*IPE* XI, 170–2)

Note that Martineau here refers ironically to her readers' desire for the kinds of high-society romances that this story at first seems to be, though it turns into something quite different. At the same time, she defends the right of her earlier stories of poor fishwives and strikers to be considered interesting. In Letitia's exhortation that 'humble life be shown ... in all its strong and strange varieties', Martineau displays her affinity with Wordsworth, her future neighbour in the Lake District, whose 'Advertisement' to the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* predicts that his readers, 'accustomed to the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers, will perhaps frequently

have to struggle with feelings of strangeness and aukwardness: they will look round for poetry, and will be induced to enquire by what species of courtesy these attempts can be permitted to assume that title'.[48] Her insistence on the moral importance of perceiving ordinary life points ahead to an apparently very different programme: that of the narrator of Eliot's 1859 *Adam Bede*, who compares the flawed Rector of Broxton to the 'more or less stupid, ugly, inconsistent people' for whom we must cultivate our daily sympathies.[49] Letitia also warns implicitly that romantic tastes in fiction contribute to class warfare, following up Henry's hints about the possible 'harm' of overlooking the majority by arguing that the working class 'should in fairness know that the aristocracy are less aware than is supposed' of their sufferings. Fiction that depicts the intensity of working-class experience might serve the aristocracy as a 'true image' of their society's most poignant, and hence most useful, moments (*IPE* XI, 171). It is notable that while the *Illustrations* are supposedly directed towards a working-class audience, the meliorative power of fiction is here most relevant to the aristocratic reader, who has the power to rectify the injustices depicted. This strategy of addressing a more powerful audience on behalf of a less powerful one is typical of the later industrial novels, especially those like *Mary Barton* that aim to transform middle-class outrage into sympathetic political action.

It is not just in attention to humble people that Martineau strangely prefigures Eliot's programmatic realism, however, but in their shared attention to the humble detail, and a concomitant shift in the source of fictional pleasure. Readers of such fiction must learn to see interest in apparent 'monotony', and the 'deep stirrings within' which are not always detectable without. In response to Henry's metafictional question about what 'a weaver of fiction [could] make of our present life', Letitia responds:

> 'Nothing of a story; only a picture; there being, as you said just now, apparent monotony without, and deep stirrings within. Such a writer, if wishing to make a narrative, must take either my former life [as an actress], – its perplexities, its poverty, its struggles under its first publicity, its labors, its love, and migration into a new state; – or your future one, – the statesman's honorable toils, joined with the patriot's conflicts and consolations.'
>
> 'But if there was good reason [he replied] for taking up precisely the interval, – from our marriage till this hour; – what then?'
>
> 'Then writer and readers must be contented with little narrative; contented to know what passes within us, since so little happens to us. Would there be nothing to instruct and gratify in pictures of our position, in revelations of our hearts, and records of our conversations?'
>
> 'Let us comfort ourselves, Letitia, with deciding that it must be the fault of the recorder if there were not' (*IPE* XI, 172–3)

There the story ends. Henry and Letitia expand their speculation that artists should depict the poor as well as the rich – and should present the poor without romanticizing them as picturesque servants, but show truths that might possibly be neither tasteful nor entertaining. Martineau gestures here at the idea that fiction has a duty to represent all of society, and that various parts of society cannot know each other truly unless mediated first by fiction. But this passage is also a metafictional rejection of the conventional novel plot, represented by the struggles of the actress or the triumphs of the statesman, in favour of something more delicate and closely observed. In her defence of monotony and the subtle nuances of conversation, Martineau seems at this moment oddly to anticipate Henry James's argument that a novel should be like 'the art of a painter'.[50]

Fiction as anti-science: the revisionary rage of *Hard Times*

If Martineau points towards Eliot and James in her inconsistent defence of mimesis, her stories share more immediately with Dickens's *Hard Times* the goal of transforming the British practice of political economy by means of a work of fiction. While their works defend mimesis, neither is particularly mimetic or subtle itself: Martineau's stories claim to imitate natural law first, and the observed details that illuminate that law second, while Dickens's novel was originally entitled *Black and White* because of its melodramatic depiction of the confrontation between benign Fancy and sinister Statistics. We might speculate that this contradiction is an effect of their shared belief in fiction as a kind of political magic, which influences public behaviour far in excess of its mere status as 'tale' because of its power to create alternative moral worlds. In this case it would not be an accident that both of these works are deeply concerned with political economy, which also creates public behaviour by the imagination (and installation) of a morally interconnected world in which selfish actions are miraculously transformed into public benefits. If one is invested in fiction's political effects, one might be led to claim that one's fiction is mimetic while it is in fact also programmatic or melodramatic – rather than actually lingering in the humble details for their own sake, as might potentially be argued in the case of, say, Gustave Flaubert. Both Dickens and Martineau base their claims to realism not only on mimesis, but on their fidelity to a truer vision of human behaviour than mere observation can provide, and they mean that truth claim to be uniquely persuasive because it is cast in fictional form. The didactic morals and arguments that detract from these works' status as realist novels thus make them potentially more effective in establishing the validity of realism as a genre.

On the other hand, of course, the goal of Dickens's work is to undo the pernicious effects of Martineau's – and much more obviously than her stories attacked didactic 'catechisms' and silver-fork romances. *Hard Times* is

an assault not just on wicked factory owners, but on the whole system of thought that Martineau wished to promote (we might call it the utilitarian-industrial complex), as well as the kind of writing that she used to promote it. This makes the novel more complicated than Martineau's stories, if only because it contains within itself an attack on its own didactic form, which is borrowed in part from Martineau. More than any of the other industrial novels, *Hard Times* sides openly with opponents of the manufacturers – not only workers, but women, children, artists, and others whose spirits it represents as crushed by the new industrial order. In its depiction of the dreary industrial Coketown, the utilitarian ideologue Gradgrind, and the brutal, wealthy Bounderby, it identifies a consistent set of motives and methods behind industrialism's abuses, and goes on to show how these ruined the lives of the industrialists themselves, as well as those around them. Gradgrind destroys the life of his favourite daughter Louisa by depriving her as a child of the moral stimulus of imagination and marrying her off to the caddish Bounderby (for love has no place in his system of rational accounting of advantages), so that in her despair she is almost seduced by the first heartless aristocrat who shows interest in her. Gradgrind's son Tom, meanwhile, grows up to be entirely selfish and manipulative, a liar and a thief. The honest worker Stephen Blackpool is forbidden from divorcing his drunken wife because of laws meant to benefit the rich; after he refuses to join his factory union he is driven away by the suspicious Bounderby and dies accidentally by falling down an open mine shaft.

But if *Hard Times* is the most openly polemical of industrial novels, it is also one of the most problematic. Its hybrid genre – part satire, part fairy tale, part realism and part grotesque – makes it difficult to classify aesthetically. While it satirizes didactic fiction it is also, quite obviously, didactic itself. Its politics are also less than consistent, for while Dickens ridicules the industrialists, he also mocks the bean-countery of the Parliamentary reformers, and the officious radicalism of trade union agitators, thus undermining the very people who were at that time trying to work for concrete change.[51] The novel ends without redemption: Gradgrind's children are permanently warped by their father's system of education, the good worker Stephen has proven too good for this world, and while Sleary's Horse-Riding circus is held out as a creative alternative to dreary factory life, the only hope it really offers is that, in the future, the workers will be better amused.[52]

These contradictions are not exactly cleared up if we read *Hard Times* with Martineau's work in mind, but they do in some ways become easier to articulate. For *Hard Times* can be read as a bitter parody of Martineau's parables – equally deterministic in its way, but with Martineau's programmatic optimism transformed into a tragic Nemesis which dogs the industrial world. Its wild shifts in tone are connected, I believe, with its object of critique – Dickens's goal was both to invert the determinism of political economy's narratives by means of a wicked cynicism and a sentimental narrative

of decline, and to undercut its determinism by pointing out the vast gulf between the social scientist's Facts and Laws and the real unpredictability of experience. He creates, in effect, a satire that defends the genre of realism against writers like Martineau, while overlooking those parts of Martineau's project – her desire to represent the poor, and her conviction that fiction could not only represent the truth, but also make a political impact by persuading the reading public of its urgency – which he himself inherited. At the same time it might be possible to argue that both writers depict a moral struggle within and against political economy in related moods of what I think is a distinctively British note of tortured irony, a trace of the attempt to reconcile their official acceptance of the inherited order with acknowledgement of that structure's inadequacies. In Martineau the cardinal inadequacy is society's refusal to accept the modern laws of egalitarian political economy, while for Dickens the inadequacy is the industrial way of thought; but I think that in their weird fusion of acceptance and despair both writers are responding to the inner contradictions of a dramatically flawed social order that is supposed not to need a revolution to fix itself. As Dickens wrote *Hard Times* directly after *Bleak House*, perhaps we can see in Louisa's sad fate an alternate ending to Esther Summerson's narrow escape, in which the earlier novel's toggling between rage and determined cheerfulness has been uncoupled from the possibility of a happy ending. Anne Humpherys points out that '*Hard Times* is much darker than even the late dark novels *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend*', which both increases its allegorical intensity and 'ironically makes *Hard Times* more realistic'.[53] The novel's relatively flat characters seem to mimic the *homo economicus* of political economy, but instead of being cheerful automata they are depicted as tragically trapped in a mechanistic world with a spark of life yet remaining in them, like dying cyborgs.

The major target of Dickens's critique in *Hard Times* is the utilitarian theory of education, which is depicted as a dry, heartless, impersonal creed aimed at crushing the imagination out of its young charges.[54] In the novel's opening scene, the school founder Gradgrind famously addresses his students thus:

> 'Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!' (*HT* 5)

What Gradgrind proposes be rooted out of children, workers, and women is 'Fancy', a broad term which includes not only wayward dreaminess, but the whole range of humane sentiments, such as sympathy, devotion, and

honour. Dickens aims to show that this regime of facts actually overlooks one of the most important facts about human beings and especially children: namely, that they are not creatures of reason alone. Because Gradgrind's world-view is so narrow, he actually ends up knowing a great deal less about the world around him than does, say, Sissy Jupe, the abandoned daughter of a circus performer whom he takes into his home as an educational experiment. Gradgrind is dumbfounded, for example, by the workers' persistent interest in novels, and their preference for Defoe over Euclid: 'Mr. Gradgrind was forever working, in print and out of print, at this eccentric sum, and he could never make out how it yielded this unaccountable product' (*HT* 42). The implication is that Gradgrind's failure to understand fiction's power over its readers will keep his philosophy from entirely transforming the town's repressed citizens, try as he might to keep out alternate world-views.

Sissy provides some of the novel's most pointed satires on political economy with her *idiot savant* failure to properly internalize its cruel abstractions. Just as Esther's decision to focus on her immediate circle of friends is meant as a corrective to Mrs Jellyby's far-off vision, Sissy's tears over her economics homework reveal her actual clear-sightedness in comparison with Gradgrind's obfuscatory rationalism. Gradgrind shakes his head over her 'wretched ignorance' in loving her father in spite of his abandonment (a love he will not really manage to elicit from his own daughter), and observes that 'after eight weeks of induction into the elements of Political Economy, she had only yesterday been set right by a prattler three feet high, for returning to the question, "What is the first principle of this science?" the absurd answer, "To do unto others as I would that they should do unto me" ' (*HT* 46). To Sissy's preference for the Golden Rule over a narrow calculation of self-interest is added her insistence on personal sympathy and identification (important components of realist narrative) over politically biased statistical aggregation. In detailing her many 'mistakes' to Louisa, Sissy first revealingly confuses 'Natural' with 'National' prosperity (' "You had better say, National ...", returned Louisa, with her dry reserve' (*HT* 47)) and then failing to respond correctly to her teacher M'Choakumchild's propaganda:

> 'And he said, This schoolroom is an immense town, and in it there are a million of inhabitants, and only five-and-twenty are starved to death in the streets, in the course of a year. What is your remark on that proportion? And my remark was – for I couldn't think of a better one – that I thought it must be just as hard upon those who were starved, whether the others were a million, or a million million. And that was wrong too.' (*HT* 47)

Louisa's 'dry' ambiguous response ('Of course it was.' (*HT* 47)) shows her ability to distance herself emotionally from the question's absurdly heartless formulation, a form of emotional distancing depicted as necessary to

her survival in Coketown but also as dangerous to her spirit as Esther's inability to accept her right to love. Sissy's refusal to see starvation from a higher plane (a plane reminiscent of Orson Welles's strategy in *The Third Man* of viewing the problem of child-murder from the heights of a Ferris wheel gondola) is a sign of her emotional intelligence in refusing to see herself or those around her as mere ciphers in an account book. Louisa's strategy of mental accommodation, however, reveals its limitations when her father suggests that she marry the much older braggart Bounderby, to whom she has always shown a marked physical aversion. Rather than seeing them as the incompatible personalities they are, Gradgrind sees the problem entirely in the abstract:

> 'Now, what are the Facts of this case? You are, we will say in round numbers, twenty years of age; Mr. Bounderby is, we will say in round numbers, fifty. ... In considering this question, it is not unimportant to take into account the statistics of marriage, so far as they have yet been obtained, in England and Wales. I find, on reference to the figures, that a large proportion of these marriages are contracted between parties of very unequal ages, and that the elder of these contracting parties is, in rather more than three-fourths of these instances, the bridegroom.' (*HT* 77)

Louisa's inability to defend herself from this cloud of irrelevant figures shows how she might have benefited from the opportunity to develop a more articulate alternative to the statistical view of life, perhaps by learning the true lesson of Sissy's 'mistakes'.

In addition to attacking political economy itself, Dickens attacks the kind of stories told by political economists. In the following indictment a caricature of Martineau's *Illustrations* can be detected:

> [Coketown's adults were] pretty well united on the point that these unlucky infants [of Coketown] were never to wonder. Body number one, said they must take everything on trust. Body number two, said they must take everything on political economy. Body number three, wrote leaden little books for them, showing how the good grown-up baby invariably got to the Savings-bank, and the bad grown-up baby invariably got transported. Body number four, under dreary pretences of being droll ... made the shallowest pretences of concealing pitfalls of knowledge, into which it was the duty of these babies to be smuggled and inveighed. But, all the bodies agreed that they were never to wonder. (*HT* 41–2)[55]

The results of this distortion are not only dull, unhappy people – but, as Dickens shows, the dissolution of the economic enterprise itself. For Tom

Gradgrind, the exquisitely raised eldest son, grows to hate Facts, becomes a cynical powermonger, robs the savings bank where he works, and ultimately dies abroad. In a parallel depiction of destructive egotism, his fellow student Bitzer successfully internalizes the gospel of facts, but then neatly turns them against his teacher in the scene of Tom's arrest. Here the simplistic didactic tales of political economy turn into self-fulfilling prophecies – precisely not in the way intended, for their young readers end up modelling themselves on the economic losers depicted. At the same time, Tom's woeful fate is just as didactically overdetermined as that of any character in Martineau. The not-too-subtle lesson of *Hard Times* is that if you read too many tales about political economy, you grow into either a deceitful slacker with no moral backbone, or a calculating toady with no moral backbone.

Hard Times shares with Martineau's work the assumption that its characters' actions display the immutable laws of human interaction – but explicitly values a subjective, individualistic point of view over the new and threateningly attractive sciences of statistics and political economy. But to lend his critique legitimacy, Dickens must demonstrate the typicality of his subject matter, so that his characters are, in some ways, as stylized as those in Martineau. Because Bounderby is from first to last a boastful cad, the revelation that he has consistently lied about being a self-made man comes as no surprise to the reader. The whole work bears a strong tinge of pantomime or fairy tale, as David Lodge has pointed out, from Gradgrind's characterization as an 'Ogre', to the description of Coketown's factories as 'Fairy palaces' (*HT* 11, 52).[56] This mythic quality of moral determinism compounds the didactic effect of Dickens's tale, though its moral is that grown-ups need childlike fantasy rather than that children need adult rationality.

The polemical similarities between Dickens and Martineau have been obscured not least because the antipathy between them was so overt. In his essay 'Frauds on the Fairies', published in *Household Words* in 1853, Dickens had already distanced himself from those who would turn fiction to extra-fictional ends. This essay also anticipates some of the self-contradictory effects of *Hard Times* in the tension it sets up between the celebration of fiction *as* a moralizing fable, and the desire to protect fiction *from* moralizing fables.[57] Dickens starts by asserting the importance of the unadulterated fairy tale in creating a moral nation:

> Forbearance, courtesy, consideration for the poor and aged, kind treatment of animals, the love of nature, abhorrence of tyranny and brute force – many such good things have been first nourished in the child's heart by this powerful aid. ... [A] nation without fancy, without some romance, never did, never can, never will, hold a great place under the sun.[58]

At the same time, the attempt to turn fiction to utilitarian aims destroys all these benefits, which Dickens demonstrates by the satiric retelling of

the tale of Cinderella twisted for the benefit of Bloomerism, teetotalism, women's suffrage, and of course tariff reform:

> Lastly, the little old lady put on Cinderella's feet a pair of shoes made of glass: observing that but for the abolition of the duty on that article, it could never have been devoted to such a purpose; the effect of all such taxes being to cramp invention, and embarrass the producer, to the manifest injury of the consumer.[59]

Martineau in turn thoroughly detested *Hard Times*, which she thought not only inflammatory but also 'so unlike life ... in England, at present, as Ogre and Tom Thumb'. In particular she disliked Dickens's efforts in favour of 'meddling and mischievous legislation' which was meant to rein in 'the great class of manufacturers – unsurpassed for intelligence, public spirit, and beneficence'.[60] Ironically, here it is Martineau who seems to be assuming the moral mantle of realist fiction, while Dickens asserts that it is his exaggerations that are most true.

By addressing contemporary economic issues, both Martineau and Dickens laid themselves open to charges of factual error and misrepresentation.[61] But while their stories insist on representing the truth about economic experience, it seems inadequate to judge the success of these popularizing projects by weighing claims about their factual accuracy. In fact their simplification of the economic views they depicted may even have made their works more efficacious. In his book on economic popularizers, W. D. Sockwell argues that 'it was not the scientific economic theories themselves that had an impact on policy, but the translation of theories into a "popular mythology" that was critical. ... If this thesis is accepted, the popularizers of economic ideas may play a more important role in the formulation and acceptance of policy than the original thinkers.'[62]

Martineau's characterization of both political economy and fictional realism as moral sciences may seem to turn narrative pleasure to the service of economic ideology, but it also lends political urgency to the project of depicting everyday life in fictional form. I've argued here that along with this political urgency, later realist fiction inherited some of the authority to represent the relation between natural law and observed detail that Martineau borrowed from political economy (and which it in turn had borrowed from Newtonian physics). Although it reacts against Martineau's attempt to fuse fiction and science in a deterministic providential overview, Dickens's *Hard Times* also takes for granted the defence, hidden in Martineau's novellas and assumed by her method, of fiction's power to reveal social truth. Both writers thus assumed that political economy was somehow deficient in a way that could be usefully supplemented by fictional narratives. Yet despite their competing rhetorical emphases, neither Martineau nor Dickens was

able to imagine a successful reconciliation of human happiness with the new economic vision of social complexity.

As in *Bleak House*, Dickens's satire in *Hard Times* is directed against a certain self-inflicted perspectival blindness. Like Mrs Jellyby, Gradgrind is blinded to his immediate environment by an oversimplified theory that encourages him to view his surroundings only as if from a great distance. This theoretical overview may be inspired by humane, rational, and even patriotic impulses, but Dickens condemns its inability to repair the damage done to that little platoon, the family. In comparison Martineau's vision is too distant, identifying with laws instead of people – though she too is ultimately engaged in the realist project of oscillating between bird's-eye and worm's-eye views of social life. In Chapter 5, we will follow this pattern into novels that take up Dickens's idea that fiction should redirect care to individuals who are inadequately represented by a systemic overview, and do so by defending their own inappropriately sympathetic narrative voices. But first, let me turn to Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, a novel that may share Dickens's project of attacking egotism, but does so by constructing a much more inconsistent, amoral, and playful narrator.

4

Ripple Effects and the Fog of War in *Vanity Fair*

The previous chapters have discussed several ways in which realist fiction tries to step in and fill some of the moral lacunae of political economy, either by imagining a secular omniscient overview that may have a subtle moral influence on the reader or by directly challenging the reader to respond to the social problems caused by industrialization. This chapter will focus on a narrative that aims less to solve social problems than to thematize the difficult ironies of a society organized around the political-economic world-view of self-interested behaviour and unintended consequences. Whereas Smith focuses on the positive results of invisible hand social theory, the comic view of William Makepeace Thackeray's 1847–48 *Vanity Fair* is sometimes optimistic but more often darkly satirical, critiquing both the narrator's and the reader's inadequacies of vision. The self-consciousness of Thackeray's narrator, while parodying Fielding, also expresses much more doubt about society's ability to turn disadvantages into advantages and straying characters into worthy protagonists. Thackeray's narrator uses his omniscience to dramatize the characters' delusions, manipulations, and ignorance of each other's intentions, vices that sometimes lead to happy outcomes but sometimes to undeserved disaster. Even the novel's happy ending, in which Dobbin finally gets his Amelia, is undercut by Dobbin's growing awareness that his devotion was directed towards an unworthy object. Meanwhile, the novel's anti-heroine Becky Sharp has only been temporarily deflected from her attempt to transform others' vanity and folly into her own social power.

Thackeray's model of society as a web of egotistical complexity anticipates the moral universe of George Eliot's novels 15 years later, but his uniquely destabilizing narrative voice often leaves open problems (the difficulty of secular ethics, the moral irony of unintended consequences, and the world as an ambiguous web of clashing egotisms) that Eliot's narrations generally try to resolve. The characteristic mood of the two authors' works is subtly different, corresponding to the difference between the strained optimism of early nineteenth-century writers and the mournful judgments of later ones:

Thackeray's work tends to melancholy but energetic comedy, while Eliot's leans to wry and sympathetic tragedy. Thus Thackeray immediately complicates his depiction of Becky's dubious social rise with an argument in favour of roast beef: 'It is all vanity to be sure: but who will not own to liking a little of it? I should like to know what well-constituted mind, merely because it is transitory, dislikes roast-beef? That is a vanity; but may every man who reads this, have a wholesome portion of it through life, I beg; aye, though my readers were five hundred thousand.'[1] With splendid denial of an ethics that would judge actions on the basis of their aggregate social benefit, Thackeray defends the individual's irrational pleasures as signs of a 'well-constituted' mind. While Eliot sometimes seems to take an 'eat-your-peas' ethical position, I will be arguing in my next chapter that she, too, frames her critique of egotism with a passionate defence of individual interiority.

In this chapter, I will argue that *Vanity Fair*'s social vision is, like the other realist novels discussed here, an imagined response to Smith's depiction of a complex society structured morally by unintended consequences. In some ways *Vanity Fair* seems to hearken back to Smith's satirical vision of social progress through mass delusion in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. But the novel's depiction of the chaotic and unpredictable results of trivial accidents also foreshadows a kind of economic thought that wouldn't become prominent until the dawn of the information age. The idea that social change might not be driven by great men or even mass movements but by something as trivial as a 'Butterfly Effect' is an essentially cybernetic understanding that society is too complex to be described without amounts of information too vast to be comprehended by the individual brain (and therefore reliant on some kind of artificial intelligence). The butterfly is an image from chaos theory, in which the beating of a butterfly's wings in the Amazon can lead to a hurricane thousands of miles away. This kind of postmodern complexity theory eschews the idea of moral messages, but does enjoin a kind of epistemological humility: in a world in which massive catastrophes can be created by a butterfly's wings, no achievement, insight, or forecast can ever be completely reliable. But while economists claim that society in all its details is incalculable – or that it has only been since the invention of powerful computers in the 1980s that the mathematics of chaotic systems like the free market has been calculable[2] – Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* can be read as an attempt to track specific causes and effects through just such a chaotic social system. However, Thackeray's project is not just to depict these complex, asymmetrical, and fragile systems – which in itself would be an achievement – but also to investigate whether morality is possible within them, and whether the system can ever be comprehensible to the questing individual reader and not simply from some aggregate position. His narratological innovation here is a fugitive and self-undermining narrator, simultaneously aware of the necessity and the inadequacy of his social overview, as he is of the story's fictionality. Another part of his strategy, and

one I think he shares with many other mid-Victorian realists, is to make the novel long enough to depict all the possible outcomes of any single random event.

Unlike the novelists of our last chapter, Thackeray refrains from taking up a political stance on the issues of the day: a contemporary noted that 'We heartily rejoice that Mr. Thackeray has kept his science and political economy (if he has any) for some other emergency.'[3] Thackeray's depiction of unintended consequences is not explicitly flagged as an economic idea. But since it has been so important to generations of economists, I would like to briefly survey this facet of Smith's invisible hand social theory and explain why I think there is no parallel in economic theory to Thackeray's depiction of society's ignorant and ironic fragility until the late twentieth century.

As I argued in Chapter 1, the ambiguous structure of Smith's invisible hand allowed it to function for later economists as a substitute for moral theory, though they generally stressed the certainty of improving national prosperity over the metaphor's other possible readings. To this may be added a wariness about social planning that first arose in reaction against the utilitarian confidence that national problems could be solved with ever-increasing numbers of statistics, and then became crucial in the twentieth century, especially in the works of Friedrich Hayek, as a bulwark against both Western socialism and Eastern communism. In this line of argument, social planning is inadvisable because the planner (analogous to Smith's 'sovereign') will never have enough information to produce an accurate depiction of the society he aims to help. A sketch of the history of complexity theory in economics – in Mill, Hayek, and the new mathematics of chaos – will help set the stage here, since much of it is derived directly or indirectly from Smith's work.

Models of market society as incalculably complex

The Mill–Whewell debate is a useful landmark in the history of discussions about the calculability of aggregate social good – that is, whether the complex interactions of a modern social order can really be judged accurately or not. This is the economic version of the moral problem modelled in our realist novels – how to estimate the effects of a single selfish action – but, as we shall see, neither approach can really offer a detailed and generalizable model of every such event. Smith's assertion that individual selfish actions lead to aggregate social benefits was merely a hypothesis, but as econometric calculation became more central to the nineteenth-century project of political economy, the question of whether these benefits could be statistically proven, or whether society was too complex for the question ever to be calculable, became a source of unease. Bentham's utilitarianism famously relied on a 'felicific calculus' to calculate the benefit of individual actions to whole societies: a concept that relies, at its base, on the assumption that the

goodness of many behavioural decisions can be more or less ascertained.[4] But in 1852 Whewell challenged Bentham by arguing that 'we cannot calculate all the consequences of any action, and thus cannot estimate the degree in which it promotes human happiness'.[5] Whewell continues: 'If we cannot call our actions *good* or *evil* till we have formed this summation, ... we are surely thrown upon a task for which our faculties are quite unfit: we have the tangled course of life to run, and are blindfolded by the hand which is to assign the prize.'[6]

Mill's response is to elaborate on Bentham's argument both by arguing that moral rules can be ascertained in the aggregate and by admitting that in any moral system there must be exceptions to the rule: 'Does Dr. Whewell mean to say ... [t]hat because we cannot predict every effect which may follow from a person's death, we cannot know that the liberty of murder would be destructive to human happiness?' Mill admits that the goodness or badness resulting from a single dubious act, say a flattering lie, may not be ascertainable, but 'We must look at them multiplied, and in large masses.'[7] Later, in his 1861 essay 'Utilitarianism', Mill adds that 'The answer to the objection [about the impossibility of calculating the beneficial effects of every action] is, that there has been ample time, namely, the whole past duration of the human species. During all that time mankind have been learning by experience the tendencies of actions; on which experience all the prudence, as well as all the morality of life, is dependent.'[8] But though Mill argues that general conclusions are possible, he implicitly admits that specific conclusions about the goodness or badness of any particular action may be impossible to calculate. Neither political economy nor rule-based moral science really has the tools to trace the results of that action throughout society.[9]

In the mid-twentieth century, to leap ahead somewhat arbitrarily, the Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek used Whewell's idea of the incalculable complexity of the social order to construct a defence of capitalism. Hayek focuses less on the morality of any one particular individual action, though, than on a semi-mystical concept of spontaneous order that manages to preserve liberty while maximizing efficiency. Hayek's conclusions are based on the dispersed nature of knowledge in economic systems: the actions of trained individuals such as shippers, real estate agents, and stockbrokers are 'based on special knowledge of circumstances of the fleeting moment not known to others'. This knowledge is partly articulate, but also partly tacit and hence not readily passed along to others. In fact, it cannot be determined in advance, but arises or is discovered in the act of competition itself. Given the speed of economic change, Hayek argues that 'the economic problem of society is mainly one of rapid adaptation to changes in the particular circumstances of time and place'. While decentralization is needed to empower the individual, economic knowledge is communicated to him most efficiently through the price system, which contains more

knowledge than '[e]ven the single controlling mind, in possession of all the data for some small, self-contained economic system' could ever have at his disposal.[10] Information about the availability of materials 'rapidly spread[s] throughout the whole economic system ... not because any of its members survey the whole field, but because their limited individual fields of vision sufficiently overlap' to pass the information along.[11] Hayek's theory of distributed information processing in markets is sometimes seen as a precursor to Wiener and von Neumann's work in cybernetics, but Hayek himself saw Adam Smith as one of the first systematic theorists of 'formations of spontaneous orders and selective evolution' and hence as the 'originator of cybernetics'.[12]

Hayek's distinction between planner and individual corresponds roughly to Smith's distinction between the sovereign and the individual merchant, but with a twentieth-century twist. Smith's sovereign was implicitly an actual king, an individual with a finite brain who might serve as a final arbiter over a fractious constitutional monarchy. The central planners in Hayek, though, are bureaucratic constructions based on twentieth-century socialist societies, with a greater capacity for organizing statistics than any government ministers of Smith's pre-statistical age. Nevertheless Hayek argues that certain biological and social systems are so complex that statistical knowledge of all their particulars will never really be possible, and thus 'the insight into the impossibility of such full knowledge induces an attitude of humility and reverence towards that experience of mankind as a whole which has been precipitated in the values and institutions of existing society'.[13] This quasi-Burkean reverence for inherited complex orders sets him apart from Smith, who was much more interested in reforming his country's sclerotic mercantilism[14] – as it does from the rationalist Mill.[15] For our purposes here, however, what Hayek fails to inherit from Smith is his sense of humour and moral irony about human vanity. By the twentieth century, Smith's vision of the 'benefits' that would accrue to a nation served by the invisible hand had become more limited and abstract, as in the concept of 'Pareto optimality', Vilfredo Pareto's description of a state in which resources are distributed so efficiently that they cannot be shared any other way without harming one of the participants – a notion that has nothing to do with whether resources are distributed equitably or fairly. Though the benefits conferred by Smith's invisible hand in *WN* are meant to be financial, Smith's idea of national well-being, even in *WN*, can hardly be described as the mere efficient use of available resources.

The rise of computing power and the possibility of constructing mathematical models of chaotic systems have recently contributed to a new discipline of emergent systems that reaches somewhat different conclusions from Hayek's. While Hayek argued that cultural and biological systems were so complex as to be incalculable, the massive increase in computing power has led to a more optimistic approach to knowledge. At the same time, there

is a greater focus on the instability and self-destructive capacities that arise from within that system itself. Where Hayek focused on the way liberal economies sustained themselves through the 'marvel' of distributed information processing,[16] theorists like Ormerod focus on the damage that can be wreaked by such fragile weapons as the butterfly's wing. While Hayek's politics map clearly onto the right side of the postwar ideological grid (though he denied being a conservative[17]), theories of chaotic human systems are not as easy to categorize politically. In the new culture of computing technology, popular depictions of chaotic complexity are depicted as utopian frontiers reflected in libertarian slogans like 'information wants to be free'. On the other hand, John Maynard Keynes concluded in the 1930s that one reason government actions could benefit the economy is that its spending is increased by a positive 'multiplier' as it ripples out through the economy. Chaotic mathematics can promote confidence in long-term planning, as in weather forecasting, though its results are less reliable in the short term. Also counting as roughly progressive is the idea that humans should respect the complexly interconnected ecosystem, which they have managed to damage in many unforeseen ways. While political approaches to economic theory can treat the economy either as a machine or as an organism (Smith relied on the former, while the post-Darwinian Hayek imagines the latter), no such ambiguity exists with regard to vast planetary natural systems, which are clearly not mechanical. Ecological theories that stress the environment's complex fragility usually advocate changing human behaviour, including inherited market systems, to adopt a more 'conservative' attitude towards natural resource exploitation.[18]

While a full discussion of this burgeoning field of inquiry obviously lies beyond the scope of my discussion here, I would like to cite a few thoughtful recent attempts to think through the implications of the mathematics of non-linear systems for economic theory.[19] British economist Paul Ormerod's *Butterfly Economics* begins by refuting Margaret Thatcher's proclamation that 'there is no such thing as society', asserting that macroeconomic activity has to be understood as more than merely the sum of various individual rational choices. His model of society is derived from biological studies of ant-hills in the mid-1980s that concluded that large numbers of ants are smarter than individual ants because of the feedback interactions between a few simple ant behaviours such as following a fresh scent trail.[20] The observation that complex systems can be formed from simple components, while overlapping with developments in artificial intelligence, strikes both at the *homo economicus* model of rational choice and the marginal utility assumption that consumers always know what they want – since consumers may not know what their own preferences are until they receive feedback from others. Ormerod lacks Hayek's faith in the price system's reliability as an information conduit, pointing out that prices fluctuate more than fundamentals and that the free market sometimes acts with seeming arbitrariness,

favouring inferior technologies like the VHS over the Betamax and creating clusters of similar firms in seemingly randomly chosen geographical locations. He concludes that though governments should avoid micromanaging the economy, some government protection for infant industries might be warranted (a conclusion also reached by Alexander Hamilton and pioneering German protectionist Friedrich List) 'in those industries where early success might secure a decisive advantage'. He also takes the Keynesian position that capitalist economies can reach equilibrium at several different set-points, some less than fully desirable, and so governments should intervene quickly to keep cyclical collapses in consumer confidence from being reinforced. Ormerod never completely explains the relationship, though, between his two models of chaotic systems: the butterfly that creates an unforeseen catastrophe, creating a ripple effect that spreads outwards from that single point in time and space making long-term predictions impossible; and the ant-hill in which long-term predictions about the system's equilibrium are possible but predictions about the behaviour of any single ant are not. He also relegates to a footnote the observation that the ants might behave differently if they could see the system as a whole. Unlike ants, humans can have ideological preferences that are totally unrelated to their own economic experiences.[21]

Nassim Nicholas Taleb, a stock trader whose thoroughgoing pessimism made him both wealthy and famous during the 2008 financial crisis, merits mention here because he bases his unorthodox investing strategy on essayistic conclusions about the stock market's inherent vulnerability to unforeseen random events. Taleb's entertaining and provocative 2001 *Fooled by Randomness*, which was followed by the 2007 bestseller *The Black Swan*, argues that emotional human minds are unable to imagine, much less calculate accurately, the likelihood of a truly random event, and constantly attribute causality and narrative to events that are better described as luck. Hence most traders think that winning and losing in the market is not random but meaningful, and assume that this time they have figured out a pattern that protects them from 'blowing up', which in Taleb's experience it almost never does. He sees markets instead as non-linear systems in which a single step forwards can lead to a catastrophic collapse backwards or vice versa – his metaphor is that of a sandcastle in which the addition of a single grain of sand causes the castle to collapse, a reversal of the 1990s optimistic belief that internet technology had created a 'New Economy' that might fuel near-infinite growth. As a 'skeptical empiricist', Taleb enjoins stoic humility rather than hubris about good or bad luck in the marketplace, recognizing that egotistic emotions invariably lead to faulty conclusions about the causality of particular events – what he calls our 'ingrained inability to cope with the complex structure of randomness prevailing in the modern world'.[22] Taleb distrusts mathematical models of the marketplace as well as emotional responses to it, claiming that no equation can produce perfect

confidence in modelling risk – an insight that was later verified by the collapse of the risk-management models supported by the elegant but flawed Gaussian copula function.[23] Despite Taleb's scepticism about faulty narratives, he claims to enjoy literature itself, though he does not say whether literature is wrong to encourage narrative thought, or paradoxically more reliable because of its ability to describe accident and randomness.[24] It will be interesting to see whether Taleb's investment strategy continues to succeed – indicating that he is right about other humans' inability to properly regulate their emotions about luck, and the inability of financial systems to be properly modelled by mathematical equations – or whether his comparative advantage will be diminished by his apparent success in long-term strategy. Taleb's particular form of inductivism has no obvious political implications, unless you see its attack on hubris as an indictment of market theology.

Mark Taylor's approach to the question of non-linear financial systems in his 2004 *Confidence Games* is articulated within the entirely different discipline of religious studies, and hence is much kinder to both Hegel and poststructuralist theory. Taylor, an academic who encountered the financial mysticism of Wall Street in the 1990s and 2000s through his start-up consultancy, aims to describe the various phantasmatic idealisms that arise at the intersection of art, religion, and the marketplace, rather than chronicling his struggle to ignore them. One of Taylor's arguments is that the fusion of art with market values that characterizes postmodernism – that is, art's abdication from its role as quasi-theological carrier of transcendent value it had assumed under modernism – also opened the way for the global religious revival that began in the 1970s. From my point of view here Taylor's analysis is useful because it tries to interpret the whole post-Hayekian discourse of cybernetic complexity within a humanist framework, highlighting the aesthetic components of Smith's 'autotelic, autopoietic' systems theory. Taylor also reiterates the insight that investors cannot be described as rationalistic 'billiard balls' but are motivated by 'different interests, intentions, and biases' and that much financial profit is derived not from increased efficiency but by the confidence game of exploiting temporary imbalances of information between brokers and clients.[25] Both Taleb and Taylor stress the inability of the human imagination to model the increasingly complex financial system, though Taleb approaches finance as if it were an autonomous natural system that could be modelled like an ant-hill or sandcastle, while Taylor, despite his idealism, is more willing to suggest the possibility of systematic fraud.

To the list of disciplines transformed by the new studies of non-linear complexity (capitalist politics, economic theory, the phenomenology of stock trading, and religious studies) we can add the field of ecological thought. Of course, ecology also inspired all the others, through both Darwin's theory of evolution and the twentieth-century idea of the ecosystem (prefigured

in the 'tangled bank' passage of Darwin's *Origin of Species*); at the same time it does not quite fit into our discussion because its model is explicitly that of a natural rather than a social system.[26] But the chain of influence between evolutionary theory and political economy is complex: Darwin apparently came up with his model of extinction after a reading of Malthus, and evolutionary thought had a strong influence on Hayek, giving rise to a school of 'evolutionary economics'. The 2008 ecocritical anthology *The Virtues of Ignorance* is of interest here because of its explicit thematization of the problem of human ignorance, enjoining an epistemological humility that resembles that of Hayek or Taleb, but directed to quite different practical ends. The volume's editors observe that 'Complex adaptive systems represent three words that combine to cover profound ignorance' and call for an

> ignorance-based worldview, ... [predicated] on the assumption that human ignorance will always exceed and outpace human knowledge and, therefore, that before we make any decision or take any action, we must consider who and how many are involved, the level of cultural change that will be involved, and the chances of backing out if things go sour. ... Ignorance of this sort is not a curable condition, and we must begin to create post-Enlightenment systems of thought that acknowledge ignorance as an initial operating condition in a living universe.[27]

Where invisible hand social theory fudges the boundaries between national welfare and cosmopolitan benefit, this new ecological thought welcomes the idea of the mental boundary and limits on development. Raymond H. Dean argues that since organic creatures function best if they have neither too little nor too much information, we should work to regulate the permeable 'membranes' that separate our knowledge from the ignorance beyond it. 'Physical and intellectual boundaries improve stability', he argues, but 'modern optimists want to destroy them. They want to maximize everyone's exposure and rely on global economics to produce the best result.'[28] Unlike any of the aforementioned considerations of non-linearity, ecocriticism is willing to question the motives of corporate multinationals and to suggest the possible virtues of fighting their power through both personal habits of consumption and collective political action. The editors of this volume hence use a cautious empirical approach Smith might have found appealing to attack the economic system founded on his works. However, they also gesture at a moral programme that might 'unite the secularist with the seriously religious', a coalition that was also available to support Smith's invisible hand.[29]

The question asked by all these recent studies of complex adaptive systems is clearly related to the problem of distanced social action that Smith suggested could be solved by the 'black box' image of an invisible hand – an

image that occupies the otherwise unrepresentably complex space between economic actions and their results. Where Smith merely implies a financial and perhaps moral connection between disparate elements, though, modern inquiries are increasingly modelled on the idea of a holistic system unified by a controlled energy flow, whether that system be political, biological, thermodynamic, information-processing, urban, or financial. We have thus tended to hypostasize and spatialize the problem of unintended consequences, eliminating some of the moral irony and surprise contained in Smith's original metaphor. The idea that capitalism can occupy a certain kind of space, like an organism, and that it can distinguish and defend itself from something that is not-capitalism, are some of the many interpretations of the invisible hand that were not readily available to Smith himself.

From the bowl of rack punch to the edges of the system

Despite the interdisciplinary fertility of the ant-hill/butterfly metaphors, studies of complex adaptive systems have not really transformed literary criticism as they have other fields of thought. To say nothing of their political slipperiness, the patterns that arise from order without design seem inapplicable to narratives that have a human author and are written to be understood by human readers.[30] But though we cannot really read novels themselves as evolving without design, they often grapple with the tension between emergent orders, random accident, and the human desire to read experience as orderly. In short, they embark upon the same investigations as the theorists of non-linear or complex systems, with the difference that novels generally foreground the frame of the individual mind's failure to grasp the system as a whole, and dramatize the ways that human attempts to understand the system then change their behaviour; so in general they spend less time celebrating the emergence of overarching patterns, and more on disrupting the human desire to find simple patterns in experience. In one of the few articles to discuss the relation of narrative to the concept of emergent orders, H. Porter Abbott claims that narratives are incapable of representing emergent order because they can only represent either the micro-order of experience from the individual point of view, or the macro-order of the whole system, while emergent orders occupy a realm in between. Narrativity depends on a certain temporal coherence, so is very good at representing causality but not so good at representing 'a multiplicity of unconnected actions or a surplus of atemporality'. Abbott fears that the human 'mental lust' for causality – a lust that also expresses itself as a desire for coherent narrative – is behind the stubborn preference for intelligent design theories over difficult emergent phenomena like evolution. Hence the continuing confusion over Smith's image of the invisible hand, which he describes nicely as 'a concession to our cognitive inclinations from which much mischief has come'.[31]

My concerns here being slightly different, I would argue that narratives can in fact model emergent behaviour, but at the cost of a certain coherence of form. You may recall Henry James's complaint about Victorian multi-plot novels:

> A picture without composition slights its most precious chance for beauty, and is moreover not composed at all unless the painter knows *how* that principle of health and safety, working as an absolutely premeditated art, has prevailed. There may in its absence be life, incontestably, as [Thackeray's] *The Newcomes* has life, as *Les Trois Mousquetaires*, as Tolstoi's *Peace and War* have it; but what do such large loose baggy monsters, with their queer elements of the accidental and the arbitrary, artistically *mean*?[32]

As has become conventional in realism, James defines his own perceptive and precise artistic style against that of a more conventional predecessor. He finds that 'life' lacks meaning, but art cannot – a point in rough agreement with Abbott's observation about the limitations of art and of human understanding (or 'health and safety'). F. R. Leavis expresses a similar frustration with Thackeray's work in particular: 'His attitudes, and the essential substance of interest, are so limited that (though, of course, he provides incident and plot) for the reader it is merely a matter of going on and on; nothing has been done by the close to justify the space taken – except, of course, that time has been killed.'[33] Geoffrey Tillotson, who describes Leavis's criticism as 'drop[ping] a slab of concrete on the novels', claims that what modernists perceived as the novels' shapelessness is in fact an accurate representation of 'the streamingness of experience', an 'untrimmed verisimilitude towards the flowingness we are aware of in our own lives'.[34]

Whether we call it 'going on and on' or 'flowingness', Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* is very long, a fact that is usually attributed to its method of serial publishing – a method shared by many bulky mid-century novels. Yet I think there is another reason why these novels are so long, and it does have something to do with their impossible attempt to capture 'life', or at least calculate some of the unintended consequences of interacting with others in a confusing capitalist society. The novel's length simply gives it some of the space to calculate all possible results from a particular action – in this case, Jos Sedley ordering a bowl of rack punch at Vauxhall. Mill and Hayek hesitate to imagine a society in which the good results of every action can be calculated, but Thackeray's speculative narrative allows him to imagine the effects of at least one such apparently random action. The result is confoundingly complicated, and not as optimistic as the invisible hand, though still morally legible. Thackeray's novel thematizes social complexity as a dangerous and violent kind of structure in which warfare, mediated through international finance, can spread damage unpredictably around

within society; small causes can lead to disproportionately great catastrophes; and a certain kind of ironic homeostasis is reached by the specular interactions of predominantly self-interested agents. Thackeray's distinctively ludic and self-undermining narrator both creates a sense of distance from the social system (the 'Vanity Fair'), and constantly re-inscribes its point of view within it. As I will detail below, the partly omniscient narrator, the length and fractal organization of the novel, the depictions of the lovable but ignorant characters, the historicist attention to large international events like imperial rule in India and the Battle of Waterloo, the portrayal of social interaction as confused and obscured, and the unpredictable thwarting or rewarding of narrative expectations all contribute to the novel's depiction of society as essentially Smithian – ironic, deluded, alternately cosmopolitan and nationalist, non-linear but possibly seen as ordered in retrospect, anti-heroic, and built around sympathetic but vain projections of others' intentions. But unlike political economy, Thackeray's novelistic form is able to represent a set of complex moral responses to this situation that combines tragedy, critique, and comedy, a tone that substantially informed the tragicomic realism of later practitioners.

Insofar as its theme is the ironized depiction of unintended consequences playing out among a field of selfish agents described at great length from a historical distance with some degree of omniscience, this chapter might also treat any number of large mid-century novels such as *Middlemarch*, *War and Peace*, or *A Tale of Two Cities*. *Bleak House* fits this paradigm with its depiction of multiple plots organized in ways invisible to the characters, as does *Silas Marner* with its lofty and somewhat despairing depiction of provincial and limited characters.[35] There is an argument to be made, though, both that Thackeray's sceptical and secular moral vision influenced these later novels and that the humility of the Thackerayan narrator, in comparison with either Dickens's angry narrator or Eliot's wise and sympathetic voice, is a more unsettling representation of a society making itself up as it goes along. Though we now see Thackeray's work as rather apolitical, it was greeted as a vicious satire when first published – a fact attested by Charlotte Brontë's enthusiastic dedication of the second edition of *Jane Eyre* to Thackeray, with praise that caused him some embarrassment:

> There is a man in our own days ... who speaks truth as deep [as an Old Testament figure], with a power as prophet-like and as vital – a mien as dauntless and as daring. Is the satirist of *Vanity Fair* admired in high places? I cannot tell ... [but] I see him as the first social regenerator of the day – as the very master of that working corps who would restore to rectitude the warped system of things.[36]

Though Thackeray disclaimed either religious or political ambitions, Tillotson argues that much of the high-realist project of attacking hypocrisy

by depicting flawed characters derives from Thackeray's world-view. He sees Thackeray's influence for instance in Eliot's observation, in *Amos Barton*: 'Thank heaven, then, that a little illusion is left to us, to enable us to be useful and agreeable – that ... the world is not made of looking-glass, to show us just the figure we are making, and just what is going on behind our backs! ... [So] we are able to dream that we are doing much good – and we do a little'; and in *Adam Bede*: 'These fellow-mortals, every one, must be accepted as they are: you can neither straighten their noses, nor brighten their wit, nor rectify their dispositions; and it is these people – amongst whom your life is passed – that it is needful you should tolerate, pity, and love.'[37]

Part of this tolerant moral outlook is derived from Thackeray's sceptical narrative voice, which constantly shifts its point of view as it reaches out for the reader's sympathy. There is some evidence that Thackeray developed this narrative voice as a reaction against Dickens's hectoring omniscient style, with the paradoxical result that Thackeray's narrative builds sympathy for the characters by undercutting our identification with them (or for that matter with the narrator). After Thackeray criticized *Oliver Twist* for misdirecting the reader's sympathies to the criminals, he parodied the Newgate style in the 1839–40 *Catherine* – though his attempt to match the narrative style precisely to the viciousness of the characters depicted resulted in the book being widely criticized as 'vulgar and immoral'.[38] Judith Fisher argues that Thackeray consciously created an anti-Dickensian narrative style (and one different in kind from Eliot as well):

> Dickens's unified, stable narrative voice (analogous with the sure and penetrating voice George Eliot would develop) could absorb the reader, remaking her into whatever image the author chose: here is both the lure and danger of authorship and reading for Thackeray. ... Thackeray, distrusting this hypnotic and seductive narrative magic, exploited these levels of reading to create multiple perspectives that are irreconcileable with each other, purposefully throwing the reader outside the text onto her own interpretive resources.[39]

In *Vanity Fair*, this purposeful narrative disorientation begins with a prologue (called 'Before the Curtain', it was written after the novel was completed) describing the narrator as the 'Manager of the Performance', one who pauses before his own puppet show to watch the passers-by at the Fair.

> As the Manager of the Performance sits before the curtain on the boards, and looks into the Fair, a feeling of profound melancholy comes over him in his survey of the bustling place. There is a great quantity of eating and drinking, ... quacks (*other* quacks, plague take them!) bawling in front of their booths ... [.] Look at the faces of the actors and buffoons when they come off from their business; and Tom Fool washing the paint

> off his cheeks before he sits down to dinner with his wife and the little Jack Puddings behind the canvas. The curtain will be up presently, and he will be turning head over heels, and crying 'How are you?' ... [The Manager] is proud to think that his Puppets have given satisfaction to the very best company in this empire. ... [P]lease to remark the richly dressed figure of the Wicked Nobleman, on which no expense has been spared, and which Old Nick will fetch away at the end of this singular performance. (*VF* xv–xvi)

This playful introduction instantly distances us from the novel's characters, described merely as 'puppets', while implying that we spectators too are players who rest occasionally between our performances. The buffoon Tom Fool is like the reader in his desire for a quiet dinner – so perhaps our desire for a quiet dinner puts us, with all our self-important ambitions for the public stage, in the same category. The spectators (or readers) in this analogy are also part of the entertainment, and will take up their parts in the spectacle when they finish watching the Manager's puppet show. Thus the conspicuous artifice of this prologue is also a realist gesture, implying that in the real world a spectator would find the continuous success and failure of human desires just as melancholy a spectacle.

Slippery as this analogy is, the figure of the Manager vanishes during the rest of the novel (until the last few lines), to be replaced by an alternately embodied and disembodied voice. Though mostly omniscient, at one point the narrator disclaims the ability or desire to pry into Amelia's private love-letters (*VF* 122). In male voice, he avows his infatuation with the silly idealistic Amelia, while alternately abusing and identifying with Becky Sharp's success at impersonation. After passing along Becky's letter mocking Sir Pitt Crawley, the narrator interposes with a confounding set of ironic disavowals:

> Rebecca is a droll funny creature to be sure ... But my kind reader will please to remember that these histories in their gaudy yellow covers, have 'Vanity Fair' for a title and that Vanity Fair is a very vain, wicked, foolish place, full of all sorts of humbugs and falsenesses and pretentions. And while the moralist who is holding forth on the cover [a speaker wearing the same donkey's ears as his listeners] (an accurate portrait of your humble servant) professes to wear neither gown nor bands, but only the very same long-eared livery, in which his congregation is arrayed: yet, look you, one is bound to speak the truth as far as one knows it, whether one mounts a cap and bells or a shovel-hat, and a deal of disagreeable matter must come out in the course of such an undertaking. ... [A]s we bring our characters forward, I will ask leave as a man and a brother not only to introduce them, but occasionally to step down from the platform and talk about them. ... Otherwise you might fancy it was I who was sneering at

> the practice of devotion, which Miss Sharp finds so ridiculous; ... whereas the laughter comes from one who has no reverence. (*VF* 83–4)

No wonder Brontë was mystified: while claiming the right to judge Becky's irreverence, the narrator admits he shares his audience's moral failings (or 'long-eared livery'), thus both preaching and refusing to preach at the same time. The abolitionist slogan 'Am I not a man and a brother?' is ironically abstracted from the great moral campaign of which it was a part, but despite the trivializing gesture retains its force of likening the spectator to the man on the stage. Moreover, Becky's letter is proved right in its depiction of the Crawleys' essential fatuity, so the narrator's profuse disclaimer rings false. Finally, the narrator punctures the omniscient position by claiming to have run into the characters as they travel around the principality of Pumpernickel ('It was on this very tour that I, the present writer of a history of which every word is true, had the pleasure to see them first, and make their acquaintance' (*VF* 622)).

Like Austen in *Northanger Abbey*, Thackeray uses self-conscious genre play to call attention to the constructedness and multiplicity of our imaginary models of society, and the conflicting codes of behaviour that follow logically from each. Fisher describes *Vanity Fair* as a competition between 'sociolects' – such as public school, evangelical Christianity, *du monde* – of equivalent epistemological value: 'each sociolect is a viable way of explaining and acting in the world: not necessarily a "good" way in terms of Christian ethics, but a viable epistemology'.[40] Chapter 6 of *Vanity Fair* dramatizes the contingency of narrative shapes by rewriting the narrative in several different genres that end up with totally different stories. The chapter begins with a self-conscious apology for the 'mild' and 'common' setting of the story thus far, followed by an ironic concession to the reader's supposed desire for spiciness: 'We might have treated this subject in the genteel or in the romantic or in the facetious manner' (*VF* 49). In story number one, a silver-fork parody, 'the Marquis of Osborne became attached to Lady Amelia with the full consent of the Duke her noble father'; in story number two the social milieu switches to the kitchen of the same house and details 'how black Sambo was in love with the Cook, (as indeed he was) and how he fought a battle with the coachman in her behalf' (*VF* 49). In a complicated satire of his own realism, the narrator imagines that 'such incidents might be made to provoke much laughter, and be supposed to represent scenes of "life"' (*VF* 49); placing quotation marks around the word 'life' effectively and rather hilariously mocks a subgenre of realism that claims that a low-comic version of lower-class life is somehow the most 'real' life. Though this mockery is directed at the implicit condescension of comic depictions of lovable servants, presumably Thackeray would also have disliked Zola and the later naturalists with their assertion of the tragic significance of working-class degradation. Next Thackeray lampoons the 'terrible' (*VF* 49) tale with

a brief sketch of 'The Night Attack' in which Amelia is abducted on a dark and stormy night, and ends with a return to the 'genteel rose-water style' (*VF* 50) tale of billets-doux traded between the Marquis of Osborne and the Lady Amelia. When he returns to his tale of the 'middle course ... amidst those scenes and personages with which we are most familiar' (*VF* 52), it is with the added claim that a narrative that draws our attention to boring and unsensational moments of life allows us to reproduce with greater accuracy the causes of later events: 'Are not there little chapters in every body's life, that seem to be nothing and yet affect all the rest of the history?' (*VF* 52). As with Martineau's attention to the boring interlude between the actress's career and her husband's Parliamentary success, Thackeray asserts that one of realism's benefits is its ability to chronicle the boring details that, like overlooked clues, might eventually reveal themselves as secret origins of mystifying larger events.

But unlike Martineau, Thackeray is not a determinist; rather, the causality of this novel is arranged around a conspicuous accident. *Vanity Fair* radiates outwards suggestively like a garden of forking paths from a set beginning point, which happens to be a scene of human folly and humiliation. The narrator indicates that the lives of the main characters – Becky, George Osborne, Amelia Sedley, and her brother Jos – would have been fairly predictable and 'perfectly happy' (*VF* 56) if Jos Sedley, feeling nervous about flirting with the scheming Becky at Vauxhall, had not ordered an extra bowl of rack punch. The narrator interposes:

> That bowl of rack punch was the cause of all this history. And why not a bowl of rack punch as well as any other cause? Was not a bowl of Prussic acid the cause of fair Rosamond's retiring from the world? Was not a bowl of wine the cause of the demise of Alexander the Great, or at least does not Dr. Lempriere say so? – so did this bowl of rack punch influence the fates of all the principal characters in this Novel without a hero, which we are now relating. It influenced their life although most of them did not taste a drop of it.
>
> The young ladies did not drink it; Osborne did not like it: and the consequence was that Jos that fat gourmand drank up the whole contents of the bowl. (*VF* 56)

Jos makes a drunken fool of himself and then is so ashamed the next day that he allows himself to be dissuaded from his pursuit of Becky by the snobbish George, sending Becky off to Queen's Crawley where she will flirt with the baronet Sir Pitt but marry his impecunious son Rawdon, all the while cherishing an unquenched resentment of George Osborne, who will marry the lovely Amelia but treat her shabbily ... and so on and so on. The novel's length is needed to illustrate the unintended consequences of one particular foolish action, whose effects expand outwards over the course of

years, and the novel does not end until Becky finally succeeds in entrapping Jos many years later.

The length of this novel, then, corresponds on a roughly analogous level to a massive amount of computing power, eternally attempting and failing to perfectly predict the economy. Like imperfect mathematical models of economic action, the size of Thackeray's project seems to strain the boundaries of representation: Thackeray needs not only to show the effects of his bowl of rack punch rippling outwards, but relate the effects of those effects, and the subtle interrelations of social life, and then attempt to make moral sense of it all. Geoffrey Tillotson points out that the endings of Thackeray's novels are fairly arbitrary, since the same characters often pop up in later novels, creating the sense of an even vaster continuity: 'One of his most characteristic gestures is to cut a matter off with an "etc., etc." ', gesturing at the infinite effects that might follow from any one cause.[41] At the same time the novel returns perpetually to the same characters, to keep society representable as a 'knowable community'.[42] This strain between infinity and knowability can only be resolved by the usual novelistic coincidences, such as the appearance of Miss Swartz in Miss Pinkerton's school and then again as George Osborne's prospective 'catch'; the fact that Lord Steyne had once apparently patronized Becky's father, the painter; and Amelia's chance meeting in Pumpernickel with Becky who, though totally destitute, has happened to keep the note George Osborne wrote her 15 years before. However there are also some characters who appear once and then never again, creating the illusion of a society both realistic and unfathomable. As Kathleen Tillotson says, 'Thackeray's characters exist in a denser context than perhaps any characters in fiction. They are aware of past time; they draw on childhood memories. ... In the shadow, just beyond every character, but ready to catch the spotlight for a single instant when needed, seem to be all the people the character has ever met.'[43] So what Leavis and James dismiss as 'going on and on' can also be seen as an attempt to capture the unfathomable complexity of a society organized around unintended consequences. However, the social order that Hayek sees as marvellously self-organizing is an object of melancholy contemplation, despair, and sympathy for Thackeray, since the vanities that power the social churn also result in personal disillusionment (and occasionally worse, as in Jos's probable fate). Money survives, but people do not.

While the novel depicts the link between the butterfly's-wing bowl of rack punch and the hurricane of the Napoleonic wars, it also traces the reverse path from world-historical event to individual suffering, which is the path more familiar to readers of post-Romantic fiction. For Lukács this link between the world-historical scene and the pathetic individual is the hallmark of nineteenth-century realism, as illustrated by the hapless hero of Walter Scott's *Waverley* who accidentally ends up in the middle of the Jacobite rebellion. Though this novel certainly inherits Scott's anti-heroic

protagonists (its subtitle is 'A Novel Without a Hero'), it also relies on the emergent structure of international finance to mediate between individual history and History. Mr Sedley's bankruptcy is caused by Napoleon's unexpected return from Elba, causing the stock market to sink at the worst possible time, and the narrator to reflect:

> Bon Dieu, I say, is it not hard that the fateful rush of the great Imperial struggle can't take place without affecting a poor harmless little girl of eighteen, who is occupied in billing and cooing, or working muslin collars in Russell Square? ... So imprisoned and tortured was this gentle little heart, when in the month of March, Anno Domini 1815, Napoleon landed at Cannes, and Louis XVIII fled, and all Europe was in alarm, and the funds fell, and old John Sedley was ruined. (*VF* 178, 180)

Finance here is the mechanism through which individual investors can buy foreign funds (Sedley has invested in the 'French fives' (*VF* 201), a French fund that collapsed upon Napoleon's sudden return from exile), but also the conduit of international violence into the domestic sphere.

Meanwhile Amelia may lack agency here, but her smallness and ignorance dramatize the total permeation of society by unpredictable financial spasms. The fragility of the butterfly in the chaos-theory metaphor works dramatically because of its contrast with the hurricanes, but usually butterflies are destroyed by hurricanes rather than creating them. Thackeray was certainly aware that complex international financial connections can create effects far beyond their original causes, as he had lost his own fortune in the 1830s after the failure of an Indian bank, forcing him into the dubious profession of freelance littérateur.[44] Jos's fortune is similarly located beyond the novel's horizon, somewhere in the mythic land of Boggley Wollah, so far away that it might as well be created magically. After hinting in the novel that Becky has killed Jos for his money, Thackeray added a playful 'P.S.' to a later letter confiding 'The India mail just arrived announces the utter ruin of the Union Bank of Calcutta, in which all Mrs. Crawley's money was. Will Fate never cease to persecute that suffering saint?'[45] If in the moral universe of political economy individual actions can eventually lead to system-wide effects in some remote time and place, those individual lives may also be destroyed by faraway events they will never understand.

The fog of war: individual confusion and retrospective delusion

Ripple effects between individuals and larger social systems thus contribute much to Vanity Fair's danger and excitement: events 'ripple' outwards, in this spatial metaphor, from trivial causes to great catastrophes, and great catastrophes eventually shape individual lives. The metaphor of the ripple

effect, admittedly, reduces the asymmetries of colonial and international power to the hydrostatic equilibrium of the smooth surface of a pond, across which ripples can flow unimpeded in every direction. The ripple effect, as metaphor, recalls the 'zigzag' *Tableau* of the physiocrats, which reduced social interactions to an oversimplified but visible and dramatic series of exchanges. Thackeray's narrator is aware, however, that his choice of genre influences his description of 'ripples' and their effects, which is why he dramatizes the triviality of the middle-class 'common life' (*VF* 49) that is the focus of this kind of realism. Thackeray's focus on humble subjects presents itself as a correction to the historical record: it is no secret that the Battle of Waterloo impacted great generals and nations, but Thackeray instead describes the side effects of that disaster as felt indirectly by people hundreds of miles away.

A further adjustment to the idea of historical change as a series of spatial ripple effects is Thackeray's emphasis on the surprising nature of these sudden changes. Real ripples can presumably be seen as they approach, but in *Vanity Fair* events cannot be foreseen and – especially in war and finance – arrive with devastating unpredictability. Caught up in systems they do not understand and cannot control, the characters constantly make important decisions on the basis of faulty or inadequate information. Thackeray dramatizes the painful confusion of social life in his depiction of the Battle of Waterloo, an event that helped inspire the idea of 'the fog of war'. But the confusion persists after the war itself is over, at a time when one might have been able to gather missing information and draw new conclusions, perhaps advancing slowly towards a rational history. In the cases of John Sedley's ruin and George Osborne's death, the book shows Sedley and the widowed Amelia repeatedly drawing the wrong conclusions from their experiences, trying and failing to fit their new experiences into the emotional patterns they had developed before the disasters. The persistence of this kind of moral mistake is not just a personal failing, but in the case of false worship of military heroism can lead whole nations to persist in patterns of pointless conflict. Though not depicted as angrily as the fog in the later *Bleak House* (described above in Chapter 2), the metaphorical fog of *Vanity Fair* represents a similar link between entrapped individuals and larger patterns of delusional self-destruction.

In military usage, the 'fog of war' can denote either a literal blindness on the battlefield, caused by gunpowder smoke and obscuring the generals' view from the commanding heights, or a figurative blindness caused by swiftly changing situations or bad reconnaissance. The phrase 'fog of war' itself is usually traced to Carl von Clausewitz's *Vom Kriege* (*On War*), written between 1816 and his death in 1831, but published posthumously in 1832. Clausewitz, who as a Prussian officer witnessed the Battle of Waterloo as well as much of the Napoleonic wars, is known for his warnings about the unreliability of information on the battlefield: 'Lastly, the great uncertainty of all data in War is a peculiar difficulty, because all action must, to a certain

extent, be planned in a mere twilight, which in addition not unfrequently – like the effect of fog or moonshine – gives to things exaggerated dimensions and an unnatural appearance.'[46] The Battle of Waterloo is renowned for its battlefield confusion: thanks to a heavy rainfall, Napoleon delayed his attack on the British armies, allowing the Prussians under General Blücher to attack Napoleon's flank in concert with Wellington. French reinforcements under the Marquis de Grouchy had been supposed to intercept the Prussians, but went astray and never engaged with the main battle. Some reports also allege that a physician had been treating Napoleon with leeches for a painful attack of haemorrhoids, but that on the night before the battle the leeches were lost, so the physician administered what turned out to be an overdose of laudanum that may have contributed to the fateful delay.[47] In *The Charterhouse of Parma* (1839), Stendhal's naïf hero Fabrizio longs to help Napoleon, but keeps missing the scene of the main action, not even recognizing the great man when he passes by.[48] Even to contemporaries, it was clear that the high stakes of Waterloo made its almost-accidental outcome a powerfully dramatic example of the irony and fragility of human aspirations.[49]

The pivot around which the plot of *Vanity Fair* turns is the shocking death of the preening George Osborne on the last day of the Battle of Waterloo. Though this novel frames this event in terms of the persistent ironization of human intention – a theme compatible with political economy – the irony of military action is obviously darker and more deadly than that of invisible hand social theory. On the one hand, military heroism is continually lampooned in *Vanity Fair*, from Rawdon's card-sharking to George's selfish dandyism – implying that not military but selfish, vain, commercial motives are really historically determinant. However, the finality of death that lurks around the edges of the drama – and occasionally takes centre stage, as in the case of the heiress Miss Crawley's paranoid hypochondria and George's death in battle – implies a different set of values that reflects poorly on the characters' frivolity. Thackeray's narrator deliberately refuses to speculate about what might lie beyond that horizon, just as he refuses to pry into Amelia's letters: Amelia's prayers too are depicted as 'secrets, and out of the domain of Vanity Fair, in which our story lies' (*VF* 262). Thackeray wrote in a letter that *Vanity Fair* depicts 'a set of people living without God in the world',[50] and the brutal description of George's death only underlines the inadequacy of worldly vocabulary to describe this limit.

Several narrative emphases magnify the sense of randomness and incongruity that leads up to George's death. It is true that George had been living a perfectly egotistical life, flirting madly with other women a mere month after his wedding, so the reader expects some kind of punishment. The famous Brussels ball the night before the battle – at which George impulsively proposes eloping with Becky – provides a theatrically moralized contrast between worldly pleasure and imminent doom, much as in Poe's 'The Masque of the Red Death'. However, his wife Amelia's excessive mourning at George's

departure leads us to expect that – ironically – he might survive. Then, while the battle is underway, Thackeray focuses on the comic foibles of the characters behind the scenes: Jos's cowardly flight, Becky's profiteering from the sale of her horses, the humiliation of the snobbish Bareacres family, and the false reports of the lazy Belgian soldier Isidor. Since the news from the front shifts so often – and since George does survive the first engagement – the reader comes to expect a comic resolution, in which George's true punishment might be to survive and continue his course of worldly falseness. However, at the end of Chapter 32, the tone of the narrative shifts rapidly: from the folly of Jos's flight to the suspenseful victory of Wellington over Napoleon to the contrasting stasis of one suddenly left behind: 'No more firing was heard at Brussels – the pursuit rolled miles away. The darkness came down on the field and city, and Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart' (*VF* 326). When the next chapter suddenly focuses once again on the scrounging toadyism of Miss Crawley's heirs, and Becky's triumph in Paris – highlighting by its conspicuous silence the months of Amelia's genuine despair – it is with a new sense of the darkness at the edges of the comic plot. The game in which ironic benefits flow to selfish agents continues, but the bluntness of that final sentence underlines the contrast between the interpretive fictions that gild social life and the inevitable disintegration of the individual humans that make it up.

Thackeray's tale of Waterloo depicts a classic 'fog of war' situation in which no one expects the final battle, no character has reliable information about the progress of the battle, and wives pray for their husbands' survival without knowing that they are already dead. But the 'fog' of bad information and faulty premises shapes the characters' actions elsewhere in the narrative as well, and the flimsiness of the characters' rationalizing responses to death and misfortune is continually satirized. The aged heiress Miss Crawley seems to be punished for her easy blasphemy and selfishness: while healthy, she trumpets her free-thinking superiority to conventional thinking, and happily exploits the greedy dependents (including Becky) who surround her. However, as she nears death she falls into a series of paranoid terrors, turning angrily against Becky and Rawdon Crawley and abandoning her *joie de vivre*. She is fortunate at the end to find a true friend in Lady Jane, but cannot avoid the oppressive tracts and hectoring of Mrs Bute and Lady Southdown, leaving her 'timid' and 'terrified' (*VF* 351). Mr Sedley's case is more tragic, since he is represented as a kind, frank soul in contrast with Miss Crawley's selfishness: after he loses his fortune, he gradually becomes obsessed with conspiracy theories about international politics and the bond markets. When Dobbin finds him in a shabby coffeehouse, he is 'crazed almost with misfortune and raving with senile anger' (*VF* 201):

> 'I ask you, Bill Dobbin, could any man ever have speculated upon the return of that Corsican scoundrel from Elba? ... I say that the escape of

> Boney from Elba was a damned imposition and plot, Sir, in which half the powers of Europe were concerned, to bring the funds down, and to ruin this country. ... Look here. Look at my papers. Look at what the funds were on the 1st of March – what the French fives were when I bought for the account. And what they're at now. There was collusion, Sir, or that villain never would have escaped. (*VF* 201)

Sedley's crimes are no greater, according to the narrator, than valuing 'money and fair repute as the chiefest good' (*VF* 201). Yet his recourse to conspiracy theory shows that though the rise and fall of the markets may be viewed from a historical distance as majestically abstract, for individual economic agents it can take on an ominous and Gothic character. Sedley's 'madness' is to intuit the other side of the invisible hand – not the predictable set of laws on which he has based his career, but the pitiless randomness with which some risks, but not others, are punished. He senses that hostile agents lurk behind his downfall, claiming he bought the 'French fives' in ignorance of major historical events – which, indeed, he did: the novel's editor notes that 'Napoleon's invasion of France on March 1, 1815, was not reflected in that day's financial news, on which John Sedley had relied' (*VF* 201 n. 9). The delay between the invasion and the news is perhaps an allusion to the Rothschilds' legendary knowledge of the outcome of Waterloo before all the other traders – a knowledge which in turn has led to quite a few conspiracy theories, though recently debunked by Niall Ferguson.[51] The basic flaw of Sedley's conspiracy theory is its egocentric bias – we readers do not think that Napoleon was liberated from Elba specifically to drive down the French fives. However, his feeling of being a pawn at the mercy of greater forces, rather than an honourable gambler aware of the rules of the game, is an accurate representation of the invisible hand metaphor's only *partial* truth about economic luck.

Thackeray depicts war and finance as similarly ironic and destructive realms, in which good fortune may fall on the undeserving but little of value is really created. The narrative is thus self-consciously archaic in two ways: first, it depicts an England in which wealth comes from inheritance and plunder (i.e. Jos Sedley's) rather than industry, and next its characters are trapped in what Christian Thorne describes as an essentially eighteenth-century view of fortune as a way of representing the mystifying operations of finance.[52] Thackeray's comic narrator is, like the typical Dickensian narrator, a playful homage to the omniscient narrator of eighteenth-century novels like *Tom Jones*. Both finance and warfare are represented as forms of gambling, implying that both riches and glory are somewhat randomly distributed. In Thackeray's narrative, characters are unable to accept this randomness and, from their dearth of accurate information, construct delusional but powerful systems of meaning. Sedley's paranoid attribution of secret meaning to Napoleon's return is clearly a pathetic individual response

to his bad luck and shameful bankruptcy. But the misattribution of glory to George Osborne feeds a more collective delusion – that is, nationalism, which may lead to more wars and death. Sedley's failure is considered, somewhat falsely, to be an individual error; as Rawdon comments glibly at the auction of the Sedleys' furniture, 'O stockbrokers – bankrupts – used to it, you know' (*VF* 177). But the monument erected to George by his father is just as delusional and self-serving. Old Osborne had fought with his son about his insistence on marrying the penniless Amelia, and feels almost as bitter about his son's failure to apologize as about his death itself. Yet he erects

> an elaborate monument upon the [church] wall, where Britannia was represented weeping over an urn, and a broken sword, and a couchant lion, indicated that the piece of sculpture had been erected in honour of a deceased warrior. ... Upon the memorial in question were emblazoned the well known and pompous Osborne arms [actually stolen from the more prominent Osbornes from Leeds]; and the inscription said, that the monument was 'sacred to the memory of George Osborne, Junior, Esq., late a Captain in his Majesty's —th regiment of foot, who fell on the 18th of June, 1815, aged 28 years, while fighting for his king and country in the glorious victory of Waterloo. *Dulce et decorum est pro patriâ mori.*' (*VF* 353–4)

The reader's knowledge of George's vanity, the deadly confusions of Waterloo, and Mr Osborne's fraudulent appropriation of the coat of arms combine to undermine the cant phrase that it is 'sweet and fitting to die for one's country' – not to mention the idea that death can be 'sacred' rather than simply tragic and pointless. Amelia's idolatrous worship of her dead husband performs a similar narrative function, yet in her case the futility of her worship is made even more painfully ironic by the fact of George's betrayal. There is no question that George actually did die in the service of his country – but he was not true to the spirit of his marriage vows, so Amelia's loving memory is not just excessively sentimental (like the church monument), but deeply false.

The contrast between these larger historical systems and the flawed perspectives of individuals might be said to correspond to the two perspectives that we have detected are unstably fused within invisible hand social theory – the bird's-eye view of the systemic theorist and the worm's-eye view of the hapless and selfish individual. Thackeray's self-conscious use and abuse of the bird's-eye position, along with his depiction of war and finance as destructive forces, lead us to sympathize more acutely with the worm's-eye point of view: that is, rather than celebrating the self-organizing qualities of emergent order, the novel forces us to empathize with the single ant in the ant-hill, or the victim of the hurricane caused by the butterfly. However,

while in Hayek the individual is privy to unique information about his particular situation, in Thackeray the individual characters are generally too vain and limited to provide useful information, much less compensate for the inadequacies of the systemic overview. Even the noblest character – Dobbin – is blind to George's flaws, believing that a marriage between George and Amelia might be successful. One contemporary reviewer complained that this focus on individual stories rather than overarching structures of meaning made the novel confusing to read: 'With few exceptions the personages are too like our every-day selves and neighbours to draw any distinct moral from. We cannot see our way clearly. ... [O]nce bring the individual with his life and circumstances closely before you and [the moral] is lost to the mental eye in the thousand pleas and witnesses, unseen and unheard before, which rise up to overshadow it.'[53] The novel's consistent tendency to undermine false structures of meaning might be seen as its fidelity to a realist or empiricist mission, as Geoffrey Tillotson argues, or it might be seen as an abdication of artistic responsibility to craft a meaningful plot, as James suggests. But it also serves as a sustained critique of the inadequacy of human systems of meaning in the face of unpredictable social complexity and the fragility of individual happiness.

The resulting mood of tragic equilibrium is what makes this an essentially bourgeois novel: *Vanity Fair* never transforms its condemnation of social duplicity into even the anger Dickens shows in his mockery of Podsnappery in *Our Mutual Friend*, much less into any idea about how to fix that structure of social duplicity. The abyss of eternity that makes George's death horrifying is balanced on the level of the narrative by the eternal survival of bourgeois society, false as it is. In political economy the ironies are mostly comic, leading to the *bouleversement* of social hierarchies: the lowly merchant brings more to society than the most dashing general, and the plans of mighty sovereigns are confounded. But in Thackeray the outcome of any relation between the great and the humble is a painful reinforcement of the status quo. Because the social area encompassed by Thackeray's novel is more limited than Dickens's – leaving out the true outcasts – the illusion of a thoroughly commodified society is more complete. Becky is thus the novel's closest approximation to a fusion of individual needs and world-historical forces; she is able to work her way up the social ladder because she can pay everyone in the coin of subtle flattery, and since all characters but Dobbin are driven by ravenous egotism, her triumph is almost total.

But unlike capitalism, Becky is a mortal living under the shadow of death, making her ambition as flawed and shallow as it is exemplary. There is a limit to her ability to succeed and grow wealthy by leaving others behind. And this novel must end too: even as it absorbs from political economy the vision of a worldly world without end, in which society is comically permeable to effects as trivial as the ambition of a woman or a bowl of rack punch, its irony is complicated by the fact that it must conclude at some

point – a horizon which is unimaginable within the charmed circle of capitalist society. For the novel to come to an end, the narrator must contrive to undo the effects of the bowl of rack punch, so we are treated to the spectacle of Becky winning and possibly killing Jos. Thus the novel suggests that given the passage of enough time, there can be a calculable end to the events that ripple out from the bowl of rack punch – and moreover, that the end of the plot is the restoration of an equilibrium that was destroyed by Jos's early failure to propose to Becky. But at another level the novel is perfectly aware of the linearity of its moral equation as it plays out over time: for though the effects of accidents cannot be said to reach a final limit, individual lives must do so. As Geoffrey Tillotson suggests, there is a driving force in Thackerayan narrative that does not want to end at all, and implies that all his other novels also exist in the same social world – a world that might, in an ideally long and perfect novel, approach the richness of the world outside the novel while still being able, in a way that social science is not, to trace all the links between causes and effects. From the bird's-eye view that imaginary world is infinite and sublimely beautiful, though it might induce a cosmic melancholy. However Thackeray never forgets that from the worm's-eye view, the pattern can seem obscure and Gothic, imperfectly intuited through the fog of ignorance and delusion. The armies roll away into the night, but the damaged individual lies forgotten on the battlefield. The characters who do best in *Vanity Fair* are the ones who remember the fact of death, and are not entirely dazzled by the world of infinite cause and effect.

5
Inappropriate Sympathies in Gaskell and Eliot

In previous chapters, this book has suggested that capitalism is a space structured by moral irony, and that in capitalist society individual actions are not supposed to be judged on the basis of their immediate effects or the possibly evil intentions of the agent, but rather within a field that encompasses those actions' many possible unintended consequences. The realist novels analysed here proceed from the premise (implied in Smith's figure of the invisible hand) that a true understanding of moral action in this kind of social space requires a composite vision that somehow takes into account both the individual and an overview of the whole social system, and work out the implications of this vision by playing with different narrative forms. The discussion of these novels in Part II began with the question of genre, showing how Austen and Dickens attempt to encompass both fields of vision by toggling between the Gothic and realism (in *Northanger Abbey*) or between omniscient and self-consciously innocent narrators (in *Bleak House*). The next chapter proposed that one characteristic result of viewing individual tragedies as trivial from the point of view of the whole system is a mood of tortured irony, both in the somewhat strained triumphalism of Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy* and in Dickens's bitter rebellion against it in *Hard Times*. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* offers a more ludic kind of tortured irony in its combination of an abstract compassion with consistent mockery of both individual delusion and narratorial authority.

The novels by Gaskell and Eliot discussed in this final chapter are chosen, like the others, not for their explicit foregrounding of industrial politics, though Gaskell's novels *Mary Barton* and *North and South* are frequently classed with *Hard Times* as 'industrial' or 'social problem' novels. Rather what interests me here is their management of this complex moral space by means not of an abstract compassion, as in Thackeray, or an angry denunciation as occasionally in Dickens, but by their explicit appeals for sympathy, and perhaps even empathy, from the reader him or herself for certain characters and situations. These appeals would fall into the modernist category of 'telling' as opposed to 'showing', and so as with Thackeray's

slippery narrator, they have sometimes been criticized as frame-breaking and internally inconsistent. After all, if the author wants to construct a reader's sympathy for a particular character like Mary Barton or Maggie Tulliver, an open appeal for sympathy might be read as an admission of writerly failure, of clumsy and desperate emphasis rather than subtle and sophisticated indirection. George Eliot's work, in particular, has sometimes been read by critics as feminized by embarrassing partisanship for one or another character, such as the idealized male figures of Adam Bede and Daniel Deronda. Yet the work of sympathy could be gendered masculine as well as feminine, as Gaskell asserts in *North and South* through Margaret Hale's insistence that John Thornton see his masculinity as chivalric and not merely tyrannical. The note of melodramatic sympathy is of course not alien to the male writer Dickens either – nor is it any less embarrassing in the cases of, say, Oliver Twist, Rose Maylie, or the pathetic Jo. In addition to being gendered in these and other ways, the social sympathy enjoined upon readers by narrators is structured around the perceived categories of class and nationhood – all these narrators (with the occasional exception of Thackeray's) address their readers as English citizens of at least middle-class status, who can thus be located roughly within a certain geographic and social space. Though the narrators describe their readers as different – older or richer or more historically advanced – from the characters, the narrators also work hard to help the reader identify with the characters on the basis of some shared emotional and national characteristics, and assume the reader cares on some level about the spiritual fate of the British nation.

I suggest that the inconsistent pulsations of sympathy in the narrative voice of these writers can be read as a way of managing the oscillations between the two viewpoints of complex capitalist social space (the worm's-eye view and the bird's-eye view) that other writers work through by playing more obviously with conventions of first-person and omniscient narration. As ways of calling attention to the distance between reader and character, they point to the continual work of gauging distance from self that falls to subjects in complex societies who are supposed both to look out for their own interests and to be aware of the system (the city, the nation, the economy) as a whole. These moments of sympathy often alternate with, or are presented in tandem with, moments in which the narrator challenges readers by presuming them to be having one kind of emotional response, when they should really be having another. The simplest form of narratorial appeal is the direct appeal for sympathy for a particular character. But often even these direct appeals are couched in terms that define the reader as different somehow from the character – as in *Mary Barton*, in which the readers are presumed to be of a different social class from the working-class Mary, and hence made somewhat more aware of the limitations of their own class positions. An even more complicated appeal is one that mocks the reader as excessively distanced from characters in books that they are reading, and so

uses the narratorial irony to distance readers from their own feelings of distance – as happens in *Vanity Fair* as well as *The Mill on the Floss*. The distance separating the readers from the characters might be one of class, but it could also be one of aesthetic sophistication or simply the difference between an adult knowledge and childish ignorance.[1]

I will be focusing here specifically on novels in which the narrator seems to have some kind of intense emotional response to the protagonist, finding her an object of distancing pity as well as powerful identification. In *Mary Barton*, Gaskell frames the task of narration as one of maternal recuperation for the nation's lost children, creating powerful scenes in which children are neglected or cared for while simultaneously distancing herself from the working-class characters. A similar systole and diastole mark Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, in which feminist and quasi-autobiographical sympathies for the passionate Maggie Tulliver are constantly parried by the narrator's questioning of the reader's identifications. In Gaskell's industrial novels these mediations between self and collective are explicitly framed as a problem in political economy whose solution might be visible if the characters (and readers) renounced their exclusive self-interest and saw their problems from an interpersonal or national level. The nation is a horizon in Eliot's work too, but the induction of locational self-consciousness in the reader also takes place on a somewhat more abstract and universalizing level. Eliot's novels are marked by an insistent awareness that the web of sympathy might be extended infinitely outwards through space and time, and yet the narrative shape must be brought back within the limitations of the human psyche to be comprehensible.[2] The disorienting shifts in narrative perspective, from greedy interest to sage-like indifference, have the effect of enacting within the novel the incompatibility between personal and collective viewpoints – though they generally return to a sympathetic but humorous voice that represents acceptance of that necessary incompatibility.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, Thackeray's first novel, the 1839–40 *Catherine*, was written as an attack on Dickens's misuse of narratorial sympathy in *Oliver Twist*:

> The power of the writer is so amazing, that the reader at once becomes his captive, and must follow him whithersoever he leads; and to what are we led? Breathless to watch all the crimes of Fagin; tenderly to deplore the errors of Nancy ... The pathos of the workhouse scenes in *Oliver Twist*, of the Fleet Prison descriptions in *Pickwick*, *is* genuine and pure ... but in the name of common sense, let us not expend our sympathies on cutthroats, and other such prodigies of evil!

Thackeray wrote *Catherine* as a satire of the Newgate novel, intending his heroine (based on a historical figure who cut off her husband's head) to be downright repulsive, claiming that 'The public was, in our notion, dosed

and poisoned by the prevailing style of literary practice, and it was necessary to administer some medicine that would produce a wholesome nausea.' However, in the final pages of his serialized novel, he claimed the newspapers had called it 'one of the dullest, most vulgar and immoral works extant', and refused to allow the novel to be reprinted in his lifetime.[3] The elaborate distancing mechanisms of the narrative voice in *Vanity Fair* may perhaps be seen as a further (and somewhat more successful) attempt to handle morally questionable material in a more sophisticated manner than Dickens. Dickens, meanwhile, was stung by his friend Thackeray's critiques, and responded in the 1841 Preface to *Oliver Twist* that 'I have yet to learn that a lesson of the purest good may not be drawn from the vilest evil,' concluding rather unpersuasively that the novel was his attempt 'to dim the false glitter surrounding something which really did exist, by showing it in its unattractive and repulsive truth'.[4] Accused of being too close to his characters, Dickens replies with the triple defence that 1) he assumes vice is sufficiently repulsive in itself, 2) he did have the moral aim of representing vice as unattractive, and 3) representing the truth is worthwhile whether it is vicious or virtuous. By contrast Gaskell and Eliot both respond to this moral problem not by distancing themselves from their flawed characters, but by drawing closer. Though fewer of their characters are criminals, when Gaskell does represent a prostitute and murderer in *Mary Barton* the reader is exhorted to forgive them their trespasses. Neither writer makes Thackeray's zero-sum assumption that 'expending' sympathy on one character makes less sympathy available for the virtuous; instead they assume that more sympathy is needed at every level of British society.

With Gaskell and Eliot, it might be said that we come to the end of the distinctive mood of tortured irony that I have noted in some earlier fiction about political economy and social change. Though their work is not totally devoid of humour, these writers are much less likely than Dickens, Austen, or Thackeray to resort to comedy to reconcile conflicting points of view, and less insistent than Martineau that the state of affairs described in their fiction is both real and morally right. Beginning in the later nineteenth century, narrators cease to apologize for the capitalists represented in their fiction, and increasingly stage their stories with a self-conscious moral irony that registers the marginal status of the literary project itself within capitalist society. In E. M. Forster's 1910 *Howards End*, for example, or David Lodge's parodic revision of *North and South* in his 1988 novel *Nice Work*, the narrators clearly identify with one of the two 'sides' in the culture war: Forster's narrator with the cultured and sensitive Schlegels over the crudely businesslike Wilcoxes, and Lodge's with Robyn Penrose, the harried professor of British industrial novels, over Victor Wilcox the engineering manager (whose name is no coincidence). At the same time, the narrators of those works assume the readers will identify with the more literate protagonists, and make limited and fairly self-conscious gestures at the ideal

of sympathizing with all the characters' points of view. Though Forster marries off his heroine Margaret Schlegel to the boyishly charming Henry Wilcox, implying that her quest to save Henry's soul is noble, the narrator also damns Wilcox explicitly for his failure to make similar connections. Lodge's professor heroine is represented as comically class-bound, but would also clearly recognize the postmodern genre of novel she is placed in, bringing her inevitably closer to the reader than the likable but culturally obtuse Wilcox. While it is true that the sympathies of Gaskell's narrator in *North and South* are clearly focalized around the culturally privileged Margaret, Margaret's work of rapprochement with her capitalist lover is described with more earnest idealism than in Forster or Lodge, and she is also described as wearying of both the ivory-tower nostrums of her Oxford godfather Mr Bell and the languid niceties of London society.

Though Gaskell and Eliot are acutely aware of the importance of managing the distance between narrator and characters as a way of orchestrating the reader's response to the novel, they do not habitually resort to comedy to do so. Forster's narrator by comparison is hilariously critical of the novel's characters, who are themselves given to witty *aperçus*, and Lodge's novel is comic on many different levels (ironic narrator, unsubtle intertextual references, fallible and foolish characters, stagily rushed happy ending). Gaskell's humour is limited to interminable stories related by working-class characters – a humour often lost on the modern reader – and though Gaskell's plots can conform rather mechanically to the convention of the happy ending, the narrator's habitual mode is one of intense and urgent feeling rather than overdetermined light-heartedness. The humour in Eliot's novels is generally limited to somewhat wintry narratorial observations that might lead just as plausibly to tragedy as to comedy. As we will see below, in a crucial passage in the generally tragic *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot's narrator plays with the reader's expectations of irony in order to reinforce the difficult necessity of earnestness (although the effect is itself rather sprightly). I suggest that what we see in Gaskell and Eliot, as opposed to the more comic writers, is the creation of an openly sympathetic narrative voice that is supposed not just to rouse the reader to political action, but compensate for the indifference or cruelty of the economic sphere by enjoining the reader to feel nurturing care for the characters.

Gaskell and Eliot each use melodrama in somewhat self-conscious ways to dramatize the difference between the way events look from a distance and the way they feel to those directly involved. In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen uses the Gothic fantasies of Catherine Morland to similar effect, contrasting her imaginative vulnerability with Henry Tilney's confident and premature assertions about England's ordinariness. In the novels discussed here, melodrama feels like a rhythm of emotional dilation and contraction, one in which the characters can be painfully trapped by narrowness, but in which excessive irony or distance is also figured as an inadequate response.

John Barton in *Mary Barton* suffers from a fatally contracted horizon after an extended period of trauma, and in *Mill on the Floss* Tom Tulliver and the residents of St Ogg's are criticized for narrowness, while Maggie struggles valiantly to broaden her horizons. Yet the novels also encourage us to share their characters' limited perspectives, either by apologizing for their bad choices, or by tears and pathos, or by means of sensational scenes like Mary's dramatic sea-chase, or even by rapping the reader's knuckles for presumed irony as Eliot does. The effect is of a constant emotional restlessness and second-guessing, since no matter what the characters feel, their responses are not quite adequate. If they take a businesslike approach to closing their factories, then they should keep the starving in mind – but the starving should also feel for the rich. If they have become sophisticated urbanites, they should feel nostalgia and compassion for the rural scene of yesteryear – but those trapped in that narrow past are right to strive for escape. The reader is in much the same oscillating position with regard to the stories, confronted alternately with intensely personal scenes and corrective instructions from the narrators, who sometimes push readers away from characters and sometimes chide them for their distance.

Even though the geographic horizon of these novels is defiantly British, it might be possible to read their emotional oscillation as one response to the ambiguous status of national borders within the imaginary space of capitalism. Though these novels try to reconcile their struggling classes by appealing to the ideal of national unity, Britain was already enmeshed in a web of globalized or imperial capital relations thanks to its industrial dominance. It is true that the novels predicate the possibility of social harmony on a fairly limited national stage, so that *Mary Barton* can suggest that economic contradictions in Britain are reconcilable through a larger-souled nationalism, but does not address the fact that the cotton that drives the mills of Manchester was picked by slaves in the American South. But I think the construction of that larger-souled nationalism is dependent in these novels on a series of perspectival shifts that are inherited through political economy from Smith's metaphor of the invisible hand. So while one could argue that actual economic dependencies between countries are what unsettle this vision of national self-sufficiency, it is also possible to argue that the perspectival shifts that construct the realist novel's political solutions are inherited from within the imagination of capitalism itself, with its very fraught relation to national borders.

'The view from the place where you stand': sympathy for strangers in *Mary Barton*

Perhaps the most striking difference between Gaskell's two industrial novels *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1855) is the change in narratorial voice between the two novels, and its clear relation to the heroines' class

status. In *Mary Barton*, an intrusive and emotional middle-class voice mediates for presumably middle-class readers the melodramatic but also fairly radical tale of the brave working-class heroine Mary, whereas in *North and South* the narrator withdraws and lets the articulate middle-class Margaret Hale speak for herself. I will be focusing here mostly on *Mary Barton*, with its many narratorial interventions that both empathize with the characters and defend them from the reader's presumed censoriousness. These moments occasionally occur in *North and South* as well – just often enough to distinguish the narrative style from that of *Pride and Prejudice*, a novel it may be said to be rewriting. In *Mary Barton*, the narrator argues frequently with the reader's presumed responses, whereas in *North and South* the heroine Margaret Hale takes on the burden of criticizing industry herself, thus embodying that critique in a fallible and limited though sympathetic point of view. Margaret Hale provides a dramatic contrast with Dickens's heroines, in that she is not only more able to intervene in industrial strife than the narrator (even Esther Summerson can do this), but just as smart as the narrator about the problem of England's 'two nations'.

The importance of sympathy in *Mary Barton* has been often noted, but less frequently remarked upon is the novel's elaborate staging of the political change that can take place through imaginative modelling of others' points of view. Even more than in the Dickens novels with pathetic protagonists (such as *Oliver Twist* or *Little Dorrit*), sympathy is here both the theme and the methodology – enjoined didactically by the narrator, but also modelled in multiple scenes between members of the working class who are both family and strangers to each other, as well as (ideally) induced in the reader by the emotional story with its moving representation of repeated traumatic loss. The melodrama of the plot (the mill fire, the murder, the love triangle, the framed lover, the breathless last-minute chase to find that lover's alibi) has traditionally been viewed with scorn by political critics such as Raymond Williams or Macdonald Daly, who see it as a strained and sentimental bourgeois compromise of the John Barton plot – which was in fact Gaskell's original focus. Daly, for instance, sees the book as 'reactionary' and 'idealist', fatally compromised by Gaskell's social position as wife of a leading Unitarian minister in Manchester, accusing it of 'express[ing] condolence without admitting responsibility', and adding that 'I share most critics' sense of the inadequacy and tiresomeness of the murder plot and the subsequent legal melodrama.'[5] In support of this argument, critics point to the narrator's occasionally condescending references to the workers' 'childlike improvidence', and the sensational depiction of the strikers' decision to murder Harry Carson (*MB* 24).

However, feminist critics generally take a more forgiving tack, valuing Gaskell's attention to domestic detail and psychic interiority. In the 'Introduction' to the *Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*, for instance, Jill Matus calls for a 'revaluation of the critical commonplace that Gaskell is

melodramatic and sentimental in depicting emotion, [arguing] further that the way Gaskell represents consciousness and its alterations under turbulent social and political conditions is not an inward turn away from social representation, but an insistence on the interrelationships between inner and outer worlds'.[6] I too believe the melodramatic plot is doing real work here: it is not a mere impediment to the novel's thwarted radicalism, but integral to its suggestion that fiction (and not just logic) can help overcome the barriers of space, political ideology, and class that divide the English nation. This perennial political assumption – that fiction can do good in the world by extending the reader's sympathy to the oppressed – may date back at least as far as Wordsworth's 'Michael', but has rarely been so programmatically defended as in this novel. To the reader agitating for regime change, this aspiration may not seem adequately transformative, but several generations of micropolitical analysis of the fantasies of civil society (whether the focus is on gender, domesticity, nationalism, or colonial relations) permit us to read it as something more freighted than simple 'idealism'.

One of the novel's themes is the literal ignorance that divides the classes from each other; but the narrator also warns about the difficulty in distinguishing between simple ignorance and actual hard-heartedness, or the desire *not* to know the sufferings of the other classes. The attempt to overcome this particular hard-hearted variant of blindness shapes the narrator's hortatory voice, as well as being demonstrated at various moments of the plot, such as the strike and the final dialogue between the worker Job Legh and the bereaved Mr Carson. While *Mary Barton* is narrated from a third-person omniscient point of view, the novel also works diligently to undermine the value of a mere uncaring overview of the systemic whole. So the narrator takes up the usual work of negotiating between bird's-eye and worm's-eye points of view, but also criticizes the bird's-eye view of the businessman (or of the reader) as superficial and somewhat cruel, proselytizing for the reader to feel with, sorrow for, and forgive individual characters instead. Hence the narrator has a somewhat standoffish relation to her own omniscience. Several times the narrator renounces knowledge of larger systems in favour of specific instances, as in the phrase from the Preface (mentioned above in Chapter 2) 'I know nothing of Political Economy, or the theories of trade [but] I have tried to write truthfully' (*MB* 4), or her quick dismissal of her survey of the reasons for the collapse of demand for Manchester textiles: 'so much for generalities. Let us now return to individuals' (*MB* 173). Where Thackeray's narrator, for instance, aims at a somewhat distanced, cosmopolitan understanding of difference, this narrator's sympathy is not cosmopolitan but clearly embodied in space and time, rooted in intense shared feeling rather than broad tolerance.

One might say that instead of being cosmopolitan, the narrator's voice aspires to the universal Christian ideal of agape, a selfless love for all of humanity.[7] Yet agape is not really possible for humans: it is based on a divine

perspective that sees all humans, even those closest to one, as equally valuable. The narrator of *Mary Barton*, by contrast, enjoins her readers to extend the intense affections of family to strangers. Evidence that Gaskell had been writing stories since the 1830s partly undercuts the Preface's assertion that the book was conceived solely as therapy for the death of the author's son (the infant Willie, who died of scarlet fever in 1845).[8] Yet the story pulsates with maternal urgency, raised to its highest pitch in the novel's repeated death-scenes. Children of every class die in this novel, from the little Wilson twins to the rake Harry Carson – whose suffering father is a much more powerful character than the careless son, just as Mrs Wilson is more present to the reader than the 'helpless, gentle, silly' Wilson twins (*MB* 76). The plot's violence is almost entirely motivated by the feelings of parents, from John Barton's desire to revenge himself on the rich after the starvation of his son Tom, to Mr Carson's desire to hang Jem whether or not he is innocent of the murder. While making it clear that all parents care about their children, serving the novel's argument that the classes have shared interests, the novel also depicts many more deaths among the working class than among the rich, implying not only that the poor are oppressed by the negligence of the rich, but that they are specially deserving of the reader's sympathy. Gaskell's work has sometimes been seen as embodying a 'maternalist' view of the class struggle, privileging unconditional and passionate nurture over benign control.[9] The maternal standpoint resembles Christian agape in its selflessness, but is driven by a particularly embodied urgency that links one adult to one child. So the emotional sharing enjoined and modelled by the novel is both universal and particular: it approaches every stranger from the imagined standpoint of that character's mother.

If agape is difficult for humans, its secular equivalent of imagining that you are everybody's mother seems equally impossible. Yet, with its continual sympathetic revision of point of view and prioritization of feeling over impersonal surveying, this maternalism does have a significant impact on one's imagination of economic systems. When the narrator points out that Carson was not bankrupted by the fire in his mill but instead found it an 'excellent opportunity' to refit the factory, there is a note of irony in the adoption of a typical self-cultivating business vocabulary, but the narrator is also admitting there is a point of view that the workers do not understand (*MB* 57). The narrative voice occasionally seems condescending to the workers, as in the awkward paragraph that seems to be rushing to exonerate the mill-owners for the starvation of little Tom Barton: 'I know that this is not really the case; and I know what is the truth in such matters: but what I wish to impress is what the workman feels and thinks' (*MB* 24). However, the workers' experience of the mill closure is actually presented as not merely more emotionally powerful to *them*, but more compelling to the reader. While Carson spends a few more hours per day in 'pleasant ... loung[ing]', the narrator emphasizes that 'There is another side to the

picture' (*MB* 58). Poor children cry and are stilled with opium, the bitter wind blows, and families like the Davenports fall prey to the fever in their fetid basement rooms. The scene in which Job Legh travels to the Carsons' house to beg for hospital admission for the dying Mr Davenport is a scene of multiple failures to care, beginning even with the servants who fail to offer Job a meal: 'they were like the rest of us, and, not feeling hunger themselves, forgot it was possible another might' (*MB* 67). The scene of domestic felicity in the Carsons' drawing room would not be out of place in a more romantic novel, but its trivial pleasantries and careless luxuries, the sisters sleeping off the late ball and Amy's demand for a pretty rose, are painfully jarring when contrasted with the preceding scene of filthy pestilence and loss. The epigraph to this chapter begins 'How little can the rich man know / Of what the poor man feels' (*MB* 57), stressing that Carson's blindness to his workers' sufferings is more significant than the workers' comparative ignorance of his economic situation.

There are several other scenes in *Mary Barton* in which the middle-class inability to feel for the poor is depicted as something more toxic than mere ignorance. When the Chartists journey to London, they display a mildly comic ignorance of Parliamentary procedure and a provincial wonder at the big city where the inhabitants 'can't say their a's and i's properly' (*MB* 101). However, the narrator's description of the Chartists' political idealism is more painfully ironic: 'the starving multitudes had heard, that the very existence of their distress had been denied in Parliament; and though they felt this strange and inexplicable, yet the idea that their misery had still to be revealed in all its depths, and that then some remedy would be found, soothed their aching hearts, and kept down their rising fury' (*MB* 86). Of course, it turns out that Parliament is perfectly aware of their suffering but merely chooses not to listen – a coldness that crushes John Barton's spirit and leads him ultimately to violence. The narrator further implies that the reader who is not moved by the novel's scenes of suffering is implicated in Parliament's cruelty: 'I think again that surely, in a Christian land, [the workers' distress] was not known even as feebly as words could tell it, or the more happy and fortunate would have thronged with their sympathy and their aid' – a 'thronging' embarrassingly absent from the story (*MB* 85). At the end of the novel, when Job Legh and Jem Wilson are summoned to explain to Mr Carson why John Barton killed Harry, Job reiterates the damage done by the capitalists' coldness. Mr Carson makes the true but inadequate point that he cannot control the larger economic system: 'We cannot regulate the demand for labour. No man or set of men can do it. It depends on events which God alone can control' (*MB* 384). Carson has clearly internalized a sacral version of the invisible hand metaphor, deferring responsibility for his economic choices to an unknowable system run by 'God' – and crucially, the narrative does not really disagree with this, to the irritation of later politically minded critics. But the book does criticize at least some of the

helplessness and passivity induced in the populace by belief in an uncontrollable economic system, in the voice of Job Legh, who plaintively argues that 'If we saw the masters try for our sakes to find a remedy, – even if they were long about it, – even if they could find no help, and at the end of it all could only say, "Poor fellows, our hearts are sore for ye; we've done all we could, and can't find a cure," – we'd bear up like men through bad times' (*MB* 386). While the novel punts on the question of working-class political agency, it also mounts a strong critique of the distancing vision of invisible hand social theory.

Another element of the novel's relative disdain for the bird's-eye point of view comes in its partisan defence of the characters' interiority and moral choices. In part, this takes the form of a polemical defence of realism of a kind familiar from Martineau's *For Each and For All*. As John Barton walks on an errand of mercy through a street of lighted shops, he grows angry with the prosperous burghers: 'He thought they all looked joyous, and he was angry with them. But he could not, you cannot, read the lot of those who daily pass you by in the street. How do you know the wild romances of their lives; the trials, the temptations they are even now enduring, resisting, sinking under?' (*MB* 63). The narrator begins by chiding the character for a failure of imaginative sympathy, but quickly likens his blindness to the reader's, implying that realist fiction can at least enlighten us to the possibility of our own ignorance. As is habitual in Dickens, the narrator also likens the compassion of the omniscient voice to the divine point of view: 'The vices of the poor sometimes astound us *here* [italics in original]; but when the secrets of all hearts shall be made known, their virtues will astound us in far greater degree. Of this I am certain' (*MB* 58). The vices of others are apparently more visible than their virtues, so the wise judge of others will assume he should be kinder than a strict objectivity would deem warranted. Hence when John Barton turns to opium to dull his pain, the narrator intervenes to exonerate him: 'But, before you blame too harshly this use, or rather abuse, try a hopeless life, with daily cravings of the body for food' (*MB* 169).

Similarly, the narrator self-consciously dials down her unflattering depiction of Mary's flirtation with Harry, reminding the reader of Mary's youth and motherlessness. In a particularly monitory moment, the narrator suggests that the blind girl Margaret is not only worthy of our pity, but is herself judging Mary too harshly because she has never known Mary's temptation: 'Gentle, reserved, and prudent herself, never exposed to the trial of being admired for her personal appearance ... Margaret had no sympathy with the temptations to which loveliness, vanity, ambition, or the desire of being admired, exposes so many; no sympathy with flirting girls, in short. Then, she had no idea of the strength of the conflict between will and principle in some who were differently constituted from herself' (*MB* 249). This passage is all the more remarkable when compared

with the moments in, say, *Adam Bede* or *Middlemarch* in which too-pretty girls are censured by Eliot's narrator. Here, it is precisely Mary's beauty that makes her worthy of our sympathy, since it exposes her to extra temptations. Moreover, her vanity and ambition are not merely flaws but aspects of her individual character that, we are invited to understand, make her liable to damaging internal conflict. Mary's struggle excites further sympathy because she manages to vanquish her vanity, unlike her Aunt Esther, who had run off with a soldier and declined into a consumptive streetwalker. Esther is perhaps the character most harshly treated by the novel, kept by various misunderstandings from the compassion of her relations and eventually dying a 'poor crushed Butterfly' (*MB* 392). Yet since her foray into prostitution was motivated by maternal love after her daughter fell ill, Esther also belongs to the larger category of working-class characters (like John Barton) who care more about being parents than is perhaps good for them – and hence are drawn closer to the grieving narrator.

Despite their flaws, the novel's working-class characters are frequently depicted as models of sympathy and caring, especially in contrast with middle-class individualists or uncaring social institutions. When Mr Davenport lies dying, John Barton pawns his remaining belongings to pay for the family's food, though he was not a particular friend of Davenport's. The narrator moralizes by comparing his service to the parable of the 'widow's mite': 'though "silver and gold he had none", he gave heart-service and love-works of far more value' (*MB* 61). The contrast with the Carsons' frivolous and ungenerous household is so obvious as to be heavy-handed. A further contrast with the feasting rich is provided by Barton's report of the Chartist delegates, who are given meat in London but refuse to eat: 'Th' food stuck in their throats when they thought o' them at home, wives and little ones, as had, maybe at that very time, nought to eat' (*MB* 100). Mary and Margaret frequently perform important emotional work simply by listening to the woes of others with instinctive tact. After Barton returns to Manchester crushed by Parliament's indifference, his daughter models better listening behaviour: when she sees her father drenched, she brings him dry clothes, and searches for food, 'talking all the while as gaily as she could', and then sits in silence, holding his hand, occasionally mimicking his sighs while waiting for him to speak. 'In this she was wise', the narrator opines, 'for when we are heavy-laden in our hearts it falls in better with our humour to reveal our case in our own way, and our own time' (*MB* 98). If Parliament acted with Mary's emotional skill, it would first try to relieve the workers' physical suffering, and then respectfully let them speak for themselves. Even the rough boatmen of Liverpool act with more generosity than Parliament, taking in Mary after she loses the address of her destination and collapses with exhaustion, and then nursing her during the brain-fever she suffers after Jem's trial.

While the novel models good behaviour for the reader's benefit, it also stages moments in which characters are morally improved by observing the acts of others. In a crucial scene of emulation, Mr Carson's heart is healed of its desire for vengeance by observing the Christ-like behaviour of children in the street. A little girl is knocked over by a rude errand-boy and runs sobbing to her nurse, who then seizes the boy and threatens him with the police. When the girl sees the boy's fear, though, she intervenes with her nurse: '"He did not mean to do it. *He did not know what he was doing* [italics in original], did you, little boy?"... And she put up her little mouth to be kissed by her injurer, just as she had been taught to do at home to "make peace"' (*MB* 368–9). After watching this scene, Mr Carson has a significantly obtuse response: '"I did not know what I was doing."... He had some association with those words; he had heard, or read of that plea somewhere before. Where was it?' (*MB* 369). Finally the penny drops and he goes home to read the Gospel scene of Christ forgiving his persecutors, after which Carson seeks reconciliation with the workers and in small ways tries to alleviate their lot.

By analogy, this book suggests that it be read as an industrial-age supplement to the New Testament, inviting us to 'take up and read' like the child who inspires the conversion of St Augustine.[10] Macdonald Daly notes that the novel aims for a similar kind of 'conversion' in its readers, though he admits frustration at the way the novel points to itself as the solution to Manchester's problems. However, since it is a realist novel, *Mary Barton* lacks a truly exemplary figure like Jesus, instead depicting the lives of struggling humans who sometimes act with Christian charity, but are just as frequently held back by their own foolishness or by tragic accidents like Margaret's blindness. Daly suggests that the novel can be read as a parable of progress from Old Testament revenge killings to New Testament forgiveness.[11] Yet where the Gospels are paradoxical and unworldly, this novel is more focused on the 'science of consequences' (*MB* 169) that appertains to earthly causality. While the novel aims for a 'conversion' mostly by overwhelming the reader's feelings – by placing the characters in increasingly traumatic situations, framing them with a sorrowing and forgiving narrative voice, and depicting characters sympathetically mimicking others' good behaviour – it does also contain an empirical argument about the way the world works. *North and South* of course takes this discussion much further, staging multiple dialogues about industrial relations between the 'southern' minister's daughter Margaret Hale and the 'northern' capitalist John Thornton, who are more or less evenly matched intellectually. In this novel, the scenes of cross-class dialogue are asymmetrical and frequently fail, leading to disaster. Typical is the catastrophic result of the satirical little cartoon of the starving workers drawn by Harry Carson during strike negotiations: though he tosses it negligently in the grate, an observant worker retrieves it and is horrified by Harry's lack of respect. Like the bowl of rack punch

in *Vanity Fair*, this cartoon becomes the trivial cause of disproportionately violent results when a cabal of strikers decides to kill Harry in revenge.

It is in this context that we should read the lurid passage in which the narrator compares the workers to Frankenstein (meaning, his monster):

> The actions of the uneducated seem to be typified in those of Frankenstein, that monster of many human qualities, ungifted with a soul, a knowledge of the difference between good and evil.
>
> The people rise up to life; they irritate us, they terrify us, and we become their enemies. Then in the sorrowful moment of our triumphant power, their eyes gaze on us with mute reproach. Why have we made them what they are; a powerful monster, yet without the inner means for peace and happiness? (*MB* 170)

Though the narrator startlingly accuses the working class of lacking a soul, members of several different groups are being criticized here. On the one hand, it clearly falls to members of the reader's class to teach the poor the aforementioned 'science of consequences', defined on a rather basic level as how to avoid drug use. Even love, the narrator states, is not enough to give the workers a proper judgment of how to maximize their scanty resources. However, members of the educated classes are also being lectured about consequences here. Carson sees no connection between the death of little Tom Barton, Parliamentary intransigence, and the chilly spring that depresses demand for summer clothing; but all these contribute concretely to the death of his son, leaving him with a desperate and darkened mind. His economic model of social causality is clearly inadequate to describe this complex chain of events; he is forced to turn for support to the Gospels, but the actual events can only be described with precision in the imaginative realm of fiction.

Chapter 37 has a somewhat extraneous relation to the rest of *Mary Barton*, since Gaskell had to insert it at the last moment after the publisher requested a lengthier manuscript. Consisting mostly of a scene in which Job Legh tries to explain John Barton's murderous actions to a grieving Mr Carson, the chapter is rather stagey and heavy-handed. Yet the very heavy-handedness of the confrontation makes evident the novel's rhetorical and political aspirations. Job Legh's multiple admissions of his ignorance of political economy in Chapter 37 echo the author's own claim to 'know nothing of Political Economy' (*MB* 4) in the Preface, which was inserted into the text at the same time.[12] This dialogue between the humble, broken testimonials of working-class characters Job Legh and Jem Wilson on one side and the peremptory and aggrieved Mr Carson on the other clearly represents an imaginary dialogue between the novel's own tentative, emotional address to the middle-class reader and a resistant reader inclined to blame individual members of the working class for their lack of responsibility.

Job Legh serves as a particularly useful narratorial stand-in because of the empiricist outlook he has presumably absorbed from his amateur natural history studies. Rather than being cold and distanced, his empiricism is placed in the service of an emotional appeal, in which the evidence of the eyes leads to a feeling in the heart. He thus relies on a trope of vision that the narrator has also used in defence of her realist method, disavowing the artifice of systemic knowledge in order to make a political point based on the immediacy of sympathy, and asserting the necessity of supplementing general laws with some kind of urgent and disproportionate care for the individual. In response to Carson's unsympathetic questioning, Legh avers, 'I'm not given to Political Economy, ... I'm wanting in learning, I'm aware; but I can use my eyes. I never see the masters getting thin and haggard for want of food ... If we saw the masters try for our sakes to find a remedy, ... we'd bear up like men through bad times' (*MB* 384–6). In resistance to Carson's economic logic, Legh also appeals to the alternate but obviously more powerful moral authority of the Bible: 'Thoughts come into my head that I'm sure are as true as Gospel, though maybe they don't follow each other like the Q.E.D. of a Proposition. The masters has it on their own conscience, – you have it on yours, sir, to answer for to God whether you've done, and are doing, all in your power to lighten the evils that seem always to hang on the trades by which you make your fortunes' (*MB* 386).

Mr Carson, on the other hand, relies on abstract nostrums that display a lack of knowledge for which he (unlike the workers) does not apologize. Perhaps feeling that expressing sympathy for or even knowledge of the workers' sufferings would amount to an admission of responsibility, he responds to all Legh's observations with lectures: 'My good man, just listen to me. ... There will come times of great changes in the occupation of thousands, when improvements in manufactures and machinery are made. It's all nonsense talking, – it must be so!' (*MB* 384–5). The relatively penitent attitudes of Legh and Jem Wilson are conditioned by their role as friends of John Barton, who killed Carson's son, but it also makes their position more appealing to the reader than Carson's. Certainly the novel is implying that the working class should rely more on pathetic appeals to the middle class than on murderous revenge, but it also suggests that the middle class should listen humbly to the workers' point of view rather than insulting them with cold-hearted and inadequately empirical economic theory. When Carson insists that economic reality cannot be changed by dialogue, Job Legh disagrees: 'You say, our talk has done no good. I say it has. I see the view you take of things from the place where you stand' (*MB* 386). For Legh, to 'see' is not just a visual action but an empathic one, and this kind of vision leads, in the novel, to the kind of political change that the author might wish her own novel to have. Under the influence of this dialogue, Carson is ultimately 'lifted out of the contemplation of [his] individual place' (*MB* 387) and, now possessed of a systemic overview conditioned by sorrow rather than premature intellectual

certainty, takes quiet steps to help the suffering workers. Carson's position as a stand-in for the middle-class reader is meant as a warning as well as a model; ideally, the emotional trauma suffered by the reader who identifies with the novel's protagonists would bring about this kind of political change of heart without the hard lesson of class-based violence.

This scene might be said to 'tell' rather than 'show' the theme of the novel, but it also complicates the novel's discourse of sympathy. When used as a substitute for working-class political power, this discourse about extending middle-class sympathy to the workers seems limited and almost reactionary. However, the novel not only describes the ideal political effects of sympathy in this scene, but uses Job Legh's empiricist approach to sympathy to criticize the excessively narrow logic of political economy. This political explanation of the uses of sympathy serves as a supplement to the novel's melodramatic plot, with its traumatic scenes of death, violence, and thwarted love. The novel's insistence on the reader's empathy with the inappropriately passionate emotions of its characters serves as a compensation for political economy's inappropriately distanced theoretical viewpoint. Where Dickens in *Hard Times* depicts the freezing effect of too much political economy, Gaskell tries to use realist fiction to melt the reader's resistance.

Emphasis and irony in *The Mill on the Floss*

F. R. Leavis's *The Great Tradition* did not inaugurate the critique that Eliot's own personal feelings had been inappropriately interjected in her works, but it may have contained its most damning formulation. When compared to the subtle Conrad, Leavis says, Eliot's work has 'an emotional quality, something that strikes us as the direct (and sometimes embarrassing) presence of the author's own personal need'. In Eliot's early work *The Mill on the Floss*, especially, 'We feel an urgency, a resonance, a personal vibration, adverting us of the poignantly immediate presence of the author.' He assumes that this distortion emanates from the imperfectly sublimated autobiographical elements of the novel: Maggie Tulliver, the passionate, intellectual girl stuck fatally in the provinces is 'essentially identical with the young Mary Ann Evans [as] we all know'. But whereas other critics have seen this emotional nostalgia as part of the writer's 'charm', Leavis finds the 'glow' around Maggie to be discordant, 'done too purely from the inside'. Since Maggie is immature, the novel is itself immature: 'To understand immaturity would be to "place" it, with however subtle an implication, by relating it to mature experience. But when George Eliot touches upon these given intensities of Maggie's inner life the vibration comes directly and simply from the novelist, precluding the presence of a maturer intelligence than Maggie's own.' In contrast to critics like James who saw Eliot's artistic flaw as her excessively intrusive intellect, Leavis sees in her work 'an immaturity that George Eliot never leaves safely behind her'.[13]

Ironically, the modern critic is likely to see Leavis's approach as itself too emotional and subjective, too obviously invested in a masculinist fantasy of 'the impersonality of genius'.[14] Susan Fraiman provides a useful history of critical response to Leavis's challenge, ranging from Gordon Haight's Darwinist defence of Stephen Guest to the feminist recuperation of Maggie's rebellion.[15] Yet I think Leavis's report of Eliot's 'embarrassing' intimacy with her character – though it is itself considered embarrassing today – unwittingly calls attention to one of the novel's most clearly articulated themes. In his conflation of narrator and author, Leavis ignores the multiple narratorial addresses that attempt to adjust the relation between narrator, reader, and character by invoking alternately the tropes of distance and passionate identification. I argue that the novel's 'inappropriate' energies are not simply an aesthetic flaw, but Eliot's recognition that in a complex society that encourages people to view themselves and others as if from a great distance, realist fiction can serve as a counterbalancing genre that, while modelling this great distance through the mediation of the omniscient narrator, just as emphatically reminds us of the narrow horizons of passionate individuals. The pier-glass metaphor in *Middlemarch* is a famous reminder of the limits of individual knowledge, but in that book the illusory egocentrism created by the scratches in the pier-glass is a monitory figure associated with the dangerous figures of Casaubon and Rosamond.[16] In *The Mill on the Floss*, the main characters Tom and Maggie Tulliver are each unable to communicate because of their stubborn sense of their own rightness; but while the novel condemns Tom's damaging egotism, Maggie's passionate selfhood is critically analysed and defended. Eliot's narrator is constantly adjusting our distance from Maggie: first seeing her life from a great distance, then swooping in to share her unbearable emotional need, while simultaneously constructing the reader as a distanced sophisticate and rapping that reader's knuckles for failing to take Maggie's immature passions really seriously.

While I am reading this novel through Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, Eliot's work, with its repeated invocation of the moral importance of sympathy, also invites critical readings inspired by Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, as for example by Rae Greiner and Imraan Coovadia. Eliot's narrators often describe the reader's distance from the novels' characters as a scene of moral reflection reminiscent of the three-step process from *Theory of Moral Sentiments*: first a fairly direct sensory identification, then the extrapolation of an 'impartial spectator' capable of seeing these actions as if from a distance, and finally an internalized 'man in the breast' that might ideally change the reader's understanding of their own moral actions.[17] This model of sympathy thus involves a dialectic movement between presence and distance: a certain distance from the action is required to produce the desired sympathetic effect. Greiner points out that in Smith, being too close to a scene of suffering actually does not produce greater sympathy but rather disgust, a reading that challenges the idea that focalizing on a

character in fiction automatically produces more sympathy. She argues that Eliot incorporates this tension between the repulsions and attractions of excessive knowledge by depicting all-knowing figures – Rosamond from *Middlemarch* and Latimer from *The Lifted Veil* – as unsympathetic and terrifying. Perfect identification with the character is never the goal of fiction: the aim is rather a harmonization or concord between different points of view.[18]

The description of omniscient narration as a bird's-eye view is explicit in Eliot, dating from *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857), but even there it is both celebrated and criticized as an epistemological viewpoint: 'any one looking at [Mr Tryan] with the bird's-eye glance of a critic might perhaps say that he made the mistake of identifying Christianity with a too narrow doctrinal system ... But I am not poised at that lofty height. I am on the level and in the press with him, as he struggles his way along the stony road.'[19] The bird's-eye view is posited and examined, but then rejected as inadequate to the work of realism, which involves lowering the reader even into the 'narrowness' of an old-fashioned preacher. Eliot's works, in common with many other realist novels, generally draw upon three complex ways of managing distance: the sympathy that divides sufferer from spectator, the irony that divides sophisticated reader from narrow or ridiculous character, and the historicity that divides remembered past from refigured present. *The Mill on the Floss* not only brings us passionately close to a particular limited character, but also thematizes the reader's probable distance from this character through the trope of 'ekstasis', or outside standing-ground – both a necessary and a limiting place from which to judge the characters. This shifting distance is dramatized most significantly in three scenes in the novel: the disorienting opening scene, with its sudden melting from realist exposition into passionate dream-space; the narrator's reflections on the difference between the romantic Rhine River and the desolate Rhône; and the clever attack on the reader right after the scene of Maggie's encounter with Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*.

Like an establishing shot in cinema, the novel's opening words mark the narrator's position as physically as well as intellectually above the characters, as if the narrator were a bird flying above the town and then closing in on the girl Maggie. 'A wide plain, where the broadening Floss hurries on between its green banks to the sea, and the loving tide, rushing to meet it, checks its passage with an impetuous embrace': the 'wide plain' is the classic flat landscape of realism, inspired by Dutch painting, but it is marked as a space of both visibility and the passionate emotion of the 'check' and the 'impetuous embrace'.[20] While the opening paragraph is narrated from an omniscient perspective, the narrator intrudes in a confusingly emotional fashion with inconsistent use of the first person. First the narrator says 'I wander along the bank' of the river, having become embodied in earth-bound form, but then the phrase 'I remember those large dipping

willows' (*MOTF* 9) casts doubt on whether the narrator is simply encountering a scene that had not changed since he was last there physically, or remembering it from a distant time and place. The narrator adds 'I must stand ... and look at' Dorlcote Mill, again asserting physical presence, exclaiming 'I am in love with moistness' which seems an oddly emotional response. In asking the reader to 'See' and 'Look at' an approaching team of horses, describing the waggoner as 'honest' and enjoying the quiddity of the horses' 'grand shaggy feet' and the 'patient strength of their necks' (*MOTF* 10), the narrator asks us not just to judge the scene but take disproportionate delight in it, as one might if one had grown up in that dull but pleasant environment. The 'girl ... watching' (*MOTF* 11) at first seems to be a random passer-by seen from the outside, with no clue of her future as the novel's protagonist.

With the chapter's last paragraph the narratorial perspective shifts yet again in a way that partly explains and partly conflicts with these multiple points of view:

> Ah, my arms are really benumbed. I have been pressing my elbows on the arms of my chair and dreaming that I was standing on the bridge in front of Dorlcote Mill as it looked one February afternoon many years ago. Before I dozed off, I was going to tell you what Mr and Mrs Tulliver were talking about as they sat by the bright fire in the left-hand parlour on that very afternoon I have been dreaming of. (*MOTF* 11)

The idea that the previous chapter has been a dream from which the narrator has awakened explains the fluid point of view, now flying above and now physically embodied, as well as the temporal conflation of past and present and the oddly intense emotional response. The dream state also prefigures the fusion of self and other that realist fiction attempts to achieve through the devices of focalization, dialogue, and interior monologue, among others. But inventing a physical space shared by narrator and reader creates some new problems that will remain unresolved, as the narrator takes on conventional omniscient form for the rest of the novel. The use of the word 'tell' rather than 'write about' or 'describe' implies an oral presence, like a conversation. But it would be an odd conversation in which one person did not notice that the other had fallen asleep, and it is a disturbing coincidence that the narrator had dreamed about the exact same scene that they had been discussing. And while the rest of the narrative is presumably a story told by a waking person, our inability to guess that the narrator was dreaming in the opening chapter places the epistemological status of the rest of the novel in doubt. This instability calls attention to the artifice of the typical omniscient voice, but also sets up a narrative in which, like in dreams, memories, or an unreliable autobiography, certain moments will carry a disconcertingly disproportionate emotional weight.

Given the narrator's dreamy 'love' for the opening scene, the later deprecation of Maggie's story as a desolate floodplain of the Rhône is jarring. The metafictional reflections that open Book Four of the novel admit that the story has got to a fairly depressing place, with the mill lost and Mr Tulliver emotionally crippled after his stroke, and then inquire whether the reader would not rather be reading a romance, which would produce a pleasing nostalgia like 'the effect produced by those ruins on the castled Rhine' by reminding the viewer of the poetic clash between the 'robber barons' and 'beauty, virtue, and the gentle uses of life' (*MOTF* 282). The scene of the Tullivers' suffering is not so uplifting: it might remind one of 'those dead-tinted, hollow-eyed, angular skeletons of villages on the Rhône' (*MOTF* 283), with their ruins of 'commonplace houses' (*MOTF* 282) destroyed by a swift and sudden flood. Then follows a paragraph listing all the ways the Tullivers' lives are narrow and sordid, including their 'conventional worldly notions' and 'little trace of religion' (*MOTF* 283).

However, continues the narrator, 'I share with you this sense of oppressive narrowness; but it is necessary that we should feel it, if we care to understand how it acted on the lives of Tom and Maggie ... The suffering, whether of martyr or victim, which belongs to every historical advance of mankind, is represented in this way in every town and by hundreds of obscure hearths: and we need not shrink from this comparison of small things with great; for does not science tell us that its highest striving is after the ascertainment of a unity which shall bind the smallest things with the greatest?' (*MOTF* 284). Thus romance may give pleasure, but realism, allied with science, can produce a more specific understanding. Note that this is a different defence of realism from an aesthetic comparison to the plains depicted in Dutch paintings, or the appreciation of flat spaces in the opening scene. Here the repulsive narrowness and triviality of the scene is emphasized as part of a conscious project: expanding the understanding by refocusing the vision. The broad vision of the scientist, with a true understanding of cause and effect, entails a deliberate assumption of the ignorance of the narrow individual, even though this might be painful to the senses. The transition between bird's-eye and worm's-eye view is unpleasant because the two cannot be simply harmonized: while the bird's-eye view is confronted with the impossible multiplicity of 'hundreds of obscure hearths', the worm's-eye view is constituted by its blindness to any kind of accurate theoretical, or even profoundly spiritual overview. The bird's-eye view hence approaches the narrow, suffering individual with a sympathy that cannot be reciprocated. And yet since all individuals share, to a certain extent, Maggie and Tom's blind struggle against overwhelming historical forces, especially given the book's autobiographical sympathy with them, this clinical distance is – and must be – repeatedly undercut by passionate identification to achieve anything like a real understanding of social complexity. In *The Wealth of Nations*, the merchant's ignorance and desire to keep his capital close to

home is comically celebrated, but this novel does not celebrate the spiritual narrowness of merchants such as Mr Deane, necessary though they may be to the social order.

This programmatic charge is repeated in the scene of Maggie's encounter with Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*, but here the figure for the distanced reader is not the concerned scientist, but the playful ironist, and so the tone of the passage is more wickedly ludic. This devotional work, which Maggie finds deeply appealing in her isolated struggle for self-determination, bears more than a passing resemblance to Smith's Stoic philosophy, though with a more Christian stress on suffering. Maggie finds strength in the following passages quoted in the novel: 'Know that the love of thyself doth hurt thee more than anything in the world ... Thou oughtest therefore to call to mind the more heavy sufferings of others, that thou mayest the easier bear thy little adversities. ... [It is necessary] that having left all, [a man] leave himself, and go wholly out of himself, and retain nothing of self-love' (*MOTF* 301–2). These passages convince her of 'insight, and strength, and conquest, to be won by means entirely within her own soul ... and for the first time she saw the possibility of shifting the position from which she looked at the gratification of her own desires – of taking her stand out of herself, and looking at her own life as an insignificant part of a divinely guided whole' (*MOTF* 302). So we see Maggie experiencing a 'second self' moment which, as in Smith, is highly morally inflected.

But again the narrator feels the need to intervene, at a moment when sympathy is invoked, to anticipate the reader's reaction and comment on the novel's precise moral aspirations. For what if the reader finds this scene merely touching and pathetic, or off-puttingly Catholic and old-fashioned, rather than actually inspiring? To defuse this tricky sentimental moment, the narrator digresses into a meta-commentary on the difference between emphatic and ironic styles of writing: 'In writing the history of unfashionable families, one is apt to fall into a tone of emphasis which is very far from being the tone of good society, where principles and beliefs are not only of an extremely moderate kind, but are always presupposed, no subjects being eligible but such as can be touched with a light and graceful irony' (*MOTF* 303). The tone here is of course ironic, first towards the reader, who is constructed as someone who sees Maggie first as 'unfashionable', clearly an inadequate response to the rebellious and spiritually yearning Maggie. The ironic reader is also someone 'extremely moderate', associated with 'good society', and limited to 'eligible' topics. So this is an irony on irony: wise narratorial irony at the expense of the reader's merely fashionable irony. The distance between Maggie and the sophisticated reader is (as in our previous example) evoked and even shared only to be undercut. And if the narrator were not so clearly a little ironic about the circumstances of Maggie's life, the tactic of mocking the reader's superficial irony, with its 'claret and

velvet carpets', its 'lounges at the club' (*MOTF* 304), might come across as dangerously emphatic.

In fact, we quickly do shift to a more emphatic tone. Now that the narrator has used irony to demolish the 'light and graceful', we get an emphatically moralized economic revaluation of its enemy, the unfashionable world of earnest and pious 'emphasis':

> But good society, floated on gossamer wings of light irony, is of very expensive production; requiring nothing less than a wide and arduous national life condensed in unfragrant deafening factories, cramping itself in mines, sweating at furnaces ... or else, spread over sheepwalks, and scattered in lonely houses and huts on the clayey or chalky cornlands, where the rainy days look dreary. This wide national life is based entirely on emphasis – the emphasis of want, which urges it into all the activities necessary for the maintenance of good society and light irony: it spends its heavy years often in a chill, uncarpeted fashion amidst family discord unsoftened by long corridors. (*MOTF* 304)

If we are repulsed by Maggie's sentimentality, in other words, we are complicit not just in ignoring the 'wide national life' but in profiting from it by a shameless irony. Just as Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* stages a scene of a leisured spectator sympathizing with a struggling subject, Eliot's reader is here constructed as an ironic spectator whose sympathy with others' emphatic labours leaves something to be desired. On the other hand, it seems that it is not the ironic but the emphatic person, the limited and passionate one, who succeeds in achieving true distance from self: 'some have an emphatic belief in alcohol, and seek their *ekstasis* or outside standing-ground in gin; but the rest require something that good society calls enthusiasm' (*MOTF* 304). If Eliot ends up where Smith started, with a defence of sympathy as the basis for moral sentiments, it has been through several ironic mediations: the construction of the sufferer as narrow-minded and old-fashioned (as well as theologically misguided); the construction of the reader or spectator as ironic and superficial; and then the partial collapse of the narrator's irony into a defence of emphasis (which is still somewhat ironic, with its reference to the gin presumably guzzled by the poor).

In *Mary Barton*, the political value of being able to identify with a narrow position is clear: it enables the middle class to sympathize with the lower class (assumed, as in the case of John Barton's narrowed horizons, to be constricted through suffering and ignorance), while that working-class experience provides an important corrective to the premature certainties of political economy. *The Mill on the Floss* shares some of those class-based assumptions that breadth of vision is a function of class, but also complicates that link by multiple levels of identification. There is certainly something improving about making a middle-class reader share the limitations

and assumptions of a lower-class character – hence the monitory rhetoric about the importance of feeling 'oppression' while reaching a scientific understanding. But there are also dangers to identifying too closely with a limited point of view. The entire town of St Ogg's is depicted as imprisoned in narrow complacency, and the Dodson sisters are incapable of sympathizing with outsiders. Tom Tulliver's narrowness is even more damaging, taking the form of restrictive and selfish maxims that destroy Maggie's chances for love. The narrator reproves Tom while reminding the reader: 'If you are inclined to be severe on his severity, remember that the responsibility of tolerance lies with those who have the wider vision' (*MOTF* 520). And on the other hand sympathizing with the limited individual is far too easy if that individual is Maggie Tulliver, who longs for a broader vision and is repeatedly thwarted. It is an enduring sorrow that Maggie is made to read *The Imitation of Christ* when she would really profit from reading *The Mill on the Floss*. Part of the identificatory force here is not just autobiographical, but narcissistic, in Freud's sense of identifying with someone we once were – and yet the narrator is irrevocably distanced by the incompatibility between the past and the author's hindsight.[21] While the narrator appears drawn to the character by a powerful love, the aesthetic danger of too self-pitying an identification is perhaps represented by Maggie's clinging embrace of Tom in their watery death.

As readers, we are also being asked to be able to feel sympathy for ourselves, including the selves we once were in 'the pitiable fashion of those antiquated times' (*MOTF* 306). The distance between irony and emphasis may be represented as the distance between an adult narrator and a passionate teenager, but it is also historicized into the temporal distance between modernity and old-fashionedness. Since it is easy to sympathize with our past selves while feeling superior to them, and participating in the narrative (however ironized) of progress over earlier unfashionable times, this is naturally a very seductive project.

In *The Mill on the Floss*, this pull towards the merging between narrator, reader, and character has a moral function, but also creates a somewhat dark utopian energy. Temporal distance functions in this novel as physical distance does for Smith: both are essentially metaphors for the chasm that separates people's emotional lives from each other. The 'pastness' of Eliot's setting is meant to serve an exemplary function: if we could all learn to see our present lives as if we were watching from the future, we might be more likely to achieve a position analogous to that of Smith's morally enlightened impartial spectator. Harry Shaw contrasts Maggie's intense devotion to her childhood and the past, and our sense of her constrained and narrow circumstances, with the wider 'utopian vignettes' for which fiction clears a space, such as in the closing scenes of the novel when Maggie imagines that 'here – close within her reach ... – was another future [a future with the impossible beloved Stephen], in which hard endurance and effort were to be

exchanged for easy delicious leaning on another's loving strength' (*MOTF* 535). Shaw describes this utopian fusion as an example of 'the historicist balancing of local and global consciousness'.[22]

Like Smith's figure of the 'invisible hand', Eliot's attempt to dissolve the space between narrator and character is a yearning for reconciliation across space and time. But while the 'invisible hand' is ultimately a comic vision of vice transformed into virtue, Eliot suggests that the distanced theoretical position is a temptation as well as a necessity. In her depiction of the murky operation of moral causality in a complex society, Eliot turns away from comedy and dramatizes instead the incoherence, the narcissism, the reflexive self-protection of irony, and the ardent and yet doomed strivings for altruism, that come with the realist writer's attempt to achieve the impossible combination of bird's-eye and worm's-eye view. Hence the value of inappropriate sympathy: while political economy collapses the imaginary space between present pain and a possible future happiness, these novels linger with those who struggled but were left behind.

Conclusion: Realist Capitalism, Gothic Capitalism

There is a great deal of magic in invisible hand social theory. The transformation of vice into virtue is amazing enough, but there is also the market's apparent self-organization, and the mysterious distance between cause and effect that can lead to sudden booms and shattering collapses. The uncanny deferral of agency in the 'invisible hand' metaphor magically resolves the apparent discord between secular capitalism and religious ideas of Providence. The beauty of its imaginary moral machine attracts new adherents in a self-reinforcing feedback loop.

This book has been about realist narratives in which the Gothic is never far from the surface; a similar story can be told about classical economic theory, which reached a high point of prestige around 1850, and then seemed to decline, though it has now returned. In Britain, as I have shown, the optimistic narratives written in the early nineteenth century were haunted by Gothic undercurrents that were ambiguously associated with foreign countries. In *Northanger Abbey* the Gothic narrative associated with foreign banditti and monks is expelled and replaced by a sense of unease about English normalcy; and in *Vanity Fair* Napoleon's return represents the constant threat of international financial upheaval. Other stories, though, play up the Gothic hidden within national borders: in *Bleak House* and *Hard Times*, the threat comes from the sclerotic aristocracy and inhuman economic theory. In *Mary Barton* and *The Mill on the Floss*, economic darkness is hidden in secret domestic spaces like Mr Davenport's wretched hovel and the Tullivers' empty mill. Martineau's *Illustrations* are dogged by a deterministic economic law that sometimes flips into outright tragedy.

This British story is, obviously, only a small portion of what can be said about cultural responses to laissez-faire. For one, if we were to expand the scope of our analysis to other countries, we would find that laissez-faire is much more clearly identified with that threatening foreign country, England. Since England was the first country to industrialize, other countries had to compete with its economic might, and were suspicious about having their borders pried open by an apparently cosmopolitan new trade

theory. The industrial-age fantasies of other capitalist countries show their own distinctive obsessions with the local boundaries between different kinds of economic and moral space; for example, the furiously upwardly mobile young protagonist of Balzac's *Lost Illusions* reads urban space as a clash between stock speculation and Bourbon conservatism, while Frank Norris's *The Octopus* and *The Pit* respond to the international commodification of the American soil through farming and railroads. The free-trade/protectionist debate over this kind of economic boundary was extremely important in early nineteenth-century American experience, for example in the 'American school' protectionist writings of Daniel Raymond and Henry Charles Carey, or the development of interstate commerce after the 1824 Supreme Court case *Gibbons* v. *Ogden*.[1] In America, the debate about interstate commerce is most conspicuously moralized by the struggle over extending slavery to the new territories.

I would like to end by pointing to Marx's reception of Smith's ideas, since it forms one possible end point of this economic formalist argument. In Germany, wholehearted embrace of free trade as a tool to build the Prussian state was mixed with fierce suspicion of cosmopolitan outsiders. While Marx and Engels hated the Prussians, they also disliked the nativism of German romantic nationalism, which makes them oddly attuned to Smith's vision of morally ambiguous cosmopolitanism. *The Communist Manifesto* undoes the delicate deferrals of the 'invisible hand' metaphor, ripping aside the veil of complexity and indirection to identify the bourgeoisie as the system's villain. But the bourgeoisie are also the victims, forced by the economic dynamism of capitalism to sacrifice their traditional values and impelled unwittingly to the brink of class warfare: 'Modern bourgeois society ... is like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells.'[2] Marx and Engels do not blame Britain in particular for calling up this demon, but they do see the magic of the 'invisible hand' as a dark, uncontrollable, and ultimately inhuman one.

This Gothic view of capitalism as a mysterious international effect must be recognized as a logical inference from invisible hand social theory. During the time period covered by this book, the spatialization of capitalism is only ambiguously thematized, and it might have been possible to conclude, for instance, that its contradictions might be resolved by a more caring form of nationalism, or a return to family values. Once industrial capitalism is associated with a particular nation, though, the spatial idea that is already present within it in the form of implicit horizons of moral actions takes on a more explicitly geographical form. Instead of being a field of ironic social complexity that might be roughly contiguous with one's own nation, capitalism is seen more often and more convincingly as a particularly insidious foreign invader. This view of capital as *Kapitalismus*, a social form of organization with its own logic and boundaries, sets the stage for the twentieth-century idea of capitalism as the defensive geographical fortress of the 'First

World'. But the paranoid view of capitalism as international conspiracy theory is inherent to invisible hand social theory: it is the Gothic side of its daylight world of ironic moral payback, and its attribution of bad effects to real villains makes a vivid kind of sense. What is more surprising is that the mysterious and counterintuitive model of moral functioning that is invisible hand social theory has come to seem, in the intervening two centuries, so completely natural.

Notes

Introduction: Capitalist Moral Philosophy, Narrative Technology, and the Boundaries of the Nation-State

1. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944), 84.
2. Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 84.
3. Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001). Joseph Schumpeter also downplays Smith's significance, viewing him mainly as a compiler of other economists' insights: see *History of Economic Analysis*, ed. Elizabeth Boody Schumpeter (Oxford University Press, 1954), 184–6.
4. The terms 'capital' and 'capitalist' are used throughout the nineteenth century: E. P. Thompson, for example, quotes 'A Journeyman Cotton Spinner' attacking 'overgrown capitalists' in an 1818 issue of *The Black Dwarf*: see *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1963), 202. However, the word 'capitalism', as a system with its own organic or mechanical logic that can be contrasted with others, does not come into common use until the mid-nineteenth century. The *Oxford English Dictionary* credits William Makepeace Thackeray with the term's first use in *The Newcomes* (1854): 'The sense of capitalism sobered and dignified Paul de Florac (II, 75).' In Marx's work, the idea of an internally coherent capitalist system of production is clear by the 1848 *Communist Manifesto*, but he may not have used the word 'Kapitalismus' in any of his published works. According to Meghnad Desai, Marx only used the word once, in a letter to a Russian correspondent: see *Marx's Revenge: The Resurgence of Capitalism and the Death of Statist Socialism* (London: Verso, 2002), 46. Earlier, the idea of international finance as an organized, predatory, urban-industrial system is popularized by William Cobbett, whose 1830 *Rural Rides* refers to London as 'the Wen' on a sickly body politic: 'It is the destructive, the murderous paper-system, that has transferred the fruit of the labour, and the people along with it, from the different parts of the country to the neighbourhood of the all-devouring Wen': *Rural Rides*, ed. George Woodcock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 81. See also Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis*, 552; and Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, revised edn (Oxford University Press, 1983), 50–2.
5. For a recent critique of the 'theology' of economics, see Duncan K. Foley, *Adam's Fallacy: A Guide to Economic Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). Perhaps the most visible sign of Smith's resurgent status as icon is the famous Adam Smith tie worn by members of the Reagan administration in the 1980s. In his eulogy for Reagan in 2004, Bruce Chapman recalled that 'You had a wide range of choices: there were green Adam Smith neckties, maroon Adam Smith neckties, red, white and blue Adam Smith neckties. For a while, I didn't think Ed Meese owned any other kind of tie. There were even Adam Smith scarves for the women.'
6. See, for example, Ralph Davies, who notes that 'organisation of capitalist lines was steadily making headway' by the sixteenth century: *The Rise of the Atlantic Economies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 24.

7. The idea that capitalism is a kind of 'creative destruction' runs through *The Communist Manifesto*, but the term itself comes from Joseph Schumpeter, who identifies it as a 'process of industrial mutation ... that incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure *from within*, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one'. See Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1976), 83.
8. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner, 2 vols (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981), 1: 456, reprinted in paper from the Oxford edition of 1976. Subsequent references will appear as *WN*.
9. One of the most trenchant analyses of this tension is Marshall Berman's *All That is Solid Melts Into Air*, which argues that nineteenth-century thinkers such as Goethe, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Mill had a far more 'ironic and contradictory, polyphonic and dialectical' (23) response to economic modernism than those of the twentieth century, who either 'embraced [modernity] with a blind and uncritical enthusiasm, or else condemned [it] with a neo-Olympian remoteness and contempt; in either case, it is conceived as a closed monolith, incapable of being shaped or changed by modern men' (24). Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982).
10. Thomas Frank notes that in the 1990s 'market populism' made this implicit equation of God and the markets much more explicit, resulting in a media cult of tech billionaires who acted like ordinary people – but a cult lacking Smith's concern with distributional justice for the poor, which Michael Ignatieff and Istvan Hont analyse in their essay on 'Needs and Justice in the *Wealth of Nations*', in *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Hont and Ignatieff (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1–44. See Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God: Extreme Capitalism, Market Populism, and the End of Economic Democracy* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000).
11. An 'emergent' system is one that evolves a complex order out of a few simple rules rather than a top-down hierarchy, and can be seen to adapt to its environment in productive ways that are visible on the macro level. Steven Johnson's 2001 *Emergence* is a fascinating introduction to this intellectual concept and its application to the fields of urban planning, biology, and internet marketing, while Mark Taylor's 2004 *Confidence Games* argues that economic theory has not yet caught up with the ways emergent orders in global finance can implode as well as expand. Both Johnson and H. Porter Abbott note that this concept resembles social theories of the late nineteenth century: Johnson says that 'You can see the last ten years or so as a return to those Victorian webs' originally suggested by 'Darwinian and social reform movements' (22) while Abbott traces the word 'emergence' to George Henry Lewes's 1874–79 *Problems of Life and Mind*. See Johnson, *Emergence: The Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities, and Software* (New York: Scribner, 2001); Taylor, *Confidence Games: Money and Markets in a World Without Redemption* (University of Chicago Press, 2004); Abbott, 'Narrative and Emergent Behavior', *Poetics Today* 29.2 (2008), 228 n. 2.
12. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 60.
13. Jane Smiley, *Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Novel* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 26; Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719–1900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 4–5.

14. Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), 35.
15. Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford University Press, 1973), 165.
16. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981).
17. F. R. Leavis's appreciation in *The Great Tradition* of Dickens's *Hard Times*, alone among Dickens's novels, can perhaps be seen as a projection of this sort: see '*Hard Times*: An Analytic Note', *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (New York University Press, 1963), 277–48. See also Igor Webb, *From Custom to Capital*, which caricatures Smith as an industrial apologist: 'Smith's whole mode of thought was permeated by what Ruskin later called mercantile language': *From Custom to Capital: The English Novel and the Industrial Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 31. Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society*, with its historical survey of Victorian and modern cultural critique, was one of the first critiques of the romantic separation of high culture from supposedly more sordid economic affairs.
18. See, for example, Catherine Gallagher's 1985 work *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction*, a virtuoso formalist approach to the industrial novels of the 1840s that reads these novels through the patriarchal critiques of Coleridge and Carlyle rather than orthodox economic theory: *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832–1867* (University of Chicago Press, 1985).
19. Martha Woodmansee and Mark Osteen, eds, *The New Economic Criticism: Studies at the Intersection of Literature and Economics* (London: Routledge, 1999); Regenia Gagnier, *The Insatiability of Human Wants: Economics and Aesthetics in Market Society* (University of Chicago Press, 2000); Mary Poovey, 'Aesthetics and Political Economy in the Eighteenth Century: The Place of Gender in the Social Constitution of Knowledge', in *Aesthetics and Ideology*, ed. George Levine (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 79–105; Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (University of Chicago Press, 1998); Mary Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (University of Chicago Press, 2008); Mary Poovey, ed., *The Financial System in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2003); Claudia C. Klaver, *A/Moral Economics: Classical Political Economy and Cultural Authority in Nineteenth-Century England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2003); Gordon Bigelow, *Fiction, Famine, and the Rise of Economics in Victorian Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge University Press, 2003); Catherine Gallagher, *The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton University Press, 2006), 2.
20. Robert Mitchell might be said to share this sense of a link between the risky globalizing capitalisms of the early nineteenth and the early twenty-first centuries in his comparison between the 'completely *open* sense of the future' of the 1990s West Coast tech bubble and the 'first century to witness this romance with finance and collective projects' – though his work focuses on the Romantic rather than the early Victorian era. Robert Mitchell, *Sympathy and the State in the Romantic Era: Systems, State Finance, and the Shadows of Futurity* (New York: Routledge, 2007), vii, viii.

21. William Goldman, *Adventures in the Screen Trade: A Personal View of Hollywood and Screenwriting* (New York: Warner, 1983), 39. See also Arthur S. De Vany, *Hollywood Economics: How Extreme Uncertainty Shapes the Film Industry* (London: Routledge, 2004), 71.
22. In *Realism*, Pam Morris defines realism as 'a genre based upon an implicit communicative contract with the reader that there exists an independent, extra-textual real-world and that knowledge of this real-world can be produced and shared': Morris, *Realism*, The New Critical Idiom (London: Routledge, 2003), 132. On the paradoxical status of knowledge derived from fictional worlds, see Morris, *Realism*, 129–62, and Martha Nussbaum's discussion of the utility of fancy in *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and the Public Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).
23. Harry Shaw provides a summary of these debates in his first chapter of *Narrating Reality: Austen, Scott, Eliot* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 'Realism and its Problems', which includes a history of vexed political response to Lukács's use of the term 'totality' to represent the novel's horizon. Most of these critiques had to do with realism papering over social contradictions or epistemological blindnesses by the construction of a prematurely confident 'master narrative', or (as in Woolf) an obsession with external things at the expense of subtle interiority. See also the chapter on realism in Francis O'Gorman's critical anthology *The Victorian Novel* (London: Blackwell, 2002). Henry James's famous attack on 'large loose baggy monsters' will be discussed below in Chapter 4.
24. The question of whether these novels' protests against the prevailing order are politically effective, pathetically useless, or sneakily complicit is a useful way of differentiating between the critical schools of, respectively, humanism, vulgar Marxism, and the Foucauldian theory that has influenced much recent literary criticism. I see virtues in all three schools, but my point that novels have been better exponents of moral complexity than economic theory up to and probably including the present moment is also a blandly descriptive historical observation.
25. Robert Torrens first analysed the problem of comparative advantage between nations in 1815, though Ricardo's discussion two years later in *The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (London: Dent, 1948), 80–4, was more influential.
26. Smith's passage describes an Amsterdam merchant engaged in carrying trade between Königsberg and Lisbon: 'The uneasiness ... which he feels at being separated so far from his capital, generally determines him to bring part of [both sets of goods] to Amsterdam: and though this necessarily subjects him to a double charge of loading and unloading, ... yet for the sake of having some part of his capital always under his own view and command, he willingly submits to this extraordinary charge' (*WN* I, 454–5).
27. Taylor, *Confidence Games*, 12. Mark Taylor argues that the idea of the economic system as a complex adaptive order is derived from the rise of networked technology in the postmodern era, but I think the idea of the economic system as a complex machine beyond human control is vividly perceived by Victorian cultural critics, though not political economists.
28. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 410–13.
29. Since Marxism claims to be a scientific system, it is surprisingly difficult to ascertain its implicit moral norms. See Jeffrey Reiman: 'The chief theoretical

reason for not thinking that ideology is conscious deception is that Marxism is a materialist theory, one that understands social practices by tracing them to features of the dominant mode of production, rather than to features of people's psychology': 'Moral Philosophy: The Critique of Capitalism and the Problem of Ideology', in *The Cambridge Companion to Marx*, ed. Terrell Carver (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 159.

30. Robert Merton, 'The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social Action', *American Sociological Review* 1.6 (1936), 904. In his article, Merton credits the Italian economist Corrado Gini with this insight, and mentions that it qualifies as what John Venn calls a 'suicidal prophecy' (904).

1 Imaginary Vantage Points: The Invisible Hand and the Rise of Political Economy

1. John Barrell, *English Literature in History 1730–1780: An Equal, Wide Survey* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1983), 33, 25.
2. See Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, and Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 57.
3. It has long been speculated that the papers that Smith burned at his deathbed contained an uncompleted system of jurisprudence that would have brought together his works on aesthetics and economics (*The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *The Wealth of Nations*). This would also have eliminated the 'Adam Smith problem', to be discussed below. See, for example, Donald Winch, 'Adam Smith's "Enduring Particular Result": A Political and Cosmopolitan Perspective', in *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Hont and Ignatieff (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 253–69, and Knut Haakonssen, *The Science of a Legislator: The Jurisprudence of David Hume and Adam Smith* (Cambridge University Press, 1981).
4. Samuel Fleischacker, *On Adam Smith's* Wealth of Nations*: A Philosophical Companion* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 22–6.
5. Internal evidence suggests the 'Astronomy' essay was written after 1749 (the date Newton's theory was finally proved by observations taken in Peru), and before 1758 (when Halley's Comet was due to return). See D. D. Raphael, 'Newton and Adam Smith', *Queen's Quarterly* 95 (1988), 36–49.
6. Commentary on Smith's concept of the invisible hand is a vigorous subset of the Smith secondary literature; see, for example, Alec L. Macfie, 'The Invisible Hand of Jupiter', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32 (1971), 595–9; Syed Ahmad, 'Adam Smith's Four Invisible Hands', *History of Political Economy* 22 (1990), 137–44; J. Ronnie Davis, 'Adam Smith on the Providential Reconciliation of Individual and Social Interests: Is Man Led by an Invisible Hand or Misled by a Sleight of Hand?', *History of Political Economy* 22 (1990), 341–52; Stephen Jay Gould, 'Darwin and Paley Meet the Invisible Hand', *Natural History* 99.11 (1990), 8–16; Bruno Ingrao and Giorgio Israel, *The Invisible Hand*, trans. Ian McGilvray (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990); Jerry Evensky, 'Retrospectives: Ethics and the Invisible Hand', *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 7.2 (1993), 197–205; Edna Ullman-Margalit, 'The Invisible Hand and the Cunning of Reason', *Social Research* 64.2 (1997), 181–98; William D. Grampp, 'What Did Smith Mean by the Invisible Hand?', *Journal of Political Economy* 108.3 (2000), 441–65; Elias L. Khalil, 'Beyond Natural Selection and Divine Intervention: The Lamarckian Implication of Adam Smith's Invisible Hand', *Journal of Evolutionary Economics* 10.4 (2000), 373–93; Elias L. Khalil,

'Making Sense of Adam Smith's Invisible Hand: Beyond Pareto Optimality and Unintended Consequences', *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 22.1 (2000), 49–63; Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, 116–56; Lisa Hill, 'The Hidden Theology of Adam Smith', *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 8.1 (2001), 1–29; Peter Minowitz, 'Adam Smith's Invisible Hands', *Economic Journal Watch* 1.3 (2004), 381–412; James E. Alvey, 'The Hidden Theology of Adam Smith: A Belated Reply to Hill', *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 11.4 (2004), 623–8; Shannon Stimson, 'From Invisible Hand to Moral Restraint: The Transformation of the Market Mechanism from Adam Smith to Thomas Robert Malthus', *Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 2.1 (2004), 22–47; Jonathan B. Wight, 'The Treatment of Smith's Invisible Hand', *Journal of Economic Education* 38.3 (2007), 341–58.

7. Davis, 'Providential Reconciliation', 341.
8. The most recent defence of the importance of theology to *WN* is Hill, who sees her article 'Hidden Theology of Adam Smith' as defending Jacob Viner's argument in *The Role of Providence in the Social Order: An Essay in Intellectual History* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1972).
9. Emma Rothschild, 'Adam Smith and the Invisible Hand', *The American Economic Review* 84 (1994), 320, 319. See also Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, 116–56. Grampp calls this view the 'risible hand' hypothesis: 'What Did Smith Mean?', 448.
10. Wayne Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (University of Chicago Press, 1974), 240; Fleischacker, *On Adam Smith's* Wealth of Nations, 4–5.
11. Viner, *Role of Providence*, 82.
12. Minowitz, 'Adam Smith's Invisible Hands', 391.
13. Rajani Kannepalli Kanth, *Political Economy and Laissez-Faire: Economics and Ideology in the Ricardian Era* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1986), 123.
14. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is pervaded with references to a benevolent guiding force in the natural world, to the point that 'The many titles by which this beneficent Nature is designated must have taxed severely the terminological resources of Scotch optimistic theism. Among them are: "the great Director of nature", "the final cause", "the Author of nature", "the great Judge of hearts", "an invisible hand", "Providence", "the divine Being", and, in rare instances, "God" ': Jacob Viner, 'Adam Smith and Laissez Faire', in *Essays on the Intellectual History of Economics*, ed. Douglas A. Irwin (Princeton University Press, 1991), 88–9. Viner theorizes that the lower incidence of such references in *WN* indicates that natural harmony is more flawed and obscure in the economic sphere than in the sphere of moral sentiments. It may also reflect the increasingly cautious language with which Smith expressed his deism: see Alec L. Macfie, *The Individual in Society: Papers on Adam Smith* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967), 108 n. 111.
15. For a history of political economy before Smith – including Mirabeau, Justi, Beccaria, Petty, Cantillon, Turgot, and innumerable mercantilist pamphleteers, see Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis*.
16. Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph* (Princeton University Press, 1977), 109.
17. John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary and Canon Formation* (Chicago University Press, 1993), 316, 303.
18. In Lacan, the 'mirror stage' is that moment when an infant first recognizes itself as a unified object (rather than a series of scattered body parts) upon seeing itself

reflected either in a mirror or in the gaze of another. Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I', in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 1–7.

19. For an analysis of the link between agency and the figure of the hand, see Katherine Rowe, *Dead Hands: Fictions of Agency, Renaissance to Modern* (Stanford University Press, 1999).
20. John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 117–51.
21. In fact, Smith did allow for 'some 35 to 40 measures of government intervention' (Grampp, 'What Did Smith Mean?', 460). Andrew Skinner's article 'Adam Smith and the Role of the State: Education as a Public Service', in *Adam Smith's* Wealth of Nations*: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Stephen Copley and Kathryn Sutherland (Manchester University Press, 1995), 93, points to the following passage in *WN* as evidence that while Smith deplored unnecessary regulation, he was not against all governmental roles in the economy: 'That security which the laws of Great Britain give to every man that he shall enjoy the fruits of his own labour, is alone sufficient to make any country flourish, notwithstanding these and twenty other absurd regulations of commerce' (*WN* I, 540).
22. My use here of the term 'negative liberty' differs from Isaiah Berlin's description of negative liberty as 'simply the area in which a man can act unobstructed by others': *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford University Press, 1969), 122. As opposed to freedom from interference, I use the term 'negative liberty' to describe a freedom that results from the inability to predict the results of one's actions.
23. However, the modern macroeconomic concept of 'home bias', first identified in 1995 by John T. McCallum, reinforces Smith's view that investors are more likely to invest near home – even though this may not maximize their profits. Obstfeld and Rogoff identify this irrational 'home bias' as one of the 'six major puzzles in international macroeconomics': 'The Six Major Puzzles in International Macroeconomics: Is There a Common Cause?', *NBER Macroeconomics Annual* 15 (2000), 339–90. Elias Khalil notes that from the perspective of neoclassical economics 'It is embarrassing to find that the only mention of the term "invisible hand" in *The Wealth of Nations* actually signifies how market impediments guarantee social tranquility, which is contrary to the efficiency dictated by competitive markets': 'Making Sense', 61.
24. Grampp, 'What Did Smith Mean?', 452, 455.
25. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith derives this concern with those surrounding us from Greek stoicism: 'Among those primary objects which nature had recommended to us as eligible [according to the Stoics], was the prosperity of our family, of our relations, of our friends, of our country, of mankind, and of the universe in general.' However, where stoicism bids us resign ourselves completely to the ultimate fate of the 'little department' around us, Smith allows that in fact these are the passions 'which chiefly excite our desires and aversions', though we appeal to the 'authority of the man within the breast' to regulate them. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), 274, 290, 292, reprinted in paper from the Oxford edition of 1976. Subsequently referred to as *TMS*.
26. Knut Haakonssen makes a similar distinction between 'contextual knowledge' and 'system knowledge' in his discussion of Smith's moral theory in *TMS*. The former is 'the kind of concrete knowledge which arises from specific situations', while the latter understands these elements 'in some sort of functional relationship to

a greater "whole" or system': *The Science of a Legislator,* 79. Smith argues that there have been fewer systems of moral philosophy than of natural philosophy because moral systems tend to be imposed from the top down and are hence swiftly refuted by our minute knowledge of the complexities of actual human behaviour.

27. Jacob Viner's essay 'Adam Smith and Laissez Faire' argues that the oft-noted differences between *TMS* and *WN* can be explained if we see *TMS* as primarily a deductive work, arguing from first principles, and *WN* as an inductive work, mostly factual, although Smith 'retained his flair for resounding generalizations' (100). This view is disputed by Macfie (among others) who argues that *TMS* also contains a strong inductive component, which brings it into harmony with *WN*'s theistic induction: see *Individual in Society,* 103–8. Fleischacker, too, stresses the role of empirical daily observations in *WN*.
28. Immediately preceding this passage Smith actually compares the overarching social knowledge of the merchant to that of the gentleman – but he stipulates that in this case the one with superior knowledge is *not* best fitted to judge the public interest: 'As during their [merchants' and master manufacturers'] whole lives they are engaged in plans and projects, they have frequently more acuteness of understanding than the greater part of country gentlemen. As their thoughts, however, are commonly exercised rather about the interest of their own particular branch of business, than about that of the society, their judgment, even when given with the greatest candour (which it has not been upon every occasion) is much more to be depended upon with regard to the former of these two objects, than with regard to the latter. Their superiority over the country gentlemen is, not so much in their knowledge of the publick interest, as in their having a better knowledge of their own interest than he has of his. It is by this superior knowledge of their own interest that they have frequently imposed upon his generosity, and persuaded him to give up both his own interest and that of the publick, from a very simple but honest conviction, that their interest, and not his, was the interest of the publick' (*WN* I, 266–7).
29. Macfie, *Individual in Society*, 109.
30. One economics textbook explains the fallacy so: 'A noneconomic example may help. You are watching a football game on a sunny autumn afternoon. The home team executes an outstanding play. In the general excitement, you leap to your feet to get a better view. *Generalization:* "If you, *an individual*, stand, then your view of the game is improved." But does this also hold true for the group – for everyone watching the game? Certainly not! If everyone stands to watch the play, everyone – including you – will probably have the same or even a worse view than when seated!' Campbell R. McConnell, *Economics: Principles, Problems, and Policies*, 9th edn (New York: McGraw Hill, 1984), 11.
31. On the invisible hand as a principle of micro-order, see Robert Heilbroner, *21st Century Capitalism* (New York: Norton, 1994), 95–9.
32. Dugald Stewart, 'Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith, LL. D.', in *Adam Smith: Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, ed. I. S. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 309. See also Catherine Wilson's *The Invisible World: Early Modern Philosophy and the Invention of the Microscope* (Princeton University Press, 1995), 69, on the detection of micro-orders, or *subvisibilia*, which had been imperceptible before the invention of the microscope: 'The microscope both undermined confidence in the manifest image of the world and, in supplying a glimpse of a latent image, gave sense to the idea of a nonoccult interpretation of nature.'

33. John Barrell gestures at this conundrum in his observation that 'within a complex, commercial society, there may be no viewing-position from which the organisation of society or the public good can possibly be grasped. ... [Smith] is reduced to inventing a fictitious and disembodied social spectator, the "philosophic eye" whose viewpoint and whose breadth and depth of vision no individual can be imagined as possessing.': see 'The Public Prospect and the Private View: The Politics of Taste in Eighteenth-Century Britain', in *Reading Landscape: Country – City – Capital*, ed. Simon Pugh (Manchester University Press, 1990), 31.
34. One of the most famous catatrophic anamorphs is the title illustration to Hobbes's *Leviathan*, which depicts the figure of the sovereign made up of the bodies of his individual subjects. See Howard Caygill, *Art of Judgment* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 19–20.
35. Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 29, 137.
36. Jacob Viner, 'The Intellectual History of Laissez-Faire', in *Essays on the Intellectual History of Economics*, ed. Douglas A. Irwin (Princeton University Press, 1991), 202–3. Viner also cites Aristotle's defence of private property in the 'Politics', Roman policy of *caveat emptor*, the medieval insistence that the merit of charity lay in its being voluntary, the scholastic doctrine of the 'just price' and 'just wage', and English common law: 'The language of "freedom" was popular in England from really ancient times. There was constant appeal of "freedoms", or "liberties", or "immunities", or "franchises", or "properties", or "rights", all of these being substantially synonymous terms and none of these being synonymous with "freedom" in the singular. ... Of the notion that "freedom" is indivisible, I can find no clear trace until the twentieth century.': 'Intellectual History', 210.
37. See Joyce Oldham Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth Century England* (Princeton University Press, 1978).
38. Roland L. Meek's *The Economics of Physiocracy: Essays and Translations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963) combines translations of large portions of Quesnay's writings with interpretive essays. See also Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *The Origins of Physiocracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976); Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis*, 232–43.
39. The businessman and public servant Jacques de Gournay (1712–59), a physiocratic fellow-traveller, is credited with coining the phrase *laissez-faire* in conversation; Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis*, 244n. Smith, however, preferred the term 'natural liberty': Richard F. Teichgraeber III, *'Free Trade' and Moral Philosophy: Rethinking the Sources of Adam Smith's* Wealth of Nations. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1986), 4–6.
40. Stewart, 'Account', 304.
41. Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis*, 241.
42. See Vernard Foley, 'An Origin of the Tableau Economique', *History of Political Economy* 5.1 (1973), 121–50, and Vernard Foley, *The Social Physics of Adam Smith* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1976), 120–38. This metaphor also led the physiocrats to the advocacy of a flat tax, because of Quesnay's doctrine that a single incision during bloodletting caused the least disruption. See also Philip Mirowski, *More Heat than Light* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 154–8.
43. Cantillon is usually given partial credit for Quesnay's innovations, although his work was forgotten until an 1881 article by William Stanley Jevons. See Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis*, 217–23.

44. Fox-Genovese, *The Origins of Physiocracy*, 290.
45. Quoted in full in *WN* II, 679. See also Fox-Genovese, *The Origins of Physiocracy*, 246–52.
46. Meek, *The Economics of Physiocracy*, 115.
47. Meek, *The Economics of Physiocracy*, 265–96.
48. Meek, *The Economics of Physiocracy*, 109–14; Fox-Genovese, *The Origins of Physiocracy*, 297.
49. On the schematic visual representation of this and later economic systems, see Susan Buck-Morss, 'Envisioning Capital: Political Economy on Display', *Critical Inquiry* 21.2 (1995), 434–67.
50. Letter from Quesnay to Mirabeau, quoted in Meek, *The Economics of Physiocracy*, 117. See also the 'Dialogue on the Work of Artisans' in Meek, *The Economics of Physiocracy*, 204.
51. Fox-Genovese, *The Origins of Physiocracy*, 206.
52. Meek, *The Economics of Physiocracy*, 375n.
53. Fox-Genovese, *The Origins of Physiocracy*, 89.
54. Quoted in Jacob Viner, 'The Economist in History', in *Essays on the Intellectual History of Economics*, ed. Douglas A. Irwin (Princeton University Press, 1991), 229.
55. On natural theology, mechanism, and the scientific revolution, see Brooke, *Science and Religion*.
56. Polanyi argues that the abstract idea of the market economy is rooted in the metaphor of the machine: 'once elaborate machines and plant were used for production in a commercial society, the idea of a self-regulating market was bound to take shape' (*Great Transformation*, 40).
57. See David Hume's Introduction to his *Treatise of Human Nature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 41–6. Elie Halévy points out that the Newtonian idea of basing a science on a single principle like gravity inspired several generations of moral philosophers, including Helvetius, whose *De l'Esprit* (1758) sought to model moral science on physical science. The most successfully reductive of these Newtonian moralists was Jeremy Bentham, who reduced all social interactions to the single law of the 'pleasure principle': Elie Halévy, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism*, trans. Mary Morris (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), 5–21.
58. Adam Smith, 'The Principles which Lead and Direct Philosophical Enquiries; Illustrated by the History of Astronomy', in *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, ed. W. P. D. Wightman and J. C. Bryce (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 45. Subsequently referred to as *HA*.
59. Christopher Herbert, *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century* (University of Chicago Press, 1991), 80, 81.
60. The terms 'science' and 'philosophy' were used interchangeably at this time: see Adam Skinner, *A System of Social Science: Papers Relating to Adam Smith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).
61. See Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*, I.i.4 ('Of the connexion and association of ideas'), and Skinner, *System of Social Science*, 18–20. But Smith applied Hume's idea of the association of contiguous phenomena to scientific systems, rather than everyday material objects: Raphael, 'Newton and Adam Smith', 47.
62. This paragraph provides a clear link between Smith's method here and his method in *WN*, which starts out with a visit to a pinmaking factory. Smith uses this scene of production to formulate the principle of the division of labour,

which underlies all economic complexity – but which is probably not recognized as such by the individual pinmakers.

63. Skinner, *System of Social Science*, 35–41.
64. This may have been written as early as 1619, but Descartes withheld it after Galileo's punishment.
65. Foley, *Social Physics*, 32.
66. René Descartes, *Le Monde, ou Traité de la Lumière*, trans. M. S. Mahoney (New York: Abaris Books, 1979), 93.
67. Descartes, *Le Monde*, 42.
68. Foley, *Social Physics*, 21. Foley makes an extended case that Smith's preference for Cartesianism was related to his study of ancient Greek science. See also Mirowski, *More Heat than Light*, 164–5.
69. Adam Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, ed. J. C. Bryce (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), 146.
70. D. D. Raphael and A. S. Skinner, 'Introduction', in *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, by Adam Smith, ed. W. P. D. Wightman and J. C. Bryce (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 22.
71. Raphael, 'Newton and Adam Smith', 44–5.
72. Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 146.
73. Mirowski, *More Heat than Light*, 164.
74. Macfie, *Individual in Society*, 598; see also Rothschild 'Adam Smith'.
75. According to Rothschild, Hayek's cardinal difference from Smith is that Hayek actively celebrates this ignorance of the individual actor, while Smith, in keeping with an Enlightenment preference for reason, treats it ironically: *Economic Sentiments*, 149–51.
76. Herbert, *Culture and Anomie*, 81.
77. Syed Ahmad, 'Adam Smith's Four Invisible Hands', *History of Political Economy* 22.1 (1990), 139.
78. Among the critics of the widespread assumption that Smith championed egoistic industrial economics are Patricia Werhane, *Adam Smith and his Legacy for Modern Capitalism* (Oxford University Press, 1991), which points out that Smith justified self-interest by an appeal to concepts of social justice, not on its own merits; and David McNally, *Political Economy and the Rise of Capitalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), which argues that Smith's capitalism was based de facto on an agrarian society, since his work antedated the full force of the industrial revolution.
79. Macfie, *Individual in Society*, 123.
80. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Friend*, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Princeton University Press, 1969), vol. 4, pt 1, 189; quoted in Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, 151.
81. Rothschild, 'Adam Smith', 322, 319.
82. On the moral irony of the doctrine of unintended consequences, see Winch, 'Political and Cosmopolitan Perspective', 264–5; on the related concept of 'moral luck' in *TMS* see Charles L. Griswold Jr, *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 240–4. Griswold shares with Fleischacker a sense that Smith was 'acutely aware ... in general of the roles that contingency and finitude play in human life' (16).
83. Principal figures in this debate were H. T. Buckle, *History of Civilization in England*, vol. 2 (London, 1861), who suggests that *WN* and *TMS* were meant as two incomplete, non-overlapping halves of a science of human nature; Witold von

Skarzynski, *Adam Smith als Moralphilosoph und Schoepfer der Nationaloekonomie* (Berlin, 1878), who believed Smith was converted to economic study by the French economists (and was later refuted by the discovery of Smith's early economic manuscripts), and August Oncken, 'The Consistency of Adam Smith', *Economic Journal* 7 (1897), 443–50. For an overview of the nineteenth-century debate see Raphael and Macfie, 'Introduction' to *TMS*, 20–5, and Russell Nieli, 'Spheres of Intimacy and the Adam Smith Problem', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 47 (1986), 611–24.

84. For a summary of recent discussions of the Adam Smith Problem, see Werhane, *Adam Smith and his Legacy for Modern Capitalism*, 7–17. An exception to the emphasis on the harmony of the two works is Viner, 'Adam Smith and Laissez Faire'.
85. Raphael and Macfie, 'Introduction' to *TMS*, 20.
86. Nieli, 'Spheres of Intimacy', 617.
87. Nieli, 'Spheres of Intimacy', 619.
88. See Viner, *Role of Providence*, 80, Stewart Justman, *The Autonomous Male of Adam Smith* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), and Kathryn Sutherland, 'Adam Smith's Master Narrative: Women and the *Wealth of Nations*', in *Adam Smith's* Wealth of Nations*: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Stephen Copley and Kathryn Sutherland (Manchester University Press, 1995), 97–121.
89. Nancy Armstrong argues in *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford University Press, 1987) that these spheres were formed more or less simultaneously, and that domestic ideology helped form, rather than merely reflecting, the 'dominant' commercial ideology.
90. See especially Catherine Gallagher's *Industrial Reformation*, an extended analysis of the relation between paternalistic and industrial, or private and public, metaphors of the nation-state.
91. Hirschman (in *Passions and the Interests*) actually sees *WN* as having 'superseded and obliterated' (69) a strain of moral reasoning that showed how interests could calm passions, blunting the 'edge of Mandeville's shocking paradox by substituting for "passion" and "vice" such bland terms as "advantage" or "interest" ' (19).
92. See Phillip Harth's 'Introduction' to *The Fable of the Bees*, by Bernard Mandeville (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 7–43; typical is John Dennis's complaint that 'Vice and Luxury have found a Champion and Defender, which they never did before' (quoted in Harth, 'Introduction', 15).
93. Raphael and Macfie, 'Introduction' to *TMS*, 11.
94. Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, ed. Phillip Harth (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 67.
95. Halévy, *Growth of Philosophic Radicalism*, 90. However, Fleischacker draws a distinction between the somewhat more Mandevillean 'moralistic fairy tale' of *TMS*, in which the production of wealth is fuelled to a certain extent by delusion, and the 'sober economic analysis' of *WN*, in which the moral hypocrisy of wealth creation is de-emphasized: *On Adam Smith's* Wealth of Nations, 111. On the self-delusion of the 'unhappy social climber' in *TMS* (223), see also Griswold, *Virtues of Enlightenment*, 217–27.
96. Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750–1834* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 2.
97. Laurenz Volkmann, 'Mandeville's Beehive and Smith's Invisible Hand: Conflicting Voices of Ethics and Economics in Early Industrialism', in *Talking*

Forward, Talking Back: Critical Dialogues with the Enlightenment, ed. Kevin L. Cope and Rüdiger Ahrens (New York: AMS Press, 2002), 26.

98. Rothschild treats the increasing prominence of the metaphor as a shorthand for Smithian capitalism as a problem, first pointing out the paucity of references to it in nineteenth-century histories, and then tracing the 'obdurate and resilient' twentieth-century taste for it to its 'implicit politics' of those who 'might very well like to set aside the sovereign' – which underplays, I think, its polemical uses against really existing socialism and communism. *Economic Sentiments*, 138, 139.
99. Rothschild's argument in Chapter 2 of *Economic Sentiments*, 'Adam Smith and Conservative Economics' (52–71), is largely based on her 1992 article in *Economic History Review*. The essay collections *Adam Smith's* Wealth of Nations*: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Stephen Copley and Kathryn Sutherland (Manchester University Press, 1995), and *New Voices on Adam Smith*, ed. Leonidas Montes and Eric Schliesser (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), also deserve special attention for their sophisticated interdisciplinary reconsiderations of Smith's work.
100. Quoted in Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, 65.
101. Quoted in Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, 59.
102. Winch, *Riches and Poverty*, 11–12.
103. Quoted in Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, 62.
104. Quoted in Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, 64.
105. Winch, *Riches and Poverty*, 125–220. A. M. C. Waterman, however, describes a brief interlude in Burke's reign brought about by the publication of Godwin's *Political Justice* in 1793, which according to Hazlitt made Burke seem like a 'flashy sophist': *Revolution, Economics, and Religion: Christian Political Economy, 1798–1833* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 24. Waterman argues that it was only Malthus's rebuttal of Godwin in 1798 that restored the prestige of the conservative argument.
106. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in *Two Classics of the French Revolution: Reflections on the Revolution in France and The Rights of Man* (New York: Anchor, 1989), 59.
107. Fleischacker, *On Adam Smith's* Wealth of Nations, 245–6, 271, 273. Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein's ingenious book *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness* (New York: Penguin, 2009) uses the word 'nudge' in much the same sense to suggest a form of public planning that would preserve individual freedom while encouraging rational behaviour through structures of 'choice architecture' (3). The spirit of this 'libertarian paternalism' (5) seems popular within the Obama administration, so perhaps 'left Smithianism' is less a fantasy than Fleischacker suggests. A political theory of 'nudging' opens itself to two possible caveats though: tinkering with regulations might be too incrementalist to solve every sort of deep-rooted political problem; and a subtly crafted choice architecture could (in the hands of a devious private operator, such as a cell phone company) be just as efficient at exploiting individual choices as in encouraging sensible collective behaviour.
108. Fleischacker, *On Adam Smith's* Wealth of Nations, 272.
109. Imraan Coovadia, 'George Eliot's Realism and Adam Smith', *Studies in English Literature* 42 (2002), 819–35.
110. *TMS* 231 n. 6.
111. Burke, *Reflections*, 73–4.

112. Burke, *Reflections*, 59–60.
113. Burke, *Reflections*, 74–5.
114. See, for example, Winch's *Riches and Poverty*, which contains an extended defence of Malthus as a 'political moralist' who was not deliberately cruel to the poor but in fact solicitous of their needs in his position as clergyman (221–405); and Klaver's focus on Ricardo in her history of the disaggregation of economic from moral sciences (*A/Moral Economics*). Marx scorned Malthus for his defence of the landowners, but relied greatly on Ricardo's vision of increasing class friction with the diminishing returns from agricultural production.
115. See Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 220–5. This irregularly administered system of outdoor relief had the indirect effects of raising the price of bread and creating a source of free casual labour for farmers. It was in turn swept away by the more efficient but also more cruel Poor Law of 1834, which herded charity recipients into sex-segregated workhouses and was harshly attacked by Dickens.
116. Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 80. Polanyi notes that in his 1704 pamphlet *Giving Alms no Charity and employing the Poor a Grievance to the Nation* Daniel Defoe had actually foreseen the sad result of this kind of system of wage subsidy since the poor would not work for free: Mandeville's 'doggerels' were a 'shallow moral paradox' in comparison (109).
117. Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 98, 104.
118. Polanyi attributes this work in error to William rather than Joseph Townsend. In his introduction to Joseph Townsend's volume, Ashley Montagu claims that 'it is to this extraordinary tract that both Malthus and Darwin owed the inspiration for their particular theories'; although Malthus never directly read Townsend, Marx at least, in a footnote in *Capital*, describes Malthus as a plagiarist of Townsend and Defoe: *Great Transformation*, 1, 10. Polanyi notes that though 'a search in the sources failed to authenticate the story ... the paradigm is not dependent on empirical support. ... Lack of antiquarian authenticity can detract nothing from the fact that Malthus and Darwin owed their inspiration to this source – Malthus learnt of it from Condorcet, Darwin from Malthus. ... Here was a new starting point for political science ... Thus it came to pass that economists presently relinquished Adam Smith's humanistic foundations and incorporated those of Townsend' (113–15).
119. Joseph Townsend, *A Dissertation on the Poor Laws: By A Well-Wisher to Mankind* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1971), 17, 37.
120. Townsend, *Dissertation*, 37–8, 23.
121. 'If the French Revolution was indebted to the thought of Voltaire and Diderot, Quesnay and Rousseau, the Poor Law discussion formed the minds of Bentham and Burke, Godwin and Malthus, Ricardo and Marx, Robert Owen and John Stuart Mill, Darwin and Spencer, who shared with the French Revolution the spiritual parentage of nineteenth century civilization': Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 84.
122. Noel Parker, 'Look, No Hidden Hands: How Smith Understands Historical Progress and Societal Values', in *Adam Smith's* Wealth of Nations*: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Stephen Copley and Kathryn Sutherland (Manchester University Press, 1995), 128.
123. In a rare reference to his own scepticism, Smith once wrote that Hume faced death 'with more real resignation to the necessary course of things, than any Whining Christian ever dyed with pretended resignation to the will of God': Letter to

Alexander Wedderburn, 14 August 1776, in *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*, ed. Ernest Campbell Mossner and Ian Simpson Ross (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), 203. Even though this particular reference was carefully excised from his official account of Hume's death (Letter to William Strahan, 9 November 1776, *Correspondence*, 217–21), Smith later remarked that his report that Hume had died a cheerful atheist 'brought upon me ten times more abuse than the very violent attack I had made [in *WN*] upon the whole commercial system of Great Britain': Letter to Andreas Holt, 26 October 1780, *Correspondence*, 251.

124. Waterman, *Revolution, Economics, and Religion*, 3–4.
125. However, see Philip Connell for a more complicated historicist narrative of the way these two groups were philosophically interdependent in the early decades of the nineteenth century: *Romanticism, Economics, and the Question of 'Culture'* (Oxford University Press, 2001).
126. Whately's distinction in the 1831 *Introductory Lectures on Political Economy* between theological and scientific knowledge was intended as a 'powerful weapon for the ideological defence of the establishment', but ironically 'surrendered the traditional justification of its intellectual monopoly: the sovereignty of Christian dogma over all human inquiry': Waterman, *Revolution, Economics, and Religion*, 11. Bigelow interestingly reads Whately's work in terms of contemporary Irish politics, since Whately was named Archbishop of Dublin in 1832 and then endowed a chair in political economy at Trinity College: *Fiction, Famine and the Rise of Economics*, 61–3, 112–43. The most significant works by the other figures are William Paley's 1785 *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* and 1802 *Natural Theology*; J. B. Sumner's 1816 *Treatise on the Records of Creation*; Edward Copleston's 1819 *Letters to the Rt. Hon. Robert Peel*, and Thomas Chalmers's 1808 *Inquiry into the Nature and Stability of National Resources* and 1832 *On Political Economy in Connexion with the Moral State and Moral Prospects of Society*. All but Chalmers, a Professor of Divinity at Edinburgh who published the scandalous first Bridgewater Treatise in 1833, were elevated to high positions in the church: Paley as Archdeacon and then Chancellor of Carlisle, Sumner as Archbishop of Canterbury, Copleston as Bishop of Llandaff, and Whately as Archbishop of Dublin.
127. Waterman, *Revolution, Economics, and Religion*, 258.
128. Waterman, *Revolution, Economics, and Religion,* 11.
129. Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795–1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 5, 16.
130. Not all religious influence during this time reinforced conservative politics, according to Bernard Semmel's *The Methodist Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Semmel here argues against E. P. Thompson's description of Methodism as 'masochistic', crediting it instead with consistent attention to working-class demands. Thompson describes Methodist liturgies as a 'ritualised form of psychic masturbation' that served to increase workers' resignation to earthly toil: *The Making of the English Working Class*, 368.

2 Omniscient Narrators and the Return of the Gothic in *Northanger Abbey* and *Bleak House*

1. Woodmansee and Osteen provide a useful overview of different theoretical options for those studying the intersection of literature and economics,

including the work of Kurt Heinzelman, Marc Shell, Deidre McCloskey, and Jean-Joseph Goux. Woodmansee and Osteen, eds, *New Economic Criticism*. See also Jan Mieszkowski, *Labors of Imagination: Aesthetics and Political Economy from Kant to Althusser* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).

2. There are now economic as well as moral critiques of the concept of 'homo economicus', the fictional rational man whose strictly utilitarian desires supposedly structure macroeconomic behaviour; see, for example, Dan Ariely's *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces that Shape our Decisions* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008). Susan Feiner has also argued that this calculating and unsentimental figure actually has the emotional profile of 'an intensely romantic young man like Stephen [Dedalus] for whom consumption, working, and saving express aspects of an infant's' tormented desire for total maternal satisfaction. Susan F. Feiner, 'Portrait of Homo Economicus as a Young Man', in *The New Economic Criticism: Studies at the Intersection of Literature and Economics*, ed. Martha Woodmansee and Mark Osteen (New York: Routledge, 1999), 206.
3. In *Confidence Games*, Mark Taylor similarly argues that Kant's aesthetics are related to Smith's concept of autonomy and form the basis of Hegel's and Marx's holisms.
4. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edn (London: Verso, 1991), 25–6.
5. Fredric Jameson, 'Modernism and Imperialism', in *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 51, 64.
6. It might be argued that multi-plot movies like Steven Soderbergh's 2000 *Traffic* represent a modern attempt to produce political outrage within this amorphous context of global economic transactions, a project given didactic shape by the Dickensian device of a threatened and sentimentalized young girl (played by Erika Christensen), and because illicit drug use can be more concretely linked to personal moral habits than other international exchanges in, for example, electronics or agriculture.
7. Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (Oxford University Press, 1970), 14; Williams, *The Country and the City*, 165.
8. Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ed. Marilyn Butler (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), 7. Henceforth cited as *NA*.
9. Barrell, *English Literature in History 1730–1780*, 31.
10. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, 296–7.
11. James Thompson, *Models of Value: Eighteenth-Century Political Economy and the Novel* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 190; Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (University of Chicago Press, 1961), 265, quoted in Thompson, *Models of Value*, 191.
12. Thompson, *Models of Value*, 187.
13. In his essay 'Omniscience', Jonathan Culler attacks the idea of the omniscient narrator itself, breaking it apart into four different categories which he alleges are usually confused: the 'performative authoritativeness of many narrative declarations', the telepathic 'reporting of innermost thoughts and feelings', the moment of 'authorial narration' that dramatizes the narrator's ability to control the narrative, and the 'synoptic impersonal narration of the realist tradition': Jonathan Culler, 'Omniscience', in *The Literary in Theory* (Stanford University Press, 2007), 190.
14. D. A. Miller, *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style* (Princeton University Press, 2003), 75. By contrast, the Miller of *The Novel and the Police* treated omniscience, with

proper Foucauldian suspicion, as a tool of social control. D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

15. Miller, *Jane Austen*, 2, 39.
16. Miller, *Jane Austen*, 31, 3.
17. Miller, *Jane Austen*, 38, 28.
18. Miller, *Jane Austen*, 42, 48, 56.
19. Miller, *Jane Austen*, 27.
20. Roy Pascal, *The Dual Voice: Free Indirect Speech and its Functioning in the Nineteenth-Century European Novel* (Manchester University Press, 1977), 7.
21. Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford University Press, 1990), 6.
22. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2002), 78, 72.
23. Miller, *Jane Austen*, 46.
24. Markman Ellis notes that Austen was 'probably familiar' with Smith's works, and that *Pride and Prejudice* contains allusions to his writings: Markman Ellis, 'Trade', in *Jane Austen in Context*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 418. Peter Knox-Shaw argues that Austen's centrist scepticism derived from an Anglo-Scottish Enlightenment culture in which both Hume and Smith were prominent, and which 'dwelt on the irrationality of human nature, tempered the optimism of the *philosophes* with an emphasis on the limits of individual heroism, and instilled a distrust of dirigism and of the doctrinaire': Peter Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5. Elsie Michie speculates that Austen probably read *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*: Elsie Michie, 'Austen's Powers: Engaging with Adam Smith in Debates about Wealth and Virtue', *Novel* 34.1 (2000), 5–6n. William St Clair has found that Austen 'exceptionally belonged to a book club as well as a circulating library', the subjects of which 'covered all parts of the world'. He notes however that in *Northanger Abbey*, General Tilney seems to think that book clubs are only for men like himself: William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 260, 253, 256.
25. Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen*, 9. Michael Wheeler describes the eighteenth-century Anglicanism Austen inherited from her father as a 'moderate' religion steering a 'safe middle course between Enlightenment rationalism ... and Evangelical "enthusiasm" '. See Michael Wheeler, 'Religion', in *Jane Austen in Context*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 406. Knox-Shaw, however, speculates that Austen 'may, without ever having ceased to believe in the utility of belief, have been something of a private sceptic in the first part of her career' (9).
26. *Northanger Abbey*'s narrator, however, does occasionally foreground the novel's fictionality by playfully referring to the 'tell-tale compression of the pages' near the end of the story. *NA* 217.
27. On 'Janeites', see Deirdre Shauna Lynch, 'Cult of Jane Austen', in *Jane Austen in Context*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 111–20.
28. Pascal, *The Dual Voice*, 57.
29. *WN* I, 456.
30. Stefan Andriopoulos, 'The Invisible Hand: Supernatural Agency in Political Economy and the Gothic Novel', *ELH* 66 (1999), 744.
31. Andriopoulos, 'Invisible Hand', 747, 753.
32. Marilyn Butler, 'Introduction' to *NA*, xx–xxi.

33. Marilyn Butler points out that *Northanger Abbey* actually parodies two genres: the Gothic novel and the novel set in Bath. See Butler, 'Introduction' to *NA*, xiv. Other commentators, such as Jan Fergus, see the novel's objects of critique as the Gothic and the sentimental novel; though certainly Gothic novels also deploy sentimental tropes. See Jan Fergus, *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel:* Northanger Abbey*,* Sense and Sensibility*, and* Pride and Prejudice (London: Macmillan, 1983). Meanwhile, George Levine sees the novel's two genres as realism and parody, though he also argues that parody is an essential moment in realism's dialectical struggle against its more conventional predecessors. See George Levine, *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* (University of Chicago Press, 1981), 61–80.
34. Butler, 'Introduction' to *NA*, xxxiii–xxxiv.
35. Patrick Parrinder, 'Character, Identity, and Nationality in the English Novel', in *Landscape and Englishness*, ed. Robert Burden and Stephan Kohl (Amsterdam: Rodopi Press, 2006), 97. For a summary of critical response to this passage, see Melissa Schaub, 'Irony and Political Education in *Northanger Abbey*', *Persuasions On-Line* 21.1 (2000), Web.
36. Levine, *Realistic Imagination*, 208.
37. Knox-Shaw thus reads this moment as a Habermasian rather than a Foucauldian one in Henry's appeal to a public sphere developed by a certain historical infrastructure. See Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen*, 110–11.
38. Karl Kroeber, 'Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*: Self-reflexive Satire and Biopoetics', in *The Satiric Eye*, ed. Steven A. Jones (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 104, 103–4. On Austen's affinity with the eighteenth-century discourse of the picturesque, see also Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen*, 73–107; for a Lacanian interpretation of the same rolling landscape, see Catherine Belsey, 'Making Space: Perspective Vision and the Lacanian Real', *Textual Practice* 16.1 (2002), 31–55.
39. By 'Italian' here, of course, I mean every part of the European continent on which the Gothic is set in the English imagination; I am also aware that England shares no actual border with Italy.
40. Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen*, 108, 113, 114.
41. Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (University of Chicago Press, 1988), 35, 39, 32.
42. Johnson, *Jane Austen*, 48.
43. Levine, *Realistic Imagination*, 80.
44. Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, ed. George Ford and Sylvère Monod (New York: Norton, 1977), 5–6. Henceforth cited as *BH*.
45. Williams, *The English Novel*, 15, 16, 17, 49. See also Arac, who defends a dialectical and progressive reading of Dickens's narrator against the critical suspicion that narrative overview is either panoptical or otherwise secretly coercive. Jonathan Arac, *Commissioned Spirits: The Shaping of Social Motion in Dickens, Carlyle, Melville, and Hawthorne* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1979), 186–90.
46. Garrett cites Edwin Muir's 1928 distinction between the spatially organized 'novel of character', which surveys characters in an unchanging social space, and the temporally organized 'dramatic novel', focused on the unfolding of an individual consciousness. Peter K. Garrett, *The Victorian Multiplot Novel: Studies in Dialogical Form* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 21.
47. Garrett, *Victorian Multiplot Novel*, 39, 41–2, 71. See also James Buzard's description of Quilp's rage against a chained dog in *The Old Curiosity Shop* as a 'travest[y]'

of 'the Dickensian differential relationship of narrator and characters... [W]ho else but his creator and confiner could provoke such a torrent of aggression[?]': James Buzard, 'Enumeration and Exhaustion: Taking Inventory in *The Old Curiosity Shop*', in *Dickens Studies Annual* 39, ed. Stanley Friedman, Edward Guiliano, Anne Humpherys, Talia Schaffer, and Michael Timko (New York: AMS Press, 2008), 30.

48. Richard Maxwell, 'Dickens's Omniscience', *ELH* 46.2 (1979), 298.
49. Arac, *Commissioned Spirits*, 112.
50. Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son,* ed. Alan Horsman (Oxford University Press, 1982), 540–1.
51. Williams, *The English Novel*, 33–4. See also Williams, *The Country and the City*, 155.
52. Garrett, *Victorian Multiplot Novel*, 34.
53. John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 2 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1904), 2: 78–9. Dickens's stipulation that this Shadow would also be 'cheerful, useful, and always welcome' (79) does little to dissipate the image's profound uncanniness.
54. For further Dickensian figures of the sun as philosophical or religious truth, see Mark M. Hennelly, 'Dickens's Daniel-Plato Complex: *Dombey and Son* and *Bleak House*', in *Dickens Studies Annual* 39, ed. Stanley Friedman, Edward Guiliano, Anne Humpherys, Talia Schaffer, and Michael Timko (New York: AMS Press, 2008), 97–126.
55. J. H. Miller, *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 65–6.
56. For revolutionary imagery in *Bleak House*, see Erik G. Lorentzen, '"Obligations of Home": Colonialism, Contamination, and Revolt in *Bleak House*', in *Dickens Studies Annual* 34, ed. Stanley Friedman, Edward Guiliano, Anne Humpherys, and Michael Timko (New York: AMS Press, 2004), 155–84.
57. Arac, *Commissioned Spirits*, 117, 119.
58. Arnold Kettle, 'Dickens and the Popular Tradition', in *Literature and Liberation: Selected Essays*, ed. Graham Martin and W. R. Owens (Manchester University Press, 1988), 161; Bruce Robbins, 'Telescopic Philanthropy: Professionalism and Responsibility in *Bleak House*', in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 216, 220.
59. 'Master and Man', *All the Year Round* 3 (26 May 1860): 159; 'A New Chamber of Horrors', *All the Year Round* 4 (2 March 1861): 500; quoted in Maxwell, 'Dickens's Omniscience', 293.
60. Maxwell, 'Dickens's Omniscience', 293. On Esther as supplement in the Derridean sense, see Audrey Jaffe, *Vanishing Points: Dickens, Narrative, and the Subject of Omniscience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 129. It is surprising that Maxwell does not follow up this insight with a discussion of *Bleak House*: in fact he concludes that 'The omniscient yet morally sympathetic view must integrate two mutually exclusive ways of looking at the city, a miracle which never quite occurs' (293).
61. For Esther's suspicion of Jacobin generalizations, see James Buzard, *Disorienting Fiction: The Autoethnographic Work of Nineteenth-Century British Novels* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 136.
62. George Orwell is among the many materialist commentators who have regretted Dickens's inability to specify a more precise analytical solution to the political impasses represented in his late novels: 'He has no constructive suggestions, not

even a clear grasp of the nature of the society he is attacking, only an emotional perception that something is wrong.' Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', in *A Collection of Essays* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), 101. Lauren Goodlad and Pam Morris approach this problem more historically by placing the novel within a contemporary political spectrum that includes the possibility of pastoral governmentality as well as the rejected alternatives of laissez-faire and centralized bureaucracy. See Pam Morris, '*Bleak House* and the Struggle for the State Domain', *ELH* 68.3 (2001), 679–98; and Lauren M. E. Goodlad, *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State: Character and Government in a Liberal Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 86–117.

63. Jacob Korg, 'Introduction', in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of* Bleak House*: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Jacob Korg (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 15. Robert A. Donovan, 'Structure and Idea in *Bleak House*', in *Twentieth Century Interpretations*, ed. Korg, 39.
64. Korg, 'Introduction', 20.
65. Katherine Williams, 'Glass Windows: The View from *Bleak House*', in *Dickens Studies Annual* 33, ed. Stanley Friedman, Edward Guiliano, Anne Humpherys, and Michael Timko (New York: AMS Press, 2003), 79, 81. Williams develops her argument in dialogue with Philip Landon's contention that Esther collaborates 'seamlessly' with the omniscient narrator in a way that resembles the transparency of the Crystal Palace exhibition building. See Philip Landon, 'Great Exhibitions: Representation of the Crystal Palace in Mayhew, Dickens, and Dostoyevsky', *Nineteenth Century Contexts* 20 (1997), 54.
66. Williams, 'Glass Windows', 80–1.
67. Catherine Belsey argues that because 'the reader is constantly prompted to supply the deficiencies of each narrative', the text creates a 'third and privileged but literally unwritten discourse' that smoothes over the novel's apparent contradictions. See Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen, 1980), 80, 81. Jeremy Tambling quotes Belsey as an example of the classic 'case against "realism" put by modern theorists' but disagrees that the two narratives cohere to this extent. Jeremy Tambling, 'Introduction', in *New Casebooks:* Bleak House*, Charles Dickens*, ed. Jeremy Tambling (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998), 7.
68. Humphrey House, *The Dickens World* (Oxford University Press, 1941), 35.
69. Joseph W. Childers, 'Politicized Dickens: The Journalism of the 1850s', in *Palgrave Advances in Charles Dickens Studies*, ed. John Bowen and Robert L. Patten (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 198–216.
70. Kathleen Blake argues that despite most critics' romantic Leavisite rejection of Benthamism, *Bleak House*'s reformist impulse is actually compatible with Bentham's in its preference for self-made individuals over superannuated aristocracy and sclerotic bureaucracies. Blake's claim that Victorian studies has unjustly ignored political economy was interestingly published in 1997, just before the substantial critical revival in this question. Kathleen Blake, '*Bleak House,* Political Economy, Victorian Studies', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 25 (1997), 1–21.
71. Gordon Bigelow sees the structure of Chancery itself as a reference to the infinite deferral of value in a 'chaotic and groundless marketplace' – and specifically the anxiety produced by the Bank Charter Act of 1844, which attempted to place controls on currency but failed to prevent either financial panic or the Irish famine. See Bigelow, *Fiction, Famine and the Rise of Economics*, 103.
72. Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present*, ed. Richard T. Altick (New York University Press, 1965), 150–1.

73. Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, 2: 160.
74. Mark M. Hennelly compares this scene to the dramatic yet puzzling 'writing on the wall' in the fifth chapter of the Book of Daniel. See Hennelly, 'Dickens's Daniel-Plato Complex', 121.
75. Virginia Blain argues that the excessive drama surrounding Lady Dedlock's death points to her function as a scapegoat for the novel's suppressed sexual violence, in which she 'takes on all the "sins" of illicit female sexuality which so threaten the fabric of a patrilineal society'. Virginia Blain, 'Double Vision and the Double Standard in *Bleak House*: A Feminist Perspective', *Literature and History* 11 (1985), 43.
76. Bert G. Hornback, 'The Narrator of *Bleak House*', *Dickens Quarterly* 16.1 (1999), 3–12.
77. W. J. Harvey, *Character and the Novel* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965), 94.
78. George Brimley, 'Dickens's Bleak House', *Spectator* 26 (24 September 1853), 924.
79. Harvey, *Character and the Novel*, 91, 94–5.
80. See Lisa Jadwin, '"Caricatured, Not Faithfully Rendered": *Bleak House* as a Revision of *Jane Eyre*', *Modern Language Notes* 26 (1996), 111–33. Although Dickens claimed not to have read *Jane Eyre*, which was published only a few years before *Bleak House*, Jadwin argues that Esther seems 'designed to refute Jane's rebellious defiance' (121).
81. Alison Case, 'Gender and History in Narrative Theory: The Problem of Retrospective Distance in *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House*', in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, ed. James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 315.
82. Jaffe, *Vanishing Points*, 133, 132, 134. Jaffe finds the phenomenon of denegation in other characters as well – for instance, in Vholes's assertion that he is not interested in Richard's case for his own benefit (though he is), and Skimpole's boast that he does not care about money (though he does).
83. Case, 'Gender and History', 320.
84. Kimberle L. Brown, '"When I Kissed Her Cheek": Theatrics of Sexuality and the Framed Gaze in Esther's Narration of *Bleak House*', in *Dickens Studies Annual* 39 (New York: AMS Press, 2008), 160–1.
85. Jaffe, however, sees the necessity of this kind of personal choice as the inevitable continuation of Esther's repressed personality, since she chooses to reject her identity as Lady Dedlock's illegitimate daughter. See Jaffe, *Vanishing Points*, 137–8.
86. The masculine equivalent to Esther's somewhat naive selflessness is Mr George's unwillingness to hire a lawyer to defend him from the mistaken allegation of killing Tulkinghorn: his stubborn reliance on the honour of his truthful speech leads even Jarndyce to exclaim 'Why, Heaven save us, man! ... you talk of yourself as if you were somebody else!' (*BH* 619). Mr George's honour is praiseworthy, but his refusal to defend himself against the distorted views of others might easily have led to his unjust death.
87. Harvey, *Character and the Novel*, 965.
88. Jaffe, *Vanishing Points*, 137, 138.
89. Kroeber, 'Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*', 108, 109.
90. Miller, *Charles Dickens*, 171.
91. Robbins, 'Telescopic Philanthropy', 214.
92. Robbins, 'Telescopic Philanthropy', 218.
93. Though the depiction of Mrs Jellyby seems to be a straightforward attack on foreign philanthropy, Timothy L. Carens notes that Dickens depicts imperial

adventure as productive for the novel's male figures, such as the honourable soldier Mr George, and the doctor Allan Woodcourt, who proves his fitness abroad by rescuing his fellow passengers from a shipwreck. So 'Charity only necessarily *begins* at home…for the middle-class woman.' Timothy L. Carens, 'The Civilizing Mission at Home: Empire, Gender, and National Reform in *Bleak House*', in *Dickens Studies Annual* 26, ed. Stanley Friedman, Edward Guiliano, and Michael Timko (New York: AMS Press, 1998), 123.

94. Robbins, 'Telescopic Philanthropy', 215.
95. 'Review of the *Narrative of the Expedition sent by Her Majesty's Government to the River Niger in 1841*', quoted in Robbins, 'Telescopic Philanthropy', 215.
96. Buzard, *Disorienting Fiction*, 115.
97. Lorentzen, 'Obligations of Home', 161.
98. Robbins, 'Telescopic Philanthropy', 227.

3 Providential Endings: Martineau, Dickens, and the Didactic Task of Political Economy

1. On the progressive aspects of Victorian liberalism, see Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton University Press, 2001); Goodlad, *Victorian Literature*; and David Wayne Thomas, *Cultivating Victorians: Liberal Culture and the Aesthetic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).
2. E.g. Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798/1803); David Ricardo, *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817); Jeremy Bentham, *Introduction to Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789); Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *On the Constitution of Church and State* (1829); Robert Southey, *Sir Thomas More; Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society* (1829); Thomas De Quincey, *Logic of Political Economy* (1844); Jane Marcet, *Conversations on Political Economy* (1816); Maria Edgeworth, *Ennui* (1809); James Mill, *Elements of Political Economy* (1820); J. R. McCulloch, *Discourse on the Rise, Progress, Peculiar Objects, and Importance of Political Economy* (1825). The publication of John Stuart Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* in 1848 brought together a number of these diverse strands and created a new disciplinary consensus. See, for example, Patrick Brantlinger, *The Spirit of Reform: British Literature and Politics, 1832–1867* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977); Noel Thompson, *The People's Science: The Popular Political Economy of Exploitation and Crisis 1816-34* (Cambridge University Press, 1984).
3. Raymond Williams's influential analysis of the industrial novels in *Culture and Society* focuses on six major works: Dickens's 1854 *Hard Times*, Elizabeth Gaskell's 1848 *Mary Barton* and 1855 *North and South*, Benjamin Disraeli's 1845 *Sybil*, Charlotte Brontë's 1849 *Shirley*, and Charles Kingsley's 1850 *Alton Locke*. Other examples of the genre include Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna's 1841 *Helen Fleetwood* and Frances Trollope's 1840 *Michael Armstrong, Factory Boy*.
4. See Klaver, *A/Moral Economics*, 2–4.
5. Charles Dickens, *Hard Times: For These Times*, ed. Fred Kaplan and Sylvère Monod (New York: Norton, 2001), 203. Henceforth cited as *HT*.
6. Taylor, *Confidence Games*, 4, 83–4.
7. Klaver, *A/Moral Economics*, 31–52.
8. Leopold Damrosch, Jr, *God's Plot and Man's Stories* (University of Chicago Press, 1985), 263, 300. Thomas Vargish by contrast makes a detailed narratological

argument for the continued importance of providentialism in major works of Victorian realism, seeing hidden religious narratives in such devices as coincidence, omens, allegories, and the convention of poetic justice. See Thomas Vargish, *The Providential Aesthetic in Victorian Fiction* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1985).

9. Gallagher, *The Body Economic*, 37. Though these 114 tracts were written anonymously, 49 can be attributed to Hannah More and another 6 to her sister Sally More. See Jeremy Collingwood and Margaret Collingwood, *Hannah More* (Oxford: Lion, 1990), 113. More began her career in the witty London society of Johnson and Garrick, but by the late 1780s was increasingly associated with the abolitionist and missionary Clapham sect.
10. Hannah More, *Works* (New York: Harper, 1835), 53–4.
11. Catherine Gallagher links subtle differences in More's and Martineau's plots to their different religious approaches to the question of Providence, with More representing an evangelical conception of divine agency as constantly intervening in the work of creation, whereas Martineau's fiction corresponds to the Unitarian or deist conception of God as a Divine Watchmaker who then withdraws from his creation. Gallagher argues that because of this heritage More's stories foreground the possibility of free will that is totally absent from Martineau's entirely deterministic stories. See Gallagher, *Industrial Reformation*, 36–61. This distinction seems to complicate Taylor's description of Smith's invisible hand as an inheritance of Scottish Calvinism, with its idea of perpetual creation, since Smith's religious beliefs were much closer to Martineau's than to either Calvinism or Methodism. In a more recent article, Linda H. Peterson traces several lines of filiation between More and Martineau, stressing how Martineau was inspired by More's specific style of fable as well as her career as a woman writer; but also linking Martineau to Scott and the Romantic poets in her radical aspirations for democratizing fiction. See Linda H. Peterson, 'From French Revolution to English Reform: Hannah More, Harriet Martineau, and the "Little Book" ', *Nineteenth Century Literature* 60.4 (2006), 409–50.
12. See, in addition to works already cited, Elaine Freedgood, 'Banishing Panic: Harriet Martineau and the Popularization of Political Economy', *Victorian Studies* 39 (1995), 33–53; Annette Van, 'Realism, Speculation, and the Gold Standard in Harriet Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy*', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 34 (2006), 115–29; Claudia C. Klaver, 'Imperial Economics: Harriet Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy* and the Narration of Empire', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 35 (2007), 21–40. In response to this increasing interest in Martineau, Broadview Press republished several of the *Illustrations of Political Economy* in 2004.
13. Deborah Anna Logan, 'Introduction', in *Illustrations of Political Economy: Selected Tales*, by Harriet Martineau (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2004), 29.
14. Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life*, ed. Macdonald Daly (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), 173. Henceforth cited as *MB*.
15. 'Heartsease', *Fraser's Magazine* 50 (November 1854), 489–90, quoted in Richard Stang, *The Theory of the Novel in England 1850–1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 72.
16. 'Recent Novels: *Agatha's* Husband', *Edinburgh Review* 97 (April 1853), 381, quoted in Stang, *Theory of the Novel*, 69.
17. 'Religious Novels', *North British Review* 26 (November 1856), 210–14, quoted in Stang, *Theory of the Novel*, 72.

18. Harriet Martineau, *Illustrations of Political Economy*, 25 vols (London, 1832–34), 1: xi. Henceforth cited as *IPE*.
19. 'Deixis' is in linguistics simply 'the location of an utterance in time and space in relation to its speaker', such as in the contrast between 'I am here now' and 'he was there then'; see Patricia Ingham, *Invisible Writing and the Victorian Novel: Readings in Language and Ideology* (Manchester University Press, 2000), 8. I use the word here in the sense of pointing to, or pointing out, something that dramatizes both the narrator's real presence before a social truth, and the reader's moral responsibility to respond to that story as if they were physically confronted with the situation it presents. In her book *Realism*, Pam Morris discusses the strength of illocutionary, or performative, statements such as the moment in Dickens's *Bleak House* when Jarndyce says 'Look at this! For God's sake look at this!', arguing that 'the exclamation makes explicit the normative illocutionary force of bearing witness conjoined to the issue of factuality'. The reader, in other words, is required to take up 'some evaluative attitude' in response, since the novel claims to refer at least in part to the reader's own moral world. See Morris, *Realism*, 156.
20. Charles Dickens, 'The Author's Preface to the Third Edition (1841)', in *Oliver Twist*, ed. Fred Kaplan (New York: Norton, 1993), 6. Mary Poovey identifies a similarly moralized claim to transparency in financial journalism, which she argues aspired to be a kind of 'perfect writing' that could be 'morally efficacious' and 'make company promoters and directors moral through its own performative force': Mary Poovey, 'Writing about Finance in Victorian England: Disclosure and Secrecy in the Culture of Investment', *Victorian Studies* 45 (2002), 26.
21. According to Levine the realist writer must 'dismiss previous conventions of representation while, in effect, establishing new ones'. Levine, *Realistic Imagination*, 8.
22. F. R. Leavis applies this term to *Hard Times* in *The Great Tradition*, 227.
23. Emily Rena-Dozier, 'Hannah More and the Invention of Narrative Authority', *ELH* 71 (2004), 224.
24. Joseph W. Childers, *Novel Possibilities: Fiction and the Formation of Early Victorian Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 140.
25. Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Politics of Story in Victorian Social Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).
26. Elaine Freedgood, *Victorian Writing about Risk: Imagining a Safe England in a Dangerous World* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3.
27. For a description of Martineau's fan mail, see Claudia Orazem, *Political Economy and Fiction in the Early Works of Harriet Martineau* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999).
28. Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, 2 vols (1877. London: Virago, 1983), 1: 194.
29. Gallagher, *Industrial Reformation*, 220.
30. Martineau, *Autobiography*, 1: 194.
31. '[S]tudents of all manner of physical sciences afterwards wanted me to "illustrate" things of which social life (and therefore fiction) can admit of no illustration. I used to say till I was tired that none but moral and political science admitted of the method [of fictional illustration] at all; and I doubt whether many of those who talk about it understand the matter to this day.' Martineau, *Autobiography*, 1: 138.
32. Martineau, *Autobiography*, 1: 238.
33. See Michael R. Hill, 'Introduction to the Transaction Edition: Empiricism and Reason in Harriet Martineau's Sociology', in *How to Observe Manners and Morals*,

by Harriet Martineau (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Transaction, 1995), xv–lx.

34. Martineau, *Autobiography*, 1: 169.
35. Martineau, *Autobiography*, 1: 171.
36. Martineau read Marcet's schoolroom dialogue in 1827, and quickly formed the desire to write a tract in which the principles of political economy were 'not smothered up in a story, but ... exhibited in their natural workings in selected passages of social life' (*Autobiography*, 1: 138). Marcet, who became a friend of Martineau, later wrote her own set of economic fables, *Johns Hopkins's Notions on Political Economy* (1833).
37. Gallagher contrasts Martineau's deductivism with Eliot's inductivism, but argues that after *Silas Marner* Eliot increasingly turned to a politics of culture to supplement her aesthetic commitment to detailed observational realism. See *Industrial Reformation*, 219–22, 222–67.
38. April Alliston, 'Female Sexuality and the Referent of Enlightenment Realisms', in *Spectacles of Realism: Body, Gender, Genre*, ed. Margaret Cohen and Christopher Prendergast (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 13–14. Alliston distinguishes between three forms of realist narratives: the 'evidentiary realism' of Defoe, which strives for an effect of verisimilitude, the 'exemplary realism' of Richardson and Rousseau, and 'mimetic' or 'high' realism, in which characters 'are examples in the other, evidentiary sense: they are the particular instances that prove a maxim or precept – in this case an implicit statement of general truth about "reality" – by standing for it, representing it' (14).
39. Valerie Pichanik represents a typically harsh modern judgment of the tales, stating that 'her characters were generally two-dimensional and she belaboured much of the message by means of wooden, didactic, and unrealistic dialogue': Valerie Pichanik, *Harriet Martineau: The Woman and Her Work* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980), 53.
40. Martineau was warned that the King of France would stop reading her series when he got to the twelfth one, *French Wines and Politics*; meanwhile the Emperor of Russia 'ordered every copy of my Series to be delivered up, and then burnt or deported; and I was immediately forbidden the empire. His example was followed in Austria; and thus, I was personally excluded, before my Series was half done, from two of the three greatest countries in Europe, and in disfavour with the third, – supposing I wished to go there.' Martineau, *Autobiography*, 1: 236–7. For a defence of Martineau's radical heritage, see Peterson, 'From French Revolution to English Reform'.
41. Gillian Thomas, *Harriet Martineau* (Boston: Twayne, 1985), 91.
42. In her *Autobiography*, Martineau observes that 'if I have had the blessing of any available strength under sorrow, perplexity, sickness and toil, ... it is owing to my repose upon eternal and irreversible laws, working in every department of the universe, without any interference from any random will, human or divine': *Autobiography*, 1: 111.
43. Gallagher, *Industrial Reformation*, 59.
44. Klaver, *A/Moral Economics*, 53–77.
45. Gallagher, *Industrial Reformation*, 61, 57.
46. Martineau, *Autobiography*, 2: 108. In 'Banishing Panic', Elaine Freedgood makes a similar point that Martineau's works are not equivalent to the economic theory they claim to illustrate, but she argues that Martineau's vision is more optimistic

than that of the theorists; it is Ricardo, and not Martineau, who has a 'tragic vision' (46) of the inevitability of class conflict.

47. Martineau, *Autobiography*, 2: 115. Ann Hobart discusses a similar passage from Martineau's 1833 essay 'Achievements of the Genius of Scott', in which she rejects historical romance and calls for a novel depicting the 'graver themes' of contemporary social reform: Ann Hobart, 'Harriet Martineau's Political Economy of Everyday Life', *Victorian Studies* 37 (1994), 241. Peterson argues that as Martineau 'turned away from Hannah More, the model with which she had begun her literary career, and toward the example of Walter Scott, Martineau articulated a new direction for British literature. ... [t]he English political revolution of 1832 was to have its parallel in an English literary revolution of the same era – by turning away from the historical novel and the hero of high birth and turning instead to ordinary heroes of the present day': Peterson, 'From French Revolution to English Reform', 443–4.
48. William Wordsworth, 'Advertisement to *Lyrical Ballads*', in *Major British Poets of the Romantic Period,* ed. William Heath (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 179.
49. George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, ed. Stephen Gill (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 222.
50. Henry James, 'The Art of Fiction', in *The Critical Muse: Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. Roger Gard (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 188.
51. The most influential articulation of political disappointment in the novel is probably Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society*, which points out that 'in condemning Thomas Gradgrind ... we are invited also to condemn the kind of thinking and the methods of enquiry and legislation which in fact promoted a large measure of social and industrial reform' (94). Hilary Schor contextualizes the novel's politics in terms of Dickens's later career: 'As Dickens's "art" matured, so his social vision at once deepened and (or so most argue) became more conservative; bringing more of England into view, he also became less able to name convincingly the solution to England's woes': Hilary Schor, 'Novels of the 1850s: *Hard Times*, *Little Dorrit*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens*, ed. John O. Jordan (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 65. Schor however concludes that Dickens's metaphoric 'social vision beyond the personal' was 'the most powerful social force of his age' (76).
52. Gallagher examines the determinism of *Hard Times* in *The Body Economic* and concludes that its 'grim' fulfilment of the reader's expectations may reflect Dickens's melancholy response to the constant pressure on his fiction to be amusing: 'some part of this usually exuberant author seems to be on strike in *Hard Times*' (71, 82).
53. Anne Humpherys, 'Hard Times', in *A Companion to Charles Dickens*, ed. David Paroissien (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 394–5.
54. The fact that in *Poetic Justice* Martha Nussbaum is able to analyse *Hard Times* not only as a critique of utilitarianism, but also as an embodiment of the superior ethical perspective of fiction itself, testifies to the continuing success of the novel's argument that utilitarianism is limited because of its refusal to recognize fiction's epistemological authority.
55. In *Reason over Passion*, Valerie Sanders points out several places where *Hard Times* explicitly echoes passages from Martineau's articles in *Household Words*: Valerie Sanders, *Reason over Passion: Harriet Martineau and the Victorian Novel* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1986), 43. See also the discussion of Bounderby's fallacious life story as a self-made man in Bodenheimer, *Politics of Story*, 197–8.
56. David Lodge, 'How Successful is *Hard Times*?', in *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens, ed. Fred Kaplan and Sylvère Monod (New York: Norton, 2001), 400–9.

57. For further connections between *Hard Times* and 'Frauds on the Fairies', see Deborah A. Thomas, *Hard Times: A Fable of Fragmentation and Wholeness* (New York: Twayne, 1997), 39–45.
58. Charles Dickens, 'Frauds on the Fairies', in *Selected Journalism 1850–1870*, ed. David Pascoe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), 566.
59. Dickens, 'Frauds on the Fairies', 570.
60. Harriet Martineau, 'The Factory Legislation: A Warning Against Meddling Legislation', in *Hard Times,* by Charles Dickens, ed. Fred Kaplan and Sylvère Monod (New York: Norton, 2001), 310.
61. See, for example, E. P. Whipple, 'On the Economic Fallacies of *Hard Times*', in *Hard Times,* by Charles Dickens, ed. Fred Kaplan and Sylvère Monod (New York: Norton, 2001), 347–51.
62. W. D. Sockwell, *Popularizing Classical Economics: Henry Brougham and William Ellis* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1994), 99.

4 Ripple Effects and the Fog of War in *Vanity Fair*

1. William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair,* ed. Peter Schillingsburg (New York: Norton, 1994), 501. Hereafter cited as *VF*.
2. Paul Ormerod, *Butterfly Economics: A New General Theory of Social and Economic Behaviour* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998).
3. Abraham Hayward, 'Thackeray's Writings', *Edinburgh Review* 88 (January 1848), 46–67; rpt. in *Thackeray: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Geoffrey Tillotson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), 39.
4. Step 6 of Bentham's instructions on how to calculate happiness is: 'Take an account of the *number* of persons whose interests appear to be concerned ... *Sum up* the numbers expressive of the degrees of *good* tendency, which the act has, with respect to each individual, in regard to whom the tendency of it is *good* upon the whole ... Take the *balance*; which, if on the side of *pleasure*, will give the general *good tendency* of the act, with respect to the total number or community of individuals concerned.' See Jeremy Bentham, 'From *An Introduction to the Principles of Morality and Legislation*', in *Utilitarianism and Other Essays*, by John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham, ed. Alan Ryan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 88.
5. Quoted in John Stuart Mill, 'Whewell on Moral Philosophy', in *Utilitarianism and Other Essays*, by John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham, ed. Alan Ryan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 244.
6. Quoted in Laura Snyder, *Reforming Philosophy: A Victorian Debate on Science and Society* (University of Chicago Press, 2006), 246.
7. Mill, 'Whewell', 244, 246. Snyder argues that here, as in many other places, Mill was using Whewell as a straw man to defend the inductivism of his own theories.
8. John Stuart Mill, 'Utilitarianism', in *Utilitarianism and Other Essays*, by John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham, ed. Alan Ryan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 295.
9. In the *System of Logic*, Mill argues that 'in the social sciences – unlike in the physical sciences – we cannot make predictions; there are too many counteracting causes'; quoted in Snyder, *Reforming*, 307.
10. Theodore A. Burczak's recent defence of a 'socialism after Hayek' proceeds from the admission that 'Today, most economists think that Hayek was right'

about the difficulties of central economic planning. Burczak however disagrees with Hayek's fabled conclusion that any attempt at economic coordination is a step down a slippery slope towards totalitarianism, and suggests that Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen's theories of Aristotelian capability theory can provide an adequate picture of human needs to circumvent the Hayekian knowledge problem and provide grounds for government action. See Theodore A. Burczak, *Socialism After Hayek* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 36.

11. Friedrich Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (University of Chicago Press, 1948), 80, 83, 85, 86.
12. Taylor, *Confidence Games*, 43–6; F. A. Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism* (University of Chicago Press, 1989), 146; quoted in Taylor, *Confidence Games*, 46.
13. Friedrich A. Hayek, 'The Theory of Complex Phenomena', in *Critical Approaches to Science and Philosophy*, ed. Mario Bunge (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Transaction, 1999), 348.
14. Christina Petsoulas argues that Hayek is wrong to see Smith, Mandeville, and Hume as sharing his ideas that liberal society is based on spontaneous order and the gradual cultural evolution of rules and laws. She points out that while Hayek always defends mercantile activities from a predatory state, Smith acknowledged that 'However beneficial they may otherwise be, the activities of the mercantile order have to be contained by appropriate institutions which, by preventing economic interests from colonising the state, guarantee the benefits gained from free trade.' See Christina Petsoulas, *Hayek's Liberalism and its Origins: His Idea of Spontaneous Order and the Scottish Enlightenment* (London: Routledge, 2001), 189. Edna Ullmann-Margalit ('The Invisible Hand') also critiques Hayek's use of the invisible hand on the grounds that Smith's view of the invisible hand is a cornerstone of secular rationalism while Hayek's stress is on accepting the limitations of human reason. She points to a confusion in Hayek's views between biological evolution, in which organic features can be assumed to serve some beneficial function, and cultural evolution, in which inherited structures may or may not actually be optimal or even useful.
15. Mill, a determinist, would probably have categorized Hayek's idea of spontaneity as a 'free-will metaphysic[s]'. See John Stuart Mill, *System of Logic*, in *Utilitarianism and Other Essays*, by John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham, ed. Alan Ryan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 115.
16. Hayek, *Individualism*, 87.
17. Hayek distinguished his classical liberal belief in free markets from a conservative defence of tradition: 'in its paternalistic, nationalistic, and power-adoring tendencies [conservatism] is often closer to socialism than to true liberalism'. See Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom. Text and Documents: The Definitive Edition*, in *The Collected Works of F. A. Hayek*, vol. 2, ed. Bruce Caldwell (University of Chicago Press, 2007), 45.
18. Jon Jensen defines this new eco-conservatism: 'Conservatism is the opposite of the blind drive toward the future, toward progress and perpetual growth, a view that dominates both the Right and the Left in contemporary politics. ... We need ... [a] progressive conservatism that moves us beyond the status quo while seeing the big picture and carefully studying exits and indirect effects.' See Jon Jensen, 'Educating for Ignorance', in *The Virtues of Ignorance: Complexity, Sustainability,*

and the Limits of Knowledge, ed. Bill Vitek and Wes Jackson (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 300.

19. Other influential vectors of popularizing this set of concepts range from James Gleick's *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York: Penguin, 1987) with its introduction to fractal mathematics, to Malcolm Gladwell's *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2002), with its link between non-linear mathematics and 'viral marketing'.
20. Ormerod, *Butterfly Economics*, 28. See also Johnson, *Emergence*, 29–33, 73–82. In this accessible intellectual history, Johnson points out that the modern science of complexity has roots in the earlier work of Smith, Darwin, and Engels, as well as urban theorist Jane Jacobs and biologist E. O. Wilson.
21. Ormerod, *Butterfly Economics*, 21, 26, 189, 23n.
22. Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *Fooled by Randomness: The Hidden Role of Chance in Life and in the Markets* (New York: Random House, 2005), 173, xlv, 36.
23. See the analysis of this equation's invention in 2000 and its quick spread through the securities markets in Felix Salmon's article 'A Formula for Disaster' (*Wired*, 17 March 2009), 74–9, 112.
24. See the discussion below of H. Porter Abbott's article on narrative and emergent order, which reaches similar conclusions about the inadequacy of narrative to model complexity. Literary criticism itself is one of the many, many intellectual disciplines dismissed by Taleb for its failure to appreciate what he calls a 'Tragic Vision of humankind that believes in the existence of inherent limitations and flaws', a visionary company that would include Smith and Hayek as well as Popper, George Soros, and Charles Sanders Peirce. However, his idea that literary critics have no concept of randomness but confuse everything with inappropriate ideas of symbolism elides the difference between analysing human artwork and an empirical approach to natural systems – as well as underselling the epistemological scepticism of the postmodern literary approaches that he prefers to dismiss, with only a little accuracy, as post-Hegelian verbiage. See Taleb, *Fooled by Randomness*, xlv, xliii, 72–5.
25. Taylor, *Confidence Games*, 89, 273.
26. 'It is interesting to imagine an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us.' Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 489.
27. Bill Vitek and Wes Jackson, 'Introduction: Taking Ignorance Seriously', in *The Virtues of Ignorance: Complexity, Sustainability, and the Limits of Knowledge*, ed. Bill Vitek and Wes Jackson (Frankfort: University of Kentucky Press, 2008), 4, 7, 9.
28. Raymond H. Dean, 'Optimizing Uncertainty', in *The Virtues of Ignorance: Complexity, Sustainability, and the Limits of Knowledge*, ed. Bill Vitek and Wes Jackson (Frankfort: University of Kentucky Press, 2008), 84, 91.
29. Vitek and Jackson, 'Introduction', 5.
30. Franco Moretti's *Graphs, Maps, and Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (London: Verso, 2007) is an intriguing exception that treats literature as an aggregate evolutionary phenomenon in which some forms of narratives survive while others succumb to extinction.
31. Abbott, 'Narrative and Emergent Behavior', 229, 230, 231.

32. Henry James, 'Preface to *The Tragic Muse*', in *The Critical Muse: Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. Roger Gard (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 515.
33. Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, 21.
34. Geoffrey Tillotson, *Thackeray the Novelist* (London: Methuen, 1954), 288, 32, 166.
35. See Eleanor Courtemanche, 'Invisible Hands and Visionary Narrators: Why the Free Market is Like a Novel', in *Metaphors of Economy*, ed. Nicole Bracker and Stefan Herbrechter (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 69–78.
36. Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Michael Mason (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), 6.
37. George Eliot, 'Amos Barton', in *Scenes of Clerical Life* (Oxford University Press, 1988), 14; Eliot, *Adam Bede*, 222. Tillotson boldly makes a similar argument for Henry James himself, tracing Thackeray's influence in the focus on flawed moral characters as well as a range of Thackerayan character-types like 'the woman who does not defeat or outrage our moral judgment ... so much as baffle it with the aesthetic fascination of the changes on the surface. Becky Sharp and Blanche Amory may well have helped James to make his Daisy Miller and Verena Tarrant'; or the 'frustrated middle-aged male personage' like Dobbin. 'Taking over much of Thackeray's field of interest, James took over much of his attitude to it, and was indebted to him for tone, angle, vivacity, high spirits, satirical laughter, and the admired "humour ... so complex and refined".' See Tillotson, *Thackeray*, 300–1.
38. William Makepeace Thackeray, *Catherine: A Story. By Ikey Solomons, Jr., Esq.*, ed. Sheldon F. Goldfarb (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 131.
39. Judith L. Fisher, *Thackeray's Skeptical Narrative and the 'Perilous Trade' of Authorship* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 2, 4.
40. Fisher, *Thackeray's Skeptical Narrative*, 5.
41. Tillotson, *Thackeray*, 12.
42. Williams, *The Country and the City*, 165.
43. Kathleen Tillotson, 'Vanity Fair', in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Vanity Fair: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. M. G. Sundell (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 41.
44. Gordon N. Ray surmises that 'the bulk of [Thackeray's father] Richmond Thackeray's estate was lost in the collapse of the great Indian agency-houses that took place at this period. The cycle began with the failure of Palmer and Company for £5,000,000 in 1830, and ended with the failure of Cruttendon and Company for £1,350,000 in 1834.' See Gordon N. Ray, *Thackeray: The Uses of Adversity: 1811–1846* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1955), 162. See Tony Webster for a history of Palmer and Co., which thrived for many years as a combination financial services and placement agency for Anglo-Indians, but failed for many reasons, including theft by both partners and native employees: 'An Early Global Business in a Colonial Context: The Strategies, Management, and Failure of John Palmer and Company of Calcutta, 1780–1830', *Enterprise and Society* 6.1 (2005), 98–133. Patrick Brantlinger analyses significant Indian references in Thackeray's fiction, including the ruin of the Scapes by an agency-house bankruptcy in *Vanity Fair*, and the collapse in *The Newcomes* of the Bundelcund Bank, supposedly founded to take up the slack from the failed agency houses. See *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 73–107.
45. Letter to the Duke of Devonshire, 1 May 1848, reprinted in *VF* 701. Thackeray pays less attention to the more obvious corollary of this catastrophe's transit from periphery to metropole: that is, that small financial or bureaucratic changes in England must have had far-reaching effects in India.

46. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, 3 vols, trans. James John Graham (London: 1908), I: 105–6. Clausewitz is also known for his analysis of 'friction' in military strategy: 'Everything is very simple in War, but the simplest thing is difficult. These difficulties accumulate and produce a friction which no man can imagine exactly who has not seen War' (I: 77).
47. Phil Mason, *Napoleon's Hemorrhoids and Other Small Events that Changed History* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009), 74–5.
48. Fabrizio is not only confused during the battle, but is unable to order his experiences in retrospect: '[Fabrizio] remained a child only on this one point: had what he had seen been a battle and, furthermore, had this battle been Waterloo? For the first time in his life, he took pleasure in reading; he still hoped to find in the newspapers or in the accounts of battle some description that might allow him to recognize the places he had passed through with Marshal Ney's escort, and later with the other general': Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), 73. See Underwood for a discussion of this novel within the context of 1830s anxieties about the visibility of history.
49. Two months after the battle, the Duke of Wellington wrote that 'The history of a battle is not unlike the history of a ball. Some individuals may recollect all the little events of which the great result is the battle won or lost; but no individual can recollect the order in which, or the exact moments at which, they occurred, which makes all the difference to their value and importance' (Letter of 8 August 1815 to John Croker; quoted in David Chandler, *Waterloo: The Hundred Days* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 10).
50. Letter to Mrs Carmichael-Smyth, 2 July 1847, reprinted in *VF* 699.
51. It is a historical commonplace that the Rothschilds made their fortune in this same year – not upon Napoleon's return, but immediately after the Battle of Waterloo several months later, when their advance knowledge of the English victory supposedly enabled them to manipulate the British bond market; see, for example, Chandler, *Waterloo*, 175. However, Niall Ferguson argues that the Rothschilds in fact were 'very nearly ruined' by this trade, and only turned a profit from this transaction several years later, when they sold those bonds at their peak value: *The Ascent of Money: A Financial History of the World* (London: Penguin, 2008), 82, 79–92.
52. According to Thorne, the use of the term 'fortune' in *Fanny Hill* 'announces the outer limits of the individual's ability to conceptualize the seemingly infinite social space around her; it marks the point where the subject's ability to make sense of the social sphere breaks down, rendering her unable to penetrate further into the distant institutions that govern her'. See Christian Thorne, 'Providence in the Early Novel, or Accident if you Please', *MLQ* 64.3 (2003), 325.
53. Elizabeth Rigby [later Lady Eastlake], from '*Vanity Fair* – and *Jane Eyre*', *Quarterly Review* 84 (December 1848); rpt. in *Thackeray: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Geoffrey Tillotson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), 80.

5 Inappropriate Sympathies in Gaskell and Eliot

1. In an earlier version of this argument (Courtemanche, 'Invisible Hands and Visionary Narrators'), I considered the distance between the omniscient narrator

in Eliot's *Silas Marner* and that novel's particularly limited and ignorant characters; here I am focusing on *The Mill on the Floss* not because that epistemological argument is any less relevant, but because the latter novel combines knowledge with sympathy in a way that overlaps with the rhetorical strategies of *Mary Barton*.

2. Ermarth argues that, in Eliot, the mediating force between individual and unknowable social whole is some kind of historical tradition: 'Her open-ended networks of influence cannot be grasped as a whole because they are dependent on individuals and therefore are constantly changing. This community need not be grasped as a whole, however, because it is securely rooted in historical traditions.' Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel* (Princeton University Press, 1983), 222.
3. Thackeray, *Catherine*, 132–3, 132, 131. In his edition of *Catherine*, Sheldon Goldfarb argues that Thackeray overstated the revulsion of the critics, who were 'not that negative'. He speculates that Thackeray turned against his work because in his retelling he had actually softened some elements of the original crime, giving Catherine a reason to kill her brutal husband, and hence had not written 'an anti-Newgate satire but one in which ruffians were presented almost affectionately'. 'Historical Commentary', to William Makepeace Thackeray, *Catherine: A Story*, ed. Sheldon F. Goldfarb (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 144, 146.
4. Dickens, 'Preface' to *Oliver Twist*, 4, 6.
5. Macdonald Daly, 'Introduction' to *Mary Barton*, by Elizabeth Gaskell, ed. Macdonald Daly (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), xiii, xii, xvii, xxi.
6. Jill L. Matus, 'Introduction' to *Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*, ed. Jill L. Matus (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 3.
7. Important analyses of the distinction between agape and cosmopolitanism include the volume *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), and Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).
8. Deidre D'Albertis, 'The Life and Letters of E. C. Gaskell', in *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*, ed. Jill L. Matus (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 23. In the same volume, Patsy Stoneman points out that *Mary Barton* is full of scenes in which working-class men take care of babies, concluding that instead of contrasting the public and the private spheres, Gaskell opposes images of inappropriate parental control to scenes of sympathy in ways that map less programmatically onto gender differences (135–9). 'Gaskell, Gender, and the Family', in *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*, ed. Jill L. Matus (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 131–47.
9. Gallagher, *Industrial Reformation*, 168–9.
10. Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), 177.
11. Daly, 'Introduction', vii–viii.
12. The publication history of these two chapters is in Daly's 'Note on the Text' in *Mary Barton*, xxxi–xxxiii. Gaskell's professions of ignorance are less believable than Job Legh's, as Daly points out that Gaskell's father had written on political economy, and she was 'familiar with her Unitarian friend Harriet Martineau's famous *Illustrations of Political Economy*, ... whose "A Manchester Strike" ... is clearly a major influence on *Mary Barton*'. *MB* 396 n. 5.

13. Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, 32, 39, 33, 41, 42.
14. Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, 32.
15. Susan Fraiman, '*The Mill on the Floss*, the Critics, and the Bildungsroman', in *New Casebooks:* The Mill on the Floss *and* Silas Marner, ed. Nahem Yousaf and Andrew Maunder (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 31–56. Peggy R. F. Johnstone, however, relies on the idea that the novel's autobiographical overdetermination is 'well known' to construct a psychoanalytic reading of Eliot's childhood narcissism that hearkens back to Leavis's critique of immaturity. 'Narcissistic Rage in *The Mill on the Floss*', *Literature and Psychology* 36.1–2 (1990), 106.
16. 'Your pier-glass or extensive surface of polished steel made to be rubbed by a housemaid, will be minutely and multitudinously scratched in all directions; but place now against it a lighted candle as a centre of illumination, and lo! The scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round that little sun. It is demonstrable that the scratches are going everywhere impartially, and it is only your candle which produces the flattering illusion of a concentric arrangement, its light falling with an exclusive optical selection. These things are a parable. The scratches are events, and the candle is the egoism of any person now absent': George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1994), 255.
17. *TMS* 26, 130. As you will recall, Smith describes the impartial spectator in terms of imagined spatial as well as emotional distance: 'We can never survey our own sentiments and motives, we can never form any judgment concerning them; unless we remove ourselves, as it were, from our own natural station and endeavour to view them as at a certain distance from us. But we can do this in no other way than by endeavouring to view them with the eyes of other people, or as other people are likely to view them. ... We endeavour to examine our own conduct as we imagine any other fair and impartial spectator would examine it.' *TMS* 110.
18. Rae Greiner, 'Sympathy Time: Adam Smith, George Eliot, and the Realist Novel', *Narrative* 17.3 (2009), 291–311. Greiner draws on Harry Shaw's argument in *Narrating Reality* that realist fiction relies on a continual speculative approximation of the feelings of others, rather than simple identification.
19. George Eliot, 'Janet's Repentance', in *Scenes of Clerical Life* (Oxford University Press, 1988), 229. See Shaw, *Narrating Reality*, 244–5.
20. George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. A. S. Byatt (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003), 9. Hereafter cited as *MOTF*.
21. Sigmund Freud, 'On Narcissism: An Introduction', in *General Psychological Theory*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York: Collier, 1963), 71.
22. Shaw, *Narrating Reality*, 262.

Conclusion: Realist Capitalism, Gothic Capitalism

1. See John Steele Gordon, *An Empire of Wealth: The Epic History of American Power* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 132–52.
2. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. Gareth Stedman Jones (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2002), 225.

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