Armchair Investigations; or, The Sublime and the Kitschy:

Dimensions of Literary Experience in Mystery Fiction

By Ann Radcliffe, Walter Scott, and Agatha Christie

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Acknowledgements

Behind every action, behind every thought, questions lie musing. *What is*? prompts some inquiries, and others, *What if* . . . ? The larger the enterprise, the longer the series of queries. *What is* an undergraduate thesis? *What if* it remains enjoyable? *What is* involved in curating the excitement? *What if* enthusiasm leads to digressions? *What is* a tolerable level of focus? *What if* I find faculty with patience enough for this experience ? *What is* experience?

What if, I don't know?

Sam Baker,
Thank you for respecting my freedom while showing me new horizons.

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Thank you for discussing research with me most mornings and also through Christmas Eve mass.

I've had a great time.

Abbreviations

ABH	Agatha Christie, *At Bertram's Hotel* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011), Kindle.
ATQ	Walter Scott, *The Antiquary*, ed. David Hewitt (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995).
AWN	Agatha Christie, *And Then There Were None* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011).
FLP	Agatha Christie, *Five Little Pigs* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011).
HM	Walter Scott, *The Heart of Mid-Lothian,* ed. David Hewitt and Alison Lumsden (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995).
MAS	Agatha Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (New York: The Bodley Head, 1920).
MOE	Agatha Christie, *Murder on the Orient Express* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011).
MRT	Ian Duncan, *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel: The Gothic, Scott, Dickens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
MSP	Daniel Tiffany, *My Silver Planet: A Secret History of Poetry and Kitsch*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).
MU	Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, ed. Bonamy Dobrée (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
RH	James B. Twitchell, *Romantic Horizons: Aspects of the Sublime in English Poetry and Painting, 1770-1850* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983).
SN	John Curran, *Agatha Christie's Secret Notebooks: Fifty Years of Mysteries in the Making* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).

Preface

Agatha Christie was one of the best selling authors of the twentieth century, and arguably the most popular author of her time. Yet she has garnered hardly any academic appreciation, and relatively little commentary even from literary historians writing for the general public.[1] Meanwhile, literary historians have, for the most part, systematically minimized the legacy and contemporary relevance of her main forerunners, among them tremendously popular proto-mystery authors like Ann Radcliffe and Walter Scott. In connecting these three authors, this thesis proposes that their popularity stems from the way they capture in their works essential, material elements of literary experience, even while their very popularity and material interest actually militated against their novels obtaining the status of literature. Specifically, I argue that these authors use forensic rhetoric and poetics: tools that reconstruct past actions (as is done, in legal contexts, by scientific criminal investigations) and distill those actions in a process which is analogous with that of reading, but which is not always considered "literary" by critics. A tradition flows to Christie from the gothic, crime-ridden mysteries of Radcliffe, a tradition which

[1] Several theories exist to explain the almost universal neglect of so famous an author. According to one biographer writing for the general public: "It turns out … to be Christie's very success that has made her uninteresting to critics. A woman writer who fails to go mad, have 'interesting' lovers, bear illegitimate children, commit suicide, or die in poverty is simply no fun." She continues by explaining that "traditional critics" understand Christie as "the Mrs. Average Conservative Housewife inexplicably producing international best-sellers[.]" Gillian Gill, *Agatha Christie: The Woman and Her Mysteries* (New York: Macmillan Inc., 1990), x-xi. Along these lines, some of Radcliffe's early critical interest derived from a completely unsubstantiated supposition that her own novels were so scary that they drove her mad, since her absence from the public sphere could only be explained by institutionalization in asylums.

Scott enriched when he added still more sophistication to already complex rules of literary engagement. Examining this tradition, this thesis attempts to sketch a new, formal model for literature at the nexus of gothic, mystery, and crime. It attends closely to what is shared by the authors in the counter-tradition it analyzes: to the modes of formal observation common to the three of them, and, relatedly, to the shared stylistic elements with which they capture both kitschiness and sublimity in the reconstruction of crimes, and of the ultimate act of reconstruction that is reading itself.

From the point of view generated by reader-oriented literary criticism, Christie's crime fiction is not a distraction from literary tradition; rather, the modes of observation she fashions mimic the sublime and kitchy experiences of likewise observant readers. Many perceive Agatha Christie's novels as mere puzzles, algebraic expressions that follow the template laid out by Edgar Allan Poe. We all know the mystery plot. The detective comes, finds clues, assembles them scientifically, assesses their accuracy, saves the day. But what, one might ask, is the role of the reader? Puzzles, algebra, templates -- these words denote the systematic manipulation of objects by a conscious agent. Framed as a question, the hypothesis runs thus: Might the detective mimic or symbolize the reader, who explores objects and technologies in order to interact with the text? If we conceptualize crime fiction, thus understood broadly, to not just involve readers emulating detectives, but also detectives emulating readers, one can see how the detective

tradition exists in relation to a tradition of reading. It must, therefore, have a place within literary and publication history. It must also possess roots that extend beyond Edgar Allen Poe. In this light, it becomes clear how Agatha Christie's corpus might relate to high literature despite its frequent assignation as popular fiction. When one sets genre aside for a moment, and views Radcliffe, Scott, and Christie without ranking their levels of artistic merit, patterns emerge illustrating their similar interests. These common preoccupations form a tradition that links gothic, historic, and detective narratives, and more specifically connects detection to literature. Across more than one-hundred and seventy years (the span traced here from Radcliffe's 1794 *The Mysteries of Udolpho* to Christie's 1965 *At Bertram's Hotel*), these authors asks readers and characters alike to identify the vectors along which the various dimensions of literary experience can be charted, by reading materially present clues.

Why, one might ask, does this project encompass such disparate authors? Can Radcliffe, Scott, and Christie legitimately occupy the same room, same conversation, the same paper? To my eyes, the greatest gap between them is that perceived between their audiences. It is viewing Christie as an author fundamentally interested in reader-writer contracts that best enables one to connect her novels to those of Sir Walter Scott and Ann Radcliffe. So whereas, in a very recent article that gives the best alternative contextualization for Christie's work to date, Shosuke Kinugawa contends for Agatha Christie's sophistication as a writer by likening her wordplay to

that of Edgar Allan Poe, I instead place her in conversation with Radcliffe and Scott, in order to emphasize the still deeper roots of her concern for her readers and of her sublimely kitchy style's appeal for them.[2] My approach to detective fiction portrays Agatha Christie not as an exemplar of a modern phenomenon, but rather as the modernizer of a timeless tradition concerned with interrelations between literary and worldly investigations. While most literary historians readily attest to Christie's importance to the reading public, her impact on literature and the twentieth-century more broadly is seldom considered, especially on the academic level. Like Robert Barnard, many consider Agatha Christie "a supremely gifted practitioner of this -- we won't say art, but -- craft." [3] The distinction between arts and crafts, or high and low arts extends back to antiquity. Termed in Ancient Greek *τέχνη* and *ποίησις* (*techne* and *poiesis*, from which words we get technology and poetry), the former refers to pragmatic construction, while the latter concerns aesthetic creation. An author like Christie is typically thought to be all technique, no poetics.

The stakes of this terminological difference between technique and poetics lie primarily in what one makes of the transmission of experience. I seek here to offer a multidimensional poetics of the reading experience of Christie, Radcliffe, and Scott as it includes, but transcends, the appreciation of technique to encompass also how experience is rendered and created.

[2]Shosuke Kinugawa, "Agatha Christie's Secret Fair Play," *Narrative* 26, no. 2 (May 2018): 163-180.
[3]Robert Barnard, A *Talent to Deceive: an Appreciation of Agatha Christie* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1980), 9.

"Poetics," then, in this study, refers to the analysis, in the tradition of Aristotle's study of tragedy, of how aesthetic experiences are made, in poems but also in prose work (and moreover, although not here, in media beyond literature).[4] To characterize a work as strictly technical is to dismiss the experiences it imparts as generic rather than authentic, fake rather than real, or popular rather than literary. In this way, when critics attribute styles and experiences to works, they evaluate those works, and form relationships with and among them, relations described with phrases such as highbrow and lowbrow, high art and low art, hitting home or far fetched. I envision the resulting axes of evaluation as vectors along which we can locate various material observations, charting out dimensions of literary experience we can explore. To start from the perspectives we take in relation to literary dimensions, I have framed each chapter with a vignette in italics that illustrates specific vectors of literary experience explored in that chapter by enticing readers into imagined journeys toward Christie's worlds. These journeys vary, from climbing up and down hypothetical stiles on her English estates to navigating through website museum holdings of her possessions to exploring Christie's homes as emblems of her social mobility and emotional transport. I also seek to draw attention to readerly perspective later in the

[4] While Dorothy Sayers has argued that detective fiction is the natural result of Aristotle's *Poetics*, even that *Poetics* "represents the finest guide to the writing of such fiction," her statements do not set the tone for this thesis. Where Sayers considers a streamlined plot integral to the detective story, I am interested in winding plots and narrative details that do not necessarily progress the story. Where Sayers apologies for the "ludicrous diction [...that has] characterized some varieties of the genre up to a very late point indeed" and assures readers that "there have recently been great efforts at reform[,]" I am fascinated with the ludicrous, absurd, or kitschy elements and argue that they are intrinsic to detective fiction.
"Aristotle on Detective Fiction," *Detective Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays,* ed. Robin W. Winks (Woodstock: The Countryman Press, 1988), 26.

chapters, with their subheadings. In each chapter, readers first encounter a subheading featuring the preposition "in" such as "Motion *in* Heart of Mid-Lothian"--which asks them to view the the literary dimensions from within the book by exploring the chapter's themes on the level of the narrative. With the last section in each chapter, however, readers are asked to step back in order to view subheadings characterized by the preposition "of," such as "Spaces *of* Udolpho." These concluding sections discuss literary dimensions from a perspective in which the novel is seen as an object within a larger context of literary circulation and publication history.

When thinking of dimensions in literature, formal aspects come to mind: points of punctuation, lines of text, spaces or areas of the page, and the physicality of described material. Instead of simply moving through theses aspects generally by casting them as the zero, first, second, and third dimensions of literature respectively, I focus on specific zones, and related concepts such as motion, pertinent to the mysteries of Radcliffe, Scott and Christie, as well as to detective fiction more generally. Each of my chapters explores one particular zone in which Christie, following Radcliffe and Scott, forensically articulates readerly experience with worldly events by aligning sublime and kitchy experiences inside and outside of her novels. In the opening chapter, "Styles, High and Low," I analyze material based assessments of style that are emblematized in Christie's debut fiction, *The Mysterious Affair of Styles*, and develop literary style as my primary vector of analysis: one with a tail in the realm of kitsch and a head reaching

into sublimity. This analysis of style leads into my second chapter, "Lines, False and True," which outlines a dimensional space between the style vector, an authenticity vector, and a temporal or historic vector, by discussing the poetics of fakery intrinsic both to nursery rhymes and to Christie's novel *Five Little Pigs.* Developing the importance of place for participatory reading, my third chapter, "Spaces, Old and New," relates Christie's *At Bertram's Hotel* to Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by showing how both novels link temporal anxieties with tangible locations, and thereby illustrate sublimity in the face of the ridiculous.

Continuing along with that mobile space that is the traveling coach, my fourth chapter, "Motions, Fast and Slow," explores historically emergent immediacies and their corresponding technologies in Scott's *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* and Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express.* Scott's novel, I argue, renders synonymous moral, social, and physical mobility; Christie's novel presents mobility, and the experience of being stuck, as an allegory for Christie's literary circulation in the mass market paperback publishing industry. This chapter thus pauses the discussion on dimensions to explore the closely related phenomenon of motion as it connects explicitly with the rendering of experience. Moving thence into a third dimension, that of sheer materiality, Chapter Five, "Stuff, Great and Mere" identifies how our authors locate sublime kitsch at the junction of expectations, objects, and identity, with special attention to Christie's *And Then There Were None* and Scott's *The Antiquary*. From there, I conclude by suggesting

that the arguments featured in each of my chapters, and all of the dimensions of literary experience, coalesce in the image of the armchair as the milieu intrinsic to both reading and to detection, and end with a brief meditation on armchair detectives in general. In their times, "the Great Enchantress," "the Wizard of the North," and "the Queen of Mystery" were popular monikers for Radcliffe, Scott, and Christie respectively: nicknames that indicate readerships that were not only appreciative, but awestruck by these authors. These appellations attest to how readers, when they appreciate literary scenes, have attuned themselves to the enthralling power of such novelists working outside the laws of convention. In the mobility figuratively afforded by the readerly armchair, the magic of these authors manifests itself at once at its most sublimely transformative and kitchily trivial.

Styles,
High and Low

But the Devil whoops, as he whooped of old:
'It is clever, but is it Art?'
~ "The Conundrum of the Workshops"

Imagine you are approaching one of Agatha Christie's English estates. Walking through its timeless, pastoral scenes, you come across stone walls that, on the plane in which livestock operate, constitute solid barriers. But you, observing, here and there, stiles--steps positioned so people can cross those walls--find with them the means to pass beyond superficial limits by ascending to a higher plane and then climbing back down to continue your journey. Thus interrupting horizontal progress with up and down motions, such stiles figure how the recognition of high and low planes of experience allows one to experience Christie's worlds.

Where literature is concerned, it is a book's style that sets it apart. On this basis, we prioritize our reading lists and determine which literary books merit prestige. Despite the difficulties inherent to a valuation system hard to pinpoint and discuss objectively, a large percentage of people consider mystery fiction lacking in style, and therefore in quality.[5] Terms

[5]Edmund Wilson was particularly disgusted by post-Conan Doyle detective fiction. He wrote: "As a department of imaginative writing, it [detective fiction] looks to me completely dead." In regards to Agatha Christie specifically, Wilson concludes that "her writing is of a mawkishness and banality which seem to me literally impossible to read." Edmund Wilson, "Why Do People Read Detective Stories?" *The New Yorker* (October 14, 1944).

like *formulaic*[6]*, puzzles*[7] and *algebra*[8] proliferate in the discourse that frames mystery stories, particularly cozy ones. Works in the mystery genre are seen as involving nothing more than the almost trivial insertion of words into a universal mold. Even Agatha Christie herself appears to have deprecated her craft as that of "a perfect sausage maker."[9] My contention here is that this mentality sells short both authorship and artistry. And, I would suggest, for all of their occasional self-denigration, the authors examined here found ways to make claims for their stylistic command. Christie, for her part, dubbed both her first novel and her first estate *Styles*. Gesturing towards a junction between history, physicality, and literature, the naming of these homes, one virtual, one real, seems like it must also represent a quiet assertion of Christie's status as a literary stylist.

Acknowledging Style

Agatha Christie's first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, is narrated by Captain Hastings, who considers himself a detective. Readers follow along as Hastings works a case in a completely orthodox and respectably English manner. He speaks patronizingly of an old foreign

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[6] See Earl Bargainnier, *The Gentle Art of Murder: The Detective Fiction of Agatha Christie* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1980); tellingly, a Christie passage appears as an introduction epigraph for Alison Wray's *Formulaic Language and the Lexicon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3.

[7] See Barnard, *Talent to Deceive*, e.g. 46, 76.

[8] See Bargainnier, who glosses the topic and mentions Francis Wyndham's "The Algebra of Agatha Christie." *The Gentle Art*, 4-5.

[9] G. C. Ramsey's *Agatha Christie; Mistress of Mystery* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1967), 24.

acquaintance, who being rather past his intellectual prime, has regressed to a doddering eccentric. When this Belgian fellow gets hired to solve the same case that Hastings is working, readers have the opportunity to assess the two men for themselves. As the novel progresses, both Hastings and the reader come to realize that, with his bursts of excitement and unexpected inferences, it is Hercule Poirot who is the real detective. Christie thus illustrates, through her deployment of an unreliable narrator and her drawing of an implicit contrast between the narrative voice as a forensic tool and the investigatory activity of a character, that style forms a basis for judgment, but also that such judgment can be erroneous. Such mistakes, and doubletakes, form an important aspect of the readerly experience of detective fiction, as they result from the coercion (both into the text and into error) conducted through the deployment of red herrings, not just on the level of plots but also on the level of styles. While Hastings falls for every one of the deceptive fallacies to which he is exposed, and thus moves from character to character suspecting each in turn, Poirot conceals his insights until he can collect enough clues to back his intuition. The reading experience of *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* thus mingles increasing suspicions that Hastings does not know as much as he thinks he does, with ongoing difficulties with accepting Poirot's steady exonerations of Alfred Inglethorp, a suspect whom Christie imbues with an excess of 'guilty bad-guy' archetypal characteristics, in a manner that redoubles the forensic activities of the paired detectives.

The novel opens with Hastings visiting his old friend John, whom he finds outraged that his elderly, wealthy, widowed stepmother has married Inglethorp, "an absolute outsider" (*MAS*, 12). As readers begin to question Hastings' reliability as a narrator, especially in regards to his hasty dismissal of Poirot, they also start questioning his prejudices against Inglethorp's "great black beard" and insistence on wearing "patent leather boots in all weathers!" (*MAS*, 12). As Poirot methodically disproves the overwhelming evidence against Inglethorp, Christie fashions them both as sympathetic victims of the same species of small-mindedness. Regarding investigative practices, Hastings and Poirot primarily differ in their ability to evaluate stimuli. When witnesses testify that Inglethorp bought strychnine days before his wife died from that poison, Hastings celebrates the receipt of sale as an invaluable clue. Poirot on the other hand finds a false beard, and identifies the receipt signature as a forgery, recontextualizing Hastings's clue within a kitschy, clichéd drama of impersonation. Kitsch thus here serves, as I want to argue it does generally as a key stylistic benchmark for forensic fiction, a baseline where representation is all clichés, appropriation, impersonation, insincerity, and cultural theft--or at least accusations thereof. Poirot convinces the police not to arrest Inglethorp, and explains to Hastings that anyone dressed in Inglethorp's "peculiar clothes" coupled "with his beard and glasses" might easily be identified as the man everyone was predisposed to suspect (*MAS* 122, 152). Poirot delivers this forensic address about a criminal impersonator wishing to throw suspicion on an innocent

outcast so well that Hastings himself is "fascinated by Poirot's eloquence" (*MAS* 153). Christie thus superimposes one detective over the criminal, and the other over the reader; such shifts in point of view help inculcate an important aspect of forensic rhetoric, the ability to view and argue both sides of a case.

Indeed, while Poirot's address reconstructs a sequence of possible past events, he doesn't here intend to fully represent what has actually happened. Instead, his intent is rhetorical. He must manipulate his audience to prevent legal action and divert suspicion, thereby gaining the time he needs to collect the evidence he needs before anyone can, "in your so expressive idiom -- 'smel[l] a rat!'" (*MAS*, 278). Poirot does not lie here: he simply expresses real potentialities, and "permits," as he says, "you to deceive yourself" while Christie's narrative voice nudges readers into sharing Hastings' ignorance (*MAS*, 277). Since Poirot's words (and to a lesser extent Hasting's) heavily influence the public interpretations it generates, the novel supports a reading that the detectives represent different forms of literary criticism as they analyze Inglethorp, who emerges as an allegory for style. Hastings initially reads circumstances -- including the sale of strychnine, Inglethrop's refusal to state an alibi, his wife's dying words "Alfred --Alfred--[,]" and the general sentiment that his marriage was nothing more than "bare faced fortune hunting" -- superficially and with condescension, already knowing the verdict they seem to confirm (*MAS*, 128, 12). He does not really question the material, instead adopting a passive model of reading,

and therefore investigation. When Poirot gently disaudes him of Inglethorp's guilt, Hastings listens to the exonerations with his same passivity, and accepts the view Poirot is voicing as the only one possible. With Inglethorp effectively off the list of suspects, Hasting's paranoia eventually leads him to suspiciously read the behavior of John's younger brother Lawrence, which had hitherto been dismissed as a version of poetic melancholy. He decides that someone with Lawrence's different style of life, or life of style, someone who has "gone through every penny he's ever had, publishing rotten verses in fancy bindings," might be amply motivated to murder for money (*MAS*, 28).

While Hastings looks for "clue[s] worth having" to support his argument (*MAS*, 62), Poirot considers all of the details to see where they lead, although his friend does not appreciate this version of detective work:

> 'It might have been salt,' replied Poirot placidly.
> I shrugged my shoulders. If he was going to take the matter that way, it was no good arguing with him. The idea crossed my mind, not for the first time, that poor old Poirot was growing old. Privately I thought it lucky that he had associated with him some one of a more receptive type of mind (*MAS*, 81).

Interestingly, Hastings considers his own approach "more receptive" even while he rebukes Poirot for the breadth of his contemplated possibilities. Despite Hasting's scepticism, Poirot's investigations allow him to understand that Inglethorp both desires his own arrest and works to materialize it through a host of artificial clues. Inglethorp, for instance, turns out to simply have added bromide sleeping powders to his wife's "tonic," which precipitate trace amounts of

strychnine into a sediment so that she takes the whole quantity in the last, fatal dose (*MAS*, 273-274). Every other plot detail either amounts to a red herring or elaborates a complicated subplot concerned with John's marital infidelities.[10] Hastings exactly represents the intended reader for Ingelthrop's performance, since Ingelthrop's strategy depends on being 'wrongfully' charged for murder on the basis of forged handwriting or the like, because (in England), "a man once acquitted can never be tried again for the same offence" (*MAS*, 280). Poirot registers the low style that seeks to trip up Hastings, recognizing the banality of both the impersonation drama and the family one, and with it, a form of grandeur. Poirot perceives a sublime high style in Inglethrop's routine that exists alongside its kitsch, or even results from the obscurity provided by its distasteful counterpart. Far from detracting from Inglethrop's achievement--or the achievement of its detection, or of the consecration of both crime and detection in the novel--this kitschy excess ultimately illuminates their elegant simplicity through their mutual juxtaposition.

Approaching Style

[10] In this sublot, John's wife secretly distributes some sleeping powders so that no one in a specific part of the house will wake up while she searches through their desks for personal letters. She had no idea that a murder would take place, and several characters had no idea that they had been drugged. In this way, Christie echoes Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone,* a detective novel in which a doctor's secret administration of Laudinim results in false testimonies and missing evidence.

Despite myriad, frequently posited definitions of style, the concept resists classification; literary style remains strangely undefined.[11] For all the efforts of theorists to pin style down, people persist in thinking of style in a vague sense, as something amorphously concerned with a variety of specific, although disputed, attributes. In lieu of concrete definitions, the meaning of style emerges as only a web of associations. Because of this, one may point to examples of style much more easily than one can point to definitions. Theodor Adorno voices a common stance in describing style in terms of artistic method and artistic practice.[12] In this framework, style becomes synonymous with technique -- seen as something predicted, chosen, and controlled exclusively by the author. Problematically, this approach assumes intention. It raises the question: If one employs an artistic method designed to signify a specific style and the audience either fails to recognize or rejects that style within the work, what results? Conversely, what happens when audiences identify styles unbeknownst to the creator? Both the words "method" and "practice" indicate that style is a procedure rather than a product. This system would allow us to explore Agatha Christie's claim as a stylist, if we were to speculate on the quality of her

[11] Mario Aquilina, *The Event of Style in Literature* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014) eg. 9

[12]"There is some truth to the historical cliché which states that the development of artistic methods, usually lumped together under the term 'style', corresponds to social development"
"Previously, style and artistic practices were negated by new styles and practices."
Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* trans. C. Lenhard, ed. by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 7, 30.

intentions and practices as far as they have been recorded, but it would not lend itself to questions about the discrepancy between her possible aims and her reception.

The realm of poetics offers views on "style" more concrete and germane to my project because of how it allows for an understanding of style as it emerges from the relations of authors to audiences and from the adjudication of the sublime and the kitschy. James Richard Bennett describes "style as text features in context -- as the material of dialogue both within a text (referentiality and reflexivity) and between those dynamic features and readers in their cultural conditions -- of nation, period, and genre."[13] This multifaceted, dialogic approach not only considers style as emerging from an interplay between writer and audience, but also from one between the expected and the surprising. While "kitsch" may be a relatively new word on the literary scene, the concept of worthy and unworthy art extends to antiquity. For Aristotle, as well as for Bennett, rhetoric represents a techne (τέχνη) -- an occupational outcome, or a technique.[14] It appears as a version of proto-kitsch, that is to say a pragmatic creative modality perceived to fall short of divinely inspired poetry (ποίησις / *poiesis*). In *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle offers architecture as an example of techne, defining it as "a trained disposition to make in accordance with correct calculation (λογός)," with the purpose of "bringing something into

[13]James Richard Bennett, "Style" *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics,* ed. Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 1226.
[14] Bennett, "Style," 1226.

existence."[15] Stephen Halliwell explains that Aristotle worked with a slightly original sense of "techne," using it to represent more the potential than the outcome of production; something analogous with nature and teleologically concerned with generation.[16] The difference then between Aristotelian "techne" and "poiesis" lies in the difference between nature and art. It centers on the concept of mimesis explained in Aristotle's *Poetics* -- namely that poetry must be fundamentally imitative since it exists because "we take delight in artistically exact reproductions[.]"[17] While Aristotle appreciates the aesthetic, Plato much prefers the practical. "Techne" as Plato uses it, has been interpreted to mean material or intellectual output that "proceeds from [or] engenders knowledge," thus differing from "poiesis," because "poetry," in his conception of it, "does not succeed by the same kind of rational process," and neglects to "teach us any genuine expertise." [18] The issue of high and low brow designations thus appears as inherently intertwined with questions of authorial intention (rational process) and the comparative valuation of the genuine and the memetic.

So while this thesis concerns novels, it does so with a focus on poetics -- a field of study that, I aims to demonstrate, can illuminate the study of prose fiction as well. I am studying novels

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[15] Philip Wheelwright (translator), "The Nicomachean Ethics." *Wheelwright's Aristotle* (*s.l.*: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1935), 227.
[16] Stephen Hallwelll's *Aristotle's Poetics* (London: Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1986), 49.
[17] Philip Wheelwright (translator), "The Art of Poetry." *Wheelwright's Aristotle* (*s.l.*: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1935), 293.
[18] Christopher Janeway's *Images of Excellence: Plato's Critique of the Arts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 9.

that intersperse poetry or nursery rhymes, or that develop poetic architectonics, or that were written by authors who also published poetry and for whom a less intentional, less technical, more rhetorical, and, I stress, more forensically oriented poetic idea of form conditioned their mindset even when writing prose.[19] On each of these counts and for more reasons, the analysis of poetic style can assist with an exploration of the tradition I am analyzing. While plots can be engaging or not, interaction with readers remains a matter of something more like poetic style. I begin with this hypothesis that reading experiences are determined, mediated if you will, through writing styles -- an idea which presupposes that every reader cannot have an entirely subjective experience and that the text itself must facilitate the majority of this experience. Although Radcliffe, Scott, and Christie all wrote from different places, times, and genres, their texts share similar relationships to readers. Astronomically popular in their times, but frequently considered reading for the masses, their novels explore literary contexts that draw on readers' knowledge of past reading experiences. This network of communal expectations and repeated tropes allows authors to transcend their physical contexts and enter into conversations with other literary figures.[20]

[19] While it is well known that Walter Scott and Ann Radcliffe wrote important poems , readers may be unaware of Agatha Christie's poetry, published in *The Road of Dreams* (1925), *Star Over Bethlehem* (1965) and *Poems* (1973)

[20] Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genre and Modes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 21-22.

Bennett's second aspect of style involves the dialogue between a text and the cultural situations of its readers. Bennett opens his article on style by glossing one of the first works of literary criticism, Longinus' *On the Sublime*, which dates to approximately the first century. He uses Longinus' three sources of the rhetorical sublime, figures, diction, and syntax, to incorporate rhetoric into his theory of style. Described by the Oxford English Dictionary in terms of exploitation, technique, and principles, the concept of rhetoric recalls to us the problem of intention.[21] But it might also, according to Bennett, nullify the opposition between the procedural and the product-oriented, or as he terms them, the natural and mechanical, aspects of style. He argues that the concept of rhetoric foregrounds the choices integral to argument, authorship, and art. If we exclude objectively random (and therefore automated) strings of words from our definition of writing, then all writing portrays the choices of its writer. After all, both structure and the absence of structure represent choices that affect the work's style as well as its reception. Rhetoric then, represents the "techne" (τέχνη) or crafted aspect of style, which works collaboratively with its counterpart, the "phusis" (φύσις)[22] or natural component. Bennett explains this second aspect in terms of habit. In addition to one's conscious choices, individual habits derived from past choices are also evident in writing. While individual habits could be

[21] As per the OED, rhetoric is: "The art of using language effectively so as to persuade or influence others, *esp.* the exploitation of figures of speech and other compositional techniques to this end; the study of principles and rules to be followed by a speaker or writer striving for eloquence, *esp.* as formulated by ancient Greek and Roman writers."

[22] From which derives the word physics

seen as an extension of choice, Bennett also argues that collective habits impact style. To envision style then as a balance between individual choice and collective circumstance allows one to perceive it as a balance between the expected and the unexpected.

You stand at the peak of the stile and observe the sublimely boundless landscapes from the vantage of a mundane, agricultural technology. Facilitating the travel between communities and personal properties as well as bridging the natural and crafted elements of a pasture, stiles add value to land by creating entry points along its boundaries. The progress of this thesis depends on such access to stiles, or styles, simultaneously concerned with the high and low.

Lines,
False and True

"His faith," said Erskine, "was fixed in a thing that was false,
in a thing that was unsound, in a thing that no Shakespearean scholar would accept for a moment.
The theory would be laughed at."
~ The Portrait of Mr. W. H.

Pause to consider how fences both materialize and visualize lines drawn in the sand. In Greek, the words for "pasture" and "law," (νομός and νόμος) differ only in their accentuation. They both concern enforceable boundaries and public distribution, while at the same time, introducing elements of the arbitrary. Lines, both topographical and legal, invite observers to wonder about their accuracy, because they command authority only so far as they are considered truthful. In questioning the accuracy, you occupy a dimension between the real and the literary. Your attention must hover between the material boundaries and legal documents to determine if the fences align with property lines, just as, to find lies in literature, readers must simultaneously consider the real world and the fictional one. Here, the vector of high and low assumes a moral force as it intersects lines of forged literature.

When Agatha Christie uses nursery rhymes in her detective novels, she connects various areas of collective awareness: children's literature and playground songs, but also, though Christie may not have realized it, gothic sensationalism, the Scottish ballad revival, and a

tradition of fake, false poetry. When she associates her novels with decidedly low brow rhymes, games, and lies, Christie mixes into them Bennett's first component of style. She showcases individual eccentricity with how she incorporates nursery rhymes into murder mysteries. The resulting style features Christie's skill, choices, and rhetoric superimposed over the long tradition of forensic poetics, and combined with the kitschy, the trivial and the juvenile. The interplay between that which readers expect, and that which they do not, appears particularly clearly in Christie's nursery rhyme novels, as she stylistically places herself at the traditional junction of children's poetry and rhymes in detective fiction, and provides readers with something that differs from both. As John Curran notes, "The attraction of children's literature, either as titles or themes has often provided crime writers with inspiration. [...] But, it was Agatha Christie who made it her own" (*SN*, 106). And the very poetic styles and traditions that Christie employs in her novels contribute to their dismissal as kitsch.

Christie's Lines

Agatha Christie introduces an additional layer of kitchiness to many of her works by referencing nursery rhymes in the title, and less frequently, in the narrative. Like the poetry interspersed in Radcliffe's novels, critics do not always know how to respond to the so-called "nursery rhyme murders." American publishers appear to have attempted to sophisticate several by changing titles like *One, Two, Buckle My Shoe*, to *An Overdose of Death* and again to *The*

Patriotic Murders and changing *Five Little Pigs* to *Murder in Retrospect.* They also changed *Hickory Dickory Dock* to *Hickory Dickory Death*, which might illustrate the futility of such a project. While Corran explains that "[t]he dramatic impact of an innocent nursery rhyme transforming into a killer's calling card is irresistible to an imaginative crime writer such as Agatha Christie[,]" Daniel Tiffany questions the claim of innocence inherent to nursery rhymes (*SN*, 106; *MSP*, 84). Situating nursery rhymes within the history of poetry, he argues that both have always concerned the blending of high and low styles through the theft or appropriation of language and culture. More specifically, Tiffany explains that nursery rhymes, like the popularization of a gothic sensibility, came out of the ballad revival which they imitate in form, font, and "vulgar intimacy" (*MSP*, 84).[23] Explaining *Mother Goose* as an imitation ballad that follows the broadside ballad convention of including a woodcut illustration for each poem, and that these illustrations were made by none other than Jane Eyre's favorite illustrator, Thomas Bewick, Tiffany reminds readers that the first edition of *Mother Goose* rhymes was published the same year as Macpherson's "translations" of Ossian (*MSP*, 84-85). While not a forgery, Tiffany argues that, in many ways, Mother Goose represents fakery.

Published in small books (2.25 by 3.75 inches), the self declared "very GREAT WRITER of very LITTLE BOOKS" created a product that claims to be for children, describing itself as illustrated "Sonnets for the Cradle" but reveals a secret mature audience with the inclusion of "NOTES and MAXIMS, Historical, Philosophical, and Critical" (*MSP*, 85-86). Clearly mocking people like Scott and his character Oldbuck who collect ballads by transcribing legends from the

[23] The "black letter font (also known as 'Gothic' type) [...] was used specifically for broadside ballads[.]" Tiffany, *My Silver Planet: The Secret History of Poetry and Kitsch* (2014)

oral tradition, the *Mother Goose Melodies* contain "a mock introduction, facetious notes, nonsensical maxims, and learned, but fictive sources" (*MSP*, 86). But they also gesture towards the place story preservers hold in the wider scope of human understanding. Describing "the great probability" that "Nonsense Verses" originate in the customs of "old British nurses," readers are commanded: "Let none therefore speak irreverently of this great maternity, as they may be considered as the great grandmothers of science and knowledge."[24] *The Antiquary*, a novel of Scott's that figures heavily later in this thesis, treats the collection and celebration of literary nonsense, among the various genealogies and credibilities of science and knowledge it centrally concerns. In reference to the pseudo-scholarly notes appended to a self-parodic poem that Scott captures in this novel, paratext that Oldbuck writes[25] and then advertises[26] in the final sentence of *The Antiquary* -- Gottlieb explains that the allusion to the existence of these notes illustrates a theory of history that considers the past as "only real in the medium of linguistic fiction." [27]

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[24] "Mother Goose's melody, or, Sonnets for the cradle," *The Lilly Library Digital Collections*, http://www.indiana.edu/~liblilly/digital/collections/items/show/87.

[25] " He [the Antiquary] regularly enquiries whether Lord Geraldin [Lovel] has commenced the Caledoniad, and shakes his head at the answer he receives. *En attendant,* however, he has completed his notes, which, we believe, will be at the service of any one who chuses to make them public, without risk or expense to the Antiquary." Gottlieb explains the situation thus: "We are left, in other words, with a highly qualified assurance of the fictional existence of explanatory notes accompanying an imaginary poem on a historical event that never occurred." Evan Gottlieb, *Walter Scott and Contemporary Theory,* 44.

[26] James MacPherson also used paratext to describe the advertisement of imaginary documents: "Some men of genius [...] advised him [MacPherson] to publish proposals for printing by subscription the whole Originals, as a better way of satisfying the public concerning the authenticity of the poems, than depositing the manuscript copies in any public library. This he did; but no subscriptions appearing, he takes it for the judgement of the public that neither the one or the other is necessary."
"Fragments of Ancient Poetry, collected in the Highlands of Scotland, and Translated from the Galic or Erse Language." *The Poems of Ossian and related Works.* Edited by Howard Gaskill (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 34.

[27] Reinhart Koselleck's "Social History and Conceptual History" (1989) quoted in Gottlieb, *Walter Scott and Contemporary Theory,* 44.

These questions of authenticity and the real, especially as they relate to science and the past, represent problems with which judicial forensics must grapple. When engaging with texts one runs the risk of forgeries, but without documentary evidence, trials run the risk of either false testimony as in the case with MacPherson, or preposterous deductions, as is the case with Rebecca in Scott's *Ivanhoe*, who is condemned to die on the basis of a generic crossbow bolt produced from a random witnesses' pouch.[28] Following Charles Rzepka's explanation that "clues" are simply metonyms, one sees how documents fulfill both the testimony and the material aspects of evidence.[29] The book itself represents a metonym for reading, simultaneously material and experiential. Virginia Woolf's declaration that *The Antiquary* "must be enjoyed in secret" seems to forget the physicality of the novel, since when closed, books become souvenirs of the experiences mediated in their pages.[30] Therefore, the very presence of a book, closed on a shelf or table, testifies to past interaction which could hardly be kept secret. In some cases, books depict internal texts to explore the experience, performance, or the documentary forensic evidence of reading. Agatha Christie's 1942 novel, *Five Little Pigs*, for example, follows Poirot as he interviews suspects under the guise of writing a book. The novel maintains a literary aspect, starting with its title borrowed from a nursery rhyme, continuing with Shakespearean intertext, and concluding with a case that hinges upon written letters.

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[28] "But it was the more difficult to dispute the accuracy of the witness, as, in order to produce real evidence in support of his verbal testimony, he drew from his pouch the very bolt-head, which, according to his story, had been miraculously extracted from the wound; and as the iron weighed a full ounce, it completely confirmed the tale, however marvellous." Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe: A Romance* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1877), 346.
[29] Charles J. Rzepka's *Detective Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), eg. 18, 159.
[30] Virginia Woolf, "Sir Walter Scott." *The Moment and Other Essays.* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1948), 63. Regarding the reading experience of the Waverly Novels, Woolf posits that there "is perhaps [...] something vicious about such pleasure; it cannot be defended; it must be enjoyed in secret."

In *Five Little Pigs*, Poirot must reopen a case that has been closed for sixteen years. His client, Carla Lemarchant has recently come of age, at which time she was informed that her mother died in prison for murdering her father. With this news came a letter to Carla from her mother explaining "[t]hat she hadn't done it--that she was innocent--that I [Carla] could be sure of that always[,]" and on the sole basis of this letter, Poirot agrees to investigate (*FLP*, 7). Poirot begins by reading the newspaper files for a published account of events, and then he interviews a series of people officially associated with the case, beginning with Caroline Crale's defense lawyer. These men help Poirot to access the official police documents, and inform him that five people were associated with the case and on the premises during the murder. Christie then offers readers an insight into Poirot's mind:

> A jingle ran through Poirot's head. He repressed it. He must not always be thinking of nursery rhymes. It seemed an obsession with him lately. And yet the jingle persisted.
> *'This little pig went to market, this little pig stayed home . . . .'* (*FLP*, 21)

Displaying a literary preoccupation, even obsession, Poirot seems to subconsciously connect nursery rhyme with crime. In this instance, he frames the five possible suspects within such a rhyme. Beginning with the deceased's best friend, a stock market broker, and his brother, a country squire, Poirot then moves on to the pigs who had roast beef and none: the deceased's now wealthy paramour and the not wealthy governess. The framing breaks down however on the last count, as Poirot comments that Caroline's younger sister, the renowned archaeologist Angela Werren, "is not, then, the little pig who cried Wee Wee Wee" (*FLP*, 22). Since Poirot's investigation depends solely on what might be considered a forensic dialogue -- a study of the differences and similarities that exist between a variety of forensic reconstructions -- he and the

readers keep hearing the same list of facts, names, and accusations. Immediately, one can see that, in this case, Poirot closely follows the iterative practice of literary criticism, as he places in conversation a selection of secondary sources that all refer to the same work in different ways. Only in this situation, Poirot must make his argument without access to a primary source. Through this circular process, the novel imitates repetitive poetic features such as ring composition and a refrain.

In a novel with seventeen forensic reconstructions of the same crime, repetition becomes a central, formal feature. In the first set of these, the men concerned with the case in an official capacity -- the council for the defense, the council for the prosecution, the young solicitor, the old solicitor, and the police superintendent -- all begin and end their self-contained forensic accounts with protestations of Caroline's guilt and the futility of Poirot's investigation. They also evoke the novel's refrain, variations of "it's a very long time ago," so often that Christie notes: "Hercule Poirot foresaw that he was going to get a little tired of that particular phrase" (*FLP*, 45). For the next ring of reconstructions, verbal interviews with the five pigs, or suspects, Poirot begins each chapter by assembling the strategy and documents most likely to result in success. Poirot explains to Phillip Blake that he must research the case for a series of books on famous crimes that he is under contract to write, that it is a lucrative proposition, and that people are always interested in reading about crimes. Poirot then approaches Philip's brother Meredith Blake, armed with letters of introduction written by members of Devonshire's social scene. Meredith is clearly annoyed by all things foreign, and "[s]lightly amused, Hercule Poirot read accurately these thoughts passing through the other's head[,]" before explaining his literary research project (*FLP*, 81). When justifying the imaginary series of books to Lord Dittisham, the

husband of the third pig, Poirot explains: “Murder is a drama. The desire for drama is very strong in the human race" (*FLP*, 114). For his last two interviews, between the governess Miss Williams, and the sister Angela Warren, Poirot realizes the need for the truth, and simply recounts the letter that Caroline had left for her daughter. With Angela, Poirot moves from the role of the writer to that of the reader, as he attends one of her archaeological lectures, is asked if he has read her book, and views a second letter from Caroline.

The second portion of the novel, sectioned off as “Book Two,” depends on Poirot’s sagacity as a critical reader. Each of his interviews had terminated with the promise to send Poirot a written forensic report, and now he must read through them. If Caroline did not murder her husband, and if he did not commit suicide (the official defense although not one person believed it), then one of these five pigs must be a murderer. This set of chapters, entitled “The Narrative of ___” call to mind Derrida’s argument that legal proceedings fundamentally require their own set of literature in the form of written records, accounts, and receipts.[31] The records detail how the victim, named Amyas after the character in Charles Kinglsey’s *Westward Ho!*, is poisoned with coniine after a visit to Meredith Blake’s private pharmacopoeia, and a reading of a passage “from the *Phaedo* [that] gives a graceous picture of [Socrates’] death” (*FLP*, 186). After the murder, Caroline admits to having stolen the coniine, but insists that she intended suicide since, by all accounts, Amyas planned to leave her for his current painting model, Elsa Greer. Repetitively described as a “predatory Juliette,” Christie further emphasizes the simile between Shakespeare's misguided character and Elsa through intertext as the old solicitor reads a passage of *Romeo and Juliet* to Poirot during their interview on Greer’s character (*FLP*, 42). The

[31]Derrida, “The Law of Genre,” 64.

governess, whose flat is decorated with a reproduction of an illustration of "Dante meeting Beatrice on a bridge[,]" retells watching Caroline tamper with evidence and plant her dead husband's fingerprints on a beer bottle (*FLP*, 127). From Angela's account, Poirot deduces that she was reading Somerset Maugham's *The Moon and Sixpence* at the time of the murder. When he finishes reading the various accounts, Poirot completes the widest narrative ring by bringing Carla and the five narrators back to the crime scene for his denouement.

While Poirot assumes the role of a kitschy literary charlatan, lying to people about an imaginary, yet generic book he had no intention of writing, Angela represents an authentic, academic author. Arriving at Meredith Blakes' former laboratory, which had been furnished with some easy chairs for the occasion, Carla begins to greet the guests: "Hallo, Aunt Angela. I read your article in *The Times* this morning. It's nice to have a distinguished relative" (*FLP*, 240). As it happens, Angela holds the key to the case. Caroline had written to her from jail, and Angela reluctantly, allows Poirot to read her letter aloud during the denouement.

> *My darling little Angela,*
> *You will hear bad news and you will grieve, but what I want to impress upon you is that it is all all right. I have never told you lies and I don't now when I say that I am actually happy -- that I feel* an *essential rightness and a peace that I have never known before. It's all right, darling, it's all right. Don't look back and regret and grieve for me -- go on with your life and succeed. You can, I know. It's all, all right, darling, and I am going to Amyas. I haven't the least doubt that we shall be together. I couldn't have lived without him. . . Do this one thing for me -- be happy. I've told you -- I'm happy. One has to pay for one's debts. It's lovely to feel peaceful.*
> *Your loving sister,*
> *Caro* (*FLP*, 152)

Poirot elaborates a vivid scene from the past: A burst of childhood violence, the throwing of a paperweight at the face of her baby sister that disfigured an partially blinded Angela, haunts

Caroline's whole life. Believing that Angela had murdered Amyas, Caroline seizes the opportunity to redeem herself. She removes the fingerprints, from the wrong objects, replaces them with Amyas', and magnanimously takes the blame. But Angela did not commit the murder either. Brought to life through Poirot's rhetoric, Amyas explains that he never intended to leave his family, and being an artist, only wished to finish a painting. Elsa, overhearing, exacts revenge by poisoning Amyas with the poison Caroline stole.

Amyas Crale was, by all accounts, a great painter. Even those unable to appreciate art, such as the police superintendent, observe: "I couldn't get it out of my mind for a long time afterwards. I even dreamt about it" (*FLP*, 56). As it turns out, the painting in question depicts the labor of a dying man painting his murderer while poison takes effect. It represents the mediation of experience. The true impact of the picture can only be realized after Poirot reveals Elsa as the murderer, at which point the appreciation of style and value alter based on the new experiential information. It becomes, in a word, sublime.

Abstract Lines

Style, experience, and value share feedback loops and interdependencies that extend back to antiquity. While works conducive to moderate experiences of comprehendable value tend to garner mild receptions, I argue that two extreme designations for aesthetic style -- sublimity, and kitsch-- describe the same shock: the shocking experience, that is, of having one's mind stunned by an encounter with an outrageously irrational spectacle. Although the exact experience and its stimulants changes with retellings, the sublime is most often associated with materiality, either in

terms of textural features or natural wonders. Tracking these varieties of sublime phenomena specifically as they occur through poetry, one sees both their close relationship to each other, and their connection to style in its rhetorical dimension.

The sublime is an ancient concept that probably originates with poetic criticism, and has since proliferated in discourses from aestheticism to ethics to Christianity and even psychology. Accordingly, its genealogy can be drawn in a number of ways. Ideas of sublimity move between poets, and through them influence western literary thought. Classics scholar James Porter explains how the only existing copy of Longinus' *On the Sublime* (considered the earliest extant work on the topic) shares a codex with the Aristotelian *Problems*,[32] as though a Byzantine scribe chose to capitalize on some extra room, and happened to record Longinus' obscure treatise as a bonus feature.[33] While projects to reconstruct a history of the sublime generally terminate at this kitschy origin, Porter reminds us that, due to timing and distribution, Horaces' "sublimitas" and the biblical "excelsus" (two Latin words that, like Longinus's Greek word "hupsous," are conventionally translated as *sublime*) exist without Longinus' influence.[34] So too do Augustine

[32] A question and answer work that may have been written by Aristotle, although its authorship remains uncertain.

[33] James I. Porter, *The Sublime in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), Chap. 1. https://www-cambridge-org.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/core/books/sublime-in-antiquity/introduction-the-sublime-before-and-after-longinus/B656A2FFCA796397612E5AC84AF0A2F4

[34] Longinus does not attempt to invent a word for the sublime, but rather appropriates and redefines ὕψος, (hupsos) which literally means height. Samuel Monk connects this coinage to Chaucer's "heigh style" and Spencer's "lofty style."
Samuel Monk, *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-century England* (*s.l.*: Ann Arbor Paperback, 1960), 18-19.

and Dante's concepts of a very similar sublimity. From this, Porter concludes that Longinus and his rival Caecilius[35] did not invent the sublime, but rather collected and published aspects of a school of thought that existed around them. Publicly available around 1468 and popularized in 1674 by Boileau's French translation, Longinus's work directly impacted both John Dryden and Alexander Pope.[36]

As he identifies the sublime in literature, Longinus begins with negative examples and demonstrates how a poem by Aeschylus "sinks little by little from the terrible into the contemptible." [37] For Longinus, the true sublime consists of two innate components and three rhetorical ones: mental elevation (possessed by Homer) and elevated passion (characteristic of Sappho), as well as high diction (mastered by Sophocles and Thucydides), compelling figures (illustrated by Demosthenes and Herodotus), and great syntax (commanded by Euripides). When used in part or in whole, the work and the reader are elevated, according to Longinus, to a state where the beauties of "lofty genius" far surpass those of mere exactitude and grammatical correctness -- for what that is great in nature appears tame and restrained? In the 17th century, Dryden adopts rather than amends these views when he evokes Longinus in his defense of heroic poetry. For Dryden, poetry should be judged based on its ability to delight. Dryden emphasizes

[35] Longinus' text was written as a direct response to Caecilius' work on the sublime, which it explicitly purports to disprove.
[36]Porter, *The Sublime in Antiquity*, chap. 1.
[37] Longinus, *On the Sublime*, trans. Rhys Robert (Adelaide University), III.
https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/l/longinus/on_the_sublime/

the importance of experience to this mode of criticism. While he concedes that "the dignity of style" may be disputed, "all reasonable men will conclude it necessary that sublime subjects ought to be adorned with the sublimest [...] expressions," a practice Dryden considers emblematic of Homer. [38] The implied claim that sublimity exists apart from, or is even transcendent of style, seems to rationalize the presence of sublime feelings in works that would later be considered kitschy. Similarly, Pope concerns himself with the difference between sublime poetry and poetry purporting to be sublime. He actually parodies Longinus' *Peri Hupsous* which, is literally, in Greek, "On Height," since it is about poetry that elevates the senses -- in his *Peri Bathous*, On Depth, about poetry that accomplishes just the opposite.[39] Pope thereby outlines a vertical axis of the literary dimensions, with high style on the top, low style below, but both styles interdependent and mutually implicated. Instead of labeling depth of style "profound" as Pope does, I will call works of this low style "kitschy."

The contemporary scholar Daniel Tiffany argues that many critics misunderstand kitsch because they miss how it actually shares a long history with poetry. He sets this argument in front of a backdrop of kitsch studies, particularly drawing on an intellectual genealogy that

[38] John Dryden, "The Author's Apology for Heroic Poetry and Heroic Licence, Prefixed to *The State of Innocence: An Opera* (1677)" *Literary Criticism of Dryden*, ed. Arthur C. Kirsch (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1966), 114.

[39] "Moderns, both in the weight of their writings and in the velocity of their judgements, do so infinitely excel the said Ancients. Nevertheless, too true it is that while a plain and direct road is paved to their ὕψος or *sublime*, no track has been yet chalked out to arrive at our βάθος or *profound*."Alexander Pope, *Literary Criticism of Alexander Pope.* ed. Bertrand A. Goldgar (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1965), 43.

engages with the "vehemence of the Modernist campaign against kitsch" (*MSP*, 2). Described by the OED as "Art or *objects d'art* characterized by worthless pretentiousness; the qualities associated with such art or artifacts[,]" and, as a verbal derivative "to render worthless, to affect with sentimentality and vulgarity" kitsch is disparaged in different ways by such key critics as Hermann Broch,[40] Clement Greenberg[41] and Eve Sedgwick.[42] Among, between, and against these negative viewpoints, Tiffany establishes a poetics of kitsch that asks whether there something inherently baffling about kitsch. Why is kitsch so frequently misunderstood? Returning to the idea that kitsch and the sublime denote aesthetic experiences of the same order, then we can speculatively use the sublime's well-known relation to the irrational to model its counterpart. Present in Longinus, and developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant, and other philosophers, an idea persists that the sublime necessarily gestures toward what exists beyond human comprehension. For Burke and Kant, this irrationality correlates with feelings of self preservation, since death and God (respectively) represent

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[40] "Broch regarded the parasitic feature of kitsch as its fundamental iniquity, calling kitsch 'the enemy within.' He compared the difference between art and kitsch to the absolute schism between good and evil: 'The Anti-Christ [that] looks like Christ, acts and speaks like Christ, but is all the same Lucifer.'"
University of Chicago, "Kitsch." *Glossary.* http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/kitsch.htm#_ftn12

[41] "But with the introduction of universal literacy, the ability to read and write became almost a minor skill like driving a car, and it no longer served to distinguish an individual's cultural inclinations, since it was no longer the exclusive concomitant of refined tastes. [...] Kitsch, using for raw material the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture, welcomes and cultivates this insensibility."
Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." *Partisan Review* 6, no. 5 (Fall, 1939): 39.

[42] "Unlike kitsch-attribution then, camp-recognition doesn't ask, 'What kind of debased creature could possibly be the right audience for this spectacle?'"
Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990), 156.

phenomena of a magnitude and an obscurity that surpasses the capacities of the mind. Following this train of thought, contemporaneous poets like William Wordsworth express the desire for an emotional experience of "a heart // that watches and receives" beyond "the meddling intellect[.]" [43] As some have argued, Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* revolutionizes the sublime by transferring it into a world of reverie where any part of "this unintelligible world" may illicit "that serene and blessed mood," in anyone who can "see into the life of things" (*RH*, 65) [44]Wordsworth perceives, to borrow James Twitchell's phrase, "god-stuff" in trees, thorns, ruins, and the mundane in general -- thus rendering the experience of everyday life likewise incomprehensible through reason, or at least through reason alone (*RH*, 71).[45] The sublime's insistence on irrationality continues in subsequent poetry on the model Wordsworth pioneers and his close associate Samuel Taylor Coleridge theorizes; this romantic poetics largely concerns responses and scenarios illogically proportioned to a material world that can never be fully understood.

Such an aesthetic dependence on the irrational seems at odds, however, with the other emergent genres of this moment that concern us more: with historical novels, and certainly with

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[43] Wordsworth's "Tables Turned; an Evening Scene on the Same Subject" discussed by Samuel Monk.
Monk, *The Sublime*, 93.

[44]William Wordsworth, "LINES written a few miles above TINTERN ABBEY, on revisiting the banks of the WYE during a Tour, July 13, 1798" *Lyrical Ballads, 1798 and 1800.* ed. Michael Gamer and Dahlia Porter (Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2008), 283.

[45] This democratization of the sublime is particularly interesting in conjunction with Marjorie Levinson's idea that "Tintern Abbey," which advertises in its long title its composition in 1798, occurs one revolution away from the Revolutionary year of 1789.
Marjorie Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986), 15.

their close relation, works of detective fiction.[46] Do these genres not, after all, impart the implied promise of logical solutions? Not only is this promise considered almost sacred, in Father Ronald Knox' *Decalogue* -- the ten commandments of fair play deduction -- it is taken to an absurd degree of seriousness.[47] These rules for an aesthetics of the intelligible form the bylaws of the Detection Club for mystery writers of which Agatha Christie was president from 1957-1976,[48] as well as the foundation for most of the literary criticism concerning the golden age[49] of detective fiction. To join, members had to participate in a ceremony written by G.K. Chesterton, which a biographer notes was intended to "set a good example" for both the Ku Klux Klan and the Mafia on how to properly induct members.[50] As you can see from this excerpt, the organization was committed to ensuring that readers had a fair chance of solving the mysteries.

Ruler:

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[46] Although Chesterton argues that detective fiction's value lies precisely in its ability to cause readers to see the sublimity or "god stuff" both in cities and in the everyday more generally.

"The narrowest street possesses, in every crook and twist of its intention, the soul of the man who built it, perhaps long in his grave. Every brick has as human a hieroglyph as if it were a graven brick of Babylon; every slate on the roof is as educational a document as if it were a slate covered with addition and subtraction sums. Anything which tends, even under the fantastic form of the minutiae of Sherlock Holmes, to assert this romance of detail in civilizations, to emphasize this unfathomably human character in flints and tiles, is a good thing."
G.K. Chesterton, "A Defense of Detective Stories." *The Art of the Mystery Story: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Howard Haycraft (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1976), 5.

[47]Josef Skvorecky's *Sins for Father Knox*, which systematically breaks each of them. Knox was not the only person to establish rules for "fair play" detective fiction, although his were the rules chosen for the Detection Club.

Josef Skvorecky, *Sins for Father Knox*, trans. Kaka Polackova Henley (New York: W.W. Norton & Company,1973), 10.

[48] "Detection Club" *agathachristie.com.*

[49] Roughly between the world wars.

[50] Maisie Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 466.

Do you promise that your detectives shall well and truly detect the crimes presented to them using those wits which it may please you to bestow upon them and not placing reliance on nor making use of Divine Revelation, Feminine Intuition, Mumbo Jumbo, Jiggery-Pokery, Coincidence or Act of God?

Candidate:

I do.

Ruler:

Do you solemnly swear never to conceal a vital clue from the reader?

Candidate:

I do.[51]

Despite frequent accusations of "foul play" -- particularly in regards to *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* -- Christie always maintained that she treated her readers fairly.[52]

To take such protestations at face value and insist on the rationality of mystery fiction would, I think, be a mistake. The detective story carries forward, from the gothic fiction that preceded and enabled it, a central involvement with irrationality. Detective fiction cannot be rational; instead, it must be rationalized. It must be confusing for most of its present, and logical only in its denouement's account of its past, so that readers cannot solve its puzzles too easily. The grand reveal of this post facto rationale is of course one of the pillars of the detective genre. Far from being a new literary device that originated with the detective story, this rationalizing of seemingly absurd details has a long previous history, under the term "the explained supernatural." The gothic novelist Ann Radcliffe remains a key figure in this discourse, because nearly every critic who has written on her novels has felt compelled to analyze her use of this

[51]Ward, *Chesterton*, 466-67.
[52] Bargainnier, *The Gentle Art*, 6.

move as a way to gauge her mastery, or lack, of literary style. Although in his criticism, Scott at times disparages Radcliffe's explained supernatural, his own works develop the concept in the direction of rationalized absurdity, or historicized fantasy. Perhaps Scott's confidence that everything could ostensibly have a logical explanation or historical precedent contributes to his freedom to explore the irrational. But in such cases, it is paramount that the readers accept your explanation; otherwise, people may consider the device as a patch compensating for stylistic inadequacy, and spend two hundred and twenty four years mocking your pirate tunnels, as they have done in the aftermath of Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*.[53] It is for such reasons that Christie, and I would add all employers of the explained supernatural, provides subtle argumentation to convince readers of the novel's conclusion by means of careful rhetoric.

It may be this felt need for rhetorical control of readerly participation that renders novels at the junction of gothic, historic, and detective genres inherently kitschy. It is largely in the zone

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[53] One of Christie's most famous novels, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* presents itself as a manuscript narrated by the murderer. Dr. Sheppard fashions himself as Poirot's substitute sidekick, (Hastings is ranching in Argentina) and goes about pretending to help solve his own crime. This particular novel has generated a great controversy, with prominent critics promoting every side. S.S. Van Dine (AKA Willard Huntington Wright) called foul play, insisting that Christie had broken "a certain 'Gentleman's agreement'" -- the rules of fair play, while Dorothy Sayers declares that "the reader ought to be able to guess the criminal, if he is sharp enough, and nobody can ask for more than this." Edmund Wilson, meanwhile, indicates that the point does not matter, while Pierre Bayard wrote a monograph explaining how a completely different character actually committed the murder.

Pierre Bayard, *Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?: The Mystery behind the Agatha Christie Mystery*, trans. Carol Cosman (New York: The New Press, 1998)

S.S. Van Dine, *The Great Detective Stories: A Chronological Anthology* (New York: Charles Scribener's Sons, 1927), 37.

Dorothy Sayers, "The Omnibus of Crime" *The Art of the Mystery Story: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Howard Haycraft (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1976), 98.

Edmund Wilson, "Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?" *The Art of the Mystery Story: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Howard Haycraft (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1976), 390-397.

of rhetorical diction that Tiffany locates the historical kitsch he analyzes in his poetics. He argues that kitschy styles are labeled as such because their diction waxes either too rhetorical or too unconventional. Accordingly, he decides that a poem's level of kitschiness should be determined, not by its themes, images, or prosody, but rather on its use of language. Diction, for Tiffany, relates to style as it "pertains to the control of syntax, word order, orthography, and most importantly, word choice" (*MSP,* 30). He considers ways in which thus placing kitsch "at the junction of rhetoric and poesis" further connects these modes to forgeries, oratory, and court trials, because it is likewise on the basis of rhetoric that these epideictic or forensic modes of expression seek to elicit a specific artificial or synthetic response (*MSP*, 31, 37). There is a convergence with Longinus here, who appears to have provided for the possibility of his work being used in conversation with kitschy poetry. Longinus comments of sublime materials that "these very things are the elements and foundation, not only of success, but also of the contrary[,]" because literary "defects usually spring, for the most part, from the same sources as our good points."[54]

While Tiffany enovokes Aristotle's *Poiesis* for his discussions of poetic diction, Aristotie's *On Rhetoric* is also apropos to the conversation. Continuing the discourse on unprestigious writing with a focus on the form of rhetoric least "noble and worthy of a

[54]Robert (trans.), *On the Sublime*, V.

politician," Aristotle's forensic rhetoric concerns the reconstruction of the past, specifically for legal defense and prosecutions.[55] Likening "forensic pleading" to hunting, he explains it to have an aspect of pleasure associated with the possibility and pursuit of victory.[56] In this way, game becomes associated with forensics in a way that seems to almost foreshadow detective fiction. Forensic rhetoric, Aristotle explains, depends on a tighter diction and better writing than other forms of oratory, because judges are less likely to be distracted in a court setting, than crowds in a theater. It represents a median between the dramatic and the literary modes of expression, and like both, depends on narration. Furthermore, "introductions to forensic speeches, it must be observed, have the same value as the prologues of dramas and the introductions to epic poems[,]" thus establishing firm connections between the ways the past is reconstructed, and the ways stories are transmitted.[57]

Forensic rhetoric then exists primarily in the contexts of judiciary and legal proceedings, as a mode of displaying wit and style while competitively reconstructing the past. But, before a detective can participate in "the game" and dazzle readers and auditors alike with a breathtaking denouement, they must first encounter a worthy opponent. The sagacity of the detective is proven through a juxtaposition with that of the criminal, just as the presence of sublimity is

[55] *Rhetoric* 1:10, *"καλλίονος καὶ πολιτικωτέρας"*
[56] Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. Rhys Robert *(s.l.:s.n.*), 50. http://www.bocc.ubi.pt/pag/Aristotle-rhetoric.pdf
[57]Robert (trans.), *Rhetoric*, 168.

illustrated by the administration of kitsch, and vice versa. As stolen expression or counterfeited culture, kitsch's inherent miscreant status places it within discourses on legality. Tiffany continues his lineage of kitsch studies by routing it through a history criticism of falseness in literature, noting T.S. Eliot's attention to the mediocracy of minor poets, Charles Baudelaire's notion of "invented clichè" and Theodor Adorno's views on "false glitter." [58] From here, he moves into discussions on the synthetic and artificial in the Neoclassical aesthetic conversations entertained by scholars such as Paul de Man and Georges Bataille, both of whom identify kitschy tendencies in poetry (*MSP*, 10). In discussing poetic language, and especially kitschy poetic language, he identifies a connection between rhetorical diction and gothic fragments, archaisms, and forgeries. This fake or fragmentary aspect correlates with the argument -- maintained by prominent poetic figures from Aristotle to Langston Hughes -- that hybrid or collective vocabularies are intrinsic to poetic diction (*MSP*, 36). In order to facilitate this verbal synthesis, poetry then had to borrow (with more or less honesty) from the classical languages, the romantic languages, many different vernaculars or dialects, and from pseudo-archaic locutions.

This theft and appropriation of languages, cultures, and perhaps even experiences that Tiffany identifies as intrinsic to poetry, necessarily places verse in discussions of forensics and the past. Like reading itself, the practice of forensics requires engagement with and

[58] Namely that artifice is necessary for poetry to speak to / critique society.

understanding of details and materials. As with detection, readers must reconstruct meaning from words written in the past. The traditions of reading and of detection have long been intertwined, as seen in the possible corollary relationship between the implementation of forensic science and appearance of fake poetry.[59] Perhaps, this relationship between literary and worldly discoverers is best illustrated by Sherlock Holmes, a fictional detective based on the first forensic doctor, Joseph Bell. [60] In each model, the question of authority naturally arises. The decision of which subjects merit literature or detection, occurs in some instances, as does the question of circulation: who should have access to documents whether legal or literary? These contentions of authority generally focus on jurisdiction, or the power to control a given space.

When you resume your walk through the fields, recall the malleable aspects of land boundaries and the ever changing nature of cartography. Lines, geographical and literary, function through socially understood, though objectively arbitrary, conceptions of truth and ownership. Border lands traditionally feature violent disputes, not only because of accusations of inaccuracy, but

[59] This relationship emerges when official investigations into James MacPherson's allegedly ancient poetry forces people to realize that memories can be unreliable, and that testimonial evidence might not be best basis for the legal system. See Lynch, *Deception and Detection*, 134,148

[60] See Martin Booth, *The Doctor and the Detective: A Biography of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), e.g. 111.

also due to contesting claims of authority. Like property lines, lines of literature inherently concern both the false and the true.

SPACES,
Old and New

And if thou doubt me, first to Delphi go,
There ascertain if my report was true
Of the god's answer; next investigate
If with the seer I plotted or conspired,
And if it prove so, sentence me to death,
Not by thy voice alone, but mine and thine.
~ Oedipus Rex[61]

Continuing on, you wonder how legal this journey is. Did anyone inform the groundskeepers of your anticipated presence? Will you be shot for trespassing? You don't notice any purple fence posts, but, recalling that only Texas' trespassing laws specify purple paint, this offers little reassurance. Although you do not see anyone, an intangible presence of authority can be felt in these spaces.

While worldly forensic rhetoric generally occurs in courts, forensic investigations and fictional forensic addresses must occur in a variety of spaces. Unlike courts, which are dedicated places presided over by established authorities, crime scenes and the practice of detection cause tension and disruption to the authorities generally considered to control the space in which either the crime has occurred or a clue has been found. Not all authorities appear with the solementy and substance associated with a court judge. Instead, some spaces are governed by intangible forces such as nostalgia, or even incomprehensible forces considered spectral. These old authorities, longing for a past time, tend to favor styles reminiscent of a natural sublime, works that evoke mountains, oceans, or the sky, as similar examples of the immortal. Kitsch has no

[61] Translated by F. Storr

place in this system. Its presence, like the crime in a detective story, disrupts the jurisdiction of the space and allows for the authority to shift to someone outside of the power structure, like a detective. This inherently disruptive property of kitsch results in poetry's difficult relationship with the "institution of literature" which "emerged to encompass and moderate divergent levels of diction" through "common disciplinary standard[s]" (*MSP*, 33) Sometimes at the expense of literary designation, kitsch's presence both in described spaces and in the pages themselves as spaces, allows for shifts in the existing authoritative systems. Aware of this authority and its inexorable connection to nostalgia, Agatha Christie continually depicts spaces that are simply not what they used to be. Her family estates, luxurious hotels, and magnificent trains catch characters off guard as they feel the same breath of impending modernity, in a moment when -- like so many of Scott and Radcliffe's characters -- they perceive their way of life on the verge of progress. Exploring the space between vectors of temporal anxiety, spatial authority, and sublime-kitsch style, this section follows Christie's novel *At Bertram's Hotel* to explore the zone on a narrative plane. Next, I explore the same phenomenon from a different perspective, considering ways in which Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* staged its own modern anxieties, dramatizing tensions that derived from the emergence of circulating libraries.

A sensation particularly associated with places, nostalgia exists where longing crosses the junction of memory and change. Nostalgia indicates impending or actualized modernization by concerning the desire for something irrevocably gone. In doing so, nostalgia fundamentally concerns a specific temporality, that of reconstructing a remembered version of the past from a contemporary vantage. As a narrative device, this temporality remains fundamental to various

forms of literature, and consequently, is the subject of many studies and critiques.[62] The tradition of nostalgic narrative, one in which events are reconstructed exclusively from memory, extends back to Homer. It structures much of the *Odyssey,* as Odysseus narrates from his remembered adventures with particular emphasis on the ἄλγος ("algos," pain) he experiences when his νόστος ("nostos," homecoming) seemed impossible. A mainstay of many quest and adventure stories, nostalgia (nostos + algos) both results and manifests in historical and gothic narratives. In fact, gothic fiction, according to Horace Walpole, represents a "blend [of] the two kinds of Romance, the ancient and the modern[.]" [63] As a union of various forms of romance then, gothic fiction emerges as something concerned with the reconstruction of embellished memories or imagined pasts, thus developing the dual narrative of detective fiction, but in a potential or contrafactual, rather than indicative mood. The creation of an unreal past concerns not only the pages within a gothic story, but also, occasionally, the books themselves, as when Ian Duncan identifies an antiquarian forgery as the first gothic tale.[64] He explains romance as "a *fiction apart* from modern life[,]" thereby reiterating both its recursive temporality and its unreality. Exploring the interrelations between the emergence of novels as platforms, and their content as romance or fiction, Duncan tracks literary transformations through touchstone authors Ann Radcliffe, Walter Scott, and Charles Dickens. Although Duncan limits his study to the eighteenth and nineteenth

[62] Such as Fiona Robertson, *Legitimate Histories: Scott, Gothic, and the Authorities of Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).
[63] Quoted in Ian Duncan, *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel: The Gothic, Scott, Dickens* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992), 20.
[64] William Marshal's "translation" of a 16th century Italian story "by" Onuphrio Muralto.
Duncan, *Modern Romance*, 20.

centuries, many of his arguments and insights find further corollary evidence in the novels of Agatha Christie.[65]

Spaces In At Bertram's Hotel

Agatha Christie accomplishes both her detective plots and implicit social commentaries through juxtapositions of the past and the present, thereby exploring nostalgia and its powers as an intangible spatial authority. She sets novels in enormous mansions to discuss the real difficulty of maintaining the necessary number of servants, as well as the modernized culture that prevents servants from being either as cheap or as submissive as they used to be. She also places some of her magnificent trains and daring train robberies alongside airplanes, emphasizing that the direction of 'progress' moves away from past splendor. [66]

While a hardboiled detective should be above such influence, Christie's famed spinster sleuth, Miss Marple can succumb to the authority of nostalgia. In an explicit romanticization of the past, Miss Marple travels back to a childhood haunt in order to vacation and "refresh her memories" *At Bertram's Hotel*. As Christie introduces readers to this location, she describes a place not only nostalgic, but marketing nostalgia.

> Inside, if this was the first time you had visited Bertram's, you felt, almost with alarm, that you had reentered a vanishing world. Time had gone back. You were in Edwardian England once more (*ABH*, chap. 1).

[65] Just as Radcliffe, Scott, and Dickens wrote during the emergence of the novel form, so too did Christie's novels appear on the paperback publishing scene (discussed here in my chapter "Motion") and in the transformative medias of radio, film, and television (unfortunately outside the scope of this thesis).

[66] One of Christie's more extreme juxtapositions between the old and the new occurs in the pages of *Death in the Clouds*. In this novel, Poirot investigates a poison blow-dart murder aboard the airliner Prometheus. Notably, a "facsimile edition" of *Death in the Clouds* appears in another meditation on temporalities, the television show *Doctor Who*.

Here, the ambiance has become so commoditized that "wonderful old duchesses" and other "old dears" stay at discounted prices because their presence improves the "atmosphere" for which American tourists will pay premiums. As the character Colonel Luscombe observes, "These people; decayed aristocrats, impoverished members of the old country families, [...] are all so much *mise en scène*" (*ABH*, chap. 1). Here perhaps, we see the negative aspects of nostalgia that prompted Susan Stewart to describe it as a "social disease[,]" as the nostalgia exercises such a degree of power that groups of people are subsumed into it and rendered inanimate.[67] At Bertram's, the past moves from a memory to a performance, from a dream to a spectacle; a representation of a dissociation between the object and the subject that grows ever more gigantic as mechanical reproduction distances materiality from "lived reality." [68] Like nostalgia, the spectacle emerges as a temporal phenomenon that uses both its position in modernity as well as its focus on distance to recall embellished cultural memories from a time of collective manual productions. What Bertram's really sells then, is the perceived connectivity to an idealized version of England's past.

Aware of the appeal connectivity provides, Christie taps into communal styles when rendering the physical appearance of Bertram's. "If you turn off on an unpretentious street from the Park," she promises readers, "and turn left and right once or twice, you will find yourselves in a quiet street with Bertram's on the right-hand side" (*ABH*, chap. 1). This almost locatable secret conveyed by a friendly narrator reads like information a chance acquaintance might provide one looking for an inn, or conversely, the beginning of a landlord's tale. The

[67] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 23.
[68] Stewart, *On Longing*, 85.

second-person voice directly engages the reader, inviting them personally, not to a place where they are, but to a place where they *could* go. Although the act of directing readers alludes to intangible authorities, this kitschy gesture towards genre conventions begins to undermine the nostalgia. After providing readers with a map and destination, Christie steps out of this adventure mode to describe the street-view of Bertram's:

> Bertram's Hotel has been there a long time. During the war, houses were demolished on the right of it, and a little farther down on the left of it, but Bertram's itself remained unscathed. Naturally it could not escape being, as housing agents would say, scratched, bruised and marked (*ABH*, chap.1)

She describes one's first impression as an ancient building almost magically protected from surrounding violence, yet marked physically by the conflict. Now, the intangible authority appears as a gothic spectre, presiding over this impressively modern version of a distinctly gothic fortress. For Duncan, the gothic represents the juxtaposition of "an origin we have lost" and a haunting alien presence, and as Christie's novel unfolds, this gothic frame becomes an increasingly accurate description of Bertram's Hotel (*MRT*, 23). In this novel, Christie's police inspector faces a long string of seemingly unrelated thefts, which, like Walter Scott's seemingly familyless character Vanbeest Brown, ultimately find a secret origin at Bertram's.[69] But while this origin is being established, Bertram's hotel in the one case and Bertram's estates in the other, undergo powerstrugles of conflicting alien authorities. This loss of the natural and introduction of the unnatural frequently manifests in gothic fictions as failed domesticities in which the stable family unit is lost, and various forms of problematic evils are introduced (*MRT*, 25). *At Bertram's Hotel*, we see the family drama on a gigantic scale. The hotel becomes a public

[69] In Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering; Or, The Astrologer*, five year old Harry Bertram disappears and spends around twenty years living under the name Vanbeest Brown.

amphitheater staging not only its own form of exaggerated domesticity, but also family dramas of its guests. In particular, that of a teenage heiress who kills her mother's first husband (they never legally divorced) at the hotel in order to ensure her financial inheritance. Ending, as Duncan argues all gothic tales must, with a denunciation of the perceived fantasy world that roots the narrative within reality, the idyllic scene of Bertram's is shattered, and Marple, free from the nostalgic authority, realizes the truth: " one can never go back, that one should not ever try to go back -- that the essence of living is going forwards" (*MRT*, 50; *ABH,* chap. 20).

Before arriving at this epiphany, Miss Marple must spend two weeks at the hotel, enjoying her vacation and observing an ever increasing number of strange, kitschy coincidences. As the characters learn to navigate this unusual space, Christie focuses on their mistakes. These errors begin innocently enough as guests miss-recognize strangers while police misremember license plate numbers -- but they simply happen too many times. It soon becomes clear that none of the characters comprehend the ridiculous, irrational events they experience. While investigating the disappearance of an absent minded clergyman, who missed his flight after mistaking the day, Miss Marple and Inspector Davies grow suspicious of the constant blunders. Everyone at the hotel seems either ailing under a numb mind, or else bent on eliciting the kitsch-sublime response in others. As it turns out, this hotel that conceals modern amenities under an "Old England" guise, is the base for an enormous crime syndicate, coincidentally run by one, Lady Sedgwick, that hires actors to impersonate the guests.[70]

[70] The actors turned criminal baffle the police by committing train robberies and the like disguised as high ranking clergymen and aged duchesses all of whom had water-tight alibis, being at well known conventions or tea parties, *etc.* at the time of the crimes.

Readers can accept *At Bertram Hotel's* denouement largely because it remains somewhat less irrational than its alternative -- that the outrageous number of mistakes do not connect. Even so, the details of this tenuously rationalized case verge on nonsense. Stewart understands nonsense as an ephemeral concept that results in a "untouched surface of meaning whose every gesture is reflexive."[71] Duncan, on the other hand, views it as a modern equivalent of the pastoral, both providing "freedom from the world of work and commerce," while highlighting the "outlaw status" of exercising liberty from "fully institutional conditions of social experience." Taken together, these ideas highlight nonsensical qualities integral to Miss Marple's deductions. Every observation and detail has an oddly reflexive quality, that reminds her of some seemingly trivial past experience that stands incongruous with conventional ways of organizing thought. For example, although she doesn't quite realize that the license plate number of a car parked near Bertram's kept changing, she explains to Inspector Davies that it reminds her of a cousin who stuttered. As an unemployed elderly spinster who lives in an unlocatable country village,[72] Miss Marple represents someone who exists outside cultural institutions. Although not a criminal, vagabond, or child, her peripheral position allows her, like many of Dickens' characters, to see through layers of society, while simultaneously preventing her insights from being taken seriously. Christie frequently employs pairs of detectives, here Marple and Inspector Davies, elsewhere Poirot and Hastings or Tommy and Tuppence, to explore the intersection where personal bearings meet perceptions of authority and respectability. While her more

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[71] Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 4.

[72] James Zemboy makes some serious efforts to locate this village, St. Mary's Mead, but concludes that Christie changes its location at will.
James Zemboy, *The Detective Novels of Agatha Christie: A Reader's Guide*. (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008), e.g 192.

miscellaneous characters almost universally prefer to place confidence in whoever is most young, English, and traditionally masculine, Christie seldom if ever affirms this impulse. This struggle for priority in a space institutionally destined for another that Christie depicts within her novels also plays out with Radcliffe's books themselves.

Spaces of Udolpho

The idea of past conventions maintaining a nostalgic authority over modern advances is clearly illustrated by Radcliffe's critical reception.[73] Fearing that kitschy styles might corrupt literary tastes, or even alter the authoritative structure of the literary scene, literary critics made a mockery out of gothic mystery novels such as hers.[74] They also felt threatened by the new institutions of public libraries, which undermines the ability to regulate readerships or reading practices. While Radcliffe currently lives on almost exclusively in the ivory towers of academia, her original readers encountered her novels in public libraries. Eighteenth-century Britain saw a rise both in circulating libraries and in small provincial bookstores, which changed the

[73] Some critics even, according to Rictor Norton, "exult[ed] in the fact that by 1849 Mrs. Radcliffe's name was allegedly almost unknown except by literary historians or devotees of antiquarian book auctions, where her romances, in reddish mottled boards, fetched no more than a penny per volume."
Rictor Norton, *Mistress of Udolpho: The Life of Ann Radcliffe* (New York: Leister University Press,1999), 259.

[74] The "marked opposition between critical and poplar tastes is crucial to understanding the process of gothic's stigmatization in the 1790s. Gothic's reception becomes especially marked and voluble after 1795, and coincides in trajectory and intensity with widespread alarm in England during these years over unrest at home and possible invasion from across the Channel. [...] For those segments of the population threatened by it, cultural change is more than merely upsetting and unsettling[, ... but might indicate greater shifts in power] in the case of the reception of the gothic, whose reviewers and critics occupy markedly different positions of cultural authority and gender than do its producers and consumers." From Michael Gamer's *Romanticism of the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 31-32. Recall that *Mysteries of Udolpho* was published in 1794.

distribution and audience of fiction.[75] Although these changes may not have drastically increased their readership--Michael Gamer for example argues that existing readers simply consumed a greater quantity of publications --they did increase the number of published female authors.[76] The Gothic tradition provided libraries with exactly the sort of generic books they needed to run efficiently, and the libraries were always willing to pay women for genre fiction manuscripts.[77] Ann Radcliffe directly benefited from the circulating libraries' acquired expertise in advertising not only women writers, but also the so-called 'female Gothic.'[78] Between Radcliffe's increasing popularity and the "historically unrivaled prices" at which the copyrights to *Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian* sold, her works attracted an enormous number of imitators. As Richard Alewyn points out, over seventy novels beginning with the words *Mysteries of* _____ proliferated in England between 1794 and 1850,[79] which, according to Jacobs, resulted in a public sense of literary genre. Because the circulating libraries grouped books with similar titles together, people began to expect connections between topic and spatial placement.[80] As this system encouraged readers to view the books interchangeably, the emerging concept of genre fiction helped libraries function efficiently since patrons might be just as pleased with available titles as they would be with waiting for more popular novels.

With this great alteration in reading habits came a confusion regarding the taste demanded by the new system. Michael Gamer explains that many writers did not know how to

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[75]Edward H. Jacobs, "Eighteenth-Century British Circulating Libraries and Cultural Book History." *Book History* 6 (2003): 3.

[76] Edwards Jacob, "Ann Radcliffe and Romantic Print Culture" *Ann Radcliffe, Romanticism and the Gothic,* ed. Dale Townshend and Angela Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 50

[77] Edwards Jacob, "Ann Radcliffe," 52

[78] Edwards Jacob, "Ann Radcliffe," 52

[79]Richard Alewyn, "The Origin of the Detective Novel" *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory,* ed. Glenn Most and William Stowe (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983),75.

[80] Edwards, "Ann Radcliffe," 54.

respond to the exploding literacy rates maybe not caused, but certainly illustrated by the circulating libraries.[81] He notes that one of the most common responses, especially among conservative prose writers, was to make "increasingly anxious calls to police the reading of women and adolescents and to contain the circulation of radical texts."[82] This aim, paired with the complementary anxiety that masses of readers might displace the existing literary spheres caused many to disparage the gothic genre. Robert Miles recalls a particularly gendered example of this criticism from an 1797 article originally published in *The Spirit of Public Journals*.

> Every absurdity has an end . . . In the meantime, should any of your female readers be desirous of catching the season of terrors, she may compose two or three very pretty volumes from the following recipe:
>
> *Take* -- an old castle, half ruinous.
> A long gallery, with a great many doors, some secret ones.
> Three murdered bodies, quite fresh.
> As many skellingtons, in chests and presses.
> An old woman hanging by her neck, with her throat cut.
> Assassins and desperados, *quaint*. *stuff*.
> Noises, whispers, and groans, three score at least.
>
> Mix them together, in the form of three volumes, to be taken at any of the watering-places before going to bed.[83]

By attacking the genre precisely because of its popularity, and by framing the criticism as a recipe, this review anticipates many of the complaints levied against the "cozy" strain of

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[81] Michael Gamer, *Romanticism of the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 32.

[82] Walter Scott as "conservative prose writer," holds more complicated place in this discussion. "In many ways the barometer of poplar taste in the period, Walter Scott writes in an array of genres whose diversity is only less striking than the precision with which he assumes the voice of ballad-singer, dramatist, antiquarian editor, minstrel, historian, reviewer, folklorist, lyric poet, romancer, and historical novelist[,]" Gamer recalls that Scott also mocks the taste of young female readers and interest of "the imitators of Mrs. Radcliffe and Mr. Lewis." Gamer, *Romanticism of the Gothic*, 32-35.

[83] Robert Miles, *Ann Radcliffe: The Great Enchantress* (Manchester: Manchester University Press,1995), 1.

detective fiction. But it also attests to the homogeneity and stability of the genre just three years after Radcliffe's foundational *Mysteries of Udolpho* was published.

This fear of lower class and female readerships upsetting the literary scene, and disrupting the nostalgic authority underlines Greenberg's influential essay, "The Avant-Garde and Kitsch," which outlines aesthetic problems that result from universal literacy. With mass cultural expression open to the public, such gatekeepers sought to regulate the surge of popular media by denigrating both its quality and the taste of its aficionados. Instead of condemning each individual work, it was simply easier to dismiss entire genres of fiction, or, as was sometimes the case, the entirety of genre fiction. As Derrida points out, genre plays an important role in this regulatory enterprise because it exists not only as inhibition, but even as a synonym with law.[84] Both concerned with the drawing of lines they know must inevitably be crossed, he explains that genre and the law mediate relations between writing and belonging. That modes of belonging prescribed by writing (laws) are the same as modes of writing prescribed by belonging (genres). Thus the authority to prescribe must be fluid or recursive. The "rights of authorship" then, "demand nothing else, but nothing less" than "the right to see, the right to have everything in sight."[85] Observation becomes integral to one's ability to navigate genre. Ideas of plural perceptions often appear in detective fiction discourse.[86] With each character necessarily observing different things at different times, readers generally realize that the visionary character's observations are not the only insights of value. Kitsch, as necessarily an

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[84] Jacques Derrida "Law of Genre" *On Narrative*, trans. Avital Ronell, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), e.g. 53, 68.

[85]Derrida, "Law of Genre," 72.

[86] See for example Risa Dickens, "An Eye on the City: The Detective Figure in Benjamin, Kracauer, and Jameson," *Open Journal Montreal,* http://www.aughty.org/pdf/eye_on_city.pdf

amalgamation of elements, logically represents a similar variety of optical perspectives. Not visionary enough to command the authority needed to rewrite the delineations of genre, yet far from blind.

Sight relates not only to kitsch and genre, but also to space and the control thereof. For this project, let us focus simply on three cognates that describe gaze and the visible: spectacle, spectator, and spectre. A prominent word in Eve Sedgwick's definition of kitsch, "spectacle," recalls the material aspects of belonging and the separation caused by mass production.[87] Similarly, readers move in and out of the role of spectator as they both watch events unfold, and actively manipulate experiential outcomes through their reading practices. But, one might wonder, does reading truly come down to intentions, or is it governed more by spectral powers? The spatial dimension of literature houses another absent, yet strangely present, intangible authority that influences readerly choices. As we have explored, spatial authorities figure prominently in the feedback loops of availability and prestige, thereby influencing a reader's choice in books. To turn our attention towards another type of space, that of the page itself, we see that some spaces invite readers to choose even their method of reading. Radcliffe's interspersed poetry specifically invites readers to skip passages, Leigh Price argues, because of the ways it differs both formally and visually from its surrounding prose space.[88] Confronted by elements so clearly other to the narrative, readers either succumb to the temptation to skip over

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[87] Susan Stewart's *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press,1993)

[88] "Why this fear of skipping? It owes something to a nostalgia rather like Bowdler's for a slow, intensive, repetitive mode of reading apparently threatened by the proliferation of ephemerally fashionable novels."
Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise and Fall of the Novel: From Richardson to George Elliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 95-96.

the poems, or else imagine "lesser" readers doing so.[89] Unlike modern detective fictions that provide readers with a manageable amount of clues or metanyms, Radcliffe's readers find themselves confronted with so much information that they necessarily must overlook some details in any given reading, thereby choosing the level at which they wish to interact with the text. In this respect, Price argues that the poetry mirrors the gossiping servants, so characteristic both of mystery and gothic fiction.[90] As the undeniable experts (though perhaps not authorities) of their fictional spaces, servants hold important information that can be found through no other means, but tend to impart their observations in a circuitus and difficult fashion, heavily augmented with accounts of random details. To bring the argument back to interspersed poetry then, these frequently skipped verses must do more than ornement the prose. Indeed, Scott was well aware of non-linear reading when he titled Waverley's seventy-second chapter as "A Postscript, Which Should Have Been a Preface," because framing the preface as the last chapter gives it "still the best chance of being read in [the] proper place[.]" [91] This intangible authority introduced by formal unconventionality appears as a force with jurisdiction over the reading process itself, a force that influences readers to disregard the physical placement of a book's features.

While Radcliffe's novels enjoy an unquestionably formative position in the gothic genre, *Udolpho* hardly seems to fit within the boundaries it helped to construct. True, it features a young heroine, old castle, and evil count, and for Robert Miles, turned the Gothic into an aesthetic rather than a collection of tropes. But, as Terry Castle points out, "to label *The*

[89] Price, *The Anthology,* 96.
[90] Price, *The Anthology*, 98.
[91] Walter Scott, *Waverley,* ed. P.D. Garside (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 363

Mysteries of Udolpho 'Gothic' and leave it at that would be a mistake" (*MU*, xi). Generally when critics discuss non-Gothic spaces in Radcliffe's tale, they focus on the pastoral elements valued by Emily and her father, St Aubert.[92] While this binary does not cover all of the prose genres explored by the novel, it also fails to address the central theme of interspersed poetry. Although declared on the title page, the interspersed poems tend to cause discomfort among critics. While some praise the skill of Radcliffe's verse and others question the rhythm, many find themselves at a loss to explain either the value or function of these original and epigraphed poems as a juxtaposition with the prose. A 1794 review in *British Critic* lays out this uncertainty:

> We have had occasion to observe that the introduction of verses in publications like the present is becoming a fashion, but we confess that they appear to us to be misplaced. However fond the reader may be of poetry, and however excellent the verses themselves, we will venture to assert that few will choose to pursue them whilst eagerly and anxiously pursuing the thread of a tale, a plain proof that, in such a situation, at least they are impertinent. Having said this, we are ready to confess that Mrs. Radcliffe's poetical abilities are of the superior kind, and we shall be glad to see her compositions separately published.[93]

Mary Favret however, offers an explanation both for the critical discomfort, and for the poems themselves. She reads Radcliffe's blatant genre mixing as an effort to imbue her novels with the masculine respectability of verse, as well as an effort to "revise the notions of legitimacy in literature and the social relations figured by genre."[94] This results in a role reversal, according to

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[92] The fact that Radcliffe's own novels are described as reading like several does not appear to stop people from arguing the opposite: "A.N. Wilson notes that it [*The Antiquary*] seems to be made up of two different novels, one a tale of convincing provincial character-types and the other 'a Gothic Romance by Mrs Radcliffe[.]'" Fiona Robertson, *Legitimate Histories,* 199. This situation recalls to me Terry Castle's question: "How well do we really know *The Mysteries of Udolpho*?"

[93] Quoted in Deborah Rogers' *The Critical Response to Ann Radcliffe* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994), 20.

[94] Mary A. Favret, "Telling Tales About Genre: Poetry in the Romantic Novel." *Studies in the Novel* 26,no. 1/2 (1994): 157.

Favret, where prose becomes perceived as a powerful force, and lyric as trivial ornamentation.[95] The authority shifts from the old and nostalgic to the new and kitschy. But poetry does more than illustrate *Udolpho*. Radcliffe uses "poetic imagination," according to Ingrid Horrocks, in lieu of a traditional hero of romanticism.[96] While none of the characters abound in heroic qualities, poetic imagination, Horrocks reads, flies to the rescue by providing both the strength to resist evil and the resolve to escape from it. Poetry then may form a heroic figure for Radcliffe herself, as it proves her knowledge of 18th century British literature and style, and through Thompson, a degree of political awareness. Horrocks explains that Thompson was viewed by female novelists as "on the side of 'rights and liberties[,]'" and that the inclusions of his poems interact meaningfully with the plot of *Udolpho*, establishing parallels between Emily and Britain.[97] Perhaps then, kitschy "poetic imagination" understood as a competing intangible authority also aids Radcliffe both to write for the general public, and to endure a resulting place in the disreputable casements of lowbrow assignation.

Immediately upon her escape from the gothic castle, the narrative shifts focus, and Emily moves beyond the vision of the readers. In one of *Mysteries of Udolpho's* more ludicrous plot moments, Radcliffe pens a new introduction with new characters four-hundred and sixty-four pages into the novel (*MU*, 464).[98] The narrative follows this new, yet strangely similar path until readers watch the recently introduced Blanche, as she watches Emily experience a shipwreck. By connecting her separate narrative threads with this transportative failure, Radcliffe evokes a long

[95] Favret, "Telling Tales," 167-168.
[96] Ingrid Horrocks, "Her ideas arranged themselves": Re-membering Poetry in Radcliffe." *Studies in Romanticism* 47, no. 4 (Winter, 2008): 509.
[97] Horrocks, "'Her ideas arranged themselves,'" 516.
[98] A similar occurrence can be found in *Romance of the Forest*, when Radcliffe introduces le Luc.

tradition of philosophical thought experiments, among them, the shipwreck metaphor in Lucretius' poem *On The Nature of Things*.[99] Discussing the pleasure one feels when, from high ground, they watch someone else struggling in the sea, Lucretius, describes the solid grounding that philosophy affords the spectator.[100] Although this is her only venture onto the sea, Emily has, at this point in the narrative, been in danger of crashing for quite some time. Tossed mercilessly between the raging sea of villainous guardians and the perilous cliffs of disastrous marriages, Emily has already experienced a sea "involved in utter darkness" when Blanche's father, the count "perceive[s] that no boat could live in the storm" (*MU* 486). Just as the confines of Udolpho staved off song and verse, Radcliffe observes in the shipwreck scene that "the tempest had again overcome every other sound" (*MU* 486). When Emily and her companions safely disembark she acquires not only the protection of the count and agency over her future, but she also changes from the philosophical student of her late father, to Blanche's teacher.

Poetry mediates classical philosophy, both literally since many works such as Lucretius' appear in verse, and narratively, since Emily both learns and instructs through read and composed lines. Following a general trend that the poems from the first half of the book thematically repeat in the second, Blanche's only original composition, "The Butterfly to his Love" recalls vividly themes from Emily's first poem, "The Glow-Worm." The image of a ghostly glow-worm is used by both Walter Scott,[101] and Alfred Tennyson,[102] and it here provides

[99] In Latin, *De Rerum Natura.*

[100] Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence,* trans. Steven Redell (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 26.

[101] In Scott's *Heart of Mid-Lothian*, a glow-worm appears in Madge Wildfire's last stanza: "The glow-worm o'er grave and stone // shall light thee steady.// The Owl from the steeple sing, // 'Welcome, proud lady.'" page 366

the subject for an intentionally kitschy poem in "a sort of tripping measure" so bad that Radcliffe comments: "[w]hatever St. Aubert might think of the stanzas, he would not deny his daughter the pleasure of believing that he approved them" (*MU*, 16-17). The poem introduces a poetic, spectral presence, in its final stanza, the oddly italicized "vapour of the woods."

> But soon *the vapour of the woods* will wander afar,
> And the fickle moon will fade, and the stars disappear,
> Then, cheerless will they be tho' they fairies are,
> If I, with my pale light, come not near! (*MU*, 17)

At the time of "The Glow-Worm"'s recital, poetic authority clearly belongs to St. Aubert, whose approval is both sought and provided. When however St. Aubert dies, he seems to either become or be replaced by a poetic wind or vapour. In another case of poetic repetition the bat sonnets appears to represent different iterations of the same poem. The first time a bat sonnet is mentioned, Radcliffe describes the lines as ones Emily "had once heard St. Aubert recite[,]" and later Blanche recalls lines "which Emily had given her" (*MU*, 96, 598). Despite not sharing any lines verbatim it seems reasonable to read them as secondary and tertiary remediations of the same poem. Emily's version begins, "Now the bat circles on the breeze of eve, // [...] Whose lonely sighs the wanderer deceive[,]" whereas Blanche shifts agency from the environment, and declares of the bat "Thou flit'st athwart the pensive wand'rer's way" (*MU*, 96, 598). Considered as differently authorized readings of the same poem by different version of the same character, the bat sonnett indicates a weird use of literary figures a part of, yet apart from the narrative.

While La Vallè clearly represents a pastoral space, and Castle Udolpho contributed to literary definitions of gothic spaces, the scenes set at château Le Blanc might represent an absurd

[102] "Chant me now some wicked stave, // Til my drooping courage rise, // And the glow-worm of the grave // glimmer in thy rheumy eyes." from "The Vision of Sin" *The Works of Alfred Tennyson: Locksley Hall, Lucretius, and Other Poems* (1881)

literalization of Longinus' sublime. The sublime for Longinus concerns the experience of an emotion "*καὶ οἷον ἔκφρονας*," even the sort of (emotion) away from or outside of the mind.[103] Several translators including W. Rhys Robert, take *ἔκφρονας* as the act of being besides oneself. [104] To see then Emily's consciousness physically outside of her mind, standing literally beside herself in the form of Blanche, one sees Radcliffe exploring figures, both literary and physical. An element of his critical theory, Longinus focuses on sublime uses of "schema" (σχήμα, forms or figures) and particularly on apostrophe.[105] While neither of the bat sonnets exactly use apostrophe, Blanche's direct address to the bats around her gives a different impression than the earlier composition. Emily recalls the sonnet after her father's death when her deserted estates frequently provide spectral fears. Startled a few paragraphs before the inset poem, she asks the room at large, "what should I fear [...] if the spirits of those we love ever return to us [?]" (*MU*, 95-96). Considering the frequency with which the narrator records thoughts that never get voiced, it seems noteworthy that Emily's question is answered by "the silence, which again reigned[,]" convincing her that "her imagination had deluded her" (*MU*, 96). In light of Terry Castle's observation that a spectral presence of St. Abert follows Emily throughout the novel,[106] it seems he could be read as the wind in the sonnett -- not engaged in direct address, but likely participating in direct conversation. To cast then frightened Emily as the wandering bat, who "listens, but with sweetly-thrilling fears, // To the low, mystic murmurs of the wind!" his sense-less plight appears similar to the terrors of imagination she keeps encountering, both of

[103] Longinus 39:2 οὐ γὰρ αὐλὸς μὲν ἐντίθησίν τινα πάθη τοῖς ἀκροωμένοις καὶ οἷον ἔκφρονας (For does not a flute on the one hand place the listeners into some emotion, even the sort of (emotion) out of the mind)
[104] Robert (trans.), "On the Sublime," XXXIX.
[105] Robert (trans.), "On the Sublime," XVI.
[106] Terry Castle, "The Spectralization of the Other in *The Mysteries of Udolpho,*" *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature*. ed. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown. (Methuen, 1987), 243, 245.

which center on problems assessing auditory stimuli: "For oft, when melancholy charms his mind, // He thinks the Spirit of the rock he hears" (*MU*, 96). Even so, this reading seems a bit tenuous.

Sublimity, Longinus decides, correlates to a figure's degree of obviousness, and increases with obscurity. Arguing that the best figure is that which escapes notice, clarity emerges as a basis for differentiating sublime schema from rhetorical devices.[107] Interestingly, Château le Blanc also concerns characters who escape notice. The space seemingly poses as a pastoral duplication of La Valée, but its secret, gothic wing vividly recalls Udolpho. When characters eventually venture into the naturally haunted gothic apartments, they encounter barely perceptible forms. These forms, real or imagined, startle Ludivico, a servant who has previously engineered Emily's escape from castle Udolpho, who,"imagining he saw a man's face, looking over the high back of his arm-chair" looks up from his reading (*MU*, 557). This is the last readers hear of Ludovico until he reappears from a substantial disappearance. The haunted chamber, Radcliffe eventually explains, contains pirate tunnels used both to store and transport stolen goods and perceiving Ludovico as a threat, the pirates decided to abduct him. For this and other rationalizations of the supernatural, Radcliffe has long faced both incredulity and rejection (*MU*, xxii). Coincidentally, a modernized although strikingly similar scene plays out in *At Bertram's Hotel*. The initial investigations concern what Inspector Davies jokingly dubs "the case of the disappearing clergyman" in which the reverend Canon Pennyfather misses his train and returns to his hotel room where he sees his visage impersonated by actor-criminals. Besides himself with confusion and concussed with a blow to the head, Pennyfather wakes up in a remote cottage,

[107] Longinus 17:1 διόπερ καὶ τότε ἄριστον δοκεῖ τὸ σχῆμα, ὅταν αὐτὸτοῦτο διαλανθάνῃ ὅτι σχῆμά ἐστιν.

having no memory of the preceding events. Positive in most respects except for the explained supernatural, Castle argues that Radcliffe's use of this literary move leaves "the reader with the sense of being cheated" and Scott elaborates on the "disappointment and displeasure" generated by Radcliffe's "unsatisfactory solution of the mysteries" (*MU,* xi, xxiii). Christie's readership, however, appears to prefer any explanation to a supernatural ending.[108]

Reassured of your safety, you view the space in a new light. You assert your right to move around the grounds by vering off of the beaten path and observing evidence of Christie's restoration. The buying, remodeling, selling, and moving of houses was one of Agatha Christie's favorite hobbies. Beginning with her childhood dollhouses, an interest in location and decorating stayed with Christie; she understood and experienced the locations that she remediated as settings for her novels.[109] She was also aware of the structures of authority and emotional transport involved in owning spaces old and new.

[108] Although interestingly the 2007 TV adaptation of *At Bertram's Hotel* changed Pennyfather's plot. In it, he assists the hotel to shuffle around leftover Nazis so that they can escape from post-war repercussions. The IMDB reviews for this episode illustrate a deep displeasure: "Appallingly Bad Christie Adaptation," "Dreadful and Unfathomable," "Unbelievably Awful," "Oh Dear," and "Murder - Of the Plot that is!"

Notably, a 1964 Miss Marple movie not based on any books, *Murder Ahoy!*, seems to have received a more positive reception.

[109] "Looking back over the past, I become increasingly sure of one thing. My tastes have remained fundamentally the same. What I liked playing with as a child, I have liked playing with later in life. Houses, for instance." Christie, *Autobiography,* 48.

Motion,
Fast and Slow

The express train that in three nights and two days
hurdles across the continent is a miracle, but travelling in it has nothing of the
faded splendour of the *train bleu*.
~*Minima Moralia* (#77)

As you amble through the tall grass, consider what the ownership of these English Estates meant to Agatha Christie. In her autobiography, Christie recalls her nurse's remonstrations against Agatha's childhood dream to become a lady of England's aristocracy.[110] *This sort of social mobility was, in Nursie's eyes, quite impossible. Nevertheless, Christie's success as a mystery author allowed her to move into various estates beginning with Styles in Berkshire and concluding with the historic, riverfront Greenway in Devon. When not moving in and out of houses, Christe traveled across the continent, both aboard the orient express and through other conveyances, with her husband, Max Mallowan, an archaeologist of the ancient Middle East. Little did Nursie know that Mallowan would be knighted for his archaeology, and Christie would receive the D.B.E, Order of the British Empire distinction for her writing--thereby becoming "the Lady Agatha" twice over.*

[110] "I wanted, above everything in the world, to be the Lady Agatha one day. But Nursie's social knowledge was inexorable. 'That you can never be,' she said. 'Never?' I was aghast."
Agatha Christie, *Agatha Christie an Autobiography* (New York: Bantam Books, 1977), 32

In order for someone to disappear, they necessarily must move. If the nostalgic, intangible authorities are considered spatial, then motion is the key to avoiding them. Technologies of motion allow for the evasion, contention, and renegotiation of established power structures as they open channels of communication both by allowing people to meet face to face, or by allowing words to circulate to a wider audience. In both its locomotive and horse-drawn varieties, the coach provides documents with a wider range of influence, but also with a whole new class of reader -- the commuter. This boost that the literary market received both in supply and demand further attests to the widespread literacy rates evidenced by the libraries. By introducing the notion of motion, however, an element of freedom emerges to evadete inhibitions and policing forces of the powers that be. On the one hand, letters in mail coaches had a greater chance of reaching their intended recipient without interception, and on the other, anyone can be forgiven for reading a kitschy novel silently on a train -- especially if they read acceptable works in their drawing rooms. But with advances in transportation, came the apparatus of the transatlantic book trade, which in the case of Christie, lessened rather than increased the immediacy between herself and her readers. This happened due to the proliferation of drastically different legal (not to mention pirated) editions of her novels. This chapter begins by exploring various types of motion depicted in Scott's *Heart of Mid-Lothian,* an early version of the detective-less detection novel. I then use *Murder on the Orient Express* to frame an exploration into Christie's publication history and existing scholarship.

Motion in Heart of Midlothian

In Walter Scott's 1818 mystery novel, *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, protagonist Jeanie Deans must navigate the motions of Scottish law in order to save her younger sister from the

gallows. In this novel, Scott's diction frequently alludes to motion across several dimensional axis, reserving horizontal motion for Jeanine and vertical for her sister. In introducing this sister "named Euphema, by corruption, Effie" Scott alludes to her storyline, while simultaneously emphasising the morality of lowness it explores (the OED defines "corruption" in terms of debasement).[111] Thus established as the characterization of descent, Effie stands trial, accused of having "*fallen* a sacrifice to an inconsiderate affection for a young man[,]" a transgression for which "she must ultimately stand or *fall*" (*HM*, 199, 201; emphasis added). This preoccupation with language encoding motion also appears, as James Chandler remarks, in the case itself, since the word "case" necessarily recalls declension, both through its grammatical sense and the conflicting natures of legal and moral case systems.[112] Indeed, as the lawyer and the scholar argue over the right to identify shortcomings in others, Scott clues his readers into a linguistics aspect of the narrative by continually noting the superiority of clerical Latin, since scholars of legal Latin do not learn the grammar.[113] Just as, in her incarcerated state, Effie cannot travel horizontally, Jeanie cannot stoop to perjury even though the lawyers have based their entire defense on her doing so. To repeal the resulting death sentence, Jeanie, a dairymaid, must walk barefooted from Edinburgh to London to beg on her sister's behalf, and convince the Queen herself that Effie Deans did not murder her secret, illegitimate infant whom no one can find.

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[111] Corrupt, adj. "Debased in character; infected with evil; depraved; perverted; evil, wicked."

[112] James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998), 311.

[113] "'*Non cuivis contingit adire Corinthum* -- aha, Mr Saddletree?'
'And aha, Mr Butler,' rejoined Bartholin, upon whom, as may well be supposed, the jest was lost"
David Hewitt and Alison Lumsden provide the following translation of Horace's line: "it has not been everyone's lot to visit Corinth." (*HM,* 43, *HM* n., 622)

Jeanie begins feeling better as soon as she resolves to undertake the journey to negotiate with the land's highest authorities, even though not one of her confidants expects success. While preparing to leave, she tends to her cattle and says some goodbyes, careful to continue moving lest stillness "soften or weaken my heart -- it's ower weak already for what I hae to do. I will think and act as firmy as I can, and speak as little" (*HM*, 226). This need to think and act, to manage emotion through motion, illustrates a power of iterative motion to engender a self assurance needed to renegotiate systems of authority. As Oliver Wendell Holmes has remarked, "walking, then, is a perpetual falling with a perpetual self-recovery."[114] Indeed, Scott depicts Jeanie's greatest power as her ability to self-recover, both from the traumatic and the ridiculous. Towards the end of her travels, Jeanie is stopped and placed under the authority of her enemies. Jeanie finds herself benighted on a road and falls into the hands of Meg Mudrdockson, the self-appointed mother to all of the highwaymen. During her captivity, Jeanie learns that her progress was arrested intentionally, and that Murdockson stole her infant nephew to punish his father for preferring Effie to Murdockson's mentally disabled daughter. Left in the charge of this daughter, Madge Wildfire, Jeanie is conducted on a long ramble through the wilderness, where she learns bits and pieces both of Effie's case and of Madge's past through her makeshift warden's fragmented poems and song.[115] Described by Fiona Robertson as a foil to Queen

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[114] From "The Physiology of Walking" (1883). Coincidentally, Oliver Wendell Holmes is generally considered Sherlock Holmes' namesake.
Quoted in Celeste Langan, *Romantic Vagrancy: Wordsworth and the Simulation of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1.

[115] Madge Wildfire frames her story around Paul Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, another tale that features a great deal of walking, as well as salvation through that motion. She casts herself as Mercy and Jeanie Deans as Christiana.

Caroline, Madge's excursion results in Jeanie's freedom, just as the calm queen pardons the emobile Effie.[116]

These walks for clemency are not *The Heart of Mid-Lothian's* only example of physical movement. The legal authorities also display great energy, but for all of their motion, they still cannot accomplish anything, or assert authority effectively. A long standing trope of detective fiction, Scott details a drama of ineffectual effort expended by the bustling, bumbling, blundering, background constabulary. The narrative opens with a smuggler who, after robbing the counting house and being sentenced to death, heroically allows his accomplice to escape during a public tollbooth-church service. As many witnessed this selfless act, the prisoner garnered public sympathies, and his public execution draws a large crowd of protesters who object to governmental cruelty. The officer in charge, Captain Porteous, decides to handle the situation by enthusiastically opening fire into the gathered crowd, which simply earns him several charges of murder. When bureaucratic corruption keeps Porteous from hanging, a calm and purposeful mob led by Robertson, the aforementioned accomplice, assume authority over the situation, overpower the prison and lynch him themselves. Following this depiction of the Porteous riot, the Edinburgh authorities rendered by Scott burst into feaverish action in their desire to apprehend every one of the conspirators. In their frenzy, the authorities agree to pardon and even hire career criminal, Jem Ratcliff,[117] in return for the apprehension of Robertson. Predictably, Ratcliff double crosses the police, but they remain blissfully ignorant of this detail.

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[116] Fiona Robertson, *Legitimate Histories: Scott, Gothic, and the Authorities of Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 210.

[117] Not a reference to Ann Radcliffe, although her name is frequently misspelled with a "t" -- even on published editions of her novels. James Ratcliff was a historical prisoner as per David Hewitt and Alison Lumsden's endnote (*HM* n., 627).

Characterizations of ineffectual authorities -- so long as they appear in works that re-establish morality and punish evil -- actually increase readers' sense of police presence, according to D.A. Miller.[118] This happens, because readers understand that the agents of the law are superfluous to the execution of justice, thus eliminating all concepts of a so called 'perfect crime.'

While Effie falls vertically, Jeanie walks horizontally, and the legal apparatus moves in circles, a new transportation technology revolutionizes the patterns of motion -- the mailcoach. As Jeanine begins her quest, the narrative voice -- presumably of the fictional schoolmaster Peter Pattison -- informs readers that, while traveling "betwixt the capital of Britain and her northern sister," in his time was, in a phrase that might well describe kitsch, "a matter at once safe, brief, and simple," it was quite the contrary in 1737 when Jeanie Deans made the journey. As a member of *Scott's Tales of My Landlord* series,[119] *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* appears in print as the transcription of a conversation Pattison overhears between the landlord and guests of the Wallace inn, which his fictional coworker Jedidiah Cleishbotham edits for publication. The novel opens with Pattison sitting in the grass as he meditates on the new immediacy resulting from the emergence of mailcoaches and awaits one's arrival. Unfortunately though, the object of his attention flips over and several lawyers who will later recount the tale that becomes *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* are "pitched into the river Gander" (*HM*, 10). These mailcoaches of the framing narrative, Kyoko Takanashi argues, represent not only literary circulation, but also "Scott['s] attempts to create an alibi" to defend himself against accusations that his novels "essentially

[118] *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 50.

[119] Which James Chandler notes might be the first ever use of the term 'series' used in the sense of grouping novels -- "Although the term was used in eighteenth-century periodical literature, I can find no earlier precedent for the 'Series' format in fiction that Scott's massive success with the three series of 'Tales of my Landlord,' and indeed with the Waverley series as a whole, established[.]" *England in 1819,* 225.

commodif[y] Scotland for the consumption of English readers[.]" [120] This alibi, as Takanashi puts it, centers around the opening scene in which an accident in circulation causes Pattison to receive local, personal, authentic narratives rather than the periodical publication he anticipated. Since the mailcoach conveyed both forms of literature, and only delivered the local story accidently, it illustrates the need for a variety of "insider" (the mail and periodical) and "outsider" (the lawyers rode outside of the coach) perspectives in order for historical novels to succeed and be circulated.[121] Furthermore, he argues that Jeanie Deans and *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* travel on parallel trajectories; "they both originate in obscure localities of Scotland and they both require a rather unconventional series of mediators to gain an audience."[122] If we then view Jeanie and *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* as mirroring each other, then in both cases, the conflicting jurisdiction over the "case" is awarded to the schoolmasters; Ruben Butler in the main narrative, and Jedidiah Cleishbotham in the framing one. The novel's "L'Envoy," (which should have been an advert), includes a line in French, and the worthy scholar of declinable languages uses the last sentence in the whole book to explain:

> Of which witty speech, if any reader shall demand the purport, I have only to respond, that I teach the French as well as the Classical tongues, at the easy rate of five shillings per quarter, as my advertisements are periodically making known to the public. *(HM,* 469)

[120] Kyoko Takanashi "Circulation, Monuments, and the Politics of Transmission in Sir Walter Scott's Tales of My Landlord," Published in *ELH* 79, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 290.

[121] William Hazlitt expressed this idea in quite different terms: "With reverence be it spoken, he [Scott] is like the man who having to imitate the squeaking of a pig on the stage brought the animal under his coat with him." from "Scott and the spirit of the age" (1825) quoted in Evan Gottlieb, *Walter Scott and Contemporary Theory* (: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 34.

[122] Takanashi, "Circulation," 304.

This seems one of the most deliberately commodified and kitschy endings possible, one specifically licensed by modern technologies. The idea of material advertising requires a cheap method of reproduction as well as a reliable means of circulation.

Motion of Murder on the Orient Express

A politics of circulation that labels "insider" and "outsider" literature, and thus determines the avenues and audiences of certain books is likewise critical to the story of Agatha Christie's literary afterlife. When I began requesting specific editions of books for this project, I encountered an unexpected example of Christie's absence in academia: her novels' general neglect in university libraries. The University of Texas' interlibrary loan system seemed to have difficulty locating current editions of Agatha Christie novels by Harpercollins, as these novels took several weeks longer than the other books I requested, and they arrived from public rather than academic libraries. The British publications of her works, meanwhile, can always be ordered as imports, but do not move at all in the scholarly circuits of book transmission. To read Christie across her places, one would have to go into motion oneself, and become the sort of person who takes sublime voyages to new locations for reading (where one might procure kitschy souvenirs): on an ocean liner, perhaps, in a modern day "coach" (i.e., a bus), or in a train.

Trains remain one of the most iconic technologies featured in Agatha Christie's novels. While many of her stories include railway travel, locomotives play an integral role in books such as *4:50 From Paddington* (also published as *Murder, She Said,* and *What Mrs. McGillicuddy Saw!*) in which a woman witnesses a murder through a series of windows as two trains speed past each other on parallel tracks. In other books like *The Mystery of the Blue Train*, Christie

uses Le Train Bleu as the setting for a Poirot case concerning murder and the theft of a ruby known as "The Heart of Fire." While certainly a transportative technology, some have identified the train as a metaphor for European writing (vis a vis the printing press and circulation), and others argue the train as emblematic of a "mystical form of knowledge that allows the subject to access a higher level of reality." [123] From these viewpoints, the train emerges as a technology of literary transport. If the printing press represents the machinery of an earlier literary revolution, the train surely represents that of a later one, since it occasioned the invention of the paperback. As legend has it, Alan Lane was returning from a visit with Agatha Christie when he found himself at the Exeter train station with nothing to read.[124] It was 1934, and books were expensive products sold in specialty stores. Due to the inconveniences of traveling with hardbacks and the impossibility of purchasing one on the road, Lane faced two options: he could either resign to the facts of life, or invent the mass market paperback.[125] His sixpenny books were the future of literacy, and they would not only be sold in public areas, but also in vending machines.[126] By one account, Lane voiced his new plan to a nearby guard who grumbled: "Far too risky. Far too popular. This fellow threatens the heart and soul of the hardback business," thus echoing Greenberg's anxieties that the availability of literature would disrupt established practices and

[123]Roxanna Curto, "Technology Transfer, the Railway, and Independence in Ousmane Sembene's Les Bouts de bois de Dieu" *Trains, Literature, Culture: Reading / Writing the Rails,* edited by Steven D. Spalding and Benjamin Frasier. (Plymouth: Lexington books, 2012), 53-77.
Alessio Lerro, "Futurist Trains: Aesthetics and Subjectivity in the Italian Avant-Garde." *Trains, Literature, Culture: Reading / Writing the Rails,* edited by Steven D. Spalding and Benjamin Frasier. (Plymouth: Lexington books, 2012), 77-97.

[124]The Allen Lane Foundation, "History," https://allenlane.org.uk/history/
[125] Lane Foundation, "History."
[126] Lane Foundation, "History." These were called Penguinincubators

tastes.[127] Christie reappears at the conclusion of this story, since Lane's train station paperbacks allow people to "'buy a Christie' for a train journey as automatically as they buy a ticket[.]" [128]

Christie's most popular train novel, *Murder on the Orient Express,* begins with an urgent telegram that necessitates Poirot's immediate travel from Stamboul to London. Although every coach on the Orient Express has been inexplicably booked, he finds his old Belgian friend M. Bouc, "a director of the Compagnie Internationale des Wagons Lits," who pulls the necessary strings to ensure Poirot's travel arrangements (*MOE*, 15). The name Bouc phonetically recalls the word "book," while translating from French as the word "goat" -- this reminds me of the parchment, glue and leather binding materials used historically in publication. It seems then, only "a slight stretch of fancy" to liken M. Bouc's friendship with Poirot to that between Christie and Sir William Collins.[129] With his publishing company, Collins helped Christie's novels reach admirers of "such a diverse lot as statesmen, financiers, teachers, bus drivers, clerics, girl scouts, and prisoners -- among others[,]" [130] and move towards historic sales (often claimed as

[127]McCrumb, Robert. "What would Allen Lane make of Amazon?" www.theguardian.com, 2013.

[128] Barnard, *A Talent to Deceive*, ix.
Elizabeth Walter also speaks to Christie's mutually beneficial relationship to the paperback industry: "In a surprisingly short time, Agatha Christie had become the first author after Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells to have a million paperback copies of her books published on one day."
"The Case of the Escalating Sales." *Agatha Christie: First Lady of Crime*. ed. H.R.F. Keating. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), 19.

[129] Christie sets president for reading wordplays in her character names in *And Then There Were None*: "Ulick Norman Owen -- Ulna Nancy Owen -- each time, that is to say, U.N. Owen. Or by a slight stretch of fancy, UNKNOWN!" (*AWN,* 61).

[130] *The New Bedside, Bathtub, and Armchair Companion to Agatha Christie,* ed. Dick Riley and Pam McAllister (New York: The Ungar Publishing Company, 1986), 1. -- a fascinating compilation of book reviews, fan articles, photographs, recipes, and crossword puzzles.

surpassing all books except the bible and those by Shakespeare).[131] According to Elizabeth Walter, an editor of Collins' Crime Club imprint, Christie worked well with Sirs Godfrey and William Collins for over fifty years.[132] In spite of a great deal of micromanaging and letters that begin "Dear Billy, I really am furious[,]" [133] or "No, I don't like the blurb at all!" [134] Christie and Collins maintained a close friendship, with the publisher buying her a car and hosting her eightieth birthday party. As Walter notes, they met as up and coming entities, and both shared and contributed to the other's success.

In spite of all its implied promises concerning speed and efficiency, the Orient Express as it appears in Christie's novel almost immediately finds itself trapped under a snowdrift. Stopped indefinitely, a conductor explains to the distressed passengers: "[h]eavens knows how long we shall be here" (*MOE*, 38). This scene of confused and disappointed passengers coming to terms with the unexpectedly stymied train aptly allegorizes Agatha Christie's career understood in terms of publication history. Although by all accounts substantial,[135] quantitative sales records do not exist for her books, perhaps because, as Elizabeth Walter asserts, they were destroyed in the

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[131] See, for example, Robert Barnard's *A Talent to Deceive: An Appreciation of Agatha Christie* (1980)

[132]Walter, "The Case of the Escalating Sales," 20-21.

[133] Letter held in the Harpercollins archive and published online at https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/831838/Letters-Agatha-Christie-angry-publisher-puppy-Poirot-book-cover-labours-of-hercules

[134] Letter held in the Harpercollins archive and available to view on their bicentennial website. https://200.hc.com/inside-the-archives/letter-from-agatha-christie/#page-content

[135] As Matthew Bunson argues: "[It] is still difficult to comprehend fully the success of Dame Agatha Christie. It has been estimated that her books have sold in excess of one-half billion copies in over 100 languages." (Note that even the estimated numbers change with each author who comments on them).
Matthew Bunson, *The Complete Christie: An Agatha Christie Encyclopedia* (New York: Pocket Books, 2000), VII.

Blitz.[136] Neither, it would appear, does a definitive list of Christie's entire written output survive. Christie herself seems to have no idea how many books she wrote (or, to be the only person who knew), having told one fan "I'm afraid I don't keep lists of my books,"[137] and another "I will have written 82 books on my 82nd birthday this year and they have been translated into over 80 languages" [138]-- a reckoning which does not correlate with any list I have found, being four or more books too many. Likewise, her notebooks record partial lists of her stories with sometimes glaring mistakes, such as remembering Poirot concerned with cases from novels in which he does not appear (*SN*, 159-160). Her works were handled by a host of American and British publishers, and were sold under a variety of variant titles-- sometimes upwords of three for a single novel. As if this were not enough, Christie also published some plots as a short story, a novel, and a play (often with a new set of titles for each mode). This snowdrift of manuscripts and editions that differ drastically between their numerus publishers hinders scholarly conversations, since no one is sure that they are discussing the same text.

The morning that Christie's Orient Express becomes immobilized, Bouc hires Poirot to investigate the murder of a passenger. In order to conduct this investigation, Poirot interviews a train full of amateurs, understood in Thomas de Quincey's sense of the word, as murder artists.[139] While the fictional snowdrift forced a reliance on so called amatures, the metaphorical snowdrift

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[136] Walter, "The Case of the Escalating Sales," 13.
[137] 1974 letter sold (presumably to a private buyer) through Vintage Memorabilia, and is "unconditionally guaranteed to be genuine" by that company.
https://www.vintagememorabilia.com/index.cfm/page/agatha-christie-autograph-letter-signed-1974/

[138] 1972 letter currently for sale through Kenneth W. Rendell II Inc. "The [self declared] world's preeminent dealer in historical letters, autographs, historical documents and manuscripts."
http://kwrendellgallery.com/literature/literature-englishirish/christie-agatha-2/

[139] Thomas de Quincey, "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts," *On Murder,* ed. Robert Morrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), eg. 13.

of Christie's publications required effort by amatures, here understood as unpaid and unscholarly individuals. One of the characters, Princess Dragomiroff, commands authority on the train and murder case despite having no relevant experience. Similarly, the first (noteworthy) Agatha Christie cataloguing project was undertaken by Nancy Blue Wynne to assist her fellow Christie readers. By 1976, the situation of Christie's papers had become so complex that enthusiasts could not ascertain whether or not they had read her entire corpus. As the bibliographical page attests, this is an amature project. It reads: "when she isn't taking care of her husband, home, and two sons, [... Wynne] teaches piano, reads mysteries, [... and] directs local children's choirs." [140] Although not the type of character that academia frequently respects, decades of foundational Agatha Christie scholarship both references and builds off of Nancy Blue Wynne's mostly complete *Agatha Christie Chronology*. Wynne's little handbook offers modern readers a glimpse of the circles in which Christie's works traveled. Considered exemplary specimens of the "cozy" detective tradition, Christie's novels were thought of as reading material for the middle-class housewife, as well as "a lot of older women [... who] forget it is as soon as they read it."[141] In the 1970s and 1980s, academia began gesturing towards Agatha Christie novels, but now, several decades later, they have just began traveling in scholarly circles.

For *Murder on the Orient Express's* denouement, Poirot gathers together all of the passengers and lays out two possible reconstructions of the crime, imploring "M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine here to judge which solution is the right one" (*MOE,* 250). He begins with an

[140] Nancy Blue Wynne, *An Agatha Christie Chronology*. (New York: Ace Books, 1976), n.p.

[141] From a chapter entitled: "A Christie Fan Confesses 'I Get That Familiar Tingle When I See Her Books': An Interview with Ms. Jean R. Denton, editor of Fleming Gazette, Flemingsburg, Kentucky."
Riley (ed.), *The Bedside, Bathtub, Companion,* 4.

explanation that connects every single clue, namely that a random, unknown enemy of the deceased snuck onto the train, stole a conductor's uniform, murdered the victim, hid both the knife and the uniform in the passengers' luggage, and left, escaping into Croatia's frozen wilderness before anyone saw him. Bouc then declares, "But it is absurd, that explanation," voicing a sentence with which readers can easily agree (*MOE*, 251). But the second option, that every passenger was a friend or family member of a two-year old who was murdered by the deceased, that they avenged her together since a " jury is composed of twelve people -- there were twelve passengers -- Ratchett was stabbed twelve times[,]" is not the reconstruction with which the institutional authorities are provided (*MOE*, 257-258). Deciding unanimously that "the first theory [.... be] offer[ed] to the Yugo-Slavian police when they arrive[,]" Poirot, Bouc, and Dr. Constantine provide a false forensic explanation in order to prevent the arrest of the twelve, justified murderers (*MOE*, 264. Unfortunately, as another institution, academia seems to have also accepted a false assessment. The idea that Christie's works, like a stranger who jumped onto the train of cultural thought, have since jumped off without a trace, allows people to downplay her cultural significance with comments such as: "she was not in herself a particularly extraordinary person[,]" [142] or Edmund Wilson's somewhat famous article title, "Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?" Perhaps intimidated by Christie's husband, Max Mallowan's declaration that "the analytic critic of detective fiction is either a knave or a fool[,]" [143] literature on Agatha Christie continues to either use her works simply as case studies in discussions of race

[142]H.R.F. Keating, "Introduction." *Agatha Christie: First Lady of Crime*. ed. H.R.F. Keating. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), 7.

[143] Quoted in Bargainnier, *The Gentle Art of Murder,* 1.

or gender,[144] or to record encyclopedic listings and propose appreciation, while refusing to use citations.[145]

[144] See for example J.C. Bernthal, *Queering Christie: Revisiting the Golden Age of Detective Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), Merja Makinen, *Agatha Christie: Investigating Femininity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), or Mevlüde Zengin, "Western Image of the Orient and Oriental in Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile*: A Postcolonial Reading." *Gaziantep University Journal Of Social Sciences* 15, no. 3 (2016): 837-866.

[145] Robert Barnard explicitly states: "Since this [*A Talent to Deceive: An Appreciation of Agatha Christie*] is intended as a popular book, I have not burdened it with any apparatus of scholarly notes, page references, etc." Barnard, *A Talent to Deceive*, ix.
Many other studies of Christie from the '70s and '80's have followed suit, so that the *Bedside and Bathtub Companion* remains somewhat more well cited than a lot of the books written by academics from this period.

Stuff,
Great and Mere

When the fear-stricken barber realized that Don Quixote's uplifted spear was aimed at him,
he [...] ran all the way home without stopping, leaving his brass basin
behind as a trophy for our hero, who could not understand
why this helmet had no visor.
~ Don Quixote

Imagine now, not the actual walk towards Christie's estates, but rather a virtual tour of her Greenway home. Preserved as a museum, some of Christie's belongings can be viewed on the National Trust website. To try ascertaining their holdings of Christie's manuscripts and the contents of her libraries, you must first sift through the ten thousand, three hundred and eighty three entries held in the Greenway estate. These include page upon page dedicated to collections of china, doilies, pocket watches, letter openers, archaeological knick-knacks, statuettes, silverware, linen, and quite a few entries labeled as "Whatnot." How will you respond to the discrepancies between the stuff you consider worthy of preservation, and that which pointlessly impedes your progress? Even if her lampshades were the best in England, do they really need a place on the website, at Greenway, or even in history? The vectors of function and quantity intersect the sublime-kitsch vector of style, thus forming a space where readers must respond to their experiences of three-dimensional stuff.

When E.M. Forster used Walter Scott's *The Antiquary* as the ultimate example for how *NOT* to write novels, one of his primary complaints was Scott's (perceived) tendency to include too much or too little. Inadvertently reminding readers that anything can be paraphrased badly,

Forster's harangue aims to nullify Scott's stylistic claims while mocking the quantity of his descriptions: "Tides rise over sand. The tide rises." [146] Annoyed with Scott's "endless suggestions," the plethora of character turns which "leads nowhere[,]" and the "plenty of reasons" Scott crafts for his dénouement, but just "dumps [...] down without bothering to elucidate[,]" Forster's frustration at excess glowers through his prose.[147] Detective writer P.D. James expresses a similar resentment against Agatha Christie in her overview of British detective fiction that begins with quotations from Forster's *Aspects of the Novel*. Omitting "Agatha Christie, arch-breaker of rules," in a list of the "[t]hree writers whose books have *deservedly* lasted beyond the Golden Age[,]" James complains that Christie wrote too many books with too few tropes (emphasis added).[148] She argues that under Christie's hand, the "Purloined Letter" ploy -- that of having the least likely person commit the crime[149] -- was "in danger of becoming a clichè[,]" especially in consideration of Christie's "immense output" and her "sad falling-off [...] as a storyteller."[150] James summarizes Christie's whole corpus as events set in "Christieland[,]" in which "the crime is solved, the murderer arrested or dead,[151] and the village returned to its customary calm and order [--]" all in a clean and tidy fashion, being governed by "Agatha Christie, arch-purveyor of cosy reassurance."[152] Forster and James "find it difficult to understand [...Scott (and Christie's)] continued reputation[,]" as they both consider their respective least

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[146] E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York, Rosetta Books, LLC., 2002), 53, 56.
[147] Forster, *Aspects of the Novel,* 61.
[148] P.D. James, *Talking About Detective Fiction* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2009), 57.

[149] Christie anticipates many critical complaints through her fictional alter ego, the detective novelist Ariadne Oliver. In *Cards on the Table*, for instance, Mrs. Oliver ledgitimizes this ploy with her comment: "'Least likely person. It seems to work out in real life just the same as in books.'"

[150] James, *Talking About Detective Fiction,*35, 85.
[151] James is not strictly correct here. Christie does occasionally allow criminals to walk free if she considers them morally justified, as in *Murder on the Orient Express.*
[152] James, *Talking About Detective Fiction*, 70, 134.

favorite author as a mere "storyteller[,]" who, for James, haven't "had a profound influence on the later development of the detective story." [153]

In reading these reductive, dismissive viewpoints, it seems clear that both Foreter and James miss something essential. Although the scant details they discuss are not wrong *per se*, their reading experiences appear to suffer from the inability to recognize stylistic uses of kitsch, and the ridiculous in general -- an inability, that is, to register open secrets. Following Eve Sedgwick's work, Anne-Lise François studies open secrets as textually imparted knowledge that "insiders" recognize but cannot discuss, and "outsiders" discuss but cannot understand.[154] In this framework, Forster can comment derisively on the tide rising over the sand, only because he misses the monumental non-event that has something to do with the characters trapped by the raging ocean as the sun sets on the wrong side of the island. Naturally, this concept of open secrets as something hovering between articulation and comprehension poses difficulties for literary criticism. As François explains:

> [T]he paradox of a disclosure that only opens the eyes of the seeing and closes the eyes of the unseeing [...] present[s] the critic with the formal problem of how to evaluate, recognize, and name a dramatic action so inconsequential it yields no *peripeteia* and seems to evade Aristotelian definitions of plot. [155]

She argues that while the hermeneutics of suspicion demands an account so as to ensure nothing gets missed, open secrets give open critics a gift: namely "[t]he sense not that critical work is unnecessary but that no one will be at fault if the mystery remains unmastered[.]"[156] Open secrets thus emerge as the uncounted, discounted, unaccountable elements that pertain to the experience

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[153] Forster, *Aspects of the Novel,* 51. and James, *Talking About Detective Fiction*, 87.
[154] Anne-Lise François, *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience*, (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2008), 1-2.
[155] François, *Open Secrets*, 3.
[156] François, *Open Secrets*, 10-11.

of a work rather than to its plot. Although she does not label it as such, when Celeste Olalquiaga works on material kitsch, she reveals it as a form of open secret. Her treasury of kitsch experience centers around Rodney, whom an "outsider" might accurately describe as a dead hermit crab suspended in a glass bauble, but an "insider" would be hard pressed to articulate as the sharer in a the nuanced and deeply personal relationship felt by the author and portrayed in chapter headings such as "Rodney and Me." [157] Following in the wake of Walter Benjamin, Olalquiaga argues that, although separated from its original aura through mechanical reproduction, material kitsch contains "shattered aura," and thus remains a dream of the souvenir it once was.[158] In this way, it becomes a twice commoditized myth, symbolizing the desire both to control time, and to hold it in one's hand -- the timeless myth of rebirth and immortality. Like so many myths about wishes though, Olalquiaga argues that the undying desire backfires, and the process of becoming kitsch results in countless deaths, beginning with the first idea to fracture original aura, and later, "every time we forget about [it.]" [159] When kitsch is looked at then, it symbolizes immortality, but as soon as one looks away, it becomes a macabre illustration of fracture and loss.

Stuff in And Then There Were None

Christie opens one of her best selling novels, *And Then There Were None*, by enticing readers into a network of implied secrets. The first of these secrets concerns a recently purchased private island setting, of which nothing is known except its prominence as a favorite topic among "rumor gossip writers" (*AWN*, 2). Accordingly, reliable information on the island remains absent,

[157] Celeste Olalquiaga, *The Artificial Kingdom: A Treasury of The Kitsch Experience* (New York: Pantheon Books,1998), eg 3-9, 78.
[158]Olalquiaga, *The Artificial Kingdom*, 123-124.
[159] Olalquiaga, *The Artificial Kingdom*, 86.

since Christie couches all explanations as gossip column excerpts, thus highlighting the the lack of a solution through the excess of clearly wrong ones: "*Busy Bee* had hinted delicately that it was to be an abode for Royalty??!" (*AWN*, 2). Even the name on the deed and receipt of sale, Mr. U. N. Owen, represents a play on the word "Unknown" (*AWN*, 61). Whomever its owner, mysterious letters and recommendations promising either employment or a vacation at Soldier Island compel the arrival of a captain, a general, a judge, a secretary, a self-righteous spinster, a young socialite, a doctor, and a detective pretending to be a safari hunter, as well as a butler and his wife, a housekeeper. These characters bring their own secrets into the story, as the narrator moves between their thoughts, showing readers that Vera, the secretary "must not think of Hugo[,]" while Dr. Armstrong's success was nearly destroyed by "that business ten -- no, fifteen years ago[,]" and Mrs. Rogers, the housekeeper "looks frightened of her own shadow" (*AWN*, 5, 13, 31). Indeed, the reader also arrives at Soldier island with a secret kept private from the party, namely that an Agatha Christie novel is very unlikely to narrate a pleasant island vacation without mishaps.

An awareness of genre conventions enables readers to experience apprehension and to register the situational irony that arises from the characters' general naivety. For example when the characters approach their destination, Vera reflects on "the worst" problem that could possibly happen on an a private island accessible only in fairweather: the "catering must be very difficult"(*AWN*, 29). This concern entertains readers, reminding them of the secret they hold while simultaneously indicating secrets wich Christie has yet to reveal. While some members of the company, perturbed by their host's absence, wonder if they have arrived at the wrong island, Vera cheerfully explores the uninhabited house. She finds herself assigned "a delightful

bedroom[,]" with "the old nursery rhyme that she remembered from her childhood days" framed above the mantle (*AWN*, 30, 33).[160] Despite its sinister subject matter, the characters who comment on the soldier rhyme, which hangs in every bedroom, do so with approval: "Neat touch, having that there!" (*AWN*,39). Since Mr. Owens displays a strong appreciation for thematic decorating, the guests also find "little china figures" of ten soldiers "in the center of the round table" (*AWN*, 44) Although the guests describe these figures as "quaint," "fun," "amusing," and "remarkably childish," no one understands their purpose. Soon after, Christie begins to open her secrets by having a unrecognizable, prerecorded voice boom over a gramophone and accuse everyone on the island (ten people) of having committed murder.[161] Anthony Marston, the young socialite recalls "a couple of kids [he] ran over near Cambridge[,]" although he considers himself the real victim as his "license [was] suspended for a year. Beastly nuisance" (*AWN*, 68). That evening, Marston finished his drink, turned purple, "choked his little self and then there were nine." Having transformed in an instant from one who "seemed like a being who was imortal [...] to crumpled and broken [...] lay[ing] on the floor[,]" Christie fashions

[160] This poem is sometimes attributed to Frank Green (1869), and sometimes to Septimus Winner (1868). In contemporary editions of Christie's novel, the phase 'soldier boys' replaces various racial slurs used in earlier versions. The name of the island generally changes to match the subject of the poem (e.g. Soldier Island), and the exceptions seem rather due to editorial oversight than to intention.

"Ten little soldier boys went out to dine; // one choked his little self and then there were nine. // Nine little soldier boys sat up very late; // one overslept himself and then there were eight. // Eight little soldier boys traveling in Devon; // one said he'd stay there and then there were seven. // Seven little soldier boys chopping up sticks; // one chopped himself in halves and then there were six. // Six little soldier boys playing with a hive; // a bumble bee stung one and then there were five. // Five little soldier boys going in for law; one got into Chancery and then there were four. // Four little soldier boys going out to sea; // A red herring swallowed one and then there were three. // Three little soldier boys walking in the zoo; // A big bear hugged one and then there were two. // Two little soldier boys sitting in the sun; // one got frizzled up and then there was one. // One little soldier boy left all alone; he went and hanged himself // and then there were none."

[161] The name of each murderer, the name of each victim, and the date of each crime is recorded on a record titled "Swan Song."

Marston into a china figure even before the butler realizes that one of the porcelain soldiers has disappeared (*AWN*, 77, 81).

The previously familiar kitschy stuff and kitchy rhymes become menacing and assume a terrible sublimity as characters and readers alike begin to realize their capacity as portals for the irrational. The china figures enumerate a countdown at the end of which every person on the island (including the nominal detective) will have been murdered in a fashion closely resembling a verse of the nursery rhyme. In so doing, they ironically add up to the fearsome, terrible, or gothic attributes many theorists of the sublime have associated with sublimity. For Burke, the fear of death represents the most sublime emotion, because it is the passion that most "effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning." Burke argues that whatever "is terrible, with regard to sight, is sublime too ... for it is impossible to look on anything as trifling or contemptible, that might be dangerous." This way in which fear can change kitschy objects into sublime ones recalls to mind Olalquiaga's argument that kitsch represents perpetual deaths. Here we arrive at the phenomenon for which Coleridge coined the phrase "material sublime," to distinguish it from the natural sublime. The material sublime, he argued, required spectacles on a vastly greater scale than its counterpart:

> Schiller has the material sublime; to produce an effect, he sets you a whole town on fire, and throws infants with their mothers into the flames, or locks up a father in an old tower. But Shakespeare drops a handkerchief, and the same or greater effects follow.[162]

Since Coleridge views the sublime as the experience of encountering the boundless, and materials are necessarily self contained, then the material sublime must cross all boundaries of

[162] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Table Talk and Omniana of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (: Oxford University Press, 1917), 33.

expectation. Although Twichell argues that Coleridge's own depiction of the sublime could only happen at sea, "The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere" is actually set after a wedding, before the reception, thus maintaining Wordsworth's idea of sublime memory, while juxtaposing the horrors of the sea against the ceremonies of the world (*RH*, 102). In doing so, he associates even the natural sublime with expectations, framing the abnormal within the normal, the death within life, or as John Curran has noted about Christie's use of nursery rhyme, the "juxtaposition of the childlike and the chilling, the twisting of the mundane into the macabre" (*SN*, 106).

Stuff of The Antiquary

Walter Scott's favorite of his own novels, *The Antiquary* consists of two distinct parts. Representing both an oddly provincial proto spy thriller and a traditional gothic mystery, these disjointed narratives converge as they approach the same forensic investigation. The novel opens with the arrival of a mysterious stranger who refuses to participate in the social life of the town and fights a duel rather than prove his identity.[163] Going by the name Lovel -- the same name as the hero of Clara Reve's foundational gothic novel, *The Old English Baron*[164] -- the real identity of this man is sought by almost every member of the community. Meanwhile, a Germain

[163] Indeed, Scott's early insistence that Lovel is not a spy hardly seems credible:
"Upon one account alone he fell somewhat under suspicion. As he made free use of his pencil in his solitary walks, and had drawn several views of the harbour, in which the signal-tower, and even the four-gun battery, were introduced, some zealous friends of the public sent abroad a whisper, that this mysterious stranger must certainly be a French spy. The Sheriff paid his respects to Mr Lovel accordingly, but in the interview which followed, it would seem that he entirely removed that magistrate's suspicions, since he not only suffered him to remain undisturbed in his retirement, but, it was credibly reported, sent him two invitations to dinner-parties, both which were civilly declined. But what the nature of the explanation was, the magistrate kept profoundly secret, not only from the public at large. but from his Substitute, his clerk, his wife, and his two daughters, who formed his privy council upon all questions of official duty" (*ATQ*, 35).

[164] Edmund Lovel, who as Fiona Robertson points out, represents almost exactly the same character as Scott's Lovel, both sharing a "calling as the Lost Heir and redeemer of his house." *Legitimate Histories,* 197.

swindler known as the Adept is accused of being a political spy, while an old traveling beger with his own secrets is arrested for apprehending him. Scott abruptly interrupts this tale that hovers somewhere between espionage and small town gossip, by introducing a bodily rather than economically decayed aristocrat in search of his long lost son who had been presumed murdered in infancy. While the investigations into Lovel's history and the fate of Glenallan's son gradually reveal themselves as each the solution to the other, Scott emphasises the ways in which material stuff can both represent and indicate identity.

The Antiquary finishes Scott's first trilogy, and is advertised as a narrative referring "to the last ten years of the eighteenth century." Coming on the heels of *Waverley*, the tale of our fathers, and *Guy Mannering*, the tale of our youth, this third novel purports to concern modernity, the time of now. Oddly, the narrative does not follow its young stranger,[165] instead focusing on an ancient beggar and the owner of one of the last three periwigs in the whole parish. Jonathan Oldbuck, the eponymous antiquary and proud owner of this periwig refers to it as the median degree of comparison, with his friend "Sir Arthur's ramilies being the positive," and the reverend Mr Blattergowl's wig "figuring as the superlative" (*ATQ*, 127). Since Scott clearly associates the periwig with Oldbuck's identity,[166] it seems notable in a novel so preoccupied with origins, that both the history and the etymology of the wig lies in confusion.[167] While Oldbuck

[165] Who Evan Gottlieb describes as "little more than a peg on which Scott hangs multiple meditations on the ways in which history can be lost, recovered, mediated, and deployed." *Walter Scott and Contemporary Theory*, 41.

[166] Notably, while studying puns, codes, and wordplay in Agatha Christie's *The A.B.C Murders,* Shosuke Kinugawa identifies, "the novel's seemingly pointless fixation with hair, and the association of hair with disguise." He argues that "hair is repeatedly evoked" as a system of clues for the most observant readers.
Kinugawa, "Secret Fair Play," 174.

[167] "Wigs are an ancient institution, but just how ancient no one knows. The word itself gives little light: "wig" is a contraction of "periwig" which is a corruption of the French *perruque*, and this word etymologists have derived with singular lack of unanimity from Hebrew, Chaldean, Greek, Latin, Gothic, Celtic, German, and Italian, so that one

does not mind the eternal disarray in which his collections of priceless manuscripts and artifacts have accumulated into a "*mare magnum* of miscellaneous trumpery" on the floor, his periwig must remain orderly (*ATQ*, 22). Indeed, it is the only object in the novel with its own dedicated manager, and due to the uneven demand for his skill, the periwig dresser, Caxon appears as almost a member of Oldbuck's household. Caxon must follow along and wait in attendance on these three "antique garnitures" as they accompany their respective owners to a celebration in honor of the young Mr. Lovel who had recently saved Sir Arthur and his daughter from the rising tide scene mocked by Forster (*ATQ*, 127). Soon however, Lovel finds himself in the background of an episode dominated by the periwigs and a german legend. During the party, Sir Arthur's daughter retells what could easily be framed as a legend about the degrees of comparison, since it concerns three brothers who interact with a demon, some, more, and most.

Processes of detection rely on comparison for the same reasons Simon Goldhill argues that scholarship depends on the case study, because that which is exemplary, whether it be a valuable clue or a notable insight, is best understood as it differs from paradigms of normalcy. [168] Again, this point boils down to the interplay of the expected and the unexpected. To frame Oldbuck as the comparative then, is to place him in the center the novel's primary action, as well as to establish him as the mediator between the mundane and the extraordinary just as he mediates between the peasants and nobility. Another grouping of three wherein Oldbuck appears as the comparative, lies in the the novel's interest in historical chroniclers. Even Forster managed

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must fein believe they are simply guessing." from O.A. Bierstadt's "Wigs" published in *Lippincott's Magazine of Popular Literature and Science (1871-1885)*; May 1885

[168]Simon Goldhill, "The Limits of the Case Study: Exemplarity and the Reception of Classical Literature." *New Literary History* (2017), 416. The shortcomings that Goldhill identifies in the case study system are also applicable to detective practices.

to stumble across an integral theme of *The Antiquary*, though he misidentifies and misvalues it. Concluding that people read Scott because "he is tangled with happy sentimental memories [,... but is no] more than a reminder of early happiness[,]" Forster imagines a readership of "the elder generation" holding onto this arcane relic out of pure nostalgia.[169] Ironically, this is the moment in which he honestly (though obliviously) engages with the novel that he scorns so vehemently -- a novel essentially concerned with the modes of preserving memories, both historical and personal. Indeed, *The Antiquary's* three protagonists -- Oldbuck, the eponymous antiquary and connoisseur of curios, Lovel, his young friend and future historic poet, and Edie Ochiltree, the traveling mendicant and preserver of oral traditions -- represent the material (comparative), the literary (positive), and the spoken (superlative) records of the pasts respectively. For Evan Gottlieb, *The Antiquary* centrally concerns an awareness that fiction and historiography cannot be entirely separated, as seen in "the difficulty of ascertaining the 'reality' of these [historical artifacts and manuscripts'] values -- if not also the authenticity of the pieces themselves" which the characters use variously in their reconstructions of the past.[170] Seen in this light, Scott's *The Antiquary* specifically connects memory to storytelling, elevating both as valid forms of historiography.

Much of Oldbuck's collection, like his periwig, strike spectators as useless. This act of collecting stuff[171] that the public does not appreciate represents what Scott Herring calls, *material*

[169] Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 21.
[170]Gottlieb, *Walter Scott and Contemporary Theory,* 42.

[171] Dorothy Sayers makes an interesting connection between hoarding and the valuation of detective fiction in her famous introduction to the *Omnibus of Crime*: "The fact remains that if you search the second-hand book-stalls for his [Man in general's] cast-off literature, you will find fewer mystery stories than any other kind of book. Theology and poetry, philosophy and numismatics, love-stories and biography, he discards as easily as old razor blades, but Sherlock Holmes and Wilkie Collins are cherished and read and reread, til their covers fall off and their pages

deviance.[172] Explaining that this mode of ownership "came to be cast as a social threat[,]" Herring argues that labels and diagnosis of hoarding illustrate society's "moral panic over stuff[,]" and represent not a new habit, but rather a new response to an old practice.[173] Scientifically defined as "the acquisition of, and failure to discard, possessions which appear to be useless, or of limited value[,]" [174]Herring frames the concept of hoarding disorders as a crowd-sourced policing (and indeed detecting) project; a project that echos the policing powers that D.A. Miller identified as integral to novels in general.[175] At one point in *The Antiquary*, the sickly Earl of Glenallen nearly faints in Oldbuck's presence, and Scott explicitly comments on the uselessness of his protagonists' holdings:

> The alarmed Antiquary ran hither and thither looking for remedies; but his museum, though sufficiently well filled with a vast variety of useless matters, contained nothing that could be serviceable on that or any other occasion. (*ATQ*, 279-280)

Scott is not arguing that antiquarianism does not have value, nor is he mocking or pathologizing the collection of artifacts. Rather, he indicates the need for alternative models of valuation, that do not hing on monetary considerations, or even those of authenticity. Indeed, as readers are constantly reminded, the awareness of secret value separates the antiquarian pursuits of Oldbuck from those of Sir Arthur, who tends to most appreciate whatever is priced highest.

When Oldbuck first introduces Lovel (and by extension, the reader) to his *Sanctum Sanctorum,* Scott immediately indicates that the systems of valuation and authenticity at work in

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crumble to fragments."Dorothy Sayers, "The Omnibus of Crime." *The Art of the Mystery Story: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Howard Haycraft (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1976), 72.

[172] Scott Herring, *The Hoarders: Material Deviance in Modern American Culture* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2014).
[173] Herring, *The Hoarders,* 6, 7.
[174] Herring, *The Hoarders,* 2.
[175] Miller, *The Novel and the Police*, eg. 56-57.

this collection represent open secrets. Since Oldbuck follows not only the historic antiquary tradition but also that of the literary antiquary, and "the earliest bibliomaniac upon record, [...] we take to be none else than the renowned Don Quixote de La Mancha[,]" readers must consider that his artifacts hold both an "outsider" value, and one consistent with the humours of Cervantes' ingenious nobleman (*ATQ*, 23). Samuel Baker comments on this double register, observing that "[t]he magic of Oldbuck's antiquarian method inheres in its uncanny ability to strike at deep truths while committing obvious surface errors." [176] In this way, Oldbuck's reconstructions of the past contrast with those conducted by the village gossips in the post office, and together illustrate common problems with forensic investigations (perhaps in detective fiction). Both concerned with the mystery surrounding Lovel's past, Oldbuck surmises astonishingly accurate information from questionable evidence while the women conduct a very thorough investigation -- studying the dimensions, paper, and seals of his letters -- from which they deduce nothing of value.

The seal represents an important clue in both investigations of Lovel's parentige, although the gossiping women's interest lies in waxen insignias, and Oldbuck's in aquatic mammals. Unfortunately for the post office sleuths, "the too, too solid wax" refuses to "melt and dissolve itself" and they can only learn that "[t]he seal was a deep and strong impression of arms, which defied all tampering" (*ATQ*, 113). Sometime after this unsatisfactory termination, Oldbuck converses with his contrarian nephew on Ossian's poems. While this conversation was intended for Lovel, it was postponed because the antiquary could not find his folio on the Ossianic

[176] Samuel Baker, "Scott's Worlds of War." *The Edinburgh Companion to Sir Walter Scott,* ed. Fiona Robertson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 76.

Controversy. Instead of the learned and literary discourse that Oldbuck first intended, his nepher Hector MacIntyre believes wholeheartedly in Macpherson's authenticity, and defends this stance by reciting the general sense as he remembers it. MacIntyre's "most admirable fooling" is interrupted when he spots "a Phoca, or seal, lying asleep on the beach[,]" seizes his uncle's walking stick, and attacks the animal for no other reason than "a Highlander could never pass a deer, a seal, or a salmon, where there was a possibility of having a trial of skill with them" (*ATQ*, 245-256). In this way, Scott associates with the seal the overall anxieties about authenticity and origin, as seen in MacIntire's need to vindicate both MacPherson and his own heritage as a Highlander. Rather than proving MacIntire's prowess as a hunter, the event culminates in the seal "wallopp[ing] away with all the grace of triumph" and carrying with her Oldbuck's walking stick "by way of *spolia opima*[,]" which was a memento of Eveline Neville, Lovel's yet undiscovered mother (*ATQ*, 246). Prefaced by a reference to the exploit in which Don Quixote becomes known (to Sancho at least) as The Knight of the Rueful Countenance, Oldbuck reminds his nephew of this hunting trip whenever he becomes too boastful (especially concerning his lineage). MacIntire therefore spends much of the novel out of countenance with seals, or, since Oldbuck insists on calling them by their Latin name, Phocas (perhaps with an imaginary spelling, fauxcas). When MacIntire can tolerate the teasing no longer, his sister begs on his behalf and Oldbuck, reconciling the two meanings of the word "seal," promises to stop: "I will rein in my satire, and, if possible, speak no more of the *phoca*—I will not even speak of sealing a letter, but say *umph,* and give a nod to you when I want the wax-light" (*ATQ*, 305). For either a discussion on Ossian or one on questionable lineage, Lovel remains the obvious choice, though these

repeated conversations of fakery and forgery never occur in his presence, as if hinting towards the eventual vindication of his birth as both legitimate and noble.

James Macpherson published highly popular collections of poems, which he claimed to have archaeologically discovered and translated from the original Gaelic. These verses allegedly composed by the ancient poet Ossian dated back approximately to "the most remote antiquity," and synthesized myths and legends that were well known in part, but had never been heard in whole.[177] As time wore on and MacPherson continued finding excuses that prevented anyone from viewing the original manuscripts, some people began to suspect their authenticity. In response, the poems were published between passionate defenses which "answe[r] all reasonable objections to the genuineness of the poems" because "it would be a very uncommon instance of self-denial in me [MacPherson] to disown them, were they really of my composition[,]" and even in such an event that "for reasons which cannot be seen at this distance of time, [one] would ascribe his own compositions to Ossian, it is next to impossible, that he could impose upon his countrymen"[178] Despite these indelible proofs, an investigation was conducted in the 1790s by the Highland Committee to clear up the ongoing Ossianic controversy. Beginning thirty years after MacPherson's publication, still without access to any original manuscripts, the committee went about their investigation by determining if anyone had memorized or transcribed Ossian's poems from the oral tradition prior to the controversy.[179] When overwhelming numbers of people, who had no particular reason or disposition for lying, swore to having recognized

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[177] James MacPherson, "Fragments of Ancient Poetry, collected in the Highlands of Scotland, and Translated from the Galic or Erse Language." *The Poems of Ossian and related Works.* Edited by Howard Gaskill (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 5.

[178] MacPherson, "Fragments," 35, 48.

[179] Jack Lynch, *Deception and Detection in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008), eg, 130.

MacPherson's translations and "cried out, *we know all these poems, we have always heard them from our infancy*[,]" people such as David Hume began to voice concerns about unreliable memory.[180] From this stalemate of an investigation Jack Lynch argues that Western systems of justice realized the problems with testimony only judicial practices and began to move towards material, documentary, forensic evidence.

Of all the stuff in the world, one item remains emblematic of both the pursuit of reading and that of fictional investigation. For who, great or mere, could call themselves either a person of letters or a detective without a well-stuffed armchair?

[180] Lynch, *Deception and Detection,* 133.

Armchairs,

Far and Near:
A Coda

M. Noirtier was sitting in an armchair, which moved upon casters,
in which he was wheeled into the room in the morning,
and in the same way drawn out again at night.
~ The Count of Monte Cristo

Instead of continuing your journey, you pause to consider the very concept of armchair travel.

MacPherson became controversial only because readers at home suspected a problem. They identified potential falsehood and brought it into public conversation, thereby generating an official investigation. Like Edgar Allan Poe's Auguste Dupin in "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," Ossian's sceptics sat in their armchairs, read over the documents of the case, and advised authorities how best to conduct the investigation. Poe, frequently accused of stealing lines for his own poems,[181] was well aware of poetic forgeries, and through them, the connection between detectives of literature and literary detectives. In fact, Poe began his foray into detective stories not with gory fingerprints and smoking guns, but with books. As the narrator first describes Dupin:

> Books, indeed, were his sole luxuries, and in Paris these were easily obtained. Our first meeting was at an obscure library in the Rue Montmartre, where the accident of us both being in search of the same very rare and very remarkable volume, brought us into closer communion. We saw each other again and again. [...] I was astonished [...] at the vast extent of his reading [... and] it was at length arranged that we should live together during my stay in the city [. ...] By the aid of [... candles] we then busied our souls in dreams -- reading, writing, or conversing.[182]

[181] Eliza Richards, "Outsourcing 'The Raven': Retroactive Origins." Published in *Victorian Poetry*,43.2 (Summer 2005) 205-221.

[182] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," *Edgar Allan Poe: Thirty-Two Stories*, ed. Stuart Levine and Susan F. Levine (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2000), 134.

Poe introduces Dupin first as a reader, and only later as one uncommonly good at deduction. Anticipating Dupin's armchair method in the second story, this passage not only prioritizes the reading skill set, but establishes it as an introduction, or even precursor of the detective skill set.

Although few genealogies of detective fiction begin before Poe,[183] his placement of reading as a precursor of detection necessarily brings the tradition of reading onto the detective fiction scene. Furthermore, the "cozy," intellectual detective figure exemplified by both Auguste Dupin and Sherlock Holmes remains, fundamentally, a person of letters. These figures clearly represent the detective model that forms and informs Hercule Poirot, a detective who is, perhaps, better read than his illustrious antecedents. In fact, quotations from novels, rhymes, poems, and dramas adorn almost all of Poirot's cases. Christie's 1966 novel, *The Third Girl*, opens as Poirot reflects on the literary fruits of his intermittent retirement.

> He [Poirot] had finished his *Magnum Opus,* an analysis of great writers of detective fiction. He had dared to speak scathingly of Edgar Allan Poe, he had complained of the lack of method or order in the romantic outpourings of Wilkie Collins, had lauded to the skies two American authors who were practically unknown, and had in various other ways given honour where honour was due and sternly withheld it where he considered it was not.[184]

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[183] Classification and terminology, how one conceives of "crime fiction," "detective fiction," and "mystery fiction," plays an enormous and frequently challenging role in this sort of genealogy project. As Julian Symons puts it: "Historians of the detective story are divided between those who say that there could be no detective stories until organized police and detective forces existed, and those who find examples of rational deduction in sources as various as the Bible and Voltaire, and suggest that these were early puzzles in detection. For the first group the detective story begins with Edgar Allan Poe, for the second its roots are the beginnings of recorded history."

Joseph Kestner begins his genealogy with Dickens, and points to 1861 as the year in which the first female fictional detective was published, although "women did not become involved in the Metropolitan Police until 1883[.]" Lucy Sussex on the other hand begins with gothic fiction and specifically the novels of Ann Radcliffe.

Joseph Kestner, *Sherlock's Sisters: The British Female Detective, 1864-1913* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 6-7.
Sussex, Lucy, *Women Writers and Detectives in Nineteenth-Century Crime Fiction: The Mothers of the Mystery Genre* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), eg 2, 26.
Symons, Julian, *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel: A History* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972.

[184] Christie, The Third Girl, 1.

Assuming the same condescending tone in which Sherlock Holmes dismissed Dupin, Poirot's *Magnum Opus* nevertheless illustrates the genealogy that Christie drew for herself. Where Conan Doyle emphasized his French roots,[185] Christie evokes British romance through Collins and the title "Magnum Opus," at least in the context of this thesis, recalls to us Scott's literary enterprise by that name. In her next novel, Christie mentions Scott specifically when discussing another of her favorite figures; the young girl who observes everything: "'I don't know if it was Burns or Sir Walter Scott who said: 'There's a chiel among you taking notes,' said Mrs Oliver, 'but he certainly knew what he was talking about.'"[186] Although Robert Burns wrote this line, it nevertheless gestures towards Scott since it adorns the frontpage of *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* as an epigraph. In a similar way, Christie's observant girl characters--evil in the case of Josephine from *The Crooked House*, but good in the case of Miranda from *Hallowe'en Party*-- secretly gesture back to the heroines of gothic mysteries such as Radcliffe's Emily.

Ultimately, the arguments explored in this thesis all intersect at the mediatory standpoint of the armchair. With their material, conceptual, and symbolic dimensions, these stylish furnishings support the practices (and practitioners) both of reading and detection. They demarcate intellectual spaces, such as offices, studies and libraries, while enthroning that space's authority; they could, conceptually at least, represent a visualization of contesting seats of power. The figure in the armchair--a patron if in a library, an owner if in a private space--reads over written lines in order to determine both their authenticity and value, while simultaneously

[185] See Stephen Knight, "Sherlock Holmes' Grandmother: French Contributions to the Formation of Crime Fiction," *Towards Sherlock Holmes: A Thematic History of Crime Fiction in the 19th Century World* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2017), 45-71.

[186] Agatha Christie, *Hallowe'en Party* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co.,1969), 119.

engaging in the virtual motions of armchair travel, a movement which defies even the authority of reality. This mode of traveling through lines rather than standing in them raises questions concerning the ways in which stuff can be used, as well as the relationships between the real and the material. As commodities symbolic of intellectual pursuits, armchairs enjoy close relationships to identity, and because of which, they contribute to perceptions of intelligence in literary detectives. Furthermore, the term "armchair detective" applies equally to fictional characters solving cases from their homes, and to readers solving the cases in anticipation of the story's denouement.[187] After writing about the first literary detective, and placing him firmly in a fantastically kitschy armchair, Walter Scott penned another meditation on chairs, this time exploring readerly participation. In *The Antiquary's* rising tide scene, a motley assortment of fishermen, villagers, and the panic-stricken Oldbuck build a makeshift crane with which they lower an armchair down the cliff face to save the characters trapped by the raging sea. These characters -- Lovel the future poet, Ocheltree the authority on local legends, Isabell Wardour the adaptor of a german fable, and Sir Arthur, the reader and collector -- take turns being suspended by the precariously dangling chair. This rescue reminds us that, in addition to their importance to detective fiction, armchairs symbolizes literary transport itself. Before it says farewell to its readers, in their armchairs, real and virtual, this thesis will thus conclude with a tour of the armchairs in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's study.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's 1907 book, *Through The Magic Door*, opens with a photograph labeled "The Author's Study." In it, a black field frames an open door that leads into

[187]B.J. Rahn, "The Armchair Detective" *Mystery and Suspense Writers: The Literature of Crime, Detection, and Espionage Volume 1*. (ed. Robin W. Winks and Maureen Corrigan. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1998), 983

a room containing a well-filled bookshelf, some wooden chairs, and a discarded newspaper. In the center of the room sits a leather armchair. This book represents a kind of autobiography told through accounts of the novels and authors who most influenced Doyle's life--books presumably read while sitting in this very armchair. The armchair, and particularly Doyle's armchair, remains emblematic of the traditions both of literacy, and of detective fiction. Indeed, one can hardly think of Conan Doyle without envisioning his literary character in an armchair: "Sherlock Holmes closed his eyes and placed his elbows upon the arms of his chair, with his finger-tips together."[188] But to understand the significance of the armchair, one must walk past it to the bookshelves in Doyle's study. Here, one finds the literature of detectives and armchairs, detectives in armchairs, and armchair detectives that inspired Doyle, and by extension, his followers. These sublime and kitschy stories of early armchair detectives explore dimensions of literary experience, by encouraging readerly participation through material and forensic interests.

In Conan Doyle's collection of the *Waverley Novels* (Walter Scott's prose collection on which Doyle based his literary career) one finds an earlier fictional detective with an iconic armchair routine. In his 1815 detective novel, *Guy Mannering; Or, the Astrologer,* Walter Scott associates his detective with armchairs, both physical and conceptual, thereby giving this literary furnishing a position of prominence in detective fiction. Since Scott sets his crime scene on an estate where landowners, potential buyers, gypsies, and smugglers all struggle for authority, he argues the spatial advantages of solving a case from afar. Although he did investigate the scene of the crime when it occurred, Scott's detective Paulus Pleydell solves the case many years later

[188] "The Five Orange Pips" *The Original Illustrated Sherlock Holmes* (New Jersey: Castle, 1976),

from the comfort of his armchair. When Scott introduces him to the reader by name, the eponymous Mannering finds Pleydell ridiculously placed in a chair:

> Mr Counsellor Pleydell, such as we have described him, was enthroned, as a monarch, in an elbow-chair placed on the dining-table, his scratch wig on one side, his head crowned with a bottle slider, his eye leering with an expression betwixt fun and drunkenness, while his court around him resounded with [...] crambo scraps of verse[.][189]

From the deviant, contrary to designated purpose way in which Pleydell uses the material stuff (having placed the chair on the table, and the bottle slider on his head), he attains a kitschy, pseudo sovereignty over the tavern's space. When Mannering emplores Pleydell to reopen the investigations twenty-odd years later, the detective "flung away his crown, sprung from [...that] exalted station" and descend from his drunken "altitudes," thus exchanging the rather spectacular guise of authority for a genuine and grounded, though sublimely professional manner of a lawyer and former sheriff-depute.[190]

This energetic up and down motion in and out of armchairs prefigures Sherlock Holmes' most consistent mannerisms. Between stories, Doyle's sleuth finds himself reduced to a perpetual state of languid despair, from which he can rise only through the introduction to a kitschy problem with a sublime solution. Once activated, Holmes exerts remarkable energy, frequently "throwing himself down into an armchair[,]"[191] only to "spr[ing] from his chair with an exclamation of delight[.]"[192] While Holmes leaves his apartments to conduct investigations and experiments which generate the data he contemplates from his chair, some argue that "the

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[189] Walter Scott, *Guy Mannering*, ed. P.D. Garside (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 204.

[190] Scott, *Guy Mannering*, 206.

[191] "A Scandal in Bohemia" *The Original Illustrated Sherlock Holmes* (New Jersey: Castle, 1976),

[192] Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet and The Sign of the Four,* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2004), 49.

purity of [... a character's] role as armchair detective" correlates to their adherence to the armchair and their resulting dependence on secondary sources.[193] Exclusively virtual investigations, such as the one depicted in Edgar Allan Poe's 1842 "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," shift the detective's focus from the stuff as material clues to the veracity of the written word. In this model of deduction, handwriting and most especially writing styles, become metanyms of identity--just like fingerprints. Although the documents read by fictional detectives generally pertain concretely to the case at hand, Wilkie Collins takes an alternative approach. In his 1868 detective novel *The Moonstone,* Collins portrays a butler turned amature detective, Gabriel Betteridge, who comprehends the world around him by performing a sort of *Sortes Virgilianae* with the text of *Robinson Crusoe* from his armchair. Collins' kitschy use of bibliomancy, divination through books, recalls this thesis' main themes, since its most popular form, *Sortes Virgilianae,* divination through Virgil's *Aeneid*, brings us back to the ancient sublime. But here and now, Collins's books must remain closed, for this thesis has reached the end of its proper discussion, having left only to thank its readers for their forbearance and attention.

[193] Rahn, "The Armchair Detective," 983.

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