THE CLOCKWORK MUSE: RITUALS OF WRITING IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN

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Introduction

Minutiae and Small Formalisms

A refrain threads its way through Thomas Hood's 1843 lyric "The Song of the Shirt": "Work—work—work!" Ten times over the course of eleven stanzas, it rings out the hours of a ragged seamstress, "plying her needle and thread" amid the misery of "poverty, hunger, and dirt." The refrain does not belong to the poem's speaker. Nor does it come from a foreman ordering the seamstress back to order. It seemingly emerges from the seamstress herself, who must "work—work—work! / From weary chime to chime."[1] Is "work" here imperative or declarative? Is the clock's discipline externally or self-imposed? In a sense it is both these things at once. The clock chimes out, but the woman's song converts the clock's "chime" into speech, synonymous with the order that she both obeys and anticipates.

This ability of the clock to "order" the bodies and minds of workers, "melting into the interstices of practical consciousness," would later gain the name "time-discipline."[2] The clock, and its precise division of time into units of production and value, evoke in texts like Hood's a

[1] Thomas Hood, "Song of the Shirt," *Punch* 5 (1843): 260 (lines 42; 49-50). See Lynn M. Alexander, *Women, Work, and Representation: Needlewomen in Victorian Art and Literature* (Athens, OH: Ohio Univ. Press, 2003), esp. "Slaves to the Needle" (209-228).

[2] The term "time-discipline" was coined by E. P. Thompson in "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," an invaluable text to which I refer throughout this dissertation. He was anticipated in many respects by not just nineteenth-century figures like Marx and Thomas Carlyle, who called the century "the Age of Machinery, in every outward and inward sense of that word" ("Signs of the Times," *Edinburgh Review* 49 [June 1829]: 443), but also by Lewis Mumford's foundational *Technics and Civilization* in 1934. Mumford named the clock, and not the steam engine, "the key-machine of the modern industrial age . . . . both the outstanding fact and the typical symbol of the machine: even today no other machine is so ubiquitous. . . . In its relationship to determinable quantities of energy, to standardization, to automatic action, and finally to its own special product, accurate timing, the clock has been the foremost machine in modern technics: and at each period it has remained in the lead: it marks a perfection toward which other machines aspire" (Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* [Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 2014], 14-15). John Tresch takes the more expected approach to this question, heralding the nineteenth century's "replacement of the balanced clock, lever, or balance as symbol of order and knowledge by the productive steam engine"—a replacement that for Tresch also heralds a movement away from "lifeless" classical machinery toward "romantic" machinery, typified by "a spontaneous, living, and constantly developing nature; it produced aesthetic effects and emotional states" (Tresch, *The Romantic Machine: Utopian Science and Technology after Napoleon* [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2012], 103; 12).

unilateral system of timely commands and human responses that exists somewhere between habitus and hegemony.[3] "I have seen . . . these minutiae," wrote Karl Marx in *Das Kapital* (1867), "which, with military uniformity, regulate by stroke of the clock the times, limits, pauses of the work."[4] Marx's timely "minutiae" in many ways presage an automated world deaf to human cares. While the clock's language is easily understood and mentally assimilated by the seamstress, the clock appears in Hood's industrial poetry both unresponsive to workers' songs and laments, and oblivious to the fatigue, injury, or illness which that labor occasions. Take for example "The Workhouse Clock":

> Oh that the Parish Powers,
> Who regulate Labor's hours,
> The daily amount of human trial,
> Weariness, pain, and self-denial,
> Would turn from the artificial dial
> That striketh ten or eleven,
> And go, for once, by that older one
> That stands in the light of Nature's sun,
> And takes its time from Heaven!
>
> ("The Workhouse Clock," lines 77-85)[5]

[3] Nigel Thrift, "The Making of Capitalist Time Consciousness," in *The Sociology of Time*, ed. John Hassard (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), 106 (originally published in Thrift's 1981 *Owners' Time and Own Time: The Making of a Capitalist Time Consciousness, 1300-1880*).
[4] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, ed. Frederick [Friedrich] Engels, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (London: Swan Sonnenschein, Lowrey, & Co., 1887) 1:269.
[5] Hood, "The Workhouse Clock: An Allegory," in *The Poetical Works of Thomas Hood*, ed. William Michael Rossetti, illus. Gustave Doré and Alfred Thompson, 2nd series (London: Ward, Lock & Co., 1880), 2:46-48. The posture of surrogate pleading for a voiceless continued a hallmark of 1840s Victorian social-problem poetry, in such works as Hood's "The Bridge of Sighs" and "The Lay of the Labourer" and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "The Cry of the Children." See J. S. Bratton, "Ballads of the Common Man," in *Victorian Popular Ballad* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 89-136.

When literary and cultural scholars talk about nineteenth-century clock-time, they generally mean just this kind of industrial time-discipline, in which enforced labor alters time into a series of commands. In this telling, clock-time short-circuits processes of communication, negotiation, and sympathy in favor of simple obedience to the laws of modern production.[6] Such a model of time bodes poorly for literature, a form deeply concerned with such processes; and it has become commonplace to depict nineteenth-century literature as engaged in a struggle *against* clock-time, aligning itself with the more ambient temporalities: dawn, day, dusk, and night, the cycle of seasons, the move out of time into eternity.[7] Such is the impression we might draw from "The Workhouse Clock," Hood's 1844 follow-up to "Song of the Shirt," which extends time-discipline from a physical and mental impress upon the body to a literary and linguistic impress upon the versification. The passage excerpted above is notably irregular, the meter jagged and the lines ringing in at anywhere between eleven and six syllables. The effect is to force each line to bend almost unnaturally toward the end rhyme.[8] It's a bit of irregularity that underscores the poem's overwhelming sensation of physical weariness.

In this rhythmic interplay of clock-time with the human body, Hood offers a phenomenology of grueling repetitive labor with which the worker and, perhaps, the writer can

[6] Marx claimed that these minutiae by which the working day was governed were "natural laws of the modern mode of production" (*Capital*, 1:269).

[7] These analyses tend to center on an acceptance that clock time entails uniformity; failing to differentiate one moment from the next, it is not fitted to the "natural" temporalities of nature and emotion that literature concerns itself with. That was not an unfamiliar sentiment during the nineteenth century, to be sure. As one reviewer wrote in *The Quarterly Review* in 1842, "If the poet does not carry the spectator with him so completely as to make him lose count of time, he has failed. . . . if we are rapt into the sphere of the poet, and whirled along with him whither his orbit leads us, we can no more measure or take account of such minute points as these, than we can measure how far we have travelled through space since we sat down to our intellectual treat" ("The *Orestea* [sic] of Æschylus," *Quarterly Review* 70 [June-September, 1842]: 189.) Yet writers were generally more apt to assimilate the clock into natural, divine, and poetic metrics of time than to reject it. Thomas M. Allen's *A Republic in Time: Temporality and Social Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Durham, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2008), for instance, has called attention to the almanac as a project for shaping national identity that was informed by time's inherent heterogeneity in early US culture: at once natural, religious, and mechanized.

[8] The predominance of feminine rhymes similarly echoes the feeling that Hood's poem can barely sustain itself through the final chime.

barely keep time. What makes "The Workhouse Clock" a *bad* poem—the metrical clunkiness, the rhyme scheme that never quite settles, opening with the almost-regular *abcbdede* but then lapsing into eccentric sequences of enclosed rhymes and monorhymes—is also what exposes the inhumanity of the clock-regulated labor system. We see a fundamental rhythmic incompatibility between the diverse laboring bodies "of either sex and various stamp, / Sickly, cripple, or strong" (lines 11-12) and the title clock that shows no regard for their human particularity. Industrial time in Hood's telling appears hostile to art as well as humanity, investing literature with an aesthetic of ugliness.

This dissertation organizes accounts which blur the line between clock-time and literary form, in order to trace the clock's impact on the pages, paragraphs, and stanzas of nineteenth-century literature. My interest lies not in the industrial setting and working hours so evocatively covered in Hood's poetry, but in a diverse profusion of house-clocks, clock-towers, and pocket-watches that seem to do what Hood's industrial clocks do not: respond to, sympathize with, and show leniency toward the people who come into contact with them. Their presence in the canon of nineteenth-century literature asks us to understand clock-time as a contested space in Victorian culture, the subject of cultural, literary, and even technological dispute. In this regard my findings participate in a larger trend, in new formalism, postcolonialism, cultural studies, and in nineteenth-century studies itself, to acknowledge the modern as comprising multiple, coextensive temporalities.[9] But the Victorian clock, as a meeting-point between religious,

[9] Allen's *Republic in Time* has emphasized this, pushing back against the critical narrative established by Walter Benjamin, Benedict Anderson, David Landes, Stephen Kern, Anthony Giddens, and others. "In making time heterogeneous," Allen writes, nineteenth-century US almanac editors "give us cause to rethink one of the basic premises of this tradition as it has been codified in the twentieth century: that time, as experienced in the modern world, is essentially homogeneous, and thus constitutes a homogenizing force in modern national states" (4). Lloyd Pratt's *Archives of American Time: Literature and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) pursues this account further, while Kathleen Davis's work on sovereignty argues, more panoramically, that both periodization and concepts of modern and premodern time have unfolded according to a false distinction between a feudal, religious past and a secular, "modern" present (Davis, *Periodization and*

philosophical, social, creative, and industrial concerns, was perhaps more forcefully involved in an attempt to cultivate sympathy between humans and industrial machinery, which all too often seemed to show the same carelessness of human life, of physical or indeed spiritual needs, as Hood's workhouse clock.

The attempts by nineteenth-century writers to locate more mutual efforts of understanding between clock and individual thus mark an attempt to salvage not just a care for human welfare but a care for literature in the face of the encroaching forces of a mechanized laboring sphere. If interpretation is in some sense a precursor to understanding, then the ways in which Victorian literature encouraged readers to understand those timepieces belong to a project of envisioning a more sympathetic, more collaborative system of exchange between mechanisms and human individuals.[10] The clocks and watches that populate the following pages are intensely vital, responsive creatures. They are variously described as guardians, friends, companions, and appendages. They speak (after a fashion), and their bodies tend to respond to the same forces of age, mortality, and cultural change that humans endure. The religious call-and-response that church chimes initiate; the clock faces and hands that render them so strangely humanoid; the

Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time [Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). Partha Chatterjee, Vanessa Ogle, Giordano Nanni, and Adam Barrows have pushed critical concepts of time into the territory of the postcolonial, emphasizing that the imperially imposed system of clock-time did not simply replace other forms of temporality in colonized nations (Chatterjee, "The Nation in Heterogeneous Time," in *Nationalism and Its Futures*, ed. Umut Özkırımlı [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 33-58; Ogle, "Whose Time Is It? The Pluralization of Time and the Global Condition, 1870s-1940s," *American Historical Review* 118, no. 5 [2013]: 1376-1402; Nanni, *The Colonisation of Time: Ritual, Routine and Resistance in the British Empire* [Manchester, UK: Univ. of Manchester Press, 2013; and Barrows, *Time, Literature, and Cartography: After the Spatial Turn: The Chronometric Imagination* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016], itself a qualifier of sorts to Barrows's earlier *The Cosmic Time of Empire: Modern Britain and World Literature* [Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2011]). Elizabeth Freeman's *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010) identifies non-"straight" or nonlinear notions of time in the modern era. And Caroline Levine's capacious *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2015) offers a more sweeping take on temporal heterogeneity and narrative form.

[10] See Suzy Anger, *Victorian Interpretation* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2005). Adela Pinch's *Thinking About Other People in Nineteenth-Century British Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010) has also informed my thinking here.

voices that "tell" time; and the rhythmic beats that shade from automation to pulsation: with all these figurations, nineteenth-century literature seeks points of communion and commonality to bypass the opposition between organic and mechanical matter.[11]

But the question of interpretation naturally concerns not just the readings of clockwork that texts seem to solicit, but the readings of texts themselves. This ambiguity comes nicely to the fore in George Eliot's comparison of Celia and Dorothea Brooke in the first chapter of *Middlemarch* (1871-72). "The rural opinion" of the Brooke sisters, Eliot writes, "was generally in favor of Celia, as being so amiable and innocent-looking, while Miss Brooke's large eyes seemed, like her religion, too unusual and striking. Poor Dorothea! Compared with her, the innocent-looking Celia was knowing and worldly-wise; so much subtler is a human mind than the outside tissues which make a sort of blazonry or clock-face for it."[12]

Eliot is, of course, making a point about reading—a point that conjures up that old tension between surface and depth.[13] To merely read a face, be it of a person, a text, or indeed a clock, is only to half-engage with it. Worse, it risks getting things entirely wrong. Like novels and poems, Eliot assumes, clocks may be read; and like novels and poems, they can model ways of reading. In assimilating clockwork into her own set of literary priorities, Eliot is also teaching readers to better attend to the aims of the texts in front of them. As we cannot, in her words, "ha[ve] a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life," lest "we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence," we must make do, to start, with clock-faces. Only then,

[11] The uncanny animation of nineteenth-century timepieces thus refutes Tresch's attribution of "lifelessness" to classical machines. See Jessica Riskin's *The Restless Clock* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 2016), which states that "in most cases, the comparisons of living beings to clocks also supported arguments from design that construed the living world as passive machinery, its order and movement imposed from without. But not quite always. In one instance, the clock, specifically, the balance, served as a model for the inner, restless, resisting agency of the mechanism itself" (78).
[12] Eliot, *Middlemarch* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 9.
[13] Eliot, *Middlemarch,* 194.

"well wadded with stupidity," may we attempt to imagine our way beneath them, into the strange subtleties of the human mind.[14]

Eliot's clock-faced characters descend from a curiously philosophical strain of British clocks that were involved in a difficult process of decoding how things work. The first mechanical, or "striking," clocks entered the European soundscape around the dawn of the fourteenth century, in the form of ecclesiastical and later municipal clock towers.[15] As Alain Corbin puts it, these towers "prescribed an auditory space" of communal and parochial belonging, shaping "the habitus of [the] community" and interspersing ambient sound with timely reminders of the sacred.[16] But the advancement of clock technology in the early modern period, and the increase of table clocks and early watches, brought mechanization into domestic spaces for the first time on a grand scale. These early devices worked poorly and needed constant tending; and the ability and indeed the necessity of opening them up, winding them, repairing

[14] In this as in other respects, *Middlemarch* quite explicitly follows in the footsteps of eighteenth-century realism. As that lion of pugilistic eighteenth-century prose Samuel Johnson famously wrote of Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding: "There was as great a difference between them as between a man who knew how a watch was made, and a man who could tell the hour by looking on the dial-plate." Richardson was the former, a knowledgeable surveyor of the cogs and wheels of character psychology. Fielding, barely literate in matters of interiority, was acknowledged capable of merely reading the surface of a watch. Yet James Boswell opined in the *Life* that "the neat watches of Fielding are as well constructed as the large clocks of Richardson, and . . . his dial-plates are brighter," too. The reader may evaluate it for how "just" are the "pictures of human nature" we find there, how "striking" the features, and how "nice" the "touches of pencil"; and we gain pleasure from that survey, when the pictures have been well done (Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* [1791; New York: Penguin, 2008], 288). *Middlemarch*'s citation of Fielding is discussed in my third chapter.

[15] See Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum, *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996), 46. See also Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago, Press, 1980); and Alfred W. Crosby, *The Measure of Reality: Quantification in Western Europe, 1250-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997).

[16] In this regard clock towers chimed with earlier timekeeping technologies intimately linked with rituals of prayer and observance across Catholic Europe. Yet these divinely correlated clocks also activated an incipient sense of Thompson's "time-discipline," the mental anticipation of the hour's next strike, and the increasing ordering of one's own duties and responsibilities around it. The most intensive early examples of clock-time's mental assimilation in fact occurred in monasteries, which translated the clock's nonverbal sounds into codified calls to worship and study. In the narratives put forth by Mumford, Thompson, Dohrn-van Rossum, and others, this religiously motivated time-discipline quickly and perhaps inevitably becomes absorbed into more mercantile affairs, presaging a capitalist conversion of time into a unit of value. Premodern clocks were in most respects public, communal devices, although hourglasses, clepsydras, and clock-candles continued to mark private time.

them, and simply observing them, perhaps helps to explain the imaginative fascination timepieces held for early modern philosophers. Where Francis Bacon provided a scientific method for questioning the manifest workings of the universe, clockwork offered a metaphor for thinkers trying to explain phenomena that could not be easily seen or explained: on one end of the scale, the relation of the universe to the divine, and on the other the more intimate relations of the body to the metaphysical concepts of spirit, soul, and mind. This deployment of clockwork metaphors for bodily and spiritual workings runs the philosophical gamut: from Descartes, Hobbes, Leibniz, Isaac Newton, and John Locke to Lord Shaftesbury, Jonathan Swift, George Berkeley, David Hume, Adam Smith, and James Boswell, winding down with William Paley's 1802 *Natural Theology*.[17] Yet despite a shift toward more measurable and more matter-based inquiry models in the nineteenth century, figures like George Henry Lewes, Thomas Henry Huxley, and William James continued this pseudo-scientific tradition well into the Victorian era, something Eliot, Lewes's partner, was undoubtedly aware of.[18]

Fiction and poetry quite naturally followed these well-trodden philosophical paths. As clocks' strange analogy to animate matter passed into common parlance, literature began to run the analogy in reverse, and to codify a sense that certain forms of technology might be understood as both verbal and imbued with feeling—with the passion, vitality, and faith absent from automated industrial machinery. In pursuing the canon of nonindustrial, semi-animate timepieces that proliferated across nineteenth-century literature, we are thus also pursuing the relationship between that traveling emblem of mechanism, the clock, and that traveling species

[17] This timeline of clockwork metaphors, uncoincidentally, follows the parameters of the Scientific Revolution and involves many of the same thinkers. See Margaret Dauler Wilson's *Ideas and Mechanism: Essays on Early Modern Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1999).
[18] I have drawn liberally throughout this project on Brad Pasanek's "The Mind is a Metaphor" database, http://metaphors.iath.virginia.edu/metaphors.

of language, the printed volume. Both have surfaces offered up for easy legibility—and we can, under certain circumstances, tuck timepiece and printed volume into our pocket, or hold it in our hand, and feel an odd sort of bodily intimacy with what seems a mere mouthpiece for some disembodied voice. Clock and text imply that there is something *underneath* the surface, something somehow alive and throbbing, that a good writer somehow captures through the more mechanized restraints of grammar, and the longer-form organizational methods that sustain a poem or narrative through time.

In these days of smartphones, ebooks, and audiobooks, the barriers between text and time have in many respects never been more porous. Icons for internet browsers, reading apps, and hyper-accurate clocks sit side by side on smartphone and tablet screens, while ebooks and audiobooks now measure chapters in minutes rather than pages. Yet this integration of time and reading material accords with a transition from analog to digital that has in some sense deemphasized text and clock-time as inhering in material objects and deriving from material systems of production. The common attributes assigned to postindustrial technology—clean, shiny, and new—develop out of a system in which data seems to transfer effortlessly to and from the abstract, airy space of the "Cloud," as users cycle through an endless series of newer models.[19] In investigating parallels that Victorian writers drew between clocks and texts, it is

[19] These descriptors are of course deeply misleading. Data centers powered by electricity take up both a physical footprint and a significant and growing percentage of national energy use and carbon emissions: up to 39.1 $MtCO^2e$ by 2020, "mak[ing] cloud computing one of the largest emerging sources of undesired CO^2 emissions" (Yahav Biran, George Collins, and Joel Dubow, "Cloud Computing Cost and Energy Optimization through Federated Cloud SoS," *Systems Engineering* 20, no. 3 [2017]: 280). That's to say nothing of the adverse health effects of silicon production, the millions of tons of electronic waste generated worldwide each year, or the carbon footprint generated by their manufacture.[19] Imaginatively, however, when we think about modern technology, it involves devices that seem distinctly disembodied compared to their industrial predecessors. See, for instance, Katharine Bohley Martin and Chris Harris, "An Analysis of E-waste: When Do Electronics Die?" *Journal of the Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences* 17, no. 1 (2017): 16-24; and Michael Ackah, "Informal E-waste Recycling in Developing Countries: Review of Metal(loid)s Pollution, Environmental Impacts, and Transport Pathways," *Environmental Science and Pollution Research* 24, no. 31 (2017): 24092-101.

worth noting that the vision of clock technology they put forth is one highly attuned to that technology's physical existence. They pay heed to the roles that particular, material objects play in the daily lives of nineteenth-century individuals, and they emphasize how these particular objects—whether a familiar clock, a favorite watch, or a beloved text—might solicit attachments, loyalties, and forms of devotion in those who read and interact with them each day.[20]

The assimilation of clockwork technology into the technologies of literature is in this sense formally illuminating how writers pitted authoritarian ideas of timed order against a more reciprocal vision of practice, habit, and ritual. Throughout the century, the press of the clock on conceptions of character, narrative, rhythm and meter, and the sequential organization of stanzas, paragraphs, chapters, dated diary entries, letters, and serial installments, would continually underscore these features as in some degree artificial mechanisms, and yet charged with a strange kind of life. The ability of nineteenth-century literature to develop and defend nonindustrial forms of clock-time hinged upon this understanding of texts as themselves types of technology; and this understanding shaped ideas about literary form on a fundamental level over the course of the nineteenth century. This dissertation, in part a historicist inquiry into nineteenth-century technological thought, is equally a formalist investigation into the literary text as a scene of reconciliation between individuals and clocks, at once mechanized and overflowing with a strange kind of life.

[20] See Rita Felski's work of enchantment and attachment, notably in *Uses of Literature* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008) and her current book project *Hooked: Art and Attachment*. Felski's work draws on Bruno Latour's actor-network-theory to emphasize the ties we share with literary texts, characters, and styles of writing, through which new "meanings and values are co-produced" (Felski, "Attachment" in "30@30: The Future of Literary Thinking," *Textual Practice* 30, no. 7 [2016]: 1154).

The Victorian resistance to the clock's alliance with industrial capitalism pivots on the ongoing acts of interpretation and interpellation that the clock solicits and performs. The clock was, as I have been suggesting, presented as something to be imaginatively engaged, decoded, *read*; but it was also very much a governor for "the sense and steady performance of such kind of duties as can be regulated by the . . . clock." The phrase, from John Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*, belongs to the description of "a quiet English cathedral town." "Think for a little while," Ruskin writes, of "the meaning of all its small formalisms, mixed with its serene sublimity. Estimate its secluded, continuous, drowsy felicities, and its evidence of the sense and steady performance of such kind of duties as can be regulated by the cathedral clock; and weigh the influence of those dark towers on all who have passed through the lonely square at their feet for centuries."[21] Clock-time, and the duties it gives both sense and steadiness, are indeed involved in a mode of regulation at once external and internal. But in Ruskin's account these duties are concerned not with profit but with the forms of labor that uphold daily lived experience: faith, care, family, social responsibility, and, more diffusely, aesthetic sensitivity. Though Ruskin's cathedral and clock have overseen religious schism, political upheaval, even the profound alteration of "the temper of the people by whom it is now surrounded," they have maintained the ability to interest the gaze, arouse feeling, and impart understanding in the viewer (77-78); and the duties they oversee are not mere repetitive motions, but rituals imbued with meaning: small formalisms rather than militarized Marxian minutiae.

In the chapters that follow I pursue the steady performances of religious and sickbed vigilance, family meals, and daily writing across the pages of nineteenth-century literature, to show how that literature gave "sense" to repetitive and regimented acts, beyond and counter to

[21] John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* (New York: John Wiley, 1880), 1:65-66, 67.

the scope of industry. The very structure of this project, this academic "book of hours," tacitly rebuts a Benjaminian model of homogeneous time, and reminds readers that we never share just one relationship with technology, but many. My first chapter, positioned at midnight, follows in Ruskin's footsteps to explore mid-Victorian literature's revival of the clock tower as a centripetal communal and spiritual object—one that might develop practices of prolonged concentration and social obligation even (or especially) in a culture of mass distraction. My second chapter, gathered around the dinner hour, unearths the proliferation of untimely watches in realist novels such as *Northanger Abbey* and *Wives and Daughters* amid the gradual onset of British standard time. It positions these untimely watches as metonyms not of disembodied abstract time, but of an early notion of relative time which correlates with the particular opinions, prejudices and untidy bodies of their owners; and it argues that realism's pre-Einsteinian relativity played a constitutive role in the development of literary character. My final chapter, striking "six at dawn," concerns the meeting of poetic ideas about verse mechanism and timed writing habits.[22] Drawing on a diverse array of post-1840s memoirs, letters, essays, and prosodic treatises, it delimits a strand of industrialized reworkings of Romantic myths of "spontaneous" creation, ranging from Charles Dickens's early serial project *Master Humphrey's Clock* to the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Robert Browning, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

While the project stretches from Wordsworth and Austen on one end of the long nineteenth century to Hardy's Edwardian poetry on the other, my findings have continually brought me back to the century's middle decades, whose literature most consciously sought out compromise and reconciliation between industry and art. The texts I foreground offer up a vision of the relationship between man and mechanism that is collaborative—not least in the task of

[22] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, ed. Kerry McSweeney (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 4.427.

writing itself. Certainly the nineteenth-century novel, and the nineteenth-century poem, could have existed without the clock. But they would have looked, and sounded, very differently without it. These are the pages that timekeepers helped to write; and to overlook that fact, or to simplify the terms of that collaborative relationship, is to miss a vast archive of material on the era's intellectually rigorous engagement with the terms of changing technology.

Midnight

Victorian Vigil and Attentive Reading Practices

"To learn to take the universe seriously," wrote Thomas Hardy in 1886, "there is no quicker way than to watch—to be a 'waker,' as the country-people call it."

The line is from *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, set like all of Hardy's novels in that half-real, half-dreamt region called Wessex. As Elizabeth-Jane Newsom sits up night after night with her dying mother, isolation presses in upon her. The hours of silence are broken "only by the time-piece in the bedroom ticking frantically against the clock on the stairs; ticking harder and harder till it seemed to clang like a gong; and all this while the subtle-souled girl asking herself why she was born, why sitting in a room, and blinking at the candle; why things around her had taken the shape they wore in preference to every other possible shape."[1] In this moment, this subtle-souled "waker" penetrates the essential contingency that lies at the heart of Hardy's novel, as it circulates through its multiple mayors, multiple Elizabeth-Janes, multiple Mrs. Henchards and Mrs. Farfraes. Placing the emphasis on a slow form of "learning" rather than a sudden shaft of insight, Hardy animates the vigil as a practice of gradual, hard-won, and imperfect enlightenment.

Although composed late in the century, *Casterbridge* projects itself back to the dawn of the Victorian era, to a society now distant in time but assertively familiar in many of its concerns. Hardy would elsewhere toy with a sort of hollow atheism "clang[ing] negligently" through "the monotonous hours."[2] Yet this scene of careful and prolonged midnight "waking"

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[1] Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge: A Story of a Man of Character* (London: Sampson Low, 1887), 162.
[2] Hardy, "A Sign-Seeker," in *The Variorum Edition of the Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, ed. James Gibson (London: Macmillan, 1979), 49 (line 4).

reads as a throwback: to a medieval notion of a spiritually vigilant watchfulness; and to an era thirty years prior, when Victorian literature oversaw an astonishing proliferation of what I refer to as "vigil scenes." These scenes look very much like the one Hardy stages in 1886. The watching they model is solitary, pursued in spite of exhaustion and accompanied only by the ticks, gongs, and chimes of the clock that mark a slow progression of self-knowledge and spiritual insight.[3] This notion of "waking" is also, even in the world of *Casterbridge*'s early Victorian England, already quaintly provincial, drawn from an age before industry and all its attendant demands and distractions.

As a late-Victorian record of mid-Victorian concerns, I find Hardy's novel an instructive entry point for exploring the topic of "vigil" as it rose to prominence in 1840s and 1850s Britain. This rise coincided with the heyday of the Victorian medieval revival; and some vigil literature can easily be gathered under that subheading. But the Victorian vigil, in seeking to mimetically approximate the clock's timely demands for attention, belongs more squarely under the banner of nineteenth-century experiments in soliciting readerly focus (and acknowledging readerly distraction).[4] The "problem" of attention in the modern era has traditionally been understood as

[3] For two, rather different takes on Thomas Hardy's clocks, see E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past & Present* 38 (Dec. 1967): 56-97; and Jeffrey Blevins, "Thomas Hardy's Timing: Poems and Clocks in Late Nineteenth-Century England," *Victorian Poetry* 52, no. 4 (2014): 591-618.

[4] Jean-Yves Lacoste, perhaps the foremost modern theorist of vigil, defines the term as a refusal of sleep that is shaped by "content we give to [it] . . . doing philosophy, writing poetry, or praying—and many other things besides." It is therefore "neither a time of salaried work (*negotium*) nor a time appropriate for leisure (*otium*)," but rather a space of "marginal or parenthetic experience," outside the ordinary conditions of daily time. *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*, trans. Mark Rafferty-Skehan (1994; New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2004), 79-80; 83. Following on Lacoste, Christina M. Gschwandtner defines vigil as a challenge to "our usual and common understandings of time, space, objects, or human relations." This activity is "not [as] labor or even work, but . . . . a 'rupture' of our usual ways of experiencing" (649-50). Like Lacoste, Gschwandtner thus emphasizes the vigil as an active state that opens the path toward "alternative" ways of thinking, being, and behaving. "The vigil does not free us from the world," Gschwandtner notes, "but in its symbolic going beyond the world, it uncovers its limits" (653). See "The Vigil as Exemplary Liturgical Experience: On Jean-Yves Lacoste's Phenomenology of Liturgy," *Modern Theology* 31, no. 4 (2015): 648-57.

an issue of ensuring "reception in a state of distraction," as Walter Benjamin would have it.[5] Garrett Stewart has noted the era's reification of "reading's solitary fixation," but also its frequent dramatizations of "interrupted reading," as the commotion of "real" life repeatedly overtakes the act of perusal.[6] This tension between narrow focus and dispersed attention plays out across eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literatures, which, forever conscious of demands they made upon a reader's time, became invested in the formal problem of what might cause an attention span to expand or contract.[7] Stephen Arata and Krista Lysack, for instance, have both demonstrated how Victorian texts admit *in*attention in its reader, as attention is reimagined "as a more dispersed and decentered phenomenon" and "restlessness and interruption" are built into the reading experience.[8] Elisha Cohn's work on "sleep reading" represents another iteration of this phenomenon, with interludes of literary reverie permitting the release of "morally vigilant individuation."[9]

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[5] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken/Random House, 1968), 240.

[6] Garrett Stewart, *The Look of Reading: Book, Painting, Text* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2006), 176; 187-89. Although distraction and divergence were thought conducive to creative inspiration—Natalie M. Phillips and Elisha Cohn are important recent contributors to this field—scholars tend to agree that both the general acceleration of modern life, and the rapidly proliferating stimuli of urban, industrial Europe, led to a renewed interest in "attentive norms and practices." See Natalie M. Phillips, *Distraction: Problems of Attention in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2016); Elisha Cohn, "Still Life: Suspended Animation in *Villette*," *SEL*, 52, no. 4 (2012): 843-60 and *Still Life: Suspended Development in the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2015), discussed in more detail in Note 20; and Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 2.

[7] For more on eighteenth-century attention in particular, see Phillips, *Distraction*; Elizabeth S. Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2005); and Margaret Koehler, *Poetry of Attention in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). Koehler aligns eighteenth-century poetic vigilance less with deep thought than an indiscriminate mania for cataloguing objects. Phillips describes representations of eighteenth-century reading as both absorptive and "occurring amid high cacophony," prompting the formation of new "literary structures meant to *work with*, rather than reform, distracted readers" (2-3).

[8] Stephen Arata, "On Not Paying Attention," *Victorian Studies* 46, no. 2 (2004): 204; and Krista Lysack, "The Productions of Time: Keble, Rossetti, and Victorian Devotional Reading," *Victorian Studies* 55, no. 3 (2013): 688.

[9] Cohn, "Still Life,' 854. My reading of vigil scenes is in some ways a response to Cohn's work on "sleep reading"—that is, on scenes that suspend reader and character alike in reveries of pleasurable beauty. In vigil scenes the demand on readers seems precisely the opposite: they ask readers to actively feel themselves to be following along more attentively than before and to experience the pressing need for change and transformation. Some admitted overlap between scenes of reverie and of vigil is due to the vigil's tacit defiance of its near twin. Both represent cases of outward stasis, and both seek to open the mind to possibilities that extend beyond the visible

Vigil literature pulls in a counter-direction to these attempts to allow for, and to mimic, the ebbs and flows of a reader's mental focus. Situationally and etymologically, vigil is bound up in what Nietzsche would later call the duty of humanity: "wakefulness itself," a heightened receptivity to "the fullest range of experience we can muster from moment to moment."[10] It thus labors upon readers' attention spans—even if that span lasts only the length of a sermon, a scene, a lyric—to cultivate a mind resistant to the effects of constant disruption. Hardy elucidates some of vigil's pedagogical dimension in *Casterbridge*: "to *learn* to take the universe seriously," as the waker bypasses accepted fact for essential truth through a habit of slow struggling toward understanding. The habits of watchfulness that vigil literature sought to develop in its readers rested heavily upon the clock as a source of what Ruskin called "small formalisms": a canon of textual "effects" deployed to capture and maintain the focus.[11] The clock thus became at once governing influence and aesthetic model, helping to extend the focus across minutes, hours, days, and years, and registered in the regular divisions of paragraphs and sentences, rhymes, lines, and stanzas. Implicit in these efforts was a Victorian feeling that focused, regular reading

world. They both raise the question of just what is happening, molecularly, in texts that document inactivity. Cohn suggests that intrusions such as doorbells must eventually call a halt to the reverie and return the narrative to forward motion. In vigil scenes, however, the periodic intrusions of the clock constitute a necessary prompt to vigilance, and they participate in both the auditory environment of the literary watcher, and the textual one that we as readers "hear."

[10] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. and ed. Marion Faber (1885; New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), 4; and Melissa A. Orlie, "Impersonal Matter," in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2010), 127; 124. The rise of "visuality" and visual culture, which crested later in the century with advancements in photography and the advent of film, forms another spoke of discussion. The term "visuality" originates with Thomas Carlyle in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1840). As Nicholas Mirzoeff discusses, Carlyle's (quite Romantic) notions of history and heroism were predicated on a notion of "a spiritually motivated vision of History" that bypassed mere material sight. See Mirzoeff, *A Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2011), 125, 139-40; and Carlyle, "The Hero as Poet," lecture 3 in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (London: James Fraser, 1842), 149.

[11] John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, 2nd ed. (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1867), 2:63.

might have a positive impact upon the vagaries of the modern mind—and also that such sustained reading was under siege in a culture of proliferating demands on the attention.[12]

The vigil was formerly a part of the medieval Catholic calendar, as days of mental preparation for religious holy days. But these explicitly and heavily ritualized Christian connotations gave way, in the modern period, to vigil as a state of mind and a fortitude of body—one marked above all by its attentive acuity and, increasingly, of social consciousness.[13] The modern sense of vigil, as Hardy inherits it, owes quite as much to the eighteenth century and its Romantic sequel as it does medieval ritual. Noted insomniac Alexander Pope had offered up this bruising couplet almost a century prior: "But pensive poets painful vigils keep; / Sleepless themselves, to give their readers sleep."[14] Romantic poetry, however, cast sleeplessness as an isolating and yet somewhat rarefied experience. Setting vigil-keepers apart from ordinary, somnolent men, it aligned quite appealingly with the idea of "genius." The vigil as it appears in the poetry of Coleridge, Byron, and their cohort is relentlessly interior and self-interrogative: it denotes a sleeplessness that *may* be physical, but that is forcefully psychological, turning the

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[12] This ambition is by no means restricted to the Victorians. D. H. Lawrence wrote in 1929 that "the essential quality of poetry is that it makes a new effort of attention and 'discovers' a new world within the known world." See Lawrence's introduction to Harry Crosby's *Chariot of the Sun* (1931) and *Phoenix*, vol. 1, ed. Edward D. McDonald (New York, 1936), as well as Sandra M. Gilbert's *Acts of Attention: The Poems of D. H. Lawrence*, 2nd ed. (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1990). For more on the relationship between vigilance, poetic composition, and reading practices, see I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1926; New York: Routledge, 2004), 168-69; Donald Revell, *Art of Attention: A Poet's Eye* (Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf, 2007); and Li Hao, "'Vigilance' and the Ethics of Cross-Cultural Reading," *The Cambridge Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2012): 146-62.

[13] The *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (1932-95; Éditions Beauchesne, *dictionnairedespiritualite.com*) defines "attention" as, in its simplest sense, "an application of the spirit" or, alternately, "of the mind" (Robert Vernay, "Attention," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*; translation mine).

[14] Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad in Four Books*, ed. Valerie Rumbold (Edinburgh: Pearson, 2009), bk. 1, l. 93.). Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* also bore witness to this semantic transition, labelling the vigil both a "service used on the night before a holiday" and a more secular act denoting the "forbearance of sleep" and the presence of "watchfulness; circumspection; [and] incessant care." The 1835 edition, "improved by Todd and abridged by Chalmers," further expands on Johnson's definition, declaring that to be vigilant is to be "watchful; circumspect, diligent; [and] attentive." *Johnson's English Dictionary* (Boston: DeSilver, Palmer & Co., 1835), 1000.

humble nocturnal watcher into poetic visionary: "In my heart," as wrote Byron in *Manfred* (1817), "There is a vigil, and these eyes but close / To look within."

Anna Barbauld's "A Summer Evening's Meditation" (1773) echoed this alignment of vigil, *vigilāre*, with second sight; and she usefully moves us toward vigil's relationship not merely with the clock, but with the more local hour of 12 a.m.: the "dead of midnight [that] is the noon of thought," when "Wisdom mounts her zenith with the stars" and "the self-collected soul / Turns inward."[15] Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode" (1802) would also posit the witching hour as the setting for vigil; and its speaker's wakefulness denotes "dejection," but also the poet's essential, visionary uniqueness: "'Tis midnight, and small thoughts have I of sleep: / Full seldom may my friends such vigils keep!" To keep (poetic) vigil, Coleridge suggests, is to accept one's quiet estrangement from the rest of mankind, to yield to thoughts different from those harbored by ordinary men. Yet in accepting the task of watching over a lost, lonely child, the lyric speaker finally escapes the wild ravages of the night, which drive the "mighty Poet, e'en to frenzy bold!" "Dejection" thus rescues its speaker (and itself) from the visionary overflow of a sleepless midnight by *yielding* to the more disciplinary task of vigil. He discovers a wakefulness that is not merely the absence of sleep and the immensity of imagination, but also a vital spiritual occupation.[16]

Midnight forever haunts the vigil, a "night partak[ing] of two days" that emphasizes the vigil's liminal, transformative qualities, its potential for alteration, and its rising sense of

[15] Anna Letitia Barbauld, "A Summer Evening's Meditation," in *Poems* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1773), 134 (lines 51-54).
[16] Coleridge, "Dejection: An Ode," in *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnusson, and Raimonda Mondiano (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 155-57.

anticipation.[17] "The ticking of a clock in the night," wrote William Hazlitt in 1827 with typical acerbity,

> has nothing very interesting nor very alarming in it, though superstition has magnified it into an omen. In a state of vigilance or debility, it preys upon the spirits like the persecution of a teasing, pertinacious insect, and haunting the imagination after it has ceased in reality, is converted into the death-watch. Time is rendered vast by contemplating its minute portions thus repeatedly and painfully urged upon its attention, as the ocean in its immensity is composed of water-drops. A clock striking with a clear and silver sound is a great relief in such circumstances, breaks the spell, and resembles a sylph-like and friendly spirit in the room.[18]

Despite his personal skepticism, what Hazlitt grasps here is the essential role that the *idea* of the clock plays in the psychology (and literary legacy) of the vigil. However mundane or uninteresting the nocturnal clock may be in actuality, the fact remains that imagination has worked upon midnight through the centuries, magnifying it through superstition, until the midnight hour "haunt[s]" the Western imaginary.[19] It is thereby "converted" by the imagination into a watchful accompaniment to the vigilant actor that "repeatedly and painfully urge[s]" it upon the listener.[20] Thus, although this chapter nominally concerns the act of *watching*, it tracks

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[17] Foucault, "Standing Vigil for the Day to Come" [Guetter le jour qui vient], trans. Elise Woodard and Robert Harvey, *Foucault Studies* 19 (2015): 218. Originally published in *La Nouvelle Revue française* 130 (1963): 709-16.
[18] William Hazlitt, "On a Sun-dial," in *Men and Manners: Sketches and Essays* (London: Reynell and Weight, 1852), 77.
[19] See Foucault, "Standing Vigil," 218-19.
[20] My reading of vigil scenes answers Cohn's recent work on "sleep reading"—that is, on scenes that suspend reader and character alike in reveries of pleasurable beauty. In both her recent book *Still Life* and in the related article "Still Life," Cohn details a less-vigilant mode of reading that, far from constituting "an exercise in morally vigilant individuation or social individuation," instead "comes only with the release of such vigilance and coherence of the self" ("Still Life" 854). In vigil scenes the demand on readers seems precisely the opposite: they ask readers to actively feel themselves to be following along more attentively than before and to experience the pressing need for change and transformation. Some admitted overlap between scenes of reverie and of vigil is due to the vigil's tacit defiance of its near twin. For reverie and vigil share a fundamental similarity: they both represent cases of outward stasis, and they both seek to open the mind to possibilities that extend beyond the visible world. They both raise the

this act between the poles of visuality and audibility, visibility and invisibility, as it charts a more all-encompassing form of awareness.

Not all vigil scenes feature clocks or hourly time, and the scenes under scrutiny in this chapter form only part of a much larger corpus of writings. What distinguishes these scenes is their conscious desire to work the formal features of the clock into their own writing, precisely to reproduce and heighten its call to attention. While Hazlitt in theorizing the clock does not formally experiment with it, the vigil scenes examined here all share strongly mimetic qualities: they echo, rhythmically and formally, the chimes and pauses of the clock.[21] Paragraphs, stanzas, and other formal divisions of the narrative frequently borrow their structure from the divisions of mechanical timekeepers, so that the self-contained unit of the paragraph or stanza may stand in, metonymically, for the span of an hour. Such vigil scenes thereby align the time of diegetic narrative with the time of reading itself. As our eyes move across the line and down the page, we begin to experience the divisions of (printed) text as units of narrative time; and these subliminal rhythms and explicit reminders of clock-time render their readers not just more "time-conscious," but also simply more "conscious." Reproducing the audible and ongoing experience of "hearing" the clock ring out, they tacitly call on readers themselves to listen, to wait, and, above all, to be watchful.

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question of just what is happening, molecularly, in texts that document inactivity. Cohn suggests that intrusions such as doorbells must eventually call a halt to the reverie and return the narrative to forward motion. In vigil scenes, however, the periodic intrusions of the clock constitute a necessary prompt to vigilance, and they participate in both the auditory environment of the literary watcher, and the textual one that we as readers "hear."

[21] One notable effect of the striking clock is its ability to push against the upper boundaries of writing's simulation of reality. Unlike the more complex tones and rhythms of bird song, musical composition, windstorms, and urban noise, the clock's strikes, tolls, or ticks are remarkably simple sounds. It requires relatively little ingenuity to conjure up their tones, and little more to imitate their regular, predictable rhythm (although, as I will discuss, textual incorporation of clock-time is both rich and interestingly variable). "*One!*" a text might intone; and we can reasonably be expected to make the leap between the word *one* and the sound of a single toll resounding (which toll might, indeed, sound rather like the word "one"). As the toll of the clock temporarily redirects the watcher's attention, these periodic strikes thus simultaneously burst upon our consciousness as readers.

It is this fundamental link between the vigilant clock and the wayward imagination—and, to push this connection further still, between the clock and the time of reading—that underpins the investigations of this chapter. We might say it is therefore heroic couplet of Pope, rather than the lyric interiority of Byron and Coleridge, that lays the groundwork for Victorian writers. Pensive, painful, and sleepless vigils may be; but their Victorian scribes reflect a concern with readership absent in much of Romantic writing. The Victorians centered this concern on the practice of *paying attention*—not merely the writer's capacity to attend to that which escapes quick glances and cursory notice, but also the reader's ability to attend to the insights a literary text might yield.[22] Their efforts were, in a word, timely. Amid an age of mass production, mass consumption, mass demography, and mass print, an age of stimuli rife (certainly for readers) with the potential for distraction, the Victorian vigil labored upon readers' attention spans—if only for the length of a sermon, a scene, a lyric—to cultivate a mind resistant to the effects of constant disruption.

In what follows, I position the clock as a vital participant in nineteenth-century efforts to solicit and develop vigilance in modern readership; and I present these efforts as participating in a Victorian alignment of certain reading habits with the difficult and daily performances of faith, care, and social awareness. If one of the projects of Victorian writers was indeed to ensure "reception in a state of distraction," then the vigil, as a model of prolonged, difficult concentration, became a prevalent exercise in resisting the lure of other pursuits. Indeed, it would seem that precisely what makes the vigil form such a throwback—the requirement of sustained,

[22] Other recent work on attention and distraction includes Kia Nobre and Sabine Kastner. *The Oxford Handbook of Attention* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2014); Andrew Epstein, *Attention Equals Life: The Pursuit of the Everyday in Contemporary Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2016); and Kenneth Jason Wardley, "'A Weariness of the Flesh': Towards a Theology of Boredom and Fatigue," in *Intensities: Philosophy, Religion, and the Affirmation of Life*, ed. Katharine Sarah Moody and Steven Shakespeare (New York: Routledge, 2012), 117-37, esp. his discussion of "Vigil and Sleep."

almost unwavering focus, in an age typified by rapid change—helps explain its attractiveness to writers composing amid the white noise of mass stimuli. And yet the intent of the writers I enlist is not merely to create wholly absorbed readers. Along this secularizing track, from the Christian writings of John Henry Newman and Christina Rossetti to the more socially oriented examples we find in Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte Brontë, and Charles Dickens, an outmoded ritual trains the gaze away from novelty and toward that which might be.[23] For it is by way of reading, these writers emphasize, that we are trained to live more watchfully in the world beyond the page.

I. Vigil and Faith in the Writings of John Henry Newman and Christina Rossetti

"Vigil" comes first from the Latin *vigilia*, signifying watch, watchfulness, or wakefulness.[24] Michel Foucault, who once asked what "might signify the prestige of the Vigil" in a secular West, felt the pressing significance of attention in vigil, labeling it an open "space of philosophy" marked by "attentive endurance," "the mind at attention at its four corners, on watch."[25] Set apart from insomnia, the physical and spiritual wakefulness of vigil marks, as Hardy suggests, a purposeful and pedagogical undertaking, one in which "learning" to take the universe seriously is emphasized over and above the success of that endeavor. Foucault identifies

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[23] For a more theoretical take on ritual, see Lorna Clymer, "Introduction," *Ritual, Routine and Regime: Repetition in Early Modern British and European Cultures*, ed. Clymer (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press: 2006); and Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992) and *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997).

[24] See "vigil, n.1," OED Online, Oxford University Press, Dec. 2016. The *OED* understands the current usage of vigil as "an occasion or period of keeping awake for some special reason or purpose." "Vigil" also functions as a verb, meaning "to keep a vigil" (see also the Latin *vigilate*). Hardy uses the verb form in "Her Death and After," lines 88-90: "So I've claim to ask / By what right you task / My patience by vigiling there?" (James Gibson, ed., *The Variorum Edition of the Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy* [London: Macmillan, 1979], 41).

[25] As Foucault put it, "The West doubtlessly drew one of its fundamental limits in the first stirrings of the day, in the vigil that maintains its brightness in the middle of the night over and against the sleep of others" ("Standing Vigil for the Day to Come" [Guetter le jour qui vient], trans. Elise Woodard and Robert Harvey, *Foucault Studies* 19 (2015): 218-19). There's some resonance here with Barbauld's midnight noon of thought, the mind at its zenith at the darkest hour.

in vigil a posture of "anticipation" that is equally "an exercise in thought and in language—in pensive speech . . . where eyes remain open, ears cocked, the entire mind alert, and words mobilized."[26]

But the Christian vigil still existed alongside its secularizing sister in the texts of Victorian writers; and the kind of anticipatory grammar it engages would provide a model for literature's adoption of the form. The idea of Christian vigil emerges in theological writings from Scripture itself, perhaps most famously after the Last Supper, when Christ exhorts his disciples to "watch" while he prays.[27] (They fail to do so, repeatedly.) This textual valorization of wakefulness, attentiveness, and faith laid out the script for vigil as "an exercise in . . . language" as much as a posture of prayer.[28] John Henry Newman, the future Catholic cardinal and leader of the Oxford Movement, put both the grammatical and the ritual aspects of vigil to work in his writings. The issue of watchfulness appears to have been a fruitful topic for Newman, who treats it in a number of texts—often, although not always, with an eye to yoking the abstract practice of watchfulness to regular and time-sensitive religious observance. In "Watching," from his *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (composed 1834-42), Newman poses the question "What it is to *watch* for Christ?" The response, which he locates in Scripture, commends constant vigilance:

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[26] Foucault, "Standing Vigil," 218.

[27] Newman cites, among others, Luke 12.36-39, Matthew 25.13, Mark 14.37, 1 Corinthians 16.13, Ephesians 6.10-13, and Revelations 26.16. Per the King James Concordance, the word "watch" appears 57 times in the KJB, from Genesis all the way to Revelations. While it occasionally appears in a military register, the predominant usage relates to a mutual practice of watching (a covenant, if you will) between God and man.

[28] An attention to hourly prayer and observation was linked to the general ritualization but also, crucially, the Catholicization of Anglican parishes. Nigel Yates cites at least two examples of parishes that forbade or condemned the observation of midnight Christmas mass as "flagrant examples" of non-Protestant practices (*Anglican Ritualism in Victorian Britain 1830-1910* [Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999], 3; 80). Time-conscious religious practices—such as midnight mass, daily eucharist, morning and evening prayers, and other types of "an advanced ceremonial" approach to Anglican worship—were widespread but controversial by the mid-century (82). See also Maureen Moran on the interplay between Victorian theories of moral management and self-regulation in the 1840s-80s and the Catholic Church's "authoritarian ethos of control and discipline, and . . . its emphasis on faith as a non-rational experience, aroused by the body through sensuous ritual or . . . ascetic practices" (*Catholic Sensationalism and Victorian Literature* [Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 2007], 16).

"'*Watch* ye therefore, for ye know not when the Master of the house cometh; at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, *Watch*'" (320; italics in original).[29]

What Newman calls for in this sermon is vigilance of the *soul*: a constant spiritual wakefulness that permits the faithful to "see" that which is invisible amidst the modern clutter of material concerns. It consists, also, of a vigilance that is itself almost invisible to others' eyes. The "action" of watching occurs, in Newman's sermon as in Scripture, at the level of language itself: in the rapid parallel phrases of "at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning," which themselves mimic the four "quarters" of the Roman watch; in the following clause, "lest coming suddenly," that propels itself off a posture of initial anticipation, only to drop precipitously on the antithetical final word, "sleeping"; and, in a feature that evokes oral delivery, but that belongs to the reader's visual apprehension of the page, in the repeated italicization of "*Watch*."

As I infer from Newman's published sermon, there exists a relationship between vigil-keeping and language that is in many ways specific to the printed page. Newman's contribution to the aforementioned passage, from Mark 13:35, consists solely of the pointed and repeated italicization of "watch"—a small typographic change that, throughout the sermon, continually calls the itinerant reader back to order. Where speech can convey urgently the psychological dynamism of vigilance, writing does so silently. The sermon, once printed, is removed from the public forum of the Sunday service to the quiet context of individual study. Reading becomes, in this sense, like the vigil itself. The text activates the outwardly motionless posture of perusing the printed page into a vividly dynamic reading experience. Over the course of his unusual

[29] This is a close transcription of Mark 13:35 from the King James Bible. John Henry Newman, "Watching," in *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (London: Longmans, 1907), 4:319-33.

career as Anglican priest and Catholic cardinal, Newman would consistently advocate for watching as a constitutive part of Christian faith: this "remarkable word" that is "remarkable because the idea is not so obvious as might appear at first sight" (321-22).[30] Rejecting the quick glances and initial impressions of "first sight," Newman advances a model of ongoing and active Christian devotion, certitude founded in and motivating a gaze which concentrates over time. The value of watching, both as a practice and as an italicized word calling our wandering focus back to the page, lies in its relationship to the difficult practices of worship, reading, and mental focus that enforce daily observance of the divine.

If vigil is the governing idea to which Newman continually returns, however, a more mundane object allows him to "fix" the mind upon its object: the striking clock. It might seem strange that a practice so at odds with E. P. Thompson's notion of "time-discipline" would rely so strongly upon this object.[31] Yet vigil scenes deploy the clock in much the same way that medieval cathedrals and monasteries once did: as calls to prayer and, in a sense, as calls to spiritual attention. Time, in this context, is disciplinary, but the yield is spiritual, not monetary, rooted in the production of thought rather than capital. Language and literature might become the site for a transcendent apprehension of the world, but only within proper constraints. Newman responds to the presence of the clock precisely because it undergirds and enables the utterance of prayer: not as "spontaneous overflow[s] of powerful feeling," but as steadier, more durable recitations that possess their own solemn beauty.[32]

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[30] Unlike many of Newman's collections of sermons, which were slotted into the Church's liturgical calendar, "Watching" was never categorized as, say, a Lenten sermon. However, at least one posthumous collection of Newman sermons designated "Watching" as its entry for the fourth Sunday of Advent (W. J. Copeland, ed., *Selection, Adapted to the Seasons of the Ecclesiastical Year, from "Parochial and Plain Sermons"* [Rivingtons: Oxford and Cambridge, 1878]), a decision that seems fitting. "The Times of Antichrist," which I discuss further down, was more explicitly associated with Advent, as part of a series that Newman titled "Advent Sermons on Antichrist."

[31] E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past & Present* 38 (Dec. 1967): 56-97.

[32] See my third chapter for a lengthier discussion of Wordsworth's writings and forms of regimentation.

Newman's "Times of Private Prayer" and "Forms of Private Prayer," also included in *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, had already insisted upon the need for forms that "*fix the attention*," and that guard against "the irreverence of *wandering* thoughts."[33] I would make two prefatory observations about these sermons. First, they follow one after the other, in the first volume of *Sermons*; and second, time precedes language in this organization. "Forms," the twentieth sermon in the collection, thus speaks of prewritten prayers as aids to fix the attention. But "Times," the nineteenth sermon, positions set *times* of prayer as necessary precursors to these set *forms*. The one follows logically upon the other. Set times, according to Newman, possess a capacity to prompt language, imparting a mental structure to our thoughts that private prayer sorely needs. "Though set times and forms of prayer are not absolutely *necessary* in private prayer," he muses, "yet they are highly expedient; or rather,"—and this is where Newman's thinking gets truly interesting—"times are actually commanded us by our Lord in the text, 'Thou, *when* thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret . . .'" ("Times" 247).

This thoughtfully italicized bit of close-reading permits Newman to make a rather ambitious argument: "certain *times* for private prayer, over and above the secret thought of God" ("Times" 247). Newman is not suggesting that sitting down to prayer at specific times of day supersedes the thought of God—merely, as he argues in his seminal theological work, *A Grammar of Assent* (1870), that faith requires a limited degree of certitude. Kirstie Blair argues that Victorian poetry of faith tends to play out in steady, regular rhythms, whereas poetry of doubt is correspondingly irregular and unsteady.[34] As I explore in more depth in the poetry of the

[33] Newman, "Forms of Private Prayer," in *Sermons*, 1:262 (italics original). See also "Times of Private Prayer," in *Sermons*, 1:244-56.
[34] Kirstie Blair, *Form and Faith in Victorian Poetry and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012), 1.

Rossetti siblings, this image of faithful, tireless regularity does often involve corresponding metrical and structural features, orbiting about the timely chimes of the clock. Yet this lyric regularity is less engaged with the presence or absence of doubt than with providing a formal framework that solicits and enables attentive dedication over time. Newman's valorization of regularity, whether it be of faithful watching, of set times of prayers, or of clock-time itself, would appear allied to a governing belief in man's need for prompts to first order his time and, only then, to direct his thoughts.

Newman's important progression in the *Grammar* is to link the clock—what he here refers to as the "landmark of thought"—to the conscience, and then to link both clock and conscience to man's intuition of God's will. If deep thought is our way to God, then time and its markers are the "landmarks" that help to guide us on the way. While the "secret thought of God" may elude immediate comprehension, we know that the clock tells us truly (usually); and we would do well to rely upon this form of certitude in the cause of self-discipline and self-reflection. Only thus, Newman argues, do we gain access to God's truth:

> The sense of certitude [the clock striking] may be called the bell of the intellect . . . . Our conscience too may be said to strike the hours, and will strike them wrongly, unless it be duly regulated for the performance of its proper function. It is the loud announcement of the principle of right in the details of conduct, as the sense of certitude is the clear witness to what is true. Both certitude and conscience have a place in the normal condition of the mind. As a human being, I am unable, if I were to try, to live without some kind of conscience; and I am as little able to live without those landmarks of thought which certitude secures for me; still, as the hammer of a clock may tell untruly, so may my

> conscience and my sense of certitude be attached to mental acts, whether of consent or of assent, which have no claim to be thus sanctioned.[35]

It is useful to note, first, how *similarly* clock-time and thought are here figured by Newman. It is not that thought is metronomic, but rather that certain intuitions, whether of the time of day or of inner conscience, will periodically jar us loose from our careless, everyday doings, awakening us from a tendency toward thoughtlessness. The repetition of both is necessary, because faith is itself active and ongoing.

The lesson we might ultimately draw from this passage is that, as in the *Sermons*, clock-time is positioned as a necessary underlying structure for well-disciplined thought. Its attachment to mental acts, its very aura of certitude (even when it strikes wrongly), both contribute to the "grammar of assent" that Newman's treatise lays out. We might say the *Grammar* culminated thinking about the clock's religious usefulness that underpinned Newman's intellectual career. As early as his 1835 lectures on "The Persecution of the Antichrist," Newman was casting the coming of the Apocalypse in terms of the countdown of a clock toward the midnight hour. "We are creatures of a day," he wrote, "and a generation is like the striking of a clock; but it tends to dissolution, and its hours are numbered."[36] Thus, when Newman argues in the *Sermons* for set times of prayer as disciplinary measures, he is merely appending a practical dimension to a metaphor of faith he has long held fruitful.

Indeed, in both its practical and metaphoric iterations, the "form" of the hour remains a source of immense imaginative power in Newman's writings. "In all things it is by small beginnings and appointed channels that an advance is made to extensive works," he writes in

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[35] Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (London: Catholic Publication Society, 1870), 233-34.
[36] Newman, "The Persecution of the Antichrist," in *Discussions and Arguments on Various Subjects* (London: Longmans et al, 1897), 103.

"Times of Private Prayer." The hour's stroke changes the very direction of our thoughts, Newman claims, actively and insistently making us more attentive Christians: "Stated times of prayer put us in that posture (as I may call it) in which we ought ever to be; they urge us forward in a heavenly direction" ("Times" 250). This posture of directing our attention toward heaven replicates, of course, the posture of anticipation that Newman lays out in "Watching." For it is precisely *when* the hour of prayer strikes, as Newman would say, that listeners are reminded that they must also wait, and watch for, "the hour strike when you may be at liberty" ("Watching" 324).[37]

I have throughout referred to Newman's watcher as "he"—first, because Newman's listeners would have been almost exclusively male; but, second, because the posture of the Christian watcher so often seems to exclude the presence or significance of family, home, and hearth—the traditionally "feminine" provinces and "female" concerns of the Victorian period. But Victorian midnight vigils, taken as a whole, insist upon the centrality of these feminine (which we might simply take as code for "domestic," "selfless," or "communal") concerns. In more neutral terms, Victorian vigils reroute an individual religious practice toward social ends. By insisting upon a short-circuit between God and watcher, Newman's writings often neglect the domestic and mundane. Yet the midnight vigil in Victorian literature, even when framed by Christian beliefs, follows upon the secularizing tides of nineteenth-century British culture, repurposing religious practice as social practice.

This historic change finds expression in the lyric poles of Christina and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who in different ways document a steady cooption of vigilant practices and time-

[37] Newman's "Watching" frequently resorts—sometimes to comic effect—to secular metaphors of time-sensitivity. These include waiting for the post; waiting for a friend's arrival at the door; and, here, waiting for the workday bell to ring.

conscious vigils for domestic concerns and, ultimately, for social causes. For the brother, the midnight vigil situates the practices of nursing, caring, and tending at the center of modern Christian life.[38] For the sister, however, Newman's ideas about the clock's role in daily observance rest at the heart of poetic composition.[39] Her time-conscious, tirelessly vigilant lyrics, including those featured in her 1885 "reading diary," *Time Flies*, mark Christina Rossetti the Victorian writer who most fervently adheres to that age-old relationship between the earthly "hour" and the divine "Hour." This duality lies at the heart of her poetry: at once expectant of an end of days and yet determined to *take her time*.

Rossetti's vigil practice has historically been understood by scholars in terms of a desire to flee this earthly sphere, and they have thus paid little attention to the role of clock-time in her poetry.[40] Like Newman, however, Rossetti uses time in order to linguistically approach, and to thereby apprehend, the divine.[41] Her religious lyrics replicate the careful, continuous shifts between religious and literary registers present in Newman's writings, training the gaze to rest longer upon the page before them.[42] The series of vigilant, time-conscious poems she worked

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[38] While the Rossettis were associated with the Oxford Movement, and might feasibly be termed "Anglo-Catholics," they nonetheless remained a part of the Anglican Church. The valorization of religious labor on display here plays out with some frequency in non-Catholic texts as well.

[39] *Time Flies* was released by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (which published much of Rossetti's later work) on May 1, 1885.

[40] Dorothy Rosenblum, one of the late-twentieth century's most important scholars of Christina Rossetti and a vital player in the resuscitation of her critical reputation, wrote a significant piece on Christina's poetic vigilance in 1982, "Christina Rossetti's Religious Poetry: Watching, Looking, Keeping Vigil," which she then expanded upon in her 1986 book *The Poetics of Endurance* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1986). Accepting the premise that Rossetti herself only haphazardly advances, that earthly time is of no real consequence, Rosenblum describes Christina's lyric speaker as "watch[ing], weep[ing] and pray[ing], always wakeful and longing for rest," but also as someone who "must find a way to pass time" purely because "time is always passing." The speaker's vigilance thus merely "amounts to biding her time until the end" ("Watching, Looking" 34). See, among many, many others: Diane D'Amico, *Christina Rossetti: Faith, Gender, and Time* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1999); Constance W. Hassett, *Christina Rossetti: The Patience of Style* (Charlottesville, VA: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2005); Elizabeth Ludlow, *Christina Rossetti and the Bible: Waiting with the Saints* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014).

[41] For Newman, "apprehension" is a constitutive part of Christian faith, distinct from fact-based "understanding" and rationality, and instead reflective of a deep internal sense of (God's) immanent reality. See Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*.

[42] Rosenblum tracks a reversal of the watchful gaze in Rossetti's lyrics, a posture of "self-display" in which "self [becomes] spectacle" (*Endurance* 136-37). See Ludlow on Rossetti's heavenward "looking."

into this 365-day "diary" implies that Rossetti found the formal elements of daily time both religiously and creatively productive. Simon Humphries has suggested that the number of roundels in *Time Flies*—twenty-four—may refer us to the twenty-four hours of the day.[43] It is within the pages of this diary, furthermore, that Rossetti lays out her clearest schema for the interplay between earthly and divine chronometrics.[44] But the formal elements of the clock appear far more broadly in her poetry; indeed, many of the lyrics later enfolded into *Time Flies* were composed far earlier, dating back at least to 1847.

Rossetti's inscription of a vigilant Christian practice into poetic forms demonstrates a sophisticated and surprisingly earthbound grasp of how the clock might bridge the gap between religious time, poetic time, and the time of reading. Implicit in this project is an interest in the continuum of times in which a lyric might situate itself. The deployment of these lyrics as small-scale timepieces thus opens up a space for a devotion that is equally a matter of faith and of reading: the kind of "devotional reading" that Lysack, William R. McKelvy, and others have focused on in recent years.[45] A mere glance at Rossetti's oeuvre underlines the clock's enduring centrality as a lyric framework.[46] Her poetry documents an ongoing interplay of ringing chimes,

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[43] Simon Humphries, ed., *Poems and Prose* by Christina Rossetti (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 483n.

[44] Rossetti's concern with vigil is frequently dramatized by two-part entries that span successive days, thereby positing midnight as the dividing line between not just vigil eve and day, but between the two halves of a poem. The eponymous September 18 entry, is one of the more interesting cases in point. This pattern thus renders "midnight," both as a point on the clock, and as a symbol of religious transition and revelation, a governing ideology for *Time Flies*.

[45] William R. McKelvy's *Devoted Readers* delves into the claim advanced by many nineteenth-century writers, that "literature was becoming modernity's functional religion," "adopt[ing] a religious habit and evinc[ing] a longing to participate in the most sacred rites" (*The English Cult of Literature: Devoted Readers, 1774–1880* [Charlottesville, VA: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2007] 1; 4). Blair, in "John Keble and the Rhythms of Faith" (*Essays in Criticism* 53, no. 2 [2003]: 129-50) notes Newman's ambitions for a mode of reading that might "active[ly]" "instill" religious principles in the reader (129-30). See also Blair, *Form and Faith*; Joshua King, "John Keble's *The Christian Year*: Private Reading and Imagined National Religious Community," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 40, no. 2 (2012): 397-420; and F. Elizabeth Gray, "'Syren Strains': Victoria Women's Devotional Poetry and John Keble's 'the Christian Year,'" *Victorian Poetry* 44, no. 1 (2006): 61-76.

[46] See, among others, "Sleep, sleep happy Child" (comp. 1848), "A Christmas Carol, / (on the stroke of Midnight)" (comp. 1849) "The eleventh hour" (comp. 1853) "Heaven's chimes are slow, but sure to strike at last" (1856; *TF 1885*), "A Peal of Bells" (comp. 1857), "Earth has a clear call of daily bells" (1858; *TF 1885*), "Old and New Year Ditties" (comp. 1856-60), "Praying always" (pub. in *TF* 1885), "Then shall ye shout" (pub. in *TF* 1885), "After

Christian vigils, and domestic watches; of earthly calendars, shaped by the transitional moments of Christmas, Easter, and New Year's; and of divine ones, shaped by the advent of Christ's second coming. The slippage her poetry enacts between clock-time, calendrical time, and liturgical time on the one hand, and divine time on the other, thus places the mundane chime of the clock along a spectrum that leads us, through prayer and watchfulness, toward an apprehension of the divine.

But if prayer is poetry for Rossetti, and poetry prayer, then the chiming of the clock underpins both: a "form of prayer," as Newman might put it, that in Rossetti's hands becomes equally a form of poetry. This construction finds fullest expression in *Time Flies*, and the September 18 entry that bears its name. But the entry is best understood as participating in a much longer and more expansive experiment on Rossetti's part:

> Heaven and earth alike are chronometers.
>
> Heaven marks time in light, by the motion of luminaries.
>
> Earth marks time in darkness, by the variation of shadows.
>
> To these chronometers of nature art adds clocks with faces easily decipherable and voices insistently audible.
>
> Nature and art combine to keep time for us: and yet we wander out of time!
>
> We misappropriate time, we lose time, we waste time, we kill time.
>
> We do anything and everything with time, except redeem the time.

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midnight, in the dark" (pub. in *TF* 1885), the two-part "Christmas Carols," "Whoso hears a chiming for Christmas at the nighest" and "A holy, heavenly chime" (pub. 1887), "Oh knell of passing time" (pub. in *FD* 1892), "Changing Chimes" (pub. in *FD* 1892), "Short is time, and only time is bleak" (pub. in *FD* 1892). *TF = Time Flies*; *FD = Face of the Deep* (1892). Many of the lyrics published in these two collections were later published elsewhere, under the titles I've listed here. See Rebecca W. Crump, ed., *Christina Rossetti: The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti: A Variorum Edition* (Baton Rouge, LA: LSU Press, 1979-1990), 3 vols; Maura Ives, ed., *Christina Rossetti: A Descriptive Bibliography* (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2011); and Jan Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography* (London: J. Cape, 1994).

> Yet time is short and swift and never returns. Time flies.
>
> (*Time Flies* 180 ["September 18"])[47]

In this entry, Rossetti casts the clock as the production of "art"—but it is clear that, with its "faces *easily decipherable* and voices *insistently audible*," the clock evokes the more specific province of poetry: printed upon the page, but implying and prompting vocalization. In fact, it is precisely these two attributes of the clock—decipherability and audibility—that separates it from the more abstract (and gradually analogue) lights of Heaven and shadows of earth. *The clock may be understood*. It stands in for that "certitude" that Newman dwells upon, as a necessary aid to the practice and process of apprehending the divine.

In other words, as Rossetti suggests again and again, time is to be used. The use of time—which is also to say, the *usefulness* of time—lies at the heart of this daily journal, which, even as it keeps its eyes on heaven, locates the act and art of attention in the scrupulous, unceasing notation of earthly time. *Time Flies*, in the punctuality of its very lineation, stands as yet another kind of timekeeper, a literary bulwark against the loss, waste, and misappropriation of time. Indeed, the "usefulness" of *Time Flies* is conveyed in the subtitle "A Reading Diary," which must strike us as a least somewhat paradoxical.[48] A diary is meant to be written, surely (even in an age when diaries so frequently made their way into print). But here the *reading* diary is a public production meant for private, individual consumption. And Rossetti goes to some lengths to make her diary useful to readers, detaching such changeable dates as Advent, Lent,

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[47] In the paired, September 19 entry, Rossetti makes the oddly litotic declaration that "it seems that time is not lightly thought of by a holy angel whose eternity nevertheless depends not on time" (*Time Flies* 181 ["September 19"]).

[48] Rossetti was clearly influenced in this composition by John Keble's *Christian Year: Thoughts in Verse for the Sundays and Holydays throughout the Year* (Oxford: J. Parker, 1827), and Keble's entry for Saint Matthew's Day appears to be a direct forerunner to some the entries discussed here: "There are in this loud and stunning tide / Of human care and crime, / With whom the melodies abide / Of th' everlasting chime" (lines 25-28). For more, see Esther T. Hu, "Christina Rossetti, John Keble, and the Divine Gaze," *Victorian Poetry* 46, no. 2 (2008): 175-89; and Lysack, "The Productions of Time."

Easter, and Pentecost from the rest of the book and placing them in the appendix, so that the book might serve as an accompaniment to daily life over the course of many years.

As I read the diary, however, Rossetti's interest lies not so much in individual entries as it does in the prolonged attention that the diary demands of its reader: a literary watchfulness that parallels Christian faith, and that relies upon markers of time to keep us vigilant over the course of many days and months. The fact that Rossetti's appendicized entries seem both rather dull and quite uninterested in the passage of time invites, perhaps, the conclusion that religious ritual has little to do with earthly time, and nothing at all to do with timekeeping. The "art" that Rossetti so lauds in the September 18 entry is here nowhere to be found.

Yet while Rossetti's appendicized entries on the Lenten and Easter season display an entirely naturalized account of anticipation, stripped of any artificial or mechanical indicators of temporal change, the diary entries between March 8 and April 10 showcase a sudden intensification of striking clocks, watchful hours, and heavenly chimes unparalleled in the rest of the diary.[49] This Lenten motif of awaiting, watching, and marking the passing hours thus steps in for the (literally) displaced markers of liturgical time as, amid the central season of the Christian calendar, Rossetti deploys the periodic interruptions of the clock to arrest anew our attention. "After midnight, in the dark / The clock strikes one,— / New day has begun. / Look up and hark!" exclaims the March 8 entry, another poem that positions the act of "striking" as a prompt for "watching."[50] The March 22 entry concludes, "Grief is not grievous to a soul that knows / Christ comes,—and listens for that hour to strike" (*Time Flies* 57).[51] And the April 5 entry (which

[49] In the prose entry for March 10, Rossetti writes, "The Table of days upon which Easter can possibly fall, shows that there are twelve days which must in all years alike be included among the forty-six week-days and Sundays of Lent. / Of these the 10th of March is the first, the 21st the last" (*Time Flies* 65). See the March 22 entry, below, which seems conscious that it has exited the Lenten season.
[50] This poem was referred to in subsequent publications as "Praying always." Rossetti, *Time Flies* 64.
[51] March 22 was the last Sunday of Lent in 1885. See also Note 49, above.

was actually Easter Sunday in 1885, the year of publication), in many ways functions as the diary's second, if unnamed, Easter poem:

> Heaven's chimes are slow, but sure to strike at last:
>
> Earth's sands are slow, but surely dropping thro':
>
> And much we have to suffer, much to do,
>
> Before the time be past.
>
> Chimes that keep time are neither slow nor fast:
>
> Not many are the numbered sands nor few:
>
> A time to suffer, and a time to do,
>
> And then the time is past.

(*Time Flies* 65 ["April 5"])

We begin here with celestial time—a celestial time that, unlike the antiquated hourglass standing in for the earth, aligns with the more advanced technology of clock-chimes. But as the poem descends in the second stanza to a more terrestrial plane, the orientation of the gaze shifts from one that looks exclusively toward the end of days (toward a sound that we are forever *waiting* to hear), to one that audibly marks the passing hours. The versification alters accordingly, the poem beginning to mark its progress at a more measured pace. The fifth line, initiated by a trochee/spondee combination, abruptly turns to iambs to close out the stanza. "Neither slow nor fast," the meter serves as a rhythmic counterpart to the "numbered" times of suffering and of action that make up daily life.

It is not quite clear, then, whether this final line, "And then the time is past," refers to the same, apocalyptic "time" as the first stanza, or whether it refers merely to the time comprising an

individual life. The slippage between these two temporal frames is typical of Rossetti's poetry, permitting her to magnify the hour of the midnight to the Hour of Revelation itself. Yet Rossetti's mutable hour also allows her to tug the cosmic magnitude of divine time back to earth, and to resituate the tokens of the divine in the small moments of quotidian life. Chimes, like poetic meter, like the everyday happenings of a devout life, come to underpin the modern practice of faith and, crucially, the everyday practices of reading and writing.

Rossetti's most time-sensitive poetry is often linked to particular days or times of the calendrical year: Christmas, most prominently, but also New Year's, Advent, and Easter, which allow her to move rapidly between the religious and quotidian registers of the hour. I will return to Rossetti's holiday poetry in a moment. Before I do, however, it's worth mentioning that the September 18 entry in *Time Flies* does *not* belong to any liturgical calendar. Although September 18 is the point at which Rossetti lays out something of an artistic manifesto for the coextensive nature of artificial, natural, and divine markers of time, the title entry will never coincide with any appointed feast or vigil. As a *date*, it lies firmly on the side of the mundane, rather than the divine. Nor is "September 18" quite a poem, although it may strike us, visually, as more poem than prose, and although rhyme and repetition abound. So why here in the diary, and why now?

We might posit that the chronological situation of "September 18" owes something to the seasons: three-quarters of the way through the diary, and three days short of the autumnal equinox. But the choice of date also permits Rossetti to emphasize an utterly uneventful and insignificant time of the year as the potential site of great *artistic* impact. As the entry makes evident, *Time Flies* is a text about daily reading, as much as it is a text about religious belief. For Rossetti, its author, this question of literary reception shadows a question of her own rituals of

composition. In the lyric entry for July 11, a date similarly located outside the liturgical calendar, Rossetti writes

> Man's life is but a working day
>
> Whose tasks are set aright:
>
> A time to work, a time to pray,
>
> And then a quiet night.
>
> And then, please God, a quiet night
>
> Where palms are green and robes are white,
>
> A long-drawn breath, a balm for sorrow,—
>
> And all things lovely on the morrow.

(*Time Flies* 132 ["July 11"])

The "working day" mentioned here does not, of course, mark Rossetti as a poet of industrial labor, or even of a more "white collar" working day, as Thomas Hood and Elizabeth Barrett Browning occasionally were. But she *is* deeply invested in the labor of composition, and the ways that daily time becomes intertwined with that particular form of labor. Just as Newman's watching is shaped by the expectation of Christ's coming, Rossetti's "working day" is continually shaped by the impending transition from one day to the next. The clock-hand circles around, ringing out the times "set aright" for the tasks of working and praying, and ticking slowly toward the midnight hour.[52] Only the shuddering of onward progression at the phrase "a quiet night," as the poem "skips" like a scratched record, transitions us from the self-enclosed

[52] Rossetti's sonnet "Found" takes as its starting point Keats's declaration that "There is a budding morrow in midnight" (in Crump, *The Complete Poems*, 380).

day of twenty-four hours to the "day" that signifies a man's life, just as the diary itself both counts down to start not only the New Year but also, more subliminally, the new age to come.[53]

If we consider her frequently reprinted "Old and New Year Ditties"—previously entitled "The Knell of the Year"—it becomes clear that Rossetti found something about the "vigil night" conducive not only to prayer, but to poetry itself. "Watch with me this last vigil of the year," the lyric speaker exhorts, urging her listeners not to "seize the vacant hour to sleep or dream," nor even to "kneel and watch apart," but to "stop with me this vigil night" (lines 3-6; 16). The ditties hail their listener, soliciting their ears and their time. Yet the poem's engagement with the midnight vigil is not purely thematic. While the first section of the three-part poem was composed on December 13, 1856, Rossetti appears to have purposefully returned to the poem only on New Year's Eve. Part 2 was composed on December 31, 1858; Part 3, on December 31, 1860.[54] Waiting until the eleventh hour of the year, as it were, Rossetti chases after the watchfulness that inheres in the new year's vigil eve. Composition thus becomes its own form of watching, an act of quiet fidelity that is called into being by the very approach of midnight and the change that it portends.

The "Ditties" are situated toward the very end of Rossetti's *Devotional Poems*, followed only by the brief lyric "Amen." The arrangement of *Devotional Poems* thus figures the collection itself as a large-scale prayer, which the "Amen" concludes and gives retroactive shape to. But the arrangement also, in claiming the "Ditties" as the penultimate entry, emphasizes them as lyrics that *anticipate* the end. We might return to Foucault here, whose understanding of the vigil relies on its position "not after evening but before morning," so that it both "outlines the

[53] See also the April 9 entry, which begins: "Rest remains, when all is done, / Work and vigil, prayer and fast, / All fulfilled from first to last, / All the length of time gone past / And eternity begun" (*Time Flies* 68 ["April 9"]).
[54] Per William Michael Rossetti, this was the only poem Christina worked on between July 24, 1860, and March 23, 1861. See Crump, *The Complete Poems*, for more on the composition history of the "Ditties."

next day" and "in turn takes [its] shape from this day which has not yet come."[55] At work here is perhaps less a sense of poet-as-*Schöpfer* ("Sometimes it suits me better to shape out / Some Tale from my own heart," writes Wordsworth in *The Prelude*), and more a sense of the poem being itself shaped by its position *as* vigil, defined by the watch's awaited end—even if that end is never quite achieved.[56] Barbara Herrnstein Smith speaks of "anti-closure," in which an intentionally "weak" ending represents its own kind of poetic success. Herrnstein Smith assumes that poems which end in anti-closure convey doubt or tentativeness, eschewing "unassailable verities" in favor of "irresolution."[57] But the anti-closure of vigil, when it appears, is seldom an expression of doubt; it signifies, quite to the contrary, an act of faith. Amidst irresolution, the watcher seeks out "certitude," rather than certainty: an inward intuition of what is true. The "Amen" that concludes *Devotional Poems* thus functions as an affirmation but not, necessarily, a firm conclusion. It belongs to a practice of faith that does not require total consummation.

This lyric arrangement is mimicked on a far smaller scale in "Changing Chimes," first published in Rossetti's 1892 collection *The Face of the Deep*. The poem is brief—a mere eight lines, composed of two quatrains that we might call variations on the same theme—but it proves somewhat difficult to parse. At first glance, its title has no bearing on the poem itself. There are, it would seem, neither chimes nor clocks, much less changing ones, to be found anywhere in the text. Indeed, in *Face of the Deep* it was given an entirely different header: "'Thou Shalt Hear a Voice Behind Thee,'" in reference to Isaiah 30:21. The decision to retitle for subsequent publication, however, transfigures what upon initial publication seemed solely a divine "Voice"

[55] Foucault, "Standing Vigil," 218.
[56] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind (Text of 1805)*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt and Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), 1.221-22.
[57] Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1968), 232-33.

into one with a double significance.[58] For clocks, too, have voices, as Rossetti had written in *Time Flies*. The effect of this alternative title is to transfigure clock chimes into equally an earthly "warning" and a conduit for divine speech:

> It was not warning that our fathers lacked,
>
> It is not warning that we lack today.
>
> The Voice that cried still cries: 'Rise up and act:
>
> Watch alway,—watch and pray,—watch alway,—All men.'
>
> Alas, if aught was lacked goodwill was lacked;
>
> Alas, goodwill is what we lack today.
>
> O gracious Voice, grant grace that all may act,
>
> Watch and act,—watch and pray,—watch alway.—Amen.
>
> (*Face of the Deep* 216)

It might seem counterintuitive that, following the dramatic call to "Rise up and act" in the third line, the ensuing action consists of the dramatically *in*active imperative to "watch and pray." Yet in the same way that Newman's italicized refrain "*Watch*" syntactically activates an externally motionless posture, "Changing Chimes" commands our attention precisely when it describes stillness. Rossetti's line break here (which she repeats in the second stanza) thus frames watching and praying as *acts* of Christian vigilance.

[58] It is unclear whether "Changing Chimes" was the original title, or whether it was only affixed to the poem in subsequent publications. Rossetti frequently repurposed existing poetry for her late, devotional collections (as was the case with *Time Flies*). It is therefore entirely possible that this poem significantly predates *Face of the Deep* and the quote from Isaiah was a late addition, intended to smooth the poem's integration into the text. Certainly there seems little relationship between the lyric and the prose that surrounds it. When published elsewhere, the poem never retained this original publication title.

There is a yet more subtle effect at work here. Because "Changing Chimes" occludes the titular chimes, we can only identify the "warning" and the "Voice" as chimes *because* the title suggests them to be our subject. The question of where the chimes have gone remains unsolved, their presence disembodied. Yet a clue can, I suspect, be located in the New Year's ditties, where the "knell of the year" dramatically "watches" for the concluding "Amen"; and, more directly, in the title of Rossetti's 1852 pre-apocalyptic lyric, "The eleventh hour." For, while "Changing Chimes" is generally decasyllabic, the fourth and eighth lines run to eleven syllables.

Moreover, these eleven syllables are divided according to regular, metrical rules into four "quarters"—with both a comma and a more visually vivid dash to emphasize these divisions. We notice, of course, the three internal rhymes, each comprising three syllables in vaguely anapestic arrangement: "Watch alway,—watch and pray,—watch alway." But then, in the final quarter of the line, the pattern falters. We here have only two syllables, along with a break in both the internal rhyme scheme of the fourth line, and the rhyme scheme of the quatrain itself. In fact, while the poem follows an unexceptionable *abac abac* rhyme scheme, the *internal* rhyme of the "c" line is, in fact, "b"—leading our ears to instead expect an *abab abab* construction. The entire poem rests upon a complex echo effect in which words or phonemes alike re-sound in new contexts, akin to the "changing chimes" of the title, so that their back-and-forth motion begins to "ring out" from one line to the next. The effect intensifies in the eighth line, in which the "b" rhyme ("pray"/"alway") is joined by the "a" rhyme ("act"). But this phonemic resonance is underpinned by other pairings: the before/after structure of the first stanza—was not/is not, warning/warning, lacked/lack, cried/cries—and the appeal that concludes the second—initiated by Alas/Alas and the triplet lacked/lacked/lack, but summed up by goodwill/goodwill, gracious/grace, and act/act.

It is the thrice-reiterated "watch" in the fourth and eighth lines, however, that most powerfully absorbs us in their odd, compelling rhythm—these lines that refuse to finish, lingering upon an oddly discordant eleventh syllable, so that we are left with a ghostly reverberation of the rhyme's missing chime. The lines have, in a sense, absorbed the diverse rhythms of the eponymous chimes—the chimes that are also, quite literally, missing from the poem. They suggest both eleven chimes on the clock, thus situating us at the eleventh hour of Biblical time, "watching" for Christ's coming; and, visually and metrically, the four quarter chimes of the hour, in which the fourth quarter chime has not yet struck. Reading the fourth and eighth lines as a *disembodied* clock, linguistically absorbed into the poem, also modifies the way that we understand their final appeal. The paired lines, uttered first by this enigmatic "Voice" and second by the poem's speaker, have united the related acts of watch and prayer under the aegis of the clock so that, when we arrive at the culminating "Amen," it and the eleventh hour are functionally the same. The poem transforms the syllabically incomplete fourth "quarter" into prayer, so that prayer itself inhabits the watchful space immediately preceding the fateful twelve o'clock hour. The duty of the modern-day Christian individual, poised at what is apparently the eleventh hour of Time itself, is, yes, a duty to watch and to pray—but also, implicitly, a duty to *keep time*. Thematically, then, this final "Amen" is both a summing up and a reminder of Time's incompleteness—waiting, poised and vigilant, in the space between the eleventh chime and the final one.

Metrical irregularity generally triggers a response that induces an attentive reader to "count" the beats of each line and stanza. In this particular instance, however, the divide between counting beats and counting time is a particularly fine one. Rossetti frequently intermingles "counting time" with watchful vigilance: witness "Then Shall Ye Shout" (1885), which counsels

the reader to "Keep silence, counting time / To strike in at the chime: / Prepare to sound,—" (lines 9-11). Another lyric, "Short is time, and only time is bleak" (1885), describes a process that looks very much like the language we saw in "Changing Chimes" of "Praying, watching, praying, chime by chime" (line 7). Here again, repetitive, inactive action is made so by its dramatic recitation. Similarly, "Old and New Year Ditties," when the speaker commands earth and heaven alike to "Watch with me" on "this vigil night," later confides to us, "I know not if they watch with me; I know / They count this eve of resurrection slow" (lines 1; 16; 10-11).

A pun on "count" in this last line raises the question whether these would-be watchers find or account this "eve of resurrection" a *slow one*, or whether they are, more literally, counting this eve *slowly*. Contextually, either reading works. Even if we accept the former interpretation, it is difficult not to suspect that Rossetti is also thinking of "count" in a more literal register—the count(down) of the hours toward twelve o'clock midnight, and poetically, as in the count of lines and syllables. Rossetti's speaker *does not know* if anyone is watching with her; but she knows that they are *counting*. And this is what truly is at stake in "Changing Chimes," as in all Rossetti poems that absorb into themselves the rhythms and sounds of vigil time. The clock comes to offers a viable, fertile lyric structure for lyrics intent on soliciting as well as depicting vigilance. Readers need not consciously connect lines 4 and 8 to the chimes of the clock, as I have done here, in order to note their metrical oddity. Nor do they need a heightened level of *analytic* concentration in order to read this emphatic final refrain more attentively. Consciously or not, they are counting Rossetti's lyrics slow. The reader intuits the experience of keeping watch as a practice which, at least in this case, feels remarkably similar to the experience of reading a poem.

Rossetti does not experiment with the formal possibilities of the midnight clock in the same ways that her brother will in "My Sister's Sleep," a Christmas vigil scene wherein the

midnight hour comes to structurally underpin the poem as a whole. But it cannot be purely coincidence that the 1893 lyric "Earth has clear call of daily bells" is a twelve-line poem concerned with the vibration of "coming chime":

Earth has clear call of daily bells,
    A chancel-vault of gloom and star,
    A rapture where the anthems are,
A thunder when the organ swells:
Alas, man's daily life—what else?—
Is out of tune with daily bells.

While Paradise accords the chimes
    Of Earth and Heaven, its patient pause
    Is rest fulfilling music's laws.
Saints sit and gaze, where oftentimes
Precursive flush of morning climbs
And air vibrates with coming chimes.[59]

The theory advanced by the speaker in this poem is, notably, the same one advanced in *Time Flies*. Again, the "final hour" is held off. We get not the sun rising in the morning sky, merely a "Precursive flush"; not the chimes themselves, but the vibration of their coming. It is only by "gaz[ing]" carefully, patiently upon the world now before us that we may apprehend that which is to come. The aesthetic consequence of such poetic vigilance is, almost unavoidably, to draw the focus back to the act of reading—to overlay the Christian practice of anticipatory devotion

[59] Composed August 6, 1858 and published in Rossetti, *Verses* (London: SPCK, 1893), 129. See also Crump, *A Variorum Edition*, 433.

with one of attentive perusal of the page. As Rossetti litotically puts it: "It seems that time is not lightly thought of by a holy angel whose eternity nevertheless depends not on time" (*Time Flies* 181 ["September 19"]).[60] In this universe where Christ is perpetually awaited, the accord between "the chimes / Of Earth and Heaven" becomes also an accord between poetry and prayer: simultaneously in time and looking toward time's end.

II. The Advent of a New Vigilance: Midnight Domesticity in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Christmas Lyric

In encouraging its readers (and its auditors) to lean in closer, Christina Rossetti's vigil lyrics ask them to simultaneously "watch" the scene that language has conjured, and to remain aware that they stand in the presence of a work of art that requires a parallel form of devotion and sympathy. This doubling of the vigilant gaze marks a mimetic triumph for vigilant texts. Yet it raises a problem of insularity. Vigil scenes ask that we pay attention; but it is unclear whether we are finally directing the weight of our attention at the real-world issues that chimes, strikes, and tocks audibly illuminate, or merely to the texts themselves. In the case of Christina Rossetti, these two effects are, perhaps, synonymous: poem, prayer, and vigil blur into a single experience, so that even when we do not fully grasp all their internal workings, their litanies work upon the senses. The self-contained quality of Rossetti's lyrics permits them to function at multiple levels at once, without apparent conflict in their respective aims.

For texts whose midnight chimes point us in other directions, the aims of poetic vigil cannot be fulfilled via the reverent reading of a poem. Their aims pull in different directions, at once asking for an intense attunement to the beats and cadences of the text, and for a wider

[60] This is paired entry for September 18, the title entry.

awareness that must manifest in the world beyond the page. These works confront, but also acknowledge, the ease with which a watch might falter, a "waker" might fall into sleep, a vigilant soul might arrive at distraction, doubt, or uncertainty. That writers evince such sympathy for these failures pushes back against the threefold assumption that time-discipline is necessarily tyrannical, or a matter of unconscious obedience, or in some way antithetical to human needs and desires. Rather, as these writers would have it, vigil represents something to aspire to, to practice: not a disciplinary rod but an aid to apprehension in a culture of rapid change.

Rossetti thus stands somewhat apart from her contemporaries, in the intensity and consistency with which her gaze turns heavenward.[61] Victorian midnight vigils, taken as a whole, continually seek to turn the gaze earthward, tempering a religious focus on the afterlife with a more socially conscious faith and embracing an ethos of caretaking and social responsibility.[62] The impression that Victorian vigils are intentionally reworking an inherited tradition helps to explain the curious duality that marks so many of them. Victorian vigil scenes tend to pit the Christian apprehension of vigil embraced by Newman and Rossetti against newer, more socially oriented versions. Implicit in this doubling is a sincere question about the viability of vigil in any form, antiquated or modern; and it belongs to a larger Victorian project of reviving and retrofitting older forms of art and architecture.[63] Matthew Arnold's 1852 narrative poem *Tristram*

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[61] Although Christina Rossetti's lyrics immerse themselves in the quotidian, their Dickinsonian attention to detail relies upon a foundational belief in God's immanence. This understanding also underlies the later poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins. See, for example, Mary E. Finn, *Writing the Incommensurable: Kierkegaard, Rossetti, and Hopkins* (Univ. Park, PA: Pennsylvania Univ. Press, 1992).

[62] See Lacoste's comments on vigil and care, which he calls the "modality . . . by which the future matters for the present," falling under "a broader logic of anticipation" (*Experience and the Absolute*, 57). See also 82-88.

[63] "Revival" as a term of course has its own history in Anglophone Protestantism, but I refer here to the same sorts of feelings that inspired both the rise of ritualism in Anglican practice (see below); and the aesthetic revival of pseudo-medieval matter in visual art, literature, and architecture. The heyday of medieval/gothic revivalism arrived for literary criticism in the 1980s and 1990s, including such works as Alice Chandler, *A Dream of Order: The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth-Century English Literature* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971); Charles Dellheim, *The Face of the Past: The Preservation of the Medieval Inheritance in Victorian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982); Michael Bright, *Cities Built to Music: Aesthetic Theories of the Victorian Gothic*

and Iseult identifies the midnight vigil with the apparent futility of Catholic ritual. The contrast the poem erects, between outmoded medieval practices and the society in which Arnold writes, categorizes its vigil scene as an artifact of a bygone era. He locates in this tableau a remarkable complement to his aesthetically minded verse—exploiting the vigil's outward gestures, as well as the rich trappings of the medieval imaginary—while ultimately dismissing its utility.

In its description of vigil, however, Arnold's poem enacts a movement between two forms of vigilance, one older and outmoded, but the other worth our continuing attention. We might even say that Arnold's resurrected medieval tableau makes a case for the abiding imaginative power of the vigil in the Victorian era. Eschewing much of the narrative sweep of the original medieval romance, Arnold's poem is part memorial, part epigraph, entombing its lead characters in effigy and composing beside their graves. In the third and final section of the poem, "Iseult of Brittany," the narrative arrives at the sole survivor of this tragedy: the abandoned and widowed wife who sits alone at night,

> Lifting her soft-bent head only to mind
> Her children, or to listen to the wind.
> And when the clock peals midnight, she will move
> Her work away, and let her fingers rove
> Across the shaggy brows of Tristram's hound,
> Who lies, guarding her feet, along the ground;
> ……
> And [then] at her prie-dieu kneel, until she have told
> Her rosary-beads of ebony tipped with gold;

Revival (Columbus, OH: Ohio Univ. Press, 1984); and Michael Alexander, *Medievalism: The Middle Ages in Modern England* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2007).

Then to her soft sleep—and tomorrow'll be

To-day's exact repeated effigy.

(lines 84-95)

Arnold enacts a number of different modes of watchfulness within this brief scene. In fact, its different objects of observance draw us toward divergent interpretations. It would be easy, and not incorrect, to read this moment as entirely about Tristram, whose absence haunts the poem's final section. Iseult's unspoken watchfulness for the absent husband threatens to supersede all that is actually present; and it is this ever-anticipated, never-materializing figure who turns a vigilant practice of faith into mere "effigy": physically still, almost inhuman, and utterly ineffectual. However many "thens," "ands," "wills," and "untils" the narrator pronounces, the vigil, and the peal of the clock transitioning us from one day to another, never effect real progression. The husband never returns; and the wife never alters her nightly routine.

The predictive quality of Arnold's language, however—not that Iseult *does* move, but that she *will* move, and let her fingers rove, and kneel and tell her rosary-beads, and turn to sleep, and then repeat it all again the next day—fights back stylistically against the narrative stillness it describes. Its language seeks to project the poem into the future, in a manner very reminiscent of Foucaultian "anticipation"; and it thereby maneuvers the reader into the posture of waiting (and watching) alongside Iseult for the midnight clock to peal. This anticipation is deeply ironized, of course, because Tristram is long dead. If medieval Catholicism depended upon a complex interplay between outward gesture and divine workings, here the interplay has given way to pure gesture. The ritual rings hollow. The clock seemingly signifies nothing.

But I would like to salvage a few elements of compassion or, at least, of resistance within this poem to the futility of Iseult's vigilance. Notice the other modes of watching in play here.

We see Iseult as a devout Catholic, heeding the midnight call to worship; and perhaps more significantly, we see her as a caretaker, minding her children as they sleep. And I have neglected one other watcher: as my own language may already have hinted, we ourselves are actively watching Iseult.

Indeed, the reader finds herself observing the scene as that the central figure cannot. It is here that the clock intervenes, taking what might be a frozen image of feminine passivity, and prompting a series of ritualized movements that are, in their own way, quite revealing of this frustratingly opaque character. Far from treating its subject as purely mechanical, Arnold locates a quiet, almost unconscious activity in Iseult's nightly wakefulness. For it is only when the midnight bell tolls that we begin to notice "move[ment]": the quiet activity of Iseult's hands.[64]

She is, famously, "Iseult aux blanches mains"—and Arnold's decision to highlight the hands thus implicitly provides another strategy by which to understand the woman. It's a masterful instance of poetic synecdoche. In truth, the fingers that ply the embroidery frame, that rove over the hound's brow, that lie "clasp'd on her lap," and that tell the rosary's gold-tipped beads, finally "tell" us far more about Iseult than do her silence and her petrified face, and they push back against the poem's refusal to let us into Iseult's mind. Moreover, Iseult's hands bespeak a range of fidelities that do not necessarily have to do—at least directly—with her husband. Instead, they call attention to her work, to her intimates, to her faith.[65] Submitting to the peals' demand that she somehow occupy her empty hours, Iseult's tireless, oddly tender fingers—which constitute the sole source of movement in the otherwise calcified scene—

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[64] For more on the diverse doings of hands in Victorian literature, see Peter J. Capuano, *Changing Hands: Industry, Evolution, and the Reconfiguration of the Victorian Body* (Ann Arbor, MI: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2015).

[65] For more on the ways needlework was reclaimed as worthwhile labor by women writers in particular, see Note 78 below, as well as Rohan Amanda Maitzen, "Stitches in Time: Needlework and Victorian Historiography," in *Gender, Genre, and Victorian Historical Writing*. (New York: Garland, 1998), 61-102, and Rosemary Mitchell, "A Stitch in Time?: Women, Needlework, and the Making of History in Victorian Britain," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 1, no. 2 (1996): 185-202.

momentarily shift our attention from the absent man to the present inhabitants; from those watched *for*, to those watched *over*.[66]

This distinction we observe in Arnold's poem aligns illustrates an historical divide between different types of vigil practice. It moves us between the Christian, individualistic, and, oftentimes, male tradition of watching for God, and a more domestic, frequently feminized practice of watching over loved ones.[67] If we accept the common argument that Christian faith in the nineteenth century was increasingly a matter of social practice and outward form, rather than deeply felt inward conviction, then the vigil topos of the 1840s and 50s papers over this phenomenon of waning piety.[68] Yet even the more secular literary vigils remained formally and topically embedded in the practice and language of scripture. The trajectory of this study is therefore less one of straightforward desacralization and more a conscious reorientation of

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[66] Note, too, the homophonic slippage between "told" and "tolled," which subconsciously aligns the activity of the midnight bells with the activity of Iseult's fingers. The pun is widespread in nineteenth-century literature, but notably occurs in Charlotte Smith's "The Forest Boy" (1784), whose midnight vigil scene unfolds in similar fashion: "The clock in her cottage now mournfully *told* / The hours that went heavily on; / 'Twas midnight: her spirits sank hopeless and cold, / And it seem'd as each blast of wind fearfully *told* / That long, long would her William be gone" (emphasis mine). Smith's poem is one of the rare Romantic vigil scenes with political (and revolutionary) aspirations.

[67] A rich body of work, both contemporary and retrospective, exists on Victorian death- and sickbed rituals. To cite only a few, see Sarah Stickney Ellis, *Women of England* (1839) and Harriet Martineau, *Life in the Sick-Room* (1844) (discussed below); Julia Stephens, *Notes from Sick Rooms* (1883); Virginia Woolf, *On Being Ill* (1930); Garrett Stewart, *Death Sentences* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984); Esther Schor, *Bearing the Dead: The British Culture of Mourning from the Enlightenment to Victoria* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1995); Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996); Miriam Bailin, *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art of Being Ill* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007); Mary Elizabeth Hotz, *Literary Remains: Representations of Death and Burial in Victorian England* (New York: SUNY Press, 2009); Julia Thomas, "Happy Endings: Death and Domesticity in Victorian Illustration," in *Reading Victorian Illustration, 1855-1875*, ed. Paul Goldman and Simon Cooke (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 79-96; and Jolene Zigarovich, *Writing Death and Absence in the Victorian Novel* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[68] Charles Laporte identifies an impulse on the part of Victorian writers to approach the scriptures in a more "human way" (Laporte, *Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible* [Charlottesville, VA: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2011], 11). Blair has pursued similar work in a more formalist vein, emphasizing "the 'trappings of ritual' . . . and forms of 'outmoded belief'" as still-crucial categories for scholarship, and locating in the idea of "form" an important poetic counterpart to religious practices (*Form and Faith*, 4-6). See also Alan G. Hill, *Tennyson, Wordsworth, and the 'Forms' of Religion* (Lincoln: Tennyson Society, 1997); F. Elizabeth Gray, *Christian and Lyric Tradition in Victorian Women's Poetry* (New York: Routledge, 2010); and Karen Dieleman's *Religious Imaginaries: The Liturgical and Poetic Practices of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, and Adelaide Procter* (Athens, OH: Ohio Univ. Press, 2012).

attention away from an older model of Christianity focused exclusively on the afterlife, toward one that pays greater heed to (what were after all afterlives by other means) the family unit and broader social responsibility. And, although the image of caretaking increasingly dominated the literary landscape, the two tenors of vigil continue to play out in the same genres and, in many cases, in the same texts, remaining in a constant, self-aware dialogue.

Perhaps nowhere is the tug-of-war between vigil as religious practice and vigil as social practice so fraught as in the literature surrounding Christmas, whose advent season marks out as a space for reflection, preparation, and anticipation, but whose observation was increasingly domesticated, sentimentalized, and commercialized.[69] This difference comes immediately into prominence when we compare Christina Rossetti's vigilant Christmas hymns to "My Sister's Sleep," her brother's Christmas lyric. "Whoso hears a chiming for Christmas at the nighest," Christina writes in the poem of the same title, "Hears a sound like Angels chanting in their glee, / . . . . Music struck in Heaven with earth's faint replying" (lines 1-2; 7). This continuum of sound, moving us between the faint replies of this world and the fuller voices of the celestial sphere, underscores the textual richness in Christina's poetry; but it firmly wields the midnight chimes as conduits, signifiers for the divine. "A holy, heavenly chime," which follows on "Whoso hears a chiming" in the two-part "Christmas Carols," formally emphasizes how, for Christina, earthly signifiers eventually give way to immanent religious realities.[70]

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Christmas lyric, however, does not direct its primary attention toward a heavenly chorus, to which the earth "faintly replies." Instead, in the spirit of Arnold's

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[69] See Tara Moore, *Victorian Christmas in Print* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

[70] Perhaps the most notable examples of Christina Rossetti's time-conscious Christmas hymns are "A Christmas Carol, (On the Stroke of Midnight.)" (comp. 1849) and the two-part "Christmas Carols," comprising "Whoso hears a chiming for Christmas at the nighest" and "A holy, heavenly chime" (pub. 1887). As their titles suggest, these poems stage their own recitation at "the stroke of midnight," literalizing the sense that midnight might prompt the composition or performance of poetry.

Iseult, "My Sister's Sleep" assembles a scene of tiny, everyday details, such that the "faint replies" of the earth become the very centerpiece of the poem. The poem groups itself about the midnight hour, enacting a shift from Christmas Eve in the first half of the poem, to Christmas Day in the second. Yet the primary object of devotion here is a dying daughter, and the poem remains divided in its focus throughout. The clock's heralding of Christ's birth is tempered by a stark rendering of grief and maternal yearning; steadfast care is juxtaposed with wavering attention and averted eyes. On display is a complex of reactions to vigilance in the modern world that offers no easy answers.

The double vision of "My Sister's Sleep" is typical of the vigil genre, and of the Christmas vigil in particular. The yuletide season provided rich fodder for writers musing about the applicability of old values to the modern world; and the pivot from eve to day, with its dramatic ringing bells, its shift from a posture of anticipation to one of fulfillment, served as a dramatic backdrop for vigil.[71] Alfred Tennyson returned with some frequency to this pivot point, first with "The Epic," his initial foray into the apparently outmoded epic form; and then, most famously, in *In Memoriam* (1850), which threads its cyclical grieving process through three successive Christmases. The effect is a forward/backward movement through time and memory that the Christmas bells then replicate on a smaller scale. Akin to a midnight prayer, yuletide bells take up the refrains of traditional hymn: "Peace and goodwill, goodwill and peace / Peace and goodwill, to all mankind," they intone in Lyric 28.[72] As ritualized in their vocalizations as

[71] Moore has described Christmas-themed literature as consolidating a particular ideology of middle-class "Englishness" that was both more nationalistic and more secular than its previous iterations. See also Joshua Taft, "Disenchanted Religion and Secular Enchantment in *A Christmas Carol*," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 43, no. 4 (2015): 659-73; and Erik Gray, "Tennyson, Virgil, and the Death of Christmas: Influence and the 'Morte d'Arthur,'" *Arion* 6, no. 2 (1998): 98-113.

[72] See also the non-yuletide bell that tolls out "Ave, Ave, Ave" in *In Memoriam*, Lyric LVI: "One set slow bell will seem to toll / The passing of the sweetest soul" (lines 10-11). Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, ed. Matthew Rowlinson (Toronto: Broadview, 2014).

prayer itself, the church bells ring out their age-old noel; and the sound seems to come at once from a more ancient English past, and from the present moment in which the grieving speaker will not immerse himself. The ageless echo of the bells, it seems, conversely drags the older Tennyson's attention back to the present:

> This year I slept and woke with pain,
> I almost wish'd no more to wake,
> And that my hold on life would break
> Before I heard those bells again:
>
> But they my troubled spirit rule,
> For they controll'd me when a boy;
> They bring me sorrow touch'd with joy,
> The merry merry bells of Yule.
>
> (28.13-20)

Longing to sleep "and no more to wake," the speaker is recalled to himself, half-reluctantly, by "those bells again," which urgently orient him toward life. "The clock / Beat[ing] out the little lives of men" from Lyric 2 has been transmuted upon this Christmas midnight from mechanism to a half-cruel cheer, a ruthlessly enforced joy. Be "merry merry," they insist. Yet their "rule," the almost subconscious control they exert over this former child, is the force that at last calls this troubled spirit to wakefulness, permitting the poem to move forward into a new year and a new stage of mourning.

The ruthless quality of the wakeful clock owes something to a tradition of strict Christian observance—"Watch and act," as Christina Rossetti commands—but, in literature, it also

underlines a frequent disparity between the watchful clock and the distracted watcher. Both the necessity of these actions, and the difficulty of performing them, haunt "My Sister's Sleep." Rossetti keeps the verse almost punishingly regular, frequently sacrificing metrical complexity in order to maintain its octosyllabic construction; and, like Tennyson's Christmas lyric, this formal regularity tugs against the speaker's mental state. "My Sister's Sleep" is composed in the stanza Tennyson would make famous in 1850—the so-called *In Memoriam* stanza, *abba* tetrameter—and this shared stanza marks something of an evolutionary convergence for the two poets. While Rossetti always defended the originality of his verse, the therapeutic cyclicality of Tennyson's masterwork, which pushes its speaker inexorably forward through time, finds an analog in Rossetti's midnight verse. Circling around like the dial upon the clock, Rossetti's rhyme follows upon the clock's advance, toying with its capacity to provide both structure and dramatic tension for a quiet and unassuming scene, and to move the poem between different tenors of faith and earthly vigilance.

Rossetti would elsewhere call midnight "the last hour of the day, whose chimes are a perfect number; whom the next followeth not, nor light ensueth from him; but in the same darkness is the old order begun afresh."[73] Rossetti did indeed begin his midnight lyric "afresh," again, and again, and again. Four different published versions exist, spanning twenty-two

[73] As for his sister, midnight was an imaginative category to which Rossetti returned with some frequency in his poetry (although not, oddly, in his visual art). The passage quoted here comes from *Hand and Soul* (Strangeways and Walden, 1869), in which Chiaro describes himself as "the last hour of the day" (13). "Soothsay" echoes a sentiment familiar to Christina Rossetti readers, when the speaker declares "Unto the man of yearning thought / And aspiration, to do nought / Is in itself almost an act." But its meditation upon the clock's "forewarning face," which traces "the thing thou has not dared to do!", seems of a piece with "My Sister's Sleep." "The Stream's Secret," which features an interlude comparing lovers' hearts to hands upon the clock, also features this request: "The hour that must be born ere it can die,— / Of that I'd have thee tell." The "tell" here evokes the common pun on "told"/"tolled"; and the poem underlines the imaginative alliance between the tides and murmurs of water, and the rhythms of mechanical timekeepers (also apparent in "The Sea-Limits").

years.[74] For the purposes of this investigation I look to Rossetti's 1848 and 1850 editions of "My Sister's Sleep," rather than the heavily revised and compressed 1869 and 1870 versions.[75] All, however, keep the midnight hour at the narrative center of the poem. In the 1848 publication, which numbers nineteen stanzas, midnight strikes over the course of the ninth and tenth stanzas, directly in the middle. In the 1850 revision, these two stanzas are compressed into a single, ninth stanza—still relatively centered within the poem's schema.[76] And all four versions of the poem open in an almost identical manner: as one pair of eyes slide shut—"She fell asleep on Christmas Eve"—and two pairs of eyes stand watch over the scene. Their watch is accompanied, "from chime to chime," by the clock that marks the passing hour.

The clock's steady chime, and the formal regularity which underpins its diegetic resonance, stand at odds with the speaker's penchant for distraction. The 1848 publication, for instance, contains an extended consideration of the speaker's negligent attention. "I watched [the moon] through the lattice-work," the speaker recalls. "But my thoughts kept a shifted poise, / And going not, would not abide" (lines 13; 19-20).[77] The speaker's gaze, "shifting" in the silence, "weak and blank" from many nights sitting up, occupies the fourth through eighth

[74] The four versions are: the 1848 edition (in *La Belle Assemblée*); the 1850 (in *The Germ*, the Pre-Raphaelite journal); the 1869 (in the privately printed *Poems*); and the 1870 (in the 1870 *Poems*, as well as all subsequent printings). The complexity of the composition and publication history for both Rossetti siblings creates challenges when it comes both to selecting a version of Rossetti's poem for study, and to considering the historical backdrop against which the poem was written. I concentrate upon the 1848 and the 1850 versions, taking them as useful barometers of the midnight vigil's prominence in mid-Victorian England. The earlier editions are also, in some sense, more narrative than the later editions, as I discuss below—and thus more reliant upon the clock as an orchestrator of narrative progression.

[75] In many respects, the 1850 and the 1870 versions strike me as entirely different poems, with different intentions, and reflective of different stages in Rossetti's literary career. The earlier versions rely more upon linear, narrative conventions. The latter is more of a piece with Rossetti's visual art, relying upon a clustering of "significant details" and emblematic images to create a visual field of meaning (in much the same way that Rossetti populated the backgrounds of his medievalist paintings in a *millefleur* style). See Jerome K. McGann, "Rossetti's Significant Details," *Victorian Poetry* 7, no. 1 (1969): 41-54.

[76] The 1869 and 1870 versions, which shrink the total number of stanzas to fifteen, situate the twelve o'clock hour in the seventh stanza—again, at more or less the halfway point.

[77] Tennyson, *In Memoriam* 95.25-26: "And strangely on the silence broke / The silent-speaking words."

stanzas without interruption—over a quarter of the poem. Despite the central presence of the mother, whose steadiness of spirit echoes the clock's progression—"lean[ing] all day / Over the bed from chime to chime" (lines 5-6)—Rossetti's initial draft emphasizes not faithful vigil, but its evasion. In the midst of this vigil poem stands, in effect, a bad watcher, and in its initial form "My Sister's Sleep" seems more interested in the speaker's *in*attention than it does the mother's watchful fidelity.

When Rossetti first revised "My Sister's Sleep" in 1850, he added or excised stanzas and altered language to heighten this maternal watching at the expense of the speaker's more abstracted, individualistic watching. These edits would include the new third stanza, which survived intact into the final edition:

> Her little work-table was spread
>
> With work to finish. For the glare
>
> Made by her candle, she had care
>
> To work some distance from the bed.
>
> (lines 9-12)

We might wonder why this stanza was added in the first place, and why it was then retained in subsequent versions that cut out nearly a quarter of the original (including four of the speaker's "watchful" stanzas). This steady survivor is decidedly workman-like, neither metrically smooth nor elevated in diction. Reiterating the word "work" three times, a redundancy which must strike us as purposeful. If the mother does indeed "lean all day / Over the bed from chime to chime," pausing to pray only when her child falls asleep, then the steadiness of her watching is also paralleled by the steadiness of her work. This is not the labor of the industrial workday; it is

"woman's work," performed into the deep watches of the night with little recognition and no glory. And when the mother sits down to pray, it is at the work-table that she does so.

We've come quite a way from the revelatory passages of Newman and Christina Rossetti. Watching here is, quite explicitly, of a piece with the work and the fidelity of the mother. Nor is this the sort of woman's work that female poets would often elevate via comparisons to poetic composition.[78] There is nothing dazzling, artistically, about this woman, "Our mother." Rather, the faithful movement of her needles constitutes—as it did for Iseult of Brittany—a parallel form of (and a form *for*) watchful prayer. Like the regular, tireless stanzas of the poem itself, Rossetti's mother "works" and watches in humble accompaniment to her daughter's faltering breath and the clock's steady chimes.

Curiously, it was the mother, rather than the poem's speaker, to whom initial readers responded most strongly. Elizabeth Youatt, who introduced the poem to the public in 1848, and framed its presentation with her own commentary, reads the poem with some insight; and I think she may stand in for the "attentive" reader I have been supposing. It is clear that Youatt's focus is bent almost entirely upon the mother, and she treats the speaker as narrator rather than a character in his (or her) own right. "'Our mother,' like all mothers, with busy fingers and loving heart!" she exclaims. "The sound of her needles clashing together as she laid them down, and the 'rustling of her silken gown,' are among those exquisite little touches of nature with which the

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[78] See my above remarks on CGR, as well as the following discussions of Victorian poetry and "women's work": Jacqueline M. Chambers, "'Thinking and Stitching, Stitching and Thinking': Needlework, American Women Writers, and Professionalism," in *Famine and Fashion: Needlewomen in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Beth Harris. (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005), 171-84; Elizabeth Erbeznik, "City-Craft as Poetic Composition in Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*," *Victorian Poetry* 52, no. 4 (2014): 628-38; Elaine Hedges, "The Needle or the Pen: The Literary Rediscovery of Women's Textile Work," in *Tradition and the Talents of Women*, ed. Florence Howe (Urbana and Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1991), 338-64; Anne D. Wallace, "'Nor in Fading Silks Compose': Sewing, Walking, and Poetic Labor in *Aurora Leigh*," *ELH* 64, no. 1 (1997): 223-256; and Carol Shiner Wilson, "Lost Needles, Tangled Threads: Stitchery, Domesticity, and the Artistic Enterprise in Barbauld, Edgeworth, Taylor, and Lamb," in *Re-Visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776-1837*, ed. Shiner and Joel Haefner (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 167-92.

poem abounds" (*La Belle Assemblée* 142). In other words, it is the "little touches" of narrative realism, and not necessarily Rossetti's "significant details," which Jerome K. McGann laid out in his article of the same name, to which Youatt is responding: the quotidian, the small, the regular.[79] Her framing of the poem in these terms thus redefines the vigil as far more feminine than the poem itself might suggest; and the force of her response can be felt in the Rossetti's revision.

But Youatt's reading of the poem also fits it to a *cultural* template of vigil scenes; and the singular publication style of "My Sister's Sleep" thus offers us a neat test case for the kinds of exchanges taking place between vigil scenes on the one hand, and the broader cultural imaginary on the other. "Gentle Reader," she writes, "have you ever found yourself a lone watcher by the bed of sickness, when the busy household was hushed and still, and you only awake? Do you not recognize this description? Have you never started when the clock struck twelve, and shuddered as the sound . . . . Happy are ye, if ye have no such memories!'" (*La Belle Assemblée* 142). The line here between the reality of sickbed watches and their literary representation is almost indistinguishable. What are we "recognizing" in this description? Is it the familiar outlines of literary vigils?[80] Or is it the recognition, in the work of art, of our own experiences?

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[79] See Note 75, above.

[80] The ritualistic aspects of Victorian death, and the impact of that ritualism on fiction, have been richly explored by a number of scholars. Michael Wheeler has spoken of the "highly conventionalized social customs and funerary rituals," which both informed and were formed in turn by literary works, and "eased the transition" from deathbed to death (*Heaven, Hell, and the Victorians* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990], 5). Zigarovich has read in these conventions a "yearning for definition and certainty, fictionalized by the ever-present deathbed or funeral scene," in the face of, "[t]he intruding loss of faith, individuation, and social identity" (*Writing Death and Absence*, 1). Stewart's *Death Sentences* takes the premise further, locating the "style" of death scenes in British fiction in the rhythms of syntax itself. Quoting Nabokov, Stewart emphasizes that "'death was but *a question of style*. . . . *a question of rhythm*.' Pressing the natural rhythms of syntax to the farthest stretch of coherence—across not only stylistic time but the invoked clock-tower symbolism of time as prosodic measure—this prolonged mortal interval . . . transposes the preceding narrative solution of death toward its 'musical resolution' as prose style in extremis" (*Death Sentences*, 345).

The answer, of course, is both at once. And this is why "scripts" for vigil scenes transcended the purely literary to include non-fiction. Harriet Martineau and Sarah Stickney Ellis both wrote of, and in fact prescribed, rituals for the sickroom that emphasize the importance of nocturnal watching. "It is much," Ellis writes in *Women of England*, her 1839 conduct manual, "*to watch through the sleepless and protracted hours of the night*. But these are services rendered only to the suffering body. . . . And how shall [the mind] be administered? . . . she is *watching* every indication of an opening for conversation, that may beguile the lingering hours of their tediousness, and lead the sufferer to forget his pain. . . . She *watches* for these, and turns them to account, by going just so far in her playfulness, as the exhausted frame can bear without injury."[81]

Martineau identifies not simply patterns for care, but the frightening *ideas* occasioned by illness that require discipline, lest they "beset" and overwhelm either patient or caretaker. "The mere description of suffering," she writes in *Life in the Sick-Room* (1844), "given by those who know it, seems to have wrought upon the general mind, for a kind of shudder goes round when it is mentioned."[82] Martineau draws something of a creative genealogy running from the actual experience of terminal illness, as the invalid "imagines" the trajectory of his "solitary transit" toward death, through those who first oversee and then retroactively narrate this process of deterioration, and finally to "those who speculate outside the experience of the sick-room" (112)—relying not upon experience, but upon narrative, anecdote, and conduct manuals to reconcile themselves to their own, far-off fate. "Surely;—" writes Martineau, "we do contemplate it—frequently—eagerly. . . . In the dark night, we picture the whole scene, under

[81] Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits* (New York: D. Appleton, 1839), 125; emphasis mine.
[82] Harriet Martineau, *Life in the Sick-Room. Essays*, 2nd ed. (London: Edward Moxon, 1844), 166 (hereafter cited in text).

every condition the imagination can originate" (113). The night becomes the stage not merely for "the experience of the sick-room," but for its repeated contemplation: "Surely;—. . . frequently—eagerly."

Yet Martineau, while attentive to the comfort the patient receives from such watchfulness as Ellis describes, sees its limits in the very abstraction—the mystery—of illness. Instead, she enlists "custom" as a refuge for the sick and dying. "Though as fully convinced as ever of the moral evil and danger of being wedded to custom and habit," Martineau writes with typical practicality, "I have now a far too decided and satisfactory impression that the sick-room is not the place for a conquest of that kind. . . . Bad as this is, I do not see how it is to be helped; for the suffering and injury caused by irregularity of methods, and uncertainty of arrangements in the sick-room, seem to show that freedom of this kind does not belong to the invalid life" (136-37). Prime among these little customs and habits is a "particularity [as] it relates to hours," although Martineau is careful to exhort the patient not expect those healthy and active to be "as strict and punctual as himself" (137).

It is this regularity that Youatt lingers over in the 1848 version, and that Rossetti himself brought to the fore in the 1850 revision. As Youatt frames the text for the reader, the mother occupies the central role, not "heedless of the flight of time, until startled by its warning voice"—as Youatt describes the poem's other characters—but reliably attentive throughout. When Rossetti in 1850 condensed the speaker's watchful passages—removing, crucially, the entire stanza that begins "I watched,"—the change made way for the mother's work-table discussed above. He also reordered the stanzas, so that our apprehension of the poem's setting is no longer focalized through the speaker's gaze, but instead follows directly upon the mother's prayer. The work of the mother, watching, praying, sewing, and marking the passing time,

supersedes the delinquent, tired watchfulness of the speaker, who strikes us (perhaps unfairly) as a more "masculine" figure, but also, in all the ways that count, as a less *watchful* one. Across these two initial versions, he (or she) stares at the moon, at "evergreen plants / Standing upon the sill," at the flame gusting in the fireplace, and at the round mirror upon the wall, all while he meditates on this "choice / Made in God for me" (1850; lines 15-16). What the speaker does *not* watch is the dying sister—a choice which we can surely understand, but which also presents an explicit contrast with the vigilant mother, who becomes the poem's central actor.

What drives "My Sister's Sleep" is not a clear or simple split between religious, individualistic watching on the one hand, and domestic caretaking on the other. The speaker meditates upon faith and the afterlife even as the mother prays, and he joins his voice to hers by the poem's final line, declaiming, "Christ's blessing on the newly born!" The difference is more a matter of *acts*, of external concerns paralleling internal ones, as in Christina's command that we "watch and act." Even as the poem places such focus on the mother at the expense of the son, it does not offer an uncomplicated acceptance of her loss. Instead, with Martineau it suggests the value of form, ritual, and regularity in the face of almost inarticulate grief. The regularity of the mother's quiet domestic activities appears to ward off some of the existential questions that plague our speaker. Although the speaker has, we are told, been sitting vigil for some nights, it is unclear what "work," if any, he has done. And thus, although the reader may access the poem only through the speaker's thoughts, that aforementioned regularity of stanzas and syllables—despite occasionally awkward phrasing and arrhythmic lines—formally aligns itself *not* with the speaker's tired, wandering mind, but rather with the steadiness of the clock, the vigilance of the mother, and the clack of needles at work.

This reading comes more forcefully into prominence when we consider Rossetti's choice to pivot the poem about the striking clock. It is the mother who, up until this point, responds to the clock's chimes, a response that accords with her general steadiness of demeanor, and with a fidelity spanning secular and religious tenors. These characteristics do not, of course, describe the speaker. It is only when the clock strikes in the ninth stanza that the poem transitions from routine to action, and the clock attempts to call the speaker to order. Here are the 1848 (left) and 1850 (right) versions:

While I was thinking, it struck twelve.	Twelve struck. That sound, which all the years
I said, "As swift as came and went	Hear in each hour, crept off; and then
Those strokes, so swift is the descent	The ruffled silence spread again,
Of life that once begins to shelve."	Like water that a pebble stirs.
	(lines 25-29)

That sound—a sound which all the years
Have heard in each hour, crept off;
and then
The ruffled silence spread again,
Like water that a pebble stirs.

(lines 25-33)

The 1850 version is, I think, more successful as verse. By a sharper interjection into the narrative, it reduces the "sound" of the clock to monosyllables, and then turns to a "ruffled silence" of trochaic words that themselves "creep off": ruffled, silence, water, pebble. The words, mimetically, first resound and then echo back, redoubled, before descending at last into silence. Implied in that ruffled interlude is the very history of the midnight hour—indeed, the history of

mechanical time writ large—that bears with it a pressing legacy of change and conversion, of waiting and watching for the next hour to strike. The silence between the strokes of the clock, one might infer, has never been neutral territory; and Rossetti's focus on the curiously "speaking" silence at the expense of the clock strokes seems to hurry us startlingly from the moment of culmination (twelve) to the long stretches of waiting that both precede and ensue.

At the same time, the 1848 passage illuminates the interplay between clock and language that Newman and Christina Rossetti had likewise found so profitable. Note how the speaker's utterance—couched between the strokes of midnight—strikes the ear. Breaking with the metrical irregularity of earlier passages, the stanza shifts into near-perfect iambs: "As *swift* as *came* and *went* / Those *strokes*, so *swift* is the des-*cent* / Of *life* that *once* be-*gins* to *shelve*." Embedded within the timespan of the clock's twelve strokes, and imbibing something of their rhythm into its speech pattern, this utterance suggests the creative as well as the disciplinary power that the clock holds—not simply for the speaker, but for language more generally, and for this poem specifically.

Youatt describes this effect as a series of counter-melodies, in which "the low note of sadness run[s] through the music of life, heard in its loudest swells, present in all its variations, uttering its warning accompaniment throughout, and moderating the harmony of the whole" (142; quoting F.W.P. Greenwood).[83] So might we consider the regularity of "My Sister's Sleep," as providing its own, moderating accompaniment to the narrative, and imparting a stanzaic and even metrical beat to the vigil. The speaker's midnight declamation is not quite as neat as this couplet from Rossetti's "John of Tours"—"As it neared the midnight toll, / John of Tours gave

[83] Youatt is quoting another source here, but she quite clearly understands this "low note of sadness . . . uttering its warning accompaniment throughout" as something akin to the clock, breaking upon those "heedless of the flight of time, until startled by its warning voice" (Rossetti, *La Belle Assemblée*, 142).

up his soul" (lines 9-10)—but it similarly relies on the external structures of poetic form and clock-time to outline, but also to leave partly unspoken, the emotions that grief provokes. As with Arnold's *Iseult*, we never enter the mother's mind, nor hear her lament. The reader can only watch her, and intuit her feelings via pathways of sympathy and personal experience. The toll of time's passage thus doubles as the toll of loss itself—a reminder of losses past, and losses to come.

Yet the midnight hour cuts both ways. The clock solicits not merely reflection and remembrance, but also attentive anticipation of the day to come. As "My Sister's Sleep" moves from Christmas Eve to Christmas day, the poem intensifies its counter-narratives of the dying child and the anticipated birth of Christ. The speaker struggles to respond to these two requests for attention. Indeed, the poem emphasizes the striking distinction between the fidelity of one watcher and the wavering posture of the other. In an added 1850 stanza, the speaker hears the mother's *laudate dominum* and, "Almost unwittingly . . . Repeated her words after her; / Perhaps tho' my lips did not stir; / It was scarce thought, or cause assign'd" (lines 49-52). Indecisive and noncommittal, even the speaker's silent, unwitting, echoed prayer falters in the face of Margaret's death. As the speaker "hid my face, / And held my breath, and spake no word," it is his mother who maintains her post, ultimately attempting to bypass the limits of her earthly watch and pursue this vigil over her daughter even into death:

> She stooped an instant, calm, and turned;
>
> But suddenly turned back again;
>
> And all her features seemed in pain
>
> With woe, and her eyes gazed and yearned.
>
> (lines 65-66; 61-64).

It is the mother's gaze that must ultimately strike us as the most forceful moral presence in Rossetti's poem. The ritualized ending, as both child and mother together kneel "upon Christmas morn / A little after twelve o'clock," and declare "'Christ's blessing on the newly born!" marks a final display of unity. Yet it is the mother's vision, and the mother's steadfast form of watchfulness, that dominate this last moment. The final opposition in this poem does not, then, elapse between vigil as Christian practice and vigil as secular practice. On this Christmas Eve, it is the mother who embodies both forms, while the son falters in her wake. Refusing weariness, idleness, and abstraction, refusing to hide from death, she gazes after her daughter, *into* death, and turns to ritualized language and gesture to cope with unimaginable grief—underscoring a model of Christian fidelity that is, first and foremost, a model of maternal devotion.[84]

I now depart the province of poetry and turn to prose, by way of a cameo from the century's end, in Margaret Oliphant's harrowing, posthumously published *Autobiography*. Lyric, heretofore the primary subject of inquiry, is perhaps more apt a vessel for vigil than prose: more self-contained in subject matter, it is also more timely, in its metrical emphases, its chiming rhymes, its orderly and regular shape. Lyric vigils, in other words, devote themselves to the task of mimesis more easily than their prose counterparts. Prose must register the vigil via different, and perhaps subtler, tools: toying with the variable speeds of sentences, relying more heavily upon punctuation to mark moments in time. Many entirely discard time-consciousness as a formal element of their vigil scenes (although not as a thematic element). Below, I will discuss several examples of prose works that share poetry's interest in making us mark their emphases, disciplining literary focus in much the way the clock does for the vigil-keeper. However, suffice

[84] An interesting bibliographic note: the 1850 text is the only text in which the speaker shifts from "Our mother" to "My mother" following his sister's death. The "our" is restored in later versions.

it to say that, whatever prose vigils may sacrifice formally, they ably wield the broader scope of the novel to great effect, placing the very private vigil in dialogue with a diverse public sphere. The lyric vigil is rarely political; the prose vigil frequently is, diving into the fray of sociopolitical debate that so often marks the pages of Victorian novels.

This is not the case, however, with the *Autobiography*, whose impact relies upon its immediacy, its intimacy, and the apparent privacy of its revelations. A memoir of professional dedication and immense personal loss, its emotional nadir arrives in a series of vigils by the deathbeds of Oliphant's three children. Equally refusing the call of weariness and the temptation to turn from the page in the face of unspeakable bereavement, Oliphant remains stubbornly awake, steadfastly watchful. "Oh this body and soul so full of anguish, my head that I could dash again the wall, but I cannot, I cannot, I am not that kind," Oliphant writes. "I am bound to bear till the very last and to live out very day and to hear every dreadful hour strike and to linger on."[85] Painfully, fitfully, but tirelessly, she records the experience of continual loss as the surest—in some cases, the only—levee against despair's rising tides.

The *Autobiography* (in Elisabeth Jay's masterful scholarly edition) thus stands as a testimony, not to a single instance of vigil, but to a lifetime of vigilance. Revisiting the deathbeds of her three children, Oliphant's rapid-fire borrowings from various standards of Victorian mourning and commemorative literature (including *In Memoriam*) lend an occasional sense of conventionality to her honest grief. But the overall impact is one of ritualized vigilance that a lifetime of loss made into a very real necessity. The *Autobiography* thus presents an instructive example of how imaginatively embedded the literary signifiers of vigil scenes had become by century's end:

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[85] Margaret Oliphant, *The Autobiography of Margaret Oliphant*, ed. Elisabeth Jay (Toronto: Broadview, 2002), 130 (hereafter cited in text).

> And about nine on Saturday night, this day fortnight, when the doctor came (I had been quite gay, laughing at the nurse and her professional way, thinking as the fever was gone all was well) he told me that he must give [Cyril] a stimulant . . . . I think it must have been about eleven or later when he suddenly got very ill, gasping and laboring for breath. The phlegm rattling in his throat. I cannot tell how long this lasted—it seemed dying—it was then that he spoke, muttering and low, of seeking God . . . . And then he turned over on his side, threw his arms up in an easy attitude like a child going to sleep, and breathed away. It was about one o'clock when all was over. The spasm which lasted perhaps an hour, perhaps not so much, I don't think so much, was all the suffering there was. (88-89).

The entire sequence is marked by dashes, parentheticals, and asides, as if to physicalize upon the page the writer's mental torment. Yet in spite of the bodily suffering undergone by mother and son alike, Oliphant manages to keep meticulous note of the clock, which helps to track her through her memories and toward the dawning realization that all hope has been lost. From nine o'clock, to eleven, to one, she struggles to time the stages of Cyril's suffering, as if in doing so she may more accurately bear witness to his final hours. There is, perhaps, some solace to be derived from doing so. The clock, her unfaltering attendant through tragedy, allows her to search out a quiet form of action.

For, as tragedy after tragedy strikes, Oliphant continues to write, and write, and write. "I had to sit for hours by the bedside and keep quiet," Oliphant notes at one point. "I had no liking then for needlework, a taste which developed afterwards, so I took to writing" (60). To be sure, at moments she does falter, ceasing to narrate, backing away from the unspeakable. Even the reassurance of the deathbed narrative topos cannot ward off the loneliness of this most bereaved

of Victorian writers. But what draws our attention in Oliphant's text is less the pathos of the deathbed scenes than the indomitable will of Oliphant herself. Standing by, she marks with heartbreaking calmness the precise time upon the clock when each of her children passes beyond her ken. The vigil, whatever its religious resonances, is at its heart an insistently—and literally—mundane experience; the interplay between clock and watcher reminds us that the scene is rooted quite firmly on earth. Thus the clock (and inherited literary renderings thereof) grounds and gives concrete form to the amorphousness of faith, death, doubt, and anxiety, insisting upon the here-and-now, flesh-and-blood experience of the deathbed.

III. The "Social Problem" of Vigil in the Mid-Victorian Novel

Even as it responded to changing cultural demands, the Victorian vigil seems therefore to have passed with relative ease from sermon to lyric to sickbed manuals, memoirs, and ultimately novels. The generic mobility of vigil perhaps helps to explain its curious durability into the century. But its particular rise to prominence in the 1840s and 1850s cannot be easily divorced from the anxieties that marked those decades. The texts examined in this final section, all produced during them, differ from those considered thus far in the directness with which they amplify the vigil as a reaction to the rising visibility (and audibility) of industrialization, and to the moral soul-searching that this phenomenon entailed. It is no coincidence that vigils appear with some frequency in the writings of authors associated with "social problem" or "Condition of England" literature. Dickens and Gaskell both returned to the vigil across their corpora. Charlotte Brontë, whose novel *Shirley* explored early industrialization, spent much of the earlier, "insurrectionary" *Jane Eyre* engaged in a defense of wakefulness.[86] In the fiction of these realist

[86] Elizabeth Rigby, "Vanity Fair—and Jane Eyre," *Quarterly Review* 84 (December 1847). Rigby famously accuses *Jane Eyre* of harboring Chartist impulses.

writers, vigil scenes test the clock's ability to signal moral as well as spiritual values in an age of mechanical reproduction, and thereby to wield the vigil as an instrument for social change. Embedding their lonely vigil scenes within narratives of urban development, legal injustice, and social strife, they make increasingly direct appeals for new understanding and altered conduct in a changing society.

That the vigil clock might elicit in the watcher a self-reflection conducive to change was a sufficiently common premise that Arthur Hugh Clough set out to mock it in *Amours de Voyage* (1849).[87] Satirically bemoaning the evils of "thinking," which he likens to "a clock in a sick man's chamber" that will not lay off its continuous ticking, the speaker exclaims, "*Hang* this thinking, at last! . . . Let me, contented and mute, with the beasts of the fields, my brothers / Tranquilly, happily lie,—and eat grass, like Nebuchadnezzar!" (lines 207; 212-13). Yet contemporary novelists were clearly interested in protracted reflection that was neither tranquil, nor contented, nor mute, as they pondered the challenges confronting an England in transition.[88] Their fictional chimes, tolls, and bells frequently call our attention to societal injustices, establishing a variation of spiritual "awakening" as a necessary precursor for more fundamental change. Dickens rang this particular bell throughout his early career, perhaps most notably in *The Chimes* (1844), but as early as *Pickwick Papers* and in most of the intervening fiction.[89] *The*

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[87] In the unfinished *Dipsychus* (1850), Clough stages an ongoing question about the existence of God that centers upon the ringing of bells. "Ting, ting, there is no God; ting, ting— / Dong, there is no God; dong, / There is no God, dong, dong." The refrain echoes through the poem, and it is the essential meaninglessness of the bells—the fact that they signify nothing—that underlines its apparent theological nihilism. Dipsychus qualifies this statement toward the end of this soliloquy, however, speaking instead of "country folks who live beneath / The shadow of the steeple," and the lingering "shadow" of Christian belief: those "[y]ouths green and happy in first love," "men caught out in what the world / Calls guilt," and those "struck" by age, disease, or sorrow "[incline] to think there is a God"—or, at least, "something very like him." See *Clough: Selected Poems*, ed. Joseph Phelan (New York: Routledge, 1995), 193-97.

[88] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, in *Aurora Leigh*, reiterates the Victorian sense that the nineteenth century marks a "transition-time" in the course of Western history.

[89] Midnight echoes its refrain, for instance, throughout the final section of *Oliver Twist* (1837-39), each time counting down to the hour of Nancy's death, who has vowed to walk London Bridge "every Sunday night, from eleven until the clock strikes twelve . . . if I am alive." Yet it also offers up a strikingly democratic notion of

Chimes, Dickens's second inaugural Christmas story, espouses a hope that the midnight clock might mediate between old and new, and allow readers to envision new ontologies. It opens by banishing the "broad bold Day" and choosing the Night as its province. "It must be argued by night," the narrator informs us, and then obligingly offers to lock his readers inside an old church until morning, so they may properly experience the tale about to unfurl.[90] In a sense, Dickens *does* lock us in, until the liberating toll of midnight. Between the opening and the close, we are caught in a more liminal narrative region: part reverie, part dream, part unblinking vigil, each pushing us toward a more all-encompassing vision of contemporary society.

The Chimes is, in many respects, the Victorian prose work that goes furthest in conflating the form of the vigil with the form of a literary text, positing both as a space (and a time) for developing greater social awareness. Both Dickens and his friend and biographer John Forster speak of "the machinery" of *The Chimes*, and the term is à propos.[91] The story continually divides into yet tinier subunits of sound and refrain, ever-smaller cogs and wheels spinning the story forward through time.[92] The narrative itself occupies twelve hours, between the twelve chimes of noon, and the twelve chimes of the midnight hour. The narrative also occupies, in its "quarter" divisions (which Dickens substitutes for chapters), the space of a single hour, counting down to midnight page by page. In both respects the time-consciousness of the characters and

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contemporary urban society: "Midnight had come upon the crowded city. The palace, the night-cellar, the jail, the madhouse: the chambers of birth and death, of health and sickness, the rigid face of the corpse and the calm sleep of the child: midnight was upon them all." Moving us between privilege and deprivation, criminality and insanity, "healthy and sickness," death and sleep, Dickens's midnight clock presides over all at once; and its link with the novel's most tragic figure plays upon readers' sympathies, turning them in the final chapters from the innocence and inalterably sunny youth of Oliver Twist toward the changeful fate of a female criminal. *Oliver Twist* (London: Richard Bentley, 1838), 304-05.

[90] Charles Dickens, *The Chimes: A Goblin Story of Some Bells that Rang an Old Year Out and a New Year In* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1845), 2 (hereafter cited in text).

[91] John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, vol. 2 (1873; Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), 118.

[92] For a good analysis of *The Chimes* on this topic, see Jay Clayton, "The Dickens Tape: Affect and Sound Reproduction in *The Chimes*," *Essays and Studies* 65 (2012), 19-40.

that of the reader flow together. Dickens's tale—a New Year's fable of charity, compassion, and interclass responsibility—thus unfolds along a carefully timed path of both forward and cyclical momentum. It is "'the voice of Time [that] cries to man, Advance!" throughout the text. Time is here allied with that most Victorian of virtues: improvement: "Time is for his [man's] advancement and improvement; for his greater worth, his greater happiness, his better life; his progress onward to that goal within its knowledge and its view" (99-100). In the Victorian England conjured by Dickens's text, clock-time and human experience accentuate each other, together confirming the possibility of a progression that diverges from economic gain or mere utility.

Yet in its concern for man's spiritual wellbeing, *The Chimes* equally reaffirms a belief that timekeepers might inhabit a vital place in contemporary society not because they are new, but because they are old.[93] Occupying an ongoing historical, spiritual, and spatial centrality, Dickens's *Chimes* suggest both the forms of internal conflict and suffering that have marked Britain's course through history and the current necessity for a more reflective approach to social change. The titular Chimes educe a half-effaced, but violently traumatic past of religious strife and the profanation of ritual. Once "baptized by bishops," and bestowed with various godmothers, and godfathers, and doubtless silver baptismal mugs, the Chimes now hang "nameless and mugless," for "Time had mown down their sponsors, and Henry the Eighth had melted down their mugs" (5). This evocation of a medieval Catholic past—one superseded by the aggressive Protestant takeover—informs the Chimes' ancient but religiously indeterminate presence. They stand not for a particular doctrine, but for the virtues of wakefulness,

[93] See Alain Corbin's *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the 19th-Century French Countryside* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1998), which argues for church bells as central to the "auditory landscape" of rural, nineteenth-century France, manifesting both religious and civic meanings as they are coopted by competing religious and political projects.

watchfulness, and progress. Conscious of occupying a crucial social role, they fight gallantly against the elements to ring in each hour for the weary soul (5), tirelessly keeping their "darksome and unwinking watch" (98) and affirming what Forster called the "secret human harmony in Church-Bells."[94]

The transformation of vigil from a religious to a more socially based practice in Victorian fiction was not without difficulties—in no small part because it was unclear if the modern world had much use for vigil. Oliphant, who lays some of the groundwork for Hardy on this subject in her 1860s Carlingford novels, would emphasize a striking psychological disjunction between the nocturnal vigil, in both its religious and domestic iterations, and the teeming, sunlit streets of public life. Although Oliphant deployed vigil in her fiction as well as her autobiography, she tended to emphasize a disconnect between the experience of vigil and the reality of quotidian existence. *The Perpetual Curate* (1863) showcases a vivid psychological struggle with the perceived emptiness of modern Christian ritual. Our perpetual curate, Frank Wentworth, frets against the demands of religious vigil on Easter Eve. Trying at intervals "to quiet the aching pulses" of his mind with "what ought to have been the hallowed associations of the last Lenten vigil," he finds this "shadow[y]" watch painfully theoretical, at odds with the "throbbing . . . wild life" he is experiencing within. "What he wanted at this moment," Oliphant writes, "was no memory of one hour, however memorable or glorious, not even though it contained the Redeemer's grave, but the sense of a living Friend standing by him in the great struggle, which is the essential and unfailing comfort of a Christian's life."[95]

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[94] Forster, "The Chimes by Mr. Dickens," *Edinburgh Review* 81 (January 1845), 184. Dickens's designation of the Chimes as comfort and accompaniment to the isolation of city life marked a clear continuation of his earlier *Master Humphrey's Clock*, discussed in my third chapter.

[95] Oliphant, *The Perpetual Curate* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1870), 1:45-46.

The curate's understanding of vigil hews to a more traditional definition of the term, as an hour of heightened attention oriented toward Christ's rebirth. But Wentworth also rejects much of that definition. He yearns after a God who is less a "Watchman" and more a "Friend"—more in keeping, in other words, with the needs of a society moving in a more democratic and less hierarchal direction. *Salem Chapel,* the previous installment in the Carlingford series, also rehearses several vigil scenes that belong to the realm of the domestic and the familial. Yet even here, they showcase an anxious incompatibility with modernity. When Oliphant's characters step off the train into "bustling sun[ny]" London "after the vigil of that night," they arrive "pale" and "ghastly." Unable to escape "the frightful suspense and excitement of their minds" that vigil has engendered, they stumble through the city, at all times burdened by "an intense consciousness of all the life circulating about them," yet conversely unable to merge with that life.[96] Vigil's value is not refuted in Oliphant; but its collision with the hubbub of urban England casts its practitioners as ghosts from a disappearing era.

Nonetheless, for roughly two decades, mid-Victorian realist fiction took part in an extraordinary outpouring of social-minded vigilance. When we read of Dickens's Chimes, "pour[ing] their cheerful notes into a listening ear . . . bent on being heard on stormy nights, by some poor mother watching a sick child, or some lone wife whose husband was at sea" (5), he is borrowing less from traditional Christian worship than from a highly typical tableau of the "lone" woman directing her thoughts toward the needs of others. Dickens's opening tableau elucidates one of the reasons for the Victorian vigil's moral power: its orientation toward care and sympathy, and away from the individualistic and exclusively masculine vigil of, say,

[96] Oliphant, *Salem Chapel* (Leipzig: Berhard Tauchnnitz, 1870), 1:268.

Oliphant's Mr. Wentworth.[97] There is something fundamentally feminine (and unabashedly emotional) about how nineteenth-century fiction records the modern vigil. Its keepers are frequently women (or vaguely androgynous, like Toby Veck in *The Chimes*), and they are more vulnerable to the vicissitude of fate and the whim of powerful social figures. The vigils that they undertake hollow out space within the narrative for their subjectivities to take account of present realities, and to envision a way past or beyond the injustices and the terrors contained therein.

George Eliot's 1857 *Scenes from Clerical Life*, her first published work of fiction, strings its final tale of a long-suffering wife between the poles of two nocturnal scenes. The first occurs "at midnight," when Janet Dempster is turned out onto the streets by her abusive husband and finds herself alone, "staring fixedly into the darkness, while inwardly she gazed at her own past, almost losing the sense that it was her own."[98] Midnight becomes the initial backdrop for self-scrutiny, initiating her transition from an abused and alcoholic housewife to a widow more fully in control of her life and at peace with her choices. Yet it is only when "the loud sound of the church clock . . . . recall[s] her completely to the sense of the present" (245) that Janet is prompted to turn from reflection to action. Seeking refuge from the bitter cold, she is taken in by the first of several female community members who come to her aid. This midnight scene, which echoes throughout the ensuing story, will circle back when, at the tale's end, Janet returns to tend

[97] Certainly Wentworth's failed vigil looks quite different from the painstakingly precise documentation of Oliphant's own deathbed vigils. See Richard Sennett's classic *Fall of Public Man* on the consolidation of the private sphere during the nineteenth century (*The Fall of Public Man* [New York: W. W. Norton, 1974]).

[98] George Eliot, "Janet's Repentance," in *Scenes from a Clerical Life* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1858), 2:245. Eliot renders the entirety of Janet's married life a sort of clock ticking toward darkness. The midnight that obscures all in this scene, however, will ultimately signal a new dawn: "The seeds of things are very small: the hours that lie between sunrise and the gloom of midnight are travelled by the finest markings of the clock; and Janet, looking back along the fifteen years of her married life, hardly knew how or where this total misery began; hardly knew when the sweet wedded love and hope that had set forever, had ceased to make a twilight of memory and relenting, before the on-coming of the utter dark" (233).

to her dying husband "through the long night-watches" of illness. The result is both Christian clemency and social commentary, bound up in each other under the aegis of the clock.[99]

Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1854-55) pushes into more outright sociopolitical commentary, when the novel turns from vigil directly into the climactic riot.[100] The scene in which Margaret Hale watches over her dying mother is a highly typical example of our literary topos: moving between nocturnal vigil as prescribed social practice (as when the doctor slides into the medical commonplaces of "'husbanding resouces,' and 'one watcher only being required'") and vigil as a more mentally all-encompassing state of mind.[101] One of the more melodramatic scenes in the novel, both as tableau and as a site of amplified, almost existential doubt, Gaskell's vigil is also structurally significant, as the immediate prelude to a series of political confrontations and personal catastrophes:

> She felt as if she never could sleep again; as if her whole senses were acutely vital, and all endued with double keenness, for the purposes of watching. Every sight and sound—nay, even every thought, touched some nerve to the very quick. . . . [A]ll the house was still. Margaret sate behind the curtain thinking. Far away in time, far away in space, seemed all the interests of past days. Not more than thirty-six hours ago, she cared for

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[99] Daniel Siegel sees Eliot's sympathy as working instead through "misperception, accidence, and unconscripted time"—the vicissitudes of the present, as opposed to Arthur Donnithorne's too-fast watch in *Adam Bede*, which causes him to "[take] up residence in some fantastic future." See Siegel, "Preacher's Vigil, Landlord's Watch: Charity by the Clock in *Adam Bede*," *NOVEL* 39, no. 1 (2005): 48-74.

[100] It is worth noting that *North and South* is the only serial novel discussed in this chapter. While Gaskell famously struggled with the restrictions of serial form, the impact that the weekly format had on her novel—particularly evident in its tendency to rely on strategies of expectation and anticipation—weighs upon this vigil scene.

[101] Gaskell, *North and South*, ed. Angus Easson (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 169 (hereafter cited in text). See also Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853), the scene in which Ruth watches her sleeping son: "The old clock on the staircase told its monotonous click-clack, in that soothing way which more marked the quiet of the house than disturbed with any sense of sound. Leonard still slept that renovating slumber, almost in her arms, far from that fatal pursuing sea, with its human form of cruelty. The dream was a vision; the reality which prompted the dream was over and past—Leonard was safe—she was safe" (*Ruth* [Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1853] 2:77). The similarities of diction and syntax in the *Ruth* and *North and South* scenes of watching is striking, although *Ruth*'s does not quite belong to the same pattern of nocturnal vigilance.

> Bessy Higgins and her father, and her heart was wrung for Boucher; now, that was all like a dreaming memory of some former life;—everything that had passed out of doors seemed dissevered from her mother, and therefore unreal. . . . She would fain have caught at the skirts of that departing time, and prayed it to return, and give her back what she had too little valued while it was yet in her possession. What a vain show Life seemed! How unsubstantial, and flickering, and flitting! It was as if from some aerial belfry, high up above the stir and jar of the earth, there was a bell continually tolling, 'All are shadows!—all are passing!—all is past!' And when the morning dawned, cool and gray, like many a happier morning before—when Margaret looked one by one at the sleepers, it seemed as if the terrible night were unreal as a dream; it, too, was a shadow. It, too, was past. (170)

The "stillness" of the scene, the heightening of perception, and, in this case, a movement from the external realities of Margaret's setting (however "unreal") to the almost metaphysical, internal realities that the pose of watchfulness enables—all these are familiar to us by this point. If this sounds curiously similar to Elizabeth Youatt's reading of "My Sister's Sleep," with its underlying toll of melancholy, it should. But whereas "My Sister's Sleep" centered a more traditional fidelity upon the steadfast mother, Margaret aligns instead with the doubtful pose of Rossetti's speaker. She arrives by vigil's end not at affirmation, not quite at hope, but at a simple assurance, in the guise of this imagined, "aerial belfry," that this, too, shall pass. This physically disembodied and doctrinally indeterminate belfry is perhaps a fitting symbol for a novel that concludes its twenty-eighth chapter thus: "Margaret the Churchwoman, her father the Dissenter, Higgins the Infidel, knelt down together. It did them no harm" (233). Espousing no particular belief system save that of "faith," Gaskell's third novel intermingles spiritual doctrines as ably as

it does politics and regional identities, each underlining a central plea for sympathy and mutual understanding.

This still leaves the question of what Gaskell's vigil scene is doing at this particular moment of the narrative. Part of its positioning has to do, no doubt, with the novel's larger interest in interweaving the personal and the political, so that the central riot scene is bookended, on one side by the vigil and on the other by John Thornton's spurned proposal of marriage. Yet it also speaks to the sense of expectation that underlies so many vigil scenes, as their tropes, narrative beats, and chiming clocks follow a specific trajectory of gradually heightened awareness.[102] In *North and South*, the private watchfulness of the vigil scene heralds and then gives way to the reality of public discord. As critics have noted, the novel constitutes something of a commentary on the psychological boundaries between different individuals' perception of time.[103] Time is personal, as truth and facts are often held to be personal. Yet Gaskell's aerial belfry, seemingly exempt from the doctrinal or indeed ideological differences that cause such strife elsewhere in the novel, provides a backdrop for the novel's ongoing struggle toward some common truth. This theme of common truth (and common time) is one she picks up in earnest in *Wives and Daughters*, which I discuss in more depth in the following chapter. It is noteworthy, however, that as a narrative centered on conflicts during the working day and with the working

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[102] Gaskell's 1863 novel *Sylvia's Lovers* features a New Year's midnight scene that, in its own way, is as marked by "watching" and "expectation" as Christina Rossetti's ditties: "On a sudden, the bells of Monkshaven Church rang out a welcome to the New Year, 1796. From the direction of the wind, it seemed as if the sound was flung with strength and power right into Philip's face. He walked down the hill to the merry sound—its merry sound, his heavy heart. As he entered the long High Street of Monkshaven, he could seen the watching lights put out in the parlour, chamber, or kitchen. The New Year had come, *and expectation was ended. Reality had begun*." Gaskell, *Silvia's Lovers*, 2nd ed. (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1863), 270-71; emphasis mine.

[103] For more on Gaskell's diverse temporalities, see Mary Mullen, "In Search of Shared Time: National Imaginings in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*," in *Place and Progress in the Works of Elizabeth Gaskell*, ed. Lesa Scholl, Emily Morris, and Sarina Gruver Moore (New York: Routledge, 2015), 107-22; Helena Michie, "Hard Time, Global Times: Simultaneity in Anthony Trollope and Elizabeth Gaskell," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 56, no. 3 (2016): 605-29; and Clare Pettitt, "Time Lag and Elizabeth Gaskell's Transatlantic Imagination," *Victorian Studies* 54, no. 4 (2012): 599-623.

man, *North and South* testifies to the ideological importance of the non-working day. The off-hours in fact become both a site and a topic of contestation in the verbal battles between Margaret and Thornton. "The masters would be trenching on the independence of their hands," Thornton declares, "if we interfered too much with the life they lead out of the mills. Because they labour ten hours a-day for us, I do not see that we have any right to impose leading-strings upon them for the rest of their time" (121).[104] Although Margaret fights against this stark division between the hours of employment and the hours of "leisure," she herself often works through serious matters in the quiet of the night, because of the unique privacy and freedom it affords. In an earlier scene that previews the pivotal vigil scene, she is left alone to ponder the shock of Henry Lennox's proposal, and the more jarring revelation of her father's religious doubts. Again she counts the time, scrabbling for certitude: "sixteen hours at most had past by" since the morning, but that life already seems "like a dream," falling away before "the hard reality" of her father's schism with the Church. Margaret does not perceive some imagined, aerial belfry, ringing in the advent of change. Rather, it is the solid "dark-gray lines of the church tower, square and straight in the centre of the view, cutting against the deep blue transparent depths beyond, into which she gazed, and felt that she might gaze for ever, seeing at every moment some farther distance, and yet no sign of God!" (42).

The moment at the Helmstead vicarage mimics the watchfulness of vigil, which seeks to bypass the immediate and penetrate the "beyond." Yet it also confirms Gaskell's penchant for linking these quiet, intensely internal moments with the larger social issues her novel tackles: marriage and female choice, religious doubt, political activism, and class strife. It seems relevant that while the church tower plays a (literally) central role in this earlier almost-vigil, the mid-

[104] Thornton references the Factory Act of 1847, also known as the Ten Hours Act, which limited the working day for factory workers to ten hours daily.

novel vigil exists more firmly outside the structures of religious observance. Faith in a Christian God remains central to the novel; but this scene sets about detaching vigil from religious practice, paving the way for a more socially oriented iteration in later chapters. The absence from Milton of church belfries emblematizes not merely a cultural shift of church chimes yielding to factory bells. It likewise notates a conceptual leap on Gaskell's part, in which an *imaginary* belfry, removed from religious observance, rings more loudly in the text than does the real one.

The implication in *North and South* that the private, domestic realm has something to offer to the public extends beyond mere political ideology. In play is a form of watchfulness that, while marked by the same attention to the hours that rings the Milton factory bells each day, depends upon an attention to individuality, and a concurrent concern with a moral system that cares about individuals as unique, particular, and worthy of understanding. Margaret's rapid shift from sole, silent watcher to the object of a universal gaze during the riot scene seems at first glance to reverse and upend the conventions of the preceding vigil. Yet the muscles exercised in Margaret's night-watch—foremost, a willingness to look beyond the immediate reality, and thereby to seek out human connection—are the very ones so in demand in the riot scene. Faced with the rising tide of a faceless mob, Margaret pleads for sympathy, reason, and understanding across the horizontal plane of the Milton mob, which threatens to overwhelm by its very immensity. One might extend this reading further, to place the aerial belfry alongside the mounting anxiety of the "strike," which reaches its climax with the pivotal "striking" of Margaret during the riot. It is not a perfect parallel, but Gaskell clearly meant for us to read the two scenes in relation to each other. It's also worth noting that these imagined or metaphoric strikes burst upon the narrative only after the factory clocks have ceased their daily chimes. Both vigil and riot scenes exist outside of the metonymic arrangement in which men at labor are mere

"hands . . . during business hours," but independent individuals outside of them; and their strikes are concerned not with the regulation of labor, but with the needs, desires, and fears of individual, feeling human beings.

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While Gaskell, like Eliot and Oliphant, has absorbed something from this vigilant literary tradition, the results differ significantly from the rhythmical experiments of the Rossettis. In this sense, her strategies for yoking her reader's attention rely primarily on an overt invocation of the vigil clock. Charlotte Brontë, however, does not simply write *about* the clock; like Dickens, she relies on it to give writing shape and sound. In doing so, both writers force us to reinterrogate our sense of the boundary between prose and verse at this period in history, suggesting that the two media share both strategies and concerns about the rise of an industrial time-consciousness. They also affirm a fundamental premise of this chapter, that the valorization of vigilant attention as it might apply to real life paralleled a sense that literature could model and reproduce the experience of unwavering focus.

The work that concludes this chapter pits three different forms of time against one another: industrial time, Christian chronology, and finally something in between the two—a form of time-consciousness I am tempted to call "human time." Like its literary fellows, *Jane Eyre* defends the necessity of wakefulness in the presence of death and the reality of religious doubt. But the novel also seeks to reaffirm the compatibility of self-discipline and human desires; and, like all of *Jane Eyre*, its vigilance troubles the fragile boundary between the political and the personal. The Lowood portion of the book portrays clock-time in its most industrial, most unyielding guise. At the same time, however, Lowood jumpstarts the novel's ongoing dialectic between a traditional, Christian time-consciousness and a modern, more human-oriented

conception of time. Amid this temporally fraught context, *Jane Eyre*'s most typical midnight vigil takes center stage. Confirming by contraries Nietzsche's assertion that man's task is "wakefulness itself," Brontë fashions a "missed" midnight vigil, when on Helen Burns's last night on earth Jane fails to remain awake. No one marks the moment of Helen's passing, and thus the midnight hour remains, for the young Jane, a mysterious and frankly terrifying phenomenon that haunts her future experiences. The consequences of this failure reverberate throughout the novel, which will emphatically defend the necessity of wakefulness and will return time after time to the hour of midnight as a site for revelation, reflection, and transformation.

The emphasis placed upon the clock in the Lowood sequences conjures up a typically nineteenth-century apprehension of time-consciousness or, better yet, time-discipline. While clock-time and various mechanical timepieces are mentioned throughout *Jane Eyre*, this sequence, between chapters 5 and 9, furnishes its most concentrated and significant incidents of clock-time. Word searches identify at least twenty-eight references to clock-time in this sequence; and upon closer inspection I have identified twenty-one discrete references in chapter 5 alone. The clock comes forth so strongly in these pages as to transcend the mere regimentation of daily existence at Lowood and to impose a similar regimentation upon the novel's paragraphs, chapters, and even sentences. Bells frequently begin or end paragraphs as well as chapters; and the hour striking (frequently registered orthographically as a sharp "—" or ":") prompts speech as well as action, so that various gestures or proclamations seem to be almost *giving voice* to the commands of the clock:

> A distant bell tinkled: immediately three ladies entered the room, each walked to a table and took her seat.

…

The indefatigable bell now sounded for the fourth time: the classes were marshaled and marched into another room to breakfast.

…

The clock in the schoolroom struck nine; Miss Miller left her circle, and standing in the middle of the room, cried—

"Silence! To your seats!"

…

The duration of each lesson was measured by the clock, which at last struck twelve. The superintendent rose—

"I have a word to address to the pupils," said she.[105]

Throughout these passages, and in others like them, Jane's narration seems to have imbibed something of the rhythms and organizing principles of clock-time. Dashes, colons, and semi-colons, as well as abrupt breaks between paragraphs, all mark our reading as surely as the clock does Jane's schooling. The grammatical units of writing begin to affect us like the timed units of the clock, as we apprehend the strict regimentation of school hours on an almost molecular level.

In as much as the harsh and often inhuman treatment of the Lowood girls recalls factory practices of the day, these early days at Lowood present a critique of the new time-discipline of industrial labor. Indeed, they suggest an early exploration on Brontë's part of industrial realities that she will pursue more explicitly in *Shirley*. "Business now began," Jane notes, although of course the "business" of Lowood is to traffic in the appearances of piety, courtesy of the redoubtable "Reed, Brocklehurst, and Co." (54). The "indefatigable bell" which "measures" out

[105] Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Stevie Davies (New York: Penguin, 2006), 54; 56; 57 (hereafter cited in text).

their tasks by the hour, the girls' enforced uniformity of appearance, and the ending of each "work"-day at 5 p.m. sharp, together mark an infiltration by the industrial, capitalist economy into the walls of this Christian charity institution.

But this reading fails to take into full account how much stubborn little Jane thrives as a student. It also neglects the very different interiorization of time-discipline into the non-working hours of Lowood, which ascends from a plane of earthly tyranny, through a more morally regimented mode of self-discipline, to a plane of spiritual faith. If Mr. Brocklehurst embodies the first of these possibilities, adherence to an industrial form of clock-time, then Jane derives from this temporal regulation a much-needed form of imaginative restraint.[106] But it is Helen Burns who hears in the clock's chimes no earthly command at all, but a celestial one.

Examining these two modes of time-awareness, the ethical and the religious, will prepare us to consider how these modes distinguish two school friends from each other, and how they also demarcate a larger cultural change in the way Christian theology and British faith were understood at mid-century. This difference will, I hope, offer a useful lens through which to read Jane's failure to keep vigil for the dying Helen, and through which to bring together the distinct traditions of vigil I see playing out in nineteenth-century literature more broadly.

Generally speaking, the deployment of clock-time in *Jane Eyre* signals Jane's abiding desire for external figures of familiarity, dependability, and discipline—a desire that provokes the intensification of clock-references during sequences either of distress and terror, or of homelessness and transition. While Jane's clocks never issue a religious call to worship, they do

[106] I ought to gesture briefly toward James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, a likewise autobiographically framed novel which deploys Catholic rigor to similar imaginative ends, and which registers clocks and clock-time both through the lens of modernity and through the lens of medieval Christianity. For a brief overview on how Joyce participates in twentieth-century reactions to narrative time, see Ursula K. Heise's *Chronoschisms: Time, Narrative, and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997).

stand in for a sort of moral rectitude, embodied at Lowood by the calm, precise Miss Temple. Although Jane struggles at first "with difficulties in habituating myself to new rules and unwonted fears" (71), she seems to have a surprising bent for attentiveness and discipline. "I observed you in your class this morning, and saw you were closely attentive," the perpetually daydreaming Helen tells Jane; "Your thoughts never seemed to wander while Miss Miller explained the lesson and questioned you" (67). Long after the school day concludes, Jane continues to mark and measure out the hours, without complaint at this continuing aspect of Lowood's regimentation.

Between the hours of 5 p.m. and dawn, hourly regimentation is crossed with small pleasures: at first, mere warming sustenance, but progressively, the opportunity for discourse and even friendship. It is as if, as the five o'clock hour strikes, the very atmosphere of the school alters in accordance: "The play-hour in the evening I thought the pleasantest fraction of the day at Lowood: the bit of bread, the draught of coffee swallowed at five o'clock had revived vitality, if it had not satisfied hunger: the long restraint of the day was slackened; the schoolroom felt warmer than in the morning—its fires being allowed to burn a little more brightly, to supply, in some measure, the place of candles, not yet introduced: the ruddy gloaming, the licensed uproar, the confusion of many voices gave one a welcome sense of liberty" (65).

It is within this context of "liberating" after-hours that Brontë maps out Jane's burgeoning relationships with the doomed Helen Burns and with Miss Temple, who serves, throughout Jane's eight years at Lowood, as a steady hand and a restraining counterweight to Jane's unruly passions. Miss Temple, we are told early on, possesses a shining "gold watch (watches were not so common then as now)" (57), and her calm, just use of the clock serves as a bright mirror to Brocklehurst's unjust exigency. A source of both nourishment and emotional

warmth for the two girls, she embodies a model of housekeeping and homemaking attuned to the chimes of the clock. As I read her, Miss Temple models for Jane a mode of time-conscious behavior which locates in the clock a moral as well as practical aid in self-discipline. (In fact, by novel's end, it will be Jane who totes a gold watch, scrupulously superintending the household of Ferndean for her blinded husband.) Though Miss Temple admits "no delay" when the bell for bedtime rings, she dismisses Jane and Helen with an embrace, "saying, as she drew us to her heart—'God bless you, my children!'" (87). It is precisely this emotive Christian rigor that Jane's passionate nature requires, to temper and give structure to her flights of imagination. Caught one midnight in a state of sublime awe, the adult Jane will remark, "Little things recall us to earth: the clock struck in the hall; that sufficed. I turned from moon and stars, opened a side door, and went in" (137).

If Jane marks time by the clock's stroke, Helen measures it as if by the burning of candles: "The time will soon come when, I trust, we shall put . . . off our corruptible bodies; when debasement and sin will fall from us with this cumbrous frame of flesh, and only the spark of the spirit will remain,—the impalpable principle of light and thought, pure as when it left the Creator to inspire the creature" (69-70). I read in Helen's doctrinal approach a form of Christianity approaching Newman's, and verging on the medieval in its apprehension of time, which directly sets off Jane's more terrestrial, and essentially more modern understanding. Helen's quickly kindled and briefly brilliant luminosity marks, as it burns inexorably down, the remaining hours before death and resurrection.[107] Thus, where Jane is ever-attentive to the clock

[107] Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum, in his excellent *History of the Hour*, discusses the use of "candle clocks" in the medieval world before the dawn of mechanical horologia (57-58). The clock candles' link to an aesthetics of prayer, faith, and nocturnal vigilance perhaps most strongly caught the Victorians' imagination. As 1838 *Blackwood's* essay mused, "The candles of man's might are doubtless burning out, but like [King] Alfred's candle-clocks, their decay measures the wearing on of the night itself.—When they sink into the socket, lo! it is not dark, but day." "Thoughts and Images," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (1838): 205.

as it records the hourly doings of daily life—just as she "minutely" hoards up a registry of injustices inflicted upon her—Helen, who considers life "too short to be spent in nursing animosity, or registering wrongs," "live[s] in calm, looking to the end" (69; 70). The individual minutes and hours are of less interest in themselves than is the eventual extinguishing of a life, and the subsequent return to her "mighty home." Indeed, Helen, despite her brilliant and wide-ranging mind, seems almost incapable of grasping earthly (clock) time. When she loses herself in reveries of the "time [that] will soon come," when she becomes distracted from her work (unlike the diligent Jane) amid this rigidly timed environment, Brontë emphasizes the fundamental difference of perspective between the two girls. The one perceives time in terms of daily habit and moral diligence; the other perceives it only as it is delimited by death and afterlife.

This fundamental difference alters entirely, however, in their final conversation on the night of Helen's death. The chapter leading up to Helen's passing is marked by Jane's continual failure to keep watch, to pay attention to the pressing reality of death that hovers over the school. Whereas the watchful Miss Temple's "whole attention was absorbed in the patients; she lived in the sick-room, never quitting it except to snatch a few hours' rest a night" (91), Jane's mind "recoil[s], baffled" by the "formless cloud and vacant depth" of death. The invariance of clock-time does not falter here; but regular, reliable Jane seems jarred from her usual punctuality. Returning from the gardens that evening, she nearly finds herself locked out of the house: "I was just in time; it was nine o'clock." When she at last musters the courage to visit the dying Helen, her recording of the time is notably, and unusually, uncertain: "It might be two hours later, probably near eleven when I—not having been able to fall asleep, and deeming, from the perfect silence of the dormitory, that my companions were all wrapt in profound repose—rose softly . . . and set off in quest of Miss Temple's room" (95).

Yet when Jane arrives, it is Helen who assures us of the time, and Helen who, for once in her too-brief life, is obsessively, even reverently, marking the passing chimes. When Helen informs Jane that "it is past eleven o'clock: I heard it strike some minutes since" (96), this formulation echoes the pattern of punctual (and punctuated) time-consciousness that characterizes the earlier Lowood sequences. Where Jane guesses at the time, Helen *hears* it. Yet what Helen "hears" is something approaching a call to worship—a call, in this instance, to God himself. The chimes of the eleven o'clock hour—which here also, with what we may by now hail as a set Victorian topos of penultimacy, mark the terminal hour of Helen's life—are in this sense synonymous with a language of utter and unshakeable faith. Ordinary time-consciousness is now a function of a heightened spiritual awareness: "I rely implicitly on His power, and confide wholly in His goodness: *I count the hours till that eventful one arrives* which shall restore me to Him, reveal Him to me" (97; emphasis mine).

It should already be clear why Foucault's notion of a language of anticipation so illuminates this vigil scene. Helen engages throughout in two interrelated actions. First, she carefully counts the time in preparation for "that eventful" hour of spiritual rebirth which awaits her; but second, her declarations to Jane concerning this anticipated future seem themselves attempts to will into being a future that Helen can now only watch for. "I believe; I have faith: I am going to God"; "I am sure there is a future state; I believe God is good; I can resign my immortal part to Him without any misgiving. God is my father; God is my friend: I love Him; I believe He loves me" (97). Part litany, part liturgy, Helen's affirmations of faith sketch out a schema of religious belief that both presages and ensures the future ascension of her "immortal part."

The dense assemblage of colons and semi-colons that connect these statements in fact makes it difficult to parse how far Helen believes her faith will ensure her arrival at her "mighty Home," and how far this speech represents a declaration of faith *in spite of* incertitude. Again, and again, and again, Helen projects herself into a future that has not yet arrived, and which the text itself never records. Her declarations can only ever anticipate the hour at which speech itself fails, just as her quiet, patient waiting for "that eventful hour" marks her passage out of time itself.

This anticipated event, however, ultimately passes unmarked in the novel. We do not know the precise hour of Helen's death. In fact, for all that death punctuates *Jane Eyre*, we never see a single dead body. Mrs. Reed's "twelve o'clock" expiration is notably not witnessed by either Jane or her daughters; servants communicate the news and the hour the next morning (276). The self-immolation of Bertha and Thornfield both occur "at dead of night!" ("Ever the hour of fatality at Thornfield," Jane muses, reflecting on the novel's many midnight catastrophes). Yet again, the event is anticipated throughout the novel, but only verified in retrospect. The pose of Jane at the novel's end, anticipating the death of St. John Rivers, in its own way reprises the vigilant pose of the Helen Burns scene, so that the novel ends awaiting, but never arriving at, the apocryphal dawn of St. John's passing.

And yet it is precisely this constant circling around the midnight hour—so often reported, but rarely witnessed—that provides the rationale for treating Helen's unseen death as another midnight death. It also provides the rationale for treating *Jane Eyre* as conscious of, and consciously inverting, the larger literary tradition of midnight vigils in order to ultimately affirm their value. This novel continually anticipates yet frequently veils the hour of midnight, precisely because of its awful, transformative, supernatural, and deadly potential. Akin to the lyric

timepieces of the Rossetti siblings, Brontë's novel ticks its way toward a figurative midnight hour—one that powerfully evokes the mid-century debates surrounding vigil—without ever arriving at the final chime. Like Christina Rossetti's "Changing Chimes," the concluding "Amen" denotes not culmination, but rather expectation.

Why, then, is the midnight hour in *Jane Eyre* so belabored a presence? My contention rests upon the way *Jane Eyre* abjures somnolence and elevates a disciplined wakefulness—both in physical terms, but also, increasingly, in terms of the soul and the heart. "Your soul sleeps," Rochester tells Jane at their first meeting; "the shock is yet to be given which shall waken it," and "[you float] on with closed eyes and muffled ears" (166). The frequent ringing of the twelve night chimes in this sense heralds and enables the slow awakening of Jane's soul—and the instauration of Rochester's—as the novel moves toward its midnight apex. Her stay at Thornfield is punctuated by repeated (and indeed "shocking") scenes of midnight wakefulness: the night of her arrival at Thornfield; the night of Rochester's arrival at Thornfield; the night Jane sits vigil with Richard Mason; the night of Rochester's proposal; her aunt's midnight death, at Gateshead; and the night before their wedding, when, we are told, Jane has "promised to wake with [Rochester]." In this last instance, Jane pauses her tale of a mysteriously torn wedding veil to register the hour: "It struck twelve—I waited till the time-piece had concluded its silver chime, and the clock its hoarse, vibrating stroke, and then I proceeded" (323).

Jane's pause is, I would argue, more significant than it might initially appear. In stark distinction to Rochester, both Jane-the-character and Jane-the-narrator are highly attuned to the progression of time, to its timekeepers, and to the exact time when significant events occur. (This trait is on full display in the novel's final midnight sequence, which will culminate in Jane's "enlightened" prayer as she awaits the bright break of day.) In the middle of her narrative about

the torn veil, the midnight chimes suddenly and almost unconsciously receive the full weight of Jane's focus. She registers their presence as significant, worthy of attention, so that the span of twelve chimes—enclosed between the dash and the second comma—becomes a brief, self-contained vigil that Rochester does not appear to participate in. These chimes do not ring out in singular fashion, however, but in an oddly doubled fashion: a silver melody and a "hoarse, vibrating" counterpart. For we have two timekeepers ringing out here (a coordination that Jane has noticed before). The brighter, cleaner sound belongs to a small timepiece in the drawing room; the lower, vibrating stroke, to the clock in the hall.

I would like to read this double ringing-in of the hour as a miniature version of the novel's famously ambiguous ending. A divided gaze concludes *Jane Eyre*, allocating its attention between a caretaker and mother in rural England, presiding over the household with her steadily ticking watch; and a missionary abroad, awaiting the fulfillment of a Christian death. In a move strikingly similar to "My Sister's Sleep," Brontë divvies up the final task of "watching" between characters who come to symbolize opposed perspectives on what is most worthy of attention. Jane Eyre's attentiveness to clock-time comes to symbolize her wider sympathy with earthly, domestic, and bodily matters. Her final happiness is marked by a quotidian regularity that implicitly assumes each night will give way to a new day—and this promised "new day" is understood in quite literal and entirely nonfigurative terms.

St. John Rivers, counting down the hours as Helen Burns did before him, neglects the immediate in favor of the revelatory. It is Christian resurrection—that "anticipated . . . sure reward"—that St. John's final words attempt to summon into being. "His own words are a pledge of this," Jane writes. "'My Master,' he says, 'has forewarned me. Daily He announces more distinctly,—'Surely I come quickly!' and hourly I more eagerly respond,—'Amen; even so

come, Lord Jesus!'" (521). Something distinctly Newmanesque haunts this speech, as St. John both affirms his certitude and yet remains perched on the brink of Christ's coming. "It was not the warning that our fathers lacked," as Christina Rossetti would write several decades later; and St. John fervently, "hourly," bends his ear to the warnings that announce themselves ever "more distinctly." His pronouncement, like Rossetti's, is both a final affirmation ("Amen") and a prayer for something that the bounds of the novel seem unable to contain.

St. John's last vigil destabilizes the determinedly earthbound gaze of Jane Rochester; and he here wrests the final word from her, interrupting the placid assurance of her married life. His final pose accentuates the rich but not altogether easy coexistence of old and new forms of watchfulness that mark the Victorian period as a whole; and it confirms *Jane Eyre*'s larger interest in both preserving and repurposing older forms in its exploration of the modern world—a world expansive in both its geography and its spirituality.[108] The novel does not dismiss St. John's heaven-oriented focus. It does, however, call his single-mindedness into question, and turns watchfulness to earthly ends. Just as St. John must wait for death to achieve fulfillment, so must his conclusion occur outside the bounds of the text, as it does outside the bounds of the physical world.

Jane, too, ends her final midnight watch in prayer. Mounting to her chamber after hearing Rochester's psychic cry, she "fell on my knees; and prayed in my way—a different way to St. John's, but effective in its own fashion. . . . I rose from the thanksgiving—took a resolve—and lay down, unscared, *enlightened*—eager but for the daylight" (484; italics original). The syntax in this passage is resolutely straightforward, punctuated by a sequential and, it would seem,

[108] Although I do not deal with the topic here, the benchmark work on *Jane Eyre* and the postcolonial remains Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (1985): 235-61.

ruthlessly disciplined account of reverence, one in keeping with Jane's time-sensitive personality. More striking yet, however, is the way the first-person pronouns "I" and "my" come to dominate the entire paragraph; a first-person pronoun occupies the subject position in seven of the paragraph's nine sentences, which have almost entirely been stripped of dependent clauses. Unlike the grammatically subordinate posture St. John takes in the novel's final utterance, Jane's approach to the divine allows her far more agency: "I seemed to penetrate very near a Mighty Spirit; and my soul rushed out in gratitude at His feet" (484).

Jane's trajectory toward marriage and motherhood similarly yokes spiritual vigilance to a larger project of self-actualization, one rooted in a yearning for romantic love and an underlying revolutionary fervor. Rather than the hierarchical spiritual organization envisioned by Helen Burns and St. John Rivers, these impulses demand a contract staged between spiritual equals.

If Helen Burns's unwatched death is the novel's most significant "missed" vigil scene, then the novel's sole confirmed admittance of the supernatural—the telepathic communication between Jane and Rochester—seems the moment at which this flipped script is unflipped. The call, which Rochester labels "the midnight whisper" (516), occurs according to Jane's testimony amid the "midnight hush" (483), "somewhere near midnight" (515), and "near midnight" (516); and according to Rochester's, as if we needed to be told yet again, "perhaps . . . between eleven and twelve o'clock" (515). It is this call that propels the novel toward its eleventh-hour happy ending by literally shocking the narrative into wakefulness. Jane initially describes the call as "act[ing] upon my senses as if their utmost activity hitherto had been but torpor; from which they were now summoned, and forced to wake" (483). But her second recollection of the moment expands upon this notion of sudden, shocking wakefulness of body and soul: "The wondrous shock of feeling had come like the earthquake which shook the foundations of Paul and Silas's

prison: it had opened the doors of the soul's cell, and loosed its bands—*it had wakened it out of its sleep*, whence it sprang trembling, listening, aghast; then vibrated thrice a cry on my startled ear, and in my quaking heart, and through my spirit" (486, emphasis mine).

It is, of course, Rochester's cry that "awakens" Jane from her nocturnal reverie, not the toll of the clock; and Rochester, for all his specification, later asserts that "the time is of no consequence" (515). Yet this insistence upon the midnight hour as the temporal setting for the call is precisely what enables Jane to confirm the spiritual sympathy that synchronizes our long and far estranged lovers. In a sense, the novel's ongoing affair with the midnight hour both anticipates and culminates in this moment—something that Elizabeth Barrett Browning offers a sunrise counterpart to in *Aurora Leigh*. If Brontë continually shies away from the precise hour of twelve o'clock, allowing us to remain in uncertain proximity to midnight, it is typical of her abiding wariness of "the eventful hour," which must always be anticipated but rarely, at least within the bounds of the novel, achieved. Yet the failures of the young Jane Eyre, so frightened of death; or of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's speaker, faltering in his watch; or even of the reader who—despite being so considerately locked inside a clock-tower by the eminent Mr. Dickens—cannot quite keep his eye and his mind and his ear to the page, conversely encourage a better, more disciplined vigilance. They turn vigil into a matter of imperfect acts, stretching through time and undertaken by individuals of many different castes and creeds: collective in their practices and concerns, even when they are experienced as solitary.

The Dinner Hour

Untimely Timekeepers and the Aesthetics of Disagreement

"'Tis with our judgments as our watches, none / Go just alike, yet each believes his own."

—Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*, c. 1709[1]

"Perhaps there is a little satire in . . . the proverb which says of people who are at sixes and sevens, 'They agree like the London clocks.'"

—*Temple Bar* magazine, 1867[2]

I found that in my station new
They wished me ever to be true,
And tell the time exact to all;
For regularly would they call
On me a certain hour to name,
And with precision to proclaim,
Ere breakfast for the parlor gay,
Or *dinner*, mightier, went away.
The *dinner-hour*, oh, what a time!

—Mary Cutts, *Autobiography of a Clock*, 1852[3]

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[1] Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* (London: W. Lewis, 1711), 4.
[2] "What's o'Clock?" *Temple Bar* 20 (July 1, 1867), 58.
[3] Mary Cutts, *The Autobiography of a Clock, and Other Poems* (Boston: W.M. Crosby and H. P. Nichols, 1852), 230 (italics original). Lynn Festa's "The Moral Ends of Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Object Narratives," in *The Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England*, Mark Blackwell, ed. (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell Univ. Press, 2007), 309-28, includes an extended analysis of the poem.

William Hazlitt famously disliked watches. Their comparative quiet—their "dumb" ability to reckon the hour—disturbed his sense of timekeepers as "stern, inflexible . . . mouth-pieces" of a disembodied but absolute time, whose progression rang out in overwhelming fashion across the soundscape of Great Britain.[4] Hazlitt gravitated toward the disciplinary certitude of the clocktower, a discipline that his 1827 essay "On a Sun-dial" casts as spiritual rather than labor-oriented. As in the vigil literature discussed in my first chapter, Hazlitt's clock-towers and watchtowers provide an intuition of the self's location in time, an intuition which must be not questioned or wrangled over but, quite simply, submitted to. Lacking this autonomous, disciplinary character, time would, Hazlitt was quite sure, become altogether too personal. Time became like a toy when men might call it to heel at will: a species of mere "paltry ventriloquism" rather than a proper "prophetic warning." "Surely if there is anything with which we should not mix up our vanity and self-consequence," he wrote, "it is with Time, the most independent of all things."[5]

This chapter, however, explores not time's disciplinary impress upon the imagination, but instead nineteenth-century fiction's comic subversion of time standardization in the British Isles. The means of this subversion are readily apparent in Hazlitt's criticism of the watch, which was, he felt, dangerously flexible in its relation of time. The watch threatened to make time merely relative. What worried Hazlitt was therefore not simply that men might remove the small timepiece from their waistcoats or pockets and, pressing a button, order it to tell the time; it was

[4] William Hazlitt, "On a Sun-dial," in *Men and Manners: Sketches and Essays* (London: Reynell and Weight, 1852), 74-75.
[5] Hazlitt, "On a Sun-dial," 75.

also that, in "squeez[ing time] out with a finger," watches interfered with the telling of truth.[6]

This concern with the ability of a person to place his or her finger upon the scales of time, and thereby muddle the terms of reality, is in keeping with a widespread tendency of watches in nineteenth-century literature to depart from an absolute and universal truth and enter instead into the terrain of illusion, trickery, ventriloquism. The nineteenth-century novel took that most independent of all things, time, and splintered it between the warring perspectives and narrative modes that gave the novel its sense of social plenitude—and, we might say, its sense of play. It is this capacity for fiction, rather than the watch's capacity for truth, that concerns this chapter's investigation, which embarks, by way of time, on consideration of a different kind of machinery altogether: the narrative strategies of the nineteenth-century novel, and the novel's reflections on its own fictionality. Hazlitt's quixotic quest for "true" time comes at the expense of not really wishing to know how that time is recorded. He has no desire to acknowledge how human hands and the mechanisms of timekeepers have produced the "inflexible" announcements that appear to give him direct access to Time. In doing so he sketches a distinction that became progressively codified in the cultural and literary imagination of Great Britain over the course of the century, a distinction between freestanding, divinely sanctioned timekeepers and the smaller, more intimate timepieces that share an altogether more suspect relationship with their owners. But the novel, a genre reliant upon the fact that no one character possesses absolute authority, shares no such qualms.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were marked by continuous pursuit of a Newtonian absolute time—one that ingenious mechanical innovations and international bureaucratic coordination were rapidly imposing across Great Britain and the imperial world by

[6] Time's announcements, Hazlitt insisted, "must be unexpected and involuntary—there must be no trick in the case—they should not be squeezed out with a finger."

the 1840s and 1850s.[7] This revolution in time grew out of the earlier national efforts to create a timepiece—more specifically, a watch—that told time true. After the 1707 Scilly catastrophe, in which more than 1,500 members of the Royal Navy perished following a massive navigational error, the British government initiated a search for a reliable marine chronometer that could accurately calculate longitude. In 1714, Parliament laid out an award of £20,000 for the clockmaker who could manage it. Some sixty years later, John Harrison succeeded.[8] It was perhaps only a matter of time before Britain did for land what it had already done for sea: use the accuracy of clocks to conduct its burgeoning population safely along the routes of the United Kingdom and then the Empire. Time was about to become standardized.

Yet while politics and innovation combined to bring time into agreement, philosophers and writers were simultaneously instilling in the language and common metaphors of English a sense of time as far more dispersed, and far more wrapped up in human concerns and human preferences, than this progressive push toward standardized time might imply. The written record

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[7] The dynamic between clock-time, modernity, and large-scale attempts to order the bodies and movements of people has been a point of scholarly interest at least as far back as Mumford's *Technics and Civilization* (1934; Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2010)—although novelists and essayists were of course working through these issues before that. Notable twentieth-century publications include Siegfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command: A Contribution to Anonymous History* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1948); E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism," *Past & Present* 38 (Dec. 1967): 56-97; Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (1977; Oakland, CA: Univ. of California Press, 2014); David S. Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2000); and Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum's superb *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996). In the past few decades, serious scholarly attention has begun moving beyond the question of white, Western labor and intersected with questions of race, empire, and globalization. Mark M. Smith, *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South* (Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2000); Ian R. Bartky, *Selling the True Time: Nineteenth-Century Timekeeping in America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2000) and *One Time Fits All: The Campaigns for Global Uniformity* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2007); Thomas M. Allen, *A Republic in Time: Temporality and Social Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2008); and Adam Barrows, *The Cosmic Time of Empire: Modern Britain and World Literature* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2010).

[8] John Harrison presented his first attempt at a timely sea watch, H1, to the Board of Longitude in 1730. H5, Harrison's fifth attempt, finally passed the test over forty years later, in 1772. It was found to lose less than 1/3 second per day, more than sufficient for calculating longitude. For more on Harrison, see Dava Sobel's classic *Longitude*, rev. ed. (New York: Walker & Co., 2005).

consistently showcased timekeepers as formal frameworks for new theories of human ontology and, more ambitiously, for the so-called clockwork universe. The horological underpinnings of philosophical and theological thought spanned centuries: René Descartes's *Meditations on Philosophy* (1641), Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651), John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Gottfried Leibniz's *New Essays on Human Understanding* (1703-05), Jonathan Swift's *A Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit* (1710), George Berkeley's *Alciphron: or the Minute Philosopher* (1732), David Hume's "Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion" (1741), Julien Offray de La Mettrie's *L'Homme machine* (1748), Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), James Boswell's *The Hypochrondriack* (1778), and of course William Paley's *Natural Theology* (1801) each partook of this cultural assumption that the clock was analogous to life, to consciousness, and to the organization of the universe.[9] Figures such as George Henry Lewes and Thomas Huxley would continue these efforts into the next century.[10]

Hazlitt replicates this metaphoric mode of speaking almost in spite of himself. Musing that watches ought to present a "clear, open aspect like a friend," rather than approaching, face "muffled," like a footpad in the night, he joins the ranks of nineteenth-century writers who continued to extend the entanglement of humans and timekeepers so profitable to the eighteenth-

[9] Brad Pasanek's *Metaphors of Mind: An Eighteenth-Century Dictionary* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2015) and its associated database offers an excellent snapshot of the conversations around clockwork in the eighteenth century, along with select medieval, Renaissance, and nineteenth-century examples. Jonathan Sawday's *Engines of the Imagination: Renaissance Culture and the Rise of the Machine* (New York: Routledge, 2007), Minsoo Kang's *Sublime Dreams of Living Machines: The Automaton in the European Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2011), and Jessica Riskin's *The Restless Clock: A History of the Centuries-Long Argument Over What Makes Living Things Tick* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2016) both offer analyses of the evolving relationship between the clock, the body, and the imagination in early modern Europe. Thomas Fuchs and Marjorie Grene's *The Mechanization of the Heart: Harvey and Descartes* (Rochester, NY: Univ. Rochester Press, 2001) more directly tackles the clock's cardiovascular associations in the same era.

[10] See George Henry Lewes, *The Physiology of Common Life*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1859-60), and Thomas H. Huxley, "On the Hypothesis that Animals Are Automata, and Its History," published in both *Nature* (September 3, 1874): 362-66 and *Fortnightly Review* 16 (November 1874): 555-80.

century thinkers.[11] Widespread in novels leading up to and following the advent of time standardization in 1840, untimely timepieces participated in, by resisting it, a new language of "true time." This resistance centered on the literary survival of untimely or unsynchronized timepieces that, by dint of being too fast or too slow, and too utterly humanoid in appearance, intruded upon the territory of what punctilious people might call untruth, but what I shall call fiction. For clocks (and their various cousins) are, after all, narrative creatures.[12]

This complicated dynamic between the timepiece's potential for truth and for fiction finds widespread evidence in the literature of the era. The speaker of Mary Cutts's narrative poem *The Autobiography of a Clock* (1852) describes both his master's expectation that he be "ever true," and his own incipient sense that he "was made" with the express duty to be "ever, ever true": to "tell" a "wholesome tale" with "fidelity," and never relate a "falsehood."[13] Cutts exploits the homophony of "told" and "tolled" throughout *The Autobiography*; but the kinship she thus enacts is hardly exceptional.[14] The notion of true time, which remained for many decades purely theoretical, entered common parlance now that time was verifiable.[15] Along a

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[11] Hazlitt, "On a Sun-dial," 72-73.

[12] For more on the ontology of watches in early modern and modern Britain, see Festa, "The Moral Ends"; Rudolf Dekker, "Watches, Diary Writing, and the Search for Self-Knowledge in the Seventeenth Century," in *Making Knowledge in Early Modern Europe: Practices, Objects, and Texts, 1400-1800*, ed. Pamela H. Smith and Benjamin Schmidt (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2007), 127-42; Alexis McCrossen, "The 'Very Delicate Construction' of Pocket Watches and Time Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century United States," *Winterthur Portfolio* 44, no. 1 (2010): 1-30; Isobel Armstrong, "Bodily Things and Thingly Bodies: Circumventing the Subject-Object Binary," in *Bodies and Things in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture*, ed. Katharina Boehm (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 17-44, esp. 33-35.

[13] Cutts, *The Autobiography of the Clock*, 191-92.

[14] "Tell" has always, semantically, enacted a slippage between narrating, recounting, or relating something, and "counting" something; the original Old English *tellen*, and its various Germanic cognates, all encompass this double meaning.

[15] Sherman's superb *Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries, and English Diurnal Form, 1660-1785* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996) embeds the eighteenth-century approach to clock-time's unreliability amid a more general loss of strong authority figures: the waning of absolute monarchy, the long fallout of the Protestant Reformation, the slow hollowing-out of religious certitude, and the accelerating disenchantment of the universe. Clock-time would appear the only one of these figures which reverses course in the nineteenth century. Reliable chronometers, set to Greenwich Mean Time, made Isaac Newton's notion of absolute time possible in real-life terms—that is, until Einstein made time relative at the dawn of the next century. See the coda to this chapter and Peter Galison, *Einstein's Clocks and Poincaré's Maps: Empires of Time* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004).

line from Parliament's 1714 proclamation, to Harrison's final sea-watches in the 1760s and 1770s, to the first imposition of railroad time in 1840, the veracity of time was continually felt to have important national consequences for a state grappling with an exploding population, a sprawling empire, and the increasing difficulty of coordinating its individual subjects in a safe, efficient, and economic manner. As clock-time was redefined in the context of imperial-economic endeavors, the truthfulness of timekeepers thus became messily entrenched in broader systems of control. Like the systems of labor that the clock oversaw, that truthfulness was made subject to different forms of policing. Edward Rigg declared in his 1881 lecture on watchmakers that if there were any reason to call a timepiece's testimony into question, it could simply be verified against the "general" "distribution of true time."[16] Assuring his auditors that a delinquent clock might be promptly corrected by this "general" truth, conveyed by public and regulator clocks, Rigg limns a system of enforced public control, in which an errant timepiece must be quickly brought back to order by its more truthful fellows.[17]

Hazlitt, trying to piece together a feeling that watches and house clocks are too sly by half and oddly disruptive to the proper running of things, objects to different-telling clocks in the

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[16] Edward Rigg, "Lecture I (Continued)," *Journal of the Society of Arts* 29, no. 1495 (July 15, 1881) 682.

[17] The notion that clock-time not only is a factor of discipline, but was also "refined" and "made susceptible to use and control" over time is one advanced by, among others, Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) 150; 157. The time-table stands at the center of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, although he never embarks on a full-scale consideration of Western clock-time. Perhaps his most notable claim therein argues that public executions and prison time-tables "each define a certain penal style" in the history of the West; and that the disappearance of the former has a connection with the rise of the latter, as punishment evolved from bodily spectacle to a more enduring and psychological system of control and prohibition. But Foucault also briefly delves into how the industrial West coopted and altered the methods of religious orders, those "specialists of time, the great technicians of rhythms and regular activities," in pursuit of "a totally useful time" (*Discipline and Punish* 150). For more on religion and nineteenth-century clock-time, see my first chapter. For scholars who have extended upon Foucault's disciplinary time, see Anthony Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987); Graeme Davison, *The Unforgiving Minutes: How Australians Learned to Tell Time* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993); Barbara Adams *Timewatch: The Social Analysis of Time* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995); and Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, trans. Jonathan Trejo-Mathys (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2015). Maria Damkjær, in her work on clock-time and Victorian domesticity, disputes the notion that Foucault's institutional time-table is an appropriate model for understanding nineteenth-century everyday life. See Damkjær, *Time, Domesticity and Print Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 13-14.

same way he might object that the news reporter has begun editorializing. "There are two clocks which strike the hour in the room where I am," he writes later in the essay. "This I do not like. . . . It is starting a difference of opinion on the subject, and I am averse to every appearance of wrangling and disputation. Time moves on the same, whatever the disparity there may be in our mode of keeping count of it."[18] These clocks do not tell Time, in other words: they tell times. Hazlitt may be right that Time has gotten into men's pockets and begun to mimic their voices and aspects; but he is hardly free of that imputation. Moving us away from the possibility of a singular authority, Hazlitt's different-telling clocks disperse the telling of time—which is also, in some sense, the telling of *Hazlitt*'s time, the nineteenth century—among potentially innumerable competing voices. Hazlitt's representation of temporality as a disputed territory, claimed by colliding opinions, thus reframes the mechanical woes of timepieces who fail to adhere to a singular time as a struggle between disparate, all-too-human actors to set the terms of their shared reality. The sense of time that Hazlitt dislikes and yet reproduces looks, we might say, rather like society—and, not coincidentally, rather like the narratives of society that novelists made their mainstay.

Nineteenth-century fiction shares a complicated relationship with discipline, and as was seen in my previous chapter it was certainly not above exerting disciplinary forces of its own. Nevertheless standardized time was felt to carry particularly autocratic implications for the telling of stories. Fiction's solution to this problem was to deepen the association between small-scale timepieces, which is to say private or personal timepieces, and the narrative ploys novelists had developed to document the *many* voices, and many perspectives, of modern British society. It was, I argue, in part by emphasizing the *fictional* aspects of the clock's telling, and by

[18] Hazlitt, "On a Sun-dial," 72.

redistributing that telling away from a singular "true time" and back toward a network of particular times, that nineteenth-century novels reacted against industrial time-discipline—and they did so by doing what Hazlitt could not avoid doing: rampantly personifying them. Leaning heavily on the philosophic and metaphoric relationships forged during the previous century, nineteenth-century writers enlisted untimely timekeepers in a larger project of defending fiction's imaginative expansiveness, its dedication to individualism and to individual characters, and its penchant for poking fun at self-serious social prejudices. Rather ironically, the expectation that timepieces "tell the truth" owed at least as much, historically speaking, to their relentless personification as to their more literal ability to tell the time. Timepieces were expected to "go right" because their existence was registered, across the metaphoric canon of the English language, as somehow more human than other objects. Possessed, variously, of hands, faces, bodies, and voices, timepieces were gifted with a strangely lifelike existence—one that no other machine present in nineteenth-century culture really equaled, and that endowed the clock with special status in the complicated relationship shared between literature and mechanism.

This humanoid quality of clocks and watches was reinforced not just by the eighteenth-century philosophy and metaphor, however, but also by more material artistic endeavors. Armed with various forms of speech (ticks, chimes, tolls, inscribed mottos, and—at least as fiction would have it—secret compartments for tales and letters), timepieces had experienced a dizzyingly decorative existence in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Some of these decorative features had very little relation to human features. But many exploited that similarity, and made it into common parlance. Watches might be given "character," for instance, by way of human figures superimposed atop clock-faces.[19] At once timekeeper and miniature, such dial-

[19] The anonymous writer of "What's o'Clock?" describes the watches of German painter Johan Zoffany (1733-1810), stating that Zohan does not merely "pourtray a likeness" of individuals thereon, but "depict[ed] a character,"

plates played upon the metaphoric relationship between the two faces, and cast timekeepers as strange extensions of character. The relationship worked in the reverse too: there were, supposedly, a raft of watches shaped like skulls, with the cogs in place of the brain and the dial-plate as the roof of the mouth. They were intended as modern replacements for the skulls that sat at philosophers' elbows, ready to prompt the vagrant philosopher back to deep thought. Philosophers, for their part, wove the forms of clockwork into their treatises on the universe, on theology, on men and animals, and on the human consciousness.[20]

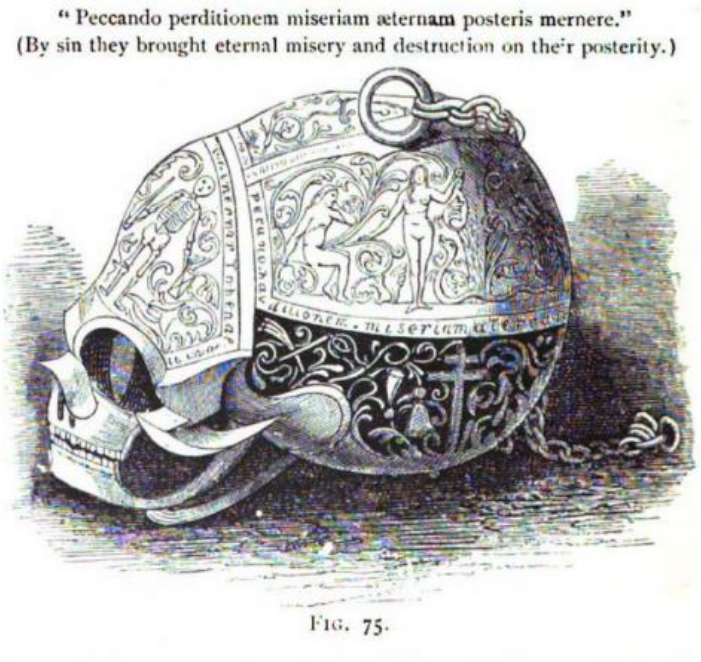

Fig. 2.1 – Illustration, F. J. Britten, *Old Clocks and Watches and Their Makers* (London: B. T.

so ably fixing how "he thought or seemed to think . . . that you might guess at what he was thinking." Watch and clock historian Edward J. Wood, meanwhile, speaks of the attempt to establish a "workmanlike character" for the Royal Exchange clock in 1843. See "What's o'Clock," 63, and Wood, *Curiosities of Clocks and Watches: From the Earliest Times* (London: Richard Bentley, 1866), 181.

[20] Dramatic histories of timekeepers were commonly circulating by the mid-nineteenth century. A year after Wood published his popular *Curiosities of Clocks and Watches* in 1866, Charles Dickens published a review of it (titled "Odd Watches") in *All the Year Round*, and the same year *Temple Bar* devoted a lengthy essay to the subject. F. J. Britten's *Old Clocks and Watches and their Makers*, which first appeared in 1873, recounted some of the same popular lore. Harry Chase Brearley's *Time Telling Through the Ages* (New York: Doubleday, 1919) assembles a thorough bibliography of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century publications on the history of clock- and watchmaking. See Appendix B, p. 235-40.

Batsford, 1899), 94. According to popular legend, this "skull-watch" belonged to Mary, Queen of Scots.[21]

Literature's clocks thus came to exist along a strange diagonal of truth and fiction, in which it was via the privilege of telling inaccurately, of daring to have differing opinions and thereby invoking "the appearance of disputation and wrangling," that timepieces came to life.[22] As fiction would have it, a clock that accurately announces the time must abnegate all claims to liveliness. It is a mere "mouthpiece," and Time—true and absolute—is the voice. The "deadly statistical clock" of Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854), "which measured every second with a beat like a rap upon a coffin-lid," is thus not merely deadening to its environs and its listeners; it is itself somehow "dead," or at least zombified.[23]

This dynamic works in reverse as well. Hazlitt would prefer an impersonal registering of time; he slips into personification only when describing timekeepers' own slippage into "disputation." Sol Gills's chronometer, in Dickens's earlier *Dombey and Son* (1846-48), is "unimpeachable" not despite its divergence from all the clocks of London, but because of it; the chronometer's human pretensions to impeachability and trustworthiness extend directly from its prosthetic-like relationship with its owner. In one of the epigraphs to this chapter, a *Temple Bar* magazine writer quotes the old proverb "They agree like the London clocks"; although the

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[21] F. J. Britten, *Old Clocks and Watches and their Makers: Being an Historical and Descriptive Account of the Different Styles of Clocks and Watches of the Past, in England and Abroad*, rev. ed. (London: B. T. Batsford, 1899), 93-98. The same image is also the frontispiece to Wood's earlier *Curiosities of Clocks and Watches*.

[22] Hannah Gay's "Clock Synchrony, Time Distribution and Electrical Timekeeping in Britain 1880-1925" (*Past & Present* 181 [Nov. 2003]: 107-40) captures something of this way of speaking in her extensive documentation of primary sources. Charting the implementation of more or less "correct" "world time," she references the anxiety that persisted into the early Edwardian period about "lying clocks," which were felt to be an "inefficient independence." One *Times* reader went so far as to state that "a lying timekeeper is an abomination and should not be tolerated"; he argued that though "individualism is in many respects [highly desirable], it is out of place in horology" (112-15). David Rooney and James Nye also make reference to this "long-running public debate on 'lying clocks'" in "'Greenwich Observatory Time for the Public Benefit': Standard Time and Victorian Networks of Regulation," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 42, no. 1 (2009): 8.

[23] Dickens, *Hard Times*, ed. Paul Schlicke (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008) 93.

saying is somewhat anachronistic by the time he is writing in 1867, the writer finds this disagreement a useful frame for human behavior—more useful, in fact, than synchronized clocks. Indeed, he uses this proverb to mock those who "must have greater consonancy and agreement between their clock hammers before conviction of any solemn event strikes them." People who expect right-striking clocks to confirm their other convictions fail to grasp that this "disagreeing fashion" is, in fact, the regular state of the world.[24]

By design or by happenstance, then, the untimely watch ticked its way merrily onto the pages of the century's most celebrated novelists: from Austen to Scott to Dickens to Gaskell to Eliot to Gissing and Hardy at century's end. Once there, its involvement in the realist novel's most self-conscious, most conventional, and thus most anti-mimetic efforts transformed the watch into a defender of fiction's ability to diverge from, critique, and expand reality's most regulatory, and most normalizing, impulses. It gained that power from its ability to disagree—an ability that is at once modest, often a matter of mere seconds or minutes, and yet symbolically profound.[25]

Such is the subject of this chapter; and I track this quirk of comic mistiming in a perhaps counterintuitive fashion: from major characters toward minor ones, from central plot-points toward marginal happenings, and then back again. The chapter is bookended by two lengthy examples of the alliance between untimely watches and narrative disagreement within the novel. I begin at the dawn of the century, with Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (c. 1798-1816; p. 1817), before flashing forward to the other side of time standardization, with Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* (1864-66). The novels' depiction of temporal competition documents what

[24] "What's o'Clock?" 58.
[25] See Jonathan Grossman's comments on this in *Dickens's Networks* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2015), 99-103.

I argue is a broader cultural inscription, in direct contrast to its potential for truth-telling, of the timekeeper's potential for fiction—or, rather, a potential to get at truth by way of fiction. Between these two more substantive engagements with untimeliness, I pursue a series of cameo appearances made by the untimely watch, with the aim of probing its enduring alliance with characters who are eccentric, minor, marginalized, or some combination of the three. In pursuing these ever more fleeting appearances, I hope to sketch how the essential marginality of untimely timekeepers tracks with their involvement both in the effect of multitude in society novels—its investment in providing testimony for the lives of *many* characters—and in novelists' efforts to put pressure on the central integrity in their novels. I do so in order to think through how fiction is generated *by* disagreement: temporal, ideological, and aesthetic.

This chapter probes the case of the untimely watch so broadly across nineteenth-century fiction that, with the hope of focusing these efforts, I have located this chapter at the dinner hour. This is not an arbitrary decision: untimely timepieces are most likely to appear in conjunction with mealtimes, and above all with the new, middle-class ritual of an evening dinner, where the bourgeois identity was actively being worked out. Regardless of when the dinner hour is set in a novel (and it became progressively later as the century wore on, as I will show in relation to Gaskell), dinner provides the most frequent setting for household disputations concerning time and life alike. That the dinner hour should give impetus to such disputes is not surprising. We are, after all, talking about preference, and the line between culinary preferences and cultural ones has always been fine indeed. The great eighteenth-century authority on the subject, David Hume, preempted Hazlitt, in some sense, when he wrote of differences in judgment: if "the judgment [what Hume calls 'a delicacy of taste'] may be compared to a clock or watch, where the most ordinary machine is sufficient to tell the hours; but the most elaborate alone can point

out the minutes and seconds, and distinguish the smallest differences of time," then it is best to restrict one's social circle to those whose judgment is most "correct" and precise.[26] Yet characters' opinions, regarding both their watches and their worldviews, rarely fall within narrow circles of acceptability in nineteenth-century novels. Rather, it is the energies sparked by disruptive differences among characters' opinions that turned the dinner hour into a staging ground for struggles over narrative and temporal dominance. And that is where I turn now, at the dawn of the century in the aftermath of Harrison's sea-watches.

I. Before Standardization: Or, When Catherine Morland Was Late for Dinner

Northanger Abbey

Dinner set for 5 p.m.

Attendees: General Tilney, Mr. Henry Tilney, Miss Eleanor Tilney, Miss Catherine Morland

Several minutes past 5 p.m. (General Tilney's watch fob)

Jane Austen, sister to a naval brother, would have been well aware of the Harrison clock, capable of ushering sailors safely home from the dangers of sea and coastline. Objects do not occupy a particularly prominent presence in the slim Austen canon. Yet clocks—their accuracy, their ability to correctly calculate one's geographic position, their role in the regulation of social intercourse and household affairs—are reliable figures in her novels, from the romantic

[26] David Hume, "Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion," in *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, new ed. (London: A. Millar, 1764), 1:7. Hume has his own story to play in the history of absolute time, when his conviction that time cannot be understood separately from the motion of distinct objects helped to inspire Albert Einstein's theory of special relativity. See Galison's comments on Hume in *Einstein's Clocks*, discussed below. James Noggle, in *The Temporality of Taste in Eighteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012), offers one of the more recent considerations of taste and time. In it, he argues that the eighteenth-century conception of "taste" rested upon the warring frameworks of duration (to "have" taste) and immediacy (to have or develop a taste *for* something, good or bad). Oddly, Noggle almost entirely neglects clock-time.

synchronization of Darcy's and Elizabeth's watches in the finale of *Pride and Prejudice* to Mary Crawford's assertion, in *Mansfield Park*, that "a watch is always too fast or too slow. I cannot be dictated to by a watch."[27] They occupy a starring role, however, in *Northanger Abbey*, Austen's love letter to novels and novel-readers. This conjunction offers an early window onto the temporal experiments undertaken by nineteenth-century novelists. Mary Crawford's assertion notwithstanding, Austen's watches do not exhibit quite the habitual untimeliness of Victorian watches. But Austen involves them, intimately, in a question of how to write a realist novel—a question that is, for her, also a political problem, involving the distribution of power and agency between characters, and between competing generic modes. It is in her most self-reflexive novel that the question of free indirect discourse and clock-time intersect for perhaps the first time.

The watch arrives in *Northanger Abbey* to mediate between warring factions: father against children, the wealthy against the merely well-to-do, romance against realism. *Northanger Abbey* slots the watch into its project of modernization and moderation: how to retain, in other words, some of the romantic sensibilities of the gothic without allowing them to overwhelm realism, and vice versa. Austen orchestrates this conundrum across three stages, which continually intersect: architecture, narrative mode, and temporality. The dictatorial and time-conscious General Tilney is determined to at once modernize his familial property, shore up the family's social position through the marriage of his children to well-heeled spouses, and crush all signs of political or filial resistance.[28] His success in all three areas is questionable at best. But, rather than reject the General's authoritarian attention to time, Austen reworks time-discipline

[27] Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (London: T. Egerton, 1814), 197.
[28] For more on the police state in *Northanger Abbey*, see Robert Hopkins, "General Tilney and Affairs of State: The Political Gothic of *Northanger Abbey*," *Philological Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (1978): 214-24. For more on General Tilney's "timeliness," see Katherine Kickel, "General Tilney's Timely Approach to the Improvement of the Estate in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 63, no. 2 (2008): 145–69.

into her vision of a moderately more democratic English society, and of a moderately less-than-"realist" modern novel. The great imaginative advance that Austen makes in this novel is to align realism as a mode with a stripped-down punctuality. She demarcates what we might call a "pure" realism, one that she presents as timely, disciplinarian, and linguistically efficient—and then immediately sets about tempering this precision with an influx of powerful feeling, linguistic excess, and a good dose of untimeliness. For Austen, the modern novel must retain its penchant for the irregular and the unregulated. In *Northanger Abbey*, that disruptive, essentially un-realist strain of fiction boils down to a slightly-less-than-punctual timepiece.

Composed long after the introduction of the portable watch in the seventeenth century, but some while before the standardization of British time, *Northanger Abbey* captures an intense temporal self-consciousness. In it we glimpse a nation clearly poised between the traditional and the modern: an intersection crystalized in the abbey itself, but likewise inflected by considerations of generic tradition. A house whose weathered exterior frames a modernized interior, and a novel whose romance structure belies its sly treatment of romance conventions, *Northanger Abbey* is, generically and narratively, a novel invested in the idea of time. But it is the novel's pointed interrogation of mechanical timekeeping that most thoroughly explores how the era's time-changes will play out in the prose and verse of nineteenth-century texts. Northanger Abbey does not run like clockwork. It runs *to* clockwork, the chimes of its many synchronized timepieces dictating the activities of the inhabitants with a military precision that, while seeking to precisely mark the progress of time on a narrative level, registers as mechanical and lifeless on a stylistic one. At the center of this system lies General Tilney's personal timepiece, its continual *tick* sublimated into the rhythms of the text and the pronouncements of its wearer, but no less insistent for that tacit silence. A metonym for both modern precise

efficiency and Gothic patriarchal oppression, Tilney's watch is the standard by which order is enforced.[29]

Yet even as the ticks of the watch attach themselves to modern rigor, they must struggle for primacy against Catherine's own temporal sensibilities, which owe much to her Gothic forerunners and import into the text an almost Kantian sense of time as "nothing other than the form of inner sense."[30] The resulting effort to regulate or give structure to time's progression is thus staged both within the house itself and across the book's competing narrative modes, and implicates the novel in a larger discussion about how the realist novel might record the small sequences of daily life, and why such a record impinges crucially on the rendition of character.

The General's watch is introduced upon Catherine's first evening at the abbey, after a deliciously disappointing approach to the house (which does not yield quite the dramatic sensations that Catherine anticipated) and immediately preceding her thrilling exploration of what turns out to be a redoubtable linen chest. At the moment Catherine arrives at the abbey and discovers the woefully modern interior encased within its "Gothic form," she also intuits "the strictest punctuality to the family hours [that] would be expected at Northanger": halting in the midst of the house tour, General Tilney has taken out his watch and "stopped short to pronounce it with surprize within twenty minutes of five!"[31] Here (in appropriately efficient fashion) is

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[29] Kickel reads the watch as an indicator of the significant economic pressures on the landed gentry to modernize and centralize the operations of the country estate, and to import the values of workplace labor into the space of the home.

[30] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 163. For more on sensibility in Austen's gothic predecessors, see Terry Castle, "The Spectralization of the Other in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*" in *The Female Thermometer: 18th-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995), 120-39. See also Hina Nazar, "Judgment, Propriety, and the Critique of Sensibility: The 'Sentimental' Jane Austen," in *Enlightened Sentiments: Judgment and Autonomy in the Age of Sensibility* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2012), 116-46; and April London, "Clock Time and Utopia's Time in Novels of the 1790s," *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 40, no. 3 (2000): 539–60.

[31] Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ed. Susan Fraiman (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 110-11 (hereafter cited in text).

established the pattern for the General's speech, and, indeed, his entire mode of being in the world: exclamatory, precise, and disinclined to linger.

This alarming punctuality recedes from view in the face of Catherine's Radcliffe-inspired explorations of her new quarters (a sequence to which I will return shortly), only to abruptly re-intrude upon her reveries. Having become entirely preoccupied by the ancient chest in her room (doubting not that it contains something dastardly), Catherine is entirely unprepared when Eleanor Tilney calls her to dinner:

> Catherine had no leisure for speech, being at once blushing, tying her gown, and forming wise resolutions with the most violent dispatch. Miss Tilney gently hinted her fear of being late; and in half a minute they ran downstairs together, in an alarm not wholly unfounded, for General Tilney was pacing the drawing-room, his watch in his hand, and having, on the very instant of their entering, pulled the bell with violence, ordered "Dinner to be on table *directly*!"
>
> Catherine trembled at the emphasis with which he spoke, and sat pale and breathless, in a most humble mood, concerned for his children, and detesting old chests; and the general, recovering his politeness as he looked at her, spent the rest of his time in scolding his daughter for so foolishly hurrying her fair friend, who was absolutely out of breath from haste, when there was not the least occasion for hurry in the world. (113)

Perhaps the first thing we notice about this sequence is the sheer *propulsion* of syntax, so that to read these sentences aloud would render us as out of breath as Catherine herself. Language tumbles forth, "violent[ly]," without particular beauty or reflection; there is "no leisure" for considered speech in the face of the General's angry pacing and ticking watch. Note the interminable last sentence (which has, in fact, been abbreviated here), in which the final clauses

alone pack in references to "hurrying," "haste," and "hurry," all while disclaiming any particular concern for timeliness. And yet it is this very concern that renders Catherine both "breathless" and "absolutely out of breath"—descriptors that might, in a Gothic context, simply indicate sublime terror, but that here suggest something more mundane. There *is* of course fear present—Eleanor's fear, and Catherine's own concern for Eleanor and her brother Henry—but it has been half-submerged beneath the more quotidian anxiety about timeliness. Gone are the sublime and the beautiful; mechanization has stepped in to take their place in the economy of sensibility.[32]

What we feel, then, is a sense of loss amidst the onrush of time, a sense which Austen's language echoes and, indeed, heightens. In places, the very articles and adjuncts of language have been telegraphically stripped away: "Dinner to be on table *directly*!" rather than "Dinner is to be on the table *directly*!" Language must proceed as efficiently as the household, and so the emphasis is placed, unsurprisingly, on "directly" and not on "dinner." The pleasures of sensory experience, akin to the pleasures of leisurely speech, must recoil before the sheer "violence" of the ringing bell, a sound that echoes and takes part in the soundscape of time that regulates the house.

Herein, of course, lies the real delight of Austen's Gothic reworking: that she aligns the framework of the Gothic with what is insistently modern. There lies an indictment in that reworking, for Austen does not mock merely the gothic. She questions, too, the impulse toward "modernity," efficiency, precision, timeliness, without regard for what such concepts entail—or, indeed, what such ideas contribute to the rhythms of modern life. The General is precise for the

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[32] I should point to the growing corpus of texts that have examined nineteenth-century understandings of how mechanisms and human beings intersected. See Tamara Ketabgian, *The Lives of Machines: The Industrial Imaginary in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Ann Arbor, MI: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2011); John Tresch, *The Romantic Machine: Utopian Science and Technology After Napoleon* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2012); and Peter J. Capuano, "The Anatomy of Anglican Industry: Mechanical Philosophy and Early Factory Fiction" in *Changing Hands: Industry, Evolution, and the Reconfiguration of the Victorian Body* (Ann Arbor, MI: Univ. of Michigan Press).

sake of *being* precise, just as he trends modern in his décor for the sake of being modern. His precision appears not to afford him any particular advantages, save this one: the timeliness upon which he insists becomes the occasion (indeed, the excuse) for his dictatorial rage.[33] The Gothic pattern setting vulnerable femininity against masculine power is upheld in *Northanger Abbey*—but the structure for that dynamic has been displaced onto a portable timepiece. The menace of the eighteenth-century Gothic—aristocratic, conservative, ancestral—finds its purest form of expression in an object of modern technology and—eventually—of mass industrial production.

Amidst the forward momentum of these passages, it is easy to lose sight of just how the entire dinner sequence pivots around the watch. The sequence immediately preceding this excerpt, in which Catherine pries into the mysteries of household linen, also moves forward with great speed, yet with an important difference—its account of time is regulated not in half-minutes, but in sensations. We know, thanks to General Tilney's watch, that Catherine's explorations occupy approximately twenty minutes. Yet the precise progression of time from one minute to the next disappears. As Catherine examines her new accommodations according to the conventions of romance, searching for ancient mysteries, her perusal is one of "motionless wonder": "She advanced," "bent over [the chest] intently," and "her progress was not quick, for her thoughts and eyes were still bent on the object so well calculated to interest and alarm" (112). The verbiage in this sequence is dense, an ornate description of slow progress and breathless anticipation; yet the anticipation lies not in the contents of the trunk, but rather in the climax of feeling that that discovery ought to occasion. Time *does* matter—but it matters insofar as it is required for an affective response to one's environment. Unlike the General's watch, Catherine's

[33] My argument runs counter to Kickel's here. As she frames it, the General is merely responding to the extraordinary economic pressures that owning and running a country estate would entail at this time; and although she scolds him for his inhospitality toward emotions, she likewise chides Catherine's ignorance in not intuiting the need for more efficient labor.

Gothic temporality does not regulate unthinking motions, but instead provides a territory over which internal experience may unfold.

The primary interest of these competing temporalities lies as much in the narrative friction that they produce —the generic and temporal *uncertainty*— as in their respective properties. Striking the flint of the old against the steel of the new, Austen interrogates what is ignited in this meeting of genres and technologies of timekeeping. The novel, given the two decades between its conception and publication, has a curious, built-in relationship with time.[34] But it also expands upon a contemporary debate over how, in literature as in life, to track time forward. Who can forget the inimitable opening of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67), whose unwound clock both initiates the doomed attempt to reorient, reenact, re-wind the events of Tristram's life, and speaks to a strange intimacy imagined between mechanical timekeeping and the novel?

Austen's novel is in search of a mode of keeping (and narrating) time that imports aspects of sensibility into the mechanics of timekeeping with the aim of giving new structure—generically and narratively—for the depiction of interiority. While timepieces recur throughout the novel, the intensification of temporal markers amidst the Northanger Abbey sequence directly corresponds to an intensification of the gothic mode, so that the tacit confrontation between Catherine and Tilney transforms the domestic space into a laboratory within which to explore, counterpoise, and ultimately interimplicate two different narrative methods. Catherine's focus throughout the gothic portions of the novel remains on the past, whose "strange violence"

[34] See Narelle Shaw, "Free Indirect Speech and Jane Austen's 1816 Revision of Northanger Abbey," *SEL* 20, no. 4 (1990): 591-601.

(112) might find physical expression even in a lowly linen chest.[35] Yet the moment in which we meet actual "violence" occurs when Catherine, having pried the chest open a few inches, is startled by real time, when an "ill-timed intruder" (Miss Tilney's maid) causes the lid to slam "with alarming violence" and Catherine "to proceed in her dressing without further delay."

This harsh intrusion of "ill-timed" mechanical time indicates not that there is no occasion for heightened sensibility in Northanger Abbey, but that Catherine has misdirected her efforts—and that we as readers may have relied overmuch on the conventions of genre to sort out our affective responses. There is indeed "violence" here—a word echoed four times over the course of the scene—but while the first occasion is hypothetical (the linen chest's imagined past), the ensuing three instances actually occur *in* the narrative, and align themselves not with Catherine's gothic imaginings, but with the General's "modern" mode of regulating his home. The violence Catherine seeks to reconstruct thus does not need to be reconstructed; for it exists in real time, and indeed is occasioned by the requirements of *being on time*.

Paradoxically, what Austen insists upon here is an attention to what occurs *now* (a word I use in a somewhat expansive sense, to mean both the here-and-now and the quotidian), and how to read events that are immediate as well as distant. Austen recruits the echoes of the preceding "gothic" sequence in the bedroom to cast the "modern" sequence in the drawing-room in a much harsher light: the "most violent dispatch" and "alarming violence" that Miss Tilney's "fear of being late" occasions are, it turns out, "an alarm not wholly unfounded," given the violence with which General Tilney pulls the dinner bell. The sound of the mysterious chest slamming shut is our proverbial red herring; it is the bell (and the watch, and the General's sharp, punctual orders)

[35] As Terry Castle has argued of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the gothic past's ability to haunt the present owes much to the Lockean notion that we can transcend that temporal boundary via a heightened sensibility, an ability to "revive" old impressions in the mind. Castle, "The Spectralization of the Other in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*."

that direct us toward the true point of interest—a more modern method of paternal tyranny, structured by the technologies of timekeeping.

And time does lies at the heart of this. Even the reader must respond, in some fashion, to the passage's modes and sounds of timekeeping. The interweaving of Catherine's determination to feel and to be moved by her surroundings, with General Tilney's passion for punctuality, structures the reader's own introduction to the abbey in such a way that the continual intrusions of the clock feel alarmingly abrupt and discordant. The shifts between Catherine's emotive passage through time and space, and the General's more mechanical passage, ring out loud and clear. Take, for instance, the scene in which Catherine concludes (in thrilling fashion) that the General must have been "dreadfully cruel" to his late wife. Misinterpreting her resulting distress as lassitude, the General springs into action: "was *most urgent* for returning with his daughter to the house," "would follow them *in a quarter of an hour*," "called Eleanor back *in half a minute* to receive a *strict* charge," all of which "*struck* Catherine as very remarkable" (Austen 124; emphasis added). While we may breathe a sigh of relief that Catherine's fantasies have not yet initiated a real-life to-do, we nevertheless feel wrenched from a passage of time propelled by sensation into one punctuated by strikes of the clock. That the General's speech has essentially removed the subject of his concern—"was most urgent for returning" rather than "was most urgent *that Catherine* return"—merely emphasizes the *linguistic* thrift that Austen connects to the concept of unreflective precision.

Yet Austen does not seek to banish mechanical time from the novel, merely to work out the terms of its inclusion. I have suggested that the conflict between Catherine and the General

corresponds to a relationship between modes of timekeeping and modes of narration.[36] Ever wary of sacrificing the imaginative power of fiction for strict regularity, she nonetheless acknowledges that regularity has its place as well as flights of fancy.[37] The novel concludes with Catherine's withdrawal from the "alarms of romance" and arrival into "the anxieties of common life" (Austen 138). In this scene, immediately following Henry Tilney's fierce scolding of Catherine's imagined horrors, we at last (and perhaps with some regret) witness Catherine's recovery from the realm of the gothic. This transition is heralded not by the inexorable tick of modernity, but by what Austen calls "the lenient hand of time," which "did much for her by insensible gradations in the course of the day" to restore good sense and judgment (Austen 138).

It is a striking image, conjuring impressions of time as sentient, sympathetic, and proximate, whose effects unfold "by insensible gradations" rather than being marked by minutes or hours. And yet the imaginative basis for time explicitly echoes the physical composition of a clock or watch. We still experience the forward movement of the clock in Austen's construct; but its hands may be seen to pause, wait, suspend, and then continue—absorbing, it would seem, some of the energies of the novel's gothic passages in order to present a substitute for the inhumanity of Tilney's watch. Indeed, the very idea of a "lenient hand" suggests an equivalence of a sorts, or at least an analogy, between the human and the mechanical; moving forward "in time" and into a consciously modern world, they mark the progression of minutes and hours, and the synchronous rise and fall of sentiment and sensation, that together compel the transformations of "common life."

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[36] Thank you to Chip Tucker for pointing out the etymology of "modern," from the Latin *modo* (a method or mode, but also a measure, rhythm, or duration) and *hodiernus* (today). See "mode, n." and "hodiern, adj." in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, electronic ed.

[37] A. Walton Litz's well-worn "Regulated Sympathy in *Northanger Abbey*," in *Jane Austen: A Study of Her Artistic Development* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), 53-71, offers a good overview of Austen's attempts in the novel to at once accommodate reason and feeling, and to "regulat[e] sympathy without destroying it."

Northanger Abbey thus offers an early glimpse into debates over what a novel might look like, sound like, go like in a new century. Austen holds off resolving the novel's tonal diversity until the very last; and this deferral makes it formally valuable to our inquiry. Austen affirms the need for some sort of ideological resolution: a lenient synchronization after a period of stylistically violent tick-tocks. But that lenient resolution is, crucially, never a given, never a priori. Gravitating toward the disruptive potential that comes of throwing time out of joint, Austen follows on an intuition that disruption might be important to the ideological work of novels, by questioning the solidity of the world they are reflecting back to readers, and by finding new modes for documenting modern life—and in the process suggesting that certain conspicuous insignia of that life betray a latent affinity to the gothicism that modernity ostensibly supersedes.

The stakes of synchronized time changed utterly, however, twenty years after Austen's death. In November of 1840, the Great Western Railway company set in motion a change that would soon stretch across every holding of the British Empire and every corner of the globe: the standardization of national time.[38] This new time sped along the train tracks of Great Britain,

[38] Many of the classic accounts of Victorian clock-time, including Jerome Hamilton Buckley's *The Triumph of Time: A Study of the Victorian Concepts of Time, History, Progress, and Decadence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1966), John Lowerson and John Myerscough's *Time to Spare in Victorian England* (Hassocks, UK: Harvester Press, 1977), Stephen Kern's *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918: With A New Preface* (1983; Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2003), and Schivelbusch's *The Railway Journey* have concentrated on this urban-industrial context. The past decade as seen a redoubling of interest in the Victorians and clock-time, and a broadening of perspectives on the topic. Recent full-length studies include Herbert L. Sussman, *Victorian Technology: Invention, Innovation, and the Rise of the Machine* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2009); Sue Zemka, *Time and the Moment in Victorian Literature and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011); Barrow, *The Cosmic Time of Empire*; Trish Ferguson, ed., *Victorian Time: Technologies, Standardizations, Catastrophes* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Ryan A. Viera, *Time and Politics: Parliament and the Culture of Modernity in Britain and the British World* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2015); and Damkjær, *Time, Print, and Domesticity*. Both Sussman and Zemka, interestingly, have also dealt in recent work with the idea of prosthetics, a concept I similarly develop in this chapter. See Sussman and Gerhard Joseph, "Prefiguring the Posthuman: Dickens and Prosthesis," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 32, no. 2 (2004): 617-28; and Zemka, in a number of conference papers and, with Capuano, *Victorian Handedness: Essays on the Manual Turn in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State Univ. Press, forthcoming).

following on the locomotives that had already shrunk distance across the only fractiously united kingdom. By 1855, standard time was more or less universal in Britain, and India—the largest and most iconic of all British imperial territories—followed suit in 1860. Yet literary time remained obstinately local, and literature's clocks and watches ever more unruly, in the decades following 1840. As in Austen, Victorian novelists seem to be struggling with what "true time" implies for the project of realism.

Austen strategically bifurcates narrative temporality, in order to think about how genre's temporality helps to generate character, and vice versa. Victorian experiments with untimeliness, however, begin to push toward the edges of the texts, within more diffuse networks of characters, and within more multiplotted novels.[39] Where Austen emphasizes the dangers of precision over the dangers of standardization, the Victorians reverse this emphasis. Precision, in localized terms, may be a desirable thing, a means of coordinating diverse groups of people. But standardization, at least where it intrudes upon personal and domestic autonomy, is treated with far more skepticism. On the surface, this fact may seem strange. The project of time standardization and the project of the Victorian novelist share quite a lot, after all. Both are interested in the ordering of time and the ordering of bodies by means of time. Both must deal with the succession of events through time, and with the simultaneity of certain happenings across space.[40] And both are (generally speaking) invested in the happy, or at least safe, delivery

[39] I borrow the sense of this term from Grossman's *Dickens's Networks*; and of course the multiplot novel is central to Alex Woloch's sense of how minor characters and (by implication) minor plotlines evolve over the course of the nineteenth-century novel. See *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2004).

[40] If I play somewhat fast and loose with Kant's terminology, it is because I treat him mostly at a remove. The Victorians write in the after-echoes of Kantian philosophy. While they know who Kant is, they haven't necessarily read him, or consciously worked him into their texts. For more on the concept of simultaneity in the Victorian novel, see Helena Michie, "Victorian(ist) 'Whiles' and the Tenses of Historicism," *Narrative* 17, no. 3 (2009): 274–90, and "Hard Times, Global Times: Simultaneity in Anthony Trollope and Elizabeth Gaskell," *SEL* 56, no. 3 (2016): 605-26.

of people to some preordained destination. This is one of the reasons that trains have always made such a good metaphor for serial novels.[41]

But clock-time retreats from the public sphere and retrieves a more Kantian resonance once it involves a private, individual, mental effort to order and make sense of one's experiences.[42] The enduring privatization of time in Victorian novels (and that is, in some sense, all that untimeliness is) reflects the surprisingly widespread sentiment that standardizing time meant standardizing the way people think, and the way people relate to each other. In broad social terms, there was some good to be gained from this; and both Austen's and, as I will return to, Gaskell's engagements with untimeliness reflect the tendency of nineteenth-century novels to search out ideological middle grounds, to find some saving grace in stylistic as well as narrative compromise. But the prosthetic attachment of untimely watches to minor and eccentric characters, and to minor subplots that lurk around the novel's periphery, stakes out fiction as a territory capable of resisting social and institutional, and aesthetic ideas of normalcy, regularity, and truth. Pushing back against the policing power of realism, as it sought to shore up ideological norms, the disputation of clocks as it appeared in the margins of nineteenth-century novels served as a counter to realism's more disciplinary tendencies, underscoring the individuality of

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[41] The railroads were convenient imaginative counterparts to the new technologies of serial publication, but they were also vehicles for distribution and literal hubs for the consumption of serial literature; taking advantage of the fact that travelers were eager for reading material, publishers set up bookselling stalls in railway stations and released cheap "yellowback" book series for passengers. John M. Picker offers an excellent discussion of this phenomenon in relation to Dickens's *Dombey and Son*. See "'What the Waves Were Always Saying': Voices, Volumes, *Dombey and Son*," in *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003), 15-40, as well as Nicholas Daly, "Railway Novels: Sensation Fiction and the Modernization of the Sense," *ELH* 66, no 2 (1999): 461-87; Leah Price, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2013), esp. 58-63; Grossman, *Dickens's Networks*; and Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries, *Transport In British Fiction: Technologies of Movement, 1840-1940* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[42] "Everything," wrote Kant in "The Transcendental Aesthetic," "that belongs to the inner determinations is represented in relations of time. . . . Simultaneity or succession would not themselves come into perception if the representation of time did not ground them *a priori*. Only under presupposition can one represent that several things exist at one and the same time (simultaneously) or in different times (successively)" (*Critique of Pure Reason*, 157; 162).

characters, and the emphatic dedication of realism to the disruptive territory of the fictional.[43] It is to these margins that I now turn.

II. Untimeliness on the Margins: Minor Characters and Side-plots in the Victorian Realist Novel

When things don't work around the periphery of realist novels, they tend to vibrate strangely against their central certainties. In 1861, the *National Review* published a reconsideration of Charles Dickens's early 1840s novel *Martin Chuzzlewit* that had somewhat larger ambitions: to distill what it called the essential "unreality" of the Dickensian eccentrics, and to work through the importance of these "unreal" and "mechanical" elements to the task of the Victorian realist novel. "The comic characters are only true to life in a remote and exceptional way," the reviewer quibbles. Yet "the serious part of the story may strike the balance, and set off the comic part, although it is strained and, in a certain sense, unreal. . . . Even if we cannot greatly admire it, we should probably think much less of the book if it were not there."[44]

This balancing act between seriousness and comedy, and between the mimetic and the unreal, has long been the subject of critical inquiry because of how neatly it undermines the

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[43] It's worth noting that we are not, generally speaking, discussing immense differences in time or opinion. Rather, as Hume puts it, it is a matter of "the smallest differences of time" that carry such disruptive power. When time differs in nineteenth-century novels, it rarely does by more than a few seconds, a few minutes, perhaps a quarter of an hour. Hazlitt's clocks may well be mere seconds apart; the fact that they allow for dispute at all is enough to explain his dislike. Edwin Reardon, in Gissing's *New Grub Street*, ed. Katherine Mullin (1891; Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2016), speaks of the "torture" of listening to the clocks at the Marylebone parish church and the adjoining workhouse, which always sound "several minutes" apart. Time is generally tormenting in Gissing; but in this case, it is the difference, rather than the simple fact of "chiming and striking" that bothers Edwin (108). How to do what one is supposed to, how write this many pages every twenty-four hours, if time does not seem quite reliable? There is something ever so slightly disturbing in that fact. For more on the problem of simultaneity in *New Grub Street*, see Nicholas Dames, "The Eye as Motor: Gissing and Speed-Reading (Accelerated Form)," in *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007), 207-46.

[44] "Martin Chuzzlewit," *The National Review* 13 (July/October 1861): 136.

reality effect of the nineteenth-century novel.[45] But this balancing act has rarely been considered in terms of time—even though, as this 1861 reviewer makes clear, time is of central importance to the relationship the realist novel enacts between the realistic (that is, true to life) and the unrealistic (that is, the more obviously fictive: characters and tropes we meet exclusively in fiction, and that we recognize *as* fictive by their very familiarity). Victorian comic writing certainly delights in throwing the human and the organic up against the mechanisms of industrial society, limning new ontologies for a mechanized existence. It is tempting to read in this light the reviewer's comment about Dickens that these "mechanical contrivances for producing fun" are engaged "in order to mark off his less prominent characters," who, although they are "utterly unreal," nonetheless "captivate us on the instant" and "make us laugh for the moment."[46]

What seems perhaps more forceful here is the reviewer's vital sense of how comedy—the things that don't quite work within the realist framework of the novel—operates within narrative time. Consciously setting the mechanical contrivances of the Victorian novel against that genre's long, carefully plotted arcs of time, he affirms comedy as a matter of "instants" and "moments": they break briefly in upon the text, only to recede from view as narrative velocity

[45] Studies of either comic novels or comedy in the novel tend to bifurcate into understandings of comedy as either disciplinary or subversive, with a good deal of nuanced overlap between the two camps. In the former category we have such works as Malcolm Andrews's recent monograph on Dickensian humor, whose discussion of the term "eccentric," or "off-center," argues that "[t]his is the corrective, normalizing function of laughter, designed to ensure the health of the social body by ridiculing deviancies." See Andrews, *Dickensian Laughter: Essays on Dickens and Humour* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013), 119. See also D. A. Miller's *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1988), which, although it does not theorize comedy at length, explicitly grounds its findings in the Victorian comic novel; and U. C. Knoepflmacher's *Laughter and Despair: Readings in Ten Novels of the Victorian Era* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1973). In the second camp, see Robert M. Polhemus, *Comic Faith: The Great Tradition from Austen to Joyce* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980), and James Williams's excellent "The Jokes in the Machine: Comic Verse," in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Poetry*, ed. Matthew Bevis (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013), 817-33. Donald J. Gray's "The Uses of Victorian Laughter," *Victorian Studies* 10, no. 2 (1966): 145-76, remains an excellent and balanced overview of the subject. Interestingly, Peter Brooks's classic *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984), makes no mention of comedy.

[46] "Martin Chuzzlewit," 138; 137; 139 (emphasis mine).

takes over.[47] We might then say that the comic timing of Victorian novels is a matter of *small* time (or, rather, of small times), operating outside the more prolonged concerns, plotlines, and driving impulses of novels—and involving, more often than not, minor characters. Alex Woloch, who has described the socially inclusive ambitions of the realist novel as complicated by the necessity of narrative focus, speaks of a "socionarrative matrix" by which, according to a logic of exclusion and stratification, certain characters and certain concerns lose out to other, more "central" ones.[48] If the central time of narrative is indeed standardized time—time that is absolute and unquestioned—then the snatches of untimeliness which appear at intervals to disrupt that assumption are correspondingly off-center.

Indeed, to turn from a metaphor of time to one of space, the province of comic untimeliness is almost always off-center, *eccentric*, in relation to the main plot.[49] The familiar type of the peculiar watchmaker, happily tinkering away in his shops, is notable not merely because he is made to resemble his watches (habit-driven, old-fashioned, and better at abstract thinking that practical action); he is notable in how, after some marvelously stylized early appearances, he is quickly ushered off the page as narrative velocity takes over. Occasionally a

[47] Henri Bergson's *Laughter* (1900), a rather serious treatise on the subject of silliness, distills a much older critical sense that comedy is itself a matter of mechanism. Comedy, Bergson famously wrote, arises from the conjunction of "s*omething mechanical encrusted on the living*." Deriving from "a sudden dissolution of continuity . . . a break with fashion," it concerns the departure of "an obvious clockwork arrangement of human events" from "the suppleness of life." See Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (1911; Mineola, NY: Dover, 2005), 37-39.

[48] Woloch, *The One Versus the Many*, 19. See also Deidre Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998) and Gage McWeeny, *The Comfort of Strangers: Social Life and Literary Form* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2016).

[49] Eccentricity was often cast as a valuable counterpart to the industrializing modern world, a mark of enduring individualism and autonomy; John Stuart Mill, for instance, included it in *On Liberty*. But as Athena Vrettos's insightful "Defining Habits: Dickens and the Psychology of Repetition," *Victorian Studies* 42, no. 3 (1999/2000): 399-426 discusses, the very habits of speech and action that typify eccentric characters often threatens to tip into something more mechanical. Jonathan Farina's excellent *Everyday Words and the Character of Prose in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2017), which analyzes the "stylistic tics" and "everyday words" of canonical nineteenth-century authors, similarly presses on the shaky divide between characters and objects.

major character—almost always of a comic variety—finds him- or herself in possession of an ill-made timepiece. But that possession is only briefly in evidence, a bit of absurdity meant to underline its owner's overly developed sense of self-importance. Austen and Gaskell are perhaps the exceptions that prove the rule; watches rarely linger in nineteenth-century texts. And so are the small-time characters often similarly small in stature, both in their importance to the novel and in the space they take up on the page.

This "momentary" quality of Victorian untimeliness concerns the intermediary stretch of this investigation, which delves further into my central premise, that untimely watches are recruited in the novel's self-conscious questioning of how stories of large and diverse groups of characters may be told. The essential marginality of the novel's untimely watches cannot, I argue, be separated from their tendency to undermine the narrative dominance of any one character, and any one timepiece, within the novel. Yet their role is one less of comic relief than of comic disruption. To depart briefly from the dinner hour for the breakfast hour, this brief exchange in Maria Edgeworth's *Helen* (1834) offers a useful instance of how novelists understood the watch's role as essentially interruptive: breaking in upon the concerns of major characters and central plots, only to quickly give way again as they resume their central position. The scene occurs toward novel's end, when the socially disgraced Helen Stanley takes refuge at the home of Esther Clarendon and her aunt Mrs. Pennant. "So now to breakfast," proclaims Esther to Helen; "You are very punctual, Miss Stanley, and that is a virtue which aunt Pennant likes, and can estimate to a fraction of a minute with that excellent watch of hers." There was, it "then came out," "some history belonging to that family-watch."[50]

Yet instead of offering up that history, the novel dodges: "and then the conversation

[50] Maria Edgeworth, *Helen, A Tale* (London: Richard Bentley, 1834), 3:202.

turned upon little family anecdotes and subjects which were naturally interesting to the aunt and niece, and not exciting to Helen, whose mind, they saw, needed quiet and freedom from all observation."[51] The question of the watch's timeliness (of quite good quality, we are assured) is immediately categorized as "little," and so naturally "not exciting" except to those whom it immediately concerns. More to the point, the watch is understood by these women *as* trivial; and this essential triviality is intuited in the way the novel, although focalizing this moment through aunt and niece, neglects to tell us anything more about it. We return to Helen's interior monologue in the very next sentence; and so the watch's family history, which the novel *Helen* never narrates, remains an untold tale. Yet its existence serves as an important counterweight to the narrative dominance of Helen's experiences: a reminder that there exist any number of other stories and histories that this novel has *not* chosen to narrate. As Browning's unnamed losels in *Sordello*—no kings to have their lives narrated by bards—hie "thro' a maze of lies" after "[their] own conceit[s] of truth," so does the "strange wheelwork" of storytelling prompt the reader to wonder at the unseen scope of lives not told.[52] Edgeworth's narration in this moment is as notable for what it conceals as what it reveals; we are allowed only so far into these minor characters' heads, and so are left with an awareness that, while Helen herself remains an open book, other narrative elements have been deliberately withheld from us.

We might generalize such moments in novels as instances in which the contrivances and artifices of realism come into focus. By their very departure from the central figures, happenings, and concerns of the novel, these breaks in the narrative surface mark out all the more clearly how fiction operates. Exposing the "machinery" behind the act of telling and the strategies of narration, untimeliness engages in the narrative tension between realism and the more "literary"

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[51] Edgeworth, *Helen*, 3:202.
[52] Robert Browning, *Sordello* (London: Edward Moxon, 1840), 121.

provinces of poetry, romance, and metaphor.[53] The minor watchmaker that begins Scott's 1822 novel *The Fortunes of Nigel* testifies to this burgeoning sense that a true time has stylistic consequences. As in Dickens's later *Dombey and Son*, Scott's eccentric watchmaker disappears from view (or, in the case of *Dombey*, actually disappears) for long stretches of the novel. His appearances occur, however, when the novel is at its most self-reflective—when it is, essentially, pondering its own machinery. This phenomenon can be explained, at least in part, by a sense of distant kinship between these two kinds of makers, watchmakers and novelists. *Nigel* begins in the "Robinson Crusoe-like cave" of "an ingenious, but whimsical and self-opinioned mechanic, most devoted to abstract studies, David Ramsay by name."[54] This self-proclaimed lineage to one of the earliest English novels sets the tone for Scott's most metanarrative novel: here, the mechanisms of the horologist are always the mechanisms of the novelist, and Scott's occasional narratorial intrusions, in which he comments on and ironizes narrative convention, parallel Ramsay's similar intrusions into the plot.

The accuracy of watches is always somewhat suspect in *Nigel*, inflected as they are by whimsy, self-opinion, and a susceptibility to imaginative pleasures. "I will be as true as a chronometer," Scott's real-life clockmaker to James I declares, to which his friend promptly responds, "I will not trust you though."[55] In this wildly anachronistic account of timekeepers, Ramsay is capable of fashioning both practical clocks "of German fashion" and decorative timepieces that "play a hundred merry tunes, and turn out . . . a whole band of morrice-dancers, to trip the hays to measure." The "clumsy, clanging, Dutch-looking piece of lumber" has the advantage, we learn, of "go[ing] the truest" (249); but Ramsay's daughter Margaret, guilty of a

[53] This is naturally a false binary; but it is undeniably a binary that writers enjoy staging.
[54] Walter Scott, *The Fortunes of Nigel* (Paris: Baudry's Foreign Library, 1832), 2 (hereafter cited in text).
[55] Scott, *The Fortunes of Nigel*, 60. Britten devotes a section *Old Clocks and Watches and Their Makers* to Ramsay, making mention of Scott's novel. See Britten, *Old Clocks and Watches*, 158-61.

great love for plays and romances, finds the merry timepiece more appealing to the imagination and, crucially, more conducive to *language*. When the upright Lady Hermione declares both that "metaphors are no arguments" and "minutes are precious . . . and we will at least suffer none of them to escape us" (248), Margaret flippantly defends the romantic disposition's penchant for metaphoric flights of fancy:

> "It would be, for example, very bold in me," said Margaret, "to say to your ladyship, that rather than live a quiet life, I would like a little variety of hope and fear, and liking and disliking—and—and—and the other sort of feelings which your ladyship is pleased to speak of; but I may say freely, and without blame, that I like a butterfly better than a beetle, or a trembling aspen better than a grim Scots fir, that never wags a leaf—or that of all the wood, brass, and wire that ever my father's fingers put together, I do hate and detest a certain huge old clock of the German fashion, that rings hours and half-hours, and quarters and half quarters, as if it were of such consequence that the world should know it was wound up and going." (249)

Margaret lays out a series of comparisons in this passage that look very much like the negotiation of both time and narrative mode that the post-Austen realist novel is forever embarking on. The careful marking of minutes advocated by her ladyship is not dismissed, but put off. Unvarying quietude is acknowledged as, perhaps, morally superior to "a little variety of hope and fear, and liking and disliking," but inhospitable to emotion or the appreciation of beauty. We might say Margaret, in her flippant way, is cataloguing the divide between a strictly *moral* realism that has in fact excluded very real parts of the real—butterflies, aspens, and merry but false-going clocks—and a more metaphorically inflected appreciation for the effervescent and the changeable. Margaret cedes the argument, admitting, "I fancy you are right madam, and that

comparisons are no arguments; at least mine has not brought me through." But it is not apparent that Scott has ceded it.

Margaret will become, in a fashion the narrator apologizes for, one of half of a rather tired marriage-plot summation. But her father plays a rather different, and more curious, role in *Nigel*. Readers would be forgiven for initially assuming that both Master Ramsay and watches generally will play a major role in the novel. The novel begins theatrically, Ramsay tinkering away in his Robinsonian cave and his two apprentices hawking wares on the streets. The construct creates a curious dynamic between clocks as *art*, and clocks as *goods*. But the scene's curiously repetitive patterning of speech, all variations on a single theme, also suggests that Scott is embarking on an experiment in the relationship between timepieces and language. The two apprentices differ from each other in their advertisements, the one mechanical (rather, it must be admitted, like the trusty German-style clock), the other inventive (merry, showy, and similarly suspect). "Clocks—watches—barnacles? . . . Watches—clocks—barnacles? . . . Barnacles, watches, clocks?" cries Tunstall, in a "dully and dry iteration" that compares poorly to the "verbal arrangements" of "the rich and recommendatory oratory of the bold-faced, deep-mouthed, and ready-witted Jenkin Vincent" (9). Vincent tailors his sales pitches to his auditors: he calls out to a passing "Master Poet" and offers "a watch that shall tell you . . . how long the patience of the audience will endure your next piece at the Black Bull"—which the bard promptly buys, laughing; to a lawyer, he offers a watch "that shall not lose thirteen minutes in a thirteen-year's law-suit" (10).

Although an untrustworthy sort, Vincent's oratorical prowess, like Ramsay's utterly impractical approach to life, undoubtedly holds its own appeal to the great Northern Bard. Scott's attraction to this "most picturesque period of history," in the early reign of James I,

derived from the chiaroscuro it afforded between "the ancient rough and wild manners of a barbarous age" and "the illumination of increased or revived learning and the instructions of renewed or reformed religion. The strong contrast produced by the opposition of ancient manners to those which are gradually subduing them affords the lights and shadows necessary to give effect to fictitious narrative"—an effect that encompasses a mix both of the "marvellous and improbable" with "the utmost probability" in his characters, and of the uneasy meeting of English with Scottish dialects, customs, and preconceptions in early seventeenth-century London.[56]

What Ramsay and his shop conjure, in the novel's scene-setting first chapter, is thus a collision of *times*. Civilization, in Scott's telling, is a matter of chronology, and a given manner of speech records one's location along that scale. But speech also has its own local rhythms, which vibrate against other voices, creating "contrast" and friction in the same way that characters' particular worldviews do. Lady Hermione's evolved sense of quiet, steady living according to the "truest" clock one can find may hold the moral high ground; but Scott, anachronistically flinging together different-going timepieces, cultures, and dialects, makes Margaret's comparative mode the mode of his novel.

That done, he quickly ushers Ramsay off-stage. The eccentric "old Time-meter . . . his face like a bronze bust . . . and glistening here and there with copper filings" (58), sets the novel going (and going, it might be added, often not quite right) with his various productions—not least his daughter, our heroine. But he only reappears in substantive fashion at novel's end, as the narrator is "wind[ing] up his story by a circumstantial description of the wedding, bedding, and throwing the stocking" (488). As this winding metaphor suggests (a metaphor implying at once

[56] Scott, "Introduction," *The Fortunes of Nigel*, vii-viii.

clockwork and textile endeavors), watches and watchmakers become the *deus ex machina* that enables consummation of the central marriage plot—a marriage plot, our narrator admits, that "the experienced reader" will have already seen coming some chapters ago, by the "sweeping out of the way of all the unnecessary and less interesting characters."[57] King James labors for weeks, "wellnigh to wear[ing] out . . . a pair of [David Ramsay's] best barnacles" (489), to search out an aristocratic inheritance for Margaret that will permit her to marry our hero. His rather imaginative solution is to declare "Davy Ramsay" a scion of the ancient knights Ramsay. Declaring that they "all wrought wi' steel, man," the King further proclaims clockmaking "a liberal art which approacheth almost to the act of creating a living being, seeing it may be said of a watch, as Claudius saith of the sphere of Archimedes, the Syracusan— / '*Inclusus variis famulatur spiritus astris, Et vivum certis motibus urget opus*'" [Some hidden influence within the sphere directs the various courses of the stars and actuates the lifelike mass with definite motions] (489-90).[58] This horological meeting point between the material and the imaginative, the mechanical and the living, becomes the central motif of the novel; for novels, too, create "living beings" out of inanimate matter, just as novelists work their own form of conjuring in between rolled pages.

Thus does *Nigel* come to a close, thanks to a king who was indeed "a great politician about trifles" (491). Scott's own trifling method, however, speaks to an explicit sense that novels, and certainly marriage-plot novels, derive from an ongoing dynamic between the "unnecessary" and the "necessary," between the central but somewhat "tired" doings of a

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[57] Scott, *The Fortunes of Nigel*.
[58] Scott quotes Claudian's description of Archimedes' famous orrery, here translated in "Archimedes' Sphere," in *Claudian*, trans. Maurice Platnauer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1922–), 2:281 (Loeb Classical Library 136); the line is excerpted in Harry Leonard Nelthropp's *A Treatise on Watch-work, Past and Present* (London: E. and F. N. Spon, 1873).

marriage plot, and the bursts of unruly, untimely, ridiculous variety that punctuate its progression. Part of this is generational: marriage-plot novels are stories of the young, and the elder generation typically in possession of such timepieces are naturally sidelined. But the years following 1840 also witnessed a strengthening of the alliance between these fiction-telling timepieces and characters who are, essentially, caught up in their own fictions of the world.[59] Although less aesthetically motivated than in either Austen or Scott, this interest in the struggle of characters to simply understand each other showcases a deepening ethical interest in the distinctiveness of personhood. The Victorian owners of untimely watches rarely have much personal claim to wisdom or sympathy; but in their stubborn adherence to a idiosyncratic understanding of the world, they solicit *our* sympathy, as well as our laughter. Their oddity derives from the way their aspirations and ambitions continually run into the roadblock of other people, and stumble over the confines of social as well as narrative convention. These are characters, in other words, for whom marriage, and the marriage plot, signals something of a loss, a capitulation to larger forces at work.

This sense of loss may be particularly strong when characters' desire to exert control over their surroundings seems disproportionate to their position in the social hierarchy. Early in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), a would-be female dictatorship butts up against resistance both temporal and social, with darkly humorous results. As family matriarch Mrs. Glegg sits in her sister's parlor, gold watch in hand, she opines that "whatever [time] it might be by other people's clocks and watches, it was gone half-past twelve by hers."[60] The conversation concerns, as it almost always does in such cases, the problematic timeliness of dinner, and the alleged lateness of the other diners. Although *Mill on the Floss*'s working-class characters abide

[59] See the introduction to Polhemus's *Comic Faith*.
[60] George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood and Sons, 1867), 45.

by a 1 or 2 o'clock dinner, followed by a 5 or 6 o'clock tea, even this early dinner hour has not escaped accusations of social pretension. Mrs. Glegg criticizes her sister Bessy Tulliver for yielding to her husband's preference for a later dinner. She declares that dinner should be held at 1 o'clock, not 1:30 or, heaven forbid, 2 o'clock; and it should involve, besides, only a boiled joint "and a plain pudding, with a spoonful o' sugar, and no spice." Her sister's offer of cheesecake and wine to tide her over is met with horror.

Poor Mrs. Glegg. The lateness of the dinner, the lateness of the other diners, and the comparative decadence of the meal irritate equally. All bespeak, she is sure, a certain weakness of character and a want of domestic economy. Disgruntled by the refusal of others to fit themselves to the demands of either her large gold watch or her biological clock (in truth, Mrs. Glegg is very hungry), she condemns the de-synchronization that has struck the family, so as to sentence "one sister to sit half an hour before the others came. But if the ways o' family are altered, it sha'n't be *my* fault."[61]

The exchange feels, in many respects, like something out of Austen. Indeed, Mrs. Glegg's frustration with the temporally disparate "ways o' the family" echoes a broader rule, that it is precisely when certain characters impose, or attempt to impose, their own intuitions of time upon others that they reveal its essential uncertainty. But this uneasy dance of mistiming around the dinner hour is interrupted by the arrival of the third sister, Mrs. Pullet, and the insistent connection Mrs. Glegg draws between the vicissitudes of character and the timeliness of their timepieces is abruptly dropped. A passing mention many chapters later, that aunt Pullet "took tea at half-past four by the sun, and at five by the kitchen clock," represents the only continuation of this idea that time is unstable in a world of moral uncertainties. We are left, then, with

[61] Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, 45-46.

untimeliness not as a central narrative feature, but as a throwaway moment, in the context of three characters whose choices rarely direct the narrative in a substantive way. And this narrative marginality aligns all too closely with the sisters' struggle to exert control over their own lives. Forceful, bitter Mrs. Glegg, "mild-peevish" Mrs. Tulliver, ridiculous and depressive Mrs. Pullet do not have the same finely drawn interiority of Maggie, Tom, or Philip Wakem. They are designated as "minor" not merely because they take up less space in the text, but by the dominance of their surface characteristics, the opacity of their minds, and the vaguely droll air with which Eliot treats their prejudices, frustrated desires, and complicated relationships with men. *Mill on the Floss* hardly solicits our laughter; but a reader with a black sense of humor might well find comedy in the former Misses Jane and Sophy Dodson. This humor, temporary though it may be, allows Eliot to begin to map the novel's gendered and economic systems of power present within the novel with a startling degree of sophistication.

Such Victorian interest in how time interacts with dynamics of power goes far in explaining the adherence of ec-centric, embodied timepieces to characters whose bodies, genders, and philosophies similarly subvert social expectations. Witness the "Bad Child" of *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65), one of Dickens's plentiful grotesques, whose breathing "laboured and rattled . . . like a blundering clock"; or the theologically and temporally composite Mrs. Jerome in Eliot's earlier *Tales from a Clerical Life* (1857), whose timepieces tell no fewer than four different times—all of which makes it very difficult to know whether the new cleric, poised to spark a village-wide theological controversy, is late for five o'clock tea.[62] Time and religious doubt go hand-in-hand here; for good or ill, no one can quite agree on what to think.

Or take Margaret Oliphant's *Miss Marjoribanks* (1865-66), like *Mill on the Floss* another

[62] Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, ed. Michael Cotsell (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 241; Eliot, "Janet's Repentance," *Scenes from a Clerical Life*.

example of untimeliness that foregrounds the governing aspirations of women. The novel centers on the local doctor's ambitious, motherless daughter, who sets out to impose a social tyranny upon the neighborhood of Grange Lane. Her campaign is conducted in the form of weekly dinner-parties, which begin promptly at 7 o'clock. But at this particular dinner-party, an individual has dared to step out of line.

> "You are late," Dr. Marjoribanks said, taking out the great watch by which all the pulses of Grange Lane considered it their duty to keep time, and which marked five minutes after seven, as everybody could see. It was ten minutes after seven by the pretty French clock on the mantelpiece, and at least twenty by the lowering countenances of Dr. Marjoribanks's guests.[63]

Oliphant's play on the idea of a clock "face" and, more intimately, of community pulses "keeping time" with Dr. Marjoribanks's "great watch" stakes out a now-familiar analogy. The figure of the watch establishes a realm of influence in which time—or, in Hazlittian terms, Time—passes from an external absolute into the mouthpiece of the doctor's great watch into the very hearts and bloodstreams of this insular and narrow-minded neighborhood. Refigured as regulator of body, blood pressure, and general conduct, Dr. Marjoribanks's timepiece underlines a troubling slippage in the dynamic between clockwork as a philosophical model for the human, and the clock as an extension of large-scale economic, national, and imperial regulation. Despite its implication in individual character, and character in a moral sense as well as a fictive one, the watch here acts to synchronize and, in a sense, subdue an entire neighborhood of individuals.

It would seem, from this initial reading of Oliphant, that to step out of time in Grange Lane is also to step out of line with excusable social conduct. Mr. Cavendish, the individual who

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[63] Oliphant, *Miss Marjoribanks*, ed. Elisabeth Jay (New York: Penguin, 1998), 131.

stands accused by the Marjoribanks gathering, is late for dinner; and his tardiness is of a piece with yet more serious violations of social conduct: daring to step out of time with Dr. Marjoribanks's watch, and romantically scorning the eminent hostess Lucilla Marjoribanks. But there is one respect in which Lucilla's dinner-party does not resemble a world of standardized time. For it is not at all clear *what time it is* at the Marjoribanks residence. The designated 7 o'clock dinner hour has been obscured by a disagreement between the three "timepieces" present in this scene—watch, clock, and countenance—and we are left disoriented within the novel chronotope.[64]

Moreover, the individuals in possession of faulty timepieces do not include the delinquent Mr. Cavendish. It is the hosts, the enforcers of social order, who find themselves out of time just when they are attempting to enforce it. This disagreement, so typical of Victorian fiction, disputes the possibility of absolute social harmony under Lucilla's "punctual" rule.[65] Although her dinner-parties exist to *bring together* the citizens of Carlingford—and to impose a benevolent dictatorship on the community—this ambition is always at odds with the reality of those individuals, whose secrets and private desires continually impinge upon Lucilla's self-professedly autocratic ambitions—and so her rule, which dissolves by novel's end, is in some sense anticipated by this moment. We might therefore understand something pivotal occurring in this dinner scene: that the community, and its concomitant systems of authority, have not quite managed to obscure the reality of the particular.

Yet Lucilla's autocratic ambitions, like Mrs. Glegg's and unlike General Tilney's, never

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[64] See Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and the Chronotope of the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination,* ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Holquist (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), 84-258.

[65] Lucilla Marjoribanks has, we are told at one point, "had in her mind" the aim "of being, as always, in harmony with *herself*. She was as punctual to the hour and minute of her engagement as if she had been a queen" (*Miss Marjoribanks*, 254).

appear truly dangerous, never carry the threat of real domination, of either narrative modes or of characters' bodies. Treating women's governing ambitions with a certain amount of irony makes them less threatening; but it also, certainly in the hands of women writers like Oliphant and Eliot, permits a certain bitterness to emerge at the lot of women who might aspire to more. The question of whether comedy in Victorian novels serves merely as a palliative or can occupy a genuinely critical function has sparked decades of scholarship, with no resolution in sight.[66] But in the case of untimely marginalia, the artifice of time speaks to an attempt not to displace systems of power, but to highlight their existence, and to, at least, temporarily counteract their certainties.

The delusions of men, almost necessarily, look somewhat different. On the surface, William Makepeace Thackeray's 1848-50 novel *The History of Pendennis* is reminiscent of Austen and Scott's conviction that the "pleasures" of imagination and self-delusion are important impulses for realism. Less explicitly concerned with social sympathy, the novel approaches untimeliness with a more aesthetic flair. Here the story concerns the "most splendid and august" gold chronometer of Mr. John Pendennis, who "always [kept] regular hours," took "his dinner . . . at six o'clock to a minute," discharges his duty as town doctor by faithfully timing the pulses of the neighborhood, and, when he proposes marriage, finds his own pulse "beat[ing] ninety, at least."[67] Mr. Pendennis is honorable, in a rather stiff and uninteresting way; but his death clears the way for his "disorderly little rascal" of a son, Arthur "Pen" Pendennis, to embark on a career of "poetry and caresses" that, while necessarily not to be applauded, is certainly the stuff of novels.[68] Pen, cycling through a series of watches, is himself forever out of time; and his

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[67] William Makepeace Thackeray, *The History of Pendennis: His Fortunes and Misfortunes, His Friends and His Greatest Enemy*, ed. George Sainsburg (1848-50; Humphrey Milfold: Oxford Univ. Press, 1864), 14.
[68] Thackeray, *The History of Pendennis*, 14.

inability to tell time parallels an inability to tell when people are lying to him—to differentiate, in essence, between truth and fiction. His father first gifts him with a "a showy ill-manufactured" watch that "was always getting out of order," despite the young Pen's best efforts to wind it each night and check it each morning.[69] He trades this in for his late father's aforementioned chronometer, most august and splendid.

In short order, however, "this portly and valuable chronometer Pen now pronounced to be out of date, and, indeed, made some comparisons between it and a warming-pan, which Laura thought disrespectful, and he left the watch in a drawer, in the company of soiled primrose gloves, cravats which had gone out of favour, and of that other school watch which has once before been mentioned in this history." In its place Pen purchases "a new French watch and gold chain."[70] The escalating chain of watches, none of which holds great claim to true timeliness, bespeaks a tension in Thackeray's novel: that its hero's "history" of becoming continually and hopelessly muddled in the fictions others tell him—and the fictions he tells himself—relies heavily on that fiction (and poetry, and caresses) to propel the narrative's increasingly absurd plot twists. Put differently, Pen's inability to know whom to trust drives Thackeray's satire in ways that Mr. Pendennis's unwavering routine and moral rectitude are incapable of sustaining. As in *Nigel*, all these watches disappear from the novel after a forceful early appearance; but they participate in Thackeray's broader inquiry into how a satire of the current age might (indeed must) rely quite heavily upon fiction, illusion, and deception.

Pendennis alludes to a sense, prominent among female owners of untimely Victorian timepieces, that the difficulty of timing concerns in part (and no small part, at that) a difficulty of holding a family together. Although Austen's General Tilney lays out a severe pattern for

[69] Thackeray, *The History of Pendennis*, 50.
[70] Thackeray, *The History of Pendennis*, 213.

generational conflict and filial disobedience, the obstinacy of these family patriarchs and matriarchs is generally couched as a doomed attempt to synchronize the diverse habits of essentially different individuals. Mr. Pendennis's unfaltering dedication to routine, order, and timely 6 o'clock dinners does not signify cold-heartedness; it constitutes merely the "frigid outward barrier" to a reserve of "warmth and love" for a wife and child he only imperfectly understands. Mrs. Glegg's harsh approach to her sisters' families does not negate (indeed, it relates to) an ingrained sense of loyalty toward her niece Maggie Tulliver. Mistiming presents a frequent occasion for familial conflict, whose disputes it literalizes; but it also points to arduous and fraught attempts to hold families together, and to emotionally coordinate their members.

It's a pattern reproduced at length within Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*, to which I turn presently, and in minor form within my final "small" example, Dickens's *Dombey and Son*. *Dombey and Son* is a famously misleading title; its most important family ties are not those that follow male primogeniture, but those between stepmothers and stepdaughters, uncles and nephews, sisters and brothers, and the more removed bond of homosocial friendship.[71] The formation of these bonds is defined above all by loss and absence: the loss of a parent, the absence of companionship, the disappearance of a guardian, even the amputation of a limb force those who have suffered the loss to search out replacements; and the resultant attachments, made more precarious by their very irregularity, group themselves around the coordinating power of timekeepers.[72]

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[71] For all that the concept of the nuclear family dominates the Victorian period, the families of nineteenth-century fiction, like their real-world counterparts, often existed in much more complicated domestic arrangements. See Eileen Cleere, *Avuncularism: Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Nineteenth-Century English Culture* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2004); Claudia Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian England* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007); Holly Furneaux, *Queer Dickens: Erotics, Families, Masculinities* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009); Duc Dau and Shale Preston, eds. *Queer Victorian Families: Curious Relations in Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2015); and Talia Schaffer, *Romance's Rival: Familiar Marriage in Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2016).

[72] A notable exception here is little Paul Dombey. Motherless and separated from his beloved sister, the titular son forges a strange friendship with the clock at his school—but rather than supplementing relationships between

In so doing, the novel offers a curious example of how a composite family—a family held together not by direct lineage, but by more abstruse bonds of kinship and affection—might intersect with the watch's nautical past, helping to conduct shipmen to safe harbor. Although the members of the Gill household, for instance, are engaged vocationally in the project of empire, home and household also contitute something of a throwback, a time capsule bobbing along amid "the human tide" of the great city of London. Its efforts toward naval regularity effectively protect the household, comprising the eccentric and markedly queer trio of Solomon Gills, Sol's nephew Walter Gay, and Captain Cuttle, from the ebbs and flows of modern urban life. At the center of it all ticks Sol's "tremendous chronometer . . . rather than doubt which precious possession, he would have believed in a conspiracy against it on part of all the clocks and watches in the City, and even of the very Sun itself."[73]

It is perhaps curious that a watch should be of such vital import to a man who, by his own confession, "[is] an old-fashioned man in an old-fashioned shop, in a street that is not the same as I remember it. I have fallen behind the time, and am too old to catch it again" (53). Both man and watch are, doubtless, old-fashioned and somewhat behind the time. Like Ramsay before him, this simple-minded man harbors a "secret attraction towards the marvelous and adventurous" (55) that locates him beyond the temporal confines of modern-day London; and his chronometer likewise belongs to a wider world charted by navigational instruments. Yet the chronometer's disputation with other timekeepers is, in a sense, immaterial; its task is to order *this* household. Sol's mental abstraction and untimeliness bespeak a sense that this atraditional household is

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people, this clock appears to replace them entirely. In the absence of close companions and amid waning health, the clock's rhythmic chant morphs into language: "how, is, my, lit, tle, friend? how, is, my, lit, tle, friend?" In Paul's animant universe, in which objects forever seem to speak to him, the fidelity of the clock to this ever-inquiring refrain, rather than the telling of the hour, resonates within the "aching void in [Paul's] young heart" (165-66; 171).

[73] Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, ed. Andrew Sanders (New York: Penguin, 1993), 48 (hereafter cited in text).

made possible, and even permissible, by the very fact of its scrupulous temporal regularity. Its very first appearance serves the verify that, at half-past five o'clock, Walter is now half an hour late for dinner. (Walter's entrance, accompanied by many protestations of hunger from both uncle and nephew, sees them, and eventually Captain Cuttle, "speedily engaged on a fried sole with a prospect of steak to follow" [49].)

If everything else in the household appears somewhat cobbled together and ready to blow away in the face of the slightest slap of the waves or public condemnation, this local regularity of hours provides them with a very real *internal* consistency.[74] Captain Cuttle, we learn, has been "eating Sunday dinners in that parlour for ten years"; and this regular source of "taciturn delight" steadies the old naval amputee, making him "a sadder and a wiser man" (57). This careful adherence to domestic routine, unchanged for a decade, conjures none of the iron control of the titular Dombey. Distinct from public and economic concerns, Sol's chronometric ordering protects an irregular family from the stark emotional alienation so apparent in the Dombey household.

Dickens takes pains to define this regularity of time and routine as private rather than public in its orientation, presenting the Gills household as impossibly divorced from economic or imperial affairs. This fact alone is rather strange. Dickens was, by this point in his career,

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[74] Many scholars have made attempts over the years to talk about time, rhythm, and measurement in more varied and local terms, with varied results. Anthropologist Edward T. Hall developed an influential distinction in the twentieth century between "monochronic" and "polychronic" societies, where the former (often associated with industrial societies) is schedule- and clock-based and time is thought of terms of efficiency and profit; and the latter (often associated with "traditional" societies) is at once less precision-focused, less concerned with wasting or using time, and—perhaps counterintuitively—more capable of multitasking. Although flawed, Hall's work opened up influential avenues for thinking beyond a straightforward and ever-increasing implementation of time-discipline. See Hall's *Beyond Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 1976) and *The Dance of Life: The Other Dimension of Time* (New York: Anchor Books, 1983), and the works of such scholars as Eviatar Zerubavel, *Hidden Rhythms: Schedules and Calendars in Social Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1981); and John B. Bender and David E. Wellbery in *Chronotopes: The Construction of Time* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1991). While the 1980s through the 2000s saw a concentration of work on the so-called *homo temporalis*, whose abiding sense of internal, biological, and seasonal time was strongly defended, it is only recently that more scholars have begun to suggest that relationships with the clock might also be more complex than scholars have often assumed.

increasingly intent on systematizing the relationship between clock-time and financial and labor practices. When Paul Dombey the first is introduced on the first page of novel, he is "jingl[ing] and jingl[ing] the heavy gold watch-chain that depended from below his trim blue coat" (11). He stands awaiting the birth of the son who will complete the promise of the novel's oft-forgot title: *Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son, Wholesale Retail & For Exportation*. Dombey will throughout run his family *like* a firm—indeed, the two are synonymous—and the ordering of family and firm alike by his ever-present watch is couched within the global capitalist marketplace of mid-Victorian commerce.

Yet the resulting view of clock-time is not, as has sometimes been contended, a straightforward tyranny by way of watch. Sally Shuttleworth, who describes *Dombey* as a work "filled with the constant sound of ticking," argues that "Dickens is not merely overworking his symbolism" by including so many different-going timepieces—for, in addition to Dombey's heavy gold watch and Sol's chronometer, we also have Captain Cuttle's own untimely silver watch, little Paul Dombey's school clock, which by the end of his short life has become his only companion, and a motley assortment of public clocks and bells. The resulting assemblage, Shuttleworth reasons, constitutes "a moral hierarchy of forms of temporal measurement," in which not all those forms work in the same way.[75] While foregrounding Dombey, *Dombey and Son* continually carves out time with alternative modes of keeping order, and alternative possibilities for the societal role of modern clock-time. Sol's household becomes the happy counter to the unhappy heterosexual pairing of Dombey and his second wife Edith; and it lays early groundwork for the ultimate pairing of Walter and Florence Dombey, another seafaring

[75] Sally Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science, and Medicine, 1840-1900* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013), 110.

couple that refuses to structure their relationship upon the same lines of capitalist investment.[76] But it also suggests alternate frameworks by which groups of people may be organized: an emotionally driven economy, rather than a financially driven one; a familial arrangement determined not by patrilineal descent, but by more removed bonds of kinship and affinity; and a focus on order that is particular and localized rather than applied across the population.

It's perhaps surprising, then, that we see so little of the Gills household after the novel's opening chapters. This dinner scene comes early in the novel, in a chapter entitled "In which some more First Appearances are made on the Stage of these Adventures." But Sol is, almost inexplicably, missing for most of book—as is Walter, presumed lost at sea, before conveniently returning to complete the unhappy novel's most idyllic marriage plot. Cuttle keeps the hearth warm, but he, too, appears only at the novel's convenience, representative of the kind of happy, quixotic home life so rare in the novel's representations. In this sense Sol's chronometer, Cuttle's silver timepiece, and little Paul's clockwork friend all suggest a hierarchy that maps not only onto, as Shuttleworth contends, differing conceptions of mental development, but also onto an ongoing tension between center and periphery.[77] Given the trajectory of clocks in Dickens's later work, *Dombey* dramatizes a turning point in his career-long struggle to think of clock-time outside the bounds of industrial capitalism. But while ceding the public sphere as a site of singular, standardized, labor-oriented time, Dickens affirms the capacity of these peripheral watch-pockets to quietly resist, and to provide shelter to characters who will not, or cannot, conform to the capitalist ideologies at the novel's center.

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[76] This is not to say that Walter and Florence are not deeply embedded in an imperial economic marketplace at novel's end. However, Dickens takes pains to present these endeavors as belonging to a different sort of marketplace. Suvendrini Perera argues that he does so by counterpoising the Paul Dombey model of capitalism with an older mercantilist approach. For more on the odd economics of *Dombey and Son*, see his "Wholesale, Retail and for Exportation: Empire and the Family Business in *Dombey and Son*," *Victorian Studies* 33, no. 4 (1990): 603-20.
[77] Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, 110.

No one would ever a mistake a watch in a nineteenth-century novel as grandiose, except perhaps to its owner. Edgeworth referred to the watch as "little," Scott, as a matter of "trifles." Sol's chronometer may be "tremendous," but it can hardly stake a claim to grandeur. Yet the watch's very smallness, its particularity, set it against many of the large-scale forces of British daily life and British fiction. It belongs, in this sense, to a feeling among realist authors that life's various trivialities were not merely metonyms for larger disagreements, but vitally significant in and of themselves—the very stuff of human contact, and the very stuff of novels. The final example to which we now turn foregrounds with remarkable consistency the minimal and the trifling, allowing the question of timing and mistiming to accrue gradually a broad thematic significance; it hews to a widespread understanding that, whatever Hume might have said on the subject, small differences in opinion concerning even the most quotidian matters are inescapable and perhaps essential components of a healthy family collective, and a socially inclusive novel. "Fate is a cunning hussy," Gaskell writes in *Wives and Daughters*, "and builds up her plans imperceptibly as a bird builds her nest; and with much the same kind of unconsidered trifles" that "[arise] every day." Routine, repetition, the cyclical acts and mundane conversations of everyday life—all, in defiance of the dramatics of plot, weigh upon the characters we have been discussing quite as much as "the hard realit[ies] of . . . hopeless woe" that seem more worthy of (readerly) attention—and these trifling matters will at last take center stage in Gaskell's final novel.[78]

III. The Other Side of Standardization: Filial Disobedience in Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*

[78] Elizabeth Gaskell, *Wives and Daughters*, ed. Pam Morris (New York: Penguin, 1996), 75 (hereafter cited in text).

"The striking six by the church clock, and the simultaneous announcement of dinner, are sounds that no one feels to be importunate."

—George Eliot, *Amos Barton*[79]

Hamley Hall

Dinner set for 6 p.m.

Attendees: Squire Roger Hamley, Mr. Osborne Hamley

A few minutes before 6 p.m. (Osborne Hamley's pretty French watch and the London Horse Guards clock); a quarter after 6 p.m. (Squire Hamley's "turnip")

A little more than a week after the unexpected death of Elizabeth Gaskell, and two months before the last completed installment of *Wives and Daughters* was released in *Cornhill* magazine, Lewis Carroll published the nineteenth century's most perennially ludic work of nonsense, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). *Alice* shares only a distant relationship with Gaskell's final novel, but it shares with that contemporaneous work a sense that the instability of time might be a way of getting at—and, for Carroll, undermining—the standards and social rituals that bind individuals together. "If you only kept on good terms with him," the Mad Hatter explains [to Alice] of Time, "he'd do almost anything you liked with the clock." This conspiracy between time and character is familiar by now: one cannot depart further from a proper, independent working of the clock than to have Time send it running from 9 a.m. (dreaded lessons) to half-past one (the much more congenial hour of dinner)—or, more crossly, make it

[79] Eliot, "The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton," in *Scenes from a Clerical Life* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1858), 1:103.

"always six o'clock . . . always tea-time."[80] Satirizing the manners, mannerisms, and imperial tendencies of British society and the British novel, Carroll extends the problem of telling time truly into a confusion of social behaviors ordered *by* time. If questioning the validity of railroad time is a perilous proposition, questioning the arrangement of mealtimes is safer terrain for thinking through the circumstances by which bodies and characters are, and ought to be, coordinated. Carroll's tea-partiers may be absurd, and intentionally so, but their gustatory predicament exists in stark contrast to the deadly croquet match that causes the tardy White Rabbit such anxiety. A watch falling into the butter dish and acquiring a few crumbs is hardly a catastrophe.

This understanding is central to *Wives and Daughters*, which systematizes the notion that people might not simply have different understandings of their shared reality, up to and including time, but that the social rituals ordered *by* clock-time might reveal a nation fundamentally out of synch with itself. Such a notion is not exclusive to Gaskell. Recounting a rural childhood in Dorsetshire, Florence Emily Hardy's *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy* (1928) is careful to note that "The 'Supper' [was] an early meal at that date, probably about four o'clock"—an ethnographic acquiescence to the presumed urbanity of readers, removed by decades and miles from Hardy's birthplace.[81] In a more humorous vein, the 1884 *Punch* article "The Hour and the Man," cautioned its gentle readers never to dine "at the absurd hour of six or half-past six," declaring: "To be before the time at dinner is to be behind your age; to be behind your age is to

[80] Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*, ed. Donald J. Gray (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013), 54-56. For a discussion of clock-time, see Gillian Beer, *Alice in Space: The Sideways Victorian World of Lewis Carroll* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2016), 28-32.

[81] Florence Emily Hardy, *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1891* (1928; Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011). Hardy compiled much of the materials from her husband's own autobiographical memoranda, as well as notes, letters, diaries, and recollected conversations.

be out of the world: to be out of the world is to be dead and buried."[82]

Punch, of course, expects the reader to laugh. But Gaskell takes seriously this absurdist logic that "to be before the time at dinner . . . is to be out of the world"—or, at least, to *feel* oneself out of the world. Like many of her fellow novelists, she set much of her later writing in a pastoral, 1830s England just beginning to experience the distant reverberations of industrialization. If factories and railroads are never glimpsed, the incursion of new ideologies, new customs, and new timekeeping technologies nevertheless continually disrupts the rituals of provincial intercourse.[83] Social rituals are, perhaps, always in motion; but the nineteenth century oversaw a significant and asymmetrical shift in the ordering of daily meals, one that intersected with complications of class, national, and generational identity.[84] The unevenness of cultural change so apparent in Hollingford, the setting of *Wives and Daughters*, finds a nicely literal counterpart in a storyworld of recurring horological unevenness. And it is the consistency with which Gaskell connects these different forms of unevenness that makes *Wives and Daughters* one of the finest and most fully realized examples of Victorian untimeliness.

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[82] "The Hour and the Man," in "Good Manners; Or, the Art of Being Agreeable. No. VI," *Punch* (June 7, 1884), 266. In classic *Punch* fashion, it juxtaposes this method of slavish adherence to fashionable dining hours with this more succinct commentary on "punctuality": "Time was made for slaves."

[83] *Cranford* (1851-53) is a famous early example of this, opening with the news that the railroad is coming to this quiet corner of England. See Poovey's seminal *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988). The title echoes the Marxist concept of "uneven and combined development," which suggests, at heart, that development does not happen unilaterally, but instead reflects the difference between local economic and cultural practices and traditions, and to exchanges between different cultures and nations.

[84] Clock-time is built into the many household manuals churned out during the century; works such as Isabella Beeton's and William Henderson's tended to include extensive time-tables for both the chores and meals of daily life and annual calendars to chart seasonal produce, best gardening practices, and even animal husbandry. See William Augustus Henderson, *The Housekeeper's Instructor, Or Universal Family Cook*, ed. Jacob Christopher Schnebbelie, 12th ed., (1800; London: J Stratford, 1805); Isabella Beeton, *Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management: A Guide to Cookery in All Branches* (1861; Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000); and Martha Jane Loftie, *The Dining-Room* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1878). I have also consulted Judith Flanders's *Inside the Victorian Home: A Portrait of Domestic Life in Victorian England* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), C. Anne Wilson's *Eating with the Victorians* (New York: Sutton, 2004), particularly her discussion of domestic time-tables; Michael Symons, *A History of Cooks and Cooking* (Urbana and Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2004); Andrea Broomfield, *Food and Cooking in Victorian England: A History* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007); and Annette Cozzi's *Discourses of Food in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

That the time of dinner as well as the timing of it was, as Judith Flanders writes, "essential," finds wide evidence in *Wives and Daughters*, which displays a keen anthropological intuition for how mealtimes intersect with stark class distinctions and pretensions.[85] As the modern workday carved out a progressively later dinner hour, dining late became a sign of a more privileged, fashionable, and capitalism-driven lifestyle.[86] The vagaries of mealtimes in British fiction present as clear a sign of the times as the railroads; and they reflect fast-moving social changes across British society. Dinner at five o'clock or, by mid-century, at six or seven, was a bourgeois norm. General Tilney's dinner in *Northanger Abbey* was understood as "modern" precisely because it was set for the late hour of 5 p.m. Decades later, Gaskell's set-in-his-ways Mr. Gibson submits only reluctantly to "this new-fangled notion of a six o'clock dinner." *Punch*, in 1884, argues strongly for 8:30 p.m., though admitting that such an hour might interfere with proper sleep.[87]

The problem of *Wives and Daughters*, then, is not just that no one knows *when* they are

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[85] Wallace, *Eating with the Victorians*, 269.

[86] Although British parliamentary and workplace regulations frequently attempted to legislate specific hours for mealtimes, and newspapers and novels debated over the proper time for meals, very little consensus gleams through. It's difficult to overstate just how diverse both the timing and terminology of meals remained in the anglophone world prior to the twentieth century. The famous heptad of hobbit meals in Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, presented in bumptiously comic terms as a throwback to old England, in fact under-samples the sheer diversity of mealtimes that have peppered the English language since the Anglo-Saxon era. (Andrea Broomfield assembles a helpful list of midday meals, including the superb "bever," "nuncheon," "nonsenchis," "nonshench," "noonshine" (apparently a favorite of Austen's) and "nooning" [Broomfield, *Food and Cooking in Victorian England*, 43]) But even amidst this semantic feast, "dinner" has a uniquely vagarious history in British history. Once located as early as 10 o'clock in the morning, it moved progressively later over the centuries. Thomas Middleton wrote in 1653 that by "dinner time, thou mean'st twelve a clock" (*The Changeling*); and by the mid-nineteenth century it was frequently located around 6 or 7 at night. However, "dinner" remained a *very* loose designation, and was further complicated by an influx of various teatimes (high, low, afternoon, and simply "tea") and by stark class distinctions. "Dinner" as a midday meal lingers among the lower classes longer than among the bourgeoisie, with "tea" taking the place of the evening meal; add in the aristocracy, who traditionally keep far later hours and might take dinner at 8 o'clock or later, and the whole thing is almost impossible to make sense of. What *does* seem to most accurately identify "dinner" is the *quantity* of food consumed; it is generally understood to be the main meal of the day, and therefore more likely to be held around midday for those undertaking manual labor. For more on food and fiction in the nineteenth century, see Michael Parrish Lee, *The Food Plot in the Nineteenth-Century British Novel* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) and Lucy McDiarmid, *Poets and the Peacock Dinner: The Literary History of a Meal* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2016).

[87] "The Hour and the Man," 266.

in time. It is, more fundamentally, that broadening cultural divides are exerting new pressure on problems of quiet temporal estrangement. Gaskell serves up the dinner hour—its timing, its lack of punctuality, and its inherent implication in signifiers of class—as a locus where these large-scale issues may be brought to life and fought over. Any number of small happenings spark the inciting event of the novel: the marriage of Mr. Gibson (lover of punctual bread-and-cheese dinners) and Mrs. Kirkpatrick (a former governess of somewhat higher social aspirations). But "the final straw," the event that sets the novel running, freeing it from the idyllic expanse of childhood and turning to the baffling reality of adulthood, is a question of dinner—a dinner that arrives late, past the set hour of 1 p.m., and when the son of the local lord has come to dine.[88] When the meal at last arrives, Mr. Gibson, in his typically stoic manner, "did not apologize directly" to Lord Hollingford. It is only later, "just as they were parting," that he excuses the lack of household punctuality: "'You see a man like me—a widower—with a daughter who cannot always be at home—has not the regulated household which would enable me to command the small portions of time I can spend there" (101).

Lord Hollingford replies: "Yet a man like you ought to be free from any thought of household cares. *You ought to have somebody*" (101, emphasis added). In short order, a new wife will be procured, a new domestic order will descend, and, most revolutionary of all, a new dinner hour will be established: the far more fashionable time of 6 o'clock.

And so does the question of a punctual dinner both initiate the novel's first major plot point and establish mealtimes as an ongoing point of contention in the rural town of Hollingford.

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[88] Gaskell doubly emphasizes this scene, referring to is as "the last drop—the final straw" (Gaskell, *Wives and Daughters*, 100; hereafter cited in text). It parallels the Hamley dinner discussed further down, in both its ramifications for the narrative and the awareness it impresses upon Mr. Gibson of the divide between himself and his fellow diner. Mr. Gibson remarks multiple times that he "dine[s] at their lunch" (61)—"their" connoting the socially superior Hamley and Cumnor families. The remark conveys a typically Gaskellian interest in how competing vocabularies extend upon class and regional divides. See Hilary Schor, *Scheherezade in the Market-Place: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992), esp. ch. 4.

The characters of *Wives and Daughters* endlessly discuss what time they will dine—"'Dinner' was it called?'" the narrator asks at one point; "Why, it was nearly eight o'clock; and preparations for bed seemed a more natural employment" (154)—in ways that divulge a bewilderment of entirely unstandardized social behavior. These discussions point us toward a world that is changing, and at a rate of change that instantiates very differently, depending on whom you look at. Despite the twelve o'clock "luncheon" at the aristocratic Towers, which opens the novel's dizzying array of mealtimes, Mr. Gibson enjoys a far humbler one o'clock "dinner." Marriage will resituate this small-town doctor amidst the trappings of the middle class, and that includes redefining the notion of "dinner," from a midday meal to a nocturnal one. The local landed gentry, in the form of the Hamleys of Hamley Hall, also enjoy a prompt six o'clock dinnertime. The Towers, more a fashionable outpost of London high society, dine at the shockingly late hour of eight.

These timely signals to dine constantly underline what the novel makes clear: that the routines, rituals, and assumptions of even so "established" and "English" a society as Hollingford ring out in resolute discordance. There persists a strong sense in *Wives and Daughters* that times are changing—and while mealtimes manifest this literally, it is equally clear that the traditional family order has also been "jarred" quite out of sync. (As witnessed by a dizzying assortment of rumored family histories, poorly understood customs, the very dialects spoken even by those living in such close proximity, the "past" is quite as fraught as the present. Do the Hamleys trace their roots to the Norman Conquest, or the Heptarchy, or pre-Roman Britain? The Squire must constantly antedate his pedigree, as the past keeps proving to be so laden with invasion and cultural hybridity.)

No one can seem to time it quite right in Gaskell. If the new Mrs. Gibson's mealtime efforts come off as mere affectation, with little eye to the comfort of anyone involved, neither do Mr. Gibson's premarital arrangements seem particularly considerate of his household. Moving dinner later in the day may mean moving "with the times," but it also accentuates how starkly modernization differs from one household to another—and, most unsettlingly, from one family member to another. Gaskell, as ever, refuses to take sides; it is enough to show that the beat of progress upsets even the seemingly simplest of propositions: when to sit down to eat, and with whom:

> for the fact was, that the late dinners which Mrs. Gibson had introduced into her own house, were a great inconvenience in the calculations of the small tea-drinkings at Hollingford. How ask people to tea at six, who dined at that hour? How, when they refused cake and sandwiches at half-past eight, how induce other people who were really hungry to commit a vulgarity before those calm and scornful eyes? So there had been a great lull of invitations for the Gibsons to Hollingford tea-parties. (441)

The dilemma here is the reaction of the professional class and petty gentry of Hollingford to Mrs. Gibson's modish "late dinners." Focalizing the narrative through the citizens of the neighborhood, Gaskell gives voice to the novel's sense of general bewilderment: not merely, *What time are we to eat?*, but *How are we even to interact with one another? Wives and Daughters* continually probes the latter question by way of the former. If Hollingford is rife with mistiming, that mistiming merely accentuates the fact that, even when characters manage to assemble themselves in a tolerably timely manner, they tend to talk past each other, to misinterpret each other, or to mishear each other entirely.

While Gaskell does not totally reject the *aims* of standardization, neither does she accept its more autocratic implications. Like Austen before her, Gaskell makes this problem of timing a *narrative* problem, accentuated by shifts from one character's perspective to another in a competition over narrative authority worthy of the attention of Alex Woloch. Constantly registering the divergence of time-telling as a divergence of opinion, *Wives and Daughters* preserves Hollingford from not just a bureaucratic overwriting of local time, but a nationalist banishing of local culture and local character. Yet within its resolutely unstandardized chronotope, *Wives and Daughters* nevertheless signals the challenges and dangers of living so totally un-attuned with one's fellows. If the initial aims of standardization were the coordination and safe transport of thousands of men, women, and children along the railways of Great Britain, then this is an aim that *Wives and Daughters* in some sense shares—even as it presents standardization as undesirable in broad social terms.

Wives and Daughters makes this tension—the desire both to affirm that people are and ought to be different from one another, and yet to model how they might coexist—central to the problem of timing. *Wives and Daughters* balances, in this sense, along one of the prime vectors of Victorian sympathy: its reliance upon the fundamental separation between reader and character, and between one individual and another. Sympathy in the Victorian realist novel was, as Rae Greiner puts it, part of an effort "to maintain a border between self and other"; it entailed a process of thinking through what relationship an individual shares with that which is not herself.[89] Simply put, sympathy in the nineteenth-century novel relied on an awareness of difference—an ever-present notion that no two objects, and no two characters, are precisely the

[89] D. Rae Greiner, "Thinking of Me Thinking of You: Sympathy Versus Empathy in the Realist Novel," *Victorian Studies* 53, no. 3 (2011): 417-26. See also her subsequent *Sympathetic Realism in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2012), as well as Adela Pinch's *Thinking About Other People in Nineteenth-Century British Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010).

same—in order to get down to the business of mediating between them; and it therefore sought to reinforce the boundaries of the self, even as it consolidated certain beliefs and epistemologies for the use of the social collective.

The literary anxiety around the smoothing out of local time thus bespeaks a more serious worry: that the universalizing impulses of the modern bureaucratic state will, in collapsing vital divides between individuals, wrest this mediatory role away from writers. Gaskell appears to enjoy the stubborn autonomy of her characters, even as she urges them toward social harmony. Indeed, this paradox is quite neatly literalized in our timekeeping topos. No less than five major characters are associated with malfunctioning or stopped watches and clocks. The new Mrs. Gibson is given a watch upon the occasion of her marriage, because her old one is constantly off-kilter. This gift fails to correct the problem, however; Cynthia Kirkpatrick will, late in the novel, liken her lack of moral code to the broken clock in the Gibsons' hallway, suggesting that the household's untimeliness and domestic disorder have endured. Over at Hamley Hall, Squire and Osborne Hamley possess watches that tell entirely different times; and the unwound dining-room clock, seemingly a product of Mrs. Hamley's death, will fail to mediate between the two.

Typically of Victorian fiction, the results of the novel's ongoing misattunement and mistiming are generally presented in lighthearted fashion. But what serves as a satirical source of domestic unease in the Gibson household takes on a more poignant guise for the Hamleys of Hamley Hall, and it is this example that I zero in on here. The pervading sense that *no one* can agree on what time dinner ought to be—or on a great many other things besides—takes on a more personal and painful dimension in the case of Squire and Osborne Hamley, a father and son who find themselves perpetually at odds.

By the time we arrive at the pivotal dinnertime exchange between Osborne and the Squire, Gaskell has already established the sanctity of 6 o'clock meals at Hamley Hall. (Molly calls it "a wearisome business, prolonged because the Squire liked it, for Mrs. Hamley seemed tired out" [Gaskell 67].) But, one "evening in the March succeeding Mrs. Hamley's death" Osborne arrives (allegedly) late to dinner, after an absence we will only learn the cause of much later. The conversation spirals into a painful confrontation between father and son, ending with the horrific accusation that Osborne has killed his mother by breaking her heart and prompting a permanent estrangement within the family. Yet it begins with the matter of what Gaskell calls, à la Scott, "the commonest trifles."[90]

The exchange begins thus:

> It was just six o'clock, and he [the Squire] went hastily into his own little business-room on the ground-floor, and, after washing his hands, came into the drawing-room feeling as if he were very late, but the room was empty. He glanced at the clock over the mantel-piece, as he tried to warm his hands at the fire. The fire had been neglected, and had gone out during the day; it was now piled up with half-dried wood, which sputtered and smoked instead of doing its duty in blazing and warming the room, through which the keen wind was cutting its way in all directions. The clock had stopped, *no one had remembered to wind it up*, but by the squire's watch it was already past dinner-time. The old butler put his head into the room, but, seeing the squire alone, he was about to draw it back, and wait for Mr. Osborne, before announcing dinner. He had hoped to do this

[90] "Trifle" is a loaded word throughout Gaskell's oeuvre, appearing in most of her novels from *Mary Barton* forward. Gaskell was, by this point in her career, a master of staging such scenes, of small, well-intentioned misunderstandings erupting into deeply hurtful volleys. "Unconsidered trifles" in *Wives and Daughters* quickly insinuate themselves into relationships that only rarely face what Mr. Gibson terms the "greater things." Indeed, it is by dint of the fact that "trifles [arise] every day" that they take on far greater consequence.

unperceived, but the squire caught him in the act.

> "Why isn't dinner ready?" he called out sharply. "It's ten minutes past six. . . . Send dinner in directly." (251, emphasis mine)

In many respects the Squire fits a familiar mold: the autocratic family patriarch, referred to more by title than by name, with a ferocious temper and a will to impose upon his adult children. The Squire is an upholder of standards—but they are feudal standards, whereby the matter of "punctuality" becomes an excuse to lord it absolutely over the household.

And yet Gaskell's description makes clear that nothing in this household has bent itself beneath the standard of the patriarch: not the clocks, not the sons, not Hamley Hall itself. It is easy to underestimate, at first, the absolute dissonance between the Squire's frenetic anxiety and its associated verbiage ("attacking Thomas . . . knocking the logs about, scattering out sparks . . . touching up the candles," and so on), and the otherwise neglected, languid atmosphere of the house itself: the fire sputtering and smoking, the wind cutting keenly through the room, and, most tellingly of all, the stopped clock no one has remembered to wind up. His attempts at exerting control merely accentuate the radical individuality of all who fall under his purview.

Gaskell is less interested in condemning these dynamics of paternal power than in examining the failure of accordance, standardization, and synchronization in this would-be despotic site of time-discipline. She trains her gaze on the apparent splintering of perspective that makes these individuals so incomprehensible to each other—an incompatibility that registers with the passage's rapid tonal shifts, between the frenzy of the Squire, the neglect of the room itself, and the "slow" movements of the elegant Osborne. And this abiding narrative sense of discordance comes to the fore in the shape of three competing timepieces: the old turnip of the Squire, which appears to have gotten somewhat ahead of itself; Osborne's ceremonious little

French watch, which he has scrupulously set to the Horse Guards' clock in London; and the unmoving clock over the mantelpiece:

> "It surely isn't six o'clock?" said Osborne, pulling out his dainty little watch. He was scarcely more unaware than it of the storm that was brewing.
>
> "Six o'clock! It's more than a quarter past," growled out his father.
>
> "I fancy your watch must be wrong, sir. I set mine by the Horse Guards only two days ago."
>
> Now, impugning that old steady, turnip-shaped watch of the Squire's was one of the insults which, as it could not reasonably be resented, was not to be forgiven. That watch had been given him by his father when watches were watches long ago. It had given the law to house-clocks, stable-clocks, kitchen-clocks—nay, even to Hamley Church clock in its day; and was it now, in its respectable old age, to be looked down upon by a little whipper-snapper of a French watch which could go into a man's waistcoat pocket, instead of having to be extricated, with due effort, like a respectable watch of size and position, from a fob in the waistband? No! not if the whipper-snapper were backed by all the Horse Guards that ever were, with the Life Guards to boot. Poor Osborne might have known better than to cast this slur on his father's flesh and blood; for so dear did he hold his watch! (252)

We might circle back to Hazlitt now, and confirm his view that the watch has not only lost its independence, but has dared to become a creature of "flesh and blood." The notion of ventriloquism, in which a human voice might invade the inner cogs and wheels of a humble watch and alter its trajectory, here becomes an altogether more bodily matter. It seems significant, for instance, that the Squire's old English "turnip" is associated with bodily strength,

while Osborne's is worn close to his too-loving and (as we shall later learn) faulty heart. No mere accessories these, no impersonal pieces of technology. Like the confusing proliferation of dining rituals and dinner hours, both Hamley watches rebut the impending reality of technological standardization, by aligning the watches with the more pressing realities of individual bodies, clashing individual worldviews, and a singular instance of familial dysfunction.

For the house itself, on the other hand, it is as if time has stood still since the death of the mistress. For it is the death of the former Mrs. Hamley that becomes the most direct source of estrangement, first between the two watches, and then, more heartbreakingly, between father and son—a divide that neither mother nor mantel-clock is alive to moderate. The absence of Mrs. Hamley née Osborne makes its presence felt in the striking culmination of this quarrel, when the Squire accuses Osborne of killing his mother. *Wives and Daughters* finds itself facing that familiar paradox at the heart of the untimely Victorian watch: for Gaskell clearly wishes to at once emphasize the radical particularity of these two men, and yet seek out forces to mediate between them. Whereas many of her fellows' fleeting treatments of the theme allow them to recruit the watch's disruptive potential, Gaskell embarks on a more prolonged engagement that balances this disruptive capacity against its potential for private coordination. Notably, she does so in ways that, even as they grapple with what we might term "large" issues of nationality, patriarchal order, and the democratization of British society, continually return us to small, intimate enclosures; if Gaskell's timepieces aspire toward some form of standardized time, or, at the very least, standardized mealtimes, they do so only in the bounds of the family.

Even this quarrel's involvement in the question of English identity occurs on the most intimate level. Indeed, the Squire's impression of English identity is itself presented as a matter

of the body. The watch is, he confirms, "'like myself . . . plain, but steady-going," as dear as "[my] father's flesh and blood" (and dearer, it seems here, than his own son).[91] This explicit understanding of time's going rate—a given watch's unique rendering of temporal truth—testifies to just how motivated Victorian untimeliness was by demands of social sympathy, grounded in a desire to accentuate the alterity of *other people*—which is something that both autocratic family patriarchs and casual readers might do well to acknowledge. The permanent estrangement between Hamley and Osborne that proceeds from this exchange reads not just as tragic, but as a logical culmination of that exchange. The watches have been all along literalizing a sense of difference, one that the Squire absolutely cannot accept within the space of the home, but that is crucial to the social project of the Victorian novel. Rejecting any national or indeed royal authority over time ("The King may go by the Horse Guards if he likes"), the Squire nonetheless sets himself up the absolute monarch of a tiny fiefdom, and rarely thinks of his sons, his wife, or his servants as separate from his own wishes and desires. As his watch "gives the law in my house," so does the Squire expect to himself "give the law" in this redoubtable sliver of old England. What disturbs him so greatly in this conflict with Osborne is the continuing intrusion upon his consciousness that Osborne is different from himself: too "girlish," too fashionable, too educated, and too representative of a world that has shifted underfoot.

It is "the contrast" between the two men that "put[s the Squire] beside himself," despite (and perhaps because of) Osborne's attempts to avoid responding in kind (253). Yet it is consciousness of this contrast, the *awareness* of difference, that stands at the heart of Gaskell's

[91] Although the nineteenth century oversaw the advent of neurology, the heart remained at the center of the corporeal imagination, thereby extending the metaphoric (and poetic) lifespan of the humanoid clock. See my third chapter for a fuller consideration of this, as well as Matthew Campbell, *Rhythm and Will in Victorian Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004) and Kirstie Blair, *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006), esp. 81-88.

untimely method. In the unabating emphasis on the body, on "flesh and blood," on hearts both sore and broken, the Squire inadvertently hits upon something vital. The awful awareness that is continually "forcing" itself upon him relates to a radical separation between himself and his once-idolized son and heir. Far from a golden extension of his own aspirations, Osborne has proven himself to be crushingly distinct from what the Squire imagined him to be—which is to say that, above and beyond his disappointments as a scholar, Osborne has materialized as a separate person, less intimately his own "flesh and blood" than the Squire once thought. The failure of timepieces within the environs to obey the rule of the prime turnip suggests a world in which forms of standardization (which is to say, of authority whether personal or neutral, feudal or modern) continually butt up against the fact of individual will, and individual character.

Thus do these watches become wrapped up in questions of blood and of reproduction, as the patriarch's attempts to enforce an ethnically and ideologically uniform family unit finds resistance at every turn. In refusing to obey an abstract notion of absolute time, untimely watches generally stretch the boundaries of the normative—what we might term "the regular"—but Gaskell places a more distinctly nationalist pressure upon them. Timepieces in this novel act as a sort of centrifuge not merely for familial disharmony, but for an enduring paranoia about "foreignness"—specifically, Frenchness—that has undermined the question of bloodlines in this English heartland. As questions abound about the possible French blood of any number of people—not least our heroine, Molly Gibson—Osborne's pretty French watch, like Osborne's heart, points us toward the true source of French invasion: the young Mrs. Osborne Hamley, poor, foreign, and Catholic.

Indeed, although we don't yet know it, this hidden alteration to the very bloodline of Hamley Hall (dating back to Conqueror and beyond, we are assured) underpins the entire

quarrel—for Osborne, as we learn at the start of this passage, has "been from home," and it is his refusal to comment on his absence that has left the Squire aggrieved and "sore-hearted" going into this disastrous meal. In a bitter quarrel about discordant watches and disastrously divergent perspectives, the phantom of Aimée, Osborne's secret wife, underscores the reality of English identity as one that is, and always has been, a matter of scandalous intermarriage and persistent cultural hybridity. The shadowy presence of both the late Mrs. Hamley and the new one also underscores an essential parallel, present throughout the scene, between timepieces and hearts. For it appears that, no less than the out-of-time, discordant, and simply stopped clocks that proliferate across the pages of this novel, hearts aren't working properly either. The "sore-hearted" Squire Hamley accuses his son of "near to break[ing] her [Mrs. Hamley's] heart" (Gaskell 253); and Osborne is, unbeknownst to either man, suffering from a malfunctioning heart that will doom any future reconciliation. This dinner scene is, in fact, the last significant interaction they will share in the novel. In this alignment between the tick of the clock and the beat of the heart, Gaskell suggests not merely that time is all ajar; she suggests something more essential is malfunctioning.

It is not, in the end, surprising that Gaskell is taking the society of Hollingford to task for not loving each other well enough. Readers and critics alike have found her tendency to retreat from large social ills to the bound of a single family, a single relationship, a small collection of individuals, rather maddening. Such criticisms are not unfounded, but in this instance they threaten to overlook the important ideological work Gaskell is performing, in recasting the standardizing impulses of a *national* railroad time in such nationally composite and blatantly emotional terms. For the family is legible as a microcosm. In a century obsessed with the "big"—the forces of the market, the deep time of geology and evolution, the long sweep of

history—her untimely watches record the reverberations of seismic cultural shifts in the more intimate enclosures of the family home and the individual heart. At novel's end (or near-end; the novel is famously unfinished) waits a vision of hard-won familial attunement: the Squire welcoming Osborne's widow and their half-French son into the venerable holding of Hamley Hall. Imagining a world in which the large-scale does not simply overwhelm the particular, in which a collective national identity suddenly overwrites the factions it encompasses, and in which novels carefully apportion the telling of their own time among many constituents, Gaskell advances the notion of a *little* timeliness—a timeliness that is neither entirely individualized, nor entirely autocratic in its effects, undergirding a world in which the idiosyncrasies and follies of both technology and people may find accommodation.

* * *

Coda

"Each Life Apart from Each": Hardy, Einstein, and the Comic Universe of Relative Time

> "Very broadly by the 1920s, both physicists and philosophers recognized that Einstein's question, *What is time?* set a standard for scientific concepts that demanded something more finite, more humanly accessible than Newton's metaphysical, absolute time. Einstein himself suggested that he had drawn an effective philosophical sword against absolute time from the eighteenth-century critical work of David Hume."
>
> —Peter Galison, *Einstein's Clocks*[92]

[92] Galison, *Einstein's Clocks*, 26; emphasis added.

Early in the new century, Thomas Hardy cast what might be understood as a critical eye on the debates of the previous eras: the question of time's independence, its particularity, its ability to remain personal and local—and the duty liberal-minded writers felt to preserve and promote that vision. "Hold what ye list, fond unbelieving Sprites," declares *The Dynasts*' pitiless Spirit of the Years. "You cannot swerve the pulsion of the Byss, / Which thinking on, yet weighing not Its thought, / Unchecks Its clock-like laws." The vast theater of war Hardy stages in *The Dynasts* (1904-08)—an "epic-drama" of Napoleonic Europe—hinges continuously upon the belief of various human actors (none more than the Emperor) that "self-ord[inance]" is possible, that individual bodies remain distinct from each other, and that time itself might bend to the will of a particularly determined actor. This "naive and liberal creed" is continually negated, however, by the spirits who lurk in the margins of the text and hover above the continent: figures of time, pity, rumor, irony, and sinisterness. Viewed from this "overworldly" vantage, Europe reveals itself as one, indivisible "organism": a prone body, wracked with pain, whose constituent parts have "forg[otten] the Prime Mover of the year / As puppet-watchers him who pulls the strings" of this gruesome *danse macabre*. Though "Earth's jackaclocks [may appear] to be / Not fugled by one Will, but function-free," the Prime Mover of Paley and his predecessors remains alive and well in this world.[93] Freedom is merely illusory.

The Dynasts' "queer mechanics"—this "gory clockwork" that never moves quite fast enough for Napoléon, no matter how often his subordinates assure him that the hour is correct[94]—rehearse through a glass darkly the liberal, individualistic vision of clock-time

[93] Thomas Hardy, *The Dynasts: An Epic-Drama of the War with Napoleon* (Kessinger Publishing, 2004; reprint of First Pocket ed., 1924), 1-6. "Jackaclock" derives from the late-medieval "jack of the clock." Historically, it referred to either the automaton (generally the small figure of a man) or, occasionally, an actual person charged with striking the bell on the outside of a clock. The term helpfully muddles the boundaries between man, clockwork, and puppetry which Hardy begins to develop in the Fore Scene.
[94] Hardy, *The Dynasts*, 245.

developed across the nineteenth-century realist novel. The novel's adherence to "Each life apart from each, with power to mete / Its own day's measures; balanced, self complete" is here rejected by Hardy in favor of a more nihilistic universe. Yet a curious development occurred just as Hardy was publishing *The Dynasts*; the centuries-long pursuit of absolute time was running into a new roadblock. Albert Einstein's 1905 paper "On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies"—better known as the special theory of relativity—appeared a year after *The Dynasts*' first installment was released. In this work and in the subsequent decade, as Einstein developed his theory of general relativity, clocks were understood to work quite otherwise than Isaac Newton had imagined more than two centuries prior. Clocks in motion slowed their ticking; gravity tugged at them, and movement confused attempts to perceive synchronicity. As Peter Galison puts it, "In Einstein's electrotechnical world, there was no place for . . . a 'universally audible tick-tock' that we call time, no way to define time meaningfully to a definite system of linked clocks. . . . 'Times' replace 'time.' With that shock, the sure foundation of Newtonian physics cracked."[95]

By sheer dint of longevity, Hardy proved to be the only major Victorian novelist who engaged with this new universe of relative time—although he did so primarily in poetry. "Your 'Now' is just a gleam, a glide / Across your gazing sense," he wrote in "The Absolute Explains," from the 1925 collection *Human Shows, Far Phantasies, Songs and Trifles*. "In fine, Time is a mock . . . . Yet hath he been believed in much, / Though lately, under stress, / Of science, less" (lines 11-12; 70-74). Despite being a frequent reader of Einstein's work, Hardy was not entirely pleased by the new developments in physics. "The universe seems to be getting too comic for

[95] Galison, *Einstein's Clocks*, 13. See also Wai-chee Dimock's "Nonbiological Clock: Literary History Against Newtonian Mechanics," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 1 (2003): 153-77, which also takes on the question of synchronicity and simultaneity and pits it against epic poetry—in this case, William Blake's.

words," he wrote to J. Ellis McTaggart of Einstein's claims.[96] His 1925 collection saw Hardy revising the old poetic understanding of devouring time—and yet mourning its loss, the forfeiture of the tragic sublimity conjured in *The Dynasts*:

> So, Time,
>
> Royal, sublime;
>
> Heretofore held to be
>
> Master and enemy,
>
> . . . The sound philosopher
>
> Now sets him to aver
>
> You are nought
>
> But a thought
>
> Without reality.
>
> ("So, Time," lines 1-11)

Strangely, the notion that time might prove "nought / But a thought" runs counter to the entire argument of time in *The Dynasts*—and yet it confirms the convictions of its prime actors, and sustains the sense of temporal anxiety that runs through most of Hardy's earlier oeuvre. If Hardy laments the loss of the nineteenth-century universe—a universe that, not so long ago, was educing similarly existential questions from the Victorian poets—it is striking that "relativity" is precisely what nineteenth-century novelists were actively developing in their fiction.[97]

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[96] Lennart A. Björk's *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy* offers a good snapshot of Hardy's collection of Einstein-related material, and gathers other literary intersections (poetic, epistolary, and otherwise) between the two. See Björk, ed., *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy* (London: Macmillan, 1985), esp. 2:544n2449, which includes this line from Hardy's 1919 letter to J. Ellis McTaggart. See also Adelene Buckland, "Physics, Geology, Astronomy," in *Thomas Hardy in Context*, ed. Phillip Mallett (Cambridge: Univ. of Cambridge Press, 2013), 242-52.

[97] Christopher Herbert has presented relativity as an important Victorian counterpart to the rise of objectivity, rehearsing, as John Stuart Mill put it, "the struggle between Liberty and Authority." Herbert presents Victorian relativity as both "inherently paradoxical," struggling to balance harmony and conflict, and yet imaginatively

Synchronized time would endure in practical and administrative terms, but Einstein had offered an imaginative "out" which corresponded, with strange precision, to the physics of nineteenth-century novels.

Hardy in this respect offers a convenient resting place for this chapter, as he imitated, ironized, rejected, and was then forcibly reconciled with the essential relativity of time that so dominated nineteenth-century fiction. Whereas *The Dynasts* finds a strange cosmic reassurance in war's grotesque adherence to a clockwork universe, at least nominally reducing its characters to mere puppetry, the younger Hardy committed himself to a more distinctly disordered and polytemporal England, and a more individualist vision of character.[98] The phenomenon of localized time is a consistently comic through-line in his tragically comic universe. Indeed, it offered the inspiration for the first article he published, at the age of 16: "The Trinity Clock scorns the society of its neighbour St. Peter's, and obstinately refuses to keep company with it; while the South-street Clock has an infinite contempt for both, and keeps on its own course; but whether it determines the hour of the day by the sun, or by railway time, or by a system of its own, it is impossible to tell. Now, in the midst of such perversity, what can the public do?"[99]

Much of Hardy's unruly clock-time sounds like this: distinctly arch, strongly personified, apt to puncture the rural beauty and social darkness dominating his fiction. The fifth chapter of *The Return of the Native* (1878), for instance, begins with a litany of unsynchronized clocks, helpfully voiced by the local mummers. "Twenty minutes after eight by the Quiet Woman, and

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appealing for nineteenth-century thinkers (*Victorian Relativity: Radical Thought and Scientific Discourse* [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2001], 61).

[98] See Note 102 for a discussion of the layered temporal metrics of Hardy's novels.

[99] Accounts of this "ditty" are somewhat confused. Michael Millgate notes in his critical biography—based on Hardy's own, mostly self-authored biography published under his wife's name—that no one has been able to confidently identify the item (*Thomas Hardy: A Biography Revisited* [Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004, 54-55). Purportedly published anonymously, the piece was written as an epistle to the dearly departed Dorchester Alms-House Clock, which had been taken away for cleaning. Qtd. in Milligate, 54. See also Ferguson, *Victorian Time*, 57.

Charlie not come," one mummer announces, to which another responds, "Ten minutes past by Blooms-End." A third chimes in, "It wants ten minutes to, by Grandfer Cantle's watch," and then a fourth rounds out the chorus: "And 'tis five minutes past by the captain's clock." This fact is not greeted with anything like dismay. Unlike "The Absolute Explains," the poem Hardy composed nearly five decades later,

> on Egdon there was no absolute hour of the day. The time at any moment was a number of varying doctrines professed by the different hamlets, some of them having originally grown up from some common root, and then become divided by secession, some having been alien from the beginning. West Egdon believed in Bloom's-End time, East Egdon in the time of the Quiet Woman Inn. Grandfer Cantle's watch had numbered many followers in years gone by, but since he had grown older faiths had shaken. . . . . Having gathered hither from scattered points each came with his own tenets on early and late; and they waited a little longer as a compromise. [100]

This passage captures something that is, I think, both essential to Hardy's treatment of independent time and illuminating of the Victorian novel as a whole. It affirms above all that time is a matter of *belief*—"varying doctrines" that evolved through time and history, attracting and losing followers with the passing years. Like Gaskell's Hollingford, whose confused location in time reflects a permanent state of clashing cultures, Egdon here rejects a bucolic past of shared belief only lately disrupted by new incursions. Secession and alienation are quite as likely as any "common root" to explain the development of these distinct temporal tenets. What divides Egdon from the uniform world of railway time, however, is the built-in impulse, shared by the mummers, first to compare their local hours and then to compromise on the difference by

[100] Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1922), 152.

"wait[ing] a little longer."

Hardy cultivates this local chronography in conjunction with the "horizons and landscapes" of Wessex, a territory he "disinterred" in order to support this "series of novels . . . mainly of the kind called local."[101] And he put some effort into developing local times as well as local towns and counties.[102] The singular mock-Time that "hath . . . been believed in much" threatens distantly, in the form of far-off cities, spreading railroad tracks, and watches with "imperial interests."[103] Yet until the very last Wessex novels, "times" remains permanently plural, and belief is thrown over for beliefs. Triangulating the hour between the various church-clocks, inn-clocks, mantle-clocks and watches of Wessex, Hardy sketches a dense system of beliefs that, while rooted in religious and civic landmarks, do not precisely adhere to either; beliefs that, moreover, are seen to evolve, to refuse conformity, and to encourage compromise. Bypassing the simple question of whether time is true or false, Hardy repositions time as a matter of personal conviction, tempered by the acknowledgment that one might be wrong—and he parallels many of these negotiations, consultations, and social leniencies with the characters' need to test their own views against their fellows, to question the veracity of their interpretations

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[101] Hardy, "Preface," in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, vol. 3 of *The Works of Thomas Hardy in Thirty-Seven Volumes* (1895; London: Macmillan and Co., 1919), v.

[102] Despite his stated interest in mapping the local, the concept of local time(s) in Hardy's fiction, and local clock-times at that, has received comparatively little notice from scholars. Readers have of course long puzzled over the role of time writ large in the Wessex novels; but this is often read along a straightforward binary, the seasonal and biological sense of time being progressively worn away by a mechanical, urban counterpart. "Local" time, in this reading, is thus distinct from clock-time, encompassing instead cycles of growing, reaping, and rest, as well as liturgical calendars. A closer reading of Hardy's clock-time, however, reveals a complex and symbolically significant layering of temporal metrics, rather than a desire to return to a purely bucolic past. Telling time *in*correctly in Wessex is as likely to result in catastrophe as telling it correctly; and even the cheerfully unsynchronized time of *The Return of the Native* reflects the density of historical alliances and conflicts. Among the recent scholars who have best captured this temporal complexity, Trish Ferguson's chapter in her own edited collection, *Victorian Time*, makes the strongest argument for Hardy's "relative" time, and sketches an excellent trajectory of changes in timekeeping technology over the course of the Wessex novels. See also Kevin Ireland's comments on notions of "the relativity of time" in Hardy's novels: "By Sword or by Crook: Cross-Plotting in *Far from the Madding Crowd*," in *Thomas Hardy, Time and Narrative: A Narratological Approach to his Novels* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 37-53.

[103] Hardy, *Far From the Madding Crowd* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1874), 295 (hereafter cited in text).

of the world.

We might go so far as to say that Hardy's timekeepers ask their adherents to weigh the proclaimed convictions of their fellows—to not merely to ask whether they *agree* with those convictions, but also to question whether they are telling the truth *about* those convictions. In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, the novel that made Hardy a household name in 1874, Gabriel Oak receives Bathsheba's assurances of Frank Troy's faithful church-going "with utter incredulity": "This supreme instance of Troy's goodness fell upon Gabriel's ears like the thirteenth stroke of a crazy clock . . . [and] threw a doubt on all the assurances that had preceded it" (321-22). The errant clock solicits the exercise of doubt; and doubt is, of course, a counterpart of belief, a process of testing the doctrines held. There is a suggestion, however haphazard, that Hardy's "crazy clocks" are pedagogically valuable for the residents of Wessex.[104] In revealing difference they encourage comparison and, as necessary, accommodation or doubt. They are modeling, in other words, sympathy; and Oak, at least, seems to comprehend the lesson.[105]

While *Return of the Native* has a preponderance of clocks, *Far From the Madding Crowd* thinks more intimately of watches and the characters who bear them. Oak and Troy, romantic rivals for Bathsheba Everdene's hand, are both in possession of inherited watches. The contrast sets up a dialogic, almost dialectic model of watches associated, on the one hand, with capitalism, commerce, and imperialism, and on the other, with kinship and a more precarious

[104] That clocks might be "crazy," a descriptor closely related to the discussion about clock's ability to testify truthfully to the time, was a notion already well circulated by Wordsworth's "The Fountain," with its "witty rhymes / About the crazy old church-clock, / And the bewildered chimes." Hazlitt quotes the passage in "On a Sun-dial"; and it also features prominently in Richard Parkinson's *The Old Church Clock*, which notes: "How apt is the youthful mind to put a portion of its own overflowing life even into inanimate things. And what dead thing is so like a living one as a clock?" Parkinson, *The Old Church Clock* (Manchester: Simms and Dinham, 1843), 93-94.
[105] Suzanne Keen has argued persuasively that by *The Dynasts* Hardy is embracing something closer to empathy, "testif[ying] to the way the inner experience feels, even if the human agents cannot understand the reason for their actions." Keen, "Empathetic Hardy: Bounded, Ambassadorial, and Broadcast Strategies of Narrative Empathy," *Poetics Today* (2011): 352.

economic situation. In some sense, this depiction of rival timekeepers succinctly weds the problem of character to the problem of the *use* of chrono-technology, in the same way that Hardy's Romantic- and Victorian-era predecessors were assembling "hierarchies of temporalities," as Shuttleworth suggests in her reading of *Dombey and Son*. Indeed, the romantic rivals map quite neatly onto the dynamic I have been charting. Troy is cold, avaricious, linguistically adept, and utterly "regular" in appearance; and his watch "has regulated imperial interests in its time—the stately ceremonial, the courtly assignation, pompous travels, and lordly sleeps" (295).[106] Its very description is punctually regular in its phrasing, and its owner is, ultimately, quite as imperial in his marital practices as the watch in its interests.[107]

But the second watch, owned by Bathsheba's final romantic partner Gabriel Oak, is conversely "peculiar." The nonsensical descriptions of its untimely impracticality, as we shall see in a moment, pushes the mimetic boundaries of realism, all as if to call attention to Oak and watch alike as fictional creations, delightful in their fictionality. Its manifest incredibility puts pressure on the concept of belief that Hardy conjures again and again in his writing on clock-time. If Hardy is often remembered for bleak realism, the comic interludes of relative time throughout his novels seem to belong to a pastoral mode, a more exaggerated and consciously stylized counterpart to the central plot. Verging at times on caricature, Oak is presented as more linguistically fragmented than the smooth Troy. And yet it is Oak who models a ceaseless

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[106] In the manuscript of *Far From the Madding Crowd*, this passage differs significantly, in keeping with significant differences made to Troy's character between manuscript and publication:

> It is an unusually good one for a man like me to possess, he quietly said. It was my poor father's. He was a medical man and always used it among his patients. The tick of that watch has run races with a thousand illustrious pulses in its time. It was all the fortune he left me. (Rosemarie Morgan, *Cancelled Words: Rediscovering Thomas Hardy* [New York: Routledge, 2002], 26)

[107] In Henry Charles Duffin's 1916 study of the Wessex novels, he goes so far as to object to Troy's too-mechanical convenience in the text: "An ancient, obvious and elementary use is made of the *deus ex machina*," he writes of Troy's role in the denouement. "Being supposed dead, he reappears at the critical moment with the precision of a stop-watch." See Duffin, *Thomas Hardy: A Study of the Wessex Novels* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1916), 31.

interrogation of his environment, deciding when and how much to believe in the account offered by other actors.[108] The resulting image is one of tolerance—to a point—but also of comparison. The acts of comparison occasioned by time's indeterminacy are finally understood as valuable ways of approaching life more generally; and the careful Oak makes for a far better reader of character than Bathsheba. She, upon receiving Troy's proclamation of love and his more regulated watch in one breath, hears Troy's intonation as one "of such exquisite fidelity to nature that it was evidently not all acted now"—never mind that his seriousness was both "less than she imagined" and "more than he imagined himself." Troy remains somewhat opaque to both himself and his future wife, with disastrous consequences.

Oak's relationship with the absurd watch, on the other hand, resembles a form of sympathetic reading, forever measured against different reference points:

> Mr. Oak carried about him, by way of watch, what may be called a small silver clock; in other words, it was a watch as to shape and intention, and a small clock as to size. This instrument being several years older than Oak's grandfather, had the peculiarity of going either too fast or not at all. The smaller of its hands, too, occasionally slipped round on the pivot, and thus, though the minutes were told with precision, nobody could be quite certain of the hour they belonged to. The stopping peculiarity of his watch Oak remedied by thumps and shakes, and he escaped any evil consequences from the other two defects by constant comparisons with and observations of the sun and stars, and by pressing his face close to the glass of his neighbours' windows, till he could discern the hour marked

[108] As Donald Eastman argues, "Gabriel Oak *always knows what time it is*—is continually interested in knowing the time, and is willing to take considerable pains to make the necessary calculations or physical effort . . . required for time-telling." See Eastman, "Time and Propriety in *Far From the Madding Crowd*," *Interpretations* 10, no. 1 (1978): 23, and Anna Henchman, "Hardy's Stargazers and the Astronomy of Other Minds," *Victorian Studies* 51, no. 1 (2008): 37-68.

> by the green-faced timekeepers within. It may be mentioned that Oak's fob being difficult of access, by reason of its somewhat high situation in the waistband of his trousers (which also lay at a remote height under his waistcoat), the watch was as a necessity pulled out by throwing the body to one side, compressing the mouth and face to a mere mass of ruddy flesh on account of the exertion required, and drawing up the watch by its chain, like a bucket from a well. (3-4)[109]

This passage's delightful absurdity obscures at first, with a rare bit of readerly laughter, just how meticulous Oak's attempts to determine the time are. Yet, practically speaking, the watch's material absurdity *occasions* its owner's process of comparison. First it must be established if the watch is indeed a watch or a small clock; and then it must be determined which hands can or cannot be believed; after which, the hour-hand must be shaken and thumped and then, for good measure, constantly compared with both the sun and stars and his neighbors' "green-faced timekeepers" (plural). Troy's imperial watch may be the more accurate of the two timepieces; but Oak, in having to constantly verify when he is in time, has the advantage of thinking more cautiously and humanely of his surroundings. Upholding by extension the capacity of "each life apart from other . . . to mete / Its own day's measures," he affirms the comic universe that Hardy later bemoaned to McTaggert.

More than that, Oak limns an active and ongoing relationship of timepieces and characters on the one hand, and texts and their readers on the other, that very much resembles the

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[109] The passage is strikingly similar to a scene in Dickens's horological frame narrative *Master Humphrey's Clock*, in which Mr. Weller is described "unbuttoning the three lower buttons of his waistcoat and pausing for a moment to enjoy the easy flow of breath consequent upon this process," then "la[ying] violent hands upon his watch-chain, and slowly and with extreme difficulty [drawing] from his fob an immense double-cased silver watch, which brought the lining of the pocket with it, and was not to be disentangled but by great exertions and an amazing redness of face." Then, "having applied the watch to his ear to ascertain that it was still going, [he] gave it some half-dozen hard knocks on the table to improve its performance." *Master Humphrey's Clock*, vol. 1 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1840), 100. See my third chapter for more on this text.

mutually reinforcing dynamic between belief and doubt. Indeed, these breaks in the "real" are cast as vital parts of our enjoyment of realist literature. The small disturbance to the universe that Einstein's research opened up toward the end of Hardy's life already existed, in some real sense, within the Victorian imagination. From Austen to Scott to Dickens, Oliphant, Thackeray, and Gaskell, relativity had come to define the time of realism; and if authors had defended the territory of fiction against the regulations of the real world, the value they had located in leaving room for doubt proved unusually prescient.

Six at Dawn

"A-Throb to Feel out for the Mutual Time": Poetic Labor in the Age of the Industrious Clock

> "What a dead thing is a clock, with its ponderous embowelments of lead and brass, its pert or solemn dulness of communication, compared with the simple altar-like structure and silent heart-language of the old dial! . . . . If [the sun-dial's] business-use be superseded by more elaborate inventions, its moral uses, its beauty, might have pleaded for its continuance. It spoke of moderate labours, of pleasures not protracted after sunset, of temperance, and good hours."
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> —Charles Lamb, "The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple," 1821[1]

Mortal my mate, bearing my rock-a-heart
Warm beat with cold beat company, shall I
Earlier or you fail at our forge, and lie
The ruins of, rifled, once a world of art?
The telling time our task is; time's some part,
Not all, but we were framed to fail and die—
One spell and well that one. There, ah thereby
Is comfort's carol of all or woe's worst smart.

Field-flown, the departed day no morning brings
Saying 'This was yours' with her, but new one, worse,

[1] Charles Lamb, "The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple," in the *London Magazine* 4 (1821): 279-84; later republished in *Essays of Elia* (1823).

And then that last and shortest.

—Gerard Manley Hopkins, "To His Watch" (c. 1885-86)[2]

This chapter concerns the relationship between the linear temporality of labor and that temporally indeterminate state of being, *inspiration*, out of which poetic labor springs and which it is continually hoping to call into being. The Victorian likening of literary inspiration (and inspiration's result, composition) to urban, industrial patterns of timed labor is something we are by now used to discussing in reference to serial novels. Seriality by necessity imposes exacting writing habits upon its composers; and for the Victorians it aroused an inescapable sense that the modern novel was also a sort of timekeeper, appearing on regularly scheduled occasions in the life of the reader and producing, on schedule, feelings of pleasure, anxiety, suspense, and sympathy. But this notion of timed inspiration is rarely talked about as a model for poetry. Even the most prodigious Victorian poets labored under somewhat different conditions from their novelist counterparts; their work was not beholden to the same ruthlessly regimented publication schedule; and poetic composition, which is difficult to quantify in terms of words per minute or pages per hour, seems at first glance correspondingly removed from the patterns of timed labor that would organize daily life in the industrial age.

Yet Victorian poets were too used to observing methodical work—not just outside their windows but in books, paintings, and newspaper illustrations devoted to documenting "the signs of the times"—not to start perceiving their labor and, ultimately, their verse through the same lens. Edmund Gosse, writing of Coventry Patmore's difficulty in marshaling inspiration on

[2] Gerard Manley Hopkins, "To His Watch," in *The Major Works*, ed. Catherine Phillips (1986; Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 171. Note: there is some debate about whether this word in the third line is "forge" or "force." I have gone with the former, which seems closer to the first version of this line, "Earlier, undone give o'er our work and lie." See Phillips, "The Effects of Incompleteness in Three Hopkins Poems," *Renascence* 42, no. 1-2 (1989-1990): 27.

command, declared, "Other poets of his age, notably Tennyson and Browning, made poetry their business. They forced the ecstasy they felt into the channels of their art, and mastered it, instead of allowing it to master them."[3] The increasingly clock-timed account of poetic creation we find in the Victorian period, as poets tugged inspiration away from an unpredictable event to one that might be planned for and even reproduced on cue through certain habits of labor, is therefore not entirely surprising. It reflects a typical Victorian belief in the moral import of steady work and self-discipline, and the ability of man to exert control over his material circumstances through the management of time.[4] "Time-discipline," a concept brought to the fore by E. P. Thompson in 1967, long predated the Victorians; but it rose to new prominence in the late eighteenth century, pairing a Protestant belief in the value of discipline and hard work with the growing demands of industrial capitalism.[5] The by-now tired idioms of "wasting" or "spending" time, being "on" or "off" the clock, using one's time wisely or, conversely, "stealing an hour" from one's

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[3] Edmund Gosse, *Coventry Patmore* (1904; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1905), 214.

[4] The most prominent Victorian word on the subject of can-do individualism is Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help; With Illustrations of Character and Conduct* (London: John Murray, 1859). Gregory Anderson's 1973 book *Victorian Clerks* (Manchester, UK: Univ. of Manchester Press, 1973) describes the emphasis in the white-collar work world on "punctuality, cheerfulness, respect, and . . . industry," noting that "unpunctuality . . . implied 'a species of dishonesty not to give the full time you were paid'" (78). This individualist notion of social mobility through self-improvement (and the anxiety this notion induced) had another counterpart in the expanding bureaucratic arm of the modern British state, domestically and across the empire. See, for instance, Elaine Hadley, "On a Darkling Plain: Victorian Liberalism and the Fantasy of Agency," *Victorian Studies* 48, no. 1 (2005): 92-102; David Malachuk, *Perfection, the State, and Victorian Liberalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Anne Frey's *British State Romanticism: Authorship, Agency, and Bureaucratic Nationalism* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2010); Chris Vanden Bossche, *Reform Acts: Chartism, Social Agency, and the Victorian Novel, 1832-1867* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2014); and, of particular interest to this discussion, Matthew Campbell's *Rhythm and Will in Victorian Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), which examines the translation of Romantic spontaneity into Victorian efforts at (and failures of) control; and Peter McDonald's *Sound Intentions: The Workings of Rhyme in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012), which examines the interplay of habit and will in Wordsworth's writings.

[5] E. P. Thompson's "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past & Present* 38 (Dec. 1967): 56-97. See also early work on this topic from William James's *The Principles of Psychology* (London: Macmillan, 1891), esp. his chapters on habit and automaton-theory (104-44), time-relations (199-202), and on the perception of time (605-42); and especially Lewis Mumford, *Technics & Civilization* (1932; Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2010). Alexis McCrossen, *Marking Modern Times: A History of Clocks, Watches, and Other Timekeepers in American Life* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2013), and Joseph Bizup, *Manufacturing Culture: Vindications of Early Victorian Industry* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2003), esp. ch. 1, "One Co-Operative Body: The Rhetoric of the Factory System" (18-50), have both offered more recent analyses of mechanized discipline.

responsibilities, emerged from a culture in which time was obsessively managed.[6] Setting one's activities to the clock signified not merely a care for money earned or lost, but a morally inflected industriousness to match this industrial age.

For the poets discussed in this chapter, these new conditions could not but shape their approach to writing. Marian Bradley, wife of a public school headmaster, wrote in 1868 of Tennyson professing "a longing . . . for regular work." "Mr. Tennyson told us how much better he felt spiritually, mentally, and bodily, while engaged on some long poem . . . . He said to my husband: 'I envy you your life of hard, regular, useful, important work."[7] This last remark might signify some self-depreciation. But however Tennyson may have intended it, it is undeniable that the Victorian obsession with omnipresent and "regular" work, offered up a relentless mirror

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[6] While there has always been some sense of time as a resource, it becomes increasingly codified under modern capitalism. Nicholas Barbon's *A Discourse Concerning Coining the New Money* (London: Richard Chiswell, 1696), for instance, advanced the notion that "every man that works, is paid for his time; and the more there are employ'd in a Nation, the richer the Nation grows" (41). A century later, Benjamin Franklin's "Advice to a Young Tradesman" established one of the more famous idioms of this new capitalist time, exhorting his young friend to "remember that *time* is money. He that can earn ten shillings a day by his labour, and goes abroad, or sits idle one half of that day, though he spends but sixpence during his diversion or idleness, ought not to reckon *that* the only expence; he has really spent, or rather thrown away, five shillings besides" (Franklin, "Advice to a Young Tradesman," in *Works of the late Doctor Benjamin Franklin* [Dublin: Wogan, Byrne, Moore, and Jones, 1793], 188). A surge of idioms and expressions related to the spending and wasting of time accordingly enter the English language during the long nineteenth century. The expression "time-saving" enters the *OED* in 1783; "time's a-wasting" and its variants enter American English in the late nineteenth century ("time," def. p4.l, *OED*). Expressions concerned with the "wasting" of time also slowly lose the sense of "waste" as something that time *does* ("time wastes," "the season wasted apace"), and come to almost exclusively situate time as a resource to *be* used, spent, or wasted. Wolfgang Schivelbusch's *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (1977; Oakland: Univ. of California Press, 2014) links this industrialization of time to technology's disciplinary character: "Technology is an expression of external domination: by means of technological constructs (machines) nature's powers and materials become disciplined to produce cultural, i.e. economic achievements" (168). This sense of time also crossed into advice for women and girls on the employment of their time (see below, in my discussion of *Aurora Leigh*). For more on the way modern time management has factored into larger systems of discipline and control, see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977), and *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1972), particularly its discussion of "time-scales"; Cynthia L. Negrey, *Work Time: Conflict, Control, and Change* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012); Nichole Marie Shippen, *Decolonizing Time: Work, Leisure, and Freedom* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Vanessa Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time, 1870-1950* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2015); and Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (1989; Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2014), which emphasizes how time came to be viewed not just "as a commodity to economized or squandered," but also "to be oriented to the regular beat of machines . . . . bells and clocks" (250).

[7] Marian Bradley, Jan. 25, 1868, letter, in Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir* (1897; New York, 1905), 2:51.

to writers engaged in more "inspired" labor. Victorians were readier to trade the sudden dawnings and unheralded breezes of Romantic lore for some degree of control over the rate and production of poetry. The Victorian timed quantification of poetic labor risks coming off as the knee-jerk reaction of a genre under siege. Yet in a century in which poetry was engaged in an existential struggle over its cultural centrality, the efforts to cultivate a more habit-driven writing process expose a feeling that poetry could not survive if it continued to emphasize its fundamental separation from the forms of machinery and automation now providing the Western world's rhythmic underpinning.

The step from practice to subject-matter, from real-world writing habits to the poetic representation of them, was easily and, it seems, simultaneously taken. If numerical units of time, not just the gradient temporalities of dawn, dusk, and night, would increasingly organize poetic output, then the relationship between poetry and the industrial clock needed to be conceived anew: not as antithetical representatives of two very different forms of labor, but as analogous mechanisms, mutually narrating the times. The rise of clock-timed poetry thus unfolds along lines similar to the timed serial novel. Initially emerging from the material conditions of labor, Victorian poets' heightened awareness of the formal proximity between clock-time and verse mechanisms—meter, rhyme, and stanza forms—infiltrated first poetry's accounts of its own creation and ultimately, in the hands of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the grander timescale of poetic history, from the initiating flush of the Homeric epic to the nocturnal hours of medieval verse to the slow tick toward a second poetic golden age.

The curious mobility of this language of clockwork—which became at once a "friend" to the toiling writer, a "teller" in its own right, a shorthand for the internal "mechanisms" of novel, lyric, and epic, and an emblem of literature's development from one century to the next—might

come off as merely a superficial, industrial-age revision of Pope's "Nature Methodiz'd," "restrain'd / By the same Laws which first herself ordain'd."[8] This chapter pushes back against such a reading. Victorian efforts to imagine forms of literary labor that are at once inspired and carefully timed are, correspondingly, efforts to imagine how carefully timed labor might be made more humane—that is, how timed labor might be oriented away from a simple system of profit and gain, production and distribution, and used to reaffirm the worth of things that are not easily quantifiable: sympathy, reflectiveness, social connectivity, and, of course, art itself. If nineteenth-century literature expanded upon an inherited vocabulary of literature's horological properties, that expansion was motivated in some sense *by* changing conditions of labor, which literature's hybrid status was in an ideal position to critique. Similar motivations lie behind the development of "relative time" in the realist novel, as discussed in my second chapter. But where relative time concerns the social arrangements of human beings vis-à-vis each other, the cases I consider here are more forcefully interested in a reconciliation between the individual and the instruments of industrial labor. Borrowing a phrase from Barrett Browning, I call these efforts of reconciliation a "feeling out for the mutual time": born out of painstaking attention to the heard and felt rhythms of the modern age, and relying on a learnt perception of the shared rhythms that undergird the forward movement of human, clock, and poem alike.

The relentless parallels Victorians drew between clockwork and literature can be understood as part of a broader program of forced encounter between mechanization and the human that literary and cultural scholars have increasingly heeded in recent years.[9] When Philip

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[8] Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* (London: W. Lewis, 1711), 9 (lines 89-91).

[9] There is too much on this topic to list in full, but some recent highlights on humans and technology in nineteenth-century literature include: Tamara Ketabgian, *The Lives of Machines* (Ann Arbor, MI: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2011), on "lively and remarkably lifelike" metaphoric career of mechanism and the "forms of feeling" that found expression in the language of technology (1, 52); Nicholas Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), esp. his chapters on sensation literature and the railway; Sarah C. Alexander, *Victorian Literature and the Physics of the Imponderable* (New York: Routledge, 2015), on physics and

James Bailey's Festus pleads for a world in which "all the great mechanic aids to toil / Man's skill hath formed, found, rendered . . . lighten labor, / And give more room to mind," he is articulating contemporary anxieties, and hopes, about an automated future more generally.[10] He is also questioning what *kinds* of labor such a future might alternately enable or enforce.[11] Automation need not be rejected outright, in Bailey's telling: it is socially destructive only insofar as it is allowed to operate independently of human (and humanist) thought. Contrasting a future in which the mechanical might "multiply" the best aspects of human existence, and a present in which it merely multiplies suffering, *Festus* pleads for a modern world in which

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geometry; Richard Menke, *Telegraphic Realism: Victorian Fiction and Other Information Systems* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2008); Megan Ward, *Seeming Human: Artificial Intelligence and Victorian Realist Character* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2018); and Laura Otis's work on the telegraph, the nervous system, and society, *Networking: Communicating with Bodies and Machines in the Nineteenth Century* (Ann Arbor, MI: Univ. of Michigan, 2001), as well as Herbert L. Sussman's 1968 edited collection *Victorians and the Machine: The Literary Response to Technology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968). For more on machines and understandings of the modern self, see Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Man*; Arnold Pacey, "Introduction: Dimensions of Experience," in *Meaning in Technology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001); Graeme J. N. Gooday, *The Morals of Measurement: Accuracy, Irony, and Trust in Late Victorian Electrical Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004) Pamela H. Smith, *The Body of the Artisan: Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2004); Boyd Hilton, "Contesting Mechanical Philosophy," in *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?: England 1783-1846* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006), 439-92; Jonathan Sawday, *Engines of the Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2007); Minsoo Kang, *Sublime Dreams of Living Machines: The Automaton in the European Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2011); John Tresch, *The Romantic Machine: Utopian Science and Technology After Napoleon* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2012); Sussman, "Machine Dreams: The Culture of Technology," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 28, no. 1 (2000): 197-204; and Adelheid Voskuhl, *Androids in the Enlightenment: Mechanics, Artisans, and Cultures of the Self* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 2015).

[10] Philip James Bailey, *Festus, A Poem*, 5th ed. (London: William Pickering, 1852), 63-64. See, for instance, Peter Viereck, "The Muse and the Machine: The Impact of Railroads and Industrialism on Poets," in *Strict Wildness: Discoveries in Poetry and History* (London: Transaction, 2008), 53-64. Viereck attaches the Romantics to anti-mechanistic attitudes predicated on both an "aesthetic" dislike of mechanization and a more ideological opposition to artificiality and rationalism. Viereck is most interested, however, in what he calls "synthesizers," poets who seek some sort of compromise with mechanization in the pursuit of ethical and aesthetic ends, and melancholy individualists, who seek to maintain human dignity in the face of mass standardization.

[11] This passage from *Festus* found its way into numerous engineering and science essays struggling to negotiate the asymmetry between technological progress and lived experience, and to acknowledge the often-devastating impact industrialization had wrought upon working-class labor conditions. "We have now arrived at an age, one example declared, "in which . . . . a great advance has been made, as regards the easement of toil, from the certainty of the industrious enjoying the reward of labor; yet even, in the present day, in too many instances, the lot of honest and willing industry is but a little remove from the forced labor of the galley slave" ("On the Development of Science, and Its Relation to Man's Social Advancement," in W. Newton, ed., *The London Journal of Arts, Sciences, and Manufactures* 33 [1848]: 356). In this "present transition state of society," the duty of the wealthy and the learned was therefore to turn their advantages to the general improvement of "the workman," through the amelioration of labor conditions and the "feeding [of] the mind with that "mighty agent," the printing press (354; 357-58).

"man's skill" might at last transition society from one founded on bodily labor to one founded on creative and emotional labor—that which makes humans both "moral and immortal."[12]

This distinction Bailey draws between the mechanical as an adjunct to "human welfare," "multiplying works of mind," and a taskmaster who forces humans "to grind the bones out of their arms / For bread," is a useful framework for how Victorian writers approached the problem of modern creative labor: how to make it industrious but not industrialized, intentional yet inspired.[13] The rise of what I am loosely calling "timed-creation stories"—that is, literary texts that both emerge out of and formally resemble the strokes of the clock or watch—constitute one of the most distinctive literary efforts to grapple with the human stakes of automated labor in the Victorian era. In attempting to remove clock-time from the context of emotionless automation yielding monetary gain, these timed-creation stories assemble a hybrid or cyborg vision of daily labor that is, as Bailey might put it, grouped around works of mind rather than works of body. I begin this investigation in the well-trodden territory of the serial novel, with Charles Dickens's most ebullient meeting of clock and composition, *Master Humphrey's Clock* (1840-41), and the autobiographical accounts that he, Anthony Trollope, and Harriet Martineau offer of their timed writing practices. Dickens is a useful pivot point here, not only because he is the most consciously cyborg of the major Victorian novelists, but also because he is one of the most metrical.[14] Moreover, he is often at his most perceptive about the sensation of writing in a timed

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[12] Bailey, *Festus*, 64.

[13] Bailey, *Festus*, 64. See Immanuel Kant's comments on taste and the beautiful in the *Critique of Judgment*: "the judging of [the Beautiful] has as its basis a merely formal purposiveness, *i.e.* a purposiveness without purpose." For Kant, aesthetic objects are, on the one hand, created to be something (and thus have some semblance of purpose). But on the other hand, the individual's interaction with that object is not predicated on their perception of that object's utility, even if it involves some awareness that the maker's purpose has been realized (Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, trans. John H. Bernard [New York: Cosimo, 2007], esp. §10; §15).

[14] George Gissing went so far as to call Dickens's "habit of writing metrically" "the gravest of faults" (*Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* [1898; New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1912], 242); "The fact can unfortunately not be disputed," he writes of Dickens's tendency to slip into blank verse (243). See also Garrett Stewart, "Evocalizing Prose: Sterne to Dickens to Lawrence," in *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext* (Berkeley and Los

society when his prose rhythms are particularly audible *as* rhythms. If the ambitions of certain timed-creation stories are quite grand, the trope is nonetheless rooted not merely in a conscious intellectual engagement with automation, but in the embodied, semi-conscious feeling of being surrounded by machinery. In turning from novel to poetry, we are thus turning our gaze toward a more forcefully phenomenological account of the rhythms of modern labor—an account that links the evolution of these rhythms to concurrent developments in thought.

A growing body of scholarship has begun to gauge the pressure of new technologies on the patterns of repetition that had historically distinguished poetry from prose.[15] These accounts span the many types of technology that were structuring the Victorian experience of the modern: steam engines, trains, factory machines, electric telegrams, and so forth (clocks are somewhat neglected by studies of Victorian technology, lacking the newfangled appeal of steam and electricity). Jason R. Rudy's recent *Electric Meters* argues persuasively for a paired understanding of embodied poetics and Victorian developments in the electrical sciences. Paraphrasing Patmore, Rudy writes that "meter [is] electrical insofar as it 'superinduc[es]' a new kind of life and beauty onto language; it makes language resonate."[16] Jason David Hall's account

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Angeles: 1990), 192-231; Robert Douglas-Fairhust, "Dickens's Rhythms," in *Dickens's Style*, ed. Daniel Tyler (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2013), 73-92; Jeremy Tambling, *Dickens' Novels as Poetry: Allegory and Literature of the City* (New York: Routledge, 2015), which tracks a number of striking and ticking clocks through Dickens's novels; Herbert F. Tucker, "Verse Visa: Dickens Adapts Poetry in *The Old Curiosity Shop*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 72, no. 4 (2018): 433-51; and William Kumbier, "'A great retiring wave': Stress, Release, and Subjectivity in Dickens's Prosodic Seas," *Dickens Studies Annual* 49, no. 1 (2018): 26-46, which focuses on Dickens's "polyphonic prose."

[15] See, among others, Robert J. Dilligan, *Verse Design in the Poetry of the Hopkins-Bridges Circle: An Essay in Computational Metrics* (Univ. of Wisconsin-Madison, 1970); Margaret Linley, "Conjuring the Spirit: Victorian Poetry, Culture, and Technology," *Victorian Poetry* 41, no. 4 (2003): 536-44; Yopie Prins, "Voice Inverse," *Victorian Poetry* 42, no. 1 (2004): 43-60; Emily Harrington, "The Measure of Time: Rising and Falling in Victorian Meters," *Literary Compass* 4, no. 1 (2007): 336-54; Jason R. Rudy, *Electric Meters: Victorian Physiological Poetics* (Ohio State Univ. Press, 2009); Caroline Levine, "Rhythms, Poetic and Political: The Case of Elizabeth Barrett Browning," *Victorian Poetry* 49, no. 2 (2011): 235-52, which helpfully recaps recent critical work on how poetic meter "mirror[s] or enact[s] a historically specific shaping of experiential time" (235); Jason David Hall, *Nineteenth-Century Verse and Technology: Machines of Meter* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); and Fabienne Moine, "Voice in the Machine: Class, Subjectivity, and Desire in Victorian Women's Factory Poems," *Cahiers Victoriens & Edouardiens* 87 (Spring 2018): n.p.

[16] Rudy, *Electric Meters*, 120-21.

of machines and Victorian meter has similarly articulated the friction generated by these parallel "mechanisms," poetic and technological, during the nineteenth century.[17] He points to the superb Latin hexameter machines that arose around the mid-century, operated, "like a grandfather clock, by weights, pulleys, and gear wheels" and wound up by a clock key, which could produce on demand (as *Chambers' Journal* put it in 1859) "ready made" Latin hexameter.[18] One of the more famous examples of these machines was called Eureka; and this conjunction of the happy surprise of discovery with the ability to pull a few levers and receive on cue a line of verse is not a bad metaphor for what the writers in this chapter aspired to.

More crucially for our purposes, these scholarly accounts document an overwhelming Victorian awareness of the mechanical continually brushing up against non-mechanized forms of repetition. Wheels, cogs, gears, metronomes, and electrical impulses overlap uneasily in Victorian poetry with footsteps, heartbeats, breaths, and, more diffusely, the daily, weekly, monthly, and annual repetitions that organize an individual's life. The phenomenological experience of the modern was, we might say, a matter of rhythm. Walter Benjamin later labeled this "a complex kind of training" to which "technology has subjected the human sensorium," felt as a succession of "nervous impulses" as the individual attempts to navigate the modern city.[19]

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[17] Hall argues that nineteenth-century prosody's interest in breaking language down into "discrete syllabic, metrical or related rhythmic units" marked one of "the more visible manifestations of meter's interface with the logic of machines" (*Machines of Meter*, 4). Meter, in Hall's telling, was fundamentally impacted by machine culture, both in terms of what it was and how it worked; and meter in turn "participated fully in the machine culture of the nineteenth century, consequently extending its discursive purchase beyond the more traditional locus of humanistic inquiry" (*Machines of Meter*, 2).

[18] D. W. Blandford, "The Eureka," *Greece and Rome* 10 (1963), 73-77, qtd. in Hall, *Machines of Meter* 158n65; and "Oddities in Music," *Chamber's Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts* 11, no. 261-86 (Jan.–June 1859), which declares of the Eureka, "All inspired poets were invited to lighten their labours by merely putting a few words into a box, turning a handle, and grinding out a Latin hexameter ready made" (313; qtd. in Hall, *Machines of Meter*, 148). See also "A Latin Hexameter Machine," *The Living Age*, vol. 7 (Boston: Waite, Peirce & Co., 1845), 214-215.

[19] Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, *1938-1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott and others (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2003), 327. See also Shelley Trower, *Senses of Vibration: A History of the Pleasure and Pain of Sound* (New York: Continuum, 2012), esp. ch. 4, "Pathological Motions: Railway Shock, Street Noises, Earthquakes" (94-125);

An 1868 article on musical phenomena in *All the Year Round* distills a Victorian attentiveness to the ways that rhythm spans the organic and artificial: "Even without music there may be rhythm: as in the ding-dong of a bell, the plash of a water-wheel, the pulsation of a heart, or the uniform march of machinery. A railway train often runs with a rhythm to which you can easily adapt a tune, of which the engine will mark the time."[20]

This metronomic imbrication of literary technique and material technologies—in which a mechanized source of rhythm helps to produce the tune and then continues to keep time for it—becomes central to Victorian attempts to imagine literary labor in more habit-driven, regular, and precisely quantified terms. The clock's developing relationship with the status of industrial-age inspiration participated, I argue, in an effort to craft a future at once mechanical and creative, flexible in its arrangements and conducive to the needs of the individual artist—even as it was increasingly regimented by time, transit systems, and centralized governing structures. It's a balance that psychology has been obsessed with for decades: what makes a culture "tight" or "loose," and how best to balance—socially, politically, economically—between these two extremes.[21] The polymetric possibilities opened up by poetry's march away from the eighteenth century's careful regularity became a useful way of capturing this rhythmical friction, and of using it to generate a vision of poetic creation that walked a careful line between regimented labor and inspired thought.[22]

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and Angela Leighton, "Justifying Time in Ticks and Tocks," *in Hearing Things: The Work of Sound in Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2018), 226-50.

[20] "Phenomena of Music," *All the Year Round* 429 (September 12 1868): 334-36. Hall also quotes this passage.

[21] See, for instance, Michele Gelfand's recent *Rule Makers, Rule Breakers: How Tight and Loose Cultures Wire Our World* (New York: Scribner, 2018).

[22] George Saintsbury later labeled this the "polymetric character" of nineteenth-century verse. See *From Blake to Mr. Swinburne*, vol. 3, *A History of English Prosody: From the Twelfth Century to the Present Day* (London: Macmillan, 1923), 317.

Taken together, these stories of clockwork inspiration, drawn from an archive of poems, novels, prefaces, essays, letters, journal entries, autobiographies, and prosodic treatises, index an important literary resistance to the sort of hourly pay structure that homogenizes time into a matter of pure capital, leaving little room for the variegations of feeling, or the surges and lapses of energy, that tend to drive creative work.[23] On the whole, they are aspirational about the capacity of literature to adapt to changing conditions of labor. But these aspirations are intimately informed by questions of difficulty and failure, which the writers I assemble present as features not just of writing (to be avoided where possible), but of what Thomas Carlyle labeled "the age of machinery."[24] The imaginative reconciliation Victorian poets sought between an industrial temporality of effortless production and the self-consciously difficult efforts of literary creation pivot upon constant reminders that technological repetitions are similarly vulnerable to arrhythmia, difficulty, and even breakdown. The temporality these texts instantiate, as one of more-or-less forward progression that does not sound or feel entirely even, poses a real question about what (and whom) modern progress ought to encompass: not just technological improvement or accumulated capital but a messier effort at reconciliation between humans and these mechanic aids that might improve or substantially worsen general welfare. In the pressure to regularly produce creative work, a poetic emphasis on the temporality of not just creation but

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[23] There has been a growing move in recent years to emphasize modernity as unfolding along "multiple and heterogeneous" temporalities (see Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2017], 50-51; Alexis McCrossen, *Marking Modern Time: A History of Clocks, Watches, and Other Timekeepers in American Life* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2013); and Partha Chatterjee, "The Nation in Heterogeneous Time," *Futures* 37 [2005]: 925-42). In a more Victorian vein, Margaret Beetham's work on Victorian periodicals has also called for greater focus on the periodical's relation not only to time-discipline, but also the other kinds of time that continued to circulate during the nineteenth century. See Beetham, "Time: Periodicals and the Time of the Now," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 48, no. 3 (2015): 323-342.

[24] For more on the nineteenth century's so-called "prosody wars," see Yopie Prins, "Victorian Meters," in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. Joseph Bristow (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 89-113; Richard Cronin, "Victorian Metrics," in *Reading Victorian Poetry* (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 65-88; Meredith Martin, *The Rise and Fall of Meter: Poetry and English National Culture, 1860-1930* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2012); and Joseph Phelan, *The Music of Verse: Metrical Experiment in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2012).

its counters—hesitation, failure, and repair—thus insists upon these jolts and mid-tempo alterations as equally part of modernity's rhythmic underpinning; and it locates in the specter of difficult production the possibility of remediation, the poetic recuperation of industrial labor and the revitalization of those who perform it.

I. Cyborg Seriality: Prose Writers and the Clock

To respond to the unceasing demands of the mass publishing market in the industrial age was in some sense to risk becoming android: to resemble one of those marvelous Latin hexameter machines, regurgitating writing of no particular cohesion or quality, on demand, out of clockwork innards. To understand literature as the product of certain mechanical processes was not a difficult imaginative leap for the Victorians. Literature has long been understood as deriving from a series of reiterable forms that, once begun, impel the text onward: installment, chapter, book, canto, paragraph, stanza, rhyme, and metrical scheme.[25] These mechanisms of literature could easily accommodate a societal turn toward the automated. But absent "space for Art's delays"—for clear-eyed and critical thought, emotion recollected in tranquility, the time to "turn a phrase" or "trim a straggling theme aright"—these mechanism might, it was felt, quickly overwhelm the sense.[26] Such are the representations of clock-time we find in George Gissing's

[25] Stuart Sherman's *Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries, and the English Diurnal Form, 1660-1785* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996) makes the compelling case that prose, at least, was strongly dependent on clock-time for its various serialized structures: "A [narrative] temporality of smallness and sameness," he writes, was prompted by and underwritten by "the perceptible 'sameness' of chronometric units," and "the serial and closely calibrated temporality that became a widespread preoccupation on clocks and watches became concurrently a widespread practice in prose written, distributed, and read over steady, small increments of real time" (8-9). See also Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse*, esp. its focus on frequency and the iterative (Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin [1972; Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1983]); J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982); and Wayne C. Booth, "Emotions, Beliefs, and the Reader's Objectivity," in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (1961; Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983).

[26] Austin Dobson, *The Complete Poetical Works* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1923), 331.

New Grub Street (1891) or Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854). Both novels record the prose imprint of the rhythms of the capitalist marketplace in dire terms. Rather literally grinding the life out of the characters, this merciless clockwork beat bears no resemblance to the embodied, cardiometric tick-tocks of, say, Squire Hamley's watch from chapter 2. On display instead is an inexorable acceleration of the mechanical at the expense of the living, and the onset of a writing style that is itself lifeless. Austin Dobson, in the 1882 rondeau "On the Hurry of Time" quoted above, cast this too-swift flight of the hours as intrinsically inhospitable to writing. "With slower pen men used to write," he bemoans in the opening line, which drags against time's hurry, metrically and sonically mimicking the eighteenth century's "meted" allotments of "blame and praise" (lines 1; 8). "With slower pen" acts as both topic and refrain for Dobson's rondeau cinquain; and its carefully timed reiterations suggest not just an older tempo of composition but a sensation of mechanical time itself as slower once upon a time. "On the Hurry of Time" denounces the modern experience of perpetual "breathless[ness]," in which thought, dazed by novelty and overdosed on adrenaline, "so briefly stays [that] / We may not work—ah! would we might!" (lines 13-14).

Dobson's longing for work, and for the time *to* work, casts the ideal conditions of composition as fundamentally contrary to the churn of modern industry. Dobson is arguing for a work model informed by thought, which, to his mind, is *slow*. But many of the Victorian prose writers attempted to reconcile themselves to the new pace of life not by slowing it down, but by reconceiving of inspired writing, born out of real feeling and real craft, as the product of this new timed environment.[27] George Eliot's tribute to Henry Fielding in *Middlemarch* (1871-72) detours

[27] Charles Knight's four-volume project *Half-hours with the Best Authors* (London: Charles Knight, 1847) compiled excerpts from popular English authors that could be read in "half-hours."

into a meditation on the pace and punctuation of modern prose, which must fit itself to the charged speed of modern life:

> A great historian, as he insisted on calling himself, who had the happiness to be dead a hundred and twenty years ago, and so to take his place among the colossi whose huge legs our living pettiness is observed to walk under, glories in his copious remarks and digressions as the least imitable part of his work, and especially in those initial chapters to the successive books of his history, where he seems to bring his armchair to the proscenium and chat with us in all the lusty ease of his fine English. But Fielding lived when the days were longer (for time, like money, is measured by our needs), when summer afternoons were spacious, and the clock ticked slowly in the winter evenings. We belated historians must not linger after his example; and if we did so, it is probable that our chat would be thin and eager, as if delivered from a campstool in a parrot-house.[28]

Eliot imagines her "historian" predecessor with satirical fondness. Yet she is careful to limn how her own method must differ from his. "The lusty ease" of Fielding's "fine English," his "copious remarks and digressions," are, by this telling, made possible because time registered differently in his century, when "the clock ticked slowly in the winter evenings." Eliot portrays time not as some steady rhythm from one century to the next, but as a tempo that changes alongside, and responds to, broader social developments. Literature, in her account, is inseparable from the changeable rhythms of clock-time, which have altered language on a molecular level.

The co-constitution imagined here between clock and language forms the underpinnings of this canon of timed-creation stories I am introducing here: works of literature that get going,

[28] George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (London: Penguin, 2003), 141.

and keep going, in ways intimately bound up with the rhythms of the modern clock. When Eliot speaks of time as being "measured by our needs," she is referring, in an expansive sense, to her readers' needs, as individuals living in the mid-nineteenth century. But she is also referring to herself, a writer who lives in this world of changing tempi and who has built her own existence around the regular division of time. Her life, as poet Mathilde Blind described it in her biography of Eliot, "flowed on [sic] its even tenor, its routine . . . rigidly regulated. The morning till lunch time was invariably devoted to writing: in the afternoon she either went out for a quiet drive of about two hours, or she took a walk with [George Henry] Lewes in Regent's Park," their talk keeping time with their pace.[29] The routine Blind documents conceives of regularity as rhythmic rather than purely metronomic: at once "rigidly regulated" and yet musical in its flowing "even tenor," which unfolds an easy alternation between hours of writing, eating, exercise, and intellectual exchange. This musical regulation, invariable though it seems to be, is in Blind's telling the lived rhythm that yields great literature. Indeed, as we shall see in the autobiographical writings of Trollope and in Dickens's *Master Humphrey*, the daily writing demanded by the relentless pace of modern publishing prompted some Victorian prose writers to theorize this pace as an opportunity for, rather than a hindrance to, literary creativity.

Their writings also—and this is why I linger on, if not after, their example—theorize the relationship between writer and publishing schedule in terms of a *rhythmic* exchange between writer and watch, just as Eliot's clock-ticks of prose arise out of carefully quantified units of labor. This rhythm becomes even more metrically pronounced in Victorian poetry's timed-creation stories; and it speaks to a Victorian attempt to conceive of an ever-more-mechanized present as sympathetic to creative impulse, by locating that impulse in the parallel pulses of body

[29] Mathilde Blind, *George Eliot* (London: W. H Allen, 1883), 213-14. It is worth noting Margaret Oliphant's famous complaint, that if she had been afforded the style of living available to Eliot, she might have written better books.

and timepiece: a bodily (and quantitative) attunement that bridges the divide between man and machine.

Trollope is the most famous of the nineteenth century's clock-attuned writers. No Victorian writer can claim to be quite so representative of this century of newly timed labor. "Few men, I think, ever lived a fuller life," he wrote in his autobiography. "And I attribute the power of doing this altogether to the virtue of early hours. It was my practice to be at my table every morning at 5.30 A.M.; and it was also my practice to allow myself no mercy. . . . By beginning at that hour I could complete my literary work before I dressed for breakfast."[30]

Yet can we label Trollope's dawn writing practices, coffee in hand and pen at the ready, "inspired"? Trollope's tireless production is, in many respects, a matter of surprisingly precise divisions of pages, with an "allotted number of pages every day" whose completion was carefully tallied in a diary to keep careful track of any "slipp[ing] into idleness." More astonishing still is Trollope's proto-digital attempt to tally his rate of words-per-minute, which caused him "to write with my watch before me, and to require myself to write 250 words every quarter of an hour."[31] He had, he explained, "found that the 250 words have been forthcoming as regularly as my watch went," seconds and minutes sublimated into words slashed forth upon the page. *Labor omnia vincit improbus,* as Trollope liked to say—and his conception of what it meant to "work[] daily as [a] literary laborer[]" was intimately founded on this careful "division of time." Trollope liked to think that such was the life of all "literary men."[32] Still, it is difficult

[30] Trollope, *An Autobiography and Other Writings*, ed. Nicholas Shrimpton (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2014), 169-70.
[31] Trollope, *Autobiography*, 78.
[32] Trollope, *Autobiography*, 78; 170. Walter Besant, in his own autobiography, wrote that while he did not tally his writing in a strict number of pages or hours a day (although he generally spent three or four hours at his work), neither did he "wait[] till the inspiration came," but rather "exercised upon myself a certain amount of pressure at the outset, when the work was difficult and the way thorny; and afterwards, when the way was easy I sat down morning after morning" (Besant, *Autobiography* [New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1902], 203).

to think of another Victorian writer for whom the spilling of much ink and the tick of a watch felt so utterly compatible.

Trollope defended his practices against critics. "If they ever trouble themselves with these pages," he wrote, they "will, of course, say that in what I have said I have ignored altogether the one great evil of rapid production,—namely, that of inferior work."[33] One might well read the brilliant mess of *The Way We Live Now* (1874-75), with its various discarded plotlines and characters shunted on the fly from major to minor status (and vice versa), and think that some reflection might have produced a more unified work of art. Yet Trollope disputed this reasoning. "I believe that the work which has been done quickest has been done the best," he confesses in the *Autobiography*. "I do not think . . . . these would have been improved . . . had each of these been the isolated labour of a couple of years."[34]

On the contrary, Trollope aspires to a sort of mental immediacy in his watch-timed writing. Regulated immediacy has taken the place of unlooked-for spontaneity: "The rapidity has been achieved by hot pressure, not in the conception, but in the telling of the story. Instead of writing eight pages a day, I have written sixteen; instead of working five days a week, I have worked seven. . . . And I am sure that the work so done has had in it the best truth and highest spirit that I have been able to produce."[35] More curiously yet, the vast assemblage of the novel (certainly of the doorstopper variety that Trollope favored, with its vast cast of characters distributed across plots and subplots and sub-subplots) is reduced in this account of "rapid writing" to a matter of pure rhythm: a rhythm that is at once musical and mechanized. "His language must come from him as music from the rapid touch of the great performer's fingers,"

[33] Trollope, *Autobiography*, 111.
[34] Trollope, *Autobiography*, 111-12.
[35] Trollope, *Autobiography*, 111-13.

Trollope explains, "as words from the mouth of the indignant orator; as letters fly from the fingers of the trained compositor; as syllables tinkled out by little bells from themselves to the ear of the telegraphist."[36]

In equating the seemingly drone-like tasks of the typesetter and the telegraph operator with the "high art" of musical performance, Trollope seeks to reframe the precisely counted and timed rate of production on which critics would blame his own literary flaws. The effect is a rapid, repetitive, mechanical labor that seems not distinct from the province of art, but an extension of the skill a musician or writer likewise acquires through long habits of practice. What Trollope suggests is a form of inspiration founded on repetition, inspiration as the rapid and rhythmic translation of thought into syllable. It is through rhythm, in other words, that Trollope locates some consonance between literary or musical performance and labor we might otherwise label automated. Indeed, Trollope goes so far as to say it is the "man who thinks much of his words as he writes them [who] will generally leave behind him work that smells of oil."[37] To linger over one's words invites artifice. While artifice might indeed smell of well-oiled gears, however, it does not follow that a novel written in time with the interlocking gears of a watch need seem automated.

Trollope's feeling that immediacy might produce writing "in the best truth and highest spirit," and that such immediacy might be founded on strictly timed habits, had a forerunner in Harriet Martineau. Martineau devoted an entire section of her autobiography to the schedules of her fellow writers, in which she commented upon how many hours they worked, what times they sat down to write, and how that was parleyed into both productivity and literary style. Her ideas about good writing are, in deeply Victorian fashion, centered on a kind of industrious sincerity.

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[36] Trollope, *Autobiography*, 112.
[37] Trollope, *Autobiography*, 112.

Like Trollope, Martineau assumes a connection between the speed and industry of composition and the immediacy, indeed the candor, of thought upon the page. Like him, she suggests that a clock-timed routine might induce creativity and prevent artifice. She "never," she says in the autobiography, "altered the expression as it came fresh from my brain"; and her pride in the unstemmed flow of her thoughts onto the page parallels her need to always have the time "before my eyes as I write" (the first object Martineau purchased once she began to earn a living from writing was "a good watch").[38] Martineau thus locates in her clock-set labor an aid against a compression of the creative faculties, enabling her to bypass the "vast misery" of waiting for inspiration to visit some new thought upon her. Wondering how one could ever "keep his ideas in train, under . . . frequent interruption," Martineau affirms that

> enormous loss of strength, energy and time is occasioned by the way in which people go to work in literature, as if its labour were in all respects different from any other kind of toil. I am confident that intellectual industry and intellectual punctuality are as practicable as industry and punctuality in any other direction. I have seen vast misery of conscience and temper arise from the irresolution and delay caused by waiting for congenial moods, favorable circumstances, and so forth. I can speak, after long experience, without any doubt on this matter. I have suffered, like other writers, from indolence, irresolution, distaste to my work, absence of "inspiration," and all that: but I have also found that sitting down, however reluctantly, with the pen in my hand, I have never worked for one quarter of an hour without finding myself in full train; so that all the quarter hours, arguings, doubtings, and hesitation as to whether I should work or not which I gave way

[38] Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, ed. Maria Weston Chapman (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 1:195, 267.

> to in my inexperience, I now regard as so much waste, not only of time but, far worse, of energy.[39]

Martineau's skepticism of the very idea of "inspiration" is on display throughout her *Memoirs*, but most acutely in this passage. Her emphasis lies on "labour" and "toil," "intellectual industry and intellectual punctuality," rather than some external force one awaits to drive the pen forward. Speaking of "all the quarter hours" supposedly absent of "'inspiration,'" Martineau affirms that they can, with the right dose of timeliness and effort, give way to a "full train" of ideas; and she sanctifies the morning hours to writing not because she feels more "inspired" at 7 or 7:30 a.m., but because "it has always been my practice to devote my best strength to my work." Mental vigor, over and above a particular creative genius, undergirds "the ordinary conditions of good authorship" in Martineau's memoir; and while she doesn't obscure the presence of "arguings, doubtings, hesitation," she believes such creative arrhythmia, these irregular starts and stops, can be overcome by sufficient self-discipline.[40]

The effort Martineau documents of winding oneself up each day to the "full train" of writing frames inspiration as a species of volition: ecstasy mastered, its energy carefully meted out.[41] As I put more pressure on the notion of writing rhythms, it's worth emphasizing that this

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[39] Martineau, *Autobiography*, 1:189.

[40] Martineau did later agonize over whether "the conflict between constitutional indolence and an overwrought sense of the value of time has done me some harm in the midst of some important good." "I find," she wrote, "[in] the last stage of my life, that I *can* play and be idle; and that I enjoy it." Idleness—"for above half of every day," she qualified—was needed to prevent a "narrowing [of the] mind," which she suspected her "long confinement within stringent bounds of punctuality had produced" (*Autobiography*, 260). This uneasy weaving between a feeling that steady labor was to be commended, and that too much of it might negatively impact quality of thought, was just one example of the deep Victorian sense of how the "punctuality" of clock-time was changing the natural rhythms of thought.

[41] Martineau's and Trollope's notion of creative immediacy found a curious counterpart in the rise of "automated writing," as discussed in Hippolyte Taine's *De l'intelligence* in 1878 and practiced by Victorian and Edwardian spiritualists. See, among others, Hilary Grimes, "(Ghost)Writing Henry James: Mental Science, Spiritualism, and Uncanny Technologies of Writing at the Fin-de-Siècle," in *The Late Victorian Gothic: Mental Science, the Uncanny, and Scenes of Writing* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 13-36; Ashley Miller, *Poetry, Media, and the Material Body: Autopoetics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2018); and Vanessa

effort at harnessing the creative impulse, as a watch converts the energy of the mainspring into a series of carefully spaces *ticks,* is therefore an effort to body forth the writer as a *non*-automated figure, even as he or she engages in repetitive and semi-mechanical practices—and even as the boundaries between the literary and the horological seem increasingly porous on the page.[42] This admixture of clock and literature constitutes both the imaginative and formal architecture for Charles Dickens's early serial project *Master Humphrey's Clock* (1840-41). "I have a notion," wrote Dickens to John Forster in January 1840, "of this old [fellow] in the queer house, opening the book by an account of himself, and, among other peculiarities, of his affection for an old quaint queer-cased clock." This clock would be considered something like a friend, "an assurance to him" who heard its nocturnal chime. "Then," he continued, "I mean to tell how that he has kept odd manuscripts in the old, deep, dark, silent closet where the weights are," which at 10 p.m. sharp each week he will take "from thence to read" with his club of fellow eccentrics. The result would be a "mixing up," as Dickens described it, of the old fellow's "enjoyments with some notion of his clock."[43]

L. Ryan, "Experience: Mind Work in William Carpenter, George Henry Lewes, and Herbert Spencer," in *Thinking Without Thinking in the Victorian Novel* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2012), 78-104, which focuses on automatic, reflexive, and "mechanical," processes of the mind, collectively labeled "automaton theory." Miller, Ryan, and Sue Zemka (Zemka, *Time and the Moment in Victorian Literature and Society* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012]) all discuss the literary implications of William Carpenter's neurological understanding of impulse, as an involuntary action that might be alternately contained or given free rein. For some contemporary accounts of mechanized thought, see Carpenter, *Principles of Mental Physiology, with their Applications to the Training and Discipline of the Mind* (New York: D. Appleton, 1874); Oliver Wendell Holmes, *Mechanism in Thought and Morals* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1871); and Edward W. Cox's superbly titled *The Mechanism of Man: An Answer to the Question, What Am I? A Popular Introduction to Mental Physiology and Psychology* (London: Longman, 1879).

[42] In this sense, Martineau's and Trollope's writing practices stand apart from what Ashley Miller has recently labeled "autopoetics": literature that appears to be "out of the control of its producers and receivers alike," the product of involuntary bodily and neurological impulses. While both timed-creation stories and automated writing are engaged with evolving ideas surrounding inspiration, impulse, and mechanized thought—Miller is particularly interested in the Victorian descendants of a "Romantic [and Coleridgean] fascination with hallucinatory poetics"—automatic writing and autopoetics concern an absence of intentionality at odds with the disciplinary measures on display in Trollope and Martineau. Automatic writing, in Miller's telling, seems not to emerge from labor at all, because the writer in this telling is merely a conduit for creative energies (Miller, *Poetry, Media, and the Material Body*, 1-3).

[43] Quoted in Michael Slater's *Charles Dickens: A Life Defined by Writing* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press,

We know *Master Humphrey's Clock* better today because of the works that grew out of it and quickly exceeded its framework: *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge*. Dickens originally imagined the project as a weekly miscellany, to be divulged from clockwork innards and narrated by the titular Master Humphrey. Yet as literary project and as publishing schedule, the *Clock* gradually became unsustainable. "Mr. Shandy's Clock was nothing to mine," Dickens confessed in a July 1840 letter to Walter Landor, in reference to the eighteenth century's most notable timed-creation story.[44] "Wind, wind, wind always winding I am . . . . I am more bound down by this Humphrey than I have ever yet been—Nickleby was nothing to it, nor Pickwick, nor Oliver—it demands my constant attention and obliges me to exert all the self-denial I possess.'"[45] This was not aided by the fact that Dickens's readers found Master Humphrey's hodge-podge of tales less satisfying than the serial pleasures of *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39) or *Oliver Twist* (1837-39). The *Clock* ultimately showcased Dickens's nimble ability to respond to readers in real time, when he discarded miscellany in favor of the serialized trials of Little Nell and Barnaby Rudge. The result ensconces the *Clock* in a familiar dynamic between clock-time and the timely demands of the capitalist marketplace. The "queerness" of Dickens's literary clock gave way to a more straightforward exchange between purchasers and producer. The physical clock, intended to serve as "a welcome friend" who, "from week to week" would "count[] the hours" and yet "cheat them of all their heaviness," was similarly consigned to the

2009), 155. At this stage, Dickens had not yet decided on whether to title the project *Master Humphrey's Clock* or *Old Humphrey's Clock*. See Matthew Bevis, "Dickens by the Clock," in *Dickens's Style*, ed. Daniel Tyler (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2013), 46-72; and Jonathan Grossman, *Dickens's Networks: Public Transport and the Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2015).

[44] See Amit Yahav, "Sonorous Duration: *Tristram Shandy* and the Temporality of Novels," *PMLA* 128, no. 4 (2013): 872-87.

[45] Dickens, letter to Walter Landor, July 26, 1840 [London], in *Charles Dickens, 1812-1870: An Anthology from the Berg Collection*, ed. Lola L. Szladits (New York: New York Public Library, 1990), 60.

margins.[46] It became, Dickens wrote in 1848, "one of the lost books of the earth—which, we all know, are far more precious than any that can be read for love or money."[47]

If the "queer-cased clock" faltered, however, as a literary experiment, it remained imaginatively central to Dickens's early career. G. K. Chesterton, still one of Dickens's finest readers, devoted an entire essay to the work. "Although it is not one of the books of which his admirers would chiefly boast," Chesterton wrote, "although perhaps it is almost the only one of which he would not have boasted himself. . . . [t]his book is the background of his mind. It is the basis and minimum of him which was always there."[48] The reason, I think, that Chesterton felt this failed experiment marked so vital a moment in Dickens's career is that the *Clock* is where Dickens began to theorize how the Victorian novel might formally incorporate the technology that accompanied its production and consumption—and might, in doing so, teach its readers to see that technology in a new light.[49] Dickens's implication of the clock in literary output framed serial literature as a series of mechanized "births" (as Chesterton put it), at once automated and yet biological. His enthusiasm for that venture quickly spilled out of the story itself and into the narrative frame, frontispieces, advertisements, and illustrations.

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[46] "Address by Charles Dickens," April 4, 1840, in *The Works of Charles Dickens: Master Humphrey's Clock* (New York: P. F. Collier and Son, 1911), viii. Although Master Humphrey does not disappear entirely, and enjoys a few intermittent appearances, he is quickly discarded as narrator of *The Old Curiosity Shop*; it is not until *David Copperfield* that Dickens will again attempt a full-scale first-person narrative.

[47] Dickens, Preface, *The Old Curiosity Shop* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1848), vi.

[48] G. K. Chesterton, "Master Humphrey's Clock," in Alzina Stone Dale, ed., *G. K. Chesterton: The Collected Works*, vol. 15, *Chesterton on Dickens* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 401. Some pages later he reemphasizes the *Clock*'s centrality to Dickens's career: it "show[s] us better than anything else the whole unconscious trend of Dickens, the stuff of which his very dreams were made." Chesterton claimed that the *Clock* was one of the most "level and even monotonous" of Dickens's creations, showcasing the odd conjunction of "a half automatic Dickens [and] a dreaming and drifting Dickens" (401; 406).

[49] Robert L. Patten's *Charles Dickens and 'Boz': The Birth of the Industrial-Age Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012), which pursues the various narrative dead ends that mark Dickens's early career, offers an excellent timeline of the creation and slow demise of *Master Humphrey's Clock*.

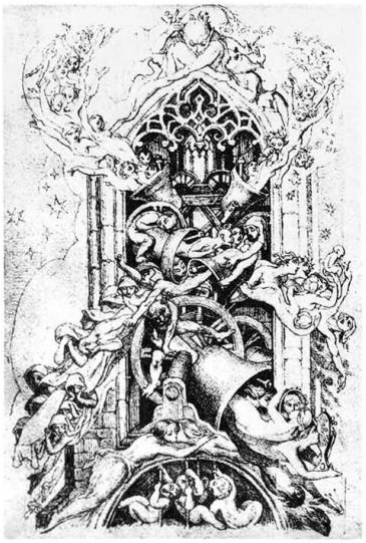

Fig. 3.1 - Tower of the chimes, David Maclise, *The Chimes* (1844)

Fig. 3.2 – Prospectus advertising for *Master Humphrey's Clock*, Hablot Browne (1840)

In this advertisement for the *Clock* and in a similar illustration from *The Chimes* (1844), Dickens sketches a cyborg version of storytelling, in which the tolling hour translates almost seamlessly into tales, phantom figures echoing on the air. The tale seems, if not produced by machinery, then at least brought to life by it, just as the weekly release of a serial installment, or the Humphrey clock's 10 p.m. chime, heralds a new chapter.

The *Clock* distills the young Dickens's ambitions to use this emblem of modern literary rhythms (for Dickens's readers, the timed patterns of reception; for the author, the patterns of labor required to produce those installments on time) to revise industrial clock-time's impersonal monotone. The result is something distinctly more embodied, and more responsive to its auditors than Marx's factory clock or *New Grub Street*'s merciless taskmaster.[50] In Dickens's telling, the clock is not just archive but friend and storyteller. Its signaling of "our happy hour of meeting"

[50] See Karl Marx, "The Working-Day" [from *Das Kapital*], in Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Writings* (London: Collector's Library, 2009), 229-79. See also Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing, and Zola* (1985; New York: Rutledge Revivals, 2010), which discusses how *New Grub Street* displays the same scrupulous (and Hopkinsesque) attention to wasted work-hours on display in Gissing's diaries. See also Pierre Coustillas, ed., *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist* (Hassocks, UK: Harvester, 1978).

(161) is at once literary and horological, a hybrid point between the "telling" of the hour and the "telling" of a tale.[51] The clock's disciplinary ability to order bodies at work is transmuted into the more pleasurable union of readers and, subliminally, of Boz himself sitting down his desk at 10 a.m. each morning.[52]

Fig. 3.3 – Frontispiece to volume 3, *Master*

[51]Dickens, *Master Humphrey's Clock*, illus. by George Cattermole and Hablot Browne (London: Chapman and Hall, 1840-41), 3:426 (hereafter cited in text). "Tell," as previously discussed, has always enacted a slippage between the "counting" of something, and the *re*counting of something; between numeration on the one hand and enumeration on the other: the original Old English *tellen* also encompasses this double meaning. Patten has noted the further connection "tell" has to counting houses, arguing that it became "another of Dickens's euphemisms for the commercial transaction of authorship" (*Charles Dickens and 'Boz'*, 278).

[52] Dickens's clockwork tendencies in his own work-life were copiously remarked upon by his friends and family. His sister-in-law Georgina Hogarth described "everything with him . . . as [going] by clockwork." As Dickens himself explained to the Rev. G. D. Carrow in an interview: "I rise at seven; at eight I breakfast; until ten I walk or ride and read the morning papers; at ten precisely I go to my desk and stay there till two, and if particularly in the vein keep at it until four. . . . So rigid is my conformity to this method of work that my family say I am a monomaniac on the subject of method" (*The Dickensian*, May 8, 1867). His son Charley draws a useful distinction between Dickens and Trollope, however, writing that though he went about "the work of his imagination and fancy" with extreme "punctuality and . . . businesslike regularity," and while "he had no faith in the waiting-for-inspiration theory," he also did not fall into Trollope's error of "forcing himself willy-nilly to turn out so much manuscript every day . . . . It was his business to sit at his desk during just those particular hours in the day . . . and whether the day turned out well or ill, there he sat accordingly" (Philip Collins, ed., "Working Habits," in *Dickens: Interviews and Recollections* [Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1983], 1:119-20). Charley's comments are also discussed in Daragh Downes's "The Best of Time, the Worst of Time: Temporal Consciousness in Dickens," in Trish Ferguson, ed., *Victorian Time: Technologies, Standardizations, Catastrophes* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 18-19, regarding "the time ethos which led to the creation *of* [Dickens's] fictions." Downes argues that "Dickens from the start sought to bring Carlyle's 'Mechanical' and 'Dynamical' forces into potent coalition by enthusiastically embracing the protocols of routinized time" (19).

Humphrey's Clock, Hablot Browne (1841).

This is not necessarily an intuitive concept. Indeed, *Master Humphrey* suggests that some imaginative labor will be required to define mechanization as open to the arts. "I thought it cruel once," Master Humphrey confesses of the clock. "It was very hard of heart, to my mind, I remember . . . . Ah! how soon I learnt to know that in its ceaseless going on, and in its being checked or stayed by nothing, lay its greatest kindness, and the only balm for grief and wounded peace of mind!" (3:421).[53] It is Master Humphrey who must "*learn*" to see the clock differently, which we then glimpse through his eyes.

The Humphrey clock's uneasy divide between a cruel, inhuman figure and a balm for grief evokes a Festusian equivocation between clock as foreman and as helpmate. There remains a sense, even in a work as optimistic as the *Clock*, that this serial fiction's weekly appearances might shade into a tool of disciplinary control.[54] So it's noteworthy that the *Clock*'s efforts at reforming perception do not center entirely on hearing in its "ceaseless" ticking a heart compassionate to its listeners. Dickens also stages these clock-club meetings with an eye toward the "ceremonies" of maintenance and repair that keep clock and text in good working order. At the start of each meeting the clock must be "wound up in silence" with a large key, a mechanical build-up of energy that echoes the clock-club's 10 p.m. banishment of "languor and indifference" (1:75). A separate key then opens the clock-case, as Master Humphrey retrieves that evening's papers and exchanges them for "new contributions" collected in the past week. In emphasizing the clock's need for mechanical restoration as a counterpart to this weekly narrative

[53] Dickens of course *did* eventually find it rather "hard of heart," transitioning to a more humane monthly installment with *Martin Chuzzlewit* in 1842.
[54] D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1988). See also Andrew H. Miller, *The Burdens of Perfection: On Ethics and Reading in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2008), which considers the disciplinary impact of ideas like improvement, automation, self-restraint, and shame.

replenishment, Dickens stresses the effort and attention both forms of technology require to keep running smoothly.

We have by this point run far afield of meter, which I have suggested forms the basis for Victorian poetry's own engagement with regulated writing. Yet while Dickens is interested in more diffuse patterns of publication (here, a weekly schedule of composition and reception), he is also interested in the more local rhythms of this clock-born prose. If Humphrey forever intuits the clock's strange animism, its almost-personhood, another member of the clock-club, the famous Mr. Pickwick, has imbibed something of its mechanism. "He would . . . stand with his head on one side to hear it tick," Dickens writes of Pickwick, "never failing to glance towards me at intervals of a few seconds each, and nod his head with . . . complacent gratification" (1:53). Pickwick's body, which absorbs the clock-ticks as a turning and nodding of the head at precisely timed intervals, is the closest thing the *Clock* offers to a truly cyborg character.

But Pickwick's ability to interiorize cadences is textual as well as mechanical; and as such he helpfully moves us toward poetry, and poetry's ingrained sense of language's clockwork properties. As Pickwick listens to Master Humphrey's recitation, Dickens writes that "he gently beat time and corrected the air with imaginary punctuation" with—in a phrase that directly evokes this earlier moment of interiorization—a "complacent motion of his head and forefinger" (1:76). The marking of time has become the marking of clauses, language strung atop a regular beat. William Mitford's 1804 prosodic treatise on the "mechanism of verse" offers an early articulation of a common understanding that language, prose and poetic alike, was marked by a kinds of "time-beaters": "the primary prosodial measures" of rhyme and meter, as well as the more diffuse "effect[s] of accent" and "the arrangement and expression" of "times" or

"quantities," that together create cadence.[55] Richard Roe's 1823 monograph on musical and spoken rhythm further developed this notion of language as unfolding in multiple intervals of time. Roe, however, described time-beaters as structuring not merely the *quantitative* units of language, but also its *sense*, rehearsed according to certain grammatical constraints and continually interacting with these quantitative attributes. Roe is a useful figure here for understanding Dickens's human time-beater, Pickwick-the-conductor enforcing the punctualities of prose.[56] Roe's understanding of linguistic time is inseparably numerical and semantic.[57] He divides time-beaters into three primary categories: metrical feet, which consist of pulsation (what we might call stress) and quantity (syllables); lines, which consist of the sense (the grammatical construction of the line) and the distribution of feet (the assemblage of metrical schemes within a given line); and finally clauses (what we might call stanzas), which consist of the multilinear distribution of meter, the position of rhyme across the lines, and the sense or grammar as it unfolds from one line to the next. Without such time-beaters, Roe argued, "there could be no perception of rhythm"—but arguably, in his telling, there would also be no perception of meaning.[58]

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[55] William Mitford, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Harmony in Language: and of the Mechanism of Verse, Modern and Antient*, 2nd ed. (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1804), 95; 81. Other nineteenth-century prosodists who use the term include Richard Roe and Coventry Patmore, mentioned below, and Sydney Dobell in *Thoughts on Art, Philosophy, and Religion* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1876).

[56] Much like "timekeeper," as mentioned in my first chapter, "time-beater" signified a person as well as an object. The *OED*, which does not include the prosodic definition of "time-beater," defines it as "a person who or (occasionally) instrument which beats out the time of a piece of music." See "time-beater, *n*.," OED Online, March 2019, Oxford Univ. Press.

[57] Richard Roe, *The Principles of Rhythm, Both in Speech and Music; Especially as Exhibited in the Mechanism of English Verse* (Dublin: R. Graisberry, 1823). See also Patmore's remarks on Hegel in "Essay on English Metrical Law," in *Poems*, 2nd ed. (London: George Bell and Son, 1886), 2:215-67: "'It is false,' [Hegel] adds, 'that versification offers any obstacle to the free outpouring of poetic thought. True genius disposes with ease of sensible materials, and moves therein as in a native element, which, instead of depressing or hindering, exalts and supports its flight. Art, indeed, must have a body as well as a soul; and the higher and purer the spiritual, the more powerful and unmistakeable should be the corporeal element;—in other words, the more vigorous and various the life, the more stringent and elaborate must be the law by obedience to which life expresses itself'" (220-21).

[58] Roe, *Principles of Rhythm*, 6.

This model of easy exchange between mechanism and meaning, pulsations and quantities, offered a useful model for how the divide between mechanical and human that posed such a problem to industrial-age writers could be replaced by one of resemblance and interplay. Dickens's Pickwick, happily sketching commas, periods, and semi-colons upon the air, shrinks the friendship between Humphrey and his clock to the intimate microlevel of phrase and sentence. The result is to emphasize how literature *already* possesses clockwork properties, which unfold according to a somewhat regular rhythm in time and carry their own methods of inscribed punctuation. If mechanical "punctuality" can lead us to, and emerge out of, a text's grammatical "punctuation," as *Master Humphrey* suggests that it can, then Dickens is setting forth a mechanized vision of prose that also feels insistently alive.

It is noteworthy that *Master Humphrey* attaches this intuition to Pickwick, Dickens's original serial character and (alongside his valet Sam Weller) the only one to travel outside the bounds of his originary work.[59] This detachment from the papers of his birth makes Pickwick less the function of a self-enclosed narrative, and more the mobile figure of narrative language itself. But if Pickwick is somehow a figure of "pure" narrative language, it is a language that nonetheless unfolds according to certain grammatical conventions and systems of tone, stress, and accent. In addition to his punctual beating upon the air, Pickwick showcases an "extraordinary anxiety to correct the reader when he hesitated at a word in the manuscript, or substituted the wrong one" (1:76). He exhibits, in other words, a pointed fidelity to the time-beats of the text, both the more regular baseline and the more variable rhythms that run atop it.

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[59] Holly Furneaux's *Queer Dickens: Erotics, Families, Masculinities* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009) calls the importation of Pickwick and the Wellers into this new book "an encouragement of readerly practices that invest character with independent life," and argues that it "provides a clear instance of the queer possibilities of serialization . . . . in its intervention into narrative structure, its mediation of the relationship between readers and author, and its generic dexterity." See esp. 88-99.

When Master Humphrey pronounces his clock-club fellows "alchemists" who can, "at our command," "tempt coy Truth in many light and airy forms" (1:5), there is some echo, in this timely conjuring of "light and airy [narrative] forms," of Pickwick's "correct[ing] the air with imaginary punctuation." That Dickens liked to dramatize prose's metrical dimensions is well understood. Yet what is striking here—and in a Victorian writer strikingly *poetic*—is the notion that these dimensions map onto clock-time's velocity. They comprise a "steady pendulum throb[bing] and beat[ing]" amid the pages of each weekly installment, their cardiac cadences and felicitous expressions offering "a crumb of comfort" to the reader (1:6; 5).

Dickens's broader efforts with *Master Humphrey's Clock*, to "knit [reader and author] more closely" by "shorten[ing] the intervals of communication between [us]" ("Preface" xi), conceives of time as a tool for insuring intimacy—between both the members of the clock-club, and between the Victorians and their texts. Directed as it is toward a circle of outcasts in a world of omnipresent work and scant humanity, Humphrey's clock-text stands as a counter-mechanism to the public capitalist sphere. Yet Dickens's queer seven-day *Clock* is ultimately less helpful in thinking about the smaller units of time which, as suggested in Pickwick's airy orchestration, do not merely make timepieces seem more like people, but emphasize how bodies and texts are like clocks, sustained by similar reiterative processes.[60] If meter in Victorian poetry's clock-texts often serves as a foundation for other, more ambitious conceits, it is these time-beats, throbbing out some degree of mutual feeling, that continually jumpstart an awareness of an analogy among clocks, texts, and bodies.

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[60] See Note 25 above. Scholarship on cardiac poetry has advanced similar ideas. As Adam Piette puts it, "The heart's regular beat is the dubious source of all repetition: mechanical pump methodically keeping a body regular and alive, and emotional source of the rhythm of all passion" ("Sound-Repetitions and Sense, or How to Hear Tennyson," *Swiss Papers in English Language and Literature* 7 [1994]: 166). See also Kirstie Blair, *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006).

II. Tallying the Poetic Hour: Victorian Poets at Work

There is a delightful passage from Browning's "Christmas-Eve" (1850), whose focus on the repetitions of Sunday liturgy offers a fitting transition point from a weekly serial to its poetic counterparts.

These people have really felt, no doubt,
A something, the motion they style the Call of them;
    And this is their method of bringing about,
By a mechanism of words and tones,
(So many texts in so many groans)
A sort of reviving and reproducing,
    More or less perfectly, (who can tell?)
The mood itself, which strengthens by using;
    And how that happens, I understand well.
A tune was born in my head last week,
Out of the thump-thump and shriek-shriek
    Of the train, as I came by it, up from Manchester;
 u / u / u / u / u u
And when, next week, I take it back again,
 u / u / u u / u / u u
My head will sing to the engine's clack again,
    While it only makes my neighbour's haunches stir

(lines 240-55)[61]

In this comic comparison of liturgy to train-travel, the hebdomadal motions of mass and motor each produce "a something"—a feeling a bit like divine inspiration, but called into being by a more reliable "mechanism of words and tones." These two parallel mechanisms, one driven by communal speech acts, the other by coal and steam, bring about "a sort of reviving and reproducing" of the feeling of this "something." They are precisely timed mechanisms of repetition that can, on schedule and by repeated use, "strengthen" the inspired faculty.[62]

Browning merrily lays different patterns atop each other: words, tones, moods, motions, a stirring of haunches and a singing of tunes, all propelled forward in time with each other.[63] The layering of ritual upon mechanism revises train travel from undifferentiated reiterations through time into something like a religious experience: moving the idle poet to poetic fecundity. Unlike the church service, however, Browning's tuneful train travel is quite emphatically a personal experience, not shared by his neighbor but imparted to his reader. The train's shrieking, thumping, clacking parts are registered musically as much as physically by the traveling poet, who begins to hear not the metronome of automated parts but a more variable tune: certainly the passage follows no particular metrical rule, beyond the loosest tetrameter, and the rhymes are ostentatiously irreverent. The weekly reproduction of words, sounds, and mechanized motions is

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[61] Robert Browning, *Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day: A Poem* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1850), 15. See also Yopie Prins, "Robert Browning, Transported by Meter," in *The Traffic in Poems: Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Transatlantic Exchange*, ed. Meredith L. McGill (Rutgers: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2008), 205-30.

[62] See William Wordsworth, "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads, with Pastoral and Other Poems (1802)*, in *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (1984; Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 595-615, particularly his emphasis on habits of mind. As Campbell puts it, Wordsworth's conception of "habit" is at odds with "the active powers" and "agency of the poet," instead "'obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits'" (Campbell, *Rhythm and Will*, 78; Wordsworth, "Preface," 598). See also Richard Adelman's *Idleness, Temptation, and the Aesthetic, 1750-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), esp. ch. 1, "The Division of Labour" (10-37).

[63] E. S. Dallas argued that the imagination was apt to perceive and respond to time's "orderly succession of beats" by unconsciously harmonizing to these time-beaters: "Thus a child will dance for joy, and when learning his lesson will unwittingly swing his body to and fro, in order to bring his most powerful faculty—the imagination—into play. If a man speed his labour, he begins to hum a tune; if his thoughts are very livelily engaged, he will beat time with his fingers or with his feet" (Dallas, *Poetics: An Essay on Poetry* [London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1852], 158-59).

not quite exact (but who can tell?). We have instead a "more or less perfect" revival of moods, religious and literary, occasioned by different ritualized motions. More important, in other words, than the unvarying precision of the mechanism of liturgy, or the tuneful shriek-shriek of the train, is the "something" it produces in the listener, who hears no monotone at all, but something that we might call poetic rhythm.[64]

As a story about the birth of a poem, Browning's "Christmas-Eve" remains in touch with the old familiar story of spontaneity.[65] But this tune springs from the more earthy and more earthly repetitions of train-wheels turning over. Nor is the poem's birth unexpected: Browning's speaker already knows that "when, next week, I take it back again, / My head will sing to the engine's clack again." The meter in this pair of lines I have scanned is not quite perfectly iambic. The second line slips an extra syllable in, to make an anapest in the third foot. In this slight but audible creakiness, we hear train travel as a repetitive but rhythmically inexact experience, which the reader is invited to react to "as if it were a physical stimulus."[66] The identical double-feminine rhyme echoes Browning's claim that this "more or less" identical "mechanism of words and tones" will return, on schedule, with the return train. No clock is in sight; but Browning is

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[64] As Alice Meynell put it in *The Rhythm of Life and Other Essays* (London: John Lane, 1896), "If life is not always poetical, it is at least metrical. Periodicity rules over the mental experience of man" (1).

[65] A by-no-means exhaustive list of recent scholarship on this subject include Lori Branch, *Rituals of Spontaneity: Sentiment and Secularism from Free Prayer to Wordsworth* (Waco, TX: Baylor Univ. Press, 2006); Anne DeLong, "Romantic Improvisation: The Discourse of Spontaneity and the Anxiety of Inspiration," in *Mesmerism, Medusa, and the Muse: The Romantic Discourse of Spontaneous Creativity* (New York: Lexington, 2012), 17-54; Gioia Angeletti, ""I Feel the Improvisatore": Byron, Improvisation, and Romantic Poetics," in *British Romanticism and Italian Literature: Translating, Reviewing, Rewriting*, ed. Laura Bandiera and Diego Saglia (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 165-80; Angela Esterhammer, "Spontaneity, Immediacy, and Improvisation in Romantic Poetry" in *A Companion to Romantic Poetry*, ed. Charles Mahoney (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 321-36, and *Romanticism and Improvisation, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008); and Michael O'Neill, "Even Now While I Write": Leigh Hunt and Romantic Spontaneity," in *Leigh Hunt: Life, Poetics, Politics*, ed. Nicholas Roe (London: Routledge, 2003), 135-55.

[66] J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1963), 118.

working out a model of poetic inspiration that derives directly from timed, regular habits.[67] The matins bell here rings out in time with the railway timetable.[68]

Browning's mechanism of words and motions, appearing in the mind if not on the page in weekly intervals, is suggestive of how industrial time had begun to alter ideas surrounding poetic composition during the Victorian period. Yet in embracing a more metered writing practice, Victorian clock-timed poetry also instantiates a degree of resistance to mechanized regularity. For all the emphasis on the repetitive measures of industrial technologies, "Christmas-Eve" doesn't feel particularly like a poem attuned to what Walter Benjamin later labeled homogeneous time: abstract, infinitely reiterable, and effortlessly translating time into capital.[69] Inception seems in this account less abstract and more muscular; and its minute irregularities act more as proof that punctual habits need not automate literature or its creators. The dual emphasis on the embodied experience of humans in the machine age, and on the machine itself as fitful, inexact creature, meet in a verse that feels no compunction to metrical perfection. In beginning to think through the relationship between poets' habits and poetic time-beaters, it's worth emphasizing how the Victorian poets who wrote to the clock foregrounded its susceptibility to error as much as they did poetry's natural compatibility with systems of time-discipline. In occasional contrast

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[67] For more on Browning's own "daily writing," see Sarah Wood, *Robert Browning: A Literary Life* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 57-59.

[68] Algernon Charles Swinburne later described Browning's mind as one technologically ahead of its age: as a "railway" outstrips the speed of the wagon, or a telegraph outstrips that of the railway. Quoted in Wood, *Robert Browning: A Literary Life*, 4. See James Ebester, "Nineteenth-Century Timetables and the History of Reading," *Book History* 12 (2009): 156-85.

[69] A notion first advanced by Benjamin and expanded by Benedict Anderson, homogeneous time takes its measurements from the steady production of material goods and accumulation of wealth, an accumulation that is often interpreted as progress. See Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," in *Selected Writings* vol. 4, *1938-1940*, 389-411; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (1983; New York: Verso, 2003); and Partha Chatterjee's 2005 pushback against Anderson: "Empty homogeneous time is not located anywhere in real space—it is utopian. The real space of modern life consists of heterotopia (my debt to Michel Foucault should be obvious). Time here is heterogeneous, unevenly dense. Here, even industrial workers do not all internalize the work-discipline of capitalism, and more curiously, even when they do, they do not do so in the same way. Politics here does not mean the same thing to all people. To ignore this is, I believe, to discard the real for the utopian" (Chatterjee, "The Nation in Heterogeneous Time," 928).

to their accounts of other forms of industrial labor, their accounts of timed *creative* labor showcase a surprising allowance for moderation and mistakes, locating in that leniency space for inspiration.

The classical poetic idea of inspiration seems on its surface antithetical to the regular rotations of measured time we find in a poem like "Christmas-Eve." Socrates, in Plato's *Ion*, had described the poet as "a thing of light . . . unable to compose poetry until he becomes inspired, and is out of his sober senses, and his imagination is no longer under his control." This is inspiration as ecstasy, in which poets compose only "through a divine allotment, to which the Muse has impelled them."[70] If poetry is divinely derived, not learned or practiced, then it exists in a different temporal frame from longer-term conceptions of diligent labor or steady effort. Time is irrelevant to such workmanship: it is, as Tennyson's Ida puts it, "one act at once," and we "can see but parts, now this, now that." It is humans' inability to perceive all "at once" that transforms this one act into "a phantom of succession" and "shapes the shadow, Time."[71] Tennyson applies this model to the creation of life itself, a birth that hovers perforce, for the mid-Victorian mind, somewhere between divine and geological. In the questions "which touch[] on the workman and his work," however, there exists a large gap between the celestial speech act of "'Let there be light and there was light'" (*The Princess* 3.303-04) and the humbler poetic efforts that depend upon acts of succession: "Aeonian music measur[ing] out / The steps of Time."[72]

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[70] George Burges, *The Works of Plato: A New and Literal Version* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1851), 4:296. The article "Elizabeth Barrett Browning" in *Scribner's Monthly* 7, no. 1 (Nov. 1873): 101-114, discusses this passage in reference to her "spontaneous and exhaustless command of words," and the particular play of her imagination. See also Penelope Murray, "Poetic Inspiration," in *A Companion to Ancient Aesthetics*, ed. Pierre Destree and Murray (Chichester, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 158-74; Hilary Susan Mackie, *Graceful Errors: Pindar and the Performance of Praise* (Ann Arbor, MI: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2003); and John Roe and Michele Stanco, eds., *Inspiration and Technique: Ancient to Modern Views on Beauty and Art* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007).

[71] Alfred Tennyson, *The Princess*, in *The Major Works*, ed. Adam Roberts (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 150 (3.303-13).

[72] Tennyson, *The Princess*, 150, and *In Memoriam*, ed. Matthew Rowlinson (Toronto: Broadview, 2014), 112 (95.41-42).

This image of succession through time, and *as* units of time, rouses a question of meter as well as labor, both forces that harness the energy of initial conception. Coleridge's account of meter in the *Biographia Literaria* (1817) traces meter's origin to the need to "hold in check the workings of passion," thus effecting "an interpenetration of . . . *spontaneous* impulse and of *voluntary* purpose."[73] Spontaneity (a singular, unlooked-for moment in time) and purpose (the intentional engaging in work over time) encounter each other through the useful restraint of meter. The poet's task is to capture inspiration's "one intellectual breeze" and transmit that feeling into "the continuing excitement of surprise" that meter works upon the reader. Coleridge is careful to emphasize that poetic vocation correspondingly requires "unintermitting," "difficult and delicate" attention to "even the mere mechanism of verse" if it is to successfully stimulate the reader's mind.[74]

Yet Coleridge and fellow Romantics such as Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Robinson tended to emphasize spontaneity over purpose. Indeed, the two categories seem in the Romantic telling to be frequently at odds with each other.[75] Robinson's tribute to Sir Joshua Reynolds opens in the aftermath of grief and the onset of resignation, when the Muse suddenly, "in strains untutored, and unsought, / Soars on the pinions of enraptured thought."[76] Robinson's poem is, to

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[73] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria; or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions* (London: Rest Fenner, 1817), 2:65-66.

[74] Coleridge, "Effusion XXXV. Composed August 20th, 1795, at Clevedon, Somersetshire [The Eolian Harp]," from *Poems on Various Subjects* (1796), in *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson, and Raimonda Modiano (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 17-19; and *Biographia Literaria*, 1:46-47.

[75] And, often, poetry as a rendering of inspired spoken performance as much as a piece of writing dashed off in a frenzy of new conception. See Jeffrey C. Robinson, "Romantic Poetry: The Possibilities for Improvisation," *Wordsworth Circle* 38 (2007): 94-100; Erik Simpson, "'The Minstrels of Modern Italy': Improvisation Comes to Britain," *European Romantic Review* 14 (2003): 345-67; and Jack Stillinger, "Keats's Extempore Effusions and the Question of Intentionality," in *Romantic Revisions*, ed. Robert Brinkley and Keith Hanley (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), 307-20.

[76] See also Robinson's "Progress of Liberty": "Why mistrust / The sensate soul, the faculty supreme / Which instinct wakens? REASON, pow'r sublime! / Accept the strain spontaneous from the Muse . . . . And tho' no flight sublime shall grace her toil, / No *classic* lore expand her thinking mind, / Prophetic inspiration, rapt, shall pour / This mystical oracle.

be sure, a monody; but in these opening lines it is equally a meditation on writing: the "spontaneous sweeps" of Truth that arrive, "untutored and unsought," only after one has resigned oneself to one's own creative impotence. Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* (c. 1821, p. 1840) similarly rejects intentionality in composition. "A man cannot say, 'I will compose poetry,'" he writes.

> The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within . . . and the conscious portions of our nature are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. Could this influence be durable in its original purity and force, it is impossible to predict the greatness of the results; but when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline . . . . I appeal to the greatest poets of the present day, whether it is not an error to assert that the finest passages of poetry are produced by labour and study. The toil and delay recommended by critics, can be justly interpreted to mean no more than a careful observation of the inspired moments, and an artificial connection of the spaces between their suggestions.[77]

The "inconstant wind" of inspiration, in Shelley's telling, cannot be "produced by labour and study," nor by "toil and delay."[78] The more you toil over the conceit of some poem or other, the further you must find yourself from the inspiration itself—and the worse, consequently, the

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[77] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), 531-32.

[78] Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" treads similar territory: "A heavy weight of hours has chain'd and bow'd / One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud. // Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is: / What if my leaves are falling like its own! . . . . Drive my dead thoughts over the universe / Like wither'd leaves to quicken a new birth! / And, by the incantation of this verse, / Scatter . . . my words among mankind!" (lines 55-58, lines 63-67). Peter Garratt's recent "Out of Breath: Respiratory Aesthetics from Ruskin to Vernon Lee," in *Reading Breath in Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 65-89, traces how poetic treatments of breath, air, wind, and spirit stand poised uneasily during the Victorian era between voluntary and involuntary ("automatic") modes of experience. See also Kate Nesbit's recent "Revising Respiration: Mesmerism, Spiritualism, and the Shared Breath of Poetic Voice in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*," *Victorian Poetry* 56, no. 3 (2018): 213-32, which takes on Barrett Browning's "imagery of shared breath and collaborative poetic utterance" as a complex response to canonical and mesmeric figures of patriarchal authorship "that both inspire and control Aurora's poetry" (214).

poem will be. Any impression the casual observer might have of a poet's regular habits of composition entirely misunderstands the nature of inspiration: they have merely made "an artificial connection of the spaces between" the "inspired moments" that have, unheralded, awakened the mind "to transitory brightness."

Wordsworth's much belabored phrase "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" is, in this sense, emblematic of the stories of inspired creation that Romantic poetry most loved to tell about itself—and the long lapses of uninspired writing over which they supposedly had very little control.[79] Shelley's *Defence* notably does everything in its power to elide the hours of labor that naturally inhere in composition. Whatever we might say about the Romantics' personal working habits, about their emphasis on "recollect[ion] in tranquility," time remains a secondary and even artificial adjunct to "Fancy and Imagination," which are "no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space."[80] Wordsworth's "spots of time" in the *Prelude* (1799; 1805; 1850), a work punctuated throughout by tolling bells, nonetheless preserve an idea of poetic genius originating outside the everyday structures of temporality.

These ideas of poetry as spontaneous visitation divorced from steady habit do not evaporate as the industrial revolution picks up speed.[81] But Victorians successors, in fashioning their own work lives after a more industrial model, began to define inspired creation in more

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[79] Timothy Clark, *The Theory of Inspiration: Composition as a Crisis of Subjectivity in Romantic and Post-Romantic Writing* (Manchester, UK: Manchester Univ. Press, 1997).

[80] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 1:296. Wordsworth's daily routine was so well known that Victorian essayists were able to fit it quite neatly into a more hourly account. As one mid-Victorian writer itemized it, "family prayers at eight—after breakfast the lessons of the day were read, and also the Psalms—dinner at two—the final meal at seven or eight; the intervals of the day being filled by walking, writing, reading, and conversation" (Henry P. Tappan, "William Wordsworth," in *Illustrious Personages of the Nineteenth Century* [New York: Stringer and Townsend, 1853], 212).

[81] Fred Kaplan's *Miracles of Rare Device: The Poet's Sense of Self in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1972) offers a useful overview of how the Victorians revised certain Romantic ideas of inspiration in a more self-conscious and occasionally defeatist vein. See especially his reading of Matthew Arnold's *Empedocles at Etna*, which Kaplan calls "the most sustained poem to come out of the growing mid-nineteenth century realization of the unsuitability of the Romantic vision of the poet and the creative process to Victorian aspirations for life and art" (124).

repetitive and less ephemeral terms. Browning, reflecting on Shelley in 1852, rather pointedly underscores the "toil" that we found Shelley sidestepping. "There are cheaper prices to pay," Browning writes, "than the bestowment of a life upon a labour, hard, slow, and not sure. Also, assuming the proper moral aim to have produced a work, there are many and various states of an aim: it may be more intense than clear-sighted, or too easily satisfied with a lower field of activity than a steadier aspiration would reach."[82] While acknowledging Shelley's desire to be understood as "a seer [rather] than a fashioner," Browning's emphasis on "steadier aspiration" and on "hard, slow, and not sure" labor, which moves the poet from the intensity of initial suggestion to a more "clear-sighted" stance, marks an important divergence from a poet whom Browning greatly admired.[83]

Browning's emphasis on slow, habitual work—even or especially in the terrain of inspired poetry—in many ways encapsulates how Victorians made central the efforts of diligent preparation and steady labor in which Wordsworth, for example, engaged during his own habit-driven writing life.[84] Browning's account of "good" poetic labor is far closer in substance to the reflections of Trollope or Martineau than it is to his Romantic forerunners. (Browning's "Childe Roland" was born from a New Year's resolution in 1853 to leave off with his desultory ways and write every day; the resolution faltered, although not before Browning drafted both "Roland" and "Women and Roses."[85]) "Certainly to have to *write by the clock* is dreadful," Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote to poet Thomas Westwood in 1845, "& I know enough of it to admit to you that

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[82] From Browning's 1852 forward to a (fraudulent) collection of Shelley's letters: "Introductory Essay [Dec. 1851], in *Selected Writings*, ed. Richard Cronin and Dorothy McMillan (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2015), 163.
[83] Browning, "Introductory Essay," 161, 163. In a similar vein, the prologue to Browning's *Asolando* proclaims the banishment of fancy's "alien glow" which obscures "the naked very thing." See also Meynell's *The Rhythm of Life*, which transformed Shelley's "artificial connection of the spaces between" inspired moments into a more "metrical absence of [the] Muse," whose rhythmical visitations and departures few have learnt to recognize (4).
[84] Jessica Fay, "Rhythm and Repetition at Dove Cottage," *Philological Quarterly* 97, no. 1 (2018): 73-96.
[85] Browning, as told to Daniel Sargent Curtis, in *Selected Poems*, ed. John Woolford, Daniel Karlin, and Joseph Phelan (Edinburgh: Longman, 2010), 348.

it is dreadful. . . . Also I shd shrink from advising you to order a set of harness & be a '*hack*' from this day forwards—you have no health for it perhaps, & I am sure you have too much sensibility." To be so harnessed to a set pace of production is, Barrett Browning argues, to be avoided: not only because one might not have the "health for it," as she was well in a position to know, but because one might also "have too much sensibility." Proper feeling is cast as necessary for art but incompatible with such rigorous and unabating labor.

And yet, Barrett Browning is quick to qualify, "*the life*" of the poet—"which is a life like another"—nonetheless requires a level of diligent and steady toil. The trick, as she lays it out, is to find a rhythm of work that neither feels too arduous, nor prevents one from *taking one's time*. "See whether by an hour or two's regular work in the day in writing," she advises Westwood, "you wd not release yourself from any necessity of a worse kind. I mean that you might *join* the two sources of revenue, & so take time & be harrassed [sic] by neither occupation, & learn by experience, which you find lightest in the lifting. . . . You wd creep through your first review, & run through the others." Barrett Browning envisions a writing practice that, by its very diligence, by its very being made to feel *not like work*, might elude the feeling of being put to the harness of clocked labor. The notion of the "hack," a term that evokes both bondage and also, quite simply, bad writing, grapples with the stakes of setting literary labors to the clock during an age when industry often meant suffering. "The danger," as the *Quarterly Review* put it in 1897, "[is] of going right on in the production of books, till the output becomes wholly mechanical. . . . [A] book which may yet be a real book . . . is produced from an infinite diversity of motives and temperaments."[86] Steadiness—that metrical interpenetration of spontaneous impulse and voluntary purpose—is to be prized; automation is not.

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[86] "Art. IV.—*The Author* Review," *The Quarterly Review* 186 no. 37 (July-October 1897): 103. See also Carlyle's "Signs of the Times," *Edinburgh Review* 49 (June 1829): 439–59, which declared the nineteenth century "in every

The effort to distinguish between these two conceptions of repetitive labor, and to fashion habits of regularity that nonetheless allow for "an infinite diversity of motives and temperaments," is at the heart of the Victorian effort to rethink the labor required to produce inspired thought. Charles Lamb, waxing nostalgic in 1821 for a timekeeper that "spoke of moderate labours, of pleasures not protracted after sunset, of temperance, and good hours," declared the mechanical clock's "business use" incompatible with moderation or temperance. But what we find in the Brownings' writings—and in Victorian poetry more broadly—is a concerted attempt to think through the resemblances between poetic and industrial labor, and by extension the possibilities afforded to art in a more automated culture than Lamb had even begun to countenance. As Barrett Browning's letter to Westwood suggests, this revisioning of inspired creation was not only of poetic interest, but of practical interest: *when to write*.[87] At what times of day did one feel most inspired? How many hours a day could one practicably write well? What quantity of time for reading, thinking, preparation were necessary to begin embarking on a new project? Could these things in some sense be measured, planned for, and turned to good use? We see this concern as far back as Walter Scott, whose reflections on genius and habit foretell the pressure to coax inspiration out of habit that his Victorian successors would experience. Writing in his diary in 1826, Scott declared "the half hour between waking and rising . . . propitious to any task which was exercising my invention." He explained,

> When I get over any knotty difficulty in a story, or have had in former times to fill up a passage in a poem, it was always when I first opened my eyes that the desired ideas thronged upon me. This is so much the case that I am in the habit of relying upon it, and

outward and inward sense of that word" the "Mechanical Age."

[87] As mentioned above, Martineau's memoir offers up an index of writing times. See also H. Erickson, "Methods of Authors: Favorite Habits of Work," *The Writer* 6, no. 6 (June 1893), 113-20, which runs through a detailed account of timed work habits of prominent eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers.

> saying to myself, when I am at a loss, "Never mind, we shall have it at seven o'clock tomorrow morning. There is a passage about this sort of matitudinal inspiration in the *Odyssey*, which would make a handsome figure here if I could read or write Greek. I will look into Pope for it, who, ten to one, will not tell me the real translation. . . .[88]

Scott never did record if he went looking for Homer's account of "matitudinal inspiration."[89] But he clearly connected that more classical account, brought back to the fore by Pope and his fellow Georgian poets, with his own more mundane habit of sitting down to write at 7 a.m. The diary entry shows Scott seeking to consciously harness the thronging ideas of early morning. It is a "habit" he relies on, when writer's block cannot be otherwise overcome. Scott's diary entries bear witness to the fact that he did indeed make a habit of "r[ising] at seven or sooner" and then writing until breakfast three hours later.[90] His carefully clocked exercise of invention in this sense attempts to maximize the hours of inspired writing: to produce and reproduce the poetic dawn as frequently as possible. Overlapping the figurative dawning of the inspired idea with the literal morning sun which accompanied his labor, Scott tugs Homer's muse toward a more practical register: different from but analogous to Browning's weekly train and the tune it sets running in his head.

This scheme of timely inspiration appeared also in Scott's epistles to *Marmion* (1808). The epistle to Henry Erskine in Canto III begins with an epic simile of April morning clouds—

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[88] Walter Scott, February 10, 1826 (Edinburgh), in *The Journals of Sir Walter Scott, 1825-32: From the Original Manuscript at Abbotsford*, ed. David Douglas (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1891), 113-14.

[89] Perhaps a reference to Homer's "rhododaktylos Eos," whom Pope redubs "Aurora." Pope, *The Odyssey of Homer* (1725-26; Aberdeen: J. Boyle, 1778).

[90] Scott, April 1, 1826, in *The Journals*, 166. Further references are made to commencing work at 7 a.m. in entries from May 1, 1826 (the *Journals*, 188); July 17, 1826 (the *Journals*, 228); Sept. 4, 1826 (the *Journals*, 250); Feb. 15, 1828 (the *Journals*, 538); March 14-16 (the *Journals*, 1828); June 10-14, 1828 (the *Journals*, 615); Feb. 9, 1829 (the *Journals*, 646); March 28, 1829 (the *Journals*, 672); June 7, 1829 (the *Journals*, 711); June 4, 1830 (the *Journals*, 745-46); June 11, 1830, where Scott exclaims, "In the morning, the usual labour of two hours. God bless that habit of being up at seven! I could do nothing without it" (the *Journals*, 748); July 3, 1830 (the *Journals* 758); and Feb. 23-25, 1831 (the *Journals*, 793).

the "morning dream" that will constitute Scott's "romantic theme" (lines 13-14). Here, the paired notions of "habit" and "fancy's wakening hour" which in Scott's diary give impulse to pen and poem are more purely symbolic, and more purely Romantic:

> Whether an impulse, that has birth
> Soon as the infant wakes on earth,
> One with our feelings and our powers,
> And rather part of us than ours;
> Or whether fitlier termed the sway
> Of habit formed in early day?
> ……
> Thus while I ape the measure wild
> Of tales that charmed me yet a child,
> Rude though they be, still with the chime
> Return the thoughts of early time;
> And feelings, roused in life's first day,
> Glow in the line and prompt the lay.
> Then rise those crags, that mountain tower,
> Which charmed my fancy's wakening hour.
>
> (lines 119-24; 152-59).[91]

The epistle to Henry Erskine invokes a question of whether poetry is indeed the impulse of innate genius or one formed by the press of habit. In a sense the answer is both at once: a series of impulses, or "measures," that must be corralled by habit into poetry: "Glow in the line and

[91] Scott, *Marmion; A Tale of Flodden Field*, 4th ed. (Edinburgh: J. Ballantyne, 1808).

prompt the lay." As we move farther away from the first awakening impulse, when the creative muse leaves its imprint upon the future poet, the metrical scheme correspondingly subsides from a more "wild" dactylic beat to the regular tick-tock of iambs. The "measure wild" of remembered tales is equally a matins bell, awakening the poetic impulse. In similar fashion does the "habit formed in early day" signify at once the habit of self-regulation learned in childhood, but also Scott's own writing habits, the early riser who would use the "early day" to break through the lapse of inspiration. The epistle to Erskine is a remaking, after a fashion, of Wordsworth's "Intimations" ode, published the previous year: the remembered dawn of life brings the adult closest to the lost, divine wellspring, figured as an aura of "celestial light" (Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," line 4). But Scott's careful layering of the "wakening hour" of life and the more local hours of composition marks him as a more direct forerunner to the clockwork metaphors of inspiration that become increasingly prominent in the ensuing decades. His account of inspired verse seeks to "tame" the "capricious chime" and the resultant "error[s] of the muse": to avoid "thriftless hours," "rambling on through brake and maze," in favor of the "practised road" (lines 27; 30; 40-41). "Oft hast thou said," he says to Erskine, "'If, still misspent / Thine hours to poetry are lent, / Go, and . . . tame thy wandering course" (lines 31-33).

This close correspondence of work habits and literary ideas of inspiration would find a number of poetic successors in ensuing decades. Thomas Hardy was another of Victorian poetry's enthusiastically time-regimented writers, a curious fact given that his novels form the centerpiece of Thompson's foundational essay on industrial time. This attention to punctual regimentation followed him from his early years as an architect in London to his later career as a

full-time writer.[92] Although he once confessed he found daytime a more "advisable" time to write, and over the years adopted a Dickensian habit of sitting down to write at 10 a.m., Hardy "prefer[red] night for working." During his London years, he would habitually devote the hours of 6 p.m. to midnight to reading and practicing poetry.[93] The poem "An August Midnight," written at Max Gate in 1899, conjures up this old habit of nocturnal composition, using a dense, metrical harmony of clock, pen, and biological matter to summon verse into being.

I.

A shaded lamp and a waving blind,
And the beat of a clock from a distant floor:
On this scene enter—winged, horned, and spined—
A longlegs, a moth, and a dumbledore;
While 'mid my page there idly stands
A sleepy fly, that rubs its hands . . .

II.

Thus meet we five, in this still place,
At this point of time, at this point in space.
—My guests besmear my new-penned line,
Or bang at the lamp and fall supine.
'God's humblest, they!' I muse. Yet why?

[92] Max Gate, Hardy's home in Dorset, had three grandfather clocks that he personally wound up each Monday morning. See Claire Tomalin, *Thomas Hardy* (New York: Penguin, 2007).
[93] Quoted in J. O. Bailey, *The Poetry of Thomas Hardy: A Handbook and Commentary*, ed. (Durham, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1970), notes to "An August Midnight. " For more Hardy's working habits, see Tomalin, *Thomas Hardy*; and Carl J. Weber, *Hardy of Wessex: His Life and Literary Career* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), which details some of the writers encountered during Hardy's early efforts to turn poet (52-53).

They know Earth-secrets that know not I.[94]

Although syllabically inconsistent, "An August Midnight" lulls us into an impression of quantitative regularity: a twelve-line schema, divided into two numbered sestets, and initially dominated by iambs and anapests (a *shad*-ed *lamp* and a *wav*-ing *blind* / And the *beat* of a *clock* from a *dis*-tant *floor*). But the pivot, as the longlegs, moth, dumbledore, and fly intrude upon the scene, discloses a metrically and biologically more diverse universe. Their entrance "besmear[s]" the "new-penned line," not obliterating the meter, but, with their "winged, horned, and spined" strangeness, preventing it from perfect symmetry. The minute dimensions of "this point of time" and space provide the locus for this meeting of insect life and poetry; the microscopic gaze that the speaker turns on his guests is of a piece with his attentiveness to the sounds of the poetic line, even as he allows the messiness of life's intrusions to mar the edges.[95]

Indeed, the swooping sound of the anapest reappears on either side of the insects' besmearing actions: at *this* point of *time,* at *this* point in *space*; and similarly, or *bang* at the *lamp* and *fall* su-*pine*. No accident that the seventh and eight lines are conceptual reworkings of the opening two: only now the shaded lamp and beating clock have been subsumed into a more unified dynamic, so that the first stanza's sequential presentation of lamp, blind, clock, insects, page, and speaker are all muddled up in the second. Each object's attunement with the others' movements is not effortless. The insects smear the ink that the writer has just laid down, are drawn to and then zapped by the lamp's shaded glow; and their alien features—so dissimilar each to each—evoke none of the regularity that the distant clock lays down at the onset.

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[94] Thomas Hardy, "An August Midnight," in *The Variorium Edition of the Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, ed. James Gibson (London: Macmillan, 1979), 146-47.

[95] Hardy's poem is, in this sense, a counter to Coleridge's declaration in the *Biographia Literaria* that "[t]he fancy is indeed no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space" (364).

Yet the "Earth-secrets" yielded by this intrusion of life onto the physical page seems, in the end, a natural culmination of this metered beginning. "An August Midnight" quickly departs from the midnight clock that title and opening lines position as the locational markers of the poem. Yet in its passage from the artificial time-beats filling the writer's study to its more existential, entomological conclusion, "An August Midnight" establishes the midnight clock as a setting and a rhythmic precursor to the more valuable insights that nature and poetry together might yield.[96] The poem's temporal and geographical markers call to mind Romantic poetry; but here the effect is less a particular event erupting out of the flow of history and more a careful, continuous progression of time and intent—the ink smeared, but the line not deterred from its course.[97] The precursive ticks are in this sense an echo of the young Hardy: laboring each night over rhyming and pronunciation dictionaries, buying up volumes of Milton, Shelley, Byron, and Browning, skimming the pages of Thomas Arnold's *A Manual of English Literature*—and preparing to one day take poetry up in earnest.[98]

The essentially optimistic models of timed-creation on display in Hardy, Scott, and the Brownings entertain an ongoing dialogue with writing's difficulty.[99] It is difficulty, after all, that

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[96] See Jean-Yves Lacoste's comments on poetry-writing and vigil, mentioned briefly in my first chapter (*Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*, trans. Mark Rafferty-Skehan [1994; New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2004], 79).

[97] As Andrew Stauffer puts, these time-stamps "signal the effusive, occasional nature of the Romantic project, its deep imaginative embeddedness within personal histories that are themselves parts of the larger sweep of cultural and political history" ("Poetry, Romanticism, and the Practice of Nineteenth-Century Books," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 24, no. 5 [2012]: 412). See also Chandler's remarks on Shelley's "England in 1819" and the self-conscious relationship between the "date" of the nation and "state" of the nation in Romantic historicism (*England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998], esp. xiv-xv; 32-33; and 78-84.

[98] Thomas Arnold's *A Manual of English Literature, Historical and Critical*, (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1862) marks one of the early attempts to assemble a canon of English literary history. Weber's *Hardy of Wessex* and Robert Gittings's *Young Thomas Hardy* (London: Heinemann, 1975) both note Hardy's reliance on this work. See Thomas Kullman, "Canon Formation in English Literature Studies: A Comparison of Britain and Germany," in *The Institution of English Literature: Formation and Mediation*, ed. Johannes Schlegel, Barbara Schaff, and Carola Surkamp (Göttingen: V&R Univ. Press, 2017), 273-94.

[99] Often when we talk about "difficulty" in literature we mean the difficulty not of writing but of *reading*. For my purposes, I find the term more useful than "writer's block." Difficulty implies hindrance rather than an

at once prompts better habits and yet, in its continual intrusions, keeps distancing those habits from truly industrial labor. But the corresponding impact timed-creation had on the Shelleyan concession to writer's block pushes this idea of difficulty to a more frustrated extreme. If writer's block was previously described as an agonizing but in some sense uncontrollable "space" between inspired moments, the Victorian emphasis on the ability to overcome inspiration's absence with the right habits assigned a more personal responsibility for those failures. Shelley's abstract spaces seemed suddenly measurable in a way they rarely had in previous eras: demanding a careful tallying of work not done or, at best, of mental preparation invested "so that, when the pulse of poetry begins to beat, the pen will run glibly."[100] Browning, writing to Alfred Domett in 1846, declared that "if the real work" should fail to present itself, it was preferable to have "bad business" to show for it rather than mere idleness and incompetence.[101] And yet, as a cumulation of poetry's timed-creation stories' interest in both literary and mechanical difficulties, failure offers its own curious resistance to a culture of endless material production—detaching pen and clock from effortless forward movement and attaching them instead to error, hesitation, and breakdown.

This motif of timed failure comes to a head in the writings of Coventry Patmore and the verse of the Victorian period's most perpetually frustrated poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins. Patmore was, as Gosse later wrote, "painfully aware that inspiration came to him fitfully and rarely, and that it left him soon." In contrast to poets like Tennyson and Browning who "made poetry their business," "master[ing] [ecstasy]," Patmore could not reliably channel his

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insurmountable barrier; and it calls to mind various kinds of technological glitches: "mechanical" and later "technical difficulties."

[100] Patmore, in Basil Champneys, *Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore* (London: George Bell, 1900), 1:251.

[101] Browning, letter to Alfred Domett, March 29, 1846, quoted in Wood, *Robert Browning*, 58.

imagination into art. "He long hoped that with age a greater freedom would settle upon him; that the heavenly visitant might be induced to come oftener, and to stay longer."[102] (As Gosse describes it, his hopes were disappointed.) His efforts to seek out regimens of order by which to deliver inspiration on cue are evident in letters written during the composition of *The Unknown Eros* (1877), later collected in his *Memoirs and Correspondences*. The epistolary record instantiates Gosse's remark that Patmore had a tendency to present his writings as "the result of a prolonged effort of the intellect," although Gosse takes this as wishful thinking on Patmore's part.[103] In one letter he writes that he has spent his time "preparing myself, by six or seven hours of reading and thought every day, for *any* plans that may be presented to me. . . . The longer it is before the key-note of my new song is given to me, the sweeter perhaps it will be." In another he documents "work[ing] steadily about eight hours a day in *preparation* for the still more unknown 'Eros,' and I think the day will probably come when I may feel fit to begin." "At all events," he wrote in a third, "it seems right to prepare myself for the possible gale, which may come some day . . . . I have always found in writing anything of consequence, that the idea, when it has got into my mind, has to brood there for years, without making any seeming progress, but in reality ripening, until the impossibility becomes all of a sudden the easiest of things."[104]

We've come far from Coleridge and the mythical, opium-inspired heights of "Kubla Khan." Patmore set himself not to the indulgence of heady dreaming but, as he put it, to fasting upon theology for "four hours a day for five months" as faithful "preparation for my work." "For poetry, contrary to the usual notion," he wrote to a friend, "is almost the only species of writing

[102] Gosse, *Coventry Patmore*, 214; 217.
[103] Gosse, *Coventry Patmore*, 218.
[104] Patmore, in Champneys, *Memoirs and Correspondence*, 251.

which cannot be done when one is out of one's senses."[105] Patmore's image of poetic "preparation" suggests a conscious disavowal of bardic ecstasy—literally, to be driven out of oneself and, potentially, out of one's wits—and a search for a process by which inspiration may be more reliably produced. Laying down the foundation for this "*possible* poem," Patmore postulates a laborious, slow preparation before the shafts of "light," at last, begin to "constantly break[] in upon [him]," when he may begin his poetic work. This is not "one act at once." *Many* hours are necessary for "the hour"—the hour of poetry, when inspiration at last breaks through the ordinary unspooling of daily time.[106]

The preparatory hours of hard work that Patmore carefully counts up have an even more extreme counterpart in the early diary entries of Hopkins, a correspondent of Patmore's and also associated with the so-called new prosody. The entries, composed during his time at Oxford in the mid-1860s, read as both litany and tally sheet of time's waste: "Waste of time in evening," he writes in 1865. "Ill temper at being quizzed. Two lessons unread. Later to bed than good. . . . Waste of time (very much) in morning. No work done in evening thro' going to Addis abt. the Canada business. Looking at temptations. Wasting time in morning. Very late to bed thro' not turning people out of my room . . . . Foolish waste of time in evening. Forgetting God, leading to self-indulgence. No evening lessons. Unwisely wasting time. . . . Inattention at chapel. Lateness to bed. . . . Wasting time in evening and going to bed late."[107] The proliferating entries, organized around the precisely timed college schedule, constitute a remarkable account of timed

[105] Patmore, in Champneys, *Memoirs and Correspondence*, 252. Contrast this to, say, James Whitehead, *Madness and the Romantic Poet: A Critical History* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2017).
[106] Patmore, in Champneys, *Memoirs and Correspondence*, 255.
[107] Hopkins, "Diary for 1865," in *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, vol. 3, *Diaries, Journals, and Notebooks*, ed. Lesley Higgins (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2015), 269-342 [303]. A draft of "The Alchemist in the City," discussed below, is included just before this entry, p. 301-03.

labor's converse, timed leisure: the internalized sense of shame over hours in which "no work [was] done."

Hopkins would continue to agonize over lost time throughout his career, particularly later as he battled crippling depression. Hopkins was not generally a poet of industrial scenes, as Thomas Hood or Elizabeth Barrett Browning often were; his poetry in many regards descends from a Romantic attentiveness which locates in nature the inscape that betokens the divine. But when the shadow of an industrious nation does peek through, it is almost always as a model he would aspire to imitate in his own creative labor. "The Alchemist in the City," an early narrative poem about creative impotence, opens with the "incapable" alchemist staring wistfully out his window at a city in which men "do not waste their meted hours," but move effortlessly (and in near-perfect iambs) from planning and building to "happy promises fulfill'd."[108] This sensation of "cumbrous shame" ("Alchemist," line 18) over hours wasted and furnaces unlit plagued Hopkins throughout his life. "Oh, the sots and thralls of lust / Do in spare hours more thrive than I," he writes in the 1889 sonnet "Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend." "Birds build—but not I build," he continues; "no, but strain, / Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes."[109] Building and breeding, craft and procreation, art and nature come to the same effect: the "spare hours" yield only impotence in Hopkins's poetry. The end of his career in particular abounds with such sonnets, conceived in "black hours" beneath "the fell of dark, not day."[110] "To R. B.," dedicated to Robert Bridges and also composed in 1889, marks a rare but unattained vision of effortless creation: a plea for "the one rapture of an inspiration," to be labored over in the mind for nine months, the "hand at work" unerring in its aim.[111]

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[108] Hopkins, "The Alchemist in the City," in *The Major Works*, 65-67 (lines 5, 8).
[109] Hopkins, "Thou are indeed just, Lord, if I contend," in *The Major Works*, 183 (lines 7-8; 12-13).
[110] Hopkins, "I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day," in *The Major Works*, 166 (lines 1-2).
[111] Hopkins, "To R. B.," in *The Major Works*, 184 (lines 5-10).

It is therefore surprising that Hopkins, a poet so obsessed with time's waste, writes perhaps the purest Victorian lyric account of timed poetic creation: the unfinished sonnet "To His Watch" (c. 1885-86).[112] There is a peculiar distancing effect produced by the third-person pronoun in the title, as if to emphasize that the sonnet is voiced not by Hopkins, but a more industrious, not to say robotic, version of him. Although the "Watch," like Dickens's *Clock* before it, is an abandoned project, it stands out for its aspirational approach to the mutually informing rhythms of clockwork and literary labor. The timepiece that ticks alongside speaker's pen is a helpmate, a lively, embodied, metrically attuned companion to the writer at work, not something to be rejected as unfit for the purposes of literary composition.

/ u u / / u u / u /

Mortal my mate, bearing my rock-a-heart

/ / u / / / u u u /

Warm beat with cold beat company, shall I

/ u u / / u u / u /

Earlier or you fail at our force, and lie

u / u u / u / u / u /

The ruins of, rifled, once a world of art?

u / u / u / u / u /

The telling time our task is; time's some part,

u / u / u / u / u /

Not all, but we were framed to fail and die—

u / u / u / / / u /

[112] "To His Watch" is generally categorized as an unfinished variation on a curtal sonnet.

One spell and well that one. There, ah thereby

u / u / u u / u / / /

Is comfort's carol of all or woe's worst smart.

/ / u u / u / u / u /

Field-flown, the departed day no morning brings

u u / u / u / u / u /

Saying 'This was yours' with her, but new one, worse,

u / u / u / u

And then that last and shortest.

The meter evokes something like iambic pentameter; but while quite rigorously decasyllabic, the sonnet audibly shifts into any number of other permutations. Rather than offering up a dystopian vision of the heart ceasing and the timekeeper beating on uncaring into cold eternity, Hopkins emphasizes the watch as a "mortal" creature, similarly vulnerable to the predations of time and mechanical failure.[113] "Shall I / Earlier or you fail," he asks, before concluding, "we were framed to fail and die." The transience of both watch and poet in Hopkins's sonnet marks an intensification of Browning's not-quite-perfect train rumblings, turning failure into a curious act of salvage against homogeneous time. The timekeeper's measurements in "To His Watch" are distinctly material in nature, its "task" fitted to a finite lifespan. While both speaker and watch exist in time, and beat time out with the vibrations of their bodies, they are neither of them representative of an abstract and universal measure. The watch's (and the poet's) task is all the more precious for this finitude: set against both the impending ruin that will overwhelm the

[113] See Andrew Hodgson, "Hopkins's Heart," *Victorian Poetry* 54, no. 1 (2016): 93-117, esp. 97-98, where he discusses "To His Watch" and its rhythmic "mix of spontaneity and endeavor."

"world of art" and the smaller woes of the individual life, this "comfort's carol" resounds with infinite fragility upon the air.

The initial point of resemblance, however, is founded in sound: these "time-beaters" of meter, stress, and rhyme. The clock is introduced to us, first and foremost, as a metrical creature, a "cold beat" produced by the delicate collaboration of balance, escapement, wheels, and mainspring. There is doubtless some formal notion of sprung rhythm in Hopkins's account of the watch: following a rigorous decasyllabic scheme, but marked by a more variable combination of five or six stresses per line. But there is also some echo, in his choice of subject, of Patmore's "Essay on English Metrical Law" (1857).[114] The "Essay" is best known for its theory of isochronous intervals, in which accents, rather than feet, mark out the natural cadences of the English language, and meter sounds most "natural" and "spontaneous[]" when it allows for "innumerable small departures" from a basic metrical scheme. In other words, the ear perceives a poem to be both natural and essentially regular precisely when it avoids the "over-smooth and 'accurate'" eighteenth-century meter.[115] But if Hopkins's sonnet follows a roughly isochronous pattern of meter, its speaker's address to his watch more closely resembles Patmore's less-studied remarks on "the rhythm of monotones." "The ticking of a clock is truly monotonous," Patmore writes, "but when we listen to it, we hear, or rather seem to hear, two, or even four, distinct tones, upon the imaginary distinction of which, and the equally imaginary emphasis of one or two, depends what we call its rhythm." This "imagined variation" of the clock-tones relates in Patmore's telling to "fancy," which "abolish[es] their monotony" and instills the

[114] Various versions of the essay circulated in the ensuing decades.
[115] See Note 24 above.

impression of "rhythmical melody."[116] Patmore's comments thus address the mind perceiving not just irregular rhythm as regular, but also monotones—in essence, the absence of rhythm—as rhythm: the ear at once correcting melody and constructing it where there is none.[117]

This contrast Patmore draws in the "Essay," between what the mind hears and what a series of sounds objectively sound like, finds a sequel of sorts in his *Principle in Art, Etc.* (1889). This essay creates an opposition between imagination and a "'fact-grinding" that destroys imagination by too much attention to material reality. Fact-grinding perceives similarity only in things that externally resemble each other; but imagination rests upon the "power of finding similitude in things diverse," an Aristotelian notion that Patmore finds essential for religion as well as love, both variations of the divine on earth.[118] The work deals very little with meter. But it offers a useful theoretical frame for "To His Watch," which grows out of an initial observation of perceived parallel rhythms to disclose a gradual process of discerning likeness in difference: "learning," in Dickens's word, to see the watch as a companion rather than a metonym of cruel, abstracted machinery. An initial rhythmic sensation of heartbeat and clockbeat, "warm beat with cold beat," suggests a metrical kinship that gradually becomes a literary one. The heart powers the poetic beat, its passions fueling the sense. But the clock provides the external

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[116] Patmore, "English Metrical Law," 231-32. See also Wordsworth's "Preface," which likewise emphasizes the faculty of perceiving "similitude in dissimilitude" (610), and William Hazlitt, *Essays on the Principles of Human Action* (London: John Miller, 1835), 41.

[117] Sidney Lanier's *The Science of English Verse* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1880), makes similar remarks about "the capacities of the ear for the definite measurement, or exact coordination, of sounds" (35). Lanier uses the clock's tick to mark off perceptions of primary and secondary rhythm. Primary, for Lanier, is the recurrence of any "equal or simply-proportionate intervals of time": in other words, a monotonous "tick, tick, tick." But, he observes, "every one who has been in a room alone with a ticking clock must have observed that every other tick seems to be different somehow, from its fellow, as if it is said, 'Tick-*tack*, tick-*tack*,' &c. ; and the effect of this difference is to arrange the whole series into groups, of two ticks in each group." Lanier labels this act of grouping secondary rhythm. "The ear not only goes on comparing each tick with tick as a *primary* unit of rhythmic measure," he explains, "but it proceeds to compare each group of two ticks with its fellow group of two ticks, thus constituting a *secondary* unit of rhythmic measure. These processes . . . are precisely what are carried on in verse" (63). Lanier also goes beyond Patmore's perceived difference in pitch and argues that the mind also conjures "a difference in emphasis, stress, or accent (that is, in *intensity*), as if the clock said, 'Tick-táck, tick-táck," and so on" (64).

[118] Patmore, *Principle in Art, Etc.* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1889), esp. "Imagination" (43-48).

accompaniment, and perhaps some degree of consolation and companionship to the lonely poet, whose more-than-Patmorean ear discerns a tone of humanizing sympathy.

Note, too, how the poem, as the speaker lays out their joint task, slips from imperfect dactyls, as the watch-spring is first set running, into a more balanced iambic pentameter, then stutters on the triple beats of "woe's worst smart" and "new one, worse," before landing on what is indeed the "last and shortest" line. This bit of clockwork arrhythmia, metrically mimicking a watch that is neither "true" to time nor immune to mechanical error, echoes the watch's own emphatic mortality. What we find, embedded in Hopkins's irregular meter, is not a theoretical timekeeper perfectly in tune, but something at once more specific and apter to err. Whether the error is indeed mechanical or merely a matter of perception in the end makes little difference; the embodied, imperfect companionship of speaker and watch exists in defiance of a more abstract and all-devouring time.

It isn't until the second quatrain that Hopkins moves from the embodied province of beats (what we might call pure sound) to language, as the watch and poet throb forward together, tasked with "telling" mortal time. Forecasting a world of "ruins" where art and life, man and mechanism, crumble at last into oblivion, the speaker nonetheless salvages something from the wreckage: the "one spell" of "telling time"—which is also, in some sense, the trick of living, of beating onward with the "force" of life's spring until the clock at last runs down.[119] It is not entirely clear whether Hopkins intended to write "forge" or "force" in line 3: force echoes the "sprung" rhythms driving the companionate beats of watch and poem; forge, resuscitating the smithy imagery of "Alchemist in the City," suggests a steadier but no less rhythmical "beating." Yet this manuscript uncertainty seems productive for our purposes. The forward movement—the

[119] See Phillips's critical edition for this line's original wording: "(We have) *One spell* (on earth) *and well* (must) *that one* (be used)." Hopkins, *The Major Works*, 377n171.

"force," if you will—of watch and poet-at-work is emphatically coequal in Hopkins's sonnet. The exertion required—the "forge" at which watch and poet hammer away in harmony—similarly iterates a rhythmic counterpart of effortful "telling." Communicating an image of poetry at once embodied and mechanized, the verse powered by and reiterating the pulsations of time and the body at work, Hopkins's unfinished sonnet offers up a hybrid vision of poetic labor: in achieving this union of the organic and mechanized, "To His Watch" manages a creative potency that, as we have seen, eludes Hopkins in the wastage of time.

It is tempting to read the unfinished lyric as a timepiece that has indeed failed: a sonnet that, in its very abandonment, threatens to contradict the creative vision of the verse even while fulfilling its mortal prophecy. Caroline Blyth, for example, writes of "the voice and movement of the poetry" that

> insist on a contemporary, urgent prescience of the "mortality' of time at cross-purposes with the convention of Time's immortality. . . . [B]y the "end" of the poem, such as it is in its incomplete form of eleven lines, there is no Comfort of the Resurrection: things, in a peculiarly late-nineteenth-century way, just get "worse." Morning never comes. It is not just his watch that's in bits—"ruins of, rifled"—but his world. Why should Hopkins finish it? His sonnet represents the terrible waste of time.[120]

Yet the sonnet's abandonment seems, in some sense, a by-product of its very emphasis on mortality: a run-down watch and a run-down poet who have, nonetheless, achieved *something*, have told some tale of their times, before their inevitable end. Mariaconcetta Constantini usefully emphasizes "Hopkins's baffling use of language" in the last few lines, in which he forsakes clear

[120] Caroline Blyth, "Introduction," in *Decadent Verse: An Anthology of Late-Victorian Poetry, 1872-1900*, ed. Blyth (London: Anthem, 2009), 2. See also Phillips, "The Effects of Incompleteness in Three Hopkins Poems."

subjects in favor of "perplexing" pronouns (who is "her"?) and vague deictics: "that one," "there," "this," "that." Constantini suggests that this descent into vagueness is related to the "unsayable" quality of immortal time. "Hopkins," she writes, "turns absence into a generator of meanings that the reader is challenged to detect."[121]

The semantic or metaphorical breakdown, I would add, had a mechanical analogue. Underlying the metaphoric tick of the watch toward life's final hour is a more practical tick of the poem's mechanisms—rhyme, meter, language—running out of momentum. The plunge of the em-dash at the end of line 6, following the acknowledgment that watch and speaker have been *designed* to fail, marks the beginning of a descent from semantic clarity to increasing opacity. The meter also, which settles in lines 5-7 into relatively regular iambic pentameter—one of the features that mark "To his Watch" as an Italian-style sonnet—lapses into irregularity. We can *hear* the poem jerking out of its earlier smoothness, echoing the poet's own uncertainty about the consolatory powers of vocation in the face of death: the contrasting stresses of "carol of all," with its chiastic drop in the center, and the sharp beats of "woe's worst smart" in line 8. The line was in fact subject to a number of wordings in the manuscript: at one point Hopkins entertained the sing-song cadence of "sweetest comfort's carol" as an alternative to the more awkward (and more ambiguous) "comfort's carol of all." He never deleted the original wording, however, and when Robert Bridges edited Hopkins's poetry for publication in 1918, he went with the original, finding it "preferable" to the second version.[122] The alternate patterning of line, which also rehearses a series of alveolar stops (swee**t**es**t** comfor**t**, wors**t** smar**t**), certainly chimes more smoothly on the ear; so it's interesting that Bridges preferred the more audible creaking of

[121] Mariaconcetta Constantini, "'To his Watch': Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Rhythm of Mortal Life," *Hopkins Quarterly* 39, no. 304 (2012): 88-106 [103].
[122] Robert Bridges, ed., *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1918), 123n70.

"comfort's carol of all." The iambic does restore itself midway through the ninth line. But the sense of the words only continues to devolve, until at last the poem shudders to a halt, stopping not just mid-line but also mid-foot: "and *then* that *last* and *shor*-test."

We might say that, in this image of gradual failure, we are seeing Hopkins's initial question to the watch play out: shall I or you be the first to fail at this poetic task of ours? In the end, it seems not to matter: the verse's mechanisms do *not* beat on once the speaker himself falters. For the purposes of poetry, at least, the organic and the mechanical cannot be entirely separated—something Richard Roe's work on time-beaters had emphasized sixty years prior. The "last and shortest" line, this final lapse of warm and cold beats, confirms the attunement of the speaker's creative force to the watch's sprung rhythm. While "To His Watch" fits the lifespans of speaker and timepiece to a slow gradation of light into dark, time into (perhaps) eternity, the emphasis continually draws us back to a question of what permits a poem to tick forward: the paired forces of sense and form, embodied mind and mortal mechanism. The intense intimacy of their rhythmic partnership signals a metrical exercise in how automation (like time itself) might be imagined not as abstract, merciless, and all-encompassing but as embodied, particular, and vulnerable to failure. Its very susceptibility to the predations of time is what makes this timepiece so fitting as topic and emblem of a lyric poem—and certainly *this* spare little lyric poem, which fits on half a page, its beginning and ending visible at the same time.

I've suggested that failure—bodily, mechanical, literary—is an inextricable, even dialectical component of Victorian literature's concern with timed labor. We might easily end this account on this image of concurrent breakdown, literary labor inexorably descending into the dusk of life. Yet Hopkins's morning-that-never-comes retains some tenuous relationship with the dawn of inspired creation: it is the better (and "older") morning that fails to materialize at

sonnet's end, glimpsed through the dark glass of a new and worse dawn. It is the same negation we find in the dark sonnet I quoted previously, "I wake and feel the fell of dark not day." Hopkins's reluctant dialogue with dawn, as he attaches the auroral to the machinery of his watch (and his sonnet), is fitting for a poet for whom writing was more often an experience of waste and incapacity.

It is the essential optimism of morning, however, that forms the backdrop of the final section of this chapter, which expands beyond these briefer tunes born from mechanism to Victorian poetry's most ambitious attempt to bring Romantic ideas of divinely derived poetry into an industrial framework: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856), which embraces a vision of industrial society informed and elevated by art's potential for enlightenment. Ascending toward a new and better dawn, *Aurora Leigh* affirms and updates for a technological era the account of poetry's partnership with science laid out by Wordsworth: "Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge . . . . bind[ing] together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society."[123] Nor is morning merely symbolic. It is, in a Scottian fashion, the reliable morning hour that revitalizes, the regular dawn that might make composition a less fragmented and more regulated initiative.[124] As Barrett Browning affirmed in "The Book of the Poets," published in 1842, the would-be poet of this new golden age must take to heart Philip Sidney's immortal command, "Foole, saide my muse to mee, looke in thine hearte and write." "Not only," she wrote, must we write "at feast times, fast times, or curfew times—not only at the hours of crisis and emotion, but at all hours of the clock; for that which God thought good enough to write, or permit the writing of, on His book, the heart is not too

[123] Wordsworth, "Preface," 606.
[124] It is in the "Pulsation of the Artery," William Blake wrote in *Milton*, that "the Poets Work is done: and all the Great / Events of Time start forth & are conceivd in such a Period / Within a Moment." *Milton a Poem*, 178 (plate 28, lines 1-3).

common, let us be sure, to write again in the best of our poems." Applying a notably Protestant work ethic to poetic composition, Barrett Browning revises Sidney's invocation to include a more egalitarian temporal setting for inspiration. "The heart is not too common," as she puts it, to write "at all hours of the clock."[125]

III. "Six at Dawn": Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Clockwork Epic

Elizabeth Barrett's dawn muse made its first, precocious appearance on the page when, at the age of nine, she wrote a poem in honor of her mother's birthday. "Come Oh my Muse," she wrote, "Aurora sings in her triumphal car / And Natures Music does the hour beguile."[126] Long before it reached fullest expression in *Aurora Leigh*, the dawn as site of invocation and symbol of poetic knowledge was a hallmark of Barrett Browning's poetry. The young Elizabeth was writing her way toward epic, after all, and Homer and Milton are apt illuminative forerunners for her sense of poetry's divine origins.

Yet Barrett Browning's sense of the "hour" in which her pen is first set running already denotes a more consciously mechanized epistemological framework for inspired creation. In the same year , Barrett Browning also penned a rote little poem "on putting up the clock at Hope End," the Moulton-Barrett family home in Hertfordshire. The poem is, for the most part, quite standard stuff: assuring us that the clock will offer "a useful lesson" on time's "value" and transience, and connecting the flight of the hours to a more divine register of life and ascension. But "On putting up the clock" also unfolds, in Hopkinsesque fashion, as a process of listening to

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[125] See Barrett Browning, "The Book of the Poets," in *The Poetical Works of Elizabeth (Barrett) Browning, With Two Prose Essays*, ed. Humphrey Milford (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1920), 654 (hereafter cited in text).
[126] Barrett Browning to Mary Moulton-Barrett, May 1, 1815 (Hope End), in *The Brownings' Correspondence: An Online Edition*. Later published in *Hitherto Unpublished Poems and Stories*, ed. H. Buxton Forman (Boston: Bibliophile Society, 1914): 1:86.

time's minstrel, of paying attention, that underlies the aural sensitivity necessary for a poet to depict modern life in its fullness. "On putting up the clock" never approaches the aesthetic achievements of Hopkins's "Watch"; but it already a suggests a more all-encompassing effort to bring a dense soundscape, at once natural and mechanized, into harmony:

> Hark! What deep tones proceed from yonder tower,
> For tell-tale Echo's voice betrays the sound!
> A Clock—the minstrel of the parting hour—
> While breathing zephyrs gently sport around.
>
> New is the note amidst these varied shades;
> Sweet Natures songsters startle at the tone:
> Cynthia appears, & Day's gay habit fades;
> But still the clock maintains its drowsy moan.
>
> (lines 1-8)[127]

Like "To His Watch," "On putting up the clock" opens with an awakening to sound: "Hark! . . . . A Clock." But aurality does not here signify a process of identification. Here the poet's ear perceives and then masters discordance. When the Hope End clock first intrudes upon the soundscape, it does so as a "deep tone" or "note" that startles "Sweet Natures songsters," who are used to sporting undisturbed amid the "breathing zephyrs" of the resonant air. But then, as the ear grows accustomed to its music, the clock subsides into a drowsy, tuneful moan—a steady reminder to use the time well, but no longer a sharp-toned intruder. The intruder now brought into the fold, the poem can proceed to its "lesson" on "the value of each passing year" (lines 10-

[127] Transcribed in a letter to Hugh Stuart Boyd, Dec. 28, 1829 (Hope End), in *The Brownings' Correspondence: An Online Edition*.

12). If the nine-year-old's birthday poem marks the start of her affection for literature's "illuminative" qualities, we might then position the Hope End clock as a template for poetry's role in attuning life's disparities.

These two early impulses, illumination and attunement, meet for Barrett Browning in the territory of epic. Epic's investment in encompassing the fullness of its age required a poetic absorption of at least some of the nineteenth century's industrial energies.[128] In similar fashion had Bailey's spasmodic epic *Festus* briefly attempted to bring "mechanic aids" and "works of mind" into alignment. And so too had William Blake's *Milton* (1804-10) spoken of that "Moment in each Day that" that neither Satan nor his "Watch Fiends" can find, but that "the Industrious find . . . [and] multiply, & when [the Moment] once is found / It renovates every Moment of the Day if rightly placed."[129] The "right placing" of poetic industry, at just the moment "when the morning odours rise abroad . . . from the Wild Thyme," becomes for Blake and Barrett Browning both a means of first eluding the reach of time's watch-fiends, and then of "multiplying" that discovery into the renovation of every other moment that falls under the watch's sway.[130]

We might thus trace an imperfect but intriguing trajectory from Homer's rosy-fingered dawn to Milton's "Morn, / Waked by the circling Hours, with rosy hand" to Blake's *Milton* to the clockwork hours of *Aurora Leigh*.[131] This longue-durée account of inspiration to fit a

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[128] For more on the nineteenth-century epic "recuperatively coherentist program of modern culture," see Herbert F. Tucker, *Epic: Britain's Heroic Muse, 1790-1910* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 16-18; 26-27.
[129] William Blake, *Milton a Poem*, ed. Robert N. Essick and Joseph Viscomi, in *The Illuminated Books of William Blake*, ed. David Bindman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1998), 193 (plate 35, lines 42-49).
[130] Blake, and Grant Campbell, "Starry Wheels and Watch-Fiends: Clocks and Timepieces in William Blake's *Milton*," *Theatre of the World* 17 (1998):165-74.
[131] David Masson's 1890 volume on John Milton and versification attempts to "time" Milton's *Paradise Lost*—positing, for instance, that Eden's sunset is "about six o'clock" and that the description of night in Book IV indicates "it was about nine o'clock" (*General Essay on Milton's English and Versification and Notes to the Poems* [London: Macmillan, 1890], 453). He contrasts Milton's semi-mechanized "circling Hours" of morning with Homer's more natural dawn (477).

mechanizing society reached apotheosis in the mid-Victorian years, when the ambition of poetry to central cultural spokesmanship sustained its long recession into the counter-cultural posture that would prevail in the ensuing century, even as momentaneous lyric prevailed over the longer temporal scope of epic. The mechanization of inspired thought seems consciously to motivate Barrett Browning's literary career; it plays out in her writings on both individual and collective poetic labor, as a national project sustained from one century to the next. Poetry in her time was at last "re-dawn[ing] like the morning," the nineteenth century overseeing the illumined birth of a more enlightened English poesy, better heirs to Chaucer, Sidney, Milton, and their classical forerunners.[132]

"The Book of the Poets" and its prequel, "The Greek Christian Poets" (both published in installments in the *Athenaeum* in 1842), contain the most extensive Barrett Browning commentary on poetry's transhistorical progress, which was at last experiencing "a revival, an awakening—a turning, at least upon the pillow, of some who slept on in mediocrity as if they felt the daylight on their shut lids" ("Book of the Poets" 652). The *Athenaeum* essays lay out a chronology of post-classical poetry whose advancement depends directly upon the steady industry of new generations of poets. The model of literary labor Barrett Browning would approve for the modern practitioner—to write "at all hours of the clock," and for poetry to "be right welcomed at every hour of the clock" ("Book of the Poets" 627)—thus becomes the template for the history of poetry more broadly: "the clock of the universal hour" that strikes off the ages of poetry, from the dawn of the classical era to the waning light and then deep night of the medieval period, to the new morning of contemporary poetry. It is by this clock that, as Barrett Browning puts it, her readers "have watched out the whole night of the world with [her],

[132] Barrett Browning, "The Book of the Poets," in *The Poetical Works*, 195.

by no better light than these poetical rushlights" ("Greek Christian Poets" 625). It is only at the beginning of the seventeenth century that "a red light is gathering—above the falling of the dews a great sun is rising: there is a rushing of life and song upward" ("Greek Christian Poets" 626). In this slow "gradation" toward morning, as "the hands of the clock" audibly mark off the five ages of English poetry, the Victorians stand at last on the precipice of a long-awaited "awaking": an awaking that will also, in *Aurora Leigh*, depend upon the more quotidian efforts of poets toiling their individual way toward the dawn ("Book of the Poets" 644; 632).

Barrett Browning's account of poetic time—as both the hours devoted to writing and a renascent literary history—is in some respects a remarkably spasmodic one. Spasmodic poetry admittedly is more likely to be understood as impelled by "galvanic life" (*Aurora Leigh* 3.249) than something more mechanized: "ceaseless as the pulsings of the blood, / The inspiration of the spirit acts / In one or other's bosom."[133] But in another sense, spasmodic poetry is a natural fit for this attachment to "all hours of the clock" as the setting for verse. As Herbert F. Tucker puts it, time for the spasmodics "has no significance beyond the steady accrual of experience as a uniform good. In this sense spasmodism is literally optimistic: any time is best, since every time is better than what has preceded it."[134] Barrett Browning maps this optimism onto her clockwork metaphor of poetic history; and she expands it beyond the hours of galvanized "emotion" to encompass the steadier labor required to bring the new poetic golden age into being. "In the meantime," she wrote,

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[133] Bailey, *Festus*, 281.
[134] Tucker, "Glandular Omnism and Beyond: The Victorian Spasmodic Epic," *Victorian Poetry* 42, no. 4 (2004): 430.

> the hopeful and believing will hope,—trust on; and, better still, the Tennysons and the Brownings, and other high-gifted spirits, will work, wait on, until, as Mr. [Richard Henry] Horne has said—
>
> Strong deeds awake
>
> And, clamouring, throng the portals of the hour.[135]

Accounts of clocked writing in Barrett Browning's letters are somewhat more ambivalent (and contradictory) than these passages might imply. Her prose essays in particular made her feel as if she were "writing to the clock," something she declared "against my nature"; and when she set out to write "The Book of Poets" she declared her intention "to be very leisurely & dawdling & discursive thereupon."[136] In the letter she writes to Hugh Stuart Boyd about the essay's publication, she declares she has attained a "rival" for his musical clocks: an Aeolian harp.[137] It's a curious juncture: this proposed rivalry between an exceedingly Romantic image of poetry and Boyd's musical clocks, both mechanized and "melodious." For all the frequency of clockwork in her poetry and *Athenaeum* reviews, her letters show a suspicion about the clock's fitness as a companion to literature, much less a model for it. Likening Boyd's clocks to Ossian's "Death of Cuthullin," she declares the poem "in literal fact, *melody*, without the intricacies, the varieties, the light & shade of *harmony*. & therefore, is it, in long continuousness, fatiguing to the ear & ungrateful to the sense of music."[138] Melody's movement is linear, a diachronic progression from one equivalent moment to the next. The fatigue it elicits is aurally derived; but it calls to mind the bodily fatigue of labor stretched "in long continuousness" between the chimes of the clock.

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[135] Barrett Browning, "The Book of the Poets," in *The Poetical Works*, 658. She is quoting Horne's *Gregory VII: A Tragedy*, 3rd ed. (London: C. Mitchell, 1849), 1.3.4-5.
[136] Barrett Browning to Marry Russell Mitford, March 16, 1842 (London), in *The Brownings' Correspondence: An Online Edition*.
[137] Barrett Browning to Hugh Boyd Stuart, June 3, 1842, in *The Brownings' Correspondence: An Online Edition*.
[138] Barrett Browning to Hugh Boyd Stuart, March 31, 1843, in *The Brownings' Correspondence: An Online Edition*.

Harmony, however, unfolds along a vertical axis; and its layered intricacies, varieties, and gradations of light and dark are suggestive of how her verse conceives of poetry as galvanically informed by love and the divine.

It's therefore striking that, as Barrett Browning writes her way toward her dawn epic, *Aurora Leigh*, her notion of the hours—as temporal structures that equally accommodate the vicissitudes of emotion and daily, "patient and laborious" writing—becomes increasingly aligned with her ideas about love. "Love strikes one hour," she writes in her 1844 poem "Loved Once," "LOVE! those *never* loved / Who dream that they loved ONCE."[139] The unchangeability of love, its continual telling stroke, is the force that links the clock to eternity, that is, to divine love—and poetry, in turn, is the art form that helps to translate that love into language. Barrett Browning's relationship with Robert Browning, begun the following year, would attach the clock to a more romantic "counterpart" to that emotion. Writing to her in late November of 1845, he mused,

> When I spread out my riches before me, and think *what* the hour and more means that you endow one with, I *do*—not to say *could*—I *do* form resolutions, and say to myself—'If next time I am bidden stay away a fortnight, I will not reply by a word beyond the grateful assent.' . . . . But I have, from the first, recorded the date and the duration of every visit to you; the numbers of minutes you have given me ... and I put them together till they make ... nearly two days now; four-and-twenty-hour-long-days, that I have been *by you*—and I enter the room determining to get up and go sooner ... and I go away into the light street repenting that I went so soon by I don't know how many minutes—for, love, what is it all, this love for you, but an earnest desiring to include you in myself,

[139] Barrett Browning, "Loved Once" (1844, in *Victorian Women Poets: An Annotated Anthology*, ed. Virginia Blain, 61-63 (lines 63-64).

> if that might be; to feel you in my very heart and hold you there for ever, through all chance and earthly changes![140]

Browning's careful tallying of minutes, hours, and days that have been "endowed" by Barrett Browning's physical proximity—this forty-eight hours "that I have been *by you*"—translates time into love: "what is it at all, this love for you, but an earnest desiring to include you in myself." The habit of counting the hours and minutes that measure intimacy has a curious relationship to writing, as this jotting down of dates and times takes the place of "a journal, a register of sights, or fancies, or feelings" that, before now, he has had no interest in keeping. The registering of clock-time as units of love bleeds into his letters to her as well; they record the time apart in which he is nonetheless thinking about her, writing to her, and hoping that she is, at the same stroke of the clock, thinking of him as well. As he wrote to her in March of the same year, "This sunny morning is as if I wished it for you—10 strikes by the clock now—tell me if at 10 this morning you feel any good from my heart's wishes for you."[141]

With this image we come to *Aurora Leigh*, an epic that is also almost a novel, a kunstlerroman that is also a marriage-plot novel, an aggressively contemporary poem that is also in dialogue with the dawn of Revelation. It toggles back and forth between the mundane and the divine, and this effect initiates two parallel temporalities. The universe in *Aurora Leigh* bends toward the illuminative eastern horizon, awaiting the "hour of souls" that will oversee the perfecting of the poetic form. *Aurora Leigh* is broadly structured around this clockwork cosmology: like the five-ages progress of poesy itself, Barret Browning's epic tracks us out of the darkness of ignorance and hardship and toward the epiphanic morning that will plunge us

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[140] Browning to Barrett Browning, Nov. 22, 1845, in *The Brownings' Correspondence: An Online Edition*.
[141] Browning to Barrett Browning, March 31, 1845, in *The Brownings' Correspondence: An Online Edition*.

headlong into a new and better age.[142] But the poem is also highly sensitive to the daily, and hourly, labor that slowly brings a divinely inspired poetry to life. It is also, and this is an important dimension of *Aurora Leigh*'s horological ethos, attentive to poetry's own role in a world marked by industrial labor measured in hourly units. As I will attempt to lay out in this last reading, the poem's accounts of literary labor are closely aligned with its attempt to lay the imaginative groundwork for a more humane time-discipline in nonliterary contexts.

What I have labeled the clockwork cosmology of *Aurora Leigh* is portended relatively early. If the title had not already announced the poem as a dawn epic, the young Aurora's tentative efforts at verse, which she likens to a "chaffering swallow" singing at dawn and taking itself "for the holy lark," quickly clarify the connection.[143] But it isn't until Book IV that Barrett Browning explicitly maps this investment in dawn, as the symbolic backdrop for poetry, onto clocks. The moment comes on the eve of her cousin Romney's wedding to the working-class seamstress Marian Erle. As Romney and Aurora walk through the drizzling darkness, their words seem, in Aurora's description, "unnatural, "tangled with the thunder at one end" (4.398; 4.409) Their exchange is muddled by a disharmony that at once reflects the cousins' fraught relationship and suggests a more metrical chaos, in which the usual exchanges of stress and rest—the tick-tock of a line of language—are "tor[n] greedily up" by a fear of silence, of "the innocent breathing-points" (4.412-13). Trying to explain the sonic discord, Aurora lays out a metaphor she draws from Leibniz, in his rebuttal to Descartes's account of mind-body dualism:

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[142] Barrett Browning is not the only Victorian to use this metaphor for literary and cultural history. The most notable prose example is Henry James's autobiography *A Small Boy and Others* (London: Macmillan, 1913), which speaks of the great realist novels of Dickens, Eliot, Thackeray, and Trollope as the "deeper-toned strokes of the great Victorian clock": these "strong time-marks" that permeated the air with a "collective sensibility," enriching common life with their "particular renewals of supply." James called these novels "steps in the march of our age, besides being so many notes, full and far-reverberating, of our [subsequent novelists] having high company to keep—high, I mean, to cover all the ground, in the sense of the genial pitch of it" (21).

[143] Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, ed. Kerry McSweeney (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 1.952-53 (hereafter cited in text).

> . . . [L]eave two clocks, they say,
> Wound up to different hours, upon one shelf,
> And slowly, through the interior wheels of each,
> The blind mechanic motion sets itself
> A-throb to feel out for the mutual time.
> It was not so with us, indeed: while he
> Struck midnight, I kept striking six at dawn;
> While he marked judgment, I redemption-day;
> And such exception to a general law
> Imperious upon inert matter even,
> Might make us, each to either insecure,
> A beckoning mystery or a troubling fear.
>
> (4.421-32)[144]

Leibniz's scenario of two clocks, laid out in the "Second Explanation of the System of the Communication Between Substances" (1696), imagines a universe in which soul and body, spirit and matter, draw inexorably into synchrony.[145] Barrett Browning's two irreconcilable forces are head and heart: Romney attends to numbers, statistics, generalities; Aurora, to art and the

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[144] See also Mary Mullen, "Two Clocks: *Aurora Leigh*, Poetic Form, and the Politics of Timeliness," *Victorian Poetry* 51, no. 1 (2013): 63-80). Mullen, following Caroline Levine and Catherine Gallagher, offers a reading of *Aurora Leigh*'s "politics of timeliness" that attempts to make sense of its "discrepant forms and temporalities [that] refuse monolithic or uniform understanding of historical time." She fails to remark on the Leibniz connection, however, and treats the clocks in a primarily symbolic vein.

[145] Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "Third Explanation—Extract from a Letter of M. D. L. Regarding his Philosophical Hypothesis and the Curious Problem . . . ," (1696), in *The Monadology and Other Philosophical Writings*, trans. Robert Latta (Oxford: Clarendon, 1898), 331-50. Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* also mentions Leibniz's third explanation: "Leibnitz's [sic] doctrine of a pre-established harmony; which he certainly borrowed from Spinoza, who had himself taken the hint from Des Cartes's [sic] animal machines, was in its *common* interpretation too strange to survive the inventor—too repugnant to our *common sense* (which is not indeed entitled to a judicial voice in the courts of scientific philosophy; but whose whispers still exert a strong secret influence.)" (129).

individual soul. They might, if only they could reconcile these two impulses, arrive at a "mutual time"—a time that is also a "mutual love," the fate Romney has already rejected in favor of a "common love" (4.331). This construction maps onto the Victorian wariness of standard time, conceiving of temporal unity more as a "feel[ing] out" between two "throb[bing]" hearts than a common law, imposed from above. But Barrett Browning is also mapping these two clocks, and the warring impulses they represent, onto the poem's gradient of light and dark: "While he / Struck midnight, I kept striking six at dawn." It's a noteworthy choice. Barrett Browning might well have written "I kept striking dawn," a perfectly admissible phrase. Yet in attributing to dawn a precise hour, 6 a.m., she in some sense foreshadows the mutual time she envisions her poem ultimately achieving: an auroral hour that is mechanized as well as inspired, metaphysically uniting head and heart, tempering the judgment that awaits at the end of days with the redemption of a new age to come.[146]

Barrett Browning's epic clocks in at nine books, rather than the traditional twelve; but the twelve-part form of chronometry haunts *Aurora Leigh*. Leibniz's clocks arrive in book 4, nearly halfway through the poem and when the hour itself seems to be approaching midnight, "the night . . . drizzling downward in the dark rain" as Romney and Aurora hope for some east-blowing wind (4.394; 4.407). It is midnight in the poem, the midnight *of* the poem, and also the midnight of poetry: as Romney puts it several pages earlier, "You poets are benighted in this age, / The hour's too late for catching even moths" [4.337-38]). Romney's declaration is undercut, however, by the reader's knowledge that we are ticking inexorably toward dawn. The clock is

[146] See Kevin Miller, *Approaching Apocalypse: Unveiling Revelation in Victorian Writing* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell Univ. Press, 2007), esp. p. 27-29; Linda M. Lewis, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Spiritual Progression: Face to Face with God* (Columbia, MO: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1998), esp. ch. 3 "The Politics of 'Planting the Great Hereafter'"; and Karen Dieleman, "Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Religious Poetics: Congregationalist Models of Hymnist and Preacher," *Victorian Poetry* 45, no. 2 (2007): 135-57.

already set, and the remaining books, lines, and poetic feet are the chimes and tick-tocks marking that progression toward 6 a.m. When Aurora identifies herself as "six at dawn," Barrett Browning is therefore integrating the clock into her conception of epic: she literalizes epic machinery, translating the twelve-book frame of the *Aeneid* and the twenty-four-book frame of the *Iliad* into an hourly progression from one age to the next. The marriage plot's fitting of numbers to art is, in this telling, scalable. The mutual time of Romney and Aurora lays the "first foundations" (9.956) for a modern kind of poetry (and a modern kind of epic) neither alien to the wheels and gears of modern industry, nor remote from the experiences of those bodies and souls it hopes to "leaven[] by the will and love" to the light of redemption.

> The world's old,
> But the old world waits the time to be renewed,
> Toward which, new hearts in individual growth
> Must quicken, and increase to multitude
> In new dynasties of the race of men;
> Developed whence, shall grow spontaneously
> New churches, new economies, new laws
> Admitting freedom, new societies
> Excluding falsehood: HE shall make all new.
>
> (9.939-49)

Aurora Leigh ends, of course, on the brink of dawn, its gaze directed eastward "where, faint and far, / Along the tingling desert of the sky . . . . Were laid . . . / The first foundations of that new, near Day / Which should be builded out of Heaven to God" (9.952-57). Channeling the language of Revelation, Barrett Browning resuscitates the clockwork narrative she first laid out in "The

Greek Christian Poets" and "The Book of the Poets." Literary history circles round at last to a new and better morning—better, in part, because the Homeric dawn is now also a Christian dawn, rising in the east as if out of Jerusalem.

Aurora Leigh's final dawn hour affirms that, out of the individual growth of hearts that have through "mechanic motion" sought out a mutual time, "shall grow spontaneously / New churches, new economies, new laws." The reprise of spontaneity, at poem's end and as the culmination of intense effort to bring the world once more out of darkness, revises Shelley's declaration that "the conscious portions of our nature are unprophetic either of [inspiration's] approach or its departure." The soul, in elevating the body, has transmuted its labor toward new spiritual, economic, and legal ends; the workings remain mysterious, retaining their origins in the divine. Yet those new creations remain, in some sense, prophesied. The foretold illumination of "six at dawn" is what *Aurora Leigh* has been telling us to watch for. As Patmore put it, one must first "brood there for years," "laying the foundation broad and deep," before the hour arrives when the shafts of "light" are at last "constantly breaking in upon" the hour.

So much for the larger machinery of the poem. But *Aurora Leigh* is also, as I have said, invested in *daily* labor, in hourly efforts of composition. The segmented production of a major poem is *not* a matter of twelve or twenty-four hours; it unfolds in bouts of work within a longer and more disciplined framework. Famously, the perspective of *Aurora Leigh* hovers halfway between autobiography and diary. Aurora's account of her life skips between past and present tense, so that we wonder whether it is purely retrospective or is closer to a daily account of daily writing, current and concurrent, accompanying the young woman as she takes up the mantle of poetry in earnest. A curious moment occurs in the last few pages of the poem, when the daily writing evoked by a diary and the enclosed retrospect of the autobiography brush up against one

another. As Romney and Aurora at last unite in mutual love and turn their eyes toward morning, a curious fourth wall appears and, as soon as it appears, breaks open. "I have written day by day," Aurora confesses, "With somewhat even writing. Did I think / That such a passionate rain would intercept / And dash this last page?" (9.725-28). In describing the process of writing her autobiography as a daily one, Aurora confirms that the earlier accounts given of her labor—undertaken "day by day" "with a morning heart, / That leaps for love, is active for resolve, / Weak for art only" (1.996-98)—have survived from mediocre chaffering of the swallow to a holier and more mature tenor. The youthful heart that on "happy mornings" (1.996) leapt for love with active resolve remains a steady, throbbing presence in the poem's present. We glimpse the poet bent over the manuscript, sudden tears "dash[ing] this last page" as the product of days of "somewhat even writing" at last attain their end.

And so the ending of *Aurora Leigh*, beneath its revelatory language and limitless ambitions for the future of poetry, concludes also with a glimpse of the writer preparing to lay down her pen. The moment feels remarkably tactile, a sodden manuscript rather than the unmarred printed volume that the reader holds in her hands. We are reminded that the temporality of the manuscript has involved many dawns, not merely revelatory or epic ones. The lines of the poem flow forth from a labor that segments itself "somewhat evenly" from day to day. The lines derive, that is, not only from the "transitory brightness" of inspiration against whose fading the poet must continually race, but from a more quotidian regimen of dedicated time. The regimen is not merciless: it allows for a certain formal and temporal irregularity, eschewing the steadier throb of blank verse, twelve books, and strict hours for looser strictures. It is as if Barrett Browning has studied Milton's *Paradise Lost* and realized that, like "[Paley's] watch . . . the remarkable construction . . . is not accidental"—but then chosen a more forgiving

clockwork for her own labors.[147] We can hear a resonance of her advice to Westwood, to engage in "an hour or two's regular work in the day in writing"; and we can hear an echo of Philip Sidney's muse, remade for composition in fast times as in feast times.

Aurora Leigh's investment in daily labor reflects, to be sure, a kind of time-discipline. Its conception of poetic labor owes much to industrial labor; and in ingesting some of that labor's rhythms, it attempts to remake them in a less punishing fashion. This rapprochement between industrial and creative works is by no means a given at the start of the poem, however. As Romney asks Aurora, "Who has the time, / An hour's time . . . think! —to sit upon a bank / And hear the cymbal tinkle in white hands?" (2.168-70). The hour's time of leisure needed for poetry does not exist for those who labor on, and so Aurora's poetry seems utterly removed from the souls she would, missionary-style, elevate to better thoughts. But Romney is wrong in his diagnosis either that people have no hour for poetry, or that Aurora herself is purely playing Miriam's cymbal with untouched "white hands." "By the way," she says in one of the poem's most quoted passages, "The works of women are symbolical. / We sew, sew, prick our fingers, dull our sight, / Producing what?" (1.460-64). Aurora is, and this is an important distinction, embroidering to create the appearance of industry, not laboring for bread. If sewing as an activity unites women across classes, its purpose and its monetary yield utterly differ across classes as well.[148] Yet Barrett Browning's conception of poetry as emerging from, and existing in, the

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[147] The quote comes from Barrett Browning's analysis of Milton's "iambic and trochaic dynasties" in *The Art of Scansion*, introduction by Alice Meynell (London: Clement Shorter, 1916), 2-3. The full quote reads as follows: "Reasoning as Paley's savage did about the watch, it becomes clear to me that the remarkable construction of this line ['Eternal wrath / Burnt after them to the bottomless pitt'] is not accidental." Milton is placed here into the position of the watchmaker deity, with *Paradise Lost* as his extremely tortuous yet still metered construction.

[148] Elizabeth Erbeznik's "City-Craft as Poetic Process in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*" (*Victorian Poetry* 52, no. 4 [2014]: 619-36) offers a helpful look at the relationship between art, female labor, and urban life. See also Anne D. Wallace, "'Nor in Fading Silks Compose': Sewing, Walking, and Poetic Labor in *Aurora Leigh*," *ELH* 64, no. 1 (1997): 223-56; Patricia Zakreski, *Representing Female Artistic Labour, 1848-1890* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006); and Maria Damkjaer, *Time, Domesticity, and Print Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

interstices of regular, difficult toil rests upon this outward similarity between middle-class embroidery and working-class drudgery. Aurora's early poetry seems to spring out of the alternation, "from hour to hour," of painfully stitching swatches of fabric with pink-eyed shepherdesses, and the writing, reading, and dreaming of poetry, which even as she pricks her fingers set her soul singing as "a work apart / Behind the wall of sense" (1.1080-82):

> And so, through forced work and spontaneous work,
> The inner life informed the outer life,
> Reduced the irregular blood to a settled rhythm,
> Made cool the forehead with fresh-sprinkling dreams,
> And, rounding to the spheric soul the thin,
> Pined body, struck a colour up the cheeks
> Though somewhat faint.
>
> (lines 1057-63)

This Coleridgean interpenetration of "forced" and "spontaneous" work is, at least in a distant way, also the Victorian compromise between enforced hourly labor and timeless poetry that *Aurora Leigh* performs on a structural level. The passage reads as an embodied account of meter, taking hold of the spontaneous song throbbing in the bloodstream and reducing its irregularities "to a settled rhythm." The body, too, is "informed" by this imposition of meter upon thought: the hot flush of the dream is "made cool"; the would-be poet seems physically healthier, "a colour [struck] up [in] the cheeks" as a response to the sanguine rhythm instilled in the blood.[149] One

[149] The notion of a "regime" or "regimen" of health goes back at least as far as the fifteenth century in English (see the OED), but it becomes increasingly attached to the management of time in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See for instance John Floyer's *The Physicians Pulse-Watch, Or an Essay to Explain the Old Art of FEELING the PULSE, and to Improve it by the help of a PULSE-WATCH* (London: Smith and Walford, 1707). Floyer speaks of his habit of "try[ing] Pulses by the Minute in Common Watches, and Pendulum Clocks, when I was among my patients," which allowed him to identify what he considered "the most healthful" and most "exceeding and deficient Pulses. . . . and to cure them by a contrary Regimen" (1-2).

might wonder whether it's "spontaneous" or "forced" work that has effected this increasingly regular rhythm. At first glance it seems logical that it should be the forced work. This would seem to prefigure the union of Romney and Aurora, the union of Romney's "formal universals" and Aurora's "spontaneities / Of . . . individual, personal life" (3.745-47).

Parallel structure, however, suggests we understand the "inner life," this spontaneous song, as the agent which reduces physical irregularities and strengthens the frail body—which lessens the impact of forced labor upon the body's regular rhythms. Barrett Browning's 1843 "Cry of the Children" had offered one of the decade's most prominent ethical critiques of industrialization's grinding inhumanity. In the "Cry," the factory "wheels are droning" "round and round," the "cold metallic motion" drowning out the burning pulses of children's exhausted bodies, their pleas for a space of silence in which ability to simply "hear each other breathing," to recognize their fellow humanity. Accordingly, their souls "spin on blindly in the dark," unable to hear the divine call "sunward" over the noise of the iron wheels. Accordingly also, the poem ticks on in a series of alternating rhymes, but with a meter and syllable scheme that is obviously irregular, as if sickened by the gears that have drowned out the intervals of "pause" and "silence" that create music.[150] Forced labor at once runs down the body, blinds it to light, and deafens its ability to hear the divine.

We might, in this context, understand two things that are being established in the book 1 passage about Aurora's "work." First, the scene inaugurates a temporality in which hourly labor (in this case, of sewing) coexists *with* song, which hums above the baseline of the needle's rote

[150] See Tucker, "Overworked, Worked Over: A Poetics of Fatigue," in *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience and Victorian Literature*, ed. Rachel Ablow (Ann Arbor: Univ. Michigan Press, 2013), 114-30; and Jennifer MacLure's "Rehearsing Social Justice: Temporal Ghettos and the Poetic Way Out in "Goblin Market" and "The Song of the Shirt," *Victorian Poetry* 53, no. 2 (2015): 151-69, which offers similar remarks on Thomas Hood's most famous industrial poem.

rise and fall. Second, and following on this hourly temporality of labor, the passage imagines poetic song as the source of a truer, healthier form of regularity, strengthening and sustaining the body-at-work whose physical suffering has rendered the individual *less* rhythmically settled. Strictly automated motion makes people cardiometrically irregular, and mentally disordered. The infusion of poetry (and, perhaps, of poetic meter) restores the individual, by establishing patterns of steady repetition that are *not* automated; they are, instead, poetic. The passage proposes an image of poetry—its mechanisms, its rhythms, its regular chimes and rhymes—as the aspirational model for *all* labor, even as it emphasizes in poetic labor an underlying kinship with manual work.

An emphasis on regular writing recurs periodically in Aurora's accounts of London. "I worked the short days out,—and watched the sun / On lurid morns or monstrous afternoons" (3.170-71), she remarks at one point. At another, slipping into the present tense, she declares, "I work with patience, which means almost power" (3.204). On yet another occasion she writes, "Day and night / I worked my rhythmic thought" (3.271-72). The constant nature of Aurora's production—and the poem's constant reminders to the reader of that constancy—does not translate into great art. (As she puts it, "I did some excellent things indifferently, / Some bad things excellently" [3.205-06].) Indeed, the strain of such ceaseless labor reads in some fashion as a cautionary tale, stretching the working day from the lurid morn to "beyond the stroke of midnight," rather than permitting the "happy morning" to remain the prime site of composition (3.27; 1.997). Yet the pattern this effect lays out, tallying the hours and days and years (three, she tells us) spent at her London desk, is not so distant from the more moderate but still daily writing that has produced the text before our eyes. The unrelenting fact of labor must await the "hour of souls" to infuse the body with healthier rhythms. Still, these periodic references to daily work are

moving us toward the autobiographer who even now sits down, for all the world like Trollope, to her desk each day.

Yet poetry's alchemical power to transmute hard labor into something more bearable, and more humane, is *Aurora Leigh*'s more pressing agenda. It finds its purest expression in Marian Erle, the seamstress who fingers have been "exquisitely pricked / By a hundred needles" (3.660-61). As Marian recounts to Aurora her life story, she details a childhood parallel to Aurora's, but far worse. Her work does not vary: "she sew[s] and sew[s] and sew[s]," and when others around her falter at the impossible task she takes up their work as well. She is first a martyr to work, later a martyr to sexual violence, and finally a Madonna ensconced with her child at Aurora's side. Yet the "good, true, noble Marian," this angel in the garret so different from the working classes Aurora both recoils from and yet would elevate from a distance, is depicted as the product of a very particular kind of education—an education that has, like young Aurora's books of poetry, throbbed out a "spontaneous" song to accompany her labors. She gleans chance volumes and loose pages from travelers, "A Thomson's Seasons . . . Or half a play of Shakespeare's, torn across . . . . Or else a sheaf of leaves . . . torn out from the heart of books, / From Churchyard Elegies and Edens Lost, / From Burns, and Bunyan, Selkirk, and Tom Jones" (3.974-82). This fragmented assembly of verse and prose, which she tends as she would a garden, "thr[owing] out the leaves that would hurt," forms the first foundations of a metrical inner life whose "cadenced hum" sets Marian apart from her miserable circumstances:

> catching from the fringes of the wind
> Some fragmentary phrases, here and there,
> Of that fine music—which, being carried in
> To her soul, had reproduced itself afresh

In finer motions of the lips and lids.

She said, in speaking of it, 'If a flower
Were thrown out of heaven at intervals,
You'd soon attain to a trick of looking up—

(3.1003-11)[151]

The passage's portrayal of Marian's soul-deep intuition of poetry's "fine music," "carried in / To her soul" and manifested in her own, plainer language, is of course EBB's aspirational model for modern poetry, the word informing the soul informing body. But something curious is afoot with this notion of fragments, gleaned "at intervals." The habit of collecting these cast-off leaves has taught Marian to mark her life by the intervals of chance poetry. They, are she confides in Aurora, the "sorrowful pleasures" that she "counts" alongside her years (3.1012-14). We might say the intervals of the poetic fragment register for Marian as the strokes of the clock that mark out time's passage and lighten one's burdens: she

sat and sewed,
With no one to break up her crystal thoughts,
While rhymes from lovely poems span around
Their ringing circles of ecstatic tune,
Beneath the moistened finger of the Hour.

[151] The motif of literary anthologizing as gardening has some precedent in nineteenth-century literature. The epigraph to *The Literary Miscellany; or, Elegant Selections of The Most Admired Fugitive Pieces, and EXTRACTS from Works of the Greatest Merit: with Originals; in Prose and Verse* (London: Champante and Whitrow, 1793-1803) evokes a similar horticultural image: "A lasting wreath, of various hue, / Deck'd with each fragrant flow'r" (see Barbara M. Benedict, "Literary Miscellanies: The Cultural Mediation of Fragmented Feeling," *ELH* 57, no. 2 [1990]: 407-30). William St. Clair's *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), also notes women's literary commonplace books soliciting new donations by presenting the album as "a Garden Plot / [Where] all my friends may sow" (qtd. 225).

(3.1016-20)

The moment directly reenacts Aurora's earlier experience of forced and spontaneous work, a spontaneity that is *not* fleeting yet not exactly predictable either, and that matches and interjects itself amid the steady drone of drudgery. In both instances Barrett Browning stages a formal parallel, and a spiritual interplay, between the automated movements of the working body and poetry's "ringing circles of ecstatic tune," which unfold together beneath the onward progression of the clock. The "Hour," setting its finger to the brim of the poetic glass, initiates the measure of time within which not merely labor but literature—its composition, its reception—comes into being.

It's curious, given *Aurora Leigh*'s investment in a poetics of writing measured by the hours, that neither Aurora nor Marian is reading or composing in these two scenes. Poetry has, in this telling, *already* been absorbed into the body and soul, and has already set their thoughts to new cadences. Sprung from the enclosed time-frame (the "hour") of an individual poem, poetry is abstracted into "ringing circles of ecstatic tune," both resounding and surrounding, that correspond to a more divine "Hour." Marian and Aurora both transmute a pilfered anthology of metered lines, inked on a page, into a more ceaseless song, intuited in "crystal thoughts" even when the individual has no "hour's time" for reading.[152] The poetry that rings out around Marian's sweatshop labor thus occupies a similar temporality similar to that of homogeneous clock-time; initially derived from particular lyric "timepieces," it now exists as a mental construct, an internal melody that steadies the pulse and strengthens the imagination. *Aurora Leigh*'s time-measured poetry thus offers up what we might call a metrical iteration of time-

[152] For more on the rise of the anthology and the miscellany, see St. Clair, *The Reading Nation*, esp. 221-29, and Tom Mole, *What the Victorians Made of Romanticism: Material Artifacts, Cultural Practices, and Reception History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2017).

discipline—what Robert Browning in a very different context labeled “the tick of time inside,” “syllabl[ing]” the brain. Marian, the exemplary working-class woman, becomes the test-case for poetry as the alternative to a purely metronomic conception of clock-time. In eschewing mutual love in favor of symbolic marriage to Marian, Romney has ironically selected a bride who is evidence of Aurora’s conviction that poetry as well as bread is necessary for the nation’s populace, in “mutual time.”

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