

NOVEL RELATIONS: COLLECTION EPISTEMOLOGIES IN NINETEENTH
CENTURY BRITISH LITERATURE

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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August 2022

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Cornell University 2022

This dissertation brings together strands of literary formalism and historical work on collections and collecting to think through how the British interest in collection constitutes and is in turn constituted by nineteenth century narrative forms—what stories do collections tell, and how do collections form stories? As an interdisciplinary contribution to contemporary debates over literary method, my project brings together insights from cultural studies and science studies to suggest that the collection—constituted by and of objects, subjects, and ideas in relation—is a form that produces literary epistemologies. Instead of the object, I turn my attention to the literary subject as constituted by, and able to constitute, representations of collections or collecting. I chart the creation of a subject through collection in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, the constitution of class through collecting in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton*, the subject’s deployment of collection as institutional critique in Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House*, and the limits of collections and collectives in H.G. Wells’s *Island of Dr. Moreau*. I argue that each of these authors narrate collection and collecting outside of its totalizing, museal, or institutional forms to show that it can be deployed to un-make and re-make disciplines, institutions, and politics when deployed by the minor character, describing the starving worker, or even implicated in the monstrous making of people in the nineteenth century British novel.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Krithika Vachali completed their B.A. in English Literature from Colorado College in 2015 and their M.A. and Ph.D. from the Department of Literatures in English at Cornell University in 2019 and 2022 respectively.

For Dad,
I wish you were here.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As the author of a dissertation on collections and collecting, it is imperative that I begin with my own imbrication with collecting institutions and institutional collections as I worked on this project. I worked on this dissertation in Ithaca New York, the traditional homelands of the Gayogohó:nq' (the Cayuga Nation), at Cornell University, which is a land-grant institution. According to the land acknowledgement used by Cornell university, the Gayogohó:nq' are members of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, an alliance of six sovereign Nations with a historic and contemporary presence on this land. As such, I am acutely aware of the ways in which my questions about collecting and collections are intimately tied to the violence of the institutions I am a part of, as well as the ongoing relationship between the Gayogohó:nq' and these lands—which is why it is necessary for me to begin here.

This dissertation is the product of a lot of work and an incredible support system. I owe my dissertation committee many thanks for their guidance throughout this process. Dr. Caroline Levine, my advisor has at this point probably read this document more than I have and has been amazingly generous with her time, expertise, kindness, and advise. Dr. Elisha Cohn and Dr. Jessica Ratcliff have not only fundamentally shaped the way I ask questions and pursue research, but they have also offered invaluable feedback and talked me through the difficulties of writing a dissertation and navigating graduate study through trying circumstances. Thank you for supporting my growth as a scholar, and for seeing me through this process safely to the other side.

Graduate work can feel like a survival reality show, and so, my undying gratitude and love for Nitzan Tal, Molly MacVeagh, Najva Akbari, Palashi Vaghela, Ana Smith, Breanna Green, and Kriszta Pozsonyi for keeping me alive, sane, and bringing me so much joy. More thanks to friends who have shared this weird journey with me—Christina Fogarasi, Jennifer Rabedeau, Anna Waymack, Seth Koproski, Victoria, Jess Banner, Kelly Richmond, Luz Angela, and Lexi Turner—and to the lovely, resilient community of scholars at Cornell. Marte, Sophie, and Shakarean, thank you for being my friends and reminding me that the academic bubble is just that, a bubble.

A huge debt of gratitude to everyone in the Department of Literatures in English for making this possible. I'm not sure how to thank Kara Peet, Karen Kudej, Paula Epps-Cepero, Lynn Lauper, Victoria Brevetti and Sara Eddleman enough for all they have done to help me stay and work at Cornell through their years, and for all of their support throughout some of my most difficult times as a graduate student. I could

not have done any of this without you. My thanks also to Dr. Shirley Samuels, Dr. Mary Pat Brady, Dr. Masha Raskolnikov, Dr. Stuart Davis, Dr. Laura Brown, and Dr. Jenny Mann for working with me over the years on advocacy, teaching, and professional development. My work received crucial funding support from the Einaudi Dissertation Development program, the research funds from the Cornell Graduate School, and the Timothy Murray Travel Grant from the Society for the Humanities. To Jessica Rodriguez, you helped me figure out how to define collection when you asked me how a collection was different from objects in proximity—this is still the question I return to every time I am stuck, and I cannot thank you enough.

And, finally, (because I teared up when I started with them, so I had to save them for the end) a huge debt of gratitude to my family. To my parents for supporting me unconditionally and encouraging me to study so far away from home even though you would have preferred to have me close. Achan, I think, you would have loved to read this. I wish you were here so that you could. To Amma and Pallavi, thank you for being my rocks. To Anand, Pramod, and Saurab who have been caring, supportive, and the providers of much levity. To Nithya Periamma, Poorna Periamma, and Emjay Periappa for taking me on adventures and taking care of me. To Saira aunty for your encouragement. To Achamma for raising me. To Pathi, especially, for telling me about Dicky Mob. To Thatha and Achacha who, I think, would have been proud of me—especially Thatha who was so, so happy when I started doctoral work. To Abhinaya and Keerthana for being wonderful. To Vinod Mama for making sure I try all the whiskey. And to Surya Aunty, Ram mama, and Sonu. Thank you all for loving me. It has been everything.

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Introduction

The long afterlife of nineteenth century imperial collecting extends into our present. In June 2020, for example, Alexandre Antonelli, the Director of Science at the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, called for the decolonization of the gardens’ botanical collections. To address the fact that the collection stemmed from imperial conquest, he suggests increasing historical research into botanical collecting, and framing future research “in the context of equality, diversity, and inclusion”. Or take the 2018 season finale of *The Great British Bake Off*. The winner, Rahul Mandal, describes his showstopper, a landscape made of cake, as

“like a rock garden, because who made the rock gardens? Mainly Victorian explorers, and they went to different countries, they liked some plants. They decide, okay, we’re gonna bring that back to our country and then they create gardens to put them. I do kind of relate with that? Nobody bring me here, I wanted to come here and that’s why I came to do my PhD but it’s very similar.”

Rahul deftly narrates himself into British collection history, where he “collects” himself into his immigration story in a show that has become one of Britain’s most popular cultural exports in the last decade.

In this dissertation, I bring together strands of literary formalism and historical work on collections and collecting to think through how the British interest in collection constitutes and is in turn constituted by nineteenth century narrative forms—what stories do collections tell, and how do collections form stories? My dissertation posits ‘collection’ as an aesthetic, scientific and material form in novels

that produces knowledges and ways of knowing. I understand the collection specifically as a relational form—defined not simply as objects or beings in proximity, but as a form mediated through the relations amongst its constituents. The relations between component parts, the overarching structure of the collection, and the collector all posit ways of knowing and valuing. This makes collection an epistemological form, one that nineteenth century British authors often engage in their work. While they reflect on scientific or material properties of collections and collecting practices that range from the amateur bric-a-brac collection to the pedagogical and disciplining institution of the museum, novelists also produce collection as a literary form that has its own distinct epistemology dependent on the genre of the novel and its concerns.

On Collection as Form

Writing about collection is a process that can quickly dissolve into a collection of aphorisms about collection. The term, and the ways it is taken up, are voluminous, proliferating, and remarkably contingent. However, much literary criticism that engages with representations of collection also consider it to be a rampaging, overpowering form—one that imposes order on ‘chaos’, wrenches objects from their contexts to make them anew, touting the wholeness of their constituents to the exclusion of all else. The collection form as developed through institutional and political entities such as the museum, the school, the archive, and the state are examples of this oppressive version of the term. However, when we consider the collection of specifically chosen objects in the courting display of a bower-bird, of the remnants of a rock collection discarded by the collector after her seventh birthday, the form that collection takes seems nothing like its institutional iteration—it is more

fragile, easily discarded, quickly dismissed, and on the verge of not being considered a collection at all. Moreover, the overdetermination of the collection form as an ordering mechanism leaves us with few theorizations of the form and its other affects. For those who study collecting as an impulse driven by personal desire, the practice often devolves into an expression of pathology or simple interest—the epistemological or even affective affordances of the form are completely neglected in these analyses.¹ In this dissertation, I show that the collection form can constitute and be constituted by a wide variety of constituents, not all of which are objects, and that the form is as adept at making knowledge through the formation of categories as it is through the dissolution of the very same classificatory impulses.

Before proceeding further, I want to lay out the theoretical and political and underpinnings of this project, to argue for reading and using the collection form as method and to describe its epistemological potential. In recent decades, the turn to description has productively questioned the critical outcomes of post-structuralism, deconstruction, and what Sedgwick terms ‘symptomatic reading’. In the introduction to an issue in *Modernism/modernity* Paul Saint-Amour offers a useful list of a host of other critical orientations like description, including just reading, surface reading, thick description, form, non-interpretive reading, computational literary analysis, post-critique and more and characterizes them as instances of ‘weak’ theory— theory that “draw[s] attention to obsolete epistemologies, to actions unprensed on self-possession, to creative practices unendorsed by the portrait of the author as lone master builder,” or, as most critics of ‘conventional’ theory argue, the critic as hero-

¹ See “On Longing” by Susan Stewart (153-4) for an explication of collection as practiced by “pack-rats,” hoarders, and the miser as an example of pathologized collecting.

interpreter (4). These theorists— most of whom, Amour notes wryly, work in my discipline of nineteenth century studies— are touchstones for this project. I am being deliberately reductive when I describe the criticism of so-called ‘weak’ theory as the lack of strong ideology critique, or as some detractors point out, critique of any kind, in favor of an investment in a quietist engagement with a depoliticized aesthetics that does not address power. However, what these theoretical methods and formulations accomplish is sometimes precisely what is elided, excluded or otherwise considered unimportant in criticism that requires objects of critique and critique itself to be totalizing, structurally coherent projects. In her work on the minor gesture that I will refer to again in my analysis of *Bleak House*, Erin Manning posits that the minor gesture, which takes place in the minor key, is often an unfinished gesture. Yet, it has the potential, when heard and realized, to alter the course of the major. The micro-political, the minor, or the grassroots collective might not directly address massive systems such as capitalism or white supremacy and dismantle them, but they are available to increasingly precarious, marginalized, and distant subjects as a form of the political. This is not to say that the outcome of a project like mine is the bestowal of agency through the ability to engage with all the affordances of a form like collection, because the myth of agency is one that also needs to be undone by weak theory. Part of what seems to undergird the criticism of the hero critic is a profound disillusionment with agency— after all, what does according or even claiming agency do for subjects who are trapped in overwhelmingly oppressive structures?² However,

² I want to make it clear here that agency, especially when it is claimed, is still an important political goal; however, the idea of agency as political *end* that overlooks the need to dismantle oppressive

it is my goal to show how forms such as collection can change and un-make and re-make disciplines, institutions, and politics when deployed by the minor character, describing the starving worker, or even implicated in the monstrous making of people.

On a more immediate front, the issue of the institutional collection of looted objects has been a primary concern throughout this project, as has the issue of working on a project about collections from a land-grant, or as *High Country News* aptly put it, a land-grab university that is built on imperial collecting practices. It has been difficult to think of collections as forms that might be able to unmake or undo themselves when the harms perpetuated by their institutionalization—as evident in Tamara Lanier’s lawsuit against Harvard University for the 1850 daguerreotypes of her great-great-great grandfather Renty and his daughter Delia, the years-long fight over the repatriation of looted objects from the British Museum, and more—are great, and simply cannot be undone. My argument for a pragmatic deployment of collection as a form is shaped by these considerations—until these imperial institutions are entirely abolished, re-constituted, or otherwise made differently, the collection form offers strategies for interrupting itself as it is used in these institutions, as well as strategies for collecting in ways that don’t draw on these institutions with the potential for making, and knowing, in other ways.

There are two main strands of scholarship I draw on to think through collections and collecting. The first occurs in the 1980s and 1990s, when Susan Stewart and Susan Pearce draw from Walter Benjamin, Jean Baudrillard, and Michel Foucault as their basis for thinking collection. Stewart suggests that collection is an

systems is problematic, especially when it is the stated goal of communities, institutions, and critics with power in their engagement with marginalized subjects and knowledge.

enclosing, ahistorical, and world-making form that erases individual histories of everything that it brings within itself (151). Only some types of collections are ‘proper’— processes such as the accumulation of things carried out by birds or hobbyists do not make the cut. Much of Stewart’s analysis characterizes collections as forms that grapple with commodity and capital and replace history with classification. Susan Pearce’s engagement with collection is different and more thorough, spanning decades of published work— for her, the term encompasses the cultural process and form specific to the European tradition whereby objects are accumulated within an overarching structure to produce meaning that is co-constituted by the objects as well as the collector who accumulates them.³ Her systematic study of the collection as assemblage from the Bronze Age to the contemporary moment offers a descriptive account of collections as a historical practice, as a process of self-making, and “as an aspect of the contemporary (and future) politics of value and social structure” (28). There is often a critical slippage between objects and collections; they function similarly in discourse, a slippage that Pearce grapples with. Collections, just like objects, have histories, and can be conscripted into the production of individual or institutional power or prestige, and only “hold meaning in so far as they relate to other meaningful objects, for significance rests in the web of relationships” (20). It is possible to reduce the collection to the status of the object, to collect collections. However, it is more difficult to reverse the process, to suggest that an object not in

³ Pearce’s insistence on collections being a particularly European tradition seems to be utilized more for narrowing the scope of her study rather than particularizing collection only to European traditions. That said, collections and collecting are not only taken up by a ‘European tradition’ to produce specific effects— it is similarly taken up by other traditions and has cultural significance, and to maintain this binary between European and its Other repudiates some of Pearce’s critique of colonialism.

relation with anything else might be considered a collection, or even to suggest that a collected object is the same as an object that is not collected. Thus, for both Stewart and Pearce, collections and collecting are overarching infrastructural processes that participate in the production of meaning, with the distinction being that for Stewart, collections eschew history for taxonomy, while for Pearce collection's impulse to taxonomy constitutes history. For both, the collection refers only to accumulations of things, or entities that are rendered objects *through* collection, as if it went without saying that only objects can be collected.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the advent of thing theory, object relations, and the "material turn" in literature in the 2000s brought a new wave of attention to collecting. This is the second major scholarly orientation that grapples with collection and concerns me in this project.⁴ Following in the wake of Bill Brown's work on thing theory, and Arjun Appadurai's work on the shifting meaning of social objects as they move and circulate, Elaine Freedgood points out that the many objects that overwhelm the Victorian novel have thus far remained unexamined. She adopts the method of Walter Benjamin's collector⁵ and the figure of metonymy to propose the practice of readings things in their material fullness as objects first before letting them get taken over by the narrative logics of the novel. In *The Ideas in Things*, Freedgood reads objects such as mahogany furniture and calico curtains to reveal

⁴ New-Materialism and the strand of theory that deals with the vitality of matter is also relevant here. For more, see Jane Bennet's *Vibrant Matter*

⁵ In addition to the collector, scholars who work with collections also frequently draw on the figures of the bricoleur (drawing from the work of Claude Levi-Strauss) and the flaneur (from the work of Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin who also invokes the figure in his exposition on the Paris arcades). At various time, both these figures stand n for the collector as well as the viewer, another slippage that the collection form tends to encourage by refusing to concretize either orientation into a specific subject position.

histories of colonialism, domesticity and labor in novels where these objects are barely remarked upon to show that their examination as objects outside the novel adds interpretive richness to the themes explored within the novel, and makes the novel a cultural archive.⁶ Those who follow Freedgood adopt her methods of staying with objects as collectors before interpreting them in terms of the literary texts they occupy, and in turn, produce new classes of objects.⁷

Where is collection in all of this? Collection after the material turn becomes a property of the newly vital object, thing, commodity, or a more particular version that breaks the referents of these terms into smaller and smaller classes. The overarching control and ahistorical decontextualization wielded by Stewart's collection now must contend with these unruly, agential objects. Both these strands of scholarship limit the study of collection to the study of objects—the main difference is whether it is the collection/collecting or the object that is the subject of analysis. For instance, two recent collected volumes of essays on objects and collections—*Literary Bric-à-Brac and the Victorians: From Commodities to Oddities* edited by Jen Harrison and Jonathon Shears published in 2016, and *Paraphernalia!: Victorian Objects* edited by Helen Kingstone and Kate Lister published in 2018—are both about Victorian objects

⁶ It is metonymy that re-enchants these objects, allowing Freedgood to move through less rigid associations than the form of the metaphor might afford, while also grappling with the contingency of the relations predicated upon the term—in its use of fleeting associations, metonymy is also culturally contingent in that these associations need to be shared amongst its readers and users for the figure to make meaning. Freedgood also argues that Victorian objects had thus far been overdetermined by their characterization as commodities in scholarship, and argues for a return to Victorian “thing” culture, where things or objects circulated in ways that helped them elude the status of the commodity while performing important social functions.

⁷ See the essays in *Literary Bric-a-brac* by Victoria Mills on representations of bric-a-brac collecting in the Victorian period and Jennifer McDonnell on Robert Browning's treatment of curiosities in *The Ring and the Book*, and Alice Crossley on the Valentine by *Paraphernalia!* by for examples of such readings.

which the scholars analyze to produce theories of bric-a-brac and paraphernalia.⁸ However, as the two short examples in the first paragraph of this introduction suggest, the history of collection and collecting has always included more than simply objects, things or commodities. The fact that most scholarship after the material turn has made collection simply a property of the study of objects rather than staying with its messy and proliferating affordances in relation to a wide array of constituents and subjects that include plants, animals, people, thoughts, ideas, abstractions, and yes— things, objects, and commodities—is the issue I address in my own project.⁹ Analyzing collection solely in terms of objects limits its formal affordances. It also makes collection a mechanism of objectification. Victorian writers and thinkers actively destabilized the object in their thinking of the collection’s ability to constitute and be constituted by an array of constituents, and returning to these moments can help us critically engage with collection in all of its instantiations.

What might knowledge making with collection in its broadest form look like? According to Pearce, objects, in their moment of collection, “cease to be living goods working in the world and become reified thoughts and feelings, carefully kept by conscious preservation” (24-5). However, in this moment of collection, the object co-

⁸ In 2012, a collection of essays in honor of Susan Pearce titled *Narrating Objects, Collecting Stories* was published that addressed the con-constitutive relationships between objects and the collections they were a part of, yet retained the collection-object relation for the most part.

⁹ Scholarship in history, museum studies, anthropology, and science and technology studies has shown that imperial collecting, much like Stewart argued, was integral to the making of empire— museums, galleries, and the world exhibitions that followed the Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace in 1851 facilitated the creation of British imperial subjects through spectatorship. Tony Bennet’s formulation of the ‘exhibitionary complex’ illustrates how institutions like the museum were “involved in the transfer of objects and bodies from the enclosed and private domains in which they had previously been displayed” to public arenas where they participated in the ordering of things, the education of the public, and the projection of power. Furthermore, historians of science have pointed out that collection forms the crux of disciplines such as biology through its constituent practices of taxonomy and classification, in addition to collection’s production of the idea of the specimen.

constitutes two imaginary orders— it allows us to articulate the world it was taken from, and the world it is entered into. For example, in the case of natural history collecting, Pearce points out that collection “transforms a ‘natural’ piece into a humanly defined object— suggesting that the categories of the natural and the human are imaginary, but stable across objects. For every collected object, there is a corresponding “natural” sphere; consequently, each collection is also an assemblage of these “natural” spheres for every object that it is constituted by. I argue, however, that every instance of a natural history specimen newly creates the ‘natural’ in the context of that specimen— the natural becomes the thing the specimen is stolen, taken, or collected from and it is always constructed in terms of the acquisition of this particular object. Thus, for every category created through collection, there are innumerable versions of that category possible through different instances of collection. Additionally, distinctions between categories such as the ‘natural’ and the ‘human’ only *appear* to be stable—in the final chapter of this dissertation, I show how the collection of the ‘human’ problematizes this distinction to the point that the collection’s ability to produce stable categories is decimated, and we are left wondering whether we really know what the human means at all. In short, collection facilitates the production of categories and the construction of epistemes.¹⁰

¹⁰ As defined by Michel Foucault in *The Archeology of Knowledge* as “the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems; the way in which, in each of these discursive formations, the transitions to epistemologization, scientificity, and formalization are situated and operate; the distribution of these thresholds, which may coincide, be subordinated to one another, or be separated by shifts in time; the lateral relations that may exist between epistemological figures or sciences in so far as they belong to a neighboring, but distinct, discursive practices. The episteme is not a form of knowledge...or type of rationality which, crossing the boundaries of the most varied sciences, manifests the sovereign unity of a subject, a spirit, or a period; it is the totality of relations that can be discovered, for a given period, between the sciences when one analyses them at the level of discursive regularities” (191)

The collection form's ability to make and unmake, and function as critique, method, text, and epistemology is easily seen in the non-literary sphere with exhibitions that grapple with colonial and extractive collection methods. In *The Social History of Egg Collecting/ The Natural History of Nest-Making*, thousands of eggs were packed in a variety of boxes, some cushioned with fiber, others with shredded paper, arranged almost carelessly on the floor. These were not real eggs; they were careful replicas made by Peter and Eileen Rowland titled "How The Artist Came to the Study of Nature" for an installation created by Peter and Andy Holden. This particular installation was part of *The Social History of Egg Collecting*, and contained exactly 7,130 eggs, reproductions of the eggs that Richard Pearson, an artist and egg collector, had amassed in his lifetime before getting caught. Egg collecting is a crime in the UK, first legislated through the Protection of Birds Act in 1954, and then criminalized through the Wildlife and Countryside Act in 1981. However, members of the Jourdain Society, a group of naturalists and oologists, continued to trade and collect eggs. In 1994, an annual dinner hosted by the Jourdain Society in a hotel in Salisbury was raided, and after searches of the members' houses, around 11,000 eggs were confiscated. The collecting, however, continued. Pearson's collection was discovered in a raid in 2006, and once seized, destroyed in 2007.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, which counted amongst its membership and supporters many eminent ornithologists, including Peter Holden, pushed for the destruction of the collection instead of adding it to museum or naturalist collections—to do so, they felt, would be tacit approval of Pearson's collecting. So, Eileen and Peter Rowland reproduced the collection for display, using

photographs and the painstaking notes that Pearson had maintained, for the exhibition in 2017. In reproducing a destroyed collection, Andy and Peter Holden made canny use of representation: they wanted viewers like me to walk into the room and confront these thousands of eggs. At the same time, they also wanted us to know that these are not the same eggs; they refer to Pearson's collection while being materially distinct enough to gain entry into museum and gallery spaces, the very spaces that the RSBP wanted unoccupied by Pearson's collection because they thought the preservation of the collection would legitimize egg collecting.

Standing in the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery in the summer of 2019, I was struck by the contradictory impulses at play. First, that it was necessary to have a collection in order to represent the pathological, destructive, yet inherently compelling nature of egg collecting—this collection of eggs was important in that it referred to the destroyed collection of real eggs. Second, that it was important to destroy the material constituents of the original collection being represented to use the collection as a form of social critique: representation of the collection, marked as distinct from the original, was understood to produce a critical distance. And third, though this exhibition and its collection of manufactured eggs critiqued what it determined to be pathological collecting, its use of collection as representational form was also a tacit endorsement of, and dependent on, another register of collecting—the collecting that took place in museums, many of which acquired egg collections from oologists before egg collecting was deemed illegal, and are now legitimized as a part of the museum's extensive natural history collections and archives. The collection form thus reveals its

own contradictory limits and holds contradictory impulses together without resolving them.

One of Freedgood's most compelling arguments for her method of engaging with objects *as* objects first is recovery— she suggests that invoking the position of the collector, even briefly, opens up a literary archive where we might locate “cultural archives [that] have been preserved, unsuspected, in the things of realism that have been so little or so lightly read” (1). Working with the collection form, or routing knowledge through the collection form, allows us to do the same for far more than literary objects. This is particularly salient in the Victorian novel where the authors actively used this form as an epistemological model not only to gather material components together, but specifically to work through how to represent, know, and respond to bodies, class, institutions, and politics. Collection and collecting as I read them in *Frankenstein*, *Mary Barton*, *Bleak House* and *The Island of Dr. Moreau* are processes, not just displays: forms that both categorize and challenge the construction of categories, which in turn destabilizes the notion of collections as only ordering mechanisms. The collection form, conceived broadly in this way, allows us to work through the relations between all these constituent categories without according the status of the object to all that constitutes a collection. We need a formulation of the collection form that does not objectify everyone caught in it without considering their co-constitution of the form, or the form's mediation of subjectivity. I want to make clear that by no means am I suggesting that harmful effects of the form— as abundantly exercised through practices of imperial collection and display that remain contested to this day in existence of looted objects, knowledges, and more— be

ignored, but rather that we stay with the form and critically engage with how writers sometimes used it to identify and illuminate these very harms and grappled with its potential to make or build otherwise.

In short, I propose that we stay with the ‘mess’, and defer our urge to sort it out.

Collection and the Novel

The relationship between the collection form and novel is two-fold— first, the collection form can help us understand the novel in its instantiation as a material, constructed cultural object that circulated in the Victorian period in the form of books, newspapers, and more; and second, the collection form is taken up by novelists as both representational and epistemological form. The bulk of this dissertation focuses on the collection form as epistemology, but I begin with a brief examination the novel as a material object through collection to show how the novel itself is a “collected” form, and in that way, much of what we learn from novels is structured through this type of collection.

Most scholars who have studied literary collections have been either historians of the book or bibliographers. This work on literature as itself a collection and the novel as a collectible object has dislodged some fundamental assumptions about the novel that have dominated the field since the start of the twentieth century. That is, scholars have typically imagined novels as narrative wholes, complete units.¹¹ But materially, theoretically, and even literarily, the singular unit is thrown into question by the novel’s relation to collecting. Conventional modes of novel-reading today

¹¹ Or, as the Museum of English Rural Life might put it, “absolute units”.

involve reading through a single bounded volume sequentially, with no temporal rhythms or limits imposed on this reading beyond the reader's own distribution of attention. If we wanted to, we could read a novel in a single afternoon, or over several days dependent on how we determine to engage in this activity. However, as we know, the novel in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries didn't work only in this way. The novel was rarely a single volume in the nineteenth century—it could and often did take the form of the serial published amongst other serials in periodicals. Even when bound in books, novels didn't have to be singular book objects; they were often published in two or three volumes. If we were to place mid-nineteenth century novel-units on a table, then the same novel could take at least three forms—a pile of periodicals or independently bound and sold serials, a two or three volume set, and a single bound volume. The novel in this time is collected (through processes of binding or aggregating into volumes or a single monograph), and it is collectible (through the reader's accumulation of periodicals, serials, or other novel fragments).

Serialization is a significant way in which novels are produced not in wholes, but as piecemeal texts. Moreover, serialization materializes change over time, and this expectation structures our engagement with the text. The periodical press and the attendant increase in the number of serialized literary works grew after the Napoleonic wars in the early nineteenth century once taxes on publishing were lifted, as Claire Pettitt argues in *Serial Forms*. Serialization shapes the ways we can bring the novel and the collection together. First, we know that serialized novels were read alongside other narrative and journalistic texts, advertisements, and reviews. To produce the arc of a single novel becomes an act of collection by the reader, accumulating,

sequencing, and isolating the narrative from the other materials present. Conversely, periodicals are themselves collections—they offer a variety of print objects for perusal, and do so through the curation of an editor, and the distribution channels offered by a publisher or distributor. Staying attentive to this form of novel publication allows us to draw connections between disparate things that may have occupied the same literary space of the periodical, such as articles about astronomy with sections of *The Moonstone*, and advertisements for health tonics with reviews of poetry.

Second, serialization offers order and rhythm to the novel—it can control both the sequence and the time between the release of installments. With serialization, temporality is made physical as readers waited for each installment, and the rhythm of each installment adds an additional layer of pacing to the temporarily established by the narrative. Reading for collection in this thus involves paying attention to the novel as a sequentially exhibited form, rather than one at the mercy of the reader.

Third, serialization blurs the boundaries between the book and the text, allowing us to displace the book as the central unit of analysis. In *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel*, Leah Price offers an account of how cultures of writing and reading anthologies trained nineteenth-century readers to extract parts of novels for collections, and she shows how novels, which can be challenging to the anthology form due to issues of sheer scale, become collectible objects. She begins with anthologies for, as she notes, they “violate modern readers’ expectations that a material unit (the book) should coincide with a verbal unit (the text)” (3). Anthologies not only determined what people read from a burgeoning sphere of printed literature, but also *who* read what, and how (3). Not only is the form of “the novel” unstable—

publishers may and did choose to publish texts such *Wise, Witty and Tender Sayings in Prose and Verse selected from the Works of George Eliot* alongside bimonthly reviews of *Middlemarch*—but the anthology also produces different groups of readers (106). Eliot’s texts demonstrate how collection can work in novel form— her use of epigraphs and verse attests to that— but she was also aware and wary of attempts to anthologize or collect pieces of her work and discard others.¹² Thus, novels could, and were rendered collectible through the anthology, the excerpt, sayings, and reviews, with each form positing its own readers, reading practices, and economies of attention. It’s also important to note that novel anthologies play an important role in classrooms today—though the conventional idea of reading the novel consists of reading a single, unabridged text from beginning to end, literary anthologies remain popular in literature classrooms for their ability to collect an authoritative series of abridged and unabridged materials alongside excerpts of criticism and contextualizing commentary from editors. The anthology is considered a useful way to offer a novice a representative glimpse of the work and importance of a specific literary period. In *How to Do Things With Books in Victorian Britain*, Price turns to the material form of the book as a collectible object itself. Books, even when they were never read, could be markers of status, investments, and commodities that might be stolen by the “wrong” class of readers (8). They could be thrown out, used to wrap fish, and given away—they could, in short, be used for anything and everything including, or other than, reading.

¹² Because, according to her, “it internalized the traditional inferiority of the novel to other genres by subordinating narrative to other modes of novelistic discourse— stylistic beauties in one case, moral truths in the other— and some novel readers to others” (155).

The majority of the work on Victorian collecting and the novel has focused on the relationship between what Tony Bennett calls the “exhibitionary complex”— the nineteenth-century British apparatus of imperial display constituted through the establishment of public collections— and the novel.¹³ Most often, the relationship between a “Victorian” collecting culture and literature is understood as one of reference— “art draws from life, and life copies art” (xix).¹⁴ But the “collected” form of a text can also affect its own theorization of collecting, as is the case with Walter Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*. For Benjamin, collecting functioned through enchantment and whimsy—he acknowledged the epistemological affordances of a collection, but for him, the thrill of collecting books lay in acquisition and the “renewal” of the object that is acquired when it leaves its context to enter the context of its new collection.

As theoretical apparatus, the *Arcades Project* is useful for its construction of the practices of collection, exhibition, and the figure of the collector. The book, now available as a substantial manuscript translated into several languages and first published in German in 1982, originally existed in fragmented form in various places, and was only gathered together after Benjamin’s tragic death. It began as a piece of writing that was meant to be a newspaper article on the subject of the Paris arcades,

¹³ See Boffin’s *Books and Darwin’s Finches: Victorian Cultures of Collecting*, Faculty Publications & Research, 2006.

¹⁴ This quote is from a comprehensive four volume book series titled *The Collector’s Voice: Critical Readings in the Practice of Collecting*, Susan Pearce, Rosemary Flanders, Mark Hall and Fiona Morton compile primary sources alongside criticism and commentary on the subject of “collecting” in the “European tradition” (ix). The third volume titled *Imperial Voices* addresses collecting in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries up to 1960 and includes a significant number of excerpts from literary work that represent collections. In the introduction to this volume, the editors go on to suggest that “very many novelists...made the material world and its accumulation in various styles of collecting a central metaphor in their fiction” (xix). However, as I have suggested earlier, the role of collection within literature works as and beyond simply being metaphor or reference— it produces knowledge.

but quickly evolved into a much larger and more ephemeral project as Benjamin expanded its scope to become an essay, then a book. Many of Benjamin's contemporaries, especially Hannah Arendt, write that his method was that of a collector as he composed what he wanted to be his biggest work—in addition to growing a library even though he was financially precarious, he kept numerous notebooks in which he collected quotes, anecdotes, sketches, and excerpts for this work. In her introduction to a collection of Benjamin's essays titled *Illuminations*, Arendt points out that he did not consider these quotes the way most scholars did, as an “accumulation of excerpts intended to facilitate the writing of the study,” but rather the study itself, with any writing becoming secondary (47). Benjamin's inversion of citational practice here changes the nature of what is cited—quotations are not exemplars or proof of the truth value of what is written; they are not intended to forestall criticism or act as supplement. Instead, by making them central to his work, Benjamin prioritized the arrangement and presentation of these collected fragments in order to access a past that he considered unavailable to him through tradition. In 1935, Benjamin wrote a short “expose” about the project in French for scholars in the Institute of Social Research in New York, of which several versions exist today. The rest of this ambitious project was found in work that Georges Bataille had secreted away in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, which was delivered to New York after the end of the war in 1947. The book as it exists now, a single monograph, chafes against its own form in many ways. When reading the book, we are forced to contend with the precarity of assembly and interpretation and are keenly aware of the temporal and geographical conditions of the book's production in a way that monographs often

elide. When reading a book and turning from one page to the next, following the thread of an idea across chapters, we might be fooled into thinking that the ideas we are dealing with were composed in the space of a single afternoon, being written on a page much the same way we would read them. Even for those of us who know that writing doesn't work that way, the codex form of the monograph imposes this flow structurally on the text that it contains. However, even the codex form struggles to contain the *Arcades Project*; it remains fragmented, much as Benjamin would have wanted it to be. The *Arcades Project's* form throws into sharp relief what nineteenth-century literature might do when it fills the spaces between, connects, holds together or forces apart apparently discrete thoughts or objects within a single textual unit—the novel, the poem, the chapter, the book. In short, there are many non-narrative and very material ways in which books and collections interact, and not acknowledging them would be a disservice to the scholarship that exists at this intersection. However, not nearly as much scholarship exists on the epistemological imbrications between collections and literary form, to which I turn now.

Like collections, novels are also epistemological entities—ways of knowing. Not only do they make knowledge, but they are adept at narrating their own processes of making knowledge, and in so doing, offer commentary on the use, misuse, or lack of use of other epistemological forms such as collections. There is no single version of the collection in nineteenth-century fiction. Rather, the novel theorizes the collection, attending to both its possibilities and its limits.

Some canonical Victorian novels are critical of the failures of collectors and collections. *Middlemarch* is a famous example. It features a number of collectors, but

it singles out Mr. Casaubon, the stodgy scholar in the pursuit of the Key of all Mythologies, and his scholarly collection for critique. Gillian Beer contrasts Casaubon to Dorothea in the text, suggesting that his is an “acquisitive sensibility,” one that “collects, and reduces” (163). Unlike Dorothea, or Eliot herself, he is unable to bridge the gap between these myths and their function or meaning in contemporary language or thought. Casaubon, in short, is unable to think *with* his objects, only to collect and compile them in an ultimately unfinished project. Casaubon’s collecting is invested in detaching an object “from all its original functions in order to enter into the closest conceivable relation to things of the same kind... [a relation devoid] of any utility, [and one which] falls to the peculiar category of completeness” (Benjamin 205). For Benjamin, this lack of utility is part of what makes a collection an important aesthetic form, but Eliot suggests that a collection of pieces of the past without a deployment in the present produces nothing of value.

Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone* focuses on another problem with the knowledge produced by collections. What if the collector’s desires and interests skew or narrow the collection? In the novel, Franklin Blake tries to exonerate himself by collecting accounts of the disappearance of the novel’s famously lost jewel from witnesses, as well as others who hear the story. His role as a curator is prominent in—Mr. Betteredge, the first narrator, states in the very beginning that it was Mr. Franklin Blake who asked him to write his account of the night the moonstone was stolen. However, Blake’s role as a curator is most emphasized nearly a third of the way into the novel, not in the main text, but in a footnote. Miss Clack’s narrative is the first one offered in the second period, and readers are warned that the acquisition and inclusion

of this account was not easy. In the first footnote to appear in the novel, Blake is forced to assert his curatorial authority over the narratives. It reads, in response to Miss Clack's tart rejoinder, "he has purchased my time; but not even his wealth can purchase my conscience too.*"

“[*Note. Added by Franklin Blake.—Miss Clack may make her mind quite easy on this point. Nothing will be added, altered or removed, in her manuscript, or in any of the other manuscripts which pass through my hands. Whatever opinions any of the writers may express, whatever peculiarities of treatment may mark, and perhaps in a literary sense, disfigure the narratives which I am now collecting, not a line will be tampered with anywhere, from first to last. As genuine documents they are sent to me—and as genuine documents I shall preserve them, endorsed by the attestations of witnesses who can speak to the facts. It only remains to be added that “the person chiefly concerned” in Miss Clack's narrative, is happy enough at the present moment, not only to brave the smartest exercise of Miss Clack's pen, but even to recognise its unquestionable value as an instrument for the exhibition of Miss Clack's character.]” (202)

Part of the impetus for the footnote is to respond to Miss Clack's criticism; the other part is to establish Blake himself as the authoritative curator of the collection in contrast to Miss Clack, who wants to do the same. In her narration, she notes that “everything shall be put neatly, and everything shall be put in order” (204), but complains too that “I am not permitted to improve— I am condemned to narrate”

(208). In defiance of the curatorial constraints placed on her narration, she also includes the documentation of correspondence between herself and Mr. Blake where they fight over her submission of “her own manuscript, copious Extracts from precious publications in her possession, all bearing on this terrible subject” (246), only to be summarily rejected. “In returning the [manuscript] and the extracts sent with it, [Blake] will refrain from mentioning any personal objection which he may entertain to this species of literature, and will merely say that the proposed additions to the manuscript are not necessary to the fulfillment of the purpose he has in view” (246-7). A compromise is reached when Blake agrees to print the documentation of their correspondence. Blake fulfills his declaration in the footnote of preserving genuine documents, but still chooses to print certain chapters and not others and is not interested in hiding these decisions for he also offers documentation of them.

Collins’s depiction of Franklin Blake as the collector of this text offers a narrative problem— how can anyone be expected to collect, faithfully, documents that may implicate him? Don’t narratives thus produced imply the convener’s guilt? The solution to this conundrum is presented by Ezra Jennings’s experiment to recreate the events of the night. An experiment, Collins suggests, cannot be faked; it can only succeed or fail. Therefore, as a process, it holds the ability reveal the truth in a manner that the collection might obscure about the intentions of the collector. The inclusion of the experiment underscores and lessens the power of the collector, which is needed in this case to absolve the collector of guilt. It also suggests that some processes, such as the replicability of an experiment, might be more authoritative than the form of the collection.

If Eliot and Collins focus on the limits of collectors, Conrad uses Stein's insects in *Lord Jim* to reflect on the relations between collecting and imperial power. His collection of "Buprestidae and Longicorns—beetles all—horrible miniature monsters, looking malevolent in death and immobility, and his cabinet of butterflies, beautiful and hovering under the glass of cases on lifeless wings," establish him as an authority on the East Indies in the novel. The conflation between the collection of insects and the knowledge of and power over place is deliberate—the former authorizes the latter. Conrad uses this collection to establish the imperial logics through which indigenous creatures are domesticated into a colonial taxonomy that accords one species beauty and the other monstrosity, a principle that is foundational for the treatment of other characters within the novel. Furthermore, the collection is a synecdoche for Stein's larger imperial project—these butterflies and beetles, much like the labor and the resources he extracts from Patusan, are meant to be brought back to European capitals as his colonial legacy. Stein's collection gives us a novelistic world in terms of beetles and butterflies, an epistemic structure that organizes other crucial elements, like character systems, within the novel.

The collection in H.G. Wells's *Time Machine*, by contrast, allows us to register imperial and civilizational decline. There is an old, decaying museum in the text that will become pivotal to the plot at the end of the novella—it is here that the time traveler finds the tinder and matches that will help him escape the monstrous Morlocks. Wells spends some of his time in the dystopia occupied by the Eloi and the Morlocks in a museum, "a latter-day South Kensington" (80), where the Time Traveler catalogues the decay and disrepair of this formerly important enterprise.

Wells suggests that institutional forms of collection¹⁵ like the museum are dependent on a working society. He also suggests, however, that these institutions will ultimately fail in their social and pedagogical aims of elevating society, even when these institutions were built explicitly for public ‘betterment’.¹⁶ The museum remains, in this novella and others, the dusty remainder of degenerative processes. Barbara Black’s analysis of Wells’s work in *On Exhibit* notes that “imagining the museum’s end serves as a means to envision the end of all things...if a museum’s greatest triumph is to shore fragments against a culture’s ruin, then one of the gravest images imaginable is of the museum itself in ruin” (170). The decaying museum presents a useful representational tool that offers institutional critique—the decay of the museum indicates the absence of the processes needed to sustain it, which in this case are capitalism and imperialism. However, it also suggests that this decay *is* the natural end of these processes.

¹⁵ The relationship between collections and institutions can be understood in multiple ways—institutions are founded to protect or promote specific collections, institutions collect, and collections can function as institutions and exert institutional authority. Studying the link between institutions and collections allows us to understand how collection epistemologies relate to power with more clarity than an analysis of a personal collection. However, personal and institutional collections do not exist in a vacuum—personal collections, particularly those of people in positions of power, can function like institutions and are likely to be transformed into institutional collections over time. A good example of this process is visible in the establishment of the India Museum in 1801, where the personal collections of those who administered or were employed by the East India Company were turned into a formal institution.

¹⁶ Institutional collections of literary objects take shape in spaces like the circulating library, the museum, and editor’s office (Mani 2017). Both state institutions and private collections operate by acts of procurement, patronage, and visitation. Susan David Bernstein shows in her study of women in the British Library, their “reading and writing are both private experiences and public acts,” dependent on the archives and the collections they engage with, and more importantly, have access to. John M. Mackenzie in *Museums and Empire* suggests that the nineteenth century museum “constituted the public face of scientific endeavor, the point of contact between scientists and public exhibition, between empirical collecting and theorization, and between such scientific discourse and popular understanding,” a role which is also fulfilled by the nineteenth century novel. Bernstein’s work offers an account of how labour, gender and class are seen and deployed in the processes of literary work in and around institutional collections. Authors such as George Eliot relied on the British Museum for research, but also held uneasy relationships with it, characterizing it as “a painful way of getting knowledge” (Eliot, quoted in Bernstein 134).

In a moment when viewing public collections was a popular mode of entertainment, the novel—itself a popular mode of entertainment—took up collections as a specifically *narrative* process, one that often began with extraction, and then moved through migration and display to upkeep and then decay. This dissertation looks closely at the way novels deploy collections and collecting practices as material, social processes intended to produce knowledge—not all of which succeed, and some of which have surprising political and aesthetic implications.

Chapter Outlines

Each chapter in this project investigates how the collection form is utilized by an author to develop narrative strategies with specific epistemological outcomes. I begin with collection as a form that experiments with the creation of the subject, and in so doing, makes both the form and the subject thus produced contingent; at mid-century, novelists use the collection to toggle between systems and individuals with varying effects to experiment with the representation and critique of large, totalizing entities; and by century's end, collecting appears as a form that can be utilized in such a way that it facilitates the erosion of its own knowledge-making capacities. This arc is not necessarily representative of a larger literary history, but it allows us to see how the collection form develops as a critical tool and problem across the nineteenth century through its development of the subject, class, the institution, and the collective.

In the first chapter, I turn to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to examine how collection might be used to construct bodies, both representational and textual. Victor Frankenstein “collect[s] bones from charnel-houses, and disturb[s], with profane

fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame” along with the “instruments of life” to create his creature, one that upon animation fills his heart with “breathless horror and disgust.” Though fabricated from various human parts— eyes, arteries, sinews, bones— the creature’s humanity, or its lack thereof, is irreducible to any of its constituents. The creature thus created fills, imperfectly and catastrophically, the gap of the human that Victor Frankenstein meant to create. I argue that by eliding the details of the collection of the Creature’s body, Shelley develops refusal as a strategy of narrative management— she constructs this knowledge as something that the reader ought not access because of its disastrous consequences rather than one the reader cannot access because it doesn’t exist. In so doing, she constructs both Frankenstein and the Creature as unreliable narrators who become the arbiters of how knowledge is disseminated through the novel. Additionally, the collection form is at work in her construction of the Creature as a textual body— both in terms of the Creature’s subjectivity that she defines through a book collection, and in terms of the form of the epistolary novel itself. I argue that the contrast between the bounded collection that determines the Creature’s textual body within the novel and the unfinished series of letters that determine the narrative frame of the novel highlight contingency as both a property of collection and foreclose it as a key consideration for the production of scientific and narrative knowledge. For readers, having to grapple with narrative being contingent— the narrator, Walton, never conclusively closes the frame of the novel, as we never find out whether his letters to his sister were complete— echoes the contingency of the domain-specificity of scientific knowledge. Contingency and refusal become narrative strategies that Shelley utilizes through the collection. A

surfeit of information— either produced because someone is withholding knowledge, or because there is uncertainty regarding the limits of knowledge, thus becomes a constitutive quality of collection.

In the second chapter, I examine *Mary Barton*, where Elizabeth Gaskell uses natural history collecting to figure social stratification and labor. Characters become specimens, and classes become taxa—systemized within the novel to bridge the chasm of understanding between conflicting classes. Harriet Martineau once described Mary Barton’s work as a ‘museum of oddities.’ In this chapter, I am interested in what making the novel a museum allows Gaskell to do epistemologically, not in terms of specific objects, but in terms of how those objects are narrated and managed. Gaskell emphasizes observation and classification in order to produce knowledge through narrative units I term ‘specimen stories’. In the novel, specimen stories structure how characters move, and how they form or maintain relationships. I read three specimen stories— of John Barton, the scorpion, and the flying fish— to show how Gaskell uses them to establish the efficacy of observation as an important epistemological practice and to suggest that these stories participate in social mechanisms such as the facilitation of courtship and the production of sympathy.

As they collect specimens, both Gaskell and Job also disavow knowledge of “political economy” even as they use observation to develop economic theory within the novel, making epistemological disavowal a strategy through which they mediate their relationship with their audience. Disavowal allows Job and Gaskell to force their interlocutors to engage with them on *their* terms, which are precisely not the terms of political economy. They suggest that we should pay attention to their ways of

observing and knowing the working class and its plight as a primary driver of economic knowledge, and ignore the political economy practiced by the masters, which follows a consumer demand-based model. Finally, in the last section of the chapter, I suggest that collecting is a political exercise—on the one hand, collecting can help produce knowledge that alleviates domestic suffering such as the plight of mill workers, and on the other, collecting can also contribute to the projection of power outwards in the form of imperial settlement as it becomes the process through which settled lands can become known.

If Gaskell criticizes the dominant categories of economic theory by turning our attention to the working-class specimen, Dickens experiments with the representation and criticism of a large institution through a minor character's deployment of the collection form. Miss Flite's collection of birds in *Bleak House* functions as a form of legal critique by drawing on the figure of collecting alongside theories of display and narrative. Miss Flite possesses a collection of English songbirds—larks, linnets, and finches—that are named Hope, Joy, Youth, Peace, Rest, Life, Dust, Ashes, Waste, Want, Ruin, Despair, Madness, Death, Cunning, Folly, Words, Wigs, Rags, Sheepskin, Plunder, Precedent, Jargon, Gammon, and Spinach. This collection allows Dickens to allegorize the proceedings of Chancery by writing the temporal and minutely legal aspects of the case onto the collection of birds. The collection, therefore, is a form used to represent a labyrinthine system (Chancery) even as it is deployed as a form of critique by a character stripped of all other forms of agency, suggesting that the relations it sustains, or parodies, offer a subversive account of an oppressive legal system. This chapter makes the case that Dickens uses Miss Flite's

collection to represent specifically the systemic violence perpetrated by powerful institutions that resist being known. I will argue that Miss Flite's collection can help us to rethink our own practices of institutional critique.

In the fourth and last chapter, I turn my attention to H. G. Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, a text that deploys a well-established instantiation of the collection form such as the menagerie and the zoological catalogue— one that produces a very specific kind of biological knowledge through taxonomy— but does so in order to unmake this very taxonomy. *Frankenstein* (1818) and *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896) also usefully bookend the literary treatment of the category of the “human” in terms of the body in the nineteenth-century British literature, a period that saw rapid advances in the fields of anatomy, comparative physiology, and medicine and surgery. If Shelley is concerned with the production of the human body alone— what does it take to make a single subject— Wells's novel takes up the question of turning a collection of specimens into a society of human beings bound by a “Law”. This move from singularity to the collective through the collection and assembly of bodies is a central concern in this chapter. Other collections of the human are also being formed and dissected at this time— as Sadiya Qureshi shows in *Peoples on Parade*, Indigenous and colonized peoples often performed in human displays in England, and these performances could be “collected” or treated as “specimens” when trying to formulate a natural history and science of human beings.¹⁷ If in Shelley we're

¹⁷ Qureshi points out that a lot of scholarship regarding human exhibitions get studied under the rubric of the freak show, which is a fruitful yet restrictive frame in that it over-determines these interactions and “risks simply equating ethnic difference with “freakishness” while simultaneously homogenizing a dizzying range of differences within the category of the “freakish””(8). Instead, her work seeks to pay close attention to exploring the diverse ways in which these shows were framed and promoted, which

grappling with the idea that the human body is biologically constituted, by the time we get to Wells, we're concerned with how we locate these bodies in biological taxonomies, and the values or rights attached to this classification. In this chapter, I argue that collecting the "human" means trying to differentiate this category from individuals, populations and peoples who are insufficiently human—an insufficiency that turns out to undermine the very category that is supposed to ground the collection. Intended to shore up the difference between humans and others, the human collection undoes its own aspirations.

Finally, in the conclusion of this project, I turn my attention briefly to collection form as it is utilized in scholarly, particularly pedagogical practice. I think through the production of literary anthologies and the academic editions of literary texts as an interactive process through which literary knowledge is codified over time. Such codification invokes a careful consideration of the literary canon as a product of our own collection epistemologies. I end by thinking through projects such as "Undisciplining Victorian Studies" to point out how we might use the collection form in our own syllabi and course-design to change the way we collect and teach the Victorian world, and to think otherwise.

offers a more nuanced account of how they produced the category of the human. Similarly, in literature, work related to the type of body-work that is the subject of this chapter—the collection and fabrication of the human body—is very usefully explicated through, and overdetermined by, analyses of monstrosity.

Ch I—Collecting the Body, Collecting the Subject: Contingent Knowledge in

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

Introduction: We begin with a Subject

Subject as a referent is a broad term— it could refer to a being with subjectivity or a self-aware person, a person who is subject to a larger political or institutional system, or the primary actor in a narrative text. In most cases, we think of the subject as human, but as criticism in animal studies and posthumanism has shown us, that does not have to be the case as non-human subjects are afforded subjectivity by virtue of their possession of consciousness, agency, volition, or personhood. Collection has several ways in which it produces the subject, both historically and literarily. The process of collection and display created subjects in the nineteenth century, as Sadiya Qureshi shows through her examination of the lives of the people who were conscripted into displays in Britain. The subjectivity of the performer was determined both by their interaction with the collection-display complex and the projection or performance of their subjectivity to audiences. On the other side of the equation, Qureshi lays out the cultures of spectatorship that produced urban and imperial subjects— people understood themselves as subjects by watching others. Qureshi's account of Britain's legacy of displaying peoples is one example of the process of subject formation, but it is only one amongst others. States can form subjects, but the more dispersed and less official process of individuation can do so also, bringing such factors as consciousness, personality, or voice into focus. I begin

here with Qureshi because she, like Mary Shelley, engages with the question of whether collecting or collection can make subjects.

In *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley pushes the collection's ability to create and know a subject to its limits. While contemporary debates contest the importance of the material body to subjectivity, Shelley's novel reveals the creation of a body and consciousness through collection as a part of subject formation. The Creature is the product of the biological collection and reanimation of body parts; the Creature's intellect and personality are the product of a series of found books and some prolonged observation of the DeLacey family; and the novel—a textual body—is fashioned as a collection of disparate texts. Shelley is interested in interrogating whether collection can produce a subject, but also tests out which kind of collection is suited to this project, imparting this problem to us in a text that is also a collection that may or may not be complete, so that we are left wondering whether we have learned all we are to learn through the novel, or if there is more. In the novel, Shelley employs refusal and contingency to structure the way we engage with or know the Creature and the process of his creation— in so doing, she establishes the subject as the product of contingent collecting practices. Contingency, or the idea that a value of any kind is only itself insofar as no new possibility emerges to destabilize it, produces uncertainty—for Shelley, then, any subject that is created through collection is only knowable or predictable insofar as the conditions of collection and creation are known. When these conditions are withheld through refusal, the subject is rendered an unstable entity—we might be able to speculate, but we would never know with any degree of certainty. The contingent knowability of the Creature as a collected subject

renders him monstrous—either the subject thus produced is monstrous because we don't know of the component parts that make him, or he is monstrous because we imagine what those parts might be. Furthermore, he is monstrous because the monstrosity of his creator is projected on to him—he is not simply a Creature, he is Frankenstein's Creature, borne of his monstrous experiments and labors.

In the enormously influential *Monster Culture (Seven Theses)*, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen points out why the monster is both an epistemological provocation and an invitation to rethink present categories. It rests in a dialectical relationship with the human— “the monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond— of all these loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate within” (8). It also sits at the “limits of knowing...a warning against exploration of its uncertain demesnes,” threatening to shift the category of the human to which it exists in relation (13). Anna Gasperini's work on the Penny Bloods also connects Frankensteinian monstrosity to knowledge. The Penny Bloods were a popular genre that was galvanized by the brutal murders for bodies for medical study by Burke and Hare. Gasperini considers the genre a “literary monster: a gargantuan combination of scattered pieces from those cultural forms that did not have a place in mainstream knowledge, an abomination for those social strata that could not control it” (8). In her book, like Victor, she “dissects a literary monster in the sense that [she] uncovers a hidden complex system of narratives, themes, and characters, whose frame is traceable in subsequent forms of nineteenth-century popular fiction” (13). She thus invokes monstrosity to characterize both her analytical approach—the dissection of a corpse—and her objects of study—the literary monster. Cohen too uses monstrosity as both

lens and method: "some fragments will be collected here and bound temporarily together to form a loosely integrated net— or, better, an unassimilated hybrid, a monstrous body" (3). Cohen and Gasperini suggest, then, that the novel makes monsters of us scholars too as we work our way through this fragmentary text.

There are two main types of collecting that occur in *Frankenstein*— of bodies, and of texts. The creature's body is the first site of collection, composed of materials that Frankenstein gathers from slaughterhouses, charnel houses, and graves, which are then assembled and infused with a spark of life. The collection of texts occurs in two ways— first in the structure of the novel, and second, in the circulation of texts through the novel. Shelley's text is an interesting mix of a frame narrative and an epistolary novel. Frame narratives are more commonly seen in later nineteenth-century work. On the other hand, the epistolary novel— or the novel in letters— is one of the dominant narrative forms of the eighteenth century. Frame narratives generally offer an enclosing structure, usually through a scene of narration, which surrounds the text of what we might consider the main plot. A conventional example is Marlowe's narration of some of the events in Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim* to a verandah full of listeners. The frame adds complexity to a narrative— it introduces the idea of audiences and speakers other than the narrators, characters, and the reader of the text, and complicates the production of meaning as it must account for the relationality among these elements. It treats the text itself as multiple texts, each with its own context that is dependent on the frame. The frame narrative, in short, is a narrative form well suited to analysis as a 'collected' text. Similarly, the epistolary novel also introduces readers, writers and narrators who may or may not be in the 'main' plot of

the text— for critics, each letter in an epistolary novel will always be defined by its own specific context in terms of who is writing it, who it is addressed to, and who reader is because, sometimes, letters are read by those who are not meant to read them. The epistolary novel is therefore also suitable for analysis as a collected text, as it invites readers to pay close attention to how a text is composed, and how the composition affects both circulation and the text's own production of knowledge. The second type of textual collecting occurs not in the form, but in the content of the novel— both the Creature and Frankenstein collect and rely on knowledge produced through texts to carry out their schemes, and Shelley emphasizes the role of reading specific books in the Creature's epistemological development. I argue here that Shelley uses both the collection of body parts and the collection of texts to ask if, and how, subjects are formed from acts of collecting, and through this questioning, shows that the subject thus produced is inherently contingent.

Shelley shows that this contingent subjectivity is unassimilable within the novel's socio-political sphere. Social systems such as the law are unable to regulate him, as illustrated by the fact that it is Justine Moritz who dies after being falsely framed for the Creature's murder of William. The DeLacey family, emblematic of nurturing domesticity, flee when they see him instead of welcoming him into their fold, a turn of events that is all the more painful because the Creature understands this family to be accepting of some kinds of Otherness, as shown in their embrace of Safie. He has no access to structures of parental care because Frankenstein rejects him as soon as is animated, nor does he have access to the potential for creating a family of his own as Frankenstein refuses to make him a companion. Frankenstein's denial is

particularly devastating to the Creature as it comes after his own realization of his inassimilability and his resignation to it. When he asks for his companion, he has no hopes of being welcomed into the fold of any social sphere, he simply seeks company within this sphere of the inassimilable— “it is true,” he admits, “we shall be monsters, cut off from all the world” (102). Unlike the other authors I discuss in this dissertation, who use the collections to mediate the relationships between subjects and categories and institutions, Shelley’s collected Creature is left utterly alone and outside of relation. The contingent subject produced through collection, for Shelley, is finally pushed outside of relation entirely.

Collecting the Body

In *Frankenstein*, the novel’s famously monstrous creature is assembled by the titular character through the collection of human and animal body parts, which are then sewn together and brought alive by a spark of life. Shelley offers readers very few details of the process of collection that is required to form this body. Frankenstein asks, “who shall conceive the horrors of my secret toil, as I dabbled among the unhallowed damps of the grave or tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless clay?”— and it is a question that will remain more or less unanswered as we read the novel, as he offers us precious few details of his labor (33). On the components of the creature’s body, all he says is that he “collected bones from charnel houses; and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame” (34). We are not told which bones were used, nor do we have an inkling of what any of these secrets are. The last detail that he offers of the process of gathering what he needed for the creature is that “the dissecting room and the slaughter -house furnished many of

[his] materials” (34). Were we to attempt to recreate his process, we would have very few details to work with. All we know from this description is that the creature’s body was assembled from bones, human and animal materials. The creature thus assembled is truly, as Frankenstein points out, a new species— not entirely human, not entirely animal, a hybrid. Furthermore, its reanimation only represents one stage of Frankenstein’s experiments with life. Should this be successful, he planned to “renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption” (33). The creature is but a hybrid step in the pursuit of human immortality— a species created in part to try and alter the course of death and decomposition.

There are several histories of scientific study and collection we can turn to to contextualize the Creature’s body in the beginning of the nineteenth century.¹ The Creature is not the first representation of an animated body, or corpse, in European history. As Janis Caldwell points out, there is a long history of anatomical illustrations that figure dissected cadavers as animated, alive beings, often posed as classical statuary. A famous example is Vesalius’s *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1543) which consists of the gradual dissection of a cadaver over four images. As Caldwell notes, the cadaver is posed in an almost pastoral scene in the first image, as though anticipating its own dissection (336). In the second and third images, the muscles, and then the skeleton is exposed, and the pose changes slightly each time, lending

¹ For comprehensive histories of dissection in the 19th century, see Helen MacDonald, *Possessing the Dead: The Artful Science of Anatomy* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2010), *Pathology in Practice: Diseases and Dissections in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Silvia De Renzi, Marco Bresadola, and Maria Conforti (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018); Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Making Humans: Complete Texts with Introduction, Historical Contexts, Critical Essays*, ed. by Judith Wilt (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003); Helen MacDonald, *Human Remains: Dissection and Its Histories*, Illustrated edition (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2011); Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection, and the Destitute*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

movement to the series. This cadaver is not still during its dissection. The backgrounds of both these images remain pastoral— pleasant landscapes with a town in the background. Though the figure is moving, there is no surgeon or anatomist present within the frame to move it, making this series visually similar to medieval representations of a danse macabre. Finally, in the last image, the cadaver is strung up, and leaned against a wall. The opened diaphragm is pinned to the wall as a sort of bloody trophy, almost as though this cadaver had finally been ‘caught’ (336). The background in the last image is significantly different from the ones in the other three— there is a sparse hill in the background, with a few stones and some grass near the cadaver’s feet, devoid of the life and the bustle that the town in the previous images signified. Caldwell terms this “symbolic resurrection— the recovering of the corpse for scientific use— and a scene of tragic waste, in which the anatomist’s prize serves to emphasize the suffering of the victim” (336). She suggests that this tradition changes precisely at the time that Shelley writes *Frankenstein*, where the emotional affect of these images gives way to images that we see today— of detailed versions of organs, vessels, and tissue arranged in detached torsos, heads, and more, neatly labeled— “no longer intent on straddling the oppositions between life and death, suffering and levity, self conscious subjects and dead objects...anatomical illustration embraced a more straightforward project: the physical body, shorn of emotion, imagination, agency, individuality, and personhood” (343).

Much like the animated cadaver tradition, *Frankenstein* refuses to let us look away from the conditions of dissection, or in this case, reanimation. But the Creature is not a direct analog for the animated cadaver. The animated cadaver only undergoes

dissection— no collection and stitching together of disparate parts to compose and the re-animate a body occurs. Moreover, the animated cadaver is clearly a single body that is being slowly exposed to the viewer’s gaze— the Creature, as Shelley writes him, is a body composed of multiple other bodies whose origins we do not know, nor do we know how they are stitched together to create a complete body. And the Creature himself refuses the fate of the animated cadaver at the end of the novel when he tells Walton that he will destroy his body so that no one is able to dissect it and figure out the mysteries of his physiology. The Creature is presented to us as an ethical, moral, narrative and scientific conundrum constantly in relation to Frankenstein— neither we nor Frankenstein can ever forget that he is responsible for the Creature’s creation, pain, and revenge. Shelley’s depiction of the Creature is what might happen were we to read the animated cadaver series backward— a resurrected body with the ability and means to question and confront the anatomist.

The debate between John Abernathy and William Lawrence on the origins and constitution of life is well-documented in *Frankenstein* scholarship. As several other scholars have noted, Mary Shelley was probably aware of this debate through Percy Shelley.² Mary Shelley seems to have chosen a position somewhere in between two viewpoints in the Creature’s genesis— on the one hand, the “spark of being” suggests that she draws from Abernathy’s analogy between life-force and electricity, but on the other, she defers to Lawrence’s ‘materialist’ claim that the arrangement of organs and

² A thorough account of the Lawrence and Abernathy debate as it relates to Mary Shelley and Percy Shelley is available in the following pieces of criticism: Anne Kostelanetz Mellor, *Mary Shelley, Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (New York: Methuen, 1988); Janis McLarren Caldwell, *Literature and Medicine in Nineteenth-Century Britain: From Mary Shelley to George Eliot* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Sharon Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality* (Houndmills [England]: Palgrave Macmillan in association with Arts and Humanities Research Board, 2005); Maurice Hindle, ‘Vital Matters: Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein and Romantic Science’, *Critical Survey*, 2.1 (1990), 29–35.

tissues was integral to life in her composition of the Creature's body. Both theories are in essence vitalist— even though Lawrence considers the arrangement of physical matter to be that which constitutes life, live matter is imbued with a vital force that differentiates it from dead matter. Shelley's compromise between these theories in the creation of the Creature might have been to overcome precisely that problem— not of creating life, but of re-creating life from something that was dead. What is important when we consider the collected body in the novel is not creation or genesis, but rather recreation, reanimation, and resurrection— every part that has been gathered to create this body has had a previous life, has been vital in a previous context.

The novel gives us no information about what these previous contexts may have been, and Shelley does not offer us much information on whether these parts are inflected with their pasts. Modern adaptations of the Frankenstein myth have taken up the question of the Creature's collected body and the particularity of its component parts. In Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the Creature, named "Whatsitsname," is composed of the stitched together body parts of victims of IED explosions. Unlike Frankenstein, Hani, the man who puts the creature together, is not a medical student but a junk dealer who sifts through the carnage caused by modern American imperialism in Baghdad to create Whatsitsname. In the novel, Whatsitsname has access to the pasts of the people it is composed of and seeks vengeance on their behalf—each body part has its own embedded history that is accessible to the created whole. The particularity of each collected part is preserved and acted upon. The reality of the new body does not erase the context that these parts come from. In the end of the novel, Whatsitsname veers from a path of vengeance to

one where it murders people for ever more valuable body parts, a self-aware collection that assesses, and keeps or discards components based on its own analysis of their utility. This rewriting draws attention to a strange aspect of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which is that the novel quite deliberately erases the particularity of the Creature's body parts: the only people who might know anything about them are Frankenstein and the Creature, and they withhold this knowledge from the reader. Although the Creature has read Frankenstein's notebooks and has access to details about his own creation, he does not seem to be affected by the contexts of the parts he is assembled from— in his moment of creation, these contexts seem to have been erased. He seeks vengeance not for the many corpses that have contributed to his material body, but for Frankenstein's neglect of his collected body *in toto*. In short, in Shelley's account, the particularity of the constituents of the Creature's body is subsumed by the totality of the collection that is the Creature's body once it is made alive.

It is politically significant that the novel withholds information about the parts that are collected into Creature's body. The Creature has been compellingly read as a representation of the working class and the poor,³ a Black, formerly enslaved person, a non-binary creature, an ambiguously racialized creature, a colonial Other, a contagion. Critics who analyze the creature and his Otherness in terms of his racialization tend to focus on the description of his appearance— his large build, his yellow skin, his black lips— as well as the similarity of the Creature's story to those of the narratives of the formerly enslaved.⁴ As Rei Terada points out in her analysis in "Frankenstein and

³ Most criticism of the Creature's body as the proletariat reference Franco Moretti's analysis in Franco Moretti, 'The Dialectic of Fear', *New Left Review*, 1/136, 1982, 67–85.

⁴ See the Moretti article referenced above for an analysis of race as well, though the fundamental issue

Blackness”, neither the creature’s appearance nor the narrative’s similarity to the genre of the runaway slave narrative is necessary to consider race, and particularity Blackness, as constitutive to the question of the human that Shelley poses in the book— any question of who is, or who isn’t, human in Britain and Europe during this time is constituted by the existence of trans-Atlantic slavery (Terada 142). Critics who focus on the Creature as colonial threat or contagion tie Frankenstein’s anxiety about the creature’s destruction of his own family to the Creature’s potential to produce a “race of devils” who would present a threat to those of Frankenstein’s ilk— this kind of analysis considers the Creature’s appearance and constitution, but also its circulation and potential reproduction.⁵ And, finally, critics who focus on the Creature as gendered or non-binary focus on how its presence disrupts Frankenstein’s own marriage, as well as how the Creature’s reanimation rewrites a conventional narration of birth.⁶ All of these are compelling, but I do want to point out that each type of analysis focuses on certain aspects of the Creature’s body and constitution, whilst

with his analysis is that he considers the Creature to be entered into ‘race’ instead of being racialized by virtue of being human in the first place—his analysis, like much of the analysis of the Creature’s racialization, places emphasis on the Creature’s description (yellow skin, black lips, his large build) to argue that the Creature is Other, which only reifies the relation between non-whiteness or non-Europeanness and race, as though Europe and whiteness are without race. Rei Terada also addresses this trend in Frankenstein scholarship in her essay cited below. For more foundational work on the Creature and race, Allan Lloyd Smith, “‘This Thing of Darkness’: Racial Discourse in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein”, *Gothic Studies*, 6.2 (2004); Nancy Yousef, ‘The Monster in a Dark Room: Frankenstein, Feminism, and Philosophy’, *Modern Language Quarterly*, 63.2 (2002), 197–226; H. L. Malchow, ‘Frankenstein’s Monster and Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain’, *Past & Present*, 139, 1993, 90–130.

⁵ Part of *Frankenstein*’s relationship with contagion was constructed through the British preoccupation with tropical medicine. For more on this relationship, see Miranda Burgess, ‘Transporting Frankenstein: Mary Shelley’s Mobile Figures’, *European Romantic Review*, 25.3 (2014), 247–65.

⁶ For an analysis of the Creature as non-binary, see Chris Washington, ‘Non-Binary Frankenstein?’ *Frankenstein in Theory* (2021): 65-84. Washington’s analysis points out, accurately, that the Creature’s request is only for a companion of ‘another sex,’ not explicitly one who is female; furthermore, the threat of the ‘race of devils’ is Frankenstein’s fear, not a desire the Creature expresses. There is room in this analysis to think of the Creature not just as non-binary, but also as on the ace spectrum to think of how the expectation of allosexuality robs the Creature of companionship.

omitting others—any analysis of the creature’s hybridity, racialization, gendering, etc. is dependent not only on Shelley’s reanimation of the Creature, but also on the particularity of the critic’s reconstitution of this reanimated body for analysis. Much like Frankenstein, we too stitch the Creature together over and over again in our own work.

In my reconstitution of the Creature’s body, I take my cue from Saadawi to suggest that the Creature’s hybridity is constituted by the unknown origins of his collected body. We do not know from whom these parts were taken, which were animal or human, how they were gendered, how they were racialized, and so on, which casts the Creature as not just a hybrid, but as an unknown and more dangerously, *unknowable* hybrid that breaks out of conventional, scientific ways of knowing—how might we taxonomize this creature, for instance? And if we cannot taxonomize him, how are we to know him? The anxiety attributed to the Creature throughout the novel comes not just from his revenge against Frankenstein, but also in his fundamental unknowability, a quality foundational even in the creation of his body.

Of course, given the history of dissection and the study of anatomy, the bodies most likely to have been used to constitute the Creature’s body were the poor. Many critics read the Creature as a figure for the poor, basing their readings on the fact that poor people were those who were often subject to dissection. Scholarship often focuses on the Anatomy Act passed in 1832, a year after the third and final edition of the novel was released.⁷ Though the passage of the Act follows the publication of the

⁷ For an extensive review of the relationship between *Frankenstein* and the 1832 Anatomy Act, see Tim

novel, many of the issues that led to this legislation speak to events in the novel itself. Historians of dissection in the last decade or so have increasingly highlighted the fact that there is an underlying assumption of whiteness and maleness to applied to figures presented in anatomical atlases, treatises, or diagrams. Between the dissection table and the page, the people whose bodies are condemned or available for dissection (often without their consent) are utterly transformed— individual features are elided to produce more ‘general’ diagrams. Caldwell’s work shows how anatomy drawings started to exclude the face as it was deemed too personalizing as the nineteenth century wore on, and what we are left with today is images of disembodied torsos, chests, muscles, organs, etc. The 1832 Anatomy Act vastly changed the demographic of people who were sent to dissection tables after their deaths. Before the passage of this Act, surgeons were only allowed to perform dissections on the bodies of those who had been convicted of and executed for a crime. Dissection was tacked on as an additional punishment to execution, and the threat of dissection became an active part of the British state’s disciplinary apparatus. Since the demand for cadavers for dissection far exceeded the number of bodies available, grave robbing was common, and surgeons were known to work with ‘resurrection’ men. However, the passage of the Anatomy Act meant that anyone who died in a state institution— primarily the workhouse— whose body remained unclaimed could be sent off for dissection. As Marshall has noted, this effectively criminalized poverty by applying what was

Marshall, *Murdering to Dissect: Grave-Robbing, Frankenstein and the Anatomy Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

formerly a punishment for crime to those whose only fault was to be poor.⁸ The Act's mandate was eventually expanded to include those who died in state institutions like the prison and the hospital and remained 'unclaimed,' which also meant that there were now many more bodies available for dissection. In some ways, the only thing that changed before and after the passage of the Anatomy Acts was the method of collection—before the passage of the Act, the bulk of human bodies were collected by resurrection men, and as in the famous Burke and Hare case, by murderers. After the passage of the Act, the act of collection simply fell to the state—it was the state that collected the poor, the sickly, and the criminal in its institutions before passing them on for dissection. The Anatomy Act is an example of the state taking over a particularly fraught form of medical collection from individuals. Additionally, the Act also changed the nature of kinship—only members of 'legitimate' family could claim bodies, which meant that for people who lived outside heteropatriarchal family structures, institutionalization meant dissection even if there were people who wanted to claim and mourn them after they died. There was also a push—Jeremy Bentham being literally emblematic of this—to encourage people to donate their bodies for dissection, but people who donated their bodies voluntarily were nowhere near the

⁸ For more on the passage of the Anatomy Act, see Richard Ward, 'The Criminal Corpse, Anatomists, and the Criminal Law: Parliamentary Attempts to Extend the Dissection of Offenders in Late Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of British Studies*, 54.1 (2015), 63–87. Though scholarship ties the poor body explicitly to dissection, an analysis of race and racialized bodies is sorely lacking here (though the dissection of racialized peoples is well documented in histories of dissection and anatomy). For some examples, see Edward C. Halperin, 'The Poor, the Black, and the Marginalized as the Source of Cadavers in United States Anatomical Education', *Clinical Anatomy*, 20.5 (2007), 489–95 (which is, as the title suggests, specific to North America) and Keren Rosa Hammerschlag, 'Black Apollo: Aesthetics, Dissection, and Race in Joseph Maclise's Surgical Anatomy', *British Art Studies*, 20, 2021. Though Hammerschlag's article only discusses the representation of Black people in anatomy manuals, the article offers a starting point for thinking about the intersection between race and dissection in terms of the Anatomy Act of 1832.

numbers of people whose bodies were taken for dissection through the Anatomy Act. In this context, it is no surprise that the Creature's body has lent itself so easily to as a collective political body of the poor and the working-class, for theirs would be the bodies most easily accessible to resurrection men before the passage of the Anatomy Act and earmarked by the State for dissection after it.⁹

This history also lends political significance to the Creature's escape at the end of the novel— if the project of dissection is to increase knowability, the Creature eludes it, disappearing so that its body can no longer be utilized for any purpose. After the publication of the novel, the term *Frankenstein* becomes a mainstay of cultural and political discourse. For instance, in a report on the New Alien Act in 1826, an addition to the English Alien Acts required immigrants to report their residence to the state twice a year and report every change of residence in addition to these two reports. Leigh Hunt characterizes this, and Acts such as the Garden Act, the Vagrant Act, the Bakers Act, the Police Acts, the Street Act, and the Marriage Act as Frankenstein's Creature— it's worth noting that every Act he mentions relates specifically to the adjudication, movement, and organization of people and bodies within the British state. He states that Parliament

⁹ From the Great Exhibition Collection in the Museum of Rural English Life, in *International Exhibition (1862 : Collection of Printed Documents and Forms Used in Carrying on the Business of the International Exhibition, 1862*. Printed by George Edward Eyre and William Spottiswoode, ... for Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1863. In this box, there is a document that lays out all the sites that foreign dignitaries will be escorted to as part of the International Exhibition in 1862— all of these were considered sites of collection and imperial display. Of all the eighteen locations on the list, most of which were galleries and museums, at least five spaces explicitly addressed the collection of human beings. These included the Pentonville and Millbank Prisons and the Fulham Refuge, Newgate Gaol and Holloway Prison, and the Bethlehem Hospital for Lunatics. These are the spaces from which unclaimed bodies would be repurposed as cadavers for dissections after the passage of the 1832 Anatomy Act, and by 1862, these sites of collection by the state are internationally conceived of as sites of exhibition as well. In short, the passage of the 1832 Anatomy Act shifted the burden of human collection from resurrection men to the British State, and the State becomes a collector of human bodies through institutions explicitly for the production of specimens for dissection

“fabricates them as *Frankenstein* fashioned his monster, without having the slightest notion how they will act when they come into force; and, like *Frankenstein*, when the work of their hands begins to trouble the world, they are scared at the huge mischief they have originated, and only solicitous to knock the fruit of their *collective wisdom* on the head when the season of power returns to them. In the meantime society suffers” (449).

Here, Hunt explicitly constructs Frankenstein as an irresponsible producer of bad, harmful knowledge, and bemoans the effects of these legal monsters on the bodies they are meant to adjudicate. Unlike the Creature himself, the Acts are not made of bodies but of laws that impact bodies, but the link between the state and its inhabitants as a body politic is clear. In this sense, we might re-imagine the 1831 version of the Creature as one that, in disappearing into the darkness, actively refutes the institutionalized collection and use of bodies facilitated by the state.

On Not Divulging the Secret of Life or Refusal as Epistemological Gambit

Both Frankenstein and the Creature refuse to offer any information about how the Creature was made— Frankenstein explicitly refuses to tell Walton his secret twice, and the Creature claims that he will ‘ascend’ his own funeral pyre so that no one can replicate Frankenstein’s process. Frankenstein’s paucity of details is, according to the narrative, deliberate to some degree. As far as discovering the “secret” to life is concerned, he says that the “discovery was so great and overwhelming, that all the steps by which [he] had been progressively led to it were obliterated, and [he] beheld only the result” (32). Shelley makes it clear in the novel

that this secret is lost with Frankenstein and cannot be re-discovered by systematically following the steps he took in his enquiry. Frankenstein is a careless scientist— he does not document his discovery sufficiently. However, this goes on to work in his favor, for a paragraph later, he tells Walton that he will not tell him how his science works. Though Walton is the addressee, Shelley is addressing the reader too.

Frankenstein says,

“I see by your eagerness, and the wonder and hope which your eyes express, my friend, that you expect to be informed of the secret with which I am acquainted; that cannot be: listen patiently until the end of my story, and you will easily perceive why I am reserved upon that subject. I will not lead you on, unguarded and ardent as I then was, to your destruction and infallible misery. Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow” (32)

In withholding these details, Frankenstein leaves us with no way of understanding, or even recreating his discovery. Any knowledge of how body parts are reanimated, in which precise arrangements, in which sequence, is elided.

On its own, the lack of details about the more anatomical aspects of the Creature’s creation is not surprising. Though Mary Shelley had access to some medical knowledge through Percy Shelley and her own correspondence with anatomists and physicians, it is not likely that she would have aspired to any kind of

detailed scientific realism. The Creature himself wants to ensure that he is not replicated— noteworthy given that he begs Frankenstein to make him a companion, not necessarily for reproduction, which suggests that Frankenstein projects reproductive desire on to the Creature even when he displays none— but he too, at the end of the novel, says that he plans burn his own body so that no one is able to replicate him. Throughout the book the emphasis on not replicating the experiment is absolute— even when attempted, characters stop at the last minute. Frankenstein is halfway through creating the Creature’s companion when he stops and disposes of her body in the sea. The slippage between creation and death is at its most acute here, for Frankenstein says that when he saw the remains of his half-finished Creature, he “almost felt as if [he] had mangled the living flesh of a human being” (122). On the one hand, these are the mangled remains of human beings, because it is from these remains that he constructs his creatures. However, in stating that it felt like the remains of “a” human being, a singular being and not a composite of parts, it is here that Frankenstein comes closest to considering his creations human. Faced with these scattered remains, Frankenstein stops to “collect” himself—what he means is that he is regaining his composure. However, given that the link between the self, the body, and collected parts is emphasized throughout the novel, it seems that Frankenstein himself is going through a process of reconfiguration amongst all these parts, re-making himself from the person who had created the Creature in the first place. Shelley’s deliberate refusal to furnish the details of this supernatural experiment serves two purposes. First, she doesn’t have come up with a more plausible method than she already has. Second, it makes the omission a moral or epistemic sleight of hand—it’s

not because she doesn't know, *it's because we can't know*. And because we can't know, we must contend with the fact that Shelley knows something she isn't telling us— she is withholding knowledge. And the whole novel becomes the justification for why we, nor anyone else, should not possess this knowledge.

Both Frankenstein's and the Creature's refusal to divulge the so-called knowledge of life figures this knowledge as dangerous and forbidden; a knowledge that, its implied, much like the Creature, should not exist because of its destructive potential. Of course, *we only know it should not exist because it does*— we would not know of its destructive potential otherwise, and indeed, Frankenstein himself is unaware of its destructive potential when he first begins his experiment. Therefore, this knowledge is a paradox within the text— the only reason that we know it exists is because of its destructive consequences, and in turn, it becomes characterized only through these consequences and not by the information, materials, methods, histories, or theories that may constitute it outside of this relation to consequence. Therefore, the only referent to this knowledge is the Creature's body, and it is also the figure of refusal.

Refusal as a narrative strategy involves several parts— there is the audience to whom something is refused, there is the speaker who refuses, and there is an object, utterance, or material of some sort that exists but is withheld, which consequently is defined by that withholding. Refusal makes it almost impossible for an audience to engage with an object outside of its relation to a reason, if any, offered for refusal. In *Frankenstein*, refusing to let Walton, and by extension, readers know the details of Frankenstein's re-animation process fences it off from some forms of engagement. For

instance, there are few ways to evaluate whether a less monstrous creature might have been made— we might say that fashioning the creature to be eight feet tall was an issue, but we would be able to offer little else because we simply do not have the details. However, we are invited, almost exhorted, to engage with whether Frankenstein should have undertaken this task in its entirety—and the answer the novel expects us to reach is a resounding “no”.

Refusal also creates an interesting dynamic between the audience and the speaker— the speaker knows more than the audience, and in refusing to divulge this information, maintains a kind of power or sway over the audience— refusal will keep an audience listening for when the secret is revealed. However, to transfix an audience in this way, the audience must be aware that there is a secret in the first place—the ability to withhold knowledge is always preceded by the production of knowledge. Refusal becomes a useful narrative device in this form of epistemic engagement with an audience— it lets us know there is something to know while simultaneously refusing to show it to us. The Creature’s body is an embodiment of that knowledge. If the novel is to be trusted, the knowledge of how to reanimate a body or create life is meant to be “lost in darkness and distance” (Shelley 161).

On Texts and Circulation

If the Creature’s body is unknowable, then the Creature’s soul or selfhood outside of the body is surprisingly entirely knowable through the representation of a collection of books. Part of Shelley’s construction of characters involves giving her readers a list of the books or the authors they have read. This is a bibliography that is perhaps meant to be explanatory—why they do the things they do, why they are the

way they are, and perhaps, even why they are what they are. Maybe the Creature is just three books in a trench coat. When both Frankenstein and the Creature narrate their own stories, one of the first things they do is enumerate this collection of books. Not only are these books or authors part of Shelley's construction of character, then, but also a part of how the characters narrate themselves.

In Frankenstein's case, the authors that influence him are as follows: Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelus, Albertus Magnus, Pliny, and Buffon. The only book that he mentions is an unnamed volume by Agrippa. I draw the distinction between books and authors to highlight the issue of attribution and closure. In Frankenstein's case, because we do not know exactly which books he has read of the authors he has mentioned, or which editions, any relationship we draw between him and these authors occurs at the level of discourse— anything they may have ever published may have been part of the corpus that influenced Frankenstein. In university, Frankenstein's reading choices, earlier derided by his father, are also derided by M. Kempe, who suggests that it is worse that Frankenstein had read these books than if he had not read at all, for now he had to unlearn all that he knew and only then relearn what is taught at the university. This comment, one that appears early in the novel, is notable for two reasons. One, it suggests that the act of reading is constitutive of character— Frankenstein is who he is because he is a reader. Second, it suggests that what one chooses to read or not read is not just significant to the acquisition of knowledge, but also to the exercise of ethics and morals. In the first chapter, Frankenstein's creation of the Creature is attributed in part to his reading material— to the “chimerical” visions of these philosophers. It is not just that Frankenstein finds the

works of these authors compelling or scientifically valuable— or not, as is the case— it’s that reading these authors is integral to his person. They form his soul.

M. Kempe, Frankenstein’s father, and others tell Frankenstein to give up these philosophers, and when he is fifteen, he does. Having just witnessed a thunderstorm and discovered the phenomenon of electricity, young Frankenstein “gave up [his] former occupations, set down natural history and all its progeny as a deformed and abortive creation, and entertained the greatest disdain for a would-be science which could never even step within the threshold of real knowledge” (24). The relationship between natural history and its deformed progeny is noteworthy here— it foreshadows Frankenstein’s creation of the Creature, and explicitly links these authors, natural history, and the Creature together. Young Frankenstein, however, goes on further to link this change of heart to the construction of his soul. He notes,

“Thus strangely are our souls constructed, and by such slight ligaments are we bound to prosperity or ruin. When I look back, it seems to me as if this almost miraculous change of inclination and will was the immediate suggestion of the guardian angel of my life—the last effort made by the spirit of preservation to avert the storm that was even then hanging in the stars and ready to envelop me. Her victory was announced by an unusual tranquility and gladness of soul which followed the relinquishing of my ancient and latterly tormenting studies. It was thus that I was to be taught to associate evil with their prosecution, happiness with their disregard” (29).

The direct link between the authors he has read and his soul is significant to Shelley's construction of Frankenstein as a character. He is not simply a person who happened to read work by these aforementioned authors and was simply more inclined than someone else to consider them noteworthy; it's that reading these authors in his formative years was constitutive to his actions, his work, his fate, and indeed, his very soul. When he meets M. Waldham at the university and hears his more sympathetic treatment of Frankenstein's early heroes, his soul is altered, again. He says,

“(A)s he went on I felt as if my soul were grappling with a palpable enemy; one by one the various keys were touched which formed the mechanism of my being; chord after chord was sounded, and soon my mind was filled with one thought, one conception, one purpose. So much has been done, exclaimed the soul of Frankenstein—more, far more, will I achieve; treading in the steps already marked, I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation. I closed not my eyes that night. My internal being was in a state of insurrection and turmoil; I felt that order would thence arise, but I had no power to produce it. By degrees, after the morning's dawn, sleep came. I awoke, and my yesternight's thoughts were as a dream. There only remained a resolution to return to my ancient studies and to devote myself to a science for which I believed myself to possess a natural talent” (29).

Here, M. Waldham's opinion of these “ancient” philosophers incites a visceral struggle within Frankenstein. The language in both this excerpt and the one pasted in

above evoke the act of physical creation or manipulation—the soul is composed of ligaments and keys, it consists of a mechanism, and it produces chords that go on to determine Frankenstein’s thoughts, conception, and purpose. In a rare moment within the novel, Frankenstein personifies his own soul— “So much has been done, exclaimed the soul of Frankenstein” (29)— a formulation all the more remarkable because it occurs within Frankenstein’s own first-person narration of events. The mechanical, even fleshy soul, is separated for a moment here from the narrating voice, pointing out an important distinction between souls, bodies, and voices within the novel. Frankenstein’s soul, Shelley tells us, is constituted by the collection of who, and what, he reads.

In the Creature’s case, the relationship between himself and the books that he reads is constructed even more explicitly. Unlike Frankenstein, there are four specific books, volumes, that develop his character. The first, Volney’s *Ruins of Empire*, is distinct from the others because he does not read this book himself but listens to Felix read it aloud to Safie. In the process, Shelley draws a tentative connection drawn between him and Safie, the Arab Christian and Turkish girl who comes to live with the DeLacys. Both the Creature and Safie learn as Felix reads out loud, and both of them are considered Other in specific ways— Safie because of her parentage and racial and national identity, the Creature for his racialized, monstrous body. Shelley constructs Safie as more easily assimilable into the Delacy family— she is young, pretty, and can marry into the family, while no such recourse exists for the Creature. When the DeLacys see him, they flee, fearing for their lives. No matter what he has read, or what he has learned, they still consider him monstrous. This fundamental difference

between the Creature and Safie enacts contingency yet again—that even if Shelley’s experiment of producing subjectivity through a collection of books works, it will only work or more accurately, fail to work when it comes up against the limits of the creature’s collected and monstrously rendered body.

The other three books that the Creature lists help him develop his own emotional, ethical, and moral relationships to the world that he occupies. The books, in order, are *Paradise Lost*, a volume (unspecified) of *Plutarch’s Lives* and the *Sorrows of Werter*. As Eric Meljac argues, the list works as a short humanities syllabus— both in terms of content and the inquiry that it elicits.¹² Unlike Frankenstein, who was influenced by authors, the specificity of these books to the Creature’s self-education is significant— the books offer an enclosed field of knowledge and influence. Shelley, and the Creature, are letting us know exactly which books and which texts are to be considered when we consider the Creature. It’s also significant that these books are discovered by chance, in a “leathern portmanteau” (88). Enclosure is doubled here— the books are found as a collection inside a container, and simultaneously act as a sort of explanatory container for the Creature’s thoughts, actions, and identity. Much like Frankenstein’s mechanical soul, the description of the Creature’s engagement with these materials is done with reference to materiality— he “exercises” his mind on these histories, they “raise” him, and they “sink” him. The Creature often repeats or uses synonyms for ‘raise’ when he talks about his engagement with these books— he

¹² Stated in this essay: ‘The Monster and the Humanities | IMPACT’ <<https://sites.bu.edu/impact/previous-issues/impact-winter-2018/the-monster-and-the-humanities/>>. Also see Susan Stewart on collection as liberal inquiry: “the liberal arts education characteristic of the leisure classes is in itself a mode of collection. The notion of the “educational hobby” legitimates the collector’s need for control and possession within a world of infinitely consumable objects whose production and consumption are far beyond the ken of the individual subject (161).

is elevated, exposed to lofty ideals that surpass his understanding. What he learns from these books “caused these impressions to take a firm hold on [his] mind,” and, more importantly, understand his own place in the world. *Paradise Lost* offers the Creature the figure of Adam, whom the Creature immediately casts as a foil to his own narration of self— “he had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his Creator; he was allowed to converse with and acquire knowledge from beings of a superior nature, but I was wretched, helpless, and alone” (90). These books are performing the important pedagogical, and epistemological function of enabling him to start developing relations to other people, figures, and concepts, through which he produces an understanding of himself.

The Creature reads Frankenstein’s journal, too, which contains an account of the Creature’s genesis alongside a few journal entries. The Creature, like Frankenstein, tells us of this journal’s existence but does not share any of this knowledge. Instead, all we know is that Frankenstein

“minutely described in these papers every step [he] took in the progress of [his] work...Everything is related in them which bears reference to [the Creature’s] accursed origin; the whole detail of that series of disgusting circumstances which produced it is set in view; the minutest description of my odious and loathsome person is given, in language which painted your own horrors and rendered mine indelible” (91).

In the last sentence of the quote, the parallel structure doesn’t quite work. In Frankenstein’s case, horror may refer to either his horror at the task he was recording,

or be work as a noun to refer to Frankenstein's experiment of making the Creature's body. In terms of the Creature, however, the word "mine" doesn't refer to the Creature's feelings or actions—it refers to him in his entirety. *He is the indelible horror*. Thus, the Creature's anger is not just that Frankenstein made him, but that Frankenstein's account of his creation as a permanent, "indelible" horror forecloses the Creature's own ability to account for himself. Thus, the knowledge of the process used to create the Creature's is complete and inscribed in notebooks, but unavailable to anyone but Frankenstein or the Creature both within and outside the novel—and this knowledge is constructed in such a way that it stifles the Creature's own voice and subjectivity. However, the Creature tells Frankenstein this in direct speech—we *see* a version of his voice. And his voice—that he narrates himself, even if that narration is only provisionally his voice because of the nested nature of the novel—is integral to his subjecthood.

One of the defining characteristics of the novel (and the thing that most adaptations get wrong) is the creature's eloquence. This eloquence is developed through the Creature's engagement with the books that he finds. It is only after reading these books that he is even able to articulate this significant criticism of Frankenstein—Frankenstein's sin isn't just creating and then abandoning him, it's his refusal to let the Creature have a voice. Of course, the Creature's criticism appears in Frankenstein's narration of the Creature's account to Walton. For now, it is important to see that the lists of books and authors that Shelley attaches to both Frankenstein and the Creature are crucial to the making of their subjectivity. Their souls and minds are shaped by what they read, suggesting that subject-formation depends on whatever

collection of books happens to come their way. The representation of some aspects of the Creature's subjectivity as a collection of books lets us draw a parallel between the textual body and the material body—Frankenstein's journal is filled with details of the Creature's creation, as is the Creature's own body, which is why he plans on “ascending” his own pyre so that no one can replicate the experiment. Not only do texts constitute a significant portion of the Creature in terms of his understanding of the world and himself, but this parallel between the journal and his own body makes the Creature's body a textual one well.

On Narrative

So far, I have been discussing the collection of human and animal parts that compose the Creature's body. Unknown and deliberately unknowable, this is a collection that resists epistemological certainty or mastery. Then, I have shown how Shelley utilizes collections of books as integral to character development, so much so that they stand in for a character's ‘soul’. Now I turn to the novel as a textual collection. In this section, I argue that the narrative structure of *Frankenstein* as an epistolary and frame narrative combines the epistemological uncertainty produced through the collection that composes the body with the totalizing representation of mind or the soul as a collection of books or authors. If Shelley suggests that the body is fundamentally unknowable, while the mind/soul is seemingly completely knowable, she relies on a supposedly clear binary—knowable and unknowable collections as absolute, opposing categories. But the contingent collected form of the narrative itself renders both these collections radically uncertain. In short, we go from knowing with

certainty that we know, or don't know how the Creature was collected to questioning whether or not the text we are reading is itself a complete collection.

Mary Shelley began writing *Frankenstein* as part of an informal contest with Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, and John William Polidori in the dreary summer of 1816, when much of the world experienced the aftereffects of the eruption of Mount Tambora.¹⁰ The novel was published in three volumes in 1818 with a preface written by Percy Shelley. In 1823, the novel was adapted into a play titled *Presumption* by Richard Brinsley Peake. In the same year, William Godwin published a new edition of the novel in two volumes— incidentally, the first edition was dedicated to Godwin. A second printing of this second edition was issued in 1826 by Henry Colburn. Later, Mary Shelley revised a third edition of the novel for the Standard Novels series edited by Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, and this time, she wrote her own introduction to the text. What is most assigned in the literature classroom today is the 1818 version, and sometimes the 1831 version. Rarely is the 1823 version to be found other than in the work of literary critics and historians who are invested in the textual history of the book. In this chapter, I work only with the text of the 1818 text, though I will refer to Mary Shelley's introduction to the 1831 text occasionally. The novel's various versions add a layer of editorial assembly to an already 'collected' narrative.¹¹

Critics have engaged with *Frankenstein's* narrative structure as a frame narrative, as an epistolary novel, oral narrative, and even as 'found document'—

¹⁰ Recently, ecocritics have analyzed the impact of the Tambora eruption on Romantic literature, see Gillen D'Arcy Wood, 'The Volcano That Spawned a Monster: Frankenstein and Climate Change', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 83.4 (2020), 691–703.

¹¹ For an excellent collation of the book that place the 1818 and 1831 versions side by side to illustrate the differences in prose, see <http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/index.html>

drawing from the idea of found footage in horror film genres. It begins as a series of letters from Robert Walton to his sister Mrs. Margaret Saville as he tells her about his journey of exploration to the north pole. As an aside, Anne Mellor and others have noted that Mrs. Saville's full name is Margaret Walton Saville, which make her initials M.W.S., the same as Mary Shelley's (Mellor 54). Whilst on that journey, his ship encounters an ailing Frankenstein, who is promptly brought on board and nursed. While Frankenstein recovers, he tells Walton a fantastic tale— this is the second frame. Frankenstein's first-person account is narrated orally to Walton— “listen to my history,” Frankenstein tells Walton— who “record[ed] as nearly as possible in his own words, what he has related during the day” (Shelley 18). Though Walton claims that these are Frankenstein's own words, and many critics take this at face value, his own narration of the process shows how mediated this account is. First, he does not write this story down as Frankenstein narrates it— he waits till the evenings to record the account. On some evenings, if he is busy, he “will at least make notes” (18). I don't bring this up to question the exactness of Walton's memory, but to note that Walton specifies a temporal lapse between when the narration is orally told, and when it is recorded in writing. What appears to be a continuous stream of narration as we read the novel is not, according to Walton, narrated that way. In adding this detail, Shelley's frame becomes more complex— there is much happening beneath the wholeness conferred by an uninterrupted account. Second, Frankenstein's frame, in its written form, is checked over by Frankenstein for inaccuracies— he “connected and augmented” Walton's notes, stating that “since [Walton] has preserved [his] narration...[he] would not have a mutilated one go down to posterity” (151). All the

tonal shifts not easily read in the frame are present in Walton's narration after the closure of Frankenstein's frame. Walton points out that

“sometimes, seized with sudden agony, [Frankenstein] could not continue his tale; at others, his voice is broken, yet piercing, uttered with difficulty the words so replete with agony...sometimes he commanded his countenance and tones, and related the most horrible incidents with a tranquil voice, suppressing every mark of agitation; then, like a volcano bursting forth, his face would suddenly change to an expression of the wildest rage, as he shrieked out imprecations on his persecutor” (151). The note about his voice ‘breaking’ adds to the conceit of a broken, disjointed narration that has been “connected” together in the writing (151).

Then, there is the third frame, opened and closed within Frankenstein's narration, and it too is conveyed orally. The creature begins his narrative seated at a fire with Frankenstein, who had “consented to listen” but not write down any part of this narrative. Unlike Walton, Frankenstein does not claim to relate the words of the creature exactly as he hears them. However, some of this narration might well be changed in Walton's account, because, as stated earlier, Frankenstein corrects part of the account before Walton sends it to his sister.

Apart from these three nested narratives— Walton's, Frankenstein's, and the Creature's, respectively— the narrative also consists of letters from characters like Elizabeth and Alphonse Frankenstein, both written documents related in Frankenstein's oral narration of his account. Interestingly, though the creature narrates

the stories of Felix and Safie, the ‘proof’ of this tale is found in Walton’s narration at the end of the novel, where he states that he believed Frankenstein’s strange tale because Frankenstein had shown him “the letters of Felix and Safie,” and because he had seen the Creature himself from the ship. As many critics have noted before me, the style of narration in each of the frames, and in many of the letters included within the frames, is remarkably similar. In short, there are few stylistic markers that set each narration apart except that each account is explicitly attributed to a specific narrator. The curious movement of letters between oral narration and written, and the ways in which they function as account and proof, highlight a fictionalized form of assembly in terms of the narrative— Shelley is deliberate in her construction of frames and her inclusion of documents; she shows, without a doubt, that this is a narrative that has been stitched together in its telling, a collected, curated, and circulated story.

The narrative as I have described it above—the textual body of the novel—is, like the Creature’s body, a collection, but it is crucially different from the bodily collection in a few ways. First, the parts of the text are clearly demarcated—we know what Walton narrates, what Frankenstein narrates, what the Creature narrates, and so on—whilst the parts of the Creature’s body are not. In fact, they cease to be parts and become simply the body once the Creature is reanimated. We can transparently, or so it seems, see the organization of the text in a way we’re unable to in the Creature’s body. Anna Clark points out that the frame narrative does a good job of differentiating between each of the narrators, because even though each account is framed within the narration of another character, their voices and perspectives still feel distinct (253). We know who is narrating which part of the story due to the fact that each narrator’s

position in relation to the other is clearly defined, so much so that we may forget that technically it is Walton narrating all of the story. And yet, though the components of the text are parsable—we can see clearly where one narrative ends and another begins, they are not separable, much like the Creature's own body. Yoon Sun Lee suggests that we can read each narrative as parallel narratives, but this is not the case, because the texts cannot be extricated from their containers (126). As Criscilla Benford notes, many critics when talking about the narrative structure of *Frankenstein* reference a matryoshka doll—it is an excellent material reference for the most part (324). However, there is an important difference between the structure of the doll and the structure of the text—each individual doll is complete on its own, but no part of the narrative can stand on its own. The frame of the narrative tends to disappear when we engage with its constituent parts. The Creature's body, though opaque in terms of its composition, is a completed body. The narrative, on the other hand, offers us no such comfortable closure. Given that Walton's missives are addressed to Mrs. Saville, and we are certainly not Mrs. Saville, how are we reading these letters—did Mrs. Saville publish them? Were they discovered in a shipwreck? In an old and musty library and then published? Even though Walton's frame encloses both the Creature and *Frankenstein's* narration, how do we know that this frame is complete? The forms of the frame and epistolary novel that Shelley has chosen emphasize the mediated and circulated nature of the text we are reading, and in so doing, highlight gaps in this chain of fictional transmission—we cannot overlook the fact that we don't know how these letters came to us, and we are acutely aware of this fictional distance between ourselves and this multiply related or mediated story.

The question of whether there is more to this story forces us to grapple with contingency. Christina Lupton examines the relationship between the physical structure of the codex and the formal structure of the eighteenth-century British novel using the idea of contingency—which she defines here as “something that already is, and that of making it apparent that it need not have been so”—to argue that authors imagined the physical form of the book as a formal, narrative dynamic that they played with in their work (1173). She works primarily here with Niklas Luhmann and his work on complex systems to suggest that contingency is key to modern life because it “describes the object within the horizons of possible variations,” which I suggest could be played with to meet or subvert reader expectations (Luhmann, quoted in Lupton 1173). Another way to think of contingency is to think of dependency—when we think of events in a sequence where each preceding event is required for the one after it to occur, then the events at the end of the sequence are contingent on the ones that occur before. For instance, if one outcome, say, a successful birthday party, is contingent on someone procuring food, someone decorating a venue, someone procuring a venue, someone inviting guests and so on, then how many of these conditions must be met for the party to be successful? Furthermore, to what extent must some or all these conditions be fulfilled for the desired outcome?

In *Frankenstein*, contingency comes to bear on multiple aspects of the novel. Because this is a nested narrative—Walton narrating Frankenstein narrating the Creature—we cannot separate them from each other. We do not have Frankenstein’s story without Walton narrating it, the Creature’s story cannot exist without Frankenstein’s narration, and what would Walton even narrate if not for the story of

Frankenstein and the Creature? Each nested layer is dependent on the one that encloses it—even at the end of the novel, when both the Creature and Frankenstein briefly appear in Walton’s narrative, they are still enclosed by, and contingent on, Walton’s narration. Considering that the narrative is the form in which any knowledge the novel seeks to transmit (such as a meditation on what might constitute the human), having a narrative that is contingent also makes the nature of any transmitted knowledge or information contingent as well, which affects its certitude. It becomes knowledge only insofar as it, as Lupton and Luhmann put it, within a horizon of variations—it carries with it the possibility of change that might be precipitated by new factors that have to be taken into consideration, emergent material, a reconsideration of scholarly methods, or something else.

Not only is the narrative as knowledge changeable, but there is also the problem of closure. Given that the novel is narrated in the form of letters and journals, and given that we are faced with this gap in the transmission of these letters from Walton to a publishable format, how certain can we be that the novel is complete? At least when the Creature finds his books, we know that they were found in a leather portmanteau with some clothes in the forest. However, here, all we know is that Walton’s letters, which contain all of novel, are addressed to his sister. We don’t know whether these letters ever reached her, if they were found by someone else and then published or circulated, whether these are only a part of the letters that Walton wrote or if they are the complete set. This is a problem that could have easily been resolved by Walton addressing his letters to us, the readers. This would enclose the letters, and the novel, neatly within the frame. However, because a chain of transmission is

specified but not completed, there is a lack of closure. Or, at the very least, there is uncertainty about closure. In this way, the structure of the novel and the Creature's body are at odds with each other— with the narrative, we can clearly see and delineate the parts that constitute it yet we do not know if there is more; with the Creature's body, we have no information as to how it is constituted or any specific details about the parts used to constitute it, but his body is whole and complete; his frame is enclosed. We get the story of a Creature of unspecified parts in the form of a narrative with an unspecified frame. If we were to look to Shelley to see how we might make a human, or what is a human, what her collections offer us is an epistemological framework of contingency, unknowability, and open-endedness—a radical lack of certain knowledge.

Conclusion

In "*In the Penal Colony*," Franz Kafka presents readers with an unusual and deteriorating form of punishment— an inscription machine that will slowly and painfully inscribe judgments on to the bodies of those who are condemned to it, making the inscription of this judgment the cause of death. The mechanism of writing, and more specifically, writing on the body brings the scriptural or documented idea of the state to bear directly on the body of the citizen— documentary violence is made flesh. The inscription of judgments in this manner makes the state and its actions material using punitive inscriptions. In the story, the only officer who is enthusiastic about this form of execution eventually ends up getting caught in the machine, subject to the same deathly inscription process that he has subjected many (and importantly, illiterate, and unknowing) prisoners to. The story addresses the process of writing— of

producing characters who may or may not know what they might be subjected to at the hands of the author, or a creator. The prisoners in the Kafka story never quite figure out what is happening to them—the officer points out that the purpose of the machine is to inscribe judgement in such a fleshly way that the prisoners understand somatically why they are being punished, but that never happens. In *Frankenstein*, the Creature comes into being as bewildered as the prisoners in Kafka’s story, however, throughout the book, he learns and grows—he eventually narrates himself, even if his narration that is mediated through both Frankenstein and Walton, and consequently, doubly contingent. The Creature’s body is not just a textual body—it is a speaking textual body, it is the figure of Shelley’s book, both ‘hideous progeny’ let loose upon the world where they both circulate—the Creature within the world of the book, and the text in the realm of culture. Shelley’s collected subject, however, vows to destroy himself at the end of the novel, giving into to his despair about his inability to assimilate or form relationships with anyone or become a part of a social, political, or even biological collective. The only connections he has left by the end of the novel are the fragments of the people and creatures Frankenstein collected to make him, fragments that have lost their own histories in their conscription as part of the Creature’s body. At the end, then, we are left with both the possibility of a collected subject, and Shelley’s profound skepticism about the collection’s efficacy alone to make the subject part of kinship, social, or political structures.

Ch II—A Museum of Oddities: Collections, Class and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary*

Barton

In a letter to Henry Reeve, the editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, Harriet Martineau, a social theorist and economist, writes of Elizabeth Gaskell's work on industrialization and labor, "how entirely Mrs. Gaskell fails, except in single portraits & in collecting anecdotes. Her personages are a museum of oddities, each one of which had struck her fancy, some time or other" (quoted in Sanders 68). In an essay written for *The Gaskell Society Journal* in 2002, Valerie Sanders suggests that this charge is unjustified, more usually applied to Dickens than to Gaskell—though it is unsurprising given that Martineau's own work tended towards "documentary realism" (68). The failure that Martineau is alluding to is one of representation—at this time, both Martineau and Gaskell are writing about industrialization and labor. The question of how they might be best represented to a readership not directly involved in the process was an open one, and on which, at least for Martineau, Gaskell had failed to answer adequately. Today, Martineau's critique seems incorrect—Gaskell's novels have become foundational to understanding the relationship between literature and labor in the nineteenth century in Britain. However, I want to take Martineau's claim seriously for two reasons; firstly, because she and Gaskell both wrote about and were concerned with the field of economics, and Martineau's work prefigured and influenced Gaskell's writing, and secondly, because Martineau's "museum of oddities" captures something that many critics studying Gaskell, and particularly *Mary Barton*, have encountered when they read the novel—that it can read like a collection of people, anecdotes, and objects. Critics have interpreted these collected things by

way of various disciplinary histories—some have drawn on natural history or natural philosophy in the nineteenth century to think through the many botanical and animal specimens in the novel, while others have looked instead to the emerging practices of linguistic anthropology to account for the examples of Lancashire dialect that so many of Gaskell’s working-class characters speak. Most recently, Elaine Freedgood’s work also offers support for Martineau’s characterization of Gaskell’s work as a museum of oddities, contextualizing *Mary Barton* in terms of the material things that appear, circulate or are produced in the novel. My own reading of *Mary Barton* here is interested in what collections allow Gaskell to do epistemologically and narratively in relation to the concept of class. She does not import specific objects or disciplines into the novel as her models, but rather uses a range of collecting practices to narrate and manage the economic and social knowledge she seeks to create. I ask: how does Gaskell produce knowledge of social class specifically by constructing what looks like a museum of oddities in *Mary Barton*? What does this aspect of the novel tell us about Gaskell’s engagement with economic thought? And, finally, what models of knowledge does Gaskell produce in her work as she moves between the forms and methods of collection and the project of representing class?

There are many ways to approach the relationship between class and collection. Both terms are porous and capacious and move across disciplines and domains of knowledge. Scientific thought might define the relation between them as one of ordering, classification, or taxonomy. What is collected is sorted into a specific class, and classes of objects, people, and ideas might constitute a collection. If we think in terms of culture, then we might understand collecting as a practice that might

constitute or indicate class— social or economic class might enable people to collect in various capacities, or people might identify themselves as collectors, and collecting as integral to the formation of a cohort or class. Collections and class share structural similarities if we consider them as theories of containment or constitution— they both consists of singular elements that are related to the concept that a collection or class might signify. Collections can therefore be similar to classes, consist of constituents than can be classified into classes, and can be enabled by class. Both collection and class as forms also create structures of value based on the specific relations between the constituents, or on hierarchies produced through the processes of collection or classification. For instance, if someone were to collect blue sea-shells, the shells that are blue will have more value in terms of this collection than shells of another hue. Similarly, when thinking of economic classes to categorize a population, we might consider what a class values most highly as a key differentiator.

A significant difference between class and collection lies in their epistemological utility. Classes are usually designated to make information easier to work with. People, data, objects, ideas, or other units get put into classes based on resemblance or similarity in structure, utility, or quality. If we can assume that if two or more things belong to a class, that they resemble each other in some form, then we can generalize. Collections are trickier. There certainly are collections that work similarly to classes, and collection as a method can be integral to the formation of classes, yet collections don't always require their constituents to resemble each other. Collections as a form may contain more anarchy, more surprising forms of relation than resemblance or similarity.

In this chapter, I specifically examine how specimens, which are constituted through collection, interact with classification and economic class. This requires me to pay attention to the history of scientific classification, the development of economics in nineteenth-century Britain, theories of labor, and more. Already, this disciplinary context limits the contours of my inquiry. However, I return to the broad relation between collection and class too because it is easy to let disciplinary specificity—in this case, the specific formations of natural philosophy, natural history, and political economy—obscure both terms’ negotiation of the relation between the singular and the collective, or the part and the whole, by making these relations an ontological quality of these forms rather than a constructed one. In short, both collection and class are socially, politically, and otherwise epistemologically constituted—they do not exist as is, but come into being, sometimes in interconnected ways. When we as critics pay close attention to this process of becoming, we can understand both how these forms are constituted, and how value is constructed by the relations between them. We can also think through the deployment of these forms and their consequences when they are projected outside or beyond narrative.

I show how Gaskell emphasizes practices such as observation, classification, and narration to curate this “museum of oddities” and argue that economics can be known and the suffering of the working class can be alleviated through the cultivation of sympathy.¹ By offering us narrative “specimens” and scenes of examination,

¹ Martineau’s criticism of Gaskell’s characterization in her novels is worth noting because her *Illustrations of Political Economy*, published in a series of novellas from 1832-33, are widely considered to prefigure Gaskell’s own project of narrativizing issues of labor. Gaskell’s emphasis on seeing is prefigured in Martineau’s preface to her *Illustrations of Political Economy* where she states that existing monographs on political economy are bad at teaching “the science systematically as far as

Gaskell's narrative switches constantly between the singular and the collective, or in this case, the specimen and class, to represent and know issues of labor. The audience for her narrative and epistemological efforts are both characters within the book—such as Mr. Carson— and the reader. Gaskell disavows knowledge of political economy as she turns our attention to the working class in the novel, suggesting political economy should only be understood and produce value in terms of the treatment of class, particularly the working class, and not in terms of other factors such as consumer demand. I use her work as an example of the argument that systems-level thinking must be produced in terms of the constituents of a system, rather than the more abstract idea of the system itself. Furthermore, I suggest that her use of specimen stories— units that describe the domestic, political, and social in terms of singular specimens— effectively underscores this epistemological argument in terms of narrative. Finally, I suggest that by making the working class and its concerns knowable to both the characters in the book and the reader, Gaskell constructs the sympathetic treatment of the working class by the masters as a core value and shows how collection makes that possible. While Shelley, in *Frankenstein*, draws attention to the contingency, unknowability and unassimilability of the collected subject, Gaskell suggests that one can know social class through observation of both the particular subject and his larger group, and that this is the only grounds on which one can

it is yet understood.” Though these books are valuable, they do not offer new learners the science in a familiar, practical form. They give us its history; they give us its philosophy; but we want its picture. They give us truths, and leave us to look about us, and go hither and thither in search of illustrations of those truths. Some who have a wide range in society and plenty of leisure, find this all-sufficient; but there are many more who have neither time nor opportunity for such an application of what they learn. 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 are actually doing in communities. Martineau's emphasis on “picture” finds its echo in Mary Barton's emphasis on sight— it is imperative to see to understand.

produce sound economic knowledge. For Gaskell, then, the collected subject is not a figure for unknowability, but rather, is integral to the construction of social categories (class) and epistemological disciplines (economics).

Elizabeth Gaskell's Economy

Gaskell doesn't define political economy in the novel for us. In two places she explicitly disavows any knowledge of it—first in the preface, and second, in the novel proper when Job Legh says that he doesn't know much about political economy. I will argue later in the chapter that Gaskell uses, indeed, begins with, disavowal as narrative device to communicate economic knowledge. However, she does offer several instances in the novel where the narrator is openly critical of the economic decisions that the masters make. After the Carson's mill catches fire, for example, Gaskell points out that the masters and the workers have very different reactions to the fire because of how differently they experience its consequences. For one, the Carsons have insurance to fall back on:

“the machinery lacked the improvements of late years, and worked but poorly in comparison with that which might now be procured. Above all, trade was very slack; cottons could find no market, and goods lay packed and piled in many a warehouse. The mills were merely worked to keep the machinery, human and metal, in some kind of order and readiness for better times. So this was an excellent opportunity, Messrs. Carson thought, for refitting their factory with first-rate improvements, for which the insurance money would amply pay. They were in no hurry about the business, however. The weekly drain of wages given

for labour, useless in the present state of the market, was stopped. The partners had more leisure than they had known for years; and promised wives and daughters all manner of pleasant excursions, as soon as the weather should become more genial” (57)

Gaskell is quick to point out the flip side of this “picture”—the laborers cannot find work, and consequently, are unable to keep their families housed or fed. There is no coal for heat or medicine for the ill, and so the fire that ends up being a welcome respite from low market demand for the Carsons is devastating to all those who work in their mills and factories. The fact that the logics of supply and demand make shutting the mills a reasonable, even welcome, decision despite the enormous harm it causes to workers is what pushes Gaskell to the question this economic logic. Not only does she suggest that ‘political economy’ as the Carsons, and consequently the masters understand it, is harmful, she also calls its epistemological efficacy into question based on its capacity to harm.² In short, Gaskell points out that whatever the masters

² It is likely that by political economy Gaskell means the demand theory of value. Gordon Bigelow describes this as a “consumption-centered version of political economy...[that stressed]...the irrelevance of political or social systems of organization to the immutable laws of value and wealth” (65). Till the 1820s, prominent strands of political economy included work by Adam Smith and David Ricardo, who argued that economic systems determined value based on theories of labor. For Smith, labor is the primary measure of the value of a commodity, while for Ricardo, it is the relations between labor, land, and capital that produce value. However, Bigelow points out that the work of people like Richard Whately, whose *Easy Lessons on Money Matters* was widely circulated and sought to explain political economy, challenged both Smith and Ricardo in their theorization of value. Now, value was determined by the desire of the consumer, rather than factors of consumption. Bigelow quotes Whately to illustrate— “It is not, therefore, labour that makes things valuable, but their being valuable that makes them worth labouring for” (62). This demand theory of value drew critics— famously Marx, Engels, and even Mill— as it was “widely perceived as cruel, or at least callously unconcerned with the suffering of the poor” (65). Bigelow also characterizes Gaskell’s critique as the Romantic critique of political economy that “protested against the kinds of ill-treatment that political economy viewed as inevitable and beneficial, but it failed to show that these abuses were the result of capitalism itself” (144). Bigelow also notes that Gaskell moves on from this position to question the idea of capital itself in her later novels.

consider economic knowledge is incorrect *because* it is harmful to workers—it cannot be right to base decisions on a knowledge that entails such substantial injury.

The central problem in *Mary Barton* is an economic one, particularly the poverty of the working class that, and as Gaskell puts in in her preface to the novel, “taints what might be resignation to God’s will, and turns in to revenge” (3). John Barton murders Harry Carson because of the latter’s inability to sympathize with, and materially alleviate, the poverty experienced by workers employed at his father’s mill. This crime frames the novel’s critique of, and sympathy for, the Chartist movement—as readers, we are asked to sympathize with the plight of workers, and yet understand the immorality of Barton’s crime. Simultaneously, the novel’s greatest charge levied against the masters is their *inability to sympathize because they are unable to adequately observe their workers*—which is dramatized in a conversation between mill-owner Mr. Carson and working-class Job Legh, John Barton’s friend. Job Legh, as the novel repeatedly tells us, is a natural historian who appears to be supported by his grand-daughter Margaret. He relies on close observation of collected specimens to understand how his worlds work— economic, political, and natural. When Mr. Carson argues John Barton’s actions are unjustifiable because masters “cannot regulate the demand for labour” and hence cannot help the material conditions of workers, Job Legh counters by saying that if masters were able to *see* the plight of workers, then they might have been able to sympathize with them (384).³ This retort is a strange one for it does not address the problem that Mr. Carson poses directly— how would the experience of sympathy change the masters’ understanding of being at the mercy of

³ Bigelow characterizes Mr. Carson’s economic logic typical of the demand theory of value— “for him, the market is beyond human control, and workers need to live by its harsh rules” (155).

market forces? There is a missing step here— for Legh, being able to sympathize would presumably cause the masters to disregard the market and think in terms of the well-being of their workers. It does not cross his mind that the masters may see this suffering and continue to not sympathize with workers in favor of raising profits and simply bringing in workers from poorer district during strikes— and Gaskell doesn't seem to consider this eventuality either.

Legh suggests that because Mr. Carson works within the logic of demand and supply, he is unable to see the damage this logic causes—thinking through demand and supply makes the suffering of workers imperceptible because the only values that matter in this framework is consumer demand and the availability of product to meet that demand. Labor only emerges as a factor that affects the manufacture of the product—a secondary, sometimes tertiary concern in this framework. Within the novel, it's the inability to see the workers' plight, rather than callousness or cruelty, that drives the masters' decisions. Thus, the issue becomes an epistemological rather than a moral one—the masters simply need to *see*. Sight is an issue for the workers as well. They are unable to see what the market is, they are unable to understand the actions of the masters. Job Legh lays out the epistemological structure that will, according to Gaskell, offer a different understanding of economics and labor—we must observe characters, whether they be workers or masters, and use these observations to bring us to a state of understanding that fosters Christian sympathy for their fellow man. Masters need to emerge from their comfortable living rooms and see the plight of their workers and construct their knowledge of economy with this observation as its foundation. As Job Legh points out, “what [workers] feel sharpest is

the want of inclination to try and help the evils which come like blights at times over the manufacturing places, while we see the masters can stop work and not suffer. If we saw the masters try for our sakes to find a remedy.... even if they could find no help...we'd bear up like men through hard times" (386). Legh's emphasis on what the workers see makes the absence of the masters' ability to see the workers' condition even more conspicuous. Not only do the masters need to observe in the way the workers do, but they also then need to act on those observations such that it is *observable* to the workers. Legh suggests that merely observing the masters trying to help, whether or not it resulted in any material gains for the workers, would alleviate the workers' plight because it would demonstrate the masters' sympathy. When this exercise of sympathy becomes possible, the novel seems to suggest that industrial relations might improve, and that workers might be "bound to their employers by the ties of respect and affection, not by mere money bargains alone; in short, to acknowledge the Spirit of Christ as the regulating law between both parties" (388).

Both workers and masters need to share the same observational field—whether they can each see issues like the workers' plight or the state of the market—to resolve the tensions between them. Furthermore, these observations need to be acted on or through the exercise of sympathy.

Whereas the masters' understanding of economy as Gaskell characterizes it erases the sufferings of the workers by making it imperceptible, careful observation fosters sympathy. However, this makes representability an issue. How are the masters to observe a class of workers in their totality and vice versa? It is difficult to observe the plight of an entire collective without turning to the individual as either a

synecdoche or personification of the class they are a part of. In Henry Mayhew's chronicling of the poor of London in *London Labour and London Poor*, he tends to switch between depictions of groups and individuals in order to represent a class—for instance, a section titled “Of the Street-Sellers of Hot Green Peas” might be immediately followed by one titled “Of the Experience of a Hot Green Pea Seller,” where the toggling between the individual and the collective is visible even at the level of the title. Presumably, we the readers are meant to understand the entire class of hot green pea sellers in the relation between the representation of the individual, and the representation of a group of individuals. Images of mobs, crowds, strikes and protest might offer a viable representational strategy to depict a class of people, but it is most effective at showing the result of what a collective has endured rather than a depiction of what is done to produce that effect. Gaskell's solution (and the key to Martineau's criticism of Gaskell) is to offer up a particular specimen which the masters must observe. The kind of observation Gaskell demands, as we will see, takes shape through the work of collecting specimens.

In *Mary Barton*, the narrator explicitly constructs John Barton as a specimen. As readers of the novel, we may feel sympathy for John Barton as an individual, but Gaskell's construction of him as a “specimen” of a Manchester man extends this sympathy to an entire class—the slippage between the scientific and political taxonomies embedded within that word is deliberate.

In addition to having something to observe, a mechanism is required for observation to take place, and a method that specifies how this mechanism produces knowledge. So, Gaskell emphasizes sight as a mechanism throughout the novel. While

Job is openly skeptical of Will having seen the *Mermadicus* or a mermaid, he is quick to believe that the young sailor has indeed seen a flying fish. When Will is confused as to why one is more believable than the other— “You'll credit me when I say I've seen a crittur half fish, half bird, and you won't credit me when I say there be such beasts as mermaids, half fish, half woman. To me, one's just as strange as t'other” (154)— Margaret suggests gently that it's because he has only seen one of these himself. Gaskell puts her emphasis not only on visual observation but on the individual as primary observer— only first-hand observation as a method is acceptable in order to make knowledge.

Gaskell extends this emphasis on sight and pictures to the event that becomes the catalyst for John Barton's murder of Harry Carson. Gaskell's narrator offers readers several accounts of the exploitation that labourers experience at the hands of masters, especially with the introduction of machines like the spinning jenny, or the masters' attempt to flood the market with cheaply manufactured cotton in order to drive the prices down and out-compete other European or continental cotton markets.⁴ We get accounts of meetings, strikes, and deliberations, all of which help build up to the moment when John Barton is called on to kill Harry Carson. However, what ends up being the final straw for the workers in the novel is an image: the caricature that Harry Carson draws of them at a negotiation between the masters and the workers

⁴ Though the narrator's accounts of these events display a deep sympathy to the workers' position, which echoes much of Marx and Engels' criticism, Gaskell's politics in the novel remain more or less conservative—unlike the views forwarded by chartists and communists, Gaskell's critique of these issues is that had the masters failed to communicate or sympathize with workers, choosing instead to exert their authority. The problem for Gaskell is not capitalism, and the exploitation it visits upon laborers due to the need to compete in a market, but rather the “want of mutual confidence” (Gaskell 161) between the masters and the workers, for, as she puts it, “distrust each other as they may, the employers and the employed must rise and fall together” (160).

during a strike, and its reception amongst all the masters who smile and nod when they see it.⁵ John Barton says that the caricature “makes me more than sad, it makes my heart burn within me, to *see* that folk can make a jest of striving men,” (188, emphasis mine) which then leads to the workers’ decision to murder Harry Carson. Just before the image is produced, the workers listen to a speech by a “gentleman from London,” an organizer, who offers a speech with allusions to the “elder and the younger Brutus” (186). Though stirring, oration is not sufficient to move the workers to murder—they need a picture to convince them to act. This moment in the text highlights the disconnection between the masters and the workers when, at the end of the novel, Job Legh accuses the masters of being unable to see. James Buzard suggests that Job Legh is the only one in the novel who “alone is given clarity of vision”—however, it is clear here that the workers as a whole have and prioritize a kind of vision too (141). It is not sufficient for them to draw conclusions about the masters’ attitudes towards them from the many meetings, hearings, and interactions they have had—they rely on an image. In fact, Gaskell seems to suggest that the workers might only see a bit too much.

Job Legh is also identified in the novel as a part of a “class of men,” but, unlike John Barton, is not rendered a specimen. This allows him to maintain his authority and individuality, something John Barton is repeatedly denied by the narrator. In their discussions of Job Legh, Anne Secord, Danielle Coriale, and Amy King suggest that his interest and work in natural history offers him mobility between the two

⁵ The image is one of the workers standing at the entrance to the room negotiations took place in, and the narrator describes them as “lank, ragged, dispirited and famine-stricken” (172). There is an allusion here to Falstaff’s speech from Henry IV, where Falstaff notes, “a mad/ fellow met me on the way and told me I had unloaded/ all the gibbets and pressed the dead bodies. No eye/ hath seen such scarecrows” (Henry IV, Part 1, IV, 2, 37-40).

antagonistic classes described in the novel. The narrator introduces Job not as a singular figure, but as a man who belongs to “a class of men in Manchester, unknown even to many of the inhabitants, and whose existence will probably be doubted by many, yet who may claim kindred with all the noble names that science recognizes” (38). Job Legh is not only a man who moves between the workers and the masters, but the occupier of a class location that overlaps these two classes. He is characterized neither as a laborer and producer of goods without adequate access to capital, nor as someone who exploits that labor and distributes produced goods and contributes to the concentration of capital in the hands of owners and not workers. The class that Legh occupies is defined instead by the pursuit and practice of natural history in ways that are not professional or tied to subsistence, but sustained through personal interest, and indeed, pleasure. As King and Secord both note, Job is an amateur, or artisan, naturalist (King 257, Secord 134). Such a position allows him to be sympathetic to and conversant with the interests of the workers and the masters, as his class position does not implicate him directly in the antagonism between them— he is neither the person denying workers’ wages and introducing mechanization, nor is he the one immediately harmed by the masters’ decisions, though other working men in his position might have been. By not constructing Job only as an individual who moves between or can claim membership in two different classes, the narrator implies that existing class frameworks might be porous for certain individuals. However, this might not be the case for the collective. So long as the workers and the masters both share an interest in the question of labor with radically different investments and outcomes— the workers need employment, the masters would make more profits if they reduced employment,

or at the very least, wages— they will be at loggerheads. However, there is the potential, the narrator seems to indicate, for them to articulate class membership along ethical orientations that emerge through the structure of sympathy that would require compromises on questions of labor to maintain class-interaction. Gaskell advances an agenda of intellectual inquiry around interests not related to labor in order to solve the problems of collectivization formed around and through labor. This, of course, is very different from the solution that the epilogue to this novel seems to offer— a way out of class in England by settling in Canada, which I will discuss later.

Critics have tended to accept Gaskell's deliberate slippage between social and natural classes. As Coriale notes, natural history "appears in *Mary Barton* as a sign of liberation from class constraints, a way of connecting amateurs to a potentially global community of scientists and fostering their knowledge of distant locales...[but is] shown to liberate only those who have access to the elaborate systems of classification that came to define natural history as science during the 1840s" (349). Secord locates Gaskell's emancipatory faith in natural history as solution for class antagonism in the call for the formation of a natural history society by Edward Binney in 1843, who wanted to ensure that workers who were natural historians would be adequately supported as more and more mechanization caused them to lose work (129). Already, the practice or work of natural history is elided in this form of social recognition, as the idea of the 'natural historian' becomes a category or classificatory term instead of a practice. Whether or not Job is legible to the owners and other professionals in the novel— which he is— Gaskell's goal is to make sure that he is legible to the reader, who is consequently placed within the class structure of the novel.

Finally, forms of seeing construct political responses within and to the novel. Several critics including Valerie Sanders, Elaine Freedgood, and James Buzard have argued persuasively that Elizabeth Gaskell is writing to a middle-class audience—which suggests that this emphasis on seeing is an effort to offer this form of knowing to specifically this audience. After all, what apart from sympathetic observation could a middle-class readership do to engage with working-class characters? In doing so, Gaskell offers an explicitly reformist rather than revolutionary solution to the problem of labor exploitation. Job Legh’s natural history knowledge is, as Amy King points out, a “structural model for reform: it offers a cure for the ills of perception” (266). In some ways, this rings true of Gaskell’s orientation towards social problems throughout the novel— she identifies structural issues to which she increasingly offers individualistic solutions. It is here that Martineau’s criticism of her writing as “a museum of oddities” rings most true— Gaskell produces a profusion of portraits, story arcs, and anecdotes that, when strung together, offer a sympathetic and detailed representation of workers in Manchester, but the novel stays at the level of individual characters and does not scale up effectively to the level of the collective. Toggling between the individual and the collective, or the specimen and the class, might be a useful representational gambit in that it creates a tentative relation between someone like John Barton and the class he belongs to, but this representational strategy does not offer political solutions for the collective. Though Gaskell shows sympathy with Chartism and ideas of revolutionary or collective action, her narrative still ends up relying on and relating the consequences of individual actions— John Barton’s murder

of Harry Carson,⁶ Maggie and Jem's decisions to settle in Canada, and so on. Any cures that we see in this novel, even at the level of changing the perception of structures, are about the individual. After having become sympathetic to a class of workers, the only political solution offered to us is that Mr. Carson is now more considerate of his workers. The people who signified this class— John Barton, Mary, and Jem— are elsewhere.

In short, there is a paradoxical effect to the collection going on in the novel—it produces a world, but only and always in terms of the individuals who populate it. However, when an action impacts the collective that these individuals are a referent for, the individuals find themselves outside the collective. Or, as the narrator notes, “so much for the generalities. Let us now return to the individuals” (Gaskell 174). Even as it gathers lots of specimens, the novel does not, and perhaps this type of narration or world-making cannot— scale to the level of the population or the collective.

Specimen Stories

The narrative unit that Gaskell introduces to emphasize observation and classification in the production of knowledge are specimen stories—they narrate how specimens are collected, analyzed, circulated, and instrumentalized. In this way, the novel transforms the collection's display of specimens into narration. In this section, I read three specimen stories—the flying fish, the scorpion, and John Barton—to show how Gaskell uses these narratives to establish the efficacy of observation and classification as important

⁶Though the workers draw straws to determine who will murder Henry Carson, the murder itself is carried out by an individual—even collective decisions end up reliant on individual actors for their enforcement.

epistemological practices, to extend the use of specimen stories to characters other than Job Legh, and to suggest that these stories participate in social mechanisms such as the facilitation of courtship and the production of sympathy.

Specimen stories structure how characters move, and how they form and maintain relationships. The narrator, Margaret, and Job Legh all construct specimen stories in the novel. The story of the flying fish facilitates courtship, which shows how specimen collection and circulation support domestic arrangements and formations. This story also expands the idea of the specimen— Job Legh trades Margaret’s song for a specimen, which makes the song itself a specimen—and is in turned is tied to how Lancashire speech is collected and used in the novel.

Specimen circulation within the novel helps us see the domestic and narrative affordances of the collection form in the management of the specimens circulate through it. The story of the scorpion addresses the distinctions between natural history description and narrative description and offers story-telling agency to Margaret— in this case, she is more effective than Job Legh at making this specimen known to Mary, and consequently the reader. Finally, John Barton’s specimen story conflates social class with taxonomic class, enabling Gaskell to propose observation and classification as a viable method of study for social and economic class formation.

Story 1:

When Will tells Job Legh about the flying fish— promptly identified as “Exocetus; one of the Malacopterygii Abdominales” by the naturalist— and offers him a specimen, Job “prove[s] his gratitude” by asking Margaret to sing (154). Throughout the novel, Gaskell points out that there is a system of exchange in place for natural specimens, even if it isn’t

always consistent. The scorpion in the beginning of the novel is obtained for two shillings from a sailor, which Job considers a bargain. Moreover, Job says that he would have “given a good deal” for some specimens of beetles and grubs from Sierra Leone, and he considers a duplicate *Araneides* or the great American *Mygale* specimen an appropriate trade for the *Exocetus* (155). Job does not expect to gain specimens, in short, without offering something in return. The song that Job offers for the specimen of the flying fish from Will is both payment and the initiation of courtship. When Margaret sings, Will “sat entranced: mouth, eyes, all open, in order to catch every breath of sound,” and Mary realizes that “Margaret, so prim and demure, might have power over the heart of the handsome, dashing, spirited Will Wilson” (155). The exchanges taking place don’t end here either, as Will’s response to Job’s, and Margaret’s, offering leaves Job “rapidly changing his opinion of his new guest” to a very favourable one” (155). In a blatant attempt to further his acquaintance with Job to court Margaret, Will offers to bring Job a specimen of a Manx cat, rightly guessing that Job would want this “tail-less phenomenon,” and looks through his sea chest for other specimens he could offer in addition to the *Exocetus*, even willing to part with a child’s caul for the cause (156). Courtship is both an unlikely outcome and a medium of exchange of the study of natural history. Margaret is involved in this system of exchange too, not in the least because it is her courtship, but also because it is her labor that goes into supporting Job’s work. Both her singing and her needlework, which damages her sight, operate within the exchange of natural history specimens, suggesting that there are bodily costs to sustaining natural history work within the novel.

Margaret’s and Will’s courtship demonstrates the specimen story’s ability to afford pleasure and domesticity. Throughout the novel, even as Gaskell suggests that

observation and classification can be utilized to make visible exploitative labor practices, she also emphasizes it as a delightful activity. Pleasure and happiness are transactional within the novel— happiness for masters results in severe suffering for workers. Job critiques this relationship when he suggests that “the duty of the happy is to help the suffering bear their woe” (385). However, non-transactional forms of pleasure include the pleasure of hospitality— both the Wilsons and the Bartons take pleasure in visiting with each other in the beginning of the novel— as well as pleasure gained in the processes of natural history, whether they be study, observation, classification, gathering, or reading. The class of artisan scientists in Manchester “revel” in their work over mealtimes or at night and find “real scientific delight” in their study of local flora and fauna (39). Job Legh is “happy as a king” whilst at work, so much so that Margaret doesn’t turn down extra work so that he may continue to purchase specimens and pursue “what gives him such pleasure” (42). Will’s fondest memories growing up with Alice include her work as a local herbalist and midwife and gathering herbs with her as a child (King 258). Lastly, as the narrator notes that “there is always a pleasure in unraveling a mystery, in catching at the gossamer clue which will guide to certainty. This feeling...gives much impetus to the police...they enjoy the collecting and collating of evidence, and the life of adventure they experience” (220).

Story 2:

Surprisingly, perhaps, given his pleasure in observing and classifying specimens, Job Legh is not a good narrator. As Coriale points out, Job’s adherence to nomenclature and taxonomy is what makes his interests unintelligible to those around

him, and even alienates them. When Mary first meets him, his naming of the specimens in his house “pattered down on her ear...like hail on a skylight; and the strange language only bewildered her” (40). Responding to Job’s contempt for his story about a mermaid, Will mocks Job by pointing out that he’s “one o’ them folks as never knows beasts unless they’re called out o’ their names. Put ‘em in Sunday clothes, and you know ‘em, but in their workaday English you never know nought about ‘em” (154). Will mutters that if only he given the mermaid a Latin name, perhaps Mermaidicus Jack Harrisensis, Job might be more willing to accept the existence of the creature (154). Will’s comment suggests that classification is as much determined by language as it is by observation. Mary’s inability to hear the Latin names of Job’s specimens, and Will’s derision for Job’s insistence of this system both point to a critique of available systems of classification within the novel. We don’t even read the Latin names of Job’s specimens when the narration is focalized through Mary— we are only left with inarticulable sounds.

Every time Job’s classificatory impulses render an object or a creature unknowable, it is Margaret who explains. As a classifier, Job is unable to produce knowledge that is true or false; he only reveals the structure or arrangement of knowledge, while Margaret offers an account of the relations between them. When Mary stands confused by Job’s specimens, for example, Margaret not only names the specimen using the English vernacular term for it— a scorpion— she also offers Mary the history of the specific specimen in front of them rather than the natural history of the species—the rare East Indian scorpion—and this renders the object legible. She offers an explanation not only of how the specimen was acquired—in a torpor behind

a rice sack on a ship coming from the East Indies by a sailor—she also tells Mary, and the reader, how it is prepared—first by boiling, and then by preservation in gin. Margaret’s labor figures in this account— it’s the fire she lit for ironing that revived the scorpion, and she was the one who fetched the gin from the pub to preserve it after it was boiled. Her account includes details of conventional kind of natural history regarding the scorpion, one that is read by Job from a book, but focalized through Margaret’s voice: “this very kind were the most poisonous and vicious species, how their bite were often fatal, and when went on to read how people who were bitten got swelled, and screamed with pain” (41). There are two forms of history nested in Margaret’s narration of the acquisition of the scorpion— the history of the specimen, which speaks to the material and curatorial concerns of natural history, as well as the history of scorpion, which offers an account of the scorpion as a creature. When Mary asks how the scorpion in the story revived itself, it’s not Job but Margaret who explains: “Why, you see, he were never really dead, only torpid— that is, dead asleep with the cold, and our good fire brought him around” (42). A third type of history is added to this story, however, for Mary goes home only to narrate “the history of the evening” to her father, “who was interested by her account, and curious to judge and see for himself” (42-3). When Job brings home the scorpion, he shakes it out of the bottle so that Margaret may see its actual size, and she leans in to “look at him better” (41). This examination is echoed in John Barton’s urge to “judge and see” Margaret and Job, tying the two observational acts together. Moreover, the nested histories— the history of the specimen, the history of the scorpion, and the history of the evening— are all required for the establishment of an epistemological orientation

where observable phenomena is related in the form of specimen stories, sometimes nested ones, and knowledge emerges from the relation between them. Furthermore, by invoking different notions and scales of history, Gaskell establishes these specimen stories as a mediated, materially invested narrative process and not simply modes of observation and classification. She also genders these practices— it is Mary and Margaret who engage in the telling of histories, whilst Job, who tends to name specimens, is silenced in this specific instance. Ultimately, Job will end up utilizing the three-history story structure that Margaret utilizes to explain John Barton's motivations and grievances to Mr. Carson.

Margaret knows to explain phenomena like torpor, and can point out why some stories, and some methods of producing knowledge, are more reliable than others. For example, Will describes the mermaid as the scene was narrated to him: “she were all the while combing her beautiful hair, and beckoning to them, while with the other hand she held a looking glass” (152). Job scoffs and points out a key problem with Will's story— the account he has just offered suggests that the mermaid has three hands, one for combing, one for beckoning, and one for mirror-holding, while Will had previously implied she had only two hands. Will's response— “No! I didn't!”— demonstrates that he has not understood Job's criticism, nor does he want to. When Will indignantly asks how the story of a mermaid— half woman, half fish— is not believable while the story of a flying fish— half fish, half bird— is, Margaret is the one who makes sense of the difference: “you never saw the mermaid yourself,” she says (153). Here we see Margaret's skill at explaining not only the specimen but the proper observational methods for knowing it.

If Job is represented in the text as the character doing classificatory work, Margaret is the one who explains that work—both to other characters and the reader. First, she makes an argument about verifiability: while the mermaid story is unverifiable because the story has only been heard from others, the flying fish story is verifiable because Will has seen it. Here she points out the importance of personal observation in the production of natural historical knowledge. Second, she establishes Will as a reliable observer, if rather naive for his belief in facts without observable proof, within the narrative, which foreshadows his efficacy as a witness in Jem Wilson’s trial. Gaskell both privileges Margaret as the interpreter of knowledge and method within the narrative, and the vernacular as the more effective way to convey said knowledge. Alice’s work as an herbalist also stresses the vernacular as a useful mode for knowledge. As King and Coriale note, Alice’s natural history is “more practical, useful, and vernacularly oriented than [Job’s],” and more capable of offering “a reform of perception” (King 258, Coriale 365). Gaskell’s women may lack specialized vocabulary, but they have the more effective language and the proper methods for knowing the world.

Story 3:

Gaskell blurs the boundaries between character and specimen by making John Barton — initially meant to be the titular character instead of his daughter— the typical specimen of a Manchester man. Thus constructed, not only does he become knowable through observation, classification, and taxonomy, but Gaskell also assumes that social class is taxonomic, like natural history. According to Margaret Schabas, this is not entirely unusual— what we might consider economic activity now was

often talked about in the terms of natural philosophy in the first half of the nineteenth century. She argues that prominent economic thinkers such as Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus, David Ricardo, and David Hume proposed theories of economy that included an engagement with natural phenomena, just as thinkers such as Charles Lyell or Carl Linnaeus theorized natural phenomena in economic terms. John Barton is introduced by the narrator in the following manner:

“Sometime in the course of that afternoon, two working men met with friendly greeting at the stile so often named. One was a thorough specimen of a Manchester man; born of factory workers, and himself bred up in youth, and living in manhood, among the mills. He was below the middle size and slightly made; there was almost a stunted look about him; and his wan, colourless face gave you the idea, that in his childhood he had suffered from the scanty living consequent upon bad times and improvident habits. His features were strongly marked, though not irregular, and their expression was extreme earnestness; resolute either for good or evil; a sort of latent, stern enthusiasm. At the time of which I write, the good predominated over the bad in the countenance, and he was one from whom a stranger would have asked a favour with tolerable faith that it would be granted” (7).

John Barton’s status as a specimen is cemented by the description that follows, which identifies his lineage, his age, his habitat, and some physiognomy that acts as foreshadowing—we know that he is good for now, and that he may not remain so by the end of the novel. The description of his behavior as a type-description is relational.

He is described through his responses to stimuli—he is someone from whom a stranger would have asked a favor. We also learn that his environment has caused his appearance—he is stunted and slight, Gaskell seems to suggest, because of childhood malnutrition. In becoming a specimen, his motives can best be explained by someone who studies natural history—this is why Job Legh, a natural historian, is the one who can explain John Barton’s actions to Mr. Carson. Further descriptions of John Barton push him even more firmly into a taxonomy:

“He had a ready kind of rough Lancashire eloquence, arising out of the fulness of his heart, which was very stirring to men similarly circumstanced, who liked to hear their feelings put into words. He had a pretty clear head at times, for method and arrangement; a necessary talent to large combinations of men. And what perhaps more than all made him relied upon and valued, was the consciousness which every one who came in contact with him felt, that he was actuated by no selfish motives; that his class, his order, was what he stood by, not the rights of his own paltry self” (171).

The emphasis on class and order, in addition to the disavowal of self-interest in his actions (so much so that he becomes a murderer) further blurs the distinction between taxonomic and social class. Additionally, Barton’s classification as a member of the working class also speaks to his talent— for “method and arrangement”— as well as his loyalties (171). John Barton’s transformation into a specimen also grants Job Legh the authority to classify, explain, or otherwise interpret him because he is one of the few characters in the novel who has experience engaging with specimens.

Practitioners and collectors of natural history like Job Legh are thereby authorized to have better knowledge about the working class than other characters in the novel, such as Mr. Carson who do not employ the methods of observation and classification.

John Barton's description as a specimen and the conflation of social and taxonomic class presents an interpretive problem in terms of the relationship between the individual and the collective, one that existed in parallel fields of knowledge such as the illustrations of specimens in scientific atlases. Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison suggest that illustrators and naturalists in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had to grapple with the problem of representation in the production of natural knowledge—how should a botanical specimen meant to illustrate an entire species be drawn? What emerged from this question is the idea of the “reasoned image,” an image that was typical (65-7). In order to make something like a species—a collective of many individuals—known, a typical individual must be chosen to represent the collective. However, typical could mean ideal (a pure form), characteristic (likely form), average (aggregate form), or even essential (fundamental form). In short, depending on the naturalist or the illustrator, choices about how to represent a species using a single illustration differed significantly based on what they wanted to highlight.

When Gaskell constructs John Barton as a thorough specimen, what are the choices made by Gaskell evident in his representation, and what effects do they have? John Barton is not a moral specimen—Gaskell is quick to condemn his actions and does not present him as an aspirational figure. More than anyone else in the novel, Gaskell presents him as a cautionary tale—he is exceptional in that he resorts to

murder, but also average in that his concerns and worries are meant to represent those of an entire class of workers. Though representative of his class, he does not encompass all of his class, nor is he extricable from his class. To know John Barton and the working class is to pay attention to how the relationship between the individual character and the class is constructed at various points in the novel—they study of relation is paramount to the study of class. By constructing Job Legh as both an unlikely expert and mediator between the masters and the workers, and John Barton as both a central character and specimen, Gaskell utilizes her own taxonomy of labor to represent, critique, and offer a solution to the problem of the exploitation of laborers by masters.

Though Gaskell privileges the methods of narration and observation articulated in Margaret and Mary's production of knowledge, Job remains the character whose knowledge wields the greatest political-economic impact. Job's explanatory prowess emerges when he has discussions with people of the upper class. He is the one who speaks with Mr. Carson regarding John Barton, for example, which results in Carson forgiving Barton for the murder of his son and implementing policies to benefit workers in his mill. As Coriale points out, when the "social machine" breaks down in *Mary Barton* as a result of failed communications between factory owners and operatives...Job Legh is the only one in the novel who facilitates its smooth function" (354).

Job is most persuasive when he argues against the idea of "self-help" that Carson demands of his workers. He points out that Carson's reasoning revolves around "fixed quantities," but notes that when workers compose the facts that Carson

works with, these facts do not remain stable (385). They cannot be worked out to determine fixed products or outcomes. Human beings, Job seems to be arguing, are filled with passions and emotions that are not easily reducible to knowable quantities— any form of narrating them needs to take place on multiple scales, much as Mary and Margaret narrate.

Job enacts this multi-scale process, concretizing it as a mode of knowledge-making through repetition. He tells John Barton's specific story (the history of the specimen), and then connects the consequences of Mr. Carson's employment practices to the broader account of how workers are disenfranchised by and at the mercy of masters (the history of class struggle). He finishes by suggesting that that action should not be based on unstable "facts," but propelled by ethical or moral concerns and judgment, echoing John Barton's words when Mary first tells him about the Leghs. Job shifts the onus of ethical actions on to the masters' conscience: "you have it on your's sir, to answer for to God whether you are doing all in your power to lighten the evils that seem always to hang on the trades by which you make your fortunes" (386). Furthermore, he places such considerations squarely on the shoulders of his audience, the middle class, by saying, "It's no business of mine, thank God!" (387). Job's final point at the end of the conversation, though Mr. Carson notes that they haven't really managed to convince each other of either of their positions, is that the conversation has helped because it allows him to "see the view [Mr. Carson] take[s] of things from the place [he] stands" (386). This articulation is the third history— the history of the conversation. It is ultimately this view that the narrator suggests reforms Mr. Carson's labor practices, for it enables him to understand that the

interests of the masters and the workers are joined together, not by the logic of profit, but “by the Spirit of God as the regulating law between both parties” (387). The narrator shows us cause and effect here— Job’s conversation with Mr. Carson led directly to “many of the improvements now in practice in the system of employment in Manchester,” casting Job as the figure who is finally able to offer an explanation that persuades Carson to implement more equitable labor practices (387).

Specimens, and the stories and histories that the characters and narrator construct around them, are significant to the epistemologies that Gaskell develops throughout the novel. Not only is she showing us how to see and observe specific specimens, she also shows us how to contextualize them such that they are explanatory. Of course, each specimen story also reveals the politics of knowledge-making, and who is afforded authority. The contrast between Margaret’s explanatory prowess versus the explanatory authority afforded to Job highlights the gender politics inherent in this type of knowledge production—women might be better at producing knowledge, yet men are the ones listened to. Additionally, women’s knowledge circulates in the domestic sphere—Margaret’s explanation happens in the context of a social visit—whilst Job’s knowledge circulates in scientific, mercantile, or political spheres. Yet across these different domains, Gaskell is clear: unlike Mary Shelley, she insists that we can and should make productive social knowledge out of collecting practices.

On Disavowal

What we have so far is this: in *Mary Barton*, Elizabeth Gaskell emphasizes the practices of observation and classification to narrate and represent class antagonism

between masters and workers. She constructs and utilizes these methods through narrative arcs I've labeled specimen stories that produce outcomes ranging from facilitating courtship to making a case for the production of sympathy between classes. The narrative process I have just described is one that Gaskell employs in order to both represent and offer a critique of the treatment of mill workers in 1840-1850 in Britain, and she does so through the mechanism of disavowal, which is the subject of this section.

As mentioned earlier, there are two key moments of disavowal in the novel. The first is when Elizabeth Gaskell disavows any knowledge of political economy in the preface to the novel, and the second is when Job Legh disavows knowledge of political economy in his conversation with Mr. Carson at the end of the novel. In the Preface to *Mary Barton*, Gaskell is careful to say that though she wrote the novel to “give some utterance to the agony which, from time to time, convulses this dumb people” referring to Manchester’s working poor, she “know[s] nothing of Political Economy, or the theories of trade...if [her] accounts agree or clash with any system, the agreement or disagreement is unintentional” (3-4, emphasis mine). Towards the end of the novel, Job Legh echoes this very sentiment in his discussion with Mr. Carson, and says “I’m not given to Political Economy, I know that much. I’m wanting in learning, I’m aware; but I can use my eyes” (384). This emphasis on seeing is important, because it speaks to the system of knowing that Gaskell offers as an alternative to the system she identifies in the Preface.

In a letter to Eliza Fox, Gaskell is clear that she “told the story according to a fancy...to really see the scenes I tried to describe...and to tell them as nearly as I

could” (82). She says explicitly that her work in the novel is representational; indeed, it is a representation that has “received some confirmation from the events which has so recently occurred among a similar class on the Continent” (Gaskell 4, emphasis mine). This authorization of representation based on observation, particularly when such an act can be confirmed by subsequent events, is the form of knowing most privileged in the novel.

As a narrative and epistemological strategy, disavowal forces the addressee—the reader or Mr Carson respectively—to operate from a place where they cannot engage with the speaker in terms of political economy (unless they spend an enormous amount of time explaining it) because the speaker has excluded it from the conversation at hand. This is an effective defensive strategy if the addressee decides to continue engaging with the speaker despite this lack, for it forces the addressee to engage on the speaker’s terms. When engaging with an addressee in a position of power, as Job Legh is when he is speaking to Mr. Carson, this strategy evens the playing field, and induces Mr. Carson to listen and engage from a perspective that is not his own. Thus, when Job uses disavowal in the novel, it forces Mr. Carson to engage with Job on his terms rather than the logic of supply and demand, or even profit. Disavowal becomes a useful way to redefine the contours of expertise—and this applies to Elizabeth Gaskell as much as it does to Job Legh.

Both Gaskell and Job seem to be anxious about occupying the position of the observer who claims expertise and authority—and both state that they are not experts in political economy. Though they disavow this knowledge, they also make the case for observation and classification being necessary for constructing knowledge about,

and relations between, different classes. Job Legh convinces Mr. Carson to be more attuned to workers' needs at the end of the novel, and Gaskell privileges observation and classification as a reliable epistemic activity throughout the novel. Gaskell's and Legh's verbal disavowal of expertise or knowledge juxtaposed with their structural agency and expertise in the text trains readerly attention to look closely not just at what they're saying, but at the paradoxical relationship between their utterances and their actions. Even though they claim to not know what they're doing, they manage to achieve the political results they desire. Disavowal of grand theory in favor of collection and observation of particulars becomes a strategy to produce certain epistemological or political outcomes—it helps them offer knowledge from a defensive stance, where their disavowal seems to be designed to forestall criticism of their methods until they have finished laying out their thoughts.

Job's reasons for choosing disavowal are clear—he's entering his conversation with Mr. Carson from a position of lesser power, and disavowal allows him to pander to the vanity of his interlocutor while establishing the domain for his analysis as one he's an expert one—natural history. Gaskell's motivations are not quite so transparent. There are a few reasons she may have chosen this strategy—it might have made the novel more palatable to middle-class readers, as critics have previously speculated. She might have chosen this posture because of her gender, or it might even signal to readers that they don't have to be conversant with economics in order to engage with this novel. The effects of this disavowal, whatever its reason, is significant. When both Job and Gaskell disavow knowledge of political economy, it becomes clear to both the characters in the book as well as potential readers that

arguing from within the domain of political economy may not have efficacy—instead of engaging with a counter claim, Job and Gaskell can simply claim to not know. Furthermore, at least in Gaskell’s case, disavowal places her outside of the episteme that both the masters and the workmen imbricated in and is consequently able to maintain the position of an observer, a position that, as I have argued thus far, comes with epistemological power.

For the rest of this argument, I will blur the distinction between Gaskell the author and the narrator of *Mary Barton*, mostly because the preface and other biographical materials suggest that the narratorial voice echoes her own sentiments and politics.⁷ In the novel the narrator doubts her ability to express herself “in the technical terms of either the masters or the workmen” and so will simply try to “state the case on which the latter deliberated” (171). Interestingly enough, immediately after saying that she will represent the workers’ views of the issue, the first description of the issue at hand is very much from the masters’ perspective.

“An order for coarse goods came in from a new foreign market. It was a large order, giving employment to all the mills engaged in that species of manufacture: but it was necessary to execute it speedily, and at as low prices as possible, as the masters had reason to believe a duplicate order had been sent to one of the continental manufacturing towns, where there were no restrictions on food, no taxes on building or machinery, and where consequently they dreaded that the goods could

⁷ I do so only in this instance while conceding that this makes me, momentarily, a bad narratologist—in the rest of the dissertation, I work from the assumption that the author, the implied author and the narrator are all different narrative entities.

be made at a much lower price than they could afford them for; and that, by so acting and charging, the rival manufacturers would obtain undivided possession of the market. It was clearly their interest to buy cotton as cheaply, and to beat down wages as low as possible. And in the long run the interests of the workmen would have been thereby benefited. Distrust each other as they may, the employers and the employed must rise or fall together. There may be some difference as to chronology, none as to fact...But the masters did not choose to make all these facts known. They stood upon being the masters, and that they had a right to order work at their own prices, and they believed that in the present depression of trade, and unemployment of hands, there would be no great difficulty in getting it done" (171).

Again, we see disavowal followed by an explanation that Gaskell claims to have no access to. Indeed, not only does the narrator have access to the masters' reasoning, she is also able to see how their faulty reasoning has affected the workers. What follows is, finally, the issue from the perspectives of the workers.

"Now let us turn to the workmen's view of the question. The masters (of the tottering foundation of whose prosperity they were ignorant) seemed doing well, and like gentlemen, "lived at home in ease," while they were starving, gasping on from day to day; and there was a foreign order to be executed, the extent of which, large as it was, was greatly exaggerated; and it was to be done speedily. Why were the masters offering such low wages under these circumstances? Shame upon them!

It was taking advantage of their work-people being almost starved; but they would starve entirely rather than come into such terms. It was bad enough to be poor, while by the labour of their thin hands, the sweat of their brows, the masters were made rich; but they would not be utterly ground down to dust. No! they would fold their hands, and sit idle, and smile at the masters, whom even in death they could baffle. With Spartan endurance they determined to let the employers know their power, by refusing to work.” (172).

The narrator then remains, apart from Job Legh, the only one who can see the interests and frustrations of both the classes in conflict with each other. Thus, Gaskell uses disavowal to position the all-seeing narrator and writer outside the class conflict she is describing. Furthermore, in the descriptions of both the workers’ and the masters’ thinking, the narrator seems to be suggesting that not only do people of the same class think alike, but that occupying a particular episteme is constitutive of class. Even lived experience of belonging to a class does not allow characters to break out of the episteme limited by their class position— as the narrator points out, the fact that Mr. Carson grew from being a worker to an owner made him more rigid about his stance of not giving in to the union or the workers, not less. Thus, knowledge is determined by class, and class-specific knowledge does not seem to be transferable even when class mobility occurs. Thus, the only people who can see all sides remain the narrator and Job, and they are able to narrate across classes. What this implies about class membership and class position, of course, is that belonging to a class makes it

difficult, if not impossible, to know the interests of the other outside the bounds of affective relationships such as sympathy.

Lastly, I want to suggest that disavowal as a strategy allows Gaskell, the narrator, and Job to emphasize what matters in this novel— by disavowing knowledge of political economy, they turn our attention away from it and bring it back, repeatedly, to the masters and the workers. ‘Political Economy’ as a category, domain, or discipline, they seem to be suggesting, is not what we should be paying attention to. Our focus must remain with the workers and the masters, the people who are involved in this over-arching system that we are told repeatedly we do not need to know. Thus, as a novelist, Gaskell seems to prioritize the individual and the class as narrative subjects rather than a more amorphous political or economic system, and in so doing, forwards the idea that systemic thinking must occur in terms of the collection of people who constitute and are constituted through it.

Beyond Explanation: Emigration, Settler Colonialism and Class Struggle

Though Gaskell offers us methods and modes of narration that produce knowledge, they are not enough to offer a solution to all the problems represented in the novel. There is no redemption available for John Barton or Esther, whose crimes of murder and prostitution may elicit sympathy, but not absolution, according to Gaskell’s Christian values. Even though sympathy is the proposed long-term solution to the class antagonism, it is insufficient to solve the issue of Jem’s lost reputation in England. While Mr. Carson may continue to own property and perhaps exercise sympathy in his relationships with workers in England, Mary and Jem have to emigrate to Canada, where Jem secures work as an instrument-maker for a newly

established agricultural college. As his former employer Mr. Duncombe points out, “It is a comfortable appointment,—house,—land,—and a good per-centage on the instruments made”—one that offers Jem class mobility he would not have had access to in Manchester (375). Jem’s emigration represents both the limits and extensions of Gaskell’s valorization of sympathy produced through specimen stories: sympathy is not enough to keep Mary and Jem in England.

However, there is still political potential in the epistemic structure that Gaskell advances through her novel. Perhaps it is insufficient in providing an immediate solution, but it does make the problem faced by the working-class characters knowable. Susan Pearce points out that “collecting in social practice [teases] out an understanding of how communities develop strategies which enable them to bring together the accumulating possibilities of objects and other social structures—like family relationships, notions of surplus and prestige, and religious practices—in order to maintain the social pattern and project it into the future” (28). Gaskell’s collecting practices in her museum of oddities—observation, classification, and the narration of specimen stories—have structured family relationships, religious values, and more.

I want to read the ending of *Mary Barton*, here, as a projection of this practice into the future. *Mary Barton* ends with the imminent arrival of Job Legh, one of the most reliable practitioners of the method of knowing Gaskell has championed throughout the novel. He is coming to collect earwigs—specimens with imminent specimen stories that have the potential to make Mary and Jem’s new lives knowable.

Job's collection practices invite us to re-read the settler colonialist ending, which has been so troubling to critics.⁸ Though Gaskell valorizes local expertise throughout the novel—the botanist who knows the plants in his area the best—she also populates Job Legh's collections with specimens from around the world. Being able to acquire specimens far away is crucial to his role as an expert. Thinking through natural history as a domain where collected specimens circulate also helps us locate how non-local spaces are naturalized *through* collection. Job Legh needs to go to Liverpool to obtain his scorpion from sailors who bring him specimens from the faraway countries and colonies, specimens that he cannot acquire in Manchester (39). Job, Coriale suggests, attains a “stay-at-home cosmopolitanism,” or a benign imperialism, “by collecting specimens from colonial territories without actually traveling anywhere” (355). Of course, this benign imperialism becomes overt—and less benign—at the end of the novel when Jem announces Job Legh's impending visit to Canada to collect earwigs. Until the end of the novel, though, Job is not mobile. Until the epilogue, Will is the person with the most access to specimens, whether it be the Exocetus or a Manx cat, allowing Gaskell to establish the necessity of mercantile and colonial trade routes and sailors who work on these routes for the furthering of natural history.

These intersections of space, occupation, work, and time simultaneously limit the ways in which naturalists in Manchester can practice natural history whilst acknowledging the potential for the production of local knowledge. When Sir. J.E.

⁸ Critics have drawn on histories of labor, emigration, imperialism, and settler-colonialism. Other critics have already done work on how imperialism functions within *Mary Barton*— from paying attention to objects like a japanned tray (Freedgood) to the hidden history of imperialism that probably led to the gradual loss of work for mill workers.

Smith wants information regarding a very rare plant, Gaskell tells us, it is only Lancashire men who work under these limited conditions that can offer him “the very information which he wanted.” (40) But Gaskell also makes it clear that Job Legh’s practices of collecting in Manchester are portable: these enable him to collect in Canada. Natural history becomes praxis that is both limited and defined by the conditions that organize the objects of study as well as the observers. This kind of knowledge, once acquired, then offers characters the ability to pass through multiple geographies.

The idea that *Mary Barton* can help readers understand national and imperial capital flows is not new. Liam Corely, for instance, points out that Will’s occupation offers readers a way to connect the worsening labor conditions in the mills to a diminishing market for cotton caused by the proliferation of cheap cotton produced in various colonial locations flooding the British market, and that John Barton’s reliance on opium offers us avenues into thinking about the opium trade and the colonial intimacies enmeshed therein. Additionally, the flow of “exotic” specimens hints at the existence of an imperial network of science-work. These connections offer a view of the novel as a necessarily networked piece of literature that emerges from and speaks to a process of imperial and capitalist worlding.⁹ This short, and by no means representative, glimpse of the criticism surrounding *Mary Barton* suggests that

⁹ Amy King and Danielle Coriale pay close attention to the discourses of natural history within the novel and think through its centrality to the narrative and epistemological concerns regarding representation, James Buzard places the novel at the “frontier” of autoethnography and narrative, and Elaine Freedgood and Joanne Wilkes pay close attention to Peter Gaskell’s carefully footnoted “Lancashire dialect” used in the novel, as well as the many epigraphs, quotes, and allusions added either by Gaskell, or with Peter Gaskell, at the behest of her editor.

readers and critics continue to account for the novel's liberal forays into several discourses and modes of thinking.

Two worlds seem to come in and out of focus in *Mary Barton*. One is a robust working-class culture with strong regional and historical linguistic usages, profound political affiliations, and extraordinary loyalty to one another. The other world, vast, networked, and imperializing, frequently eclipses this one, as Elaine Freedgood argues (214). And in the end Gaskell's characters are unable to remain in the world that she has painstakingly collected and built for them. Critiques of capital, and the sympathy towards movements like Chartism, must be understood not simply within the context of Manchester, or London, but in the context of an expanding and contracting imperial state.¹⁰

¹⁰ The first edition of Charles Dickens's *Household Words* brings together people whose work is pertinent to understanding the stakes for knowledge making and politics in *Mary Barton*. After the publication of *Mary Barton*, Elizabeth Gaskell corresponds with Charles Dickens, and Dickens publishes her work for the first time in this issue (installments of *Lizzie Leigh*). In this issue, he also includes "A Bundle of Emigrant Letters," which he collects with Caroline Chisholm, who was a social campaigner and philanthropist who wanted to help working-class families emigrate and settle in British colonies. In this piece, Dickens and Chisholm suggest that emigration is a solution to the growing problem of poverty amongst the working classes in Britain, and that helping these families emigrate and settle Britain's colonies would both better their circumstances and make them less likely to resort to crime in Britain and necessary participants in Britain's colonial project by taking British values with them. Caroline Chisholm was vociferous in her support for this project, and published pieces such as the *ABCs of Colonisation* to further her claims. She eventually succeeded in helping establish the *Family Colonisation Loan Society* in 1849, which was meant to help the families of convicts travel to and settle in Australia. By the time Dickens writes and publishes the first installments of *Bleak House* in 1852, his views on Chisholm's projects seem to have shifted, because he appears to base the character of Mrs. Jellyby on her, a character he criticizes for "telescopic" philanthropy that is woefully inadequate in terms of addressing domestic poverty in England. I draw attention to this edition of *Household Words* because it helps us see the different people, and discourses, surrounding emigration, poverty, labour, and settler colonialism in the mid-19th century. This edition helps us put writers like Elizabeth Gaskell and Charles Dickens in conversation with people like Caroline Chisholm, and consequently, trace how issues such as emigration and settlement play out in novels. Though published before this edition of *Household Words*, *Mary Barton*'s ending set in Canada draws on these discourses of settlement as a remedy to the plight of a disenfranchised and exploited working class in England. Natural history naturalizes the protagonists' emigration to and settlement in Toronto as a solution to the growing disparity between workers and masters in Britain due to the influx of cheaply manufactured colonial goods, becoming an epistemology that authorizes imperial expansion and settlement. Paying attention to the novel's valorization of natural history allows us to understand natural history as a

As a solution, the ending of the novel is Canada is abrupt and surprising. We do not know how Mary and Jem travel there, or the details of their journey. The writing and memoirs of settlers in Canada such as Catherine Parr Triall offer, in exacting detail, accounts of traveling from Britain to Canada that included descriptions of things like quarantine for cholera, and the struggle to establish a domicile. However, Jem, Mary and Mrs. Wilson's journey remains un-narrated—the narrator only offers an image of them *after* they have settled to the readers. The elision of travel, and its details, is a curious one, and might constitute a limit in Elizabeth Gaskell's epistemology. Throughout the novel, we are offered few descriptions of circulation, of people *or* specimens, with the notable exception of Mary's journey to Liverpool, and John Barton's journey to London. Instead, we get specimen stories, as noted previously, where accounts of a specimen's circulation can be inferred through its narration within the novel.

The narrator starts the epilogue with the same emphasis on “seeing” a landscape that is as cultivated as the Manchester landscape that opens the novel. If in the beginning we are invited to see the *contrast* between “thoroughly rural fields, with the busy, bustling manufacturing town,” (5), at the end of the novel, readers are reintroduced to a visual experience of contrast between nature and civilization:

“a long, low, wooden house, with room enough and to spare. The old primeval trees are felled and gone for many a mile around; one alone remains to overshadow the gable end of the cottage. There is a garden

narrative device used to settle, and naturalize, space. Additionally, it also authorizes working-class characters with little agency as producers of knowledge.

around the dwelling, and far beyond that stretches an orchard...at the door of the house, looking towards the town, stands Mary” (392).

The felling of trees, with one left as a lone witness, invokes the twinned violence and world-making tendencies of settlement—the land is cleared of its old inhabitants so that it can be constructed as new and uninhabited, ready for settlement. The repetition of the juxtaposition of a cultivated rural landscape to that of a town is significant—in using a similar rhetorical move to describe both Manchester and this new setting in Canada, the narrator seems to suggest that both can be known equally through observation. That is, the same devices that the narrator uses to know and make Manchester and its inhabitants known are likely to work in this new setting. Thus, it seems only logical that the character who is supposed to have the clearest vision throughout the novel— Job Legh— is invoked in the very last sentence of the novel because he is coming to visit, presumably, to make this place known as well.

Ch III— Minor Characters, Allegory, and Institutional Critique in *Bleak House*

In the context of Victorian studies, it is hard to think of collection outside the context of the institution. Although we know by now that not all collections become institutions or are even in relation with institutions, the Victorian history of the Great Exhibitions and the development of the public museum make it difficult to see how collections work otherwise. One effect of the deployment of collection on this scale as a form of entertainment, pedagogy, power, and culture is that it became a well-known *form* of knowledge, one that was applied in non-institutional contexts as well as in institutional contexts other than that of the museum. As the relationship between collection, collecting and the museum is well-documented in Victorian literary studies, I turn instead to the institution of Chancery in this chapter to show how Dickens— the producer of eccentric and eminently collectible minor characters— engages with the problem of both representing and criticizing an institution by using collection to significantly rework an existing representational and critical device— the allegory.

Hope, Joy, Youth, Peace, Rest, Life, Dust, Ashes, Waste, Want, Ruin, Despair, Madness, Death, Cunning, Folly, Words, Wigs, Rags, Sheepskin, Plunder, Precedent, Jargon, Gammon, and Spinach—these are the names of the birds in Miss Flite’s collection in Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House*. Miss Flite is a minor character, and her collection seems to elicit a variety of responses from critics and readers. Karen Chase names Miss Flite’s twittering throughout the novel as an example of a fidget, a form of movement that she suggests “provides a radical unsettling of dichotomous structures” (19), while Trevor Blount suggests that Miss Flite is “an example of the baleful destructiveness of Chancery” (114). She and her collection are sometimes

understood to be a symbol—a thorough examination of Miss Flite and her birds can be found in Don Richard Cox’s article on the birds in *Bleak House*, where he suggests that specific groups of birds such as Hope, Joy, Youth, Peace, Rest, and Life can be associated with specific character groups such as the “*Bleak House* circle” consisting of Richard, Ada, Esther, and Mr. Jarndyce (6). In this chapter, I am interested in why Miss Flite and her collection lend themselves to these forms of interpretation in equal measure—what is it about them that makes them simultaneously minor details and overarching narrative devices? I argue that Dickens relies on Miss Flite’s minorness to represent and critique Chancery, an institution that was famously opaque and difficult to represent. Not only was it hard to understand for both lay-people and professionals alike, but there also appear to be no adequate representational mechanisms for it outside of literature or news reports about individual cases published in the periodical press. This chapter makes the case that Dickens uses Miss Flite’s collection to represent specifically the systemic violence perpetrated by powerful institutions that resist being known. Miss Flite’s collection illuminates the collection form’s ability to both represent institutions and practice of institutional critique. Furthermore, it is wielded by a minor character who has been accorded little agency both in the text and in Dickens criticism. Dickens thus offers us the inverse of Shelley’s collected subject—a subject who collects. And, keeping with the structure of this inversion, Shelley’s contingent, unknowable protagonist, the Creature, is replaced by Dickens’ minor, and consequently surprisingly knowledgeable character Miss Flite. If in *Mary Barton* Gaskell turned us away from the overarching structure of “political economy” to emphasize the production of economic knowledge in terms of observing specimens

of the working class, Dickens *highlights* the institution as a product of collection as the hands of a collector everyone dismisses. Thus, even though both Gaskell and Dickens share the project of representing marginal characters at the mercy of overarching, oppressive structures, Dickens does not favor scientific collection processes like species observation. He focuses instead on using a marginal character who re-works the traditional dichotomy between collection and allegory to represent a powerful social institution that has eluded representation, and to reveal its impact on a range of lives.

Miss Flite and her Birds

How does Dickens create continuity through a long, serialized, multi-plot novel? Several critics have pointed to the ways that characters, settings, spaces, and institutions are doubled in *Bleak House*. As Hilary Schor points out, Esther is “doubled by her secret mother, the mysteriously frozen Lady Dedlock,” and then Dickens himself is “doubled in turn by his narrating heroine” (136). Not only characters like Esther and Lady Deadlock, but settings too are deftly doubled—the omniscient narrator in the novel notes that “both the world of fashion and the Court of Chancery are things of precedent and usage: oversleeping Rip Van Winkles who have played at strange games through a deal of thundery weather; sleeping beauties whom the knight will wake one day” (20). Dickens also multiplies his world through his many alliterative and un-individuated names, such as the Boodles, Goodles, and Choodles of the peerage. Characters like Harold Skimpole rely on repeated phrases and verbal tics that “function as connected signals that can help create the order-within-disorder” (49). Dickens needs more than a plot, in other words, to create

coherence, and connectivity might even be said to be the central problem of the novel—a connectivity across the elements of this sprawling text, across the apparently disconnected people in its social world (crossing-sweepers, lawyers, and aristocrats), and between the novel and the political order it represents. Dickens’s narrator famously asks “what connexion can there have been between many people in the innumerable histories of the world, who, from the opposite sides of great gulfs, have, nevertheless, been very curiously brought together?” (256). The project of the novel becomes to figure, that is, to make sense by making a figure of the very question of “connexion,” including breaks and gaps and forged links.

One of those figures, for Dickens, will be Miss Flite’s collection. Miss Flite has lost most of her family to her case, and now lives in a rented room above Mr. Krook’s shop, which is clean but bare—devoid of food, clothing, and sources of warmth, all indicating her poverty. This is the exhibition space for her curious collection—birds, “larks, linnets, and goldfinches”—imprisoned for a symbolic purpose (49). Her collection is never-ending and registers ongoing death: birds have died and been replaced, and newer ones have been added.

The list of names for these birds starts out as recognizably allegorical: Hope, Joy, Youth, Peace, Rest, Life, Dust, Ashes, Waste, Want, Ruin, Despair, Madness, Death, Cunning, Folly.” But by the end, bewilderingly, they have become odd objects and food: Words, Wigs, Rags, Sheepskin, Plunder, Precedent, Jargon, Gammon, and Spinach. Listed in this manner, the referential capacities of these names are uncertain, yet seemingly numerous. For instance, we could read them teleologically—Hope, Joy, Youth, Peace, Rest and Life might refer to the early stages of her case, where the

promise of an inheritance may have outweighed concerns about a long and impoverishing court case. The next few names then acknowledge the specific teleology of Chancery—Dust, Ashes, Waste, Want, Ruin, Despair, Madness, and Death. The names that follow resist the sequence they are in. While Cunning, Words, Wigs, Plunder, Precedent, and Jargon might refer to, and critique, Chancery proceedings, Folly and Rags function instead as descriptive of Miss Flite herself as well as Chancery’s other victims. The contrast between Rags and Sheepskin, which appear one after the other, highlights the contrast in her living conditions before and after her case started—when Esther, Richard and Ada visit her, they notice immediately that her room is cold because she cannot afford coal. Furthermore, Rags ties her to Mr. Krook through a material reference, for he is a landlord and shop-owner who deals in rags, amongst other odds and ends. These names, in sequence, appear in the novel several times, which gives them the qualities of a chant—the slant rhyme between Wigs and Rags, and Jargon and Gammon become noticeable, as does the alliteration of Plunder and Precedent. Jargon seems to be the final stopping point for interpretive possibilities in this sequence—after it, we get Gammon and Spinach, almost mocking reminders of food that Miss Flite finds difficult to afford.¹ Other interpretive possibilities exist too—we might pay attention to allusion to the well-known phrase “ashes to ashes, dust to dust,” from the Book of Common prayer, or to

¹ In the 2005 BBC adaptation of *Bleak House*, the names of these birds are performed as a chant or recitation by Pauline Collins, the actress who plays Miss Flite. It’s the viewers’ first introduction to the character of Miss Flite, and she is filed feeding her birds as she calls out these names, in order, in her small room. In the adaptation, the first and the last episodes prominently feature Miss Flite and her collection as a means of indexing the beginning and the end of the series, emphasizing the end of the case through a cathartic release of her birds. The use of this image in a serialized adaptation of this serialized novel underscores its narrative utility across media—it functions as a useful narrative double or foil to Chancery.

the alliterative pair Waste and Want that represent two modes of relation to inheritance, or to the juxtaposition of Madness with Cunning. In offering us this sequence of names for birds we know only to be larks, linnets and finches, Dickens deploys the collection as an invitation to the reader to engage in wordplay and interpretation. Only once we have engaged with these interpretive possibilities, we must stop and wonder whether they will take us anywhere.

While the reader may be bewildered, however, Miss Flite is a careful, deliberate collector.² She establishes the birds as living and dying symbols of her case at Chancery, with the object of releasing them when a judgment is finally given. She knows, however, that “they die in prison” (49). Unlike Miss Flite herself, cursed with a long enough life that her case slowly but surely impoverishes and consumes her, the birds’ lives “are so short in comparison” (49). “The whole collection has died over and over again,” Miss Flite points out, leaving Ether, Richard, Ada, and the reader to confront the idea of a collection so fixed that it continues past the death of its constituents (74). Yet, this collection is in fact dependent on the mortality of the birds: this cycle of death is how Miss Flite refers to a system where “innumerable children have been born into the cause; innumerable young people have married into it; innumerable old people have died out of it— it’s its own self-contained system” (16). Miss Flite’s collection is a way to figure Chancery as a deadly, cyclical system.

² In her chapter “Bleak House and the Curious Secrets” in *Curious Subjects: Women and the Trials of Realism*, Schor suggests that Esther Summerson is an “accidental collector,” pointing out that though she has “husbands, fathers, babies, “pets” galore” could not make her a person (162). Schor seems to suggest that this lack of personhood emerges from Esther’s inability to ask, speak, or act; yet Esther has access to a full set of motivations, concerns, dilemmas, depth, and narration not afforded to other characters. Furthermore, Esther is an accidental collector because she is rendered one through interpretation—it’s Schor’s reading that makes her collect. Miss Flite, on the other hand, collects deliberately, and does so with specific representational purpose—her collection is the case.

Mr. Krook's shop is also a double of Chancery, and it is worth asking why Dickens includes more than one symbolic referent for the same institution. Miss Flite introduces Mr Krook to Esther, Richard, and Ada as "the Lord Chancellor. His shop is called the Court of Chancery." (69).³ The shop is a site of unfettered and unsustainable accumulation. Mr. Krook acquires old documents, rags, wastepaper, marine stores, clothing, old iron, kitchen stuff, bottles, law books, and bones—upon entering, Esther notes that "everything seemed to be bought and nothing to be sold there" (67). Much like Chancery, the shop only acquires, and offers nothing to those who visit. Esther even imagines that the many rusted keys in the shop must have belonged to old law offices, and that rags that hung from an overhead beam could have been the "counsellors' bands and gowns sown up" (68). Richard points out that a pile of bones in a corner of the shop could very well be the "bones of clients" (68). Chancery's violence is made visible through Mr. Krook's shop, just as its violence also takes place there including the deaths of Mr. Krook, Tom Jarndyce, and Nemo. Mr. Krook and his shop are so much a double for Chancery that even Mr. Krook's body becomes a double for the corrupted body of the institution, and Dickens exercises a familiar political impulse in his treatment of it as he does in his critique of the courts — he burns it all down.

³ This oddness, much like Miss Flite's madness, characterizes the shop world of Chancery, and is a critique levied at the actual court itself— there is an oddness, and madness, that is often brought on to and functions to the detriment of the people caught up in claims, suits, and cases. In her article, Daly points out that "unaccompanied by names and faces, violence risks becoming a joke," something that Dickens knew and was playing into when he adds elements of farce to several instances of violence that results from Chancery proceedings (39). The register of farce is levied as critique—the outcomes of Chancery and jest are conflated, and the loss of life and livelihood caused by the former is minimized by the latter.

Unlike Miss Flite, Mr Krook never organizes the material contents of his collection. There is no system or order at work. When Esther first visits his shop, the illiterate Mr Krook detains her to read what he writes. He shapes his letters “backwards,” and writes them one at a time, rubbing the previous letter out before starting on the new one. In this manner, he asks Esther to confirm the word “Jarndyce,” followed by the words “Bleak House” (76). In Mr. Krook’s space, filled with “parchmentses,” his inability to read reduces names that carry symbolic weight within the novel to simply a sequence of letters. That he writes letters out backwards and singly, rubbing the previous one out before writing in the new one, offers a marked contrast to the printed material he accumulates, where all the letters are grouped together in words, which in turn are grouped in sentences, and so on—like both the suit and the novel itself. When he spells “Bleak House” and “Jarndyce,” he renders both the novel and the case at the heart of it as mystifying, illegible, overwhelming accumulation of letters, of documents, of people. Mr. Krook’s pained decryption of his many legal documents evokes the agonizing bewilderment of many of the characters embroiled in Chancery proceedings as they try and fail to escape the structures they are conscripted in and subject to. And this image of a vast, messy, disorderly accumulation haunts the novel itself. Is that all “Bleak House” is?

As a reader, I do not have to contend with Mr. Krook’s classification or characterization of his objects because he does not offer any—apart from his “backwards” approach to literacy. Readers and characters are free to utilize the literary terrain of Mr. Krook’s shop for our own productions of meaning—its representation of unfettered accumulation lends itself also to unfettered interpretation. When faced with

proliferating things and proliferating interpretations, as in Krook's shop, there are few resources narrative sense-making.

Miss Flite's collection, by contrast, invites specific ways of making meaning and giving order to the case. First, her collection survives the fire that consumes Mr. Krook's shop, and is tied to the unfolding, and eventual end, of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Second, she uses the birds to interpret Chancery: its imprisoning force, its patterns of repetition and replacement. Much like the birds that she constantly replaces in her collection, she has seen many faces come and go (566). She controls the collection— she doesn't allow her birds to sing too often by keeping their cages covered and behind a curtain— and is in turn controlled by it— for her mind is “confused by the idea that they are singing while [she] is following the arguments in court” (74). When she adds Richard and Ada to her collection, she exercises limited agency over their narrative treatment in the book. She foreshadows Richard's death at the end of the novel—much like the birds that keep dying, and keep getting replaced, he too is fated to be yet another ward of yet another case that will never end or be lost to costs. However, even as the collection exercises some authority over Richard's life span, his death is also significant enough to buy the other birds their freedom— Richard's death dissolves this collection. We see our last glimpse of Miss Flite from Esther: “when all was still, at a late hour, poor crazed Miss Flite came weeping to me, and told me that she had given her birds their liberty” (979). Once Richard dies, and the case is concluded with the estate gone to costs, the collection does not remain intact. Miss Flite may be its “poor, crazed” keeper, but she also remains the character who retains agency over the collection's schematic function and its organization of the

novel's many material and abstract objects. Apart from Esther or the omniscient narrator of *Bleak House*, Miss Flite is one of the few characters who wields narrative control—the ability to foreshadow, to refer or to critique—over other characters within the novel.

Miss Flite and Mr Krook offer different, even contradictory, figures for the courts of Chancery—an orderly collection and a messy shop—which together allow Dickens to explore the challenge of representing institutions: which of these figures represents Chancery most accurately? Why do we need both? More importantly, each figure seems to offer us a different way to grasp and contend with the sociality that Chancery produces. Mr. Krook's shop warns us about the dangers of consumptive, accumulating systems, while Miss Flite's collection shows us how it might be managed. Produced by minor characters, these figures offer us representations and critiques that are very different from each other, even as they refer to the same institution.

Collections and Allegory

I have suggested that Dickens uses Miss Flite's collection not only to represent the institution of Chancery but also to manage relations within the novel. But why turn to the eccentric detail, the strange particular, the minor character for this work? I will argue here that Dickens uses Miss Flite's collection to play with the representational capacities of allegory.

Critics who study allegory have pointed out that the device works particularly well at addressing two things—representability and incommensurability. Allegories raise questions about what can be represented abstractly, given the adequacy, or

inadequacy, of language available (Jameson 33). Theresa Kelley notes that “allegorical abstractions have a tremendous undertow; they drag human particularity towards a fixed form and idea,” so with any allegory, we must grapple with how abstractions co-constitute or relate to particulars (7). Thus, not only do allegories consistently raise the question whether the thing being read *can be read*, they also sustain an “irreducible difference between allegorical representation and its referent” (5).

And this is where the issue of incommensurability comes to the fore. The gap between a representation and its referent makes incommensurability a feature of allegory as a device. For Jameson, every allegory stages a gap between the literal and the allegorical, and out of this gap it is possible to draw connections to the moral, or the analogical, which for my purposes I will deem the political.⁴ Allegories set incommensurabilities in relation to each other and can either lead to “ideological comfort or . . . restless anxieties of a more expansive knowledge” (34). What’s especially evident in critical engagement with allegory is the impulse to *allegoresis*—to reading for allegorical meaning. While Jameson defines allegoresis through its outputs—a set of interpretations, which are often static, context-dependent, and particular—Kelley defines the impulse as a delivery mechanism—something that facilitates the creation of these outputs (7).

Both Jameson and Kelley agree that scholarship has neglected the role of allegory in Victorian texts. Jameson suggests that realism’s argument against allegory

⁴ Put simply, if an apple is the literal text, then its abstract, allegorical referent is the Fall, then the moral level might have something to do with the ills of temptation, while the analogical level might offer this as a way to think through the inevitably fallen state of humanity.

“presupposes a radical distance between meaning and empirical reality, and attributes to allegory a failed attempt to produce an impossible unification of these dimensions” (2). And yet the Victorian reading public was well-versed in allegoresis and its problems. Highly allegorical texts like *The Pilgrim’s Progress* were immensely popular, and Victorian readers were also engaged in newly emerging disciplinary forms of knowledge, particularly in the natural sciences, which prioritized new epistemologies that prioritize an abundance of material objects and detail rather than trafficking in abstractions. Kelley suggests that allegory still works for Dickens and Browning, functioning as “a recursive form or structure, endlessly self-referential in its own inventions and reinventions” (Kelley). A self-referential device, allegory is both conducive to being taken apart to be understood, and offers the possibility for readers to read it as something held together.

I want to build, here, on the idea that allegory is a device that can hold things together. Walter Benjamin’s primary charge against the allegorist is that “he has given up the attempt to elucidate things through research into their properties and relations,” choosing instead to conscript objects and concepts into forms that “rely on his profundity to illuminate their meaning” (211). The allegorist, for Benjamin, runs the risk of becoming the much bemoaned “hero” critic, a role that often reduces the value of texts to their interpretability. In this respect, the allegorist seems to Benjamin to be “the polar opposite of the collector.” The collector “brings what belongs together; by keeping in mind their affinities and their succession in time, he can eventually furnish information about his objects” (211). But in an inversion not uncommon in the

Arcades Project, Benjamin eventually concludes that “in every collector lies an allegorist, and in every allegorist a collector” (211).

Or to put this another way, both allegories and collections are forms of information management; both structures organize discrete bits of information, data, materials, objects, or other units. Any time a collection starts to mean something more than the sum of its parts, especially in literature, it trends precariously towards allegory. And this is why Miss Flite’s collection is effective. It sustains this tension in *Bleak House*, rather than resolving it: the bird collection is a way to organize various materials, maintaining their specificity while *also* pointing to a meaning beyond the sum of their parts. And Dickens make this clear with his almost-allegorical bird names—he wants us to perform allegoresis even as he arrests us in the process, making sure that no single abstraction functions as the end of reading. There is no single interpretive key to the birds.

Critics of *Bleak House* tend toward allegorical readings— from the middle-class nation as embodied in the figure of Esther Summerson to the argument that Mr. Krook’s surprising death by spontaneous combustion allegorizes the problem of vexed authority.⁵ Dickens, by contrast to many of his critics, seems ambivalent about allegoresis. And so he draws attention to the failures and the hubris of totalizing interpretation by introducing two allegorical figures in the novel: the Roman and Miss Flite’s birds.

⁵ See Olga Stuchebukhov, ‘Bleak House as an Allegory of a Middle-Class Nation’, *Dickens Quarterly*, 2006:147 and Daniel Hack, “‘Sublimation Strange’: Allegory and Authority in ‘Bleak House,’” *ELH* 66, no. 1 (1999): 129–56.

The narrator in *Bleak House* is contemptuous of the allegorical figure on Mr. Tulkinghorn's ceiling, described as one "in Roman helmet and celestial linen, sprawl[ing] among balustrades and pillars, flowers, clouds, and big-legged boys, and makes the head ache—as would seem to be Allegory's object always, more or less" (c). The figure has typical and easily coded allegorical visual details that the narrator offers, but its abstract referent remains missing. In short, it's labeled an allegory but does not perform allegorical functions. It is this abstract level of meaning that Dickens's narrator seems to always be on the verge of filling in as the novel progresses, using narrative to invest an incomplete, opaque, or meaningless figure we only know to be allegorical because it is named as such. The cavalier treatment of the Roman in the beginning of the novel suggests that Dickens is drawing on the tensions between allegorical and other forms of interpretation. Introduced as a headache, the Roman on the ceiling eventually starts to point out plot details such that he becomes the sole, mute witness to Mr. Tulkinghorn's murder.

Mr. Tulkinghorn's failure to take the Roman and his ever-present pointing seriously is implicated in his delay in figuring out the mystery of Lady Dedlock's relationship with Nemo. Dickens dramatizes this failure, and indeed, makes it absurd. The narrator chides Mr. Tulkinghorn for refusing to look out his window to notice what the upside-down Roman points at "with the arm of Samson (out of joint, and an odd one) obtrusively" thereby missing seeing Lady Dedlock walk out of his rooms to find Jo, and later Nemo's grave (c). By suggesting that the figure is somehow visually out of joint, Dickens complicates its efficacy as an allegory as its ability to point meaningfully emerges from its imperfections— its significance arises from the fact

that it doesn't point as it should. The reference to Samson complicates this statement for it presents readers with a chance to make an easy allegorical leap— the arm of Samson indicates that it is also the arm of judgment, and yet, it foregrounds the arm and not Samson's hair or his eyes that are more prominent in the biblical story. Is the Roman, like Samson, blind or otherwise incapacitated? Additionally, the parenthetical aside, "(out of joint, and an odd one)" serves to drag readers back from this foray into biblical allegory and turns our attention to the Roman as merely visually allegorical...and a badly made one at that.

The narrator seems to defend Mr Tulkinghorn's failure to give this figure's pointing some credence— for, even if he did look out the window,

“what would it be to see a woman going by? There are women enough in the world, Mr. Tulkinghorn thinks—too many; they are at the bottom of all that goes wrong in it, though, for the matter of that, they create business for lawyers. What would it be to see a woman going by, even though she were going secretly? They are all secret. Mr. Tulkinghorn knows that very well.”

This narratorial defense makes us question whether the figure slowly invested with allegorical importance is one that is worthy of such attention. The free indirect discourse employed — Mr Tulkinghorn's misogyny imbues the narrator's own speech— is satirical. Dickens makes the dismissal of allegory as a useful signifying or narrative trope sound almost reasonable, yet this particular scene exists only to foreshadow Mr. Tulkinghorn's downfall as a result of not paying attention to this allegorical source of important information. Dickens seems to be suggesting that if

Mr. Tulkinghorn had been able to read this allegory properly, even though it functions badly as an allegory, then he might have acquired information regarding Lady Dedlock earlier in the novel. The tension between whether or not the Roman can be interpreted allegorically, and how, refigures the trope within the novel and suggests that both a multiplicity of allegorical readings, and a willingness to simultaneously deal with allegory as purely ornamental is required within the text. It also suggests that allegory in the novel is difficult to parse when deconstructed, and turns readers' attention instead to how it functions as a device that holds tensions together.

Eventually, the Roman will become the mute witness to Mr. Tulkinghorn's death, eternally pointing in a way that offers inconsistent significance. The horror of Mr. Tulkinghorn's death is represented in the relation between the ever-pointing hand and its new, macabre referent— his body or more precisely, its absence. The narrator constructs the relationship between the pointing finger— which has thus far only been imbued with the significance of pointing out Lady Dedlock— and Mr. Tulkinghorn's body by suggesting that new meaning is invested when a person “look[s] up at his outstretched hand and looking down at what is below it” shrieks and flees, eventually causing “alarm in the street” (c). The Roman requires a character to draw the connection between the arm and the body in order for the pointing to become significant. The Roman is deftly constructed as a witness when the narrator points out that those who attend the wake murmur, “If he could only tell what he saw!” (c). The figure of the Roman stands in for the reason behind Mr. Tulkinghorn's death, a substitution facilitated by the connection the narrator draws between the ever-pointing finger and Mr. Tulkinghorn's body. This is not exactly an allegorical function yet—

the Roman is standing in for a plot-hole, a mystery, a void that will be filled with details at the end of the novel and not an abstraction.

The narrator evokes such abstraction by refusing the figure access to it. Here, the Roman sets the scene— “he is pointing at a table with a bottle (very nearly full of wine) and a glass upon it and two candles that were blown out suddenly soon after being lighted. He is pointing at an empty chair and at a stain upon the ground before it might almost be covered with a hand. These objects lie directly within his range” (c). By offering us a description of details rather than abstraction, and details that defy dissolution into abstraction, the narrator suggests that these details complicate the allegoresis of Tulkinghorn’s death within the novel. The narrator notes, “An excited imagination might suppose that there was something in them so terrific as to drive the rest of the composition, not only the attendant big-legged boys, but the clouds and flowers and pillars too— in short, the very body and soul of Allegory and all the brains it has— stark mad” (c), suggesting that Allegory itself— the Roman and the device— has been driven mad with the murder that has taken place for the device is unable to offer an account for it. The representation of this device is rendered mute. When parsing this, we see that the narrator thinks investing these details with allegorical meaning would fundamentally change the way we see or read conventionally allegorical figures like cherubs, or the components of a Roman allegorical landscape. It would render previously allegorical figures moot and unreadable, as both these orders of things cannot be allegorical at the same time, or at least in the same ways. Reading both as allegorical necessarily complicates the way we must read allegory within this novel— as something that functions on both these

registers (realist, and vaguely classical), and something that is coming to being through a constructed contradiction between them.

The Roman, at the end of all this, goes from being a mute, sometimes useless figure to one that “is invested in all eyes with mystery and awe,” and becomes “a paralyzed dumb witness” (c). This paralysis is in line with the Roman’s previous association with Samson, a figure most popularly evoked for the loss of power and authority. The new significance of the Roman is established— “so it shall happen surely, through many years to come, that ghostly stories shall be told of the stain upon the floor, so easy to be covered, so hard to be got out, and that the Roman, pointing from the ceiling shall point, so long as dust and damp and spiders spare him, with far greater significance than he ever had in Mr. Tulkinghorn’s time, and with a deadly meaning” (c). The Roman indicates the scene of the death, the deceased, and the unknown murderer, and all of his previous allegorical affordances are superseded by his new status as a mute witness, making him vulnerable to the kind of allegoresis, which if we wished to participate in, would turn him into a figure that stands in for the crooked, powerless, yet knowing witness in the murder case that becomes the subject of the final third of this novel.

Hablot Knight Browne’s illustration of the Roman, titled “A new meaning in the Roman” helps emphasize both the pictorial and narrative realms of allegory that the figure of the Roman disturbs in this novel— this illustration, the only representation of the figure of the Roman, appears in the chapter with Mr.

Tulkinghorn's death.⁶ What we know to be a pictorial allegory only appears in the form in which it is narrated to be in at the very moment in which it is invested with new meaning. Furthermore, the illustration depicts the scene after Mr. Tulkinghorn's body has been moved to the bedroom, which means the Roman is only seen pointing at the scene—the table, the chairs, the candles—and the conspicuous absence of Mr. Tulkinghorn or his murderer. The plate with the Roman is a dark plate—which is a different style of printing and illustration than earlier lithographic plates from the novel, such as the one depicting Miss Flite. Browne developed this style of illustration partly because he gained access to more than simply copper plates as he worked on these illustrations, and partly to prevent copyists from easily reproducing his work. What this means visually is that as the novel progresses, the backgrounds of the illustrations get darker and darker, and they are composed within a kind of portal frame. Critics have suggested that these then correspond with plot getting darker as the novel progresses (Farrar 38). In an analysis of the dark plates in *Bleak House* and their epistemological functions, Farrar points out that several of the scenes illustrated elide the characters that populate it—these images “demand[] power not just over characters' bodies but viewers' perspectives as well” (40). When confronted but narratively with the absence of the murderer and Mr. Tulkinghorn's body, and pictorially with the absence of any bodies at all, including those who the text tells us are looking up at the allegory and investing it with new meaning or refiguring it as a witness, the reader or viewer is the primary audience for the subversion of allegory in the body of the Roman. There are no characters within the text through which this

⁶ See ““A New Meaning in the Roman” by “Phiz” —Thirtieth Illustration for “Bleakhouse” (May 1853). VictoriaWeb.Org.

demand for a new way of thinking about allegory is mediated, at least in the illustration.

The Roman is out of joint, mute, dumb, and a paralyzed witness. He is an empty vessel that is filled and refilled with new significance that shifts through the novel. If, initially, he stands in for overlooked knowledge— if only Mr. Tulkinghorn had looked, he would have been able to understand the mystery of Lady Dedlock sooner— by the end of the novel, he becomes a figure with privileged access to truth who is then unable to express it. This refusal results in the reinscription of this figure as a stand in for unknowable knowledge. He also stands in for failed reading— he has failed at pointing out the significance of Lady Dedlock’s meeting with Joe, and he continues to fail at conveying the truth of Mr. Tulkinghorn’s murder. This repetition indicates that this allegorical figure is always going to perform a kind of failure or misreading, which suggests that the form of allegory within the novel will result in similar outcomes. The novel requires both a different form of allegoresis and a different engagement with allegory. If we take seriously the critical claim that the figure of allegory has generally offered some kind of privileged access to the truth, then at best the Roman knows something that he withholds from the readers, and at worst, he seems to indicate that any kind of allegoresis we perform will always result in a kind of failure. Allegories, then, Dickens seems to suggest, are for the birds.

The names that Dickens gives Miss Flite’s birds, as we have seen, can immediately be indexed as allegory, and yet, as we read each successive name, Dickens also unsettles the familiarity of the device. There is nothing in the novel to tell us *why* any of these undifferentiated birds are named what they are named, there is

no incident or character that can be indisputably tied to each of the birds, and it is hard to think of what abstraction is to be found in a reference to spinach or gammon.

However, having disabused us of this version of allegoresis, Dickens goes on to make the entire collection of non-allegorical birds have suspiciously allegorical functions, since the entire collection refers to the workings of Chancery. The addition of Richard and Ada to the collection, and Miss Flite's liberation of her birds at Richard's death, make the collection into a kind of allegory— certainly in the Jamesonian sense where the collection works on all four levels: the literal birds refer to Chancery, which then allow us to theorize further at the moral and analogical levels of Jameson's schema. Rita Felski and Elizabeth Anker construct allegory as a device that thinks, and *Bleak House* certainly unfolds this definition too: the collection is both how readers might think of Chancery, and also a representation of Miss Flite's thoughts.

In other words, Miss Flite's collection works *both* as an allegory and as a way of knowing a world that is not allegorical. Her imprisonment of the birds indicates the violence inherent in the actual material collection—live bodies are contained in a cage. Furthermore, it also shows us the violence of allegory as a device, as the birds are there to represent Chancery's carceral power and so are not meaningful in themselves but only in the service of figuring something altogether different. In highlighting both forms of violence, Miss Flite's birds suggest that the novel offers two different ways to know Chancery as a system that functions despite and because of the deaths of people who are caught up in it—one literal, a collection of imprisoned bodies, and the other allegorical, a representation of Chancery. As Kelley writes, “at the limit of Victorian realism and a rationalist faith in human and social progress are monsters like

‘Chancery’ grotesque forms whose abstractive powers exceed or control real particulars” (218). This very control is the critique that Miss Flite’s collection levies against the institution within the novel.

And yet, it is also in this critique that Dickens points to a narrative remedy to this exercise of power. He shows that the abuse of power can occur at any social level so long as there is something to exercise power over— the Lord Chancellor over his petitioners, Miss Flite over her birds. However, a narrative inversion takes place.

While the many birds Miss Flite imprisons and replaces are not individuated, at least a few of the petitioners in *Jarndyce vs. Jarndyce* are. We know of Richard and Ada and are told of Tom Jarndyce and Mr. Jarndyce— they are named and narrated within the text. Furthermore, while Chancery seems to keep going despite Richard’s death, Miss Flite’s carceral collection does not. Miss Flite reveals the violence enacted by collection, and the novel remedies it—individuating on the one hand and liberating on the other. There isn’t much the novel can do about Chancery, it seems, but it can destroy the collection.

Collection and its Affordances

Numerous literary critics have studied *Bleak House* as a response to real Chancery cases, and legal scholars have studied the novel as part of legal history.⁷ I

⁷ See Gary Watt, *Equity Stirring: The Story of Justice beyond Law* (Oxford: Hart Pub., 2009). The list of reforms introduced in the 19th century to the court of Chancery ranged from being minor to those that eventually ended in significant erosion of the institution. Lord Eldon held the role of the Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain from 1801-1827, with a break of a year between 1806-1807. During his tenure, reform was minor, and calls for reform were often rephrased as attacks or repudiations of his conduct, and not of Chancery as a whole. However, reforms were slowly introduced. In 1813, a new Vice Chancellor was added. In 1825, a commission convened under Lord Eldon made its report, published in 1826. Some of the recommendations from this commission were reflected in the Procedure Amendment Act in 1833. After Lord Eldon’s retirement, in 1841, two more Vice Chancellors were added to speed up the hearing and adjudication of claims. In 1850, George Turner introduced an Act to

have suggested that Miss Flite's collection offers a representation, and through this representation, a critique of Chancery and the violence it inflicts upon its suitors. It is my argument here that Dickens was self-conscious about the ways that his contemporaries were failing to articulate the *systemic* violence of Chancery. Miss Flite's collection functioned as a surprisingly effective way to communicate a troubling legal institution to a broad public—one that disrupted particular lives on the one hand and at the same time held them together. It is in part through this minor character, then, that *Bleak House* comments on legal reform.

Chancery reform primarily affected the propertied class and was a sphere where upward social mobility could be quickly and efficiently halted.⁸ The nineteenth century eventually sees the dissolution of the courts of Chancery—it ceases to exist as an independent body or institution and is dismantled to be incorporated into the newly formed courts of Equity in 1873—in part because the ways in which it was legislating property and inheritance were deemed unsustainable. A significant number of the arguments made in favor of Chancery reform at the time had to do with how the court was or wasn't represented in the public sphere. Until 1836, there was little statistical information available regarding the cases or the proceedings at court, and even a

try and reduce the costs and duration of cases. In 1851, on the recommendation of the Chancery Reform Association, two new Lord Justices were appointed to hear from the Master of the Rolls and the Vice Chancellor. This helped speed up the hearing of claims a little, but Masters, Chancellors and their deputies were still held back by the fact that they could not simply make decisions based on oral testimony from witnesses and had to rely on written affidavits to establish evidence instead. More reform took place under the Common Law Procedure Acts of 1852 and 1854, and the Chancery Amendment Act of 1852. In 1853, based on some of the cases that were used as exemplars to urge reform, and on the reform in general, Dickens begins *Bleak House*. In 1860, under Lord Campbell, a table of consolidated orders was published. Finally, after the fusion of Equity and Common Law in 1875, the Court of Chancery ceased to exist as it once did and its functions were dispersed through the court system.

⁸ See the article quoted from the Times in John Butt, "'Bleak House' in the Context of 1851," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 10, no. 1 (1955):5-6.

report that came out in that year was considered dubious. Most of the information that the public could access about Chancery was anecdotal, presented in opinion pieces in the periodical press, or as Michael Lobban points out, was available in the “form of a series of snapshots of Chancery business” (398). While this made the plight of people subjected to the courts of Chancery abundantly clear, it did not necessarily make the system itself more legible. One could know what the system was—a “barbarous system of imprisonment, often for life, of people who are too poor or too ignorant to avoid contempts of Chancery”—but not necessary how it worked (Hunt 597).

The Chancery Reform Association, convened in 1851, held public lectures regarding Chancery. One of the members of the association, William Carpenter, depicts Chancery as an institution with “multitudinous intricacies” and “pandemonium” plagues its representation (Carpenter 5). The association included not just lawyers, but other professionals as well, and was roundly criticized in *The Law Review and Quarterly Journal of British and Foreign Jurisprudence* for having “non-experts” offer ostensibly expert opinions on the institution, and most importantly, for proposing to “indulge in mere general statements, and attempt to excite an indiscriminate clamor against the Legal Institutions of the country, without proposing any distinct and effective remedies” (Richards 5). The problem of representing Chancery was publicly contested. Dickens offers his own representation of Chancery in the midst of this debate by experimenting with different forms: “snapshots,” caricatures, collections, and ultimately the serialized novel are all representational tools that depict the Court. His representation of Chancery is a form of knowledge-making—a bid to try and understand an institution whose representation was being

actively contested in the public sphere, and in so doing, to depict an institution on the brink of reform or collapse. It is in this context that Miss Flite's collection offers a particularly productive solution: it represents Chancery as an institution that is not only confusing and particular, but also holds things together. And this allows Dickens to make two specific critiques. First, the collection reveals and criticizes the conflation of life and property within the context of Chancery proceedings. Second, it understands Chancery as an institution that perpetuates violence and constitutes life as disposable—and is therefore ultimately incapable of generating justice.

Bleak House is deeply interested in the tension between the management of life and the management of inheritance. Chancery as a judicial apparatus is tasked explicitly with the management of inheritance and property. However, as Dickens and other proponents of Chancery reform point out, the effect that it has on the material lives of its claimants is undeniably violent. We never see the inheritance or the property under dispute in the infamous Jarndyce and Jarndyce case, but we are privy to a potentially damaging family secret—the fact that Esther Summerson is the illegitimate child of Lady Dedlock—and the consequences of the lack of inheritance, which is Richard's death. We are privy to the mismanagement of life, yet unable to see the material property it is supposed to protect.

In this context, Miss Flite's collection of live birds to figure Jarndyce and Jarndyce throws light on the difficulties of representing a bewildering and violent legal system and all that it controls in terms of both life and property. Dickens uses the collection to combine the biopolitical management of bird life with the allegorical management of characters and property. Miss Flite's birds present the legal system

primarily as an institution tasked with the management of life. However, having representations of Chancery rely on images of accumulation or birds also drives home the point that Miss Flite's collection is, in fact, a critique of ownable things, of property.

Miss Flite's collection of living birds is effective at revealing the conflation of life and property—a collection of inanimate objects would not have the same effect. This fact is underscored by the many instances of slippage between Miss Flite's birds and various Chancery suitors within the novel.⁹ *Bleak House* figures the legal system as constituted by its management of life refracted through the management of property. When that management is carried out insufficiently—Tom Jarndyce's death, Richard's death, the dissolution of the Jarndyce cause into costs—it demands reform. Visions that this reform could take, much like all the other things related to Chancery within the novel, are displaced into a different realm—whether it be Mr. Krook's burning shop, or the resolution provided by kinship bonds within the private realm of the household as demonstrated by Mr. Woodcourt and John Jarndyce's management of Esther, Ada, and Ada's future child. However, this reform doesn't take place within the novel, which suggests that though Chancery is constituted by the lives of the people embroiled in cases, it continues to exist even after they die or are removed from the collection; we are left instead with a politics of disposability and the troubling lack of value afforded to the individual, all too deftly highlighted by Miss Flite's replaceable birds.

⁹ For a full list, see Emma Brody's prize-winning essay titled "Birds and Cages in Bleak House." <https://dickens.ucsc.edu/programs/hs-pdfs/emma-brodey.pdf>

If Chancery is responsible for managing life through its management of property and in so doing, rendering those lives disposable, then it is an institution that perpetuates violence. Suzanne Daly locates this violence in the circulation and deployment of legal documents, suggesting that by “minimizing physical violence and foregrounding repeated instances in which characters channel greed, cruelty, or the will to power through paperwork, Dickens in *Bleak House* reconceives the representation of conflict” (Daly 20). But Dickens also moves beyond paper to living bodies. And if, in Daly’s analysis, the document trail in *Bleak House* offers a network through which violence is mediated and can be located, then Miss Flite’s collection of birds offers a framework through which the logic of the systemic material violence enacted by Chancery is made visible. The challenge of trying to represent systemic violence in a dense novel, dispersed across time and without obvious villains or specific agents, is that it that cannot be traced easily across a page but must be followed through chapters, with hazy causes and effects, and no single instigator.

Dickens explicitly invokes the frustrating problem of Chancery as a “system.” In the novel, when Gridley is particularly frustrated by the lack of progress on his case, he says,

"The system! I am told on all hands, it's the system. I mustn't look to individuals. It's the system. I mustn't go into court and say, 'My Lord, I beg to know this from you—is this right or wrong? Have you the face to tell me I have received justice and therefore am dismissed?' My Lord knows nothing of it. He sits there to administer the system. I mustn't go to Mr. Tulkinghorn, the solicitor in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and say to him

when he makes me furious by being so cool and satisfied—as they all do, for I know they gain by it while I lose, don't I?—I mustn't say to him, 'I will have something out of some one for my ruin, by fair means or foul!' HE is not responsible. It's the system. But, if I do no violence to any of them, here—I may! I don't know what may happen if I am carried beyond myself at last! I will accuse the individual workers of that system against me, face to face, before the great eternal bar!"
(251-2).

Gridley is acutely aware of his own lack of agency within the Chancery system— as he points out, there is no one who takes responsibility for the ills visited upon him. The Lord Chancellor, the lawyers, the masters and the clerks all shrug off personal responsibility and displace it on to “the system,” which makes it impossible to apportion blame. The displacement of blame and accountability onto a system constructs perpetrators as powerless and results in a lack of justice. Even if, as he threatens, he were to “accuse the individual workers of that system” before the “great eternal bar,” it would ultimately be an exercise in futility because the system is designed to perpetuate, not address or offer redress to, the injustice and violence that Gridley identifies. Like Miss Flite’s collection and Mr Krook’s shop, Gridley’s criticism of the “system” here is another one of Dickens’s representational experiments in figuring Chancery. Here it is represented as a system that offers no interpretive clarity, or access to recourse. As he dies, Gridley tells Miss Flite, “this ends it. Of all my old associations, of all my old pursuits and hopes, of all the living and the dead world, this one poor soul alone comes natural to me, and I am fit for.

There is a tie of many suffering years between us two, and it is the only tie I ever had on earth that Chancery has not broken” (406).¹⁰

Ultimately, Gridley is right: Chancery fails to offer recourse to its victims. Personal, non-institutional ties and kinship ‘save’ characters who have been wronged by the case, and the panacea to systematic ills is found not within public institutions or redress, but in private, domestic spaces. Ada and her unborn child— Richard’s heir— live with Mr. Jarndyce, and Esther is married to Mr. Woodcourt and lives with him in the second Bleak House, property that she is not entitled to under public law due to her parentage. The private sphere regulated by friendship and kinship is the recourse to the violence of Chancery— where none of these provisions would have been provided to these characters. But Gridley’s figure only captures the overwhelming, totalizing form of the system: Miss Flite’s collection also shows us how the system repeats and endures, and how it is composed of individual parts only loosely held together, and it suggests that there may be some room for agency.

The Minor Character; the Political Subject

Given all that her collection does in the novel, it is tempting to say that Miss Flite’s birds give her a narrative agency that is at odds with the agency she is accorded socially. She deploys the collection as a curatorial practice, a way to manage materials. This use of the collection shows how it can be a formal mode of narrative or plot management. It is also successful as critique—and as a critique of allegory itself. Miss Flite’s collection yields not a single interpretative key but rather a series of moves: identification, representation, repetition, coherence, and replacement, and all

¹⁰ Dickens repeats this bit of Gridley’s speech twice in the same chapter, thereby adding emphasis.

of these features help us register institutional violence. Her collection works as an instrument to manage the difficult economies of attention that come with the problem of having a long, dense, serialized multiplot novel with two narrators.

It has been my argument here that the form of the bird collection joins realism and allegory in a way that allows us to grasp systemic violence, but it is strange that Dickens locates this crucial representational work in the hands of such a minor character. If we understand the case in terms of the collection, then we see Miss Flite as a foil for the Lord Chancellor. Just as he wields power over the wards and subjects of a case, she holds and wields power over her birds. Mr. Krook is another foil for the Lord Chancellor. But surely the fact that these two eccentric, relatively powerless people stand in for the Chancellor should arrest our attention. If we were to think about *where* the collection and critique of Chancery are located, we would see that these appear in the margins, yet a margin that commands outsized importance and attention in what Woloch calls “a distributed field of attention” (17). Miss Flite’s ability to understand the institution and affect the narrative is unique. Only Tulkinghorn and Bucket seem to have as much power. And only Miss Flite, along with Krook and Nemo, help make Chancery thinkable for the readers, and representable for Dickens.

How should we approach the representation and knowledge produced by a minor character? Dickens often uses minor characters within the novel as caricatures, metaphors, or themselves allegories to maintain complexity in the midst of abstraction. Long traditions of scholarship on Victorian fiction have read protagonists as figures for the dominant ideology of liberal individualism. But critics such as Emily

Steinlight, Alex Woloch, and Caroline Levine, have questioned and complicated the role of individuation in *Bleak House*, suggesting that the novel is about populations, character systems, or networks rather than autonomous persons. Steinlight argues that Dickens's unit of representation is best understood by the paradox of what she terms supernumeraries—“the number of units in excess of the total” (119). Characters elude systemization through countability, and Chancery exerts a politics of individual expendability. For Woloch, some characters have a privileged access to depth *at the expense* of others, which he theorizes as a critique of middle-class bourgeois coming-of-age and its accompanying process of individuation. Esther Summerson's well-rounded characterization is possible because of the caricaturing of Caddy, Prince, or Miss Flite. However, these caricatures come at the expense of Esther's own individuation within the narrative as any individuation starts to look like a distorted collective of these minor characters (Woloch 46).

And yet, Miss Flite's collection suggests an alternative to this movement back and forth between the poles of individual and collective. In her collection, individuals are expendable not for the benefit of someone else, but within or for the sake of organizing principles or institutional norms. Miss Flite's birds can be replaced, even given the same names, precisely because she refuses their individuation even as their deaths register the violence of the system. They function similarly to nodes in networks, an articulation that Caroline Levine offers regarding Mrs. Badger's husbands within the novel, pointing out that “Mrs Badger makes clear...that a husband if not first and foremost a particular person but a position in a kinship network and specifically a *replaceable* node” (128). We can rethink character— less as “powerful

or symbolic agents in their own right than as moments in which complex and invisible social forces cross,” or in terms of my bleaker interpretation, as something that is disposable within a system that continues nevertheless (126). This kind of disposability is insidious because *nothing is lost or worn down* when Miss Flite’s birds die. There is Jarndyce after Jarndyce to replace the ones who have died, as there are multiple members of Miss Flite’s family available as claimants, just as there is a seemingly infinite supply of larks, linnets and finches to cycle through a collection. Chancery can go on indefinitely because its structure remains intact, for even if all the claimants in a particular case die, there will be other cases.

Thinking of Miss Flite’s collection as doing important representational and critical work allows us to relocate critique and to rethink its social and narrative implications. Generally, we might assume that characters involved in the project of articulating institutional critique are central characters who use their centrality to gather attention to the effects of institutions by way of the particular details of their lives and understanding. Esther Summerson, for example, draws attention to the mystery of her parentage, calling attention to structures of kinship, legitimacy, and class without representing any of these *as* systems. The critical tradition has offered less authority and centrality to Miss Flite. And yet if we engage with minor characters as interpreters, they turn out to be the ones who make an institution like Chancery legible. While Esther or Mr. Jarndyce may warn Richard against his involvement in the suit, they do not tend to offer overarching critiques of the system of Chancery the way minor characters like Mr. Gridley or Miss Flite do. Nor do their bodies get conscripted into narratives of destruction like Mr. Krook.

By deliberately locating systemic critique in the realm of minor characters, Dickens seems to suggest that the minor character is the appropriate subject and producer of social knowledge. At the same time, he points out the futility of such critique—both Mr. Krook and Mr. Gridley die, and Miss Flite’s suit is never settled. In short, Dickens suggests that this ability to articulate critique is not liberatory, even while it does successfully teach us the workings of complex and powerful institutions like Chancery.

When minor characters offer critiques of central institutions, systems or problems, it grants them a measure of narrative agency. But agency is complicated here. I will build on Erin Manning’s Deleuzian concept of the minor gesture to theorize critique in a minor key. I will argue that reading Miss Flite as agential because she offers critique doesn’t actually give her much political purchase within the novel—she is still subject to the system she critiques.

Erin Manning develops the idea of the “minor gesture,” drawing from the work of Deleuze and Guattari, which she defines as “the gestural force that opens experience to its potential variation. It does this from within experience itself, activating a shift in tone, a difference in quality” (1). For Manning, the minor gesture is minor not simply because it operates in a minor key—flowing in relation to yet outside the major key, which offers sequence or coherence. It is minor in that it eludes modes of perception that easily recognize the major, yet if activated, has the potential to change the trajectory of the major in undetermined ways. As Manning points out, the minor “has a mobility not given to the major: its rhythms are not controlled by a preexisting structure, but open to flux” (1). In suggesting that Miss Flite’s collection of

birds, amongst other things, is a minor gesture, I am not suggesting that it is minor simply because it is deployed by someone we would consider a minor character. As Manning cautions us,

“the minor gesture is not the *figure* of the marginal, though the marginal may carry a special affinity for the minor and wish to compose with it. The minor gesture is the force that makes the lines tremble that compose the everyday, the lines, both structural and fragmentary, that articulate how else experience can come to expression. To compose with the minor gesture requires, as Deleuze cautions, the prudence of the experimenter, a prudence awake to the speculative pragmatism at the heart of the welling event” (7).

Or, in this case, the prudence of the collector. Miss Flite’s collection is a minor gesture precisely because it offers a precarious narrative alternative to the problem of Chancery in *Bleak House*, even as it ultimately fails to offer any resolution. There are several modes of narrative management within *Bleak House*—we have a third person omniscient narrator who frequently employs free indirect discourse as well as the first-person narration of Esther Summerson; characters who repeat themselves or have recognizable, and repeated verbal tics, and more. In incorporating all these forms of narrative management, Dickens defamiliarizes the work of imposing coherence; he draws attention not to a single underlying whole but to several forms of narration. Strands of narration in the novel map well on to Manning’s discussions of minor and major keys. The third person omniscient narration and Esther Summerson’s first person narration both function as major keys within the novel, while free indirect

discourse that lets us see minor characters, as well as these characters' own organization schema such as Mr. Krook's shop, Miss Badger's husbands, or Miss Flite's collection, function as the minor. And when we look closely at Miss Flite's collection as a minor gesture, we can see the conditions that might precipitate an alternative to Chancery within the novel, and as we read, these conditions of possibility become a critique of the institution. In *Bleak House*, Miss Flite's birds alternately dissolve into birds, the Chancery suit, allegories without referents, birdsong, or cacophony. Even the dissolution of the collection is more easily tied to the culmination of plot—Richard's death and the end of the case—than it is as an argument for the dissolution of the institution. As Mr Krook points out early in the novel, even if her birds were released, they would probably die soon at the hand of predators, as they are unused to being uncaged. Instead of the explanatory deconstruction that allegory offers—either something means something, or something means nothing—the collection plays with and refuses overarching meaning by dissolving into wordplay and narrative excess of eccentric details whilst still remaining a form that reveals the violence of abstraction (of both Chancery and allegory) while participating in it. This mode of critique helps holds incommensurabilities together without resolving them, *training attention rather than interpretation*, through the active and constitutive form of collection.

Conclusion

Given that Dickens appears to locate critique in the realm of minor characters in order to offer a register of critique more readily available to these characters instead of conscripting them *into* critiques performed by readers, narrators, or central

character, I want to ask what this model offers us now. What forms of critique we might draw from and cultivate as we address the violent institutions and systems of the present, and how might critique hold together the incommensurabilities of our complex positionalities vis-a-vis institutions whilst still performing an analysis of their workings and their effects?

The minor gesture produces very different outcomes for Manning and Dickens. For Manning, it allows for a politics of affirmation and locates agency in agencement rather than the individual. A politics of affirmation is one that consistently interrupts events to create conditions of possibility, whilst a negative politics choreographs events into a pre-existing loop where harms continue to happen, and the conditions for justice cannot be met. In Manning's work, an affirmative politics does not necessarily mean that justice is guaranteed; but she suggests that in catalyzing conditions of possibility that interrupt the flow of the major, the minor gesture offers the possibility for justice in ways previously unimagined. It is not surprising that she invests in the notion of agencement rather than agency—for her, agencement, which is distributed agency rather than agency invested in a single individual, steers us towards an affirmative politics because it offers spaces for multiple actors, not just the individual, to act. This allows for modes of agency that we see foregrounded in ecocriticism and new materialism, where we are sensitive to the volitional force of non-human beings and objects. Alternatively, it also creates space for actors such as Haraway's cyborg, where individual agency is subordinated to relational action. For Manning, the idea that a single individual, invested with agency, could critique a system might be negative politics, especially because individual agential action is often inadequate for

countering systemic harms. A negative politics choreographs events into a pre-existing loop where harms continue to happen, and the conditions for justice cannot be met whilst a politics of affirmation is one that consistently interrupts events to create conditions of possibility. And, of course, since minor gestures only create conditions of possibility, their affirmative political tendencies can become negative as events unfold.

This is what happens in *Bleak House*. Mr. Krook's shop, Mr. Gridley's articulation of the system, and Miss Flite's collection all interrupt the narrative to offer the seeds of possibility for thinking or imagining Chancery otherwise. Yet, for the characters who vocalize these critiques, there is no liberation from the system. Mr. Gridley and Mr. Krook die, and Miss Flite remains destitute and at the mercy of others' charitable care. Dickens seems to suggest that, ultimately, whether we consider these characters' ability to offer critique agential or not, that agency alone is not enough to save them within the novel. Dickens's politics in a minor key is that these minor gestures that sometimes fall apart—allegories that don't quite allegorize, shops that don't quite sell—precisely in their frequent failure to do much to the institutions they criticize, they highlight both the violence and the futility of their own critique. Yet, these gestures are many. And that seems to be important to Dickens too—it is important for these minor characters to choreograph, to borrow another term from Manning, minor gestures that interrupt the field of relations that constitutes the novel even when it does nothing within the novel itself, for the payoff is in the reading. The point, for Dickens, is that we might read for multiple modes of holding parts together. And so, instead of a politics of affirmation, we have a politics that recognizes the

constraints of power and understands agency as distributed, and yet suggests nonetheless that critique in a minor key matters even as it remains impotent within the story-world. For knowing that individual agency offers very little in the minor key, and having to confront it repeatedly, through a variety of gestures in the reading of the novel, the minor prompts us to think otherwise.

Chapter IV— Collection and Collectives: Political Possibility in H.G. Wells’s

Island of Dr. Moreau

In this last chapter of the dissertation, I look closely at how collection might be utilized to develop a collective. The distinction between the collection and the collective is one of kind— the collective is often understood to be a social and political term in a way collections often are not, and collectives also imply that those who constitute it are subjects who participate in or are embroiled with a form of political governance as opposed to simply being ordered. In this chapter, I interrogate Wells’s deployment of the form of the menagerie and its subsequent dissolution to think through the collection form’s capacity to make and unmake itself and the worlds it produces through the dissolution of categorization.

Both collections and collectives are determined by their constituents, which in the case of the collective is usually a human subject. Thus, it is not surprising that critics interested in the human subject have spent time with both *Frankenstein* and *The Island of Dr. Moreau* when addressing the question of the human in nineteenth-century literature. Both novels give us the opportunity to understand the mechanics of collected bodies, or bodies that are made of collected parts. In *Moreau*, Wells is more forthcoming than Shelley about how humans might be produced and relies on the idea of degeneration to suggest that doing so would cause the boundaries of what appeared to be a fixed category of the human to erode, producing political and epistemological uncertainty about the constitution and governance of these subjects. For *Frankenstein*, the Creature as an individual is enough to cause alarm, while *Moreau* produces *Frankenstein*’s feared ‘race of devils’ on his island. Unlike *Frankenstein*, *Moreau*

anticipates the collected subject's alienation from social, kinship, political, and even biological collectives, and so he creates a new one for them—the Law, only for it to break down, rendering these collected subjects, much like the Creature, ungovernable. Although they understand the human as a collection in very different ways, both Shelley and Wells use an attention to practices of collection to destabilize a notion of the unitary subject and the settled political and biological categories that follow from it.

In *Moreau*, H.G. Wells offers us a tale of evolutionary hubris and imperial excess— Dr. Moreau, like Frankenstein, has taken his experiment of trying to create a humanoid creature much too far. Like *Frankenstein*, *Moreau* also features several instances of collection and collecting that remain relatively understudied and offer new insights into the novel's more prominent (and well-documented) themes of evolution and imperialism, as well as offering us another try at answering the question of what it might have meant to be human at the turn of the twentieth century. *Moreau* is also the text in this project that fully harnesses the collection's ability to produce worlds, even if the world he creates on his island falls apart. Most scholarship focused on *Moreau* offer accounts of the novel's participation in the discourse surrounding evolution in the late 1890s and the early 1900s in Britain. H.G. Wells, in addition to being a prolific novelist, was also an essayist who had a degree in biology, and frequently published work on prescient biological discoveries and issues alongside his fiction— one of these issues, of course, is evolution. In most scholarly editions of *Moreau*, the novel is usually contextualized by appendices that offer excerpts from the writings of Charles Darwin, Thomas H. Huxley, and Herbert Spencer alongside work

that explains the vivisection debates of the 1870s. Mason Harris, John Glendening and others have convincingly argued that Wells changed his mind about evolutionary theory as he was writing the book— shifting from a Lamarckian notion of acquired traits being heritable to a more Darwinian one, a natural selection unaffected by directional flows or progress towards an ideal form or being. Another prominent section of scholarship about the novel addresses the text’s examination of the animal/human divide, or its lack thereof—as Kelly Hurley points out, evolutionary thought “described a bodily metamorphosis which, even though taking place over aeons and multiple bodies, rendered the identity of the human body in a most basic sense— its distinctness from “the brute beasts”— unstable” (56). She argues that the Gothic elements of abhuman entities— neither fully human, nor fully bestial— like the Beast People force us to confront the idea of a declining humanity. Feminist analyses of the novel point out the almost complete exclusion of women in the novel except for a few of the Beast People, who are then immediately portrayed as promiscuous and or violent, to suggest that the novel plays with the idea of a purely masculine form of replication.³¹ Finally, scholars in postcolonial studies have pointed out that the novel addresses the British empire and imperial anxieties and could be read as an allegory for failed systems of governance imposed through empire. In the sections that follow, I think through how the novel subverts the idea of the imperial menagerie and an imperial collective through its depiction of the Beast People. I show how Prendick, the narrator except in the initial letter that frames the novel, moves

³¹ See Elaine Showalter, ‘The Apocalyptic Fables of H. G. Wells’, in *Fin de Siècle/Fin Du Globe: Fears and Fantasies of the Late Nineteenth Century*, ed. by John Stokes, *Warwick Studies in the European Humanities* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1992), pp. 69–84

through these collection and collective forms to collapse the distinctions between the idea of the animal or the human, in terms of both the body and the body politic, to call the category of the human into question. Unlike the relation between the subject and governance developed by Dickens and Gaskell, who utilize the collection to illustrate bad governance and offer epistemological and political solutions, Well's collection offers no political correctives or epistemological reshuffles that can repair the relationship between the subject and governance. Like Shelley, he too ends his novel by leaving Prendick, Montgomery's collected subject, alone.

Menageries, Gardens, and the Imperial Ark

The Island of Dr Moreau revolves around a collection of animals, a menagerie. The nineteenth century menagerie is inextricable from the idea of empire. Payal Taneja points out that the buying and selling of exotic animals for Moreau's experiments exposes the novel's imbrication within imperial trade routes that facilitated commerce and science (141). However, she points out, the novel is less interested in using the menagerie to depict human dominion over nature than in questioning the idea of "governance" (142). She argues that the "novel undermines the confidence in overseas trade of exotic animals by staging the downfall of the agents of such trade: the sailors and the scientist (145). Both Kurt Koenigsberger and Harriet Ritvo understand the nineteenth century British menagerie to be an integral part of imperial display. Imperial expansion meant that merchants frequently brought back animals to London, where, if they survived, they were displayed to the public as an example of the reach of the empire. Koenigsberger suggests that menageries and zoological gardens became a part of what Tony Bennet called the "exhibitionary

complex”— they were spectacles that evoked wonder and dominion in equal measure.³² He also suggests that the menagerie was meant to be a form that offered totality— not only was each menagerie composed of a type specimen that encompassed the entirety of a species, but that it was meant to offer a comprehensive view of every animal there ever was. Of course, the mechanism of getting to ‘every animal’ was through the expansion of empire. Writers who evoked the form, Koenigsberg points out, often relied on the term “delineation” to “catalog, describe, and advertise zoological collections and displays” (62). Menageries as a form afford several, sometimes contradictory, impulses: on the one hand, their use as a display of imperial power makes them displays of luxury, power, and excess, whilst their aspiration to ‘totality’ makes them collect, classify, taxonomize and manage animals as part of a project to produce verisimilitude and eliminate the very idea of the excess.

In the introduction, I turned to the work of Susan Stewart as an early theorist of the collection as form. For her, Noah’s Ark is the “archetypal collection” (152). The ark figures the transformation of history into taxonomy— all that once was is to be destroyed, and all that remains is an ark ordered by kind:

“The world of the ark is a world not of nostalgia but of anticipation.

While the earth and its redundancies are destroyed, the collection maintains its integrity and boundary. Once the object is completely severed from its origin, it is possible to generate a new series, to start again within a context that is framed by the selectivity of the collector... The world of the ark is dependent on a prior creation: Noah

³² See Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995).

has not invented a world; he is simply God's broker. What he rescues from oblivion is the two that is plus one, the two that can generate seriality and infinity by the symmetrical joining of asymmetry...the point of the collection is forgetting— starting again in such a way that a finite number of elements create, by virtue of their combination, an infinite reverie. Whose labor make the ark is not the question: the question is what is inside” (152).

For Stewart, the collection's ability to erase its own process of becoming by imposing totality makes it a problematic historical form. Yet, as we have seen in both literary and non-literary spheres, collection has become a form sometimes overdetermined by its relation to history—collecting institutions like the museum and the archive explicitly construct themselves as repositories for and producers of history. Rather than erasing history, contemporary scholarship has conflated the form of collection generally with particular historical collections, an uneasy relation as evidenced by the fact that most historical collections contend with the problem of looted and unethically obtained materials. What Stewart doesn't point out is that the ark, in its act of erasure, becomes symbolic of that very erasure. True erasure occurs when we don't realize that something is missing—but the ark as a collection reminds us of a world that was destroyed. In *Moreau*, the dissolution of the menagerie works in the same way. The form is systematically destroyed through Moreau's experiments, and though the Beast people revert to their more 'bestial' natures, they can never return to being separate, as they were in the menagerie.

Though we frequently think of *Moreau* in terms of vivisection and evolution, there is not as much scholarship on the novel's deployment of the form of the menagerie. This is not surprising, partly because the novel itself seems hazy on whether or not it plays with the idea of the menagerie. When Prendick asks Montgomery whether the collection of animals aboard the *Ipecacuanha* is an "ocean menagerie," all Montgomery has to say is that it "looks like it" (22). Prendick, unsatisfied with the lack of clarity in this answer, tries again— this time, he tries to think of the animals as commodities— he asks Montgomery whether they are "merchandise, curios?" and is only met a response that is, again, "It looks like it, doesn't it?" (22). The lack of confirmation, and the emphasis on understanding that this assemblage of animals is based on what it 'looks' like foreshadows the novel's own subversion of the idea of a menagerie. Again and again, we must question whether what we encounter on the island is a menagerie, and if not, what about it is like or unlike a menagerie, just as Prendick does. We also must contend with the question of whether Prendick is a part of the menagerie. When he thanks Montgomery for saving him, Montgomery characterizes his rescue of Prendick specifically as specimen collection, which is reinforced by the fact that he is on a collection trip for Moreau procuring animals when he finds Prendick. Like the unfortunate puma, the llama, the deerhounds, the rabbits, and other assorted animals, Prendick too seems to be a part of this scraggly menagerie.

Nineteenth century menageries and ethnographic displays were not always separate— sometimes, they both constituted forms of public entertainment and education. As Qureshi points out, performers, often from colonial spaces, were a part

of displays in London and elsewhere, and they negotiated the conditions of their display with varying levels of agency. Exhibitions or displays such as “Farini’s Friendly Zulus” at the Royal Aquarium or “The Earthmen!” at the Regent Gallery were not uncommon at this time, and people and animals were also displayed in public venues and engagements that included panoramas, dioramas, and lectures. Prendick’s status as a “collected” specimen is a minor subversion of this historical trope— as a white British man who was also a biologist, he was more likely to be the collector than a specimen— but the novel quickly moves beyond subversion to something else altogether.

If Prendick is “collected,” we could reasonably assume that he will be subjected to whatever it is that Montgomery and Moreau do to their collection. It is an assumption that Prendick himself erroneously makes when he breaks into Moreau’s lab and sees what the doctor has done to the puma. After viewing the puma’s flayed, painful, and humanoid body in the lab, Prendick thinks that Moreau and Montgomery are engaged in human vivisection and fears that he might be their next subject. When he runs away from Moreau’s enclosure and finds himself amongst the Beast People, he allows them to think that he is one of them, that he too has been created by Moreau. The Ape-Man thinks that he is, like the Ape-Man himself, a ‘five man’, thereby including Prendick in the Beast People’s social hierarchy. This misapprehension is corrected when Montgomery and Moreau find Prendick, and Moreau explains the animal vivisection that he carries out on the island. The day after this explanation, Prendick goes from being one of the ‘five-finger’ Beast People to one of the men with the whips— a man who came to the island and was not made by Moreau in the House

of Pain. In this instance, Prendick slowly distinguishes himself from the company of both the Beast People and the animal specimens that Montgomery procured for Moreau and becomes one of the collectors. In the chapter on *Mary Barton*, I argued that by making John Barton a specimen, Gaskell concretizes his class position and prevents mobility—the opposite happens in *Moreau* with Prendick. Not only does Prendick run away from Moreau to resist become a part of his collection, he also moves in and out of the collective of the Beast People who live outside Moreau's compound. He renders classification—Gaskell's objective in *Mary Barton*—moot as he moves through the various collections and collectives on the island, embodying Wells's disenchantment with the utility of the form.

If the menagerie form is supposed to collect, delineate, classify, and manage, then Moreau's experiment fundamentally alters it. Instead of delineation, he makes hybrids that collapse the notion of taxa and hierarchy—although, only incompletely, for he is still trying to reach some kind of ideal, human standard for each of his creations. He, unlike others who oversee a menagerie, is uninterested in making sure that each of his animals remains distinct. Instead, he wants to “find out the extreme limit of plasticity in living shape,” and toy with the limits of a category such as animal or human (110). The animals collected for his experiment dissolve and emerge as new creatures in his lab, through excruciating pain, and become beings whom we struggle to classify as human or animal because they still maintain vestiges of the animals they are composed of. The menagerie collapses into the individual when we consider characters like M'ling, whom Prendick describes as “a complex trophy of Moreau's horrible skill,— a bear, tainted with dog and ox”—where these creatures may have

existed separately in a collection, they are now fused together within a single body, and fused so as to strip them of their original behaviors or instincts even if that fails to happen (130). Moreau says that when he first makes his creatures, they appear to him as indisputably human, but that this changes. When his creatures do not meet his standards of humanness, or, as Moreau puts it, as the “beast-flesh grows day by day back again,” he expels them from the enclosure on to the island and leaves them to fend for themselves (182). Thus, they are removed from his collection.

From Collection to Collective

When Prendick first enters the settlement of Beast People in the novel, he is subjected to a recitation of their law, a ritual that he suggests holds the community to some semblance of order, though it is in decline. It is unclear here whether the Law is something the Beast people produced, or if it is strange gospel that Moreau has produced as a form of social control. However, we later learn that it is the Ape-Man who comes up with the law after being expelled from Moreau’s enclosure. He is taught to “read, or at least to pick out letters, and...some rudimentary ideas of morality” by one of the Kanaka men who accompany Moreau and Montgomery to the island (121). This teaching is religious, as Moreau specifies that the boy who taught the Ape-Man was a “bit of a missionary” (121). The allusion to missionary work puts the novel firmly within the framework of European empires, since missionary work constituted an integral part of imperial networks.

The Beast People, once discarded from Moreau’s collection when they become too bestial for him, become a collective— free from the structure that encloses them, they have to create their own form of governance. There is ritual and structure

associated with the Beast People's community on the island. When Moreau first encounters them and is asked whether he comes to live with them, he responds that he has, only to be told that then "he must learn the Law" (90). The Law becomes prerequisite for participation in this community. Not only does Prendick have to learn it, he must perform this learning through repetition. He must "say the words" (90). Though Prendick is contemptuous of the ritual, he nevertheless identifies it as a ritual, a ceremony. As he recites the prohibitions, clearly modelled on the ten commandments, he too falls into a "rhythmic fervour" alongside the Beast People (91). Like a menagerie, the law offers structure— the Beast People have a list that dictates how they mustn't act, a figure they venerate, a priest/teacher who "says" or passes on the Law in oral form, and punishments that follow the breaking of the Law. The Law also adjudicates morality— "evil is he who breaks the law," while those who adhere are, if not good, then at least barely civilized (142). Though Moreau professes to have little to do with the Law, he still ends up acting as the enforcement mechanism attached to this community— he is the one who punishes the Beast People with threats of returning them to his laboratory or the "House of Pain," and eventually, Prendick attempts to assume that role.

However, the novel is not optimistic about the longevity of this type of order— the Beast People eventually regress so much that they start flouting their own laws, eventually reverting to their beastly selves. When Moreau dies, the collective is temporarily destabilized—

““Is there a Law now?” asked the Monkey-man. “Is it still to be this and that? Is he dead indeed?”

“Is there a Law?” repeated the man in white. “Is there a Law, thou
Other with the Whip?” (162).

Prendick, realizing how precarious the order produced by the Law is, tries to suggest that Moreau’s death only meant that he was now watching them from above, and that the Law itself remained alive through this unseen scrutiny. However, given that the Law is formed so much through the material alteration of bodies, order wrought through the process of cutting, grafting, stitching, and healing, a disembodied form of enforcement or surveillance does not hold much power. The sociality and political community of the Beast People is formed through the flesh, and when it becomes disembodied, it starts to fall apart. With no Moreau or Montgomery to organize them, and with Prendick avoiding them, the members of this tentative collective don’t regress into becoming the collection that they once were— they become feral, ungoverned. Prendick emphasizes this decline by saying that they do not revert to “such beasts as the reader has seen in zoological gardens,” mostly because they couldn’t; the grafting of one animal onto the other had been too final. When describing them, Prendick is forced to resort to think of each creature as a degree of something rather than as a whole— he points out that “one perhaps was ursine chiefly, another feline chiefly, another bovine chiefly” (195). What falls outside the animals each of the Beast People are “chiefly” composed of is reduced to a “generalized animalism” which escapes any attempt at classification or delineation (195).

The Beast People’s animalism changes and is less shocking to Prendick as the novel progresses—he first identifies the animalistic qualities of the beast people as “true animalism” (66). After living on the island for a bit, he characterizes this

animalism as “grotesque” as he tries to link what he knows of Moreau’s experiments to the Beast people (80). The third time he refers to the animalism of the Beast people, he characterizes it as an “explosive” animalism, characterized as such because of Prendick’s fear that the Beast Folk would revert to their animal selves abruptly after Moreau’s death. It is the final mention of animalism that is characterized as “generalized,” foreshadowing the fact that Prendick now always sees this animalism in everyone he encounters. When Prendick is finally rescued and returned to London, which we might associate with order and civilization, he is unable to stomach the sounds of the city. The crowd begins to sound like the Beast People, and he is no longer able to distinguish between the city dweller and the creatures that he met on Moreau’s island. Everyone is suspect—

“prowling women would mew after me; furtive, craving men glance jealously at me; weary, pale workers go coughing by me with tired eyes and eager paces, like wounded deer dripping blood; old people, bent and dull, pass murmuring to themselves; and, all unheeding, a ragged tail of gibing children. Then I would turn aside into some chapel,—and even there, such was my disturbance, it seemed that the preacher gibbered “Big Thinks,” even as the Ape-man had done; or into some library, and there the intent faces over the books seemed but patient creatures waiting for prey” (205).

He maps the fate of Moreau’s island on to the much larger island and imperial center that is London. And that is precisely the point— that there is no fundamental difference between the Beast People and the rest of humanity, that some aspect of

Moreau's experiment has already come to pass in London, and that imperial and evolutionary decline is inevitable. The distinction between the menagerie or the collection and the collective formed by the Beast People on the island has been firmly established through the process of vivisection and surgery—the collection had to be indelibly, materially transformed in order to bring about even the potential for a collective. In London, however, Prendick's narration suggests that something of this process has already taken place, and much like what has happened on the island, there is no going back to a previous state of imagined order. What is in store is only decline.

Collecting Butterflies and Possibilities

What kind of knowledge does *Moreau* produce, and what kind of knowing occurs throughout the novel? Like *Frankenstein*, *Moreau* is a frame narrative, and a more conventional example of the genre. The novel begins with a letter from Charles Edward Prendick, who identifies himself as the nephew of Edward Prendick, the narrator in the novel. This letter states that this narrative was found amongst his uncle's possessions after his death, and that he is publishing the story "in accordance with, [he] believes, [Prendick's] intentions" (8). The link between the writing of this narrative and its transmission to the reader is complete, unlike *Frankenstein*, suggesting that this is a closed narrative—this is all there is to it. Within this closed tale there are more enclosures. *Moreau* falls quickly within the genre of castaway narratives, or stories where men (usually) are shipwrecked on a deserted (initially) island and must rely on their wits to survive. The conventions in the genre will then include an encounter with the Other, whether in the form of people, flora, or fauna, and will usually end with the return of the castaway to the imperial center after a

period of growth or individual development. Prominent examples of this genre include *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels*, and work in this genre may also be considered travel narratives, adventure stories, or at the turn of the twentieth century, scientific or imperial romances. The idea of enclosure is significant to these novels—the foreign island, for it is *always* a foreign island— becomes a laboratory of sorts in which the subjectivity of the protagonist is formed or altered, and this process can take place without the intrusion of entanglements or issues that would come with a setting such as a city or a town. The protagonist need not concern himself with having to navigate relationships with friends, family, or colleagues, other than to think about them wistfully, in the abstract, which then allows the writer to develop the encounter with the Other to the exclusion of all else.

The idea of the island as an enclosed setting is particularly well documented in Caribbean and postcolonial literature, where it functions as an imperial laboratory of sorts.³³ The island is treated initially as both terra incognita and terra nullius, as terrain that is constructed as uninhabited precisely so that it may be conquered. As Prendick soon realizes, the enclosure of the island is required for Moreau's experiments because he had already been expelled from London for his work— he *needed* the island's remote location in order to escape scrutiny, judgment, and censure. However, he also needed the island to be on imperial trade routes in order to acquire his animals. The island is a space of networked enclosure. The garden of Eden is another significant

³³ See E. Deloughrey, 'Island Ecologies and Caribbean Literatures', *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie*, 95.3 (2004), 298–310. A strand of postcolonial and Caribbean criticism (especially work by Sylvia Wynter) also draws from the figure of Caliban as the racialized Other from William Shakespeare's *Tempest*. More contemporary strands of Caribbean writing also evoke the idea of the island as imperial laboratory and its troubled presents.

allusion with regards to the island— both are spaces where life is created, and both are governed by a set of rules that punish rule-breakers with expulsion. Furthermore, if zoological gardens draw on the idea of the garden of Eden— as complete catalogue of all life that divinely, and perfectly, exists— then the island subverts both these ideas with its collection and collective of Beast People who are produced through the collapse of species boundaries, by a man who is certainly not God.

Islands as enclosed spaces with minimal interference from the rest of the world are also significant to biological thought now and during the nineteenth century— much of Darwin’s work in the Galapagos could be conducted because the islands constituted a kind of closed ecological unit that lent itself to the study of populations because the scientist could control for factors such as geographical spread and weather. Wells also seems to explicitly evoke Darwin in the setting of this novel when he offers coordinates for the island— “latitude 5° S. And longitude 105° E.”— however, scholars now consider this to be an error (7). In his edited volume of the novel, Mason Harris points out that longitude 105° E would place Prendick on the opposite side of the ocean from the wreck of the *Lady Vain*, and that the coordinate was likely 105° W, which would place the island closer to the wreck. Harris and others point out that Moreau’s Island is “in an isolated part of the Pacific with the Galapagos Islands as the nearest land” (72). Island biogeography, sometimes referred to as insular biogeography, is an entire field devoted to the study of the populations of small ecosystems in remote areas with minimal disturbances from the rest of the world, facilitated significantly by the scientific inquiry conducted in remote islands encountered by merchants from European empires. Finally, there is another enclosure

within this already enclosed narrative— Moreau’s laboratory and living quarters exists within an enclosure in the island, and it is in this enclosure that much of Moreau’s scientific work takes place. As discussed earlier, when his creations don’t meet his standards for humanity, they are expelled from this enclosure. When these enclosures are breached, catastrophic things happen— Prendick’s uninvited presence on the island precipitates the narrative, and the Puma Woman’s escape from the laboratory causes Moreau’s death. The text maps order on to enclosures, but then points out the very fragility of these structures.

How might we think of enclosure and containment vis a vis the production of knowledge, particularly human knowledge? First, both enclosure and containment are primarily spatial properties— they are most often used to understand how spaces work. Prendick’s nephew writes that his “uncle passed out of human knowledge about latitude 5° S. And longitude 105° E., and reappeared in the same part of the ocean after a space of 11 months,” thereby mapping knowledge on to space (8). One reading of this sentence is simply that no one knew anything of Prendick in the time that he disappeared; however, given the novel’s examination of the category of the human, the idea of *human* versus other forms of knowledge is significant. Either the novel offers us knowledge that fills this gap in human knowledge, or it offers us a kind of knowledge and knowing that is not human at all. Because of his status as the narrator, much of the negotiation of the knowledge and its qualities falls to Prendick. He addresses knowledge in the very first page of his narrative— Prendick begins by immediately disagreeing with the reporting about the sinking of the *Lady Vain*. It was reported that there were four men who jumped in a dinghy, he points out, but *actually*

there were only three; in making this move early on in the novel (he even gives the date for the report) he immediately establishes the reliability of his knowledge as compared to what is produced in newspapers. This, he tells us, is the more authoritative account. However, after this move of confidently asserting what he knows, Prendick proceeds to spend the rest of the novel doubting not just what he knows, but the nature of knowledge itself.

For Prendick, knowledge of the island is difficult to come by. Apart from the first few pages where he performs his correction of reporting, he narrates himself as desperately seeking knowledge, while constructing Moreau and Montgomery as those who have it. When Montgomery rescues Prendick, he phrases his justification for saving the man in terms of knowledge: “You had the need, and I had the knowledge” (29) he says, making knowledge both a response to lack and curiously contingent to moral narrative— if Montgomery hadn’t had the knowledge, then would Prendick have been saved? Prendick begins to produce knowledge formally after Moreau tells him about his experiments. His certainty about the Beast People presents itself in a chapter titled “Concerning the Beast Folk,” which immediately follows Moreau’s explanation, and is framed like a zoological catalogue. However, I argue that this exercise, instead of offering an account of the Beast People that offers clarity, produces more doubt— he is unable to sustain conventions of zoological description when he describes them, which then highlights the limits of representation afforded by these genres.

Prendick resorts to the form of the catalogue when he describes the Beast People to the reader, a form conventionally used to depict menageries and produce

zoological knowledge. He immediately admits to his inability to sketch adequately, referring to the convention of zoological catalogues being furnished with sketches, before attempting to describe each of the Beast People as though they are specimens. However, he fails in this attempt because instead of telling us what they are, he consistently talks about them in terms of how they are insufficiently human. He points out that their limbs are disproportionate, that their heads are set too far forward on their bodies, and that they lack the “inward sinuous curve of the back which makes the human figure so graceful” (128). He immediately foregrounds his discussion of their facial features by saying that this is their “most obvious deformity,” once again foreclosing the possibility of them being anything other than imperfect humans. The list goes on. Their hands are described as “always malformed” (128). In short, Prendick’s catalogue consistently constructs the Beast People as constituted by the negative—by what they are not, what they fall short of, what they fail to become. And perhaps this is when the exercise frustrates him because he realizes that the catalogue, a form that is meant to present new creatures in a constitutive way by describing what features they have, is unsuitable to his representative project of consistently depicting the Beast People as less than human. Furthermore, how might he describe creatures that are evolutionarily unstable—how might a catalogue, which offers little in terms of temporality and constructs specimens as timeless and frozen in time simultaneously, account for degeneration? And so ends his catalogue.

The form of the novel offers representational solutions. Koenigsberger understands “the English novel as a kind of zoological cabinet [that] sought to arrange, present, and manage domestic and imperial narratives—though, crucially, however

much it labored, it never quite contained the cultural energies it strove to bring within its compass” (22). This narrative failure makes sense in many ways, because it is always easier to manage unchanging things rather than things that change. The novel— with its narratives that unfold over time—cannot as effectively contain things the way a zoological cabinet can, because its treatment of the subject is fundamentally different. In a menagerie or a catalogue, the specific is almost always subordinated to the general— the illustrations that we see are of animals as type rather than animals as individual; the specimen is meant to signify an entire species, and not just the model that an artist may have used. Botanical and zoological illustrations frequently made composite illustrations— doing away with “irregularities” to produce type specimens. This is not to say that specificity is completely elided— reports of menageries often include descriptions of individual animals with distinct names, personalities, and behaviors— but the relation to species is always present. Spectators are always expected to ask how the individual is similar to, or different from, the abstract idea of its species. On the other hand, while novels may also sustain a similar relation to individuals and the communities of which they are a part, they do make it easier to represent the individual with all of their quirks and qualities, conventional or otherwise, because they offer a narrative form that accounts for a subject changing over time. The novel makes it easier to narrate change— if the Beast People do not stay static enough for zoological or ethnographic descriptions, then they can be represented by the narration of the process of their creation and their degeneration.

This difference in genres also indicates differences in the status of knowledge— are things knowable as abstract, timeless concepts or are they

historically and materially contingent? Critics of both *Frankenstein* and *Moreau* often turn to Foucault's ideas of the classical episteme and the modern episteme to describe this distinction in the quality of knowledge. The former, for which Foucault offers the ideal form of a table, produces knowledge through the taxonomy, description and organization of external material objects whilst the latter produces knowledge as contingent on factors such as labor, capital, temporality, power, and language. I only bring up this mode of scholarship to point out that regardless of whether we trust Foucault's terms, this distinction is a useful one.³⁴ Prendick is invested in understanding the world as it is— Moreau contemptuously describes him as “collecting butterflies” (114). What he means is that for Prendick, knowledge is produced through the delineation of categories, and the sanctity of the limits of each of these categories. He might want to know what these limits are, but not exceed them. Moreau does just that. He moves beyond knowledge as something that is produced when the material world is structured in specific ways to knowledge as something that produces material differences in pre-existing, inviolable categories. The distinction here is between knowledge as something that is descriptive versus knowledge as digressive.

It is also here that the form of collection encounters a limitation in terms of its ability to produce particular kinds of knowledge— it is hard to know through collection when its constituent parts keep merging into each other in ways that cannot be materially or narratively undone. An account of this digressive knowledge is what

³⁴ For an overview on epistemes, see Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, 1st American ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971) and Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 1st American ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972)

the novel produces, which is why the question of what is human, inhuman, or insufficiently human remains unresolved. And it is why, as the novel's subtitle states, it is a "possibility."

Terms of Dissolution

Thus far, I have discussed Wells's work as utilizing the collection form only to dissolve it, calling its efficacy into question. However, what are the determinants of this dissolution— at what point does Moreau know that he has failed? What exactly is he aspiring to? It is not a stretch to point out that Moreau's goal is one of eugenics—the only question is whether he was after the creation of the perfect specimen of the white, European man or, as James Tyner suggests based on Montgomery's tolerance of M'Ling, to produce "racialized, laboring Others" (8). Similarly, in *Frankenstein*, the limit of the collection form's ability to create a subject is the Creature's racialized appearance— in both these novels, the figure of the racialized subject is the figure of the limit, the figure that causes dissolution.

Throughout both this chapter and my chapter discussing *Frankenstein*, I have used the term human and the subject almost interchangeably, although they are not interchangeable—one can be a subject without being a human, and vice versa. In Sylvia Wynter's theorization of the making of Man in the European tradition, she points out that there are two key stages to the development of Man— Man1 who emerges in the Renaissance as a political subject, and Man2, the bio-economic subject who is produced through the advent of the biological sciences. Man2 also has his non-European Other, who in *Moreau* is figured by the Beast People. Wynter and other scholars working in Caribbean Studies have long-since worked with the figure of

Caliban in Shakespeare's *Tempest* to talk histories of European conquest. What is Moreau if not another version of Shakespeare's Prospero? For Wynter, the post-Darwinian moment creates grounds for what she terms as the "Two Cultures" theory of knowledge.

"That is, as one whose disciplinary fields were to be all based on the new description of the human as a purely biocentric being, and in whose terms not only the people of the Black Diaspora, but this time the peoples of Black Africa itself (as well as their continent, Africa" together with all the colonized dark-skinned "natives" of the world and the darker-skinned and poorer European peoples themselves, were not to find themselves/ourselves as discursively and institutionally imprisoned as the Indians, the Negros-as-slaves and the Mad had been discursively and institutionally imprisoned... This principle, that of bio-evolutionary Natural selection, was now to function at the level of the new bourgeois social order as a de facto new Argument-From-Design— one in which while one's selected or dysselected status could not be known in advance, it would come to be verified by one's (or one's group's) success or failure in life" (310).

For all the promise of biological technology post Darwin, and potential in the project of drawing a biological link between all human beings as human, even if insufficiently so, Wynter points out that iteration of the human still produced the category of Black, Native, non-European, indentured, and poor Others. Thus, if we borrow her framework, and cast Moreau and the Beast People as Prospero and Caliban, as Man2

and his Others, we find that in each case the limit of the human is embodied by the racialized subject.

So, what are the politics of Wells's project of Moreau's unmaking of both the menagerie and the collective through the creation of the Beast People (after the death of the Indigenous Kanaka who had accompanied Moreau, thereby re-enacting the colonizing trope of violently erasing the Native community to produce *terra nullius*, land rendered available for the discoveries of imperial scientific practice) when the undoing of the form relies on one of the collection form's greatest harms—the colonial classification of people? Prendick's final account of London, and Londoners who were historically multi-ethnic but are coded as British and white in this instance as akin to the Beast People provides a small corrective—Wells seems to be suggesting that the imperial metropolis itself is not quite as human as we think because its inhabitants resemble the Beast People. However, in so doing, the figure of the racialized subject as the litmus test for humanity is further cemented, which only re-instantiates racial difference as central to European subjecthood.

Wells's utopianism was invested in the idea of the world state—after World War I, he was one of the most active proponents of the League of Nations as a necessary form of world governance. He also saw the British Empire as a suitable structure for the establishment of the world state because of its existing imperial spread, and much like Moreau's island, he envisioned the empire as a form that would undo itself. As Lorenzo Veracini points out, for Wells, “a single empire would abolish imperialism while technology would undo space” thus displacing the contestation of land that drives imperialism (168-9). In light of this, it is unsurprising that Wells

would figure Moreau's project of the settlement of an island to produce a version of 'perfected' humanity would fail—nor is it surprising that he extends this critique to the imperial center, and we must not forget, the island, of Britain. There is something wrong, he seems to be suggesting, in all collections and collectives on *all* islands, which subverts the center-periphery model that so often structures the relationship between London and various colonial spaces. However, Veracini's analysis of Wells's utopianism is incorrect when he suggests that Wells "routinely dismissed existing ideas of contradiction—race, class, nation, the state—and could only do so because the prospect of a world-state allowed him to sift the location of struggle away from actually existing geographies" (168). As is clearly visible in my own analysis of *Moreau*, he considered race, so much so that he accurately points out that the racialized person is the limit for the imperial adjudication of the human and, for his utopian collective of the world state, the political subject. However, it is also clear in the novel that he critiques the specific production of the racialized subject through empire—both the white European man and the laboring, racialized, Other are imperial categories. In short, he criticizes collection that produces the imperial iteration of the racialized subject as allegorized by Moreau and his experiments as unsustainable, but his criticism offers no way out for the racialized subject. Wells's theory of imperial collection—that it produced problematic subjects—offers no reparative or emancipatory futures for these subjects or the collectives they might form.

Conclusion

Both *Frankenstein* and *Moreau* address the question of the human in similar ways. Each novel begins with a scientist who tries to make a human, succeeds in this

endeavor, proceeds to be murdered by his creation which then makes the reader question the endeavor's success, which then precipitates the questioning of the category of the human itself. Instead of following a simpler structure— “What is human?” “Human is A, B, C”— both novels approach the idea as fixed and self-evident before attempting to reproduce it, failing, and then using that failure to constitute the question itself. We only need to know what the human is when we realize that our implicit knowledge of the category doesn't allow us to make the human. And in both cases, the practice of collection seems to facilitate this failure— collected parts don't cohere into wholes that neatly fit existing taxonomies or hierarchies, into existing structure of knowability. In Moreau, Wells's exceedingly pessimistic account of the supposed intrinsic bestiality of all human beings— which, however, is problematically routed first through explicitly racialized human beings— prompts the examination of the conditions in which this knowledge is made visible.

Though taxonomy and categorization continue to remain significant for the study of evolutionary biology, the pervasive racist fear of degeneration that emerged in the wake of Darwin's work is the dissolution of these very categories. Wells's move from the menagerie— a form that was developed during the Enlightenment based on the premise of a world where everything could be collected and neatly categorized without fearing mixture— to the collective of the Beast People, is reflective of this fear taken to an imaginative conclusion. This imagined post-evolutionary world makes a mockery of categorization, where the mechanism of degeneration could well cause one to 'regress' into a bestial state. Most of all, it makes a mockery of the idea of control— the Law is made only for it to be broken, the Beast People are ejected from

the compound for their lack of adherence to white British subjectivity. The shift from a world that can be explained through categorization to one where those very categories are unstable is a problem for the very utility of processes such as classification— what is the point, Wells seems to be asking— if it is all unpredictable anyway?

In *The Fate of Man*, Wells characterizes the “intelligence of the nineties” or the late Victorian period as one that determined the future by looking at the past (68). The assumption was that if enough of the past could be known, gathered, cataloged, and understood, we would all be adequately prepared for the future. However, taking umbrage with this outlook, Wells argues that what was needed instead was an orientation toward the future— a life lived based on an analysis of what *could* happen in the present or in the days to come. Even from this simple characterization, it is easy to see how the collection form is, for the most part, ideally suited to an analysis of the past, which is based on developing relations between discrete facts, happenings, objects, and ideas rather than an orientation toward the future that eschewed such cataloging for the calculation of probabilities. The problem with “assemblies of well-informed and progressive minds” who worked on the advancement of science, for Wells, is that even after the end of the Victorian era, they remained far too invested in the present, and more problematically, the past (82). *Moreau* ends up being an early instantiation, after *The Time Machine*, of Wells’s futurist orientation— an experiment in thinking in terms of possibility. He claims that “alertness to the future...is a novel and artificial thing in life,” an artificiality he constructs in *Moreau* through the use and subversion of the collection form.

Collecting, Re-Collecting: Opportunities and Limits

The problem with writing a dissertation on collection as form is that it becomes difficult to think of my own methodology outside the context of collecting. While I will stop short of saying that this dissertation is a collection— even I think that this might be pushing the form too far— I do think that the collection forms offer a pragmatics of engagement with literary study and pedagogy.

There is a lot of scholarship on the collection form and its instantiation in research in several fields, including history, literary studies, and anthropology. The collection forms of the archive and the museum are crucial sources for researchers, but they also present problems. Critical studies of both these institutional forms have pointed out how their collecting practices offer a history of domination, where accounts of power are over-represented while those subjected to this power can trace their own histories only in fragments. The archival encounter involves having to wade through the infrastructural and procedural practices of the collection form to arrive at boxes full of papers, objects, or other materials that have an affective charge even as they are conventionally understood to leave out affect in favor of the production of an ‘objective’ knowledge. Not accounting for affect makes the archive hostile to the researcher, and in the case of marginalized researchers, re-enacts the exclusions and oppressions that the documents they store might record. The analysis of affect in the archive as integral to the production of knowledge outside dominant structures such as white supremacy, and the archiving of affect outside the conventional structures of the library or the museum, are two strategies for engaging with the collection form by collecting, re-collecting, making, and unmaking, or engaging with its limits. Saidiya

Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* is one example. Hartman traces how an engagement with archives that contain the "judgments and classification that subjected young black women to surveillance, arrest, punishment, and confinement" might produce histories that "yield a richer picture." In her note on method, she describes her process thus:

"The endeavor is to recover the insurgent ground of these lives; to exhume open rebellion from the case file, to untether waywardness, refusal, mutual aid, and free love from their identification as deviance, criminality, and pathology; to affirm free motherhood (reproductive choice), intimacy outside the institution of marriage, and queer and outlaw passions; and to illuminate the radical imagination and everyday anarchy of ordinary colored girls which have not only been overlooked, but is nearly unimaginable" (xiv).

In the compelling work that follows, Hartman shows us how this method of critical fabulation, initially defined in 2008 in "Venus in Two Acts," pushes against the limits of the archive that rendered the stories of the women she studies almost invisible and re-collects them into this monograph. Another example of creative engagement with the archive is Sara Ahmed's "willfulness archive." She imagines this archive as a collection of "the documents that are passed down in which 'willfulness' comes up as a trait," but she is also quick to note that since archives also represent the domiciliation and imprisonment of the documents within them, the idea of the willfulness archive is a subversive repudiation of the archive form itself—it is the constitution of an archive in terms of what the form is meant to suppress. Hartman and

Ahmed rework the collection form to offer new critical possibilities and terms for engagement.

Thinking with and through collection as form is also useful for our scholarly fields. For instance, in my field of nineteenth century literary studies, work such as “Undisciplining Victorian Studies” forwarded by Ronjaunee Chatterjee, Alicia Chrifoff, and Amy Wong offers a necessary corrective to the elision of race in the discipline. These writers push for scholarship that remakes the collection of writers and texts that traditionally compose the field— for example, the inclusion of thinkers who have been shunted away from the “Victorian” field through its liberal logics and located in postcolonial studies, race and ethnic studies, or Indigenous studies, even while they can be understood as part of the Victorian world and Victorian texts. These authors specifically call for a new politics of relation, one that must “destabilize regulatory categories of identity and their constituent perspectives on the world and on the texts we study,” which suggests to me that the deployment of a practice of “re-collection” in terms of the canon and the bibliography through the re-constitution of the relations of these forms would be useful to this project’s call for a more radical citational practice that centers marginalized scholars (382).

The authors of “Undisciplining” express their discomfort with formalist analysis, analysis that I use as method in this project, because of its propensity to leave out “weird” or “odd” forms. But as I hope to have shown through this dissertation, forms such as the collection, while they functioned in totalizing ways, also afforded the weird, the odd, and the inconsistent — in short, a pragmatic engagement with

formalism shows that method doesn't have to produce totalizing accounts and can pay attention to each form's limits.

In terms of pedagogy, the production of syllabi, the most-used and yet innocuous form of the collection-form in the university, has been an important and necessary extension of these projects— digital projects like “Undisciplining the Victorian Classroom” assemble and produce syllabi, zoomcasts, and other pedagogical material that do the critical work of redefining the field through an anti-racist, anti-colonial lens. These syllabi, produced and edited by a collective of scholars, illustrate the potential for something like the syllabus, which has worked equally well as a mechanism of the exclusions of race and coloniality from the field, to be re-collected to address these very problems. Re-collected syllabi actively remake the field in their classrooms through the disruption of the white literary canon, by, for instance, ensuring that non-white and non-British authors are not confined to the uncomfortably named categories of “race week” or “empire week,” and by devoting significant space and time to the work of authors formerly excluded from the canon and treating them as foundational rather than ancillary to the period. The repudiation of Macauly's single shelf of “a good European library” through scholarship such as Gauri Viswanathan's *Masks of Conquest* and Sanjay Seth's *Subject Lessons* stresses the need for these efforts to critically engage with the Victorian studies classroom outside the global north, and more of the innovative work done with Victorian studies from scholars and institutions outside of these networks needs to be more actively engaged with. Another example of a pedagogical intervention that takes up the collection form is the teaching and production of anthologies for use in university classrooms. As established

collections that represent the literary canon, anthologies have the potential to re-collect and so subvert the literary canon, as does the teaching of anthologies critically as a specific instantiation of collection in classrooms. Therefore, anthologizing outside of existing norms of periodization and disciplinarity offers opportunities for collecting otherwise.

While these pedagogical re-collections are useful and necessary within the current context of the university, as I suggested in the introduction, I do not expect that engaging with the collection form's non-totalizing impulses will produce radical or revolutionary outcomes. However, given the popular understanding of the Victorian period as a "collecting age," it is important to engage with the subversive potential of the form to question this definitional popular understanding. In recent adaptations of Victorian literature, or media set in the Victorian period, collection becomes an almost depoliticized, aesthetic or instrumental form—the language of flowers in the 2020 film *Enola Holmes* is merely a key required to solve the mystery of her mother's disappearance. It's not that a critical stance towards collection is not possible in popular culture—one only has to look to the scene in *Black Panther* where Killmonger recovers Wakandan artefacts from the museum for an example of such a depiction—but rather that collection become an aesthetic marker instead of a mechanism, a figure rather than form. Rethinking collection is important to disrupting these continuing popular understandings of Victoriana, especially when Victorian authors themselves frequently deviated from this use of the form.

As I have shown in this dissertation, nineteenth century experiments regarding the collected literary subject and the collections *of* literary subjects do not offer a

single ideological or political argument, but rather a series of arguments about the potential of the form as it functions within the novel. While Shelley and Wells narrate collected subjects who are incompatible within existing or newly constructed collective or political structures, Gaskell and Dickens narrate how collection can help subjects be seen or exercise epistemic authority within structures that marginalize them. However, even in the case of Gaskell and Dickens, the promise of the collection as an emancipatory form is modest—John Barton, though his collection facilitates the changing of economic relations in Manchester, still dies at the end of the novel; Miss Flite, though she successfully mounts a criticism of Chancery, remains dependent on the charity of others to survive.

However, the narration of collection complicates each of these novels' conclusions about their subjects. Mary Shelley's strategy of leaving the narrative structure of the novel open through her employment of the epistolary form suggests that though her collected subject, her poor, monstrous Creature, is inassimilable within the novel, there is always the potential for a newfound document that might change this—either in terms of the Creature's isolation, or in terms of his relation to the world. This narrative invitation is one that multiple authors have taken up—for instance, in Victor LaValle's *Destroyer*, the Creature emerges from the Arctic in the modern age, responding to its alienation by destroying the world that had alienated it. In a more troubling vein, though Mary and Jem have to leave Manchester at the end of *Mary Barton*, Job Legh's deployment of collection to narrate and make things known promise knowability in their new lives as settlers in Toronto, which in turn allows us to see that for Gaskell, the deployment of collection can both help make the plight of

the working class known in an oppressive economic structure whilst simultaneously authorizing settler colonialism in collection's capacity to produce knowledge.

Dickens's use of the Miss Flite's collection functions within the public sphere outside the novel as a possible solution to the representability of Chancery in the mid-nineteenth century—her collection, first published through serialized installations in the periodical press, is model for a usable model for public and fictional critique. And, finally, Wells's experiment of dissolving one instantiation of the collection form to produce another, only to have that fail as well communicates his profound ambivalence of the form's ability to produce effective political structures or political knowledge. However, Wells's pessimism—and his novella of the 'possibility' of decline—still relies on the form to narrate its own decline, and we can argue, decline in general. Thus, he ends up using collection to narrate imperial decline—a truly ironic use of the form when we consider how the British empire is understood by many *as* an empire of collection.

All the interventions I have described above are modest in one way or another, and my intervention is modest, too, in the sense that unconventional deployments of or engagement with the collection form will not undo major structures like the museum, the library, the university or their colonial effects—the British Museum is still a collection of looted artefacts, and U.S. land-grant universities still function because of the appropriation of Native lands while housing troubling museal and archival collections. However, until a moment of dissolution or radical reinvention of these institutions emerges, engaging with the form in these small, pragmatic, and subversive ways that remain mostly in the key of the minor offer strategies for staying with the

mess—a move that Chatterjee et al. also invoke towards the end of their article by drawing of Fred Moten’s and Stefano Harney’s notion of study. They urge us to stay with the “difficulties and challenges of being interpellated subjects” within the field of Victorian studies (383)— and creating conditions of possibility for undoing, re-collecting or otherwise re-making what we have inherited.

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