Knowing totality: capitalism across consciousness and community in Kim, Nostromo, Sons and lovers, and Ulysses

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Knowing Totality: Capitalism Across Consciousness and Community

in *Kim*, *Nostromo*, *Sons and Lovers*, and *Ulysses*

by

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Abstract

*Knowing Totality* reads literary portraits of consciousness at the level of capitalist totality. The largest level of the project argues that there is a formal discord in certain twentieth-century novels between “knowability,” or an accepted community narrative, and character “consciousness,” which reaches beyond it. I locate within these formal breaks social and historical contradictions that characterize capital, where seemingly content-based issues in the texts—Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*, Joseph Conrad’s *Nostromo*, D.H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers*, and James Joyce’s *Ulysses*—manifest themselves at the level of form; The pairings place the novels in dialectical conversation, highlighting characters on the periphery of communities that are themselves peripheral in many ways to such centers of accumulation.

Particularly, I explore the way consciousness navigates and exposes capitalist contradiction, accounting for the limitations of knowability and unevenness as part of the ever-expanding impulse to accumulate. Disruption as I read it in the seemingly knowable community recognizes not only what Ernst Lohoff has called the asocial sociality of consciousness, but also capitalism’s inherent need to establish limits that it must continuously encounter and transcend. My readings of the disruptive exchange between community narrative and consciousness find both to be productively joined in and determined by their relationship to global capital. Ultimately, the dissertation is invested in the way that the form of the novel is uniquely able to glimpse, in moments of discord between individual and communal knowledge, a larger economic system that it cannot fully represent.
“We must try to accustom ourselves to a perspective in which every act of reading, every local interpretive practice, is grasped as the privileged vehicle through which two distinct modes of production confront and interrogate each other…If we can do this…we will no longer tend to see the past as some inert and dead object which we are called upon to resurrect, or to preserve, or to sustain, in our own living freedom; rather, the past will itself become an active agent in this process and will begin to come before us as a radically different life form which rises up to call our own form of life into question and to pass judgment on us, and through us on the social formation in which we exist. At that point, the very dynamics of the historical tribunal are unexpectedly and dialectically reversed: it is not we who sit in judgment on the past, but rather the past…which judges us, imposing the painful knowledge of what we are not, what we are no longer, what we are not yet.”

Fredric Jameson (“Marxism” 175)

“the fact about contemporaries … is that they’re doing the same thing on another railway line…”

Virginia Woolf (Letters 315)
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Novels on the Periphery

The success of Gustave Flaubert’s portrait of the Revolution of 1848 in *Sentimental Education* turns not on describing the historical moment itself in great detail, but on contextualizing it in the lives of literary characters that together form a social composite. Flaubert’s particular genius lies, says Roberto Schwarz, in his brand of “scientific impartiality,” in his ability to incorporate rather than suppress the details of social conflict so well that, perhaps counter-intuitively, the whole picture reveals “the lies of ideology” ([*Master* 120, 121]). The revelation of ideology in *Sentimental Education* depends to a large extent on Flaubert’s critique of self-interest in French society. Therefore, when the novel’s anti-hero Frédéric regards the culminating chaos of the Revolution at one moment “without a quiver of emotion” and feels swayed by the “magnetism of the public enthusiasm” to “universal tenderness” at another, the novel mediates his reaction at two levels; Frédéric’s wayward morals represent a personal failure to engage politically, Flaubert suggests, but that personal failure manifests as a result of 1848’s more endemic social failure (*Sentimental* 238, 239-40).

Frédéric’s “type” of hypocrisy and shortcomings proliferate in the novel’s account of its social milieu. He aspires, like many men in the city, to the upper class, he indulges in luxury, and he occasionally advocates for “the people” by plagiarizing the ideas of his more radical friends. When the narrative reaches the events of the June Days, Frédéric views the “wounded who sank to the ground” not as people, but as if “he was looking on at a show” (235). Here, as many times before, his propensity to neglect the political and social relevance of his world by bathing it in aesthetics overwhelms his ability to evaluate its meaning. As he walks through the bloody battle with artist-opportunist Hussonet, who scoffs in disgust at the behavior of the people, Frédéric responds with what might be another attempt at aestheticizing, a comment that gets lost in the
rising tension: “No matter!” he observes to his friend, “The people are sublime” (238). For readers in both Flaubert’s time as well as our own, the Romantic notion of the sublime conjures, among other ideas, the irreconcilable experience of overlooking a scene, typically natural, with terror and awe. The allusion to Romanticism in the novel is not in and of itself significant, as Flaubert consistently draws allusions to other authors and artistic movements in his narrative, but the context for the observation explores the connection between literature’s aesthetic and social power.

The application of the sublime in the midst of the June Uprising causes the reader to stumble because it cannot be attributed either to what Frédéric actually thinks or feels or to the narrator’s view, although the words come from Frédéric. Frédéric finds the people essentially harmless, so hardly worth considering beyond their role as a beautiful spectacle that he leaves the Uprising to stroll around Paris late into the evening; for him, the concept of the sublime is simply a term with artistic pretensions. On another level, though, sublimity stands out because the idea articulates the scene quite aptly. The description of the revolution and the people as sublime—the regard for their social and political project as one inspiring terror and awe—naturalizes the fight for equality at the same time that it comments meta-narratively on the project of Sentimental Education itself, on the novel’s aesthetic reorganizing of the historical event that Marx would call in The Eighteenth Brumaire the “un-heard of disgrace of the revolution.” Like the sublime, the text straddles what appear to be incommensurable ideas in 1848, betraying both a certain fear and the tempered hope in Flaubert’s generation of authors, namely how they might construct a novel committed to the world but not hemmed in by that world’s ideological limitations, limitations that could and did produce 1848 and what followed.
We might think of Flaubert and *Sentimental Education*, then, as introducing a historically situated aesthetic with the ability to exceed its political moment not by transcending reality, but by rearranging the elements of history to produce new social understanding. The novel in effect anticipates modernism, but I want to stress that it is modernism in what we generally call the era of realism. Flaubert’s project, in its posing of aesthetic and political questions at both the diegetic and non-diegetic level, combines many of the qualities which typically separate modernism from realism: the co-existence of the aesthetic and the political, the ever so slight fracturing of reality in a historical moment, and the intrusion of an interior “feeling” or experience on the territory of the objective narrator. That is, we continuously separate realism and modernism in our chronologies, but we find their techniques usefully fused in a novel that narrates the pivotal event for history and politics afterward, the ramifications of which remain prescient. For literature following 1848, especially twentieth-century literature as it negotiates a string of monumental shifts in culture and society, we must consider the possible communication between the precepts of realism and modernism, specifically their approaches to narrative, community, and the individual.

In what follows, I highlight twentieth-century literature’s continued interest in knowability in a historical and social period that made this project impossible, evident in narrative portraits of individual and even alienated consciousness. I focus particularly on pairs of novels that initially appear divergent in their aesthetic and social interests, comparing in two sections Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* with Joseph Conrad’s *Nostromo* and D.H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lover* with James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. In my pairings of the novels, I consider the perspectives of characters on the peripheries of their communities to ultimately argue that what seems a geographic and economic distance from the center of accumulation instead speaks to the ways
even local communities and characters within them are joined in and by their relationship to
global capital. In turn, the contradictions between individual and communal knowledge show us
how these texts glimpse a large economic system that they cannot exactly represent.

Critically, by reading the formal device of consciousness and what I call the desire to
“know totality,” I demonstrate the way that novels help us to see more concretely how the world
market is implicit in capital’s formations, fundamentally a part of its logical unfolding.
Disruption in the seemingly knowable community, I find, is a recognition of capitalism’s
contradictions, of its need to transcend the limitations it inevitably establishes and comes up
against and in its development of asocial sociality. Across four chapters, I make a distinction
between what the overt narrative voice seems to understand, specifically in its class perspective,
and the way that reading the determinations of consciousness at the level of capitalist totality
(not only in the form of character, but also the form of the novel itself) reveals ideology at work
in the novels. The project of knowing totality, then, asks us to consider how the novel is more
than the sum of its parts. My pairing of the novels in the end recognizes the capacity of literature
to exceed ideological capture, transcending mere representation. Ultimately, I conclude that the
aesthetic form of the novel, in its re-arranging of the pieces of the world, necessarily produces a
new view of the world that is never quite that world.

Knowing Totality

Across a wide variety of critical works that contrast modernism with realism, modernism
features as a retort to the realism that preceded it. Modernism’s aesthetic commitment, so the
story goes, defines itself in opposition to the consensus reached by realism. Pericles Lewis offers
a typical account: “the modernists’ reworking of the techniques of the realist novel involved a
rethinking of the political and epistemological theories on which realism had drawn” (8). “The techniques by which the nineteenth-century realist novel had represented the relationship between individuals and society,” Lewis clarifies, “reflected assumptions about human nature, knowledge, and history” (Modernism 8). As a result, modernism required a new mode of thought that was not complicit, as realism allegedly was, with liberal political theorists of the time (Modernism 8). Jessica Berman confirms this when she writes, “the formal emphasis on partial or incomplete perspectives may indeed be what separates these modernists from their realist equivalents” (Fiction 20). Realism, she muses, can be classified by “its insistence that we have been presented with a coherent and complete version of events from a perspective that we too are invited to share” (21). In their turn away from realism, Berman imagines modernists “wrest[ing] the question of community” away from “the domain of public citizenship and the state to a liminal zone” (7), and instead contending with a “structure of feeling” (16). Modernism, Lewis and Berman suggest, undermines realism’s attempt to know a whole world by fracturing that world and challenging its very structure.

Much earlier, in a now-infamous debate, Marxist critics Georg Lukács and Theodor Adorno summarized the situation quite differently. Their correspondence on realism and modernism, which took place over some 30 years, suggests that the task of knowing the world was perhaps the only place where realism and modernism—and they themselves—found common ground. For Lukács and Adorno, what distinguishes realism from modernism is an impasse about the view from which literature grasps an increasingly global capitalism. Lukács maintains that modernism presents a “subjectively perceived moment isolated from the totality in an abstract and over-intense manner” (“Realism” 39), while realism presents the essence of reality, figuring “Man [as] zoon politikon, a social animal” whose “individual existence” and
ontological being…cannot be distinguished from social and historical environment” (“Ideology” 19). Adorno’s response in defense of modernism emphasizes the later movement’s reflection on consciousness as “socially mediated” (“Reconciliation” 158). For him, the monologue intérieur captures “both the truth and appearance of a free-floating subjectivity” (160); truth, in that “in the universal atomistic state of the world, alienation rules over men,” and appearance inasmuch as “the social totality has precedence over the individual, a totality which is created and reproduces itself through alienation and through the contradictions of society” (160). Realism, for Lukács, attempts to synthesize a total system of social relations from the perspective of a narrator looking over the text, while modernism, for Adorno, mediates totality from the perspective of fractured subjectivity, allowing literature an autonomous response to capitalism’s increasing penetration of consciousness.¹

Essentially, Adorno and Lukács propose different modes of organizing and accessing the social and historical content of the world, a content masked, they agree, by capitalism. If we consider the places where these theorists do agree for a moment, we can extrapolate and juxtapose realism and modernism’s narratorial devices as well as their conclusions about their worlds. Realism, from the perspective of the narrator, organizes people and issues according to the idea that the social world can be understood; it articulates clearly delineated social relationships according to which people act and think. In modernism, the focus presumably shifts

¹ Martin Jay’s study of Lukács and Adorno’s different conceptions of totality is useful here. Jay suggests that their differences are, in some ways, simply the result of divergent training in philosophy; Lukács was a Hegelian, a “holist,” while Adorno studied under Kracauer, who “nurtured Adorno’s ability to read and interpret the seemingly insignificant details of modern life, which more global perspectives, such as Lukács’, often passed over in silence” (Marxism and Totality 245). This represents what Jay calls Adorno’s belief that “atonality was more ‘truthful’ than ‘extorted reconciliation’” (255). “For all of Adorno’s interest in Lukács and Hegelian Marxism,” he continues, “for all his fascination with the concepts of reification, mediation and second nature, for all his attraction to the totalizing methodology of Horkheimer’s Institute, he stubbornly maintained that under present circumstances, the anti-holistic lessons he learned…were of equal, if not greater, value” (255).
to the individual’s attempt to organize and understand the social world, a project that any individual seems to finds impossible. But here social and historical context is important.

Hugh Kenner’s seminal study of modernism in *A Sinking Island* rests on the idea that the modernist aesthetic arose as a result of authors’ historical recognition that, in the twentieth century, “whole orders of certainty were vanished” (124). The modernists, Kenner notes, had to contend with the disappearance or alteration of foundational experiences and truths. Of course, the privileged knowledge that Kenner attributes to modernist authors in metropolitan centers did not elude the rest of the world, in large part because the world was becoming increasingly connected. What Kenner’s observation fails to emphasize, then, is that the nature of those vanished orders of certainty were social in content, and so were the nebulous structures that took their place. If we rephrase Kenner’s adage with this addition—“that whole social orders of certainty were vanished”—then the period of modernism coincides with, and therefore takes as its ground, the complex experience of navigating an altered social space that now includes the rest of the world.

Fredric Jameson identifies “the problems of figuration” in the transition from market to monopoly capitalism, or “a growing contradiction between lived experience and structure, between a phenomenological description of the life of an individual and a more properly structural mode of the conditions of existence of that experience” (*Cognitive*). More specifically, Jameson claims that in the era of modernism individuals sense that “the truth of [their] experience no longer coincides with the place in which it takes place” (*Cognitive*). In a similar argument, Raymond Williams claims what were once “knowable communities” vanish in an expanding social world, reflecting “the altered and critical relations between and within social classes” (*Country* 165). Together, Jameson and Williams suggest that the capitalist widening of
the world obscured what were accepted and thus conceptually stable understandings of social structure. Inter-imperial rivalry intensified from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, widening the world and obscuring previous class relations among people. Thus, existence in imperialism “is bound up with the whole colonial system of the British Empire,” a startlingly complex idea for any individual to accommodate, but also a structural truth about the social world of capitalism (Cognitive). I find myself aligned with Jameson and Williams with regard to conceptions of community and capitalism, but I want to draw out a few lines of thought about the historical positioning of realism and modernism, specifically.

More recently, in his discussion of the relationship between realism and modernism, Jameson has argued for understanding the movements as “two unrelated systems.” Modernism, he simplifies, is “an aesthetic category” while “realism is an epistemological one” (Singular 124). Though he sees a kind of productive failure in placing realism and modernism alongside one another based on their commitments to the “model of innovation,” I believe Jameson overreaches. Despite his focus on historicizing, his definition risks erasing realism’s existence as an aesthetic—which it certainly is—and begrudges modernism its epistemological interests, interests it certainly has. If we accept that realism and modernism are two kinds of literary responses whose approaches represent incompatible modes and that any claim to know the world in the twentieth century—the supposed work of realism—must be anachronistic. When we suggest that realism’s will to know the world serves anachronistic ends no longer desirable in the twentieth century, and further suggest that modernism’s aesthetic project overwrites this, we simultaneously argue that the impulse to socially unify the world was the sole historical project of the nineteenth century. As I will argue throughout this project, however, literature’s impulse
to epistemologically organize and know the world, a domain long ago relegated to realism and the nineteenth century, remains at the forefront in the twentieth.

The aesthetic of modernism can, of course, be identified with a shift in the twentieth century to interiorization, which accounts for formal qualities of experimentation as well as fragmentation of time and consciousness. We might also think of the aesthetic of interiorization, though, as a historic response whose formal presentations organize epistemological approaches to a changing world. The separate ways that we have understood realism and modernism to approach the world, then, not only coexist in the twentieth century but also appear there as complementary, stylistic modes. These approaches might be more productively understood in the twentieth century not as the coexistence of residual and emergent approaches—or as a comparison between an out-of-date realism and a new modernism—but instead as aesthetic, epistemological modes that help us explore character consciousness within a text. Character consciousness, in the context of the social world of the text, might be understood not just as an aesthetic choice, but as a literary-historical theory regarding knowledge in and about the world—not only knowability and the local community, but consciousness in an incomprehensibly big world. Or, as Marx has famously described it: “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.”

That is, against theories that suggest otherwise, many novels in the twentieth century theorize the extent to which it is possible for a character or individual to fully conceptualize the content of their world. I read these seeming epistemological responses as continuations of the political and social work that began with Flaubert as a response to 1848. Read together rather than separately, these modes propose that the enterprise of knowing the world can both succeed and fail in the particular historical moment of the modernist novel. Moreover, when we compare
novels that navigate the same historical and social period from what can be considered peripheral perspectives, their different approaches reveal the insights and concomitant blindness of the other as well as their overlaps—and what they together bring to bear on the twentieth century.

Before I move to the specific approaches, especially with regard to what they tell us about the novel and the social world, I want to return to a crucial term in Lukács and Adorno’s conversation that undergirds the methodology of my argument. Totality, so often associated with realism, and a much-maligned Marxist term, contains an implicit dialectical idea that I argue has been underdeveloped in studies of modernism and the twentieth century. As I argued above, the post-1848 novel can perform an essential social, political, historical, and cultural function when it recognizes the possibilities that history contained, but for various reasons particular to that moment, social relations could not overcome. That is, if 1848 marks the end of the ability to believe in the process of history as linear progress, or the end of the idea that the movement of history corresponded with political and cultural advancement for everyone, then this moment also allows the novel to understand historical and political contradictions as the site of productive failures in the present, a potential not fully realized until the twentieth century.

After 1848, it was clear that liberty, equality, and fraternity codified rather than eliminated class difference. Usefully, however, the contradictions of history in capitalism inevitably provide a space for insight and possibility; when a literary text narrates social as well as individual contradictions within the knowable community—when it engages the incommensurability of knowing totality in capitalism in the twentieth century—it imagines the

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2 Fredric Jameson outlines the critical tendency to equate totality with totalitarianism, or the elimination of difference: “In its contemporary form, the critique of such identity theory argues not merely that the concept of ‘totality’ is here a code word for Absolute Spirit, but that a whole vision of history is herein perpetuated, in which Utopia (read: communism) is understood as achieving its ultimate identity by the obliteration of difference through sheer force; or...in which a direct line runs from Hegel’s Absolute Spirit to Stalin’s Gulag. This fashionable polemic stereotype has, of course, no historical or textual justification whatsoever” (Political 50-51).
kinds of relationships that prevent their synthesis. Although the Revolution of 1848 did not succeed, *Sentimental Education* makes clear the central social and political problems of Flaubert’s generation by emphasizing the contradictory elements at work in France. In this way, we might see Flaubert and the authors who follow him as outlining the unfolding of the conditions of history as a way of thinking about the present with an eye to the future.

More than a celebration of an aesthetic that floats above its moment, I understand novels that engage in this kind of work to serve a crucial, dialectical purpose with relation to history. *Sentimental Education*, for example, comprehends and thus productively exposes the contradictions of history not only in its narrative content, but also by understanding itself reflexively as a response to the contradictions of which it is also a part. When the contradictions of a historical moment are rearranged and elucidated as they can be only in literature (a product of its license to remove itself from the precise appearances of the world), a foundation for differently comprehending history emerges, and glimpses of social relationships as they actually exist in the world begin to emerge. Thus, literature has a dual role in any given historical and political moment following 1848—to reconcile the contradictions of society by imagining them in conversation, in characters’ relations to their worlds and in the novel’s relationship to its world. The term capable of comprising the magnitude of these ideas—of text, of capitalism, of class, of aesthetics, of mediation between novel and history, of consciousness and knowledge of the world—is, I argue, totality.

The significance for totality in literature resides in its ability to understand consciousness not only as a processing of the social ground of the text, but also as necessarily mediated by the content of that ground. More specifically, any consideration of totality requires distinguishing between totality as “concept”—the ability of an individual to conceptualize the real, existing
totality of social relations—and totality as “thing,” the economic reality and structure of capitalism, the already-existing condition that obfuscates that very ability and thus naturalizes unequal social relations between people. That is, in capitalism it remains impossible for an individual to conceptualize and unify the real social relations of the world given capitalism’s ceaseless movement through contradiction and its masking of the inequalities it produces in order to continue. What seems important for totality, then, is the distinction that Adorno alluded to but did not make entirely clear in 1960: there is a contradiction between the concept of totality in capitalist reality and the concept of totality that literature can imagine.

Literature, most scholarship seems to agree, engenders a conceptual attempt to unify and mediate the contradictions of social life. We might think of this as an attempt at knowing totality, or the capacity to exceed capitalism’s totality by grappling with its social conditions. When literature conceptualizes the world by rearranging it, it occasionally finds a way to exceed or reach beyond appearance by imagining the possibility of a social unity otherwise made impossible by capitalism, either from a perspective within the text or as a result of its insights—in literature’s negotiation of its historical moment and its relevance in historical moments after. The definitions above seem to suggest the burden as well as the enlivening potential in various ways, they fail to fully articulate the duality as they might. The approaches to knowing totality taken by Kim, Nostromo, Sons and Lovers, and Ulysses, I will argue, ultimately mediate the content of the social relations of the text, but they also tell us how different novels can help us

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3 It is important to note that neither realism nor modernism accurately represents reality or its actually existing social order. Capitalism inevitably and necessarily naturalizes vast differences in lived experience—class distinctions—according to shifting cultural distinctions. What is at issue, in either case, is ultimately the organization of beliefs, laws, divisions of labor, and distribution of and access to resources such that they combine to produce inequality. It is the work of ideology in capitalism to conceal the contradictory pattern of an always-inverted reality by producing an inverted consciousness. We might think of literature that addresses totality, then, working to access the space of ideology, or attempting to engage consciousness so that it identifies the inversion of reality.
engage the project of overcoming the contradictions of social life. While these novels certainly understand that project differently from one another, they seem to agree that knowing the world remains the immanent concern of twentieth century literature.

As I suggested above, in the era of modernism certain texts engage the contradictions of capitalism to reveal the lies of ideology: they explore, on the one hand, a kind of knowable community, and, on the other, an uncertain or ambivalent consciousness often at odds with that community. The choice to render the communities knowable, what we have consistently called the realist mode—or the suggestion that characters or the narrative understand the nature of social relations in community—is integrally linked to the idea that while such work seems impossible in the twentieth century, it remains central to the novel. That is, we can read contradiction in the novel as an attempt to reconcile people with their world, supporting the notion that overcoming alienation depends upon social unity.

I compare *Kim* with *Nostromo* and *Sons and Lovers* with *Ulysses* to explore the expansion and intensification of capitalist imperialism in the novel. My readings of these novels and their historical moments, roughly the first and second decades of the twentieth century, assert that empire, nation, colony, and community, and individuals within them are elements of capitalist totality that the novels address. In this way, novels that portray the social grounds of particular communities as knowable suggest the source of the modern predicament as well as a potential solution. The novels I have chosen stage a relation between a seemingly traditional knowable community and a member of that community who is, partly, outside it or wants to stand outside it in some way: *Kim*, *Nostromo*, Gertrude and Paul Morel, Stephen Dedalus, and, of course, Leopold and Molly Bloom. At the same time, these characters and their communities are clearly part of a globalizing totality; they allow us to think, on the one hand, about the
relation between the local and the global and, on the other, to test a set of claims about historical social forms.

Put differently, the pairings place the novels in dialectical conversation, highlighting characters on the periphery of communities that are themselves peripheral in many ways to such centers of accumulation. Particularly, I explore the way consciousness navigates and exposes capitalist contradiction, accounting for the limitations of knowability and unevenness as part of the ever-expanding impulse to accumulate. The appearance of the social formation of the “knowable community” alongside a character consciousness which seems to challenge this, asks us to travel through characters’ and novels’ mediations of India, Sulaco, Bestwood, and Dublin to discover the broader social world in which they exist. That is, Kipling, Conrad, Lawrence, and Joyce show us communities that appear economically peripheral to a world that cannot quite include them. Yet, the very idea of unevenness or the periphery tells us that the communities exist in deep economic connection with centers of accumulation, fully incorporated into a world that relies on their inclusion. We might then think of capitalism’s tendency to expand even as it sets limits, showing contradictions within communities in the novel, as a way to more meaningfully consider social being as it determines consciousness, in a social world now global in nature. Thus, while individual knowledge appears different in each community—not only where an individual in a text begins but where and how far they think they can go—we see that knowing totality is a historical project shared by characters in a wide range of geographical locations and therefore a range of novelists.

Because knowing totality has typically been considered the exclusive purview of the narrator in realism, texts that engage a knowable community have been viewed as portraying a kind of social anachronism. I contend that the historical era of modernism presents an aesthetic
of interiorization with the capacity for considering the content of the social world, mostly as an attempt on the part of characters to know totality, its magnitude and its effects, even as it recognizes this as an impossibility. In this way, I hope to offer a more complete picture of aesthetic, interiorized modes of knowing in the twentieth century as they develop and change in response to history. I understand the particular approach a text may take as one kind of working out of that history, allowing me to explore relationships between texts whose relationship to one another might not be immediately obvious otherwise. Particularly, I pair works that have been more canonically accepted as modernist, Joseph Conrad’s *Nostromo* and James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, with contemporaries whose works have been less easy to classify—Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* and D.H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers*, respectively. Reading these novels in relation to one another allows me to connect seemingly separate local knowable communities, better understanding the novels’ different presentations, or explanations, as together contributing to the rich story of capitalism. Or, put differently, if we understand certain contemporaneous twentieth-century texts to be negotiating the shared and strange experience of navigating capital and knowing totality, we can think of them as positing complementary interpretations that provide nuance to our understanding of totality in an expanding social world.

**Reading Totality**

I consider the literary historical project of knowing as it develops at three levels of mediation, each tracking a more complex understanding of the world of the novel and its social form. At the most immediate stage of analysis, I will consider what the text proposes as the singular story of an individual or individuals and how their consciousness, and its formal presentation, reflects their liminal place in their community. This includes how, or if, a character
believes they understand the social relations of the community. Secondly, I will consider what the text itself proposes as an explanation for knowability, including a peripheral relation to centers of accumulation. This includes thinking about the totality of social relations in the novel and how they may differ from the character’s particular perspectives. From the totalizing view offered by the novel, it is sometimes possible to weigh what an individual knows against what the narrative and other individuals “know,” often leading to conflicts between character consciousness and knowability. Finally, I will suggest that the pairings of novels produce a conversation about a shared economic and historical concern and thus moment of capitalism. This provides a way of thinking about the place of the text in the context of a broader social totality—a totality that connects characters and their communities’—and even our own—understanding of unevenness and knowability and extends this communication between novels. The chapter comparisons also allow me to construct an intertextual, socio-historical narrative across time, which demonstrates the way that totality and interiorization, with literary texts, reveal a basic contradiction of capitalism, that between totality and individuation, two opposed processes that capital produces in equal measure.

At the most basic level, this helps me consider places and moments in the texts where knowability appears to be the special insight or purview of either an individual or the community. Critically, I read these moments in terms of the limitations imposed by capitalism on not only consciousness, but also on itself. We might think of Kim’s belief that the predicament of empire can be reconciled by his unique ability to negotiate East and West by avoiding or embracing the Great Game or Paul Morel’s belief that his experience is limited by Bestwood’s status as part of the backward rural part of England, which he can possibly transcend if he goes “abroad.” It is also possible to see this in the organizing principle of a text itself, where the
community or characters seem to trust or align with a dominant narrative that defines their world, as Nostromo does through his allegiance to the upper class of Sulaco or as Dubliners do when they imagine their oppression by the British Empire to be a shared community narrative that brings them together, even if they challenge this as individuals. We consistently see limitations in characters’ and novels’ impressions of the community as defined in comparison with some other place. Locating limitation, or acknowledging the closed aspects of the texts, allows us to see unevenness and knowability as a critical tactic on the part of capitalism, which is universally reliant on the appearance of separation and difference in multiple places across the globe.

Yet formal breaks and disruptions between narrative and character or in character consciousness also suggest a social, historical, and economic and social totality that must always be in motion, which I read in terms of capitalism’s ceaseless drive toward expansion and accumulation. True to capitalist contradiction, these breaks happen alongside and in the middle of character or narrative claims to knowability. We see, for instance, Kim and Paul contend with existential uncertainty which shows us the reality of social class and determinism, while character consciousness and the social worlds of Nostromo and Ulysses are thoroughly mediated by capitalist narratives concealed as communal ones. We begin to see, from this viewpoint, disparities in social, economic, daily existence as well as access to resources, which helps us to think about the effects of expansion and accumulation. Breaks with and in knowability, too, help us imagine the way that novels are able to negotiate capitalist contradiction (or think openly as Adorno describes it), where we must think dialectically about social relations and historical conditions as they appear in texts and to characters. Knowability is, the texts together suggest,

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4 Critics often use “open form” to describe a certain kind of approach to poetic form. Denise Levertov, for instance, associates open form with the idea that poetry must grapple with the idea that “the universe has turned out to be much less defined than we had thought” (Estess). She goes on to say, “I think that we should acknowledge the chaos we live in and deal with it; open forms can allow one to explore chaos and see what can be discovered there”
fully infused by capitalist ideology. Disruption in the seemingly knowable community, then, is a recognition of the contradictions of capitalism, of its need to transcend the limitations it inevitably establishes and comes up against.

The relationship between and among texts in the same historical moment, therefore, must also be dialectically mediated. Too often, studies of the twentieth century attempt to recover the political potential of certain texts and authors by setting them against straw man texts or by privileging the mechanism of modern social responses and places against anachronistic ones. Rather than create a system of winners and losers, I’ve chosen ambitious texts that address a meaningful contribution to the project of knowing totality and whose attempts mutually constitute a significant moment in literature’s understanding of social form under capitalism. While the texts explore different places and different individual relationships to the community, reading totality asks us to think about contradiction, about appearance and essence, as part of the universal experience of life under capitalism. Thus, I read across the social worlds of texts, showing the capacity of capitalism to disguise itself and take apparently different forms. Despite their differences, that is, the novels inevitably illuminate the contradictions that together determine and are determined by capitalism.

Against theories that would suggest that interiority, or the condition of alienation writ through a formalized literary portrait of consciousness, could occur in a textual world that was not immanently social, I contend that the project of interiorization is, has always been, and could not manage without being, a mediation of an ontological and thus social space. In the absence of

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(Estess). Alternatively, Umberto Eco describes open works of art, or art as “a complete and closed form in its uniqueness as a balanced organic whole, while at the same time constituting an open product on account of its susceptibility to countless different interpretations which do not impinge on its unadulterable specificity” (“Poetics” 3). I want to distinguish my use of open and closed form from Levertov and Eco by emphasizing that the aesthetic of open or closed “form” must be understood, in literature, to relate to the social ground of the text. Thus, open and closed forms emanate from the social world of the novel.
clear demarcations of class, and in their encounters with what Ernst Lohoff has called capitalism’s “asocial sociality”—the way that we imagine ourselves as isolated despite the fact that capitalism connects us in an ever more global social world—twentieth-century texts rely, in fact, on knowing and unifying their place according to the only method they know, by interpreting the appearance of a world whose content eludes them. I suggest that this collection of novels together represents an historical project that, by trying to wrangle with the contradictions of history and reorder them, in some ways exceeds the social failure that allows capitalism to continue. My approach offers, I believe, a new way to imagine familiar novels’ understandings of knowability and consciousness as well as their conceptual, aesthetic approaches to the uncertainty of the social world in the historical context of twentieth-century capitalism.

**The World of Twentieth-Century Literature**

In this project, I hope to align somewhat separate trends in modernist scholarship by emphasizing the useful threads in cosmopolitan theories of community, postcolonial perspectives on peripheral relations, and Marxist work on empire and unevenness in capitalism. Recently, work on community remains the almost exclusive purview of cosmopolitanism, which focuses on forging communities across geopolitical lines by situating new modernisms in “cultural parataxis” with more canonical ones, or as a meditation on canonical modernist authors whose politics tend to discount them from conversations regarding social change. Rather than compare canonical and non-canonical works or try to recover the personal politics of certain authors, I want to emphasize instead that reading totality in *Kim, Nostromo, Sons and Lovers,* and *Ulysses*  

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5 Jessica Berman, for instance, argues that the writings of Henry James, Virginia Woolf, and Gertrude Stein actually make demands for “modern, cosmopolitan versions of community” (*Modernist 3*).
requires considering the novels and their authors in relation to centers of capitalist accumulation, often but not always synonymous at this time with British Empire. Particularly, we see the way their novels navigate consciousness in terms of capitalist contradiction, accounting for the limitations of knowability and unevenness as part of the ever-expanding impulse to accumulate, thus concealing and revealing capitalism. If the definition of a modernist aesthetic of interiorization requires thinking about literature in the context of the contradictions of capital accumulation, then, as Paul Stasi suggests, “expanding the definition of modernism to include peripheral formations…might, in fact, efface the relationship between imperial center and aesthetic practice” (Modernism 4). Therefore, I consider texts that imagine themselves as peripheral, even as we see them as part of the relationship Stasi articulates. With these ideas in mind, I want to explore the formal breaks in characters’ understandings of their social worlds as a way to see the “real” content of those worlds, and thus consider the historical and social contradictions of capitalism.

In postcolonial and Marxist discussions of modernism and the twentieth century, disagreement arises on the ways that peripheral colonies and metropolitan cores come to constitute each other in a global capital economy and the ways that modernists related to this widening world. However, in my argument, I emphasize the ways in which core and periphery relationships are mutually constitutive in Kipling, Conrad, Lawrence, and Joyce’s explorations of their local, knowable communities and colonies, especially as we find nations themselves rife with the unevenness of capitalism in the first 35 years of the twentieth century. This unevenness is the ground on which modernist texts and authors build the experiences that Kenner sees vanishing. The historical ground in the era of modernism, then, negotiates three things: a
widening capitalist world and a sense of this widening, a corresponding mystification of previous categories of social organization, and the (in)ability to conceptually unify these.

The collection and chronology of texts here can be broadly understood to track the history of expansion and intensification of world capitalism from 1900-1921. And while I posit the expansion of global capitalism to be the underlying thread that connects the texts I discuss, I also take seriously the important relationship between the local and the universal. To this end, I would like to offer two considerations for this project. First, the texts I’ve chosen necessarily figure a relationship to capitalist accumulation and expansion but acknowledge that any analysis of this is complicated by factors of author origin/nationality, the setting(s) for their story, the historical moment in which the text was written or published, and the moment in which the text purports to take place. These are complex facts that I will attempt to negotiate, but I also want to resist conclusions that rely too heavily on local difference, or what Joshua Clover calls the “geographer’s view,” which will always find “the variegations and subtleties of a moment distributed across space” (522). That is, if we focus too narrowly on the details of a novel as an author’s entirely unique and distinct aesthetic of location or situation, or imagine novels to be telling different and unrelated stories about unrelated worlds, we stand to miss the larger conversation that takes place between these texts and the world economic system in which they exist.

For Clover, focusing on the concept of “combined” in the “combined and uneven” equation requires the addition of an historical perspective, which he claims is “far less about spatial distribution of unevenness than about an uneven temporal advance of development” within a given place, which we can usefully apply to the idea of knowability in the communities of *Kim, Nostromo, Sons,* and *Ulysses* (524). Relatedly, in what have often been divisive
conversations between postcolonial studies and Marxist studies, I want to highlight Crystal Bartolovich’s idea that the “politics of location (geographical and historical)…affects Marxism and postcolonial studies alike” (Marxism 11). To that end, in this argument I will champion the idea that capitalism must be understood as occurring in different forms and iterations at particular historical moments, but that “unequal global politico-economic conditions” are central to that larger narrative (11).

Just as well, however, Kipling, Conrad, Lawrence, and Joyce betray an access to the culture and resources that spring from capitalist accumulation, and as a result their conceptual projects demonstrate what Esty and Walkowitz both call epistemological privilege.6 Despite the ways that the idea has been coopted, epistemological privilege traditionally arises in proximity to, but outside of, a privileged center. The notion of a center from which culture emanates also encapsulates the means by which that center—around which the benefits of capitalism organize—transposes ideology onto a given country or region so that it can easily utilize the latter’s resources, a process we see alive and well in the Punjab, Costaguana, rural England, and metropolitan Ireland, though to seemingly take different forms. This requires thinking also of how the transplanting of imperialist ideology plays out in Western literature by often and necessarily neglecting the experiences of occupied peoples, for whom imperialism is not just

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6 Esty cites Jameson and Raymond Williams’s idea of epistemological privilege, which “in the metropolis enables certain characteristic forms of modernist thought and expression…[or] modernist art in the urban centers where European artists had free access to each other’s work and to cultural materials from all over the world” (30). “This model of cosmopolitan privilege,” he rephrases, “accounts for modernism’s general capacity to rise above, while incorporating, the local materials of any given cultural tradition” (Shrinking 30). Walkowitz argues in Cosmopolitan Style for a critical cosmopolitanism of “international engagement that can be distinguished from planetary humanism by two principle characteristics: an aversion to heroic tones of appropriation and progress, and a suspicion of epistemological privilege, views from above or from the center that assume a consistent distinction between who is seeing and what is seen,” a perspective she argues represents “an ‘unwillingness to rest,’ the attempt to operate ‘in the world’ (2). Cosmopolitanism, she clarifies, means “preserving a posture of resistance,’ the entanglement of ‘domestic and international perspectives,’ and the self-reflexive repositioning of the self in the global sphere’ (2-3).
economic exploitation, but the attempted and often successful erasure of culture—something we notably do not see take place in *Sons*, in the English village of Bestwood.\textsuperscript{7} Given this idea, it is important to note that while the settings of the texts I discuss each theorize different concentrations and manifestations of that center, they all register the experience of living in capitalism in characters’ fraught experiences of their social worlds. In the comparisons of the texts I discuss—first Kipling and Conrad at the turn of the century and Joyce and Lawrence in the second decade—we see shifts internal to the center, also.

The history of literature, as the backdrop on which the literature of the twentieth century play out, requires a more specific discussion of capitalism. Reading Kipling, Conrad, Lawrence, and Joyce through a lens of shifting social and economic realities from 1901-1921, as we recognize moments of radical revolutionary possibility in literature at the same time that that we sense its continued failure. This project celebrates the power of the novel to produce innovative, meaningful responses to this contradiction, which I imagine to have been inaugurated in many ways by Flaubert and Marx in their responses to the 1848 revolutions which did not produce a revolutionary response capable of overthrowing the economic system of capitalism, but which did birth the possibility of aesthetic responses with the ability to imagine how we might exceed that socio-political failure. These rearrangements and re-conceptualizations of history are

\textsuperscript{7} Patricia Chu provides a framework for acknowledging the constitutive relationships between imperialist nations and colonized regions when she emphasizes that empire studies in modernism have frequently failed to take into account “the crux of postcolonial analysis: understanding the ‘native’ rather than the ‘colonizer’ as the subject of history” (*Race* 13). Chu goes on to say that studies of imperialism in modernism “tend to examine the relationship between the rise of artistic modernism and the historical phenomenon of Western imperialism…in terms of appropriation and inspiration,” a perspective that often “reiterate[s] the logic of imperial economics: metropolitans use raw materials from the periphery to manufacture finished goods” (13). Like Chu, I will argue that twentieth-century literature demands an examination of who or what is conspicuously absent in modernist, imperialist narratives—especially when they narrate colonial spaces. Nevertheless, I will also try to complicate a narrative of the authors and characters I’ve chosen that would label the perspectives in their novels as entirely hegemonic or without nuance.
precisely what the novels of Kipling, Conrad, Lawrence, and Joyce show us in their desire to know totality in the twentieth century.

Chapters

My first chapter, “‘In All This Roaring Whirl’: Kim, Capitalism, and the Contradiction of Knowledge,” proposes that while the linear narrative of Kim initially appears to privilege an exceptional individual’s invaluable ability to negotiate empire and colony in India, the novel covertly emphasizes the contradiction of knowledge in capitalism. Kim is ultimately the story not of an individual who must navigate a personal choice, I argue, but rather of the universal process of capitalist expansion, which compels consciousness to experience history as teleological and individual. The chapter focuses on formal disruption as critical to reading the novel, not only in the character’s moments of existential crisis, but also in the ways that contradiction and the realities of the social world manifest themselves in places that reveal Kim in the historical context of the Second Afghan War. This chapter ultimately argues, then, for the necessity of recognizing two Kims, neither of which can be read independently of the other, each part and parcel of the lived social, and thus individual, contradiction of capitalism.

My second chapter, “‘A Break of Continuity in the Chain of Experience’: Narrating Capitalism in and with Nostromo,” argues for recognizing the omissions and subsequent revelations of social relations in Nostromo in light of colonization and capitalism. I read the novel according to the narrative’s explicit privileging of the perspectives of an elite class set on “developing” the San Tomé mine as a way to push through and past the construct of the nation to expose this tendency in the novel. The “success story” of Sulaco’s independence and the progressive development of the mine—(a euphemism for the production and accumulation of
capital) from the perspective of the elite class—begins to fall apart. In the interstice, we are able, instead, to see the conflict between the classes, which allows us, in turn, to recognize the social contradictions not only produced by but also constituting capitalism. Ultimately, I read the portrait of Nostromo’s liminal character—particularly focusing on his coming to consciousness late in the book—as instructive for reading not just the privileged perspective of the upper class, but also their determination by capitalism. That is, the upper-class of Sulaco is equally mediated, developed as well as limited in the desire to both imitate and overcome Europe, themselves neither masters of capital nor the wretched of the earth.

My third chapter, “‘Space Between’: Shifting Consciousness in Sons and Lovers,” argues that disruption, both formal and historical, is the key to reading Sons and Lovers as a whole. By embracing the moments of disruption between the narrative and character consciousness in the novel, I square what appear to be its antithetical or diverging movements: the narrative of working-class life in Bestwood associated with a kind of knowability, on the one hand, and the extended retreats into individual consciousness that seem disconnected from this in their desire to be included in a modern world figured outside the community, on the other. Yet, as the character Paul tries to imagine something beyond Bestwood, we find the mine reasserting itself in his mind, telling us the extent to which consciousness emanates from present historical and social circumstances that include and infuse Bestwood. It is in this way that we discern the reality of working-class existence as it disrupts narratives that would place it in the past as well as individual attempts to exist outside of class structure.

My fourth and final chapter, “‘Overseas or Halfseasover Empire’: Character, Community, and Capitalist Determinism in Ulysses,” argues that even as individual characters fail to see or recognize it, what Lohoff has called capitalism’s asocial sociality shows us the
cumulative process of determinism. Particularly, the story that Dubliners think they know—that Ireland is an occupied imperial community—falls away in subjective thought, making the everyday world itself estranged. My reading of character determinism in *Ulysses* further considers, at a deeply related level, places in the text where characters’ assumptions about what they know of exploitation are set against or overlook obvious examples of exploitation taking place across the city of Dublin. I find, then, that character determinism shows us the way that capitalism mediates consciousness, which *Ulysses* suggests is shaped by a much broader reality, namely a world market.
He tried to think of the lama—to wonder why he had tumbled into a brook,—but the bigness of the world, seen between the forecourt gates, swept linked thought aside…All that while he felt, though he could not put it into words, that his soul was out of gear with its surroundings—a cog-wheel unconnected with any machinery, just like the idle cog-wheel of a cheap Beheea sugar crusher… He did not want to cry,—had never felt less like crying in his life,—but of a sudden easy, stupid tears trickled down his nose, and with almost an audible click he felt the wheels of his being lock up anew on the world without. Things that rode meaningless on his eyeball an instant before slid into proper proportion. Roads were meant to be walked upon, houses to be lived in, cattle to be driven, fields to be tilled, and men and women to be talked to. They were all real and true—solidly planted upon the feet—perfectly comprehensible—clay of his clay, neither more nor less…

(Kim 234)

Nostromo was some time in regaining his hold on the world. It had slipped from him completely in the deep slumber of more than twelve hours. It had been like a break of continuity in the chain of experience; he had to find himself in time and space, to think of the hour and the place of his return. It was a novelty. He was one of those efficient sailors who generally wake up from a dead sleep with their wits in complete working order…But this awakening, in solitude, but for the watchful vulture, amongst the ruins of the fort, had no such characteristics. His first confused feeling was exactly this—that it was not in keeping. It was more like the end of things…

(Nostromo 296)
Raymond Williams’s early interpretation of Joseph Conrad’s epic novel, *Nostromo*, marks a shift in the characters and communities of novels at the turn of the twentieth century. There, Williams identifies Conrad’s acknowledgement of “the new experience, the new social experience, which complicates and surpasses the simple and customary virtues” (150). What seems to distinguish Conrad in the twentieth century from Austen and Eliot in the nineteenth is “isolation,” what Williams calls “a new and varying quality,” or a historical brand of “the disappearance of a social value” (150). Williams alludes not to “isolation the condition, the condition of man,” but rather to “isolation the response, the tragic response, to an action and a history that has changed and still changes: extending, connecting beyond customary meanings and beyond national frontiers: the unique, the deliberately created, the imagined and now known world” (153). Williams’s reading of Conrad enlivens the crisis of community articulated later in *The Country and the City* by thinking about the development of literature in a historical period that seemed especially attuned to the transitions between old and new ways of living and thus thinking. The nineteenth-century inclination to make a “moral history,” Williams implies, gives way in the twentieth to depictions of character isolation, changing the social landscape of the novel. This response, he suggests, comes from a real socio-historical phenomenon “felt” the world over, one that though it is not articulated as the focus of his study, we can properly distinguish as the intensification and expansion of capitalism.

This is especially interesting given Williams’s famous declaration that all novels represent knowable communities. Both concepts—knowability and community—require elaboration at the turn of the twentieth century, namely the recognition that the desire to “know” one’s community persists at the same time that such a project becomes more difficult in a widening world. To think about this tendency and its implications for reading expanding
capitalism (often synonymous, in this historical moment, with British Empire) in early twentieth-century literature, this section pairs two authors whose interest in the subject is well documented: Joseph Conrad and Rudyard Kipling. I compare, particularly, *Nostromo* and *Kim*, not only because they engage precisely the contradiction Williams identifies, but also for their explicit attention to British colonial communities. This allows us to test and apply Williams’s thesis in the British literary turn to representations of the colony. Interestingly, both *Kim* and *Nostromo* narrate an intricate portrait of a “knowable” colonial community in which consciousness shows us a crisis in the colony.

On the one hand, my pairing of *Nostromo* and *Kim* draws a distinction between the texts’ prerogatives in imagining colonial communities as tied to crises of knowledge, particularly in the perspectives from which the novels narrate the experience of expanding capitalism. Kipling’s individualized, linear story of a young boy in India, who appears to “know” how to navigate the workings of colonial administration and his community, contrasts starkly with what Kenneth Ligda has rightly called Conrad’s “analeptic method” of unfolding the tale of a nation (or a mine) and its many inhabitants in the throes of revolution. Still, while *Kim’s* structure promotes the idea that its unique protagonist knows nearly everything, the novel as a whole subverts this, revealing the structuring of knowledge as capitalist teleology; in the process, it shows us what *Kim* does not and cannot know. *Nostromo* works less singularly. Through a perspective rooted in a Europeanized upper class whose desire for extracting silver and accumulating capital leads to the development of a nation, the novel posits the exploited *Nostromo* as a kind of synecdoche for the once-colonial country and its upper class in their unsteady relation to international capital.

Yet, on the other hand, I find a productive critical communication between Kipling and Conrad where we have tended to see opposition. Quite different from what the lack of
comparative criticism would have us believe, narrative similarities between *Kim* and *Nostromo* abound: they are in relative agreement that an explicit exploration of empire forms the foundation of writing in the early twentieth century; their texts detail colonies as the spaces where Europeans might best hope to “know” community (even as their texts show their environs as incorporated in an increasingly global capital); and they develop interior and perspectival approaches to explore a regionalized, community crisis of expanding capitalism as the latter intensifies in the colony. Particularly, they each identify, in moments of formalized interiority, or character consciousness, a crisis of knowledge in the colony experienced by the seemingly privileged characters who give the texts their names.

*Nostromo* and *Kim* each privilege characters who are presented as unique in that they are European transplants in the colonies (a role that was not unique, of course, in the actual colonies). Likewise, *Kim* and *Nostromo* each do the bidding of the British Empire, acting as mediators between colonial administrators and indigenous people. On the surface, this allows the narrative, and the characters, to seem to have it both ways: *Kim* and *Nostromo* are uniquely acculturated and knowledgeable about, and are, therefore, permitted to maneuver within, their community, while they, at the same time, maintain a social position, related to their “European-ness,” that enables them to imagine that they are above the colonized peoples who largely make up the background of the stories. Yet each of the titular characters, who we might mistakenly assume are central to the story, are in reality liminal, existing somehow both inside and outside their communities.

Indeed, the occasional otherness of *Kim* and *Nostromo* seems to stand in for an otherness that cannot be represented. As Jameson notes, in a passage that implies a European perspective, that
colonialism means that a significant structural element of the economic system as a whole is now located elsewhere, beyond the metropolis, outside of the daily life and existential experience of the home country, in colonies over the water whose own life experience and life world—very different from that of the imperial power—remains unknown and unimaginable for the subjects of the imperial power, whatever social class they may belong to. (157)

Kipling and Conrad’s literary interest in the colonial community, and European transplants there, speaks to the expansionary impulse of capitalism, which must inevitably seek out new sites of exploitation. That is, the social, and thus individual, crisis that the novels try to resolve by turning to the supposedly knowable space of the colony is itself a product of capitalist imperialism. The investigation of the colony, then, can only reproduce these historical and social contradictions in “new” markets. This, perhaps, is the true mark of the common global system.

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Tim Armstrong and Jed Esty each make compelling cases for the particular trajectories of Nostromo and Kim, respectively. For Armstrong “Nostromo offers a model of the being of society… not so much a realistic representation of a given historical situation as a paradigm of political processes—a model through which Conrad explores the ontology of the social world” (3-4). Comparing Nostromo with George Eliot’s Middlemarch, he clarifies that the former “is a paradigm which stands for the being of society and exemplifies its contradictions. This difference between Eliot’s syntagmatic and Conrad’s paradigmatic strategies of representation,” he argues, “reflects a larger historical shift in the novel’s generic emphasis from constructing realistic worlds to laying bare the principles of world-construction” (4). Armstrong’s comparison brings to light an important distinction between the authors, particularly that Eliot’s work focused on communities where ruptures were taking place, while Conrad considers continuity—particularly as Sulaco attempts to establish stability against a familiar pattern of rupture we can
associate with capitalist expansion (connected, of course, to the national narrative we see in Eliot).

Esty’s understanding of *Kim* notes the presentation of “India as a knowable, navigable space,” which he claims, “is Kipling’s tactic for managing antagonisms to which Kim, and *Kim*, are heirs” (8). This is “the perfect way to imply that Pax Britannica is the guarantor, not the enemy of Asian multiculturalism,” while the novel’s picaresque quality, its refusal to proceed as a *bildungsroman*, in fact “makes imperial adolescence the master trope of conflict deferred” (8). We might observe that a similar argument links Armstrong and Esty’s analyses, namely that Conrad and Kipling individually explored the role of the liminal individual in the British colonial community. However, these analyses also give us the potential to see that Conrad’s holistic portrait of a developing country and Kipling’s story of a single individual each grapple with the structure of capitalist imperialism

The stories of individuals’ experiences of empire narrate the historical process of capitalist expansion as it took place in the colonial community leading up to the turn of the twentieth century. Particularly, the novels focus on the colonies at a time when Britain’s “position as the common factor in these different networks, and the scale of its overseas investments, allowed it to play a stabilizing role during economic crises” (144).1 It is worth noting that the texts subvert the popular approaches taken by fiction in the late nineteenth century, namely the adventure tale of the 1880s and 1890s, as well as the story of metropolitan consciousness that was the work of their contemporaries in the Edwardian era.2 The refusal to

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1 Alex Callinicos writes: “By the 1890s, “and certainly by 1914,” an “emergence of a ‘single complex interlocking pattern’” is detectable across the world (144).

2 I allude here to authors like Robert Louis Stevenson, as well as to texts like Henry James’s *The Golden Bowl* or even Virginia Woolf’s *The Voyage Out*, which, while it considers a colonial space, does so from the upper-class position that tours a foreign world they hardly come to know.
entirely engage either of these familiar narratives speaks to Conrad and Kipling’s proximity to empire and the colonies, as their novels seek to understand a community that is and is not their own, a fact that is simultaneously enlightening and limiting for their characters and the social scape of the novel. By locating their narratives in the space of the colonies during the height of imperialist clamoring, the authors consider the structural development and maneuvering of the British Empire at its zenith, while their texts seem to register the uncomfortable tension between knowability and totality.

*Kim* and *Nostromo*’s portraits of India and Costaguana ground themselves in specific historical references to the means by which capitalism was expanding, particularly through modes of transport and industry. The train system, for instance, works across the texts not as a recognition of the technological innovation made possible in the time of steam, the way it might have been framed in public discourse at the time and even by characters in the individual novels, but rather as a complicated source of both convenience and exploitation. The “work of the government” (26) in *Kim* but built in the interest of private but nationalized investment in *Nostromo* (33), the train increases the speed with which people and products move, but also necessitates that the people schedule their lives around its imposed pace. At moments, we see the narrators identify the clash between old and new forms of life as the source of conflict. The description of “old world-piety and modern progress that is the note of India today” in *Kim* (13), and the alteration to the once-tranquil gulf in Costaguana whose natural tidal defenses finally and permanently lower under the pressure of the steamship in *Nostromo*, move from anecdotal descriptions of local colonial spaces into more meaningful socio-historical claims about uneven development in capitalism (9).
Read together, *Nostromo* and *Kim* bring us to the shared conclusion that the colonies, those communities assumed to be “knowable” to European imperialists especially, were part of the larger socio-historical community of capitalism. By reading totality, we see the novels’ similarities as well as their differences regarding the crisis produced by expanding capitalism not just in the centers of accumulation, but also in the colony. I find that the texts, then, complement and counterbalance the limitations of each other, together giving us a rich understanding of historical process and social relations, even as they necessarily fall short of encapsulating capitalist totality.
“In All This Roaring Whirl”:
Capitalism and the Contradiction of Knowledge in Kim

Rudyard Kipling’s Kim is, at once, a novel more complicated and more consistent than has been acknowledged in criticism. From the outset, its allegiances seem clear—it conscripts us, as readers, in the privileging of the perspective of a European boy in British India. On its surface, then, Kim tries to tell us that the contradictions of the colonial world can be navigated if an exceptional individual, namely the titular Kim, uses his intuition and cunning. And yet, Kim is also a novel more complex than has been previously argued—it manages to consistently bring together apparently disparate narrative and formal strategies to reveal contradiction as the modus operandi of capitalist imperialism. To explore this, I want to highlight something seemingly simple that has eluded criticism: what the novel’s narrative perspective tells us we are seeing contradicts what, in various moments, it shows us. If we read according to the perspective of Kim, as the novel tells us we should, we find him, and his knowledge, at the center and structure of the narrative; yet we must also acknowledge the formal interruptions to this perspective, when Kim’s existential crises not only contradict his understanding, but posit structures that determine and extend beyond him. This chapter ultimately argues, then, for the necessity of two Kims, neither of which can be read independently of the other, each part and parcel of the lived social, and thus individual, contradiction of capitalism.

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Esty has argued convincingly, in Unseasonable Youth, for the structural importance of Kim’s suspended adolescence. Esty contends that Kim is part of a larger literary trend near the turn of the twentieth century that saw novels begin less and less to link nation and character progress, and instead to incorporate the international essence of capitalism by exploring
characters who resisted linear progression and development. In contrast to Esty, I argue that it is not the character’s youth that allows us to see the influence of capital in the novel, but rather his seemingly unique ability to carve out a path for himself unavailable to other characters in the novel. While criticism about the novel’s depiction of British India and Kim’s place in it abound—the character is read continually in terms of dualism, hybridity, interstice, and agency—I contend that these are not opposite, but apposite contradictions of international capital operating in the Indian colony.¹

To read and access capitalism as a narrative force, I argue that one of the most legible but simultaneously understudied and underrecognized structures organizing the narrative is what appears to be Kim’s vast knowledge, or his capacity to combine and wield intuition and observations about people and their habits to sway, trick, and exploit others—and move about with ease in a contested colonial space—without harm.² As Edward Said has astutely summarized:

Kim graduates from one brilliant success to the other. By the end of the novel he is at the beginning of a new and satisfying life, having helped the lama achieve his dream of redemption, the British to foil a serious plot, the Indians to continue enjoying prosperity under Britain...[He is a] remarkably optimistic novelistic character. Kim’s search for an identity that he can be comfortable with by the end of the novel is successful. Like many other heroes of imperial fiction (as we read about their exploits in Conrad and Haggard, for example) Kim’s actions result in victories not defeats. He restores India to health, as the invading foreign agents

¹ See Tim Christensen’s “The Unbearable Whiteness of Being: Misrecognition, Pleasure, and White Identity in Kipling’s "Kim,“ College Literature 39.2 (2012): 9-30 and Don Randall’s Kipling’s Imperial Boy: Adolescence and Cultural Hybridity, Palgrave: New York, 2000. Christensen, for instance, argues that "Kipling utilizes a foundation feature of British colonial discourse—the profoundly ambivalent nature of identification with the colonial other—to imagine a much more complex and durable distinction between English and Indian identity than has been acknowledged by recent critics" (11). Randall notes that “Kim registers the potentially disruptive, problematizing effects that may be occasioned by the introduction of a hybridized subject to modern imperialism’s culturally divided world” (111).

² See Matthew Fellon, “Knowing Kim, Knowing in Kim,” Studies in English Literature 53:4 (2013). Fellon describes knowledge in Kim according to epistemology: “Readers are likely to differ from Kipling in judging what constitutes true knowledge, but Kim tends to encourage a critical approach to knowledge and to knowledge claims more than it tends to establish particular truths” (902). Fellon goes on to acknowledge “discourses of knowledge, including proverbial and ethnological dicta,” as well as the challenge of knowing other people (903). This is not, I argue, the knowledge in which Kim is ultimately interested.
are apprehended and expelled. And, indeed, throughout *Kim* itself we are impressed with the boy’s resilience, his capacity for standing up to extreme situations such as those trials of identity engineered for him by Lurgan sahib. Part of the boy’s strength is his extreme knowledge, almost instinctive in its wellspring, of his difference from the Indians around him; after all he has a special amulet…later this develops explicitly into his awareness of being a sahib. (344-345)

True, if we read *Kim* solely in terms of identity, the privileges of whiteness, or even colonizer and colonized, we are sure to notice that Kim gets to dictate much of his life. This lens explains the predicament of the novel in terms of cultural difference—and therefore suggests that acculturated Britons can overcome the predicament. We see, of course, throughout the text what the British do when they have a chance: save the spy, exploit others for gain, and propel empire forward. Said’s sense that “many of [Kipling’s] later readers have refused to see his implicit recognition of this troubling and embarrassing truth” (350), in many ways, compels us to read *against* the structure of the individual progress to see this—and the difference is crucial.³

I argue that the back and forth between English and Indian, West and East, ideal knowledge and who has it, is a ruse. Indeed, to be taken in by this is to be taken in by the moniker of the Great Game, to operate according to its terms, which allowed capitalism, and its historically specific alliance with British imperialism, to present itself in ideological terms of knowledge and linear progress. In this way, the novel’s intense focus on Kim’s knowledge, and the critical moments at which it temporarily falls away to reveal Kim’s consciousness, show us

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³ See Daniel Born’s “The Burden of Kipling: Lord Jim and Heart of Darkness,” *The Birth of Liberal Guilt in the English Novel: Charles Dickens to H.G. Wells*, University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill (1995). Critiques of what were interpreted as Kipling’s personal politics appeared contemporaneously alongside his works. As Born observes, “‘Kiplingese,’ the ‘Kiplingesque,’ or ‘Kiplingitis’ as critic Richard Le Gallienne put it in his scathing book-length attack in 1900, comprise just some of the currency of abusive terms used at the turn of the century to whittle the reigning literary lion down to the sum of his political convictions. The assertion of such terms became a reliable strategy for enforcing the critic’s own moral and literary superiority and was anticipated already in 1897 by Henry James (101). See also John McBratney’s *Imperial Subjects, Imperial Space: Rudyard Kipling’s Fiction of the Native-Born*, The Ohio State University Press, Columbus: 2002.
uncertainty. These moments, I find, move us closer to understanding the not only the contradictions of consciousness in an increasingly isolated but still deeply social world, but the contradictions, also, of an expanding imperial world market. From a purview that accounts for two Kims, that is, we can read these contradictions according to appearance, or what the novel tells us, and essence, or what the novel shows us.4

First, what appear to be the structures by which we read the novel—the linear process of Kim’s ascendancy to the British government or the loose, happenstance episodes associated with the lama’s Wheel of Life—together form a teleology, each doing the work in different moments of distracting from, deferring to, and, in the process, concealing the essence of individual existence within capitalism. It is only in the moments where the appearance of Kim’s sureness is interrupted—when we find Kim not only confused, but isolated in the middle of the people and world he claims to know so well—that we can discern that the novel’s prescribed structures are insufficient to understanding the world to which he belongs. In these moments, the notion that an individual is capable of determining (as opposed to being determined by) historical circumstance briefly disappears and ideology is laid bare.

Second, the contradictions of consciousness also allow us to more closely examine the complicated and contradictory essence of capitalism as it took shape in British India. Not only does the imperial narrative of knowledge manage to hide in plain sight the reality that defines Kim’s character more than any other, his class, but the impact on the working class more

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4 Marx argues that the appearance and essence of capitalism must thought in terms of contradiction: “in present bourgeois society as a whole, this positing of prices and their circulation etc., appears as the surface process, beneath which, in the depths, entirely different processes go on, in which… apparent individual equality and liberty disappear” (247). Marx describes capital as the “moving contradiction” in the Grundrisse (706). “By its very nature,” he says, capitalism “posits a barrier to labor and value-creation, in contradiction to its tendency to expand them boundlessly. And in as much as it both posits a barrier specific to itself, and on the other side equally driver over and beyond every barrier, it is the living contradiction” (421). Later, Marx states simply: “The general and necessary tendencies of capital must be distinguished from their forms of appearance” (433).
broadly; we witness, often in the background of the novel, the desperate scarcity surrounding Kim: famine, lack of resources, a reserve army of labor, and poverty—which Kim can neither acknowledge nor change. Significantly, these realities are not exclusive to India or even colonialism, but rather are contradictions structured by class, geopolitical national power, and sites of exploitation, as well as the apparent limits that compel capital to seek out colonial markets in its expansion.\footnote{See P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins’s \textit{British Imperialism: 1688-2000}, Longman: Harlow (2001). Cain and Hopkins instructively outline the role of British India in the larger system of capitalism: “Of the global theories of imperialism that have dealt with India, Marx’s analysis is outstanding among those advanced by contemporary observers, and it remains a powerful influence today. The 1850s were for Marx a decisive moment of transition, a time when the obstructive ‘moneyocracy’ and ‘oligarchy’ of City and landed interests yielded to the progressive ‘millocracy’ of Manchester and its allies. Marx viewed the Indian Mutiny of 1857, and the transfer of administrative control from the East India Company to the crown in the following year, as symbolizing an important stage in the global spread of industrial capitalism. Ending the East India Company’s powers of patronage would deprive aristocratic families of administrative and military places for their younger sons; opening India to the full blast of competition from modern manufactures would fuel Britain’s economic development, enhance the power of the rising industrial bourgeoisie, and stimulate the process of modernization in India herself” (277).} We find, in acknowledging two \textit{Kims}, the character’s belief that he determines his narrative as part and parcel of capitalism’s creation of and deep dependence on precisely this combination of alienation and exploitation.

\textit{“The Fulfillment of Sublime Prophecy”}\footnote{See P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins’s \textit{British Imperialism: 1688-2000}, Longman: Harlow (2001). Cain and Hopkins instructively outline the role of British India in the larger system of capitalism: “Of the global theories of imperialism that have dealt with India, Marx’s analysis is outstanding among those advanced by contemporary observers, and it remains a powerful influence today. The 1850s were for Marx a decisive moment of transition, a time when the obstructive ‘moneyocracy’ and ‘oligarchy’ of City and landed interests yielded to the progressive ‘millocracy’ of Manchester and its allies. Marx viewed the Indian Mutiny of 1857, and the transfer of administrative control from the East India Company to the crown in the following year, as symbolizing an important stage in the global spread of industrial capitalism. Ending the East India Company’s powers of patronage would deprive aristocratic families of administrative and military places for their younger sons; opening India to the full blast of competition from modern manufactures would fuel Britain’s economic development, enhance the power of the rising industrial bourgeoisie, and stimulate the process of modernization in India herself” (277).}

The 15 chapters of \textit{Kim} proceed linearly, each registering a milestone in the eponymous character’s development, which is loosely tied, in the poems and epigraphs that introduce the chapters, to a “turn of the [Buddhist] wheel” of life (\textit{Kim} 125). Kim’s travels from Lahore to Benares, and particularly his route along the Grand Trunk Road, which “crosses all streams on this side of Hind” and “[bears] without crowding India’s traffic for 1500 miles,” show the vastness of both India and Kim’s understanding of it (41, 51). Different from the \textit{bildungsroman}, \textit{Kim}’s picaresque quality shows, as Phillip Mallett suggests, the “processes of change and development,” and as a result, “the purposes of history are lost sight of in the rewards of the
present moment” (Mallett 118). Alternatively, Esty argues that *Kim* functions according to a logic of an “episodic and ahistorical structure,” or as an “exposé of the basic contradictions of Anglo-India in 1900” (9). I counter that the novel’s method of organization reveals the way Kim, an Anglo-Indian engaged in the process of expanding empire in the colonies, is compelled to think of his experience in teleological terms. When Kim finds himself struggling to choose between what is often presented as a loose Indian plot contrasted to a linear Anglo plot, the novel inadvertently offers glimpses of the contradictory social and economic connections increasingly forged by capitalism, which make claims regarding knowledge of the social world, including India, evidently impossible.

The first paragraph signals that the novel will be dealing in effects rather than causes. We are made immediately aware of Britain’s colonial presence in India:

He sat, in defiance of municipal orders, astride the gun Zam-Zammah on her brick platform opposite the old Ajaib-Gher—the Wonder House, as the natives call the Lahore Museum. Who hold the Zam-Zammah, that ‘fire-breathing dragon’, hold the Punjab, for the great green-bronze piece is always the first of the conqueror’s loot. (3)

Interestingly, the passage, steeped in esoteric details and phrases, presents a scene likely unfamiliar to most of the novel’s British civilian audience at the time. Even so, while the renderings of Hindustani words and phrases—“Zam-Zammah” and “Ajaib-Gher,” for instance—make a distinction between those who know and those who do not, they are also “translated” almost as soon as they are uttered. Moreover, the words are quite literally the trappings of colonization: the Zam-Zammah gun and the British museum. The effect is multilayered: on the one hand, we have the sense that *Kim* hopes to provide a Western reading public a glimpse into the “adventures” in the colonies, effectively bringing them along for the colonizing project,
while making this palatable and, ultimately, familiar; and on the other, we sense imposed parameters around what is important to that world—effect without cause.

Kim’s own summaries of the country, in moments when he appears either naïve or almost telepathic, register the reality of an expanding social world—for him, “formless India” represents the largest space he can imagine (82). Imagining India as “formless” denotes a space that cannot be entirely encapsulated by narrative because it is, in the present of the novel, incomprehensible to Western logic. Despite the text’s generalizations regarding India as a whole, however, it is effectively limited to the region of Lahore (present-day Pakistan) and glimpses of Benares and Lucknow (Northern India). The effective corralling of this area allows the novel to make the case for Kim’s preeminent knowledge of what appears to be a vast space by, in fact, defining its borders.6

The reasons for focusing attention on Lahore are, more or less, spelled out, even neatly represented by the Zam-Zammah gun that Kim mounts at the beginning of the novel. The gun (what might more accurately be called a cannon), which we know is valuable to the community given its symbolic position in a central part of the city, helps to emphasize Lahore’s social, cultural, and economic significance to British India. As a cultural and historical artefact, the gun illuminates not only the contestations for power in Lahore (represented by both the children of different castes and religions clamoring to climb onto the gun as well as the military and territorial battles that are alluded to throughout the novel), but more specifically what everyone

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6 See Ann Parry’s “Recovering the Connection Between Kim and Contemporary History,” Kim, WW. Norton: New York (2002). Parry writes: Kim and the Lama travel to Benares and this is the furthest south that the novel extends. They then wander along the Grand Trunk Road, which would have taken them north again. Far, therefore, from hearing in this novel as it claims ‘The soul of all the East’ (26) [25] both the quest and the spry story happen in, relatively speaking, a small northern area of the subcontinent” (313).
in Lahore already knows: the established rule of the British Empire there and the continuing quest for sustained control throughout the region.

Knowledge, here and elsewhere, is the point; throughout the text, questions abound regarding who has access to it, what they do with it, when they acknowledge or share it, from whom it is withheld, and who is not worth knowing. In a text fixated on concealment and revelation, those who “know,” we quickly discern, are able to navigate the complex geopolitics of British India, exchanging information, moving freely, and managing to procure basic necessities and, sometimes, payment. Knowledge in *Kim* is, at once, social and individual. It is both the things one is presumed to know and the things one should intuit (which, in Kim’s case, is tied to his Englishness). It is sometimes taught or learned through observation, or in Kim’s case, it is attached to what he would know had he been born and raised in Europe. Kim’s relationship with the British Empire is largely one viewed in terms of the value he can provide—value which he later exploits. When, for instance, Kim catches wind of an oncoming but still relatively secret war, he carries a message from Mahbub Ali to Colonel Creighton, or “his own and a few score thousand other folk’s fate slung round his neck,” which results in personal payment, though “he was Irish enough by birth to reckon silver the least part of any game” (34). Later, as the rumors of war swell and encroach on India, Kim manipulates a situation with an old soldier who was part of The Mutiny by suggesting he knows confidential information about the war through prophecy: “But this shall be a great war—a war of eight thousand” (42, 43). Behind the scenes, of course, interimperial rivalry actively exploits nameless thousands as it gains momentum—and in the process likewise exploits Kim as he imagines himself exploiting others.

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7 Kim describes, at one point, that he can get what he wants “at the cost of half an anna and a little knowledge” (107).
The implications of knowledge in the novel, then, are always social, even as they are consistently registered as individual and exclusionary.

The opening pages, of course, serve to texture the experiences of Kim as individual; if we reread the passage, we note the first word of the text: “he.” The next few pages of the novel establish Kim as a uniquely acclimated “sahib,” orphaned by Irish parents—themselves in India, it is implied, as part of the colonizing mission which also included Ireland—and living on the streets of Lahore.⁸ We quickly discern that it is largely Kim’s knowledge in which we are interested; Kim’s “case,” as Hurree Babu notes later, “is noted as exceptional on the books” (153). In other words, what makes Kim’s story remarkable and worth telling, is his deft knowledge of the social and cultural intricacies of British India, the product of a lifetime of experience maneuvering the streets of Lahore (and, by implication, the intricacies of Indian culture and its adaptations under British rule), his home since birth. More important than this, the text tells us, is Kim’s strategic awareness of the power his knowledge and social position as an acculturated European allow him to wield in the circumstances surrounding him—and the recognition by British officials that this knowledge might be exploited to the benefit of empire.⁹

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⁸ Kim’s European ancestry is initially articulated through references to what Edward Said describes as the character’s “unusual pedigree,” a kind of inheritance for which he is “singled out” (“Kim” 344). Kim’s ancestry frequently appears to serve as the lynchpin of his, and thus our, story. For instance, the idea that “there was some justification for Kim” alone having the temerity to sit astride the Zam-Zammah gun (against municipal orders) can be explained by the fact that “the English held the Punjab and Kim was English” (3). The text builds upon this by explicitly emphasizing Kim’s race in the second paragraph: “Though he was burned black as native; though he spoke the vernacular by preference, and his mother-tongue in a clipped sing-song; though he consortcd on terms of perfect equality with the small boys of the bazar, Kim was white” (3). The implication, it seems, is that Kim—unlike native Indian peoples—has the power of choice, the value of which he recognizes and exploits.

⁹ Said usefully describes Kipling’s support from “the authorized monuments of nineteenth-century European culture, for whom the inferiority of non-white races, the necessity for them to be ruled by a superior civilization, and the absolute unchanging essence of the Orientals, blacks, primitives, women were more or less unchallengeable, unquestioned axioms of modern life. The extraordinary status of racial theory, in which it was scientifically proven that the white man stood at the pinnacle of development and civilization, is a case in point” (338).
The novel takes every opportunity to describe Kim’s unique value in the community of Lahore:

[Kim] lived a life wild as that of the Arabian Nights, but missionaries and secretaries of charitable societies could not see the beauty of it. His nickname through the wards was ‘Little Friend of all the World’; and very often, being lithe and inconspicuous, he executed commissions by night on the crowded housetops for sleek and shiny young men of fashion. It was intrigue, of course — he knew that much, as he had known all evil since he could speak, — but what he loved was the game for its own sake. (5)

Before all else, the passage privileges Kim’s talent for blending into “Eastern” life to make his way through the streets of Lahore. This is exceptional, at one level, because his way of life is supposedly incomprehensible to the Western “missionaries and secretaries of charitable societies,” who are, like Kim, English. At another more particular level, we learn of the “men of fashion”—both English and Indian, it is later revealed—who rely on Kim’s ability to commission important and vaguely imperial tasks without being detected. To avoid discovery (and to accrue favors), Kim relies on his knowledge of Indian culture and customs to disguise and ingratiate himself—as he himself insists twice in succession to the lama, “I know the people” (14). Just as important is his wide network of relationships, as “everybody in sight [knew Kim] except the peasants from the country” (6).

Kim’s knowledge in concert with his secrecy stand as a testament to his acculturation—a general acknowledgement that floats through the community—or, the pervading sense in the novel that Kim is unique, as “no white man knows the land and customs of the land” (79). Kim’s role as “Little Friend of All the World” in British India, then, is crucial as it enables him to move between the factions and castes of Lahore at the same time that he maneuvers within and around official colonial forces; Kim is made a native informant, for instance, despite the fact that he is not native. These details seem designed to explain Kim’s successful negotiation of what the text
juxtaposes as two essentialized ways of living and thinking—East and West—the navigation of which will make operations for British empire run more smoothly.

As readers, then, we feel we are moving not through the complex system of capitalist imperialism, but instead through the seemingly linear process of Kim’s choice regarding his future. We move through his story with him, experiencing the British Empire from his perspective: as a supposed adventure without any real threats of danger or exploitation; as the narrative describes at one point, Kim is often distracted “thinking of the immense fun to come” (149). When he is caught spying on a priest and a reverend of a regiment, for instance, he escapes by making allusions to both the Mavericks (the insignia of the bull Kim associates with his destiny) and the Masonic amulet around his neck, reflecting that it was “a time for caution and fancy”: "Nine hundred pukka devils and the Colonel riding on a horse will look after you when you find the Red Bull!" and “I did not know what to do when I saw the Bull… I think the Bull shall help me” (76). While the belief in the bull prophecy is meant to call to mind Kim’s childish misunderstanding of something his father said about the “bull” (or his father’s Irish regiment, the Mavericks) protecting him, it also represents his tendency to frame—and, given his unique connection to British Empire—things that happen around him as having to do with him. These details, then, largely texture the story in the background of his individual journey.

Indeed, Kim believes that destiny will help him overcome any obstacles in his path; he consistently references a badge with an emblazoned “red bull” that was among his father’s few possessions, which he wears in a pouch around his neck. As readers, we know that this is not fate, but regiment insignia, and that the pouch contains papers confirming that Kim’s father was a Mason (4). In other words, Kim’s social success based on inheritance rather than merit, though it is crucial to recognize, of course, that the European recipients of this bounty are permitted to
think of it as the latter; as Kim reflects at one point: “this adventure, though he did not know the English word, was a stupendous lark—a delightful continuation of his old flights across the housetops, as well as the fulfillment of sublime prophecy” (73). After being handed an education and a privileged position as a spy in the Great Game—that violently playful euphemism for the inter-imperial battle between Britain and Russia for control of Afghanistan—at the age of roughly 15, Kim’s good fortune is framed in terms of personal accomplishment by the headmaster of his British school: “you must not think that you are going out into the world to enjoy yourself, or that your fortune is made. There is a great deal of hard work before you. Only if you succeed in becoming [permanent], you can rise” (149).10 It is on this foundation and with this understanding that the novel introduces Kim to new information that we discover along with him, inviting us to observe his general thoughts and specific reactions as the world appears to open before him.

“Who is Kim?”

Midway through, the novel makes plain what it has alluded to throughout as its central dilemma: the infamous existential question “Who is Kim?” The question, echoed by Kim in moments of confusion, is meant to represent the push and pull he feels between his dual allegiance to the Lama (and therefore India) and the Great Game, a kind of competition for preeminent knowledge in the text. To which system of knowledge production, the text seems to ask, does Kim belong? The supposedly rational, real-politic of the Great Game or the irrational mysticism of the Lama? The competing options, the novel suggests, present Kim with a choice

regarding his “path” in life—East or West, enlightenment or intrigue, teacher or spy—essentially
a question of how he can best utilize his knowledge and intuition without too much outside
control or interference. As a way of emphasizing these competing claims on knowledge, the text
spends time going back and forth through a series of what are effectively lessons for Kim, geared
at imparting knowledge. At the same time that he attends a formal British school, then, his
education is supplemented with informal lessons on what it is to be British in India; the precise
lessons of this are often only alluded to, though they seem to emphasize the cunning of the
British, the childishness and often naivety of the lama, and the fact that the British are often
“charitable” (“Try these,” in reference to his glasses, which he gifts the Lama (13)) but also one
step ahead.

Characters appear and reappear seemingly from nowhere to instruct and guide Kim on his
journey, often functioning as narrative expositions for Kim’s knowledge of Indian culture. Even
as Kim’s Englishness is treated as a trump card in his dealings with Indian people, then, his
ability to practice acculturation, and even adhere to the spiritual aspects of Indian culture, is
emphasized and valued. This is best exemplified by the character Lurgan—a European “jeweler”
who is (like almost everyone else) vaguely involved in the Great Game—whom Kim meets at
the recommendation of the British on one of his many sabbaticals from school. From his
introduction (which focuses on Kim’s impressions and perspective), Lurgan is recognized by
Kim as unique; though a sahib, he speaks Urdu that is “not English in intonation” and displays a
“resistance to explaining things,” traits that Kim muses mark an Englishman in India (128). Most
important, he does not act as a “genuine imported Sahib from England” would (129). At the heart
of his lessons is the attempt to teach Kim how to think beyond what is immediately presented—
to think, in other words, in a way useful to the Game.
The starkest of these examples takes place when Lurgan encourages Kim to see “beyond” or through the broken pieces of a water jar to imagine it whole: “Look! It shall come to life again, piece by piece. First the big piece shall join itself to two others on the right and left—on the right and the left. Look!” (130). Kim is amazed as he sees “one large piece of the jar where there had been three, and above them was the shadowy outline of the entire vessel” (130). To fight Lurgan’s attempt to entrance him, Kim switches from thinking in Hindi to thinking in English:

So far Kim had been thinking in Hindi, but a tremor came over him, and with an effort like that of a swimmer before sharks…his mind leaped up from a darkness that was swallowing it and took refuge in—the multiplication table in English!

‘Look! It is coming into shape,’ whispered Lurgan Sahib.

The jar had been smashed—yes, smashed—not the native word, he would not think of that—but smashed—into fifty pieces, and twice three was six, and thrice three was nine…The shadow outline of the jar cleared like a mist after rubbing eyes. There were the broken shards; there was the spilt water…and thrice twelve was thirty-six! (130)

The language used in the description implies that Kim’s vision of the intact jar is attributable to his “thinking” in Hindi and, by extension, the misstep of relying solely on knowledge acquired by living in India as an Indian. More particularly, the explanation suggests that, having grown up in India, Kim’s mind will picture the jar unbroken based on essentialized and vague notions of Indian mysticism. When Kim refuses to submit to fall back into the familiar patterns of thinking supposedly familiar to Hindi speakers, or to be persuaded that the jar is whole, we are to understand that it is only by virtue of “being” and speaking in English that he recognizes that the jar is, indeed, broken. Kim relies on a kind of proprietary British knowledge, which the text makes synonymous with Logic itself, in order to resist Indian magic.11

11 In an interaction with Huneefa, Mahbub, and Hurree shortly after, Kim receives “protection of the Road,” or a magic (“tadoo”) Pathan blessing, to which Kim must submit if it is to be effective. When Kim resists, Mahbub
The Lurgan episode, therefore, is framed in terms of education, and meant to be a complement to the formal education Kim receives at the English St. Xavier school (even as we recognize that Lurgan is not actually Indian, but rather an acculturated Englishman). The combination of these competing forms of knowledge directly prepares Kim to apply his new sense of understanding and transcendence in the near future. Notably, part of the lesson is that Kim must exploit mysticism as a way to be cautious of ever becoming too English. As Hurree explains: “If you were Asiatic of birth you might be employed right off; but this half-year of leave is to make you de-Englishized, you see?” (155). To be useful to the Great Game, Kim must balance his understanding of the supposedly separate worlds of England and India, ultimately propelling himself and Britain forward. Indeed, the implication flitting throughout the scene is that Kim must pass as and surpass being Indian while maintaining his allegiance, at the base of it, to England and the Great Game.

Kim is, as a matter of course, soon given the opportunity to put his acquired knowledge to the test; his lessons, it is implied, have been building toward this opportunity. Kim’s spy work—his opportunity to test the knowledge he has been accumulating through his tailored lessons—is largely based on circumstances that appear without warning, but for which Kim is inherently prepared. His navigation of these circumstances relies on his ability to recognize, with limited warning and subtle signals, the need for his intervention. Moments like these have the effect of making Kim appear as a singularly important accomplice in the operation of empire, because his role is emphasized as critical to the endeavor.

Only “two days entered to the Game” (171), Kim rides the train with a man who, he deduces, works for the British government as a spy like himself (167). With his “knowing” remarks, “‘Allah! How he fought! We should never have done it but for the drugs. That was his white blood, I take it” (150).
ability, Kim anticipates the need of his “services” when he notices the man’s cut face, a “badly torn” garment, and “one leg…bandaged” coupled with the fact that the man is not dirty, indicating he did not have a physical accident as he claims (167). Kim determines that a “fall from a cart could not cast a man into such extremity of terror” (167). After Kim notices an unusual amulet, a sign that he rightly interprets as an indication that the man works for the British government in India undercover, he subsequently flashes “his own amulet” (given to him by Hurree and described as “ours,” or belonging to the Great Game code of the “Sat Bhai/Seven Brothers” (154)), to let the man know that he, too, works for the rogue arm of the British government, the Game (167). Under the auspices of healing the man, Kim announces to the train car that he will “cure” the man, who he refers to aloud as “this sick one” (170).

Kim provides a “healing against the shadow of death,” which contains a duplicitous action (170). First, to avoid detection by those observing him on the train, Kim pretends to heal the man of a sickness, which allows him to literally disguise the man so that he will be unrecognizable when he exits, making it possible for him to elude detection by Russian rivals, and certain death (170). In a matter of minutes Kim conceals the man’s identity by making him appear to be Saddhu, a caste different from that to which the man actually belongs. Though the train moves quickly and Kim has little time, his ability to conceptually negotiate the multiple sects of society—in combination with his established as well as recently initiated knowledge—affords him the ability to maneuver within and around the train passengers, managing the conflicting expectations of the protesting castes to avoid suspicion.

In the case of the disguised man, Kim’s knowledge of his role proves luminary; he intuits that his actions will have a significant impact. Indeed, the text corroborates Kim’s thoughts and assumptions in the description of the aftereffects of the train episode, outlining the singular
importance of what he has done in the scheme of the Great Game in British India as well as his ability to identify his contributions in this, *his*, world. His help, as it travels across the nation, catalogues a chain reaction of events:

Incidentally, an over-zealous policeman had arrested, on charge of murder done in a far southern State, a horribly indignant Ajmir cotton-broker, who was explaining himself to a Mr Strickland on Delhi platform, while E23 was paddling through byways into the locked heart of Delhi city. In two hours several telegrams had reached the angry minister of a southern State reporting that all trace of a somewhat bruised Mahratta had been lost; and by the time the leisurely train halted at Saharunpore the last ripple of the stone Kim had helped to heave was lapping against the steps of a mosque in far-away Roum—where it disturbed a pious man at prayers. (176)

Here the narrative seems to confirm Kim’s intuition, the path that he has made possible, and the ways it has affected the trajectory of the Great Game. As Phillip Mallett points out, at many moments in the novel there is often “no gap” between the narrator and Kim (119). The narrative’s imperialist spy plot combined with this seeming omniscience, which seems to extend to Kim, has readers looking in concert with the character for signs of those “in the know.” The narrative seems to confirm Kim’s vital contribution to the imperial process, summarizing—almost as a coconspirator—Kim’s work.

Yet, there is simultaneously a sense that in the vastness of the world that empire transgresses, Kim will not be able to see the direct impact on his community or life. As the Lama notes, “Thou hast loosed an Act upon the world, and as a stone thrown into a pool so spread the consequences thou canst not tell how far” (176). Even as the narrative intervenes to tell us that the Lama’s comment is tantamount to “ignorance,” which ultimately benefits Kim by keeping him humble—having just “controlled himself with an effort beyond his years”—it also introduces a world for which Kim cannot fully account. The series of events, then, address the sense that Kim is correct about the effects of his action, an otherwise fantastical coincidence.
Here, the individual fantasy of omnipotence rhymes with the global structure of a world that allows such impacts to travel across such vast spaces. Most interesting, the unevenness of the passage, when Kim’s knowledge seems to falter, has in fact been preceded by moments of doubt more striking not only for their formal qualities, but for the wrenches they throw into the structural, linear plot of the novel.

“He Knew Not What Fate”

If we examine the moments where Kim questions his sense of self and identity, we see that they are less about his management of what he considers to be two worlds, and instead about his confrontation, his reckoning with, the idea that these worlds are in fact one. The character’s isolation, his momentary recognition of fear of solitude, then, manifests when he contends with the idea of a single social world that envelops and overwhelms him. Notably, these quandaries are not, and cannot be, resolved in the narrative plot, but are rather quickly passed over. Nevertheless, Kim’s existential crises disrupt the seemingly linear structure of his journey, suggesting not only that his choice regarding his path in life is perhaps less secure than he imagines, but also that progress is itself constructed in the narrative frame set by capital.

Kim encounters his first existential crisis midway through his journey.

'Hai mai! I go from one place to another as it might be a kickball. It is my Kismet. No man can escape his Kismet. But I am to pray to Bibi Miriam, and I am a Sahib.' He looked at his boots ruefully. 'No; I am Kim. This is the great world, and I am only Kim. Who is Kim?' He considered his own identity, a thing he had never done before, till his head swam. He was one insignificant person in all this roaring whirl of India, going southward to he knew not what fate. (101)

Kim considers, on his way to speak with Colonel Creighton, “his own” identity, but finds he is insignificant in the “roaring whirl of India.” Kim’s individualism, which has been in many ways the focus of the story up to this point, is swallowed by “India,” a place and state of mind that
Kim purports to know well enough to at times control. Yet, in the same moment, we find Kim’s idea of “India,” along with the rest of his consciousness, to be socially determined. That is, the primary importance assigned to Kim’s individual thoughts and knowledge before this point reveals the extent to which consciousness is deeply and actually social. Kim’s existential crisis, which the text wants to re-contain as a crisis of identity—even going so far as to put it in a kind of stream-of-consciousness—offers to tell us about knowledge and its limits, ultimately unfolding the way Kim is determined by the social world around him. What is more, this is a fact that the text cannot but return to, given Kim’s fixation on effectively controlling this world.

As he waits to board a train to meet the lama after receiving his “lessons” from Lurgan, Kim catches a brief moment to reflect and experiences what the narratives calls “a sudden natural reaction”:

“'Now am I alone—all alone,' he thought. 'In all India is no one so alone as I! If I die today, who shall bring the news—and to whom?’
‘Who is Kim—Kim—Kim?’
He squatted in a corner of the clanging waiting-room, rapt from all other thoughts; hands folded in lap, and pupils contracted to pin-points. In a minute—in another half-second—he felt he would arrive at the solution of the tremendous puzzle; but here, as always happens, his mind dropped away from those heights with a rush of a wounded bird, and passing his hand before his eyes, he shook his head. (156)

The narrative categorizing of Kim’s reaction as “natural” seems rooted in two causes: first, his tendency (“as always happens”)—perhaps attributable to his youth, his personality or a more general human condition—to feel close to “the solution of the tremendous puzzle”; and second (and more problematically) the implication that he thinks and feels in a way supposedly inherent to Indian culture. As if to assure us of the cultural reasons for Kim’s query, the narrative elaborates: “A very few white people, but many Asiatics can throw themselves into amazement as it were by repeating their own names over and over again to themselves, letting the mind go
free upon speculation, as to what is called personal identity” (156). Aside from the latter sentiment’s patent absurdity, the moment is inconsistent with the larger narrative; Kim’s crisis is remarkable precisely because it cannot be explained in terms already established by the novel. Kim has been essentially alone most of his life and has felt the push and pull between cultures throughout that time. “Who is Kim?” is less a question Kim asks himself, then, and more the intrusion of a social world that must be included to tell Kim’s story, but which cannot but contradict the individuality of such a narrative.

Initially, it seems as if Kim is reacting to the unique internal conflict that governs his life. He is, in this moment, at rest, without a mission to complete or an adventure to captain, away from both the pull of Great Game intrigue and the push to reconnect with the lama. Here, we encounter one of the only moments in the text that represent a formal incorporation of Kim’s thoughts as they occur to him, particularly his concern that he is alone. And herein lies the contradiction: we know quite well that Kim has never been alone, as he has many resources constantly at his disposal. That is, as the scenes focused on Kim’s knowledge and supplemental lessons suggest, we observe a tremendous amount of time and resources spent on Kim. Indeed, we can discern a relatively constant intervention that frame Kim’s path as teleology, an effort on the part of many people to make sure everything around and associated with Kim works as it is supposed to, only to confirm that this was providence. At the same time, we recognize that the text itself complicates the idea that Kim’s journey is about the conflict between East and West; we receive clues throughout that the government comprises Indian and British officials, and that, in addition to Kim, people like Mahbub, Huneefa, Hurree, Lurgan, exist.

That is, the injunction to live according to the rules of what are we are told are two separate worlds is not unique at all to the world of the text. Instead, we are presented with a slew
of characters who do exactly what Kim does. Not only Lurgan, Mahbub Ali, Hurree Babu, Colonel Creighton, but even the Lama live in the gray area created by empire in India. What is more, what we find in the novel’s characters is not cultural hybridity, or what a Russian spy calls the “monstrous hybridism of East and West” (199), but the contradiction of capitalism hid in plain sight. Kim’s quandary—and what comes before it—shows a tremendous teleology in the process of construction and then destruction.

Moreover, in the text’s presentation of an individually rather than socially determined teleology, we detect a pattern of contradiction bigger still. The constant allusions to knowledge and Kim’s need to negotiate what are presented as two disparate worlds allows capital to operate without having to acknowledge what it is or does—not merely moving forward by contradiction, but able to create cultural and geographical difference and division at the same time that it continues to universalize the capital form, bringing together a global working class. We arrive at the mechanism of class by way of our reading of the character of Kim as an individual. In the crisis moment above, we observe that Kim’s view fails to consider—even as it incorporates—the world around him, suggesting that he feels disconnected not from either of the paths designated—the Game or the Wheel—but instead from the entire social world around him. The essence of the question “Who is Kim—Kim—Kim?” rests in what is better understood to be the social crisis brought about not by the conflicts inherent to empire, but rather the broadening of the bounds of Kim’s social world, and with it his sense of isolation.

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If we return to the opening pages of the narrative, we find a summary regarding communal knowledge and social relations, or who “knows” Kim:

As [Kim] drummed his heels against Zam-Zammah he turned now and again from his king-of-the-castle game…to make a rude remark to the native policeman on
guard...The big Punjabi grinned tolerantly: he knew Kim of old. So did the water-carrier, sluicing water on the dry road from the goat-skin bag. So did Jawahir Singh, the Museum carpenter, bent over the new packing-cases. So did everybody in sight except the peasants from the country, hurrying up to the Wonder House to view the things that men made in their own province and elsewhere. The Museum was given up to Indian arts and manufacturers, and anybody who sought wisdom could ask the Curator to explain. (6)

“Everybody,” we are told matter-of-factly, is familiar with Kim, “except the peasants from the country.” At first mention, the reason for this is ostensibly geographic; the peasants do not live in the city, are there infrequently, and as a result are unaware of the people and social relationships there. Yet the passage gives the lie to the search for knowledge; the relationships are not about “knowledge” at all, but rather about access to information as well as the privilege of acknowledgement, each of which are tied to class. Wisdom, we are told, is free to “anybody,” but what is portrayed is the exclusion of peasants from their own history and from Kim’s narrative perspective. Too, the operation of a British-run museum, constructed around the idea that the British are “keeping” knowledge of Indian cultures alive, and our own knowledge that such an endeavor purports to archive the cultures it destroys and erases from historical narrative, is a precise metaphor for the structural process taking place in the novel.

That is, if we try to neatly summarize what Kim knows about empire and his role within it at the beginning and then again at the end of the book, we see knowledge eludes him as well as the other characters like Mahbub Ali, Lurgan, Colonel Creighton who, it is implied, have more information than he does. More than this, we should acknowledge that, in a text about empire and knowledge regarding how to sustain and expand it, the text itself seems to know—or reveal—very little; not only is the reality of violence hidden throughout, but the terms “empire” or “imperial” never appear. Rather, the structure of the text aims to make empire illegible to us—where “knowledge” stands in for many other operations, the effects of which are largely opaque.
The structure of *Kim*, in other words, appears to be best explained as the development of a European in British-India, but the essence of this narrative is in its structure as a teleology. We are only able to access the teleology through a social world the text encourages us to think of as incidental. *Kim*, then, allows us to meditate on the parts of capitalism that are typically hidden from view (the Great Game, that rogue operation carried out by a small selection of men) at the same time that it hides itself in seemingly innocuous interactions.

Kim’s apparently quick recovery from his existential crisis, which comes at the heels of his encounter with Hurree and Huneefa, leads into a social interaction that we can more easily read in terms of ideology: its reliance on exploitation, its inherent inequity, and its estranging and obscuring of social relations. After receiving a kind word from a holy man he boards a train to Benares to find the lama. Once in Benares, Kim commissions a man to guide him who, we are told, is a “Punjabi farmer…who had appealed in vain to every God of his homestead to cure his small son, and was trying Benares as a last resort” (157). For Kim, healing the child is an opportunity to be respected as a “man” with the power to heal; it is only through a half-conscious thought, almost an aside, that Kim muses that he “knew how to recognize starvation when he saw it” (158). Kim saves the child by sharing quinine that “he had in tablets, and dark brown meat-lozenges—beef most probably” and the group plans to meet the next day (159).

If we include the contextual details that surround the episode—considering especially what takes place between Kim’s healing and their reunion the next day to confirm the child’s improving health—we reencounter Kim “healing” someone else—the British spy—which leads us to question Kim’s cognizance of his place in his world. Taken as a whole, Kim’s foray into healing people acquires new meaning; Kim is relatively unconcerned with the farmer and his son in comparison with the British spy. Indeed, so much does Kim privilege his work concealing the
spy that he directly threatens the farmer: “I did this charm in thy presence because need was
great…if…thou rememberest what thou hast seen…a murrain will come among the buffaloes,
and a fire in thy thatch, and rats in the corn-bins, and the curse of our Gods upon thy fields, that
they may be barren before thy feet and after thy ploughshare” (160). Given its place in the series
of events that frame it, however, the passage reveals more than the privileging of an imperialist
perspective, or even the role of the individual in capitalism.

Significantly, these events—Kim’s disguising the British spy and his subsequent threat
to the farmer—take place on the train, the social scope of which allows us to see the contradictory
mechanism of capitalist imperialism in motion. Throughout the text, the narrative frames the
confusion Indian peoples experience in their interactions with the train as a product of the
conflict between “old world-piety and modern progress that is the note of India today” (13). This
perspective attempts to portray India as “out of time” with European progress, and, therefore, to
render it timeless. These allusions, of course, lead to offensive generalizations that range from
the narrative observation that “all hours of the twenty-four are alike to Orientals” (25) to one
man’s complaint about third-class carriages: “there is not one rule of right living which these
terrains do not cause us to break. We sit, for example, side by side with all castes and peoples”
(27). The comments are juxtaposed with Kim’s perspective and purpose on the train, which we
are to assume is “forward-thinking” by comparison—reflecting to the lama that the train allows
them to go “farther…than thou couldst walk in two days” (30)—and ingenious for blending in
with the people on commission of an imperial task, “as unremarkable a figure as ever carried his
own and a few score thousand other folk’s fate slung around his neck” (34).

Despite what the narrative tells us, however, the scenes on the train show us not only the
ambivalence with which the people view the train, but that Kim’s comfort on the train is
determined by its presence in India as a mechanism of empire; the train, while used by the characters in the novel to move from place to place, is ultimately, as one man says, “the work of the government” (26).\textsuperscript{12} As such, the interactions that take place on the train begin to unpack the exploitative effects of empire on the people by bringing them together in a kind of social composite. While the train is used by people to travel, it ultimately moves at the discretion of empire.\textsuperscript{13} We might rephrase this to say that the institution of the railway serves the interests of British Empire, particularly when we view it in light of one of its most striking consequences: famine in India.

This recognition further contextualizes the episode with the “sick” child of the farmer and a contradiction in capitalism’s mode of production: with direct access to a food source, the child should be well fed, but is, in fact, starving. The farmer—whose farm is increasingly part of a globalizing capitalist system—must produce and sell rather than consume the crops that he has grown. The famine—itself part of a much larger series of famines in India that suggest pattern

\textsuperscript{12} See Tara Sethia’s “Railways, Raj, and the Indian States: Policy of Collaboration and Coercion in Hyderabad,” \textit{Railway Imperialism}. Editors Davis and Wilburn. Greenwood: New York (1991). Sethia argues: “The construction of the Indian railroads, ranking as one of the top four among the world’s rail networks, attracted the largest single unit of foreign investment of the nineteenth century. Unlike the United States, the railways in India were introduced by the British as a commercial enterprise during the age of ‘imperialism of free trade.’ However, the Indian railways were never a free enterprise but remained subject to governmental control. The process of imperial control over railway construction and operation frustrated industrial development and led to uneven economic growth of the Indian subcontinent” (103).

\textsuperscript{13} See Alex Callinicos \textit{Imperialism and Global Political Economy}, Cambridge: Polity Press (2009). Callinicos writes that the “starting point, then, to understanding capitalist imperialism is that it emerges at the historical moment when, not only does a new constellation of Great Powers appear following the American Civil War and the foundation of the German Reich, but a genuinely global capitalist world economy takes shape. Eric Hobsbawm has painted a superb portrait of the 1850s and 1860s as the decades when ‘observers [first] saw the world not merely as a single interlocking complex, but as one where each part was sensitive to what happened elsewhere, and through which money, goods and men moved smoothly and with increasing rapidity, according to the irresistible stimuli of supply and demand, gain and loss and with the help of modern technology’. Hobsbawm highlights the significance in this transformation of the ‘extraordinary acceleration in the speed of communication’, closely connected to huge reductions in transport costs, which were all made possible by the new technologies emerging from the maw of industrial capitalism—above all, the railway, the steamship and the telegraph. But this process of physical integration was associated with the knitting together of a global web of economic relations facilitating the flows of commodities, money and capital” (144).
more than aberration—is the direct result of the crops of Indian farmers, rice and grain in particular, being grown and then moved away by way of the trains. The separation of the crops from Indian farmers, too, was not a singular instance of the misuse of the railway system, but rather a direct function of its design and institution in India—to move products away from their producers. Despite the capacity of a train system to provide access to food to a wide swathe of people, perhaps to even aid in curtailing starvation, its value is in its exportation of products. We sense in this contradictory exchange, and in the institution of the train itself, the modus operandi of capitalism—to separate the producer from his product and to enter it into the process of globalizing exchange. Here, we see a conflict not in East and West—what the text would have us believe are two different worlds, somehow out of time with one another—but rather the clash in social classes necessitated by the capitalist mode of production.

These episodes, and the social scape that they represent, illuminate what might more broadly be termed the economics of *Kim*—particularly poverty and its continuous appearance and description in the novel. Indeed, the first page of the novel is attuned to class when it describes Kim as “a poor white of the very poorest” (3), whose status dictates that he spends time begging and maneuvering through the streets. Throughout the text, he finds himself in a position of precarious dependence within the social and economic confines of imperial occupation, part and parcel of his own exploitation: even as he is privileged in certain ways, he lives a life of precarity, as do the majority of people except for an “exceptional” few, of which Kim is not one. Given its narrative presentation as part of the landscape that Kim observes sometime keenly and at others with only passing interest, the deep division between social classes nearly blends into

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the background, but does not, because it cannot, vanish completely. The unstable socio-historical reality for individuals across Lahore manifests itself in moments that articulate exclusion: those outside the ruling class in the colonies are part of a global lower class, a social stratum that cannot have its exploitation outwardly recognized in a text about knowledge without giving lie to the whole thing.

**Two Kims**

Near the end of the novel, after a physically and mentally stressful encounter with several Russian spies, Kim awakens from a long sleep to find his thoughts confused. Having travelled a great distance and surrendered important documents he collected on behalf of Britain as a spy in the Great Game, he finds himself without a clear direction. His mind, the text tells us, reels with “the bigness of the world,” which “swept linked thought aside” and we return to existential crisis:

The unnerved brain edged away from all the outside, as a raw horse, once rowelled, sidles from the spur. It was enough, amply enough, that the spoil of the kilta was away—off his hands—out of his possession. He tried to think of the lama—to wonder why he had tumbled into a brook—but the bigness of the world, seen between the forecourt gates, swept linked thought aside. Then he looked upon the trees and the broad fields, with the thatched huts hidden among crops—looked with strange eyes unable to take up the size and proportion and use of things—stared for a still half-hour. All that while he felt, though he could not put it into words, that his soul was out of gear with its surroundings—a cog-wheel unconnected with any machinery, just like the idle cog-wheel of a cheap Beheea sugar-crusher laid by in a corner. The breezes fanned over him, the parrots shrieked at him, the noises of the populated house behind—squabbles, orders, and reproofs—hit on dead ears.

'I am Kim. I am Kim. And what is Kim?' His soul repeated it again and again. (234)

The passage appears primed to have Kim address directly what the novel has largely concealed with its structure, “his soul...out of gear with its surroundings” as it attempts to comprehend “the
bigness of the world.” Interestingly, the passage explicitly identifies the contradiction for Kim: his brain, on the one hand, “edged away from all the outside,” retreats to what we might imagine to be his interiority, while on the other hand, he seems unable to completely separate himself from what he sees “between the forecourt gates,” or the world outside the gates of the compound, which “swept linked thought aside.” The issue, then, is that Kim cannot reliably predict what will happen next nor rely on either his belief in the progress often borne out by either his “knowledge” or his good luck (the privilege of being associated with the British). Yet, we might more accurately say his struggle is not a personal crisis, but one experienced as personal. And it is to Kim’s personal experience that the novel returns again; in the next paragraph, he senses “the wheels of his being lock up anew on the world without,” and the world before him that “rode meaningless on the eyeball an instant before slid into proper proportion” becomes “perfectly comprehensible” (234). Altogether, the passage is, oddly enough, incomprehensible in the context of what the novel has been telling us, becoming legible only if we consider what it has been showing us: the contradiction of consciousness within capitalism.

The final pages appear to stage, once again, the familiar battle between East and West, each offering a choice that will determine Kim’s path in life, each proposing that Kim has a special claim to knowledge. The Lama confronts Mahbub Ali about his intention for Kim to reenter the Great Game: ‘Nay—he must go forth as a teacher,’” while Mahbub Ali counters that ‘He is somewhat urgently needed as a scribe by the State’ (236). The novel ends with Kim staring at the Lama, who promises enlightenment, but Kim declines to decide between the two paths. Phillip Mallett has described the end of the novel in terms of “crisis”: “The relation between the two quests moves,” he writes,

towards a crisis at the end of the novel. Edmund Wilson argues that the reader expects that ‘Kim will come eventually to realize that he is delivering into
bondage to British invaders those whom he has always considered his own people, and that a struggle between allegiances will result.’ But then there is no struggle; Kim and the Lama achieve their goals, but ‘the parallel lines never meet’. There is neither opposition, nor synthesis. Kipling, according to Wilson, refuses to face conflict. (121)

More than knowledge, progress or a clash of cultural identities or hybridism, we can better understand that Kim’s attempt to frame his role in individual and not social terms speaks to the way the structure of capitalism eludes not only him, but consciousness generally.

The lama and Mahbub Ali expose the contradictions of their positions in the context of a world which we now understand to be deeply connected, but also built upon inequality. The lama encourages cultivated and learned knowledge (which has consistently been linked with British education in the novel) as well as inaction (“then all doing is evil?” “To abstain from action is well—except to acquire merit” (178)), while the British are interested in Kim’s knowledge (which Kim learns on the streets of India) to the extent that it will produce action, so long as he is willing to remember his inherited and innate allegiance to England. What is particularly fascinating about the end of the novel, however, is that it ultimately undoes appearance to reveal essence, striking down what it has built and revealing, briefly but also as a final word, the reality of Kim as an individual in the “all the roaring whirl”: Kim is batted about between the men like an object being exchanged, is not consulted in his path, and ultimately makes no choice at all.

While the linear narrative of Kim initially appears to privilege an exceptional individual’s invaluable ability to negotiate empire and colony in India, the novel also provides, perhaps without its own knowledge, the means by which we can detect the contradiction of knowledge in capitalism as it expands in the historical moment of new imperialism—again, a relation between appearance and its essence. Indeed, the text moves forward not due to a narrative of progress or linear structure, but instead by a series of contradictions that we can read as the logic of empire laid out. “Who is Kim?” is less the question Kim is asking himself, and is instead the intrusion of
a social world that must, on one hand, be included to tell Kim’s story, but on the other, cannot but contradict a narrative about his singular journey. *Kim* is ultimately the story not of an individual who must navigate a personal choice, but rather of the universal process of capitalist expansion, which compels consciousness to experience history as individual and thus teleological.
“A Break of Continuity in the Chain of Experience”:

**Narrating Capitalism in and with Nostromo**

*Nostromo* remains one of the most complicated portraits of political and social evolution in literary modernism. The narrative takes great pains to involve us in the changing political and social landscape of the country, of revolution and development there, detailing the conversations that inspire and inform political maneuvers and “progress” that will dictate policy—and the continued extraction of silver and influence from the San Tomé mine. The novel offers a breadth and depth of knowledge regarding Sulaco, in particular, as what takes place there extends far beyond the boundaries of the city; plans concocted and enacted there, it is implied, will have an impact on the rest of the country. And it is on this aspect, the development of the country that will eventually become Sulaco, that most critics have focused. As Deidre David argues in her “Introduction” to *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, “*Nostromo* is inhabited by Europeans and South Americans, the formation of their subjectivity explicitly connected with the volatile formation of the nation” (8). I would instead argue that *Nostromo* is, in many ways, less the tale of the new nation of Sulaco and more the story of the development of the San Tomé mine and the experiences of the handful of people whose investments set and keep it in motion. The nation is, in other words, the vehicle steered by those with vested interests in the mine, the control of which enables them to accumulate silver unfettered.

Where criticism has tended to focus on psychology and the nation as the key to reading the novel and its titular character—described by David as “a psychologically complex Italian immigrant to Central America…and he is but one figure in Conrad’s panoramic unfolding of Central American politics” (9)—this chapter argues for recognizing the omissions and
subsequent revelations of social relations in *Nostromo* in light of colonization and capitalism, read according to the narrative’s explicit privileging of the perspectives of an elite class set on “developing” the San Tomé mine. It is only by initially reading through and past the construct of the nation and its development that we are able to expose this tendency in the novel. The upper class continuously espouses the nation, first Costaguana and then Sulaco, as the means by which they will improve the economy of Costaguana and the lives of Costaguaneros, all the while engaging more deeply in and with international capital, further ensuring the exploitation of the people.

In other words, so saturated are we with what appear to be the neutral details of Sulaco’s development that we overlook the novel’s intense focus on the perspective of an elite and wealthy upper class, to the near complete exclusion of the perspective of the working class and the conditions of their existence. Throughout the story, we see only glimpses of the people who live and work around, and in, the mine, their very existence called forth, it seems, to texture the backgrounds of the stories of the elite. It is here, in the background of things as they are presented on the surface in *Nostromo*—the success story of Sulaco’s independence and the progressive development of the mine (a euphemism for the production and accumulation of capital) from the perspective of the elite class—where the presentation of an upper-class narrative begins to fall apart. In the interstices, we are able instead to see the conflict between the classes and, therefore, recognize the multiple contradictions of capitalism.

The novel’s titular character, Nostromo, occupies a contradictory position between the classes of Sulaco, which textures, at one level, my understanding of social relationships in the novel. Particularly, Nostromo’s connection to those in power, however beneficial in particular moments, never overrides the very real nature of class relationships; indeed, the narrative fails to
recognize Nostromo (in the same way that it does every working-class character in the novel) as an individual capable of conscious thought up and until he is in possession of a large sum of silver, a shift so significant that it changes the formal presentation of his character. At another deeply related level, Nostromo’s role in the novel allows me to contextualize and thus read the local particularities of Costaguana as part of the international reality of a capitalist world economy. Critically, I read Nostromo’s liminal social position in the novel, particularly following his infamous abduction of the silver, as instructive for understanding contradiction—here uneven development and the way both people and nations appear to occupy ambivalent positions in a world system—as part and parcel of the nature of economic and social relationships under capital. Indeed, by virtue of my acknowledgement of the contradictions of internationalism capitalism, I find the perspectives of upper-class individuals in Sulaco equally mediated, developed as well as limited in the desire to both imitate and overcome Europe, themselves neither masters of capital nor the wretched of the earth. Ultimately, my reading of the novel illuminates the structure not only of social relations as they play out locally in fictional Sulaco, but the ways that Nostromo helps us think about the contradictions of capitalism contained within portraits of consciousness, often peripheral in a world of expanding social relations.

“A Progressive and Patriotic Undertaking”

Nostromo’s narrator baldly introduces us, in the first pages of the novel, to a seeming critique of British colonization in Sulaco, Costaguana.1 “In the time of Spanish rule,” reads the

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1 Conrad bases the fictional Costaguana on Colombia, which had gained independence in 1810 and had developed the first South American constitutional government nearly 40 years later. Interestingly, U.S. interest and intervention peak in the first years of the 20c. and lead to the separation and creation of the nation of Panama. It is in this period that Conrad writes Nostromo.
opening line, “the town of Sulaco—the luxuriant beauty of the orange gardens bears witness to its antiquity—had never been commercially anything more important than a coasting port with a fairly large local trade” (19). Under Spain, “Sulaco had found an inviolable sanctuary from the temptations of a trading world” (19). With the advent of “steampower,” English ships with a new capacity to power through difficult coastal waters began to “violate the sanctuary of peace” (23). The narrative, and thus the history of Sulaco to which we are privy, begins with a Spanish occupation that offers, according to this telling, benevolent protection. Even as we gather that the presence of the Oceanic Steam Navigation Company (or O.S.N., an English company) marks a shift in Sulaco away from a “calm existence,” the implied interimperial struggle over Sulaco, or the battle between Spain and England and the consequences for the Costaguanero population, passes by without mention. Each of the descriptions, in this way, mitigates colonization by naturalizing it, suggesting that it serves a stabilizing role in Sulaco. As the narrative summarizes: “as they seldom failed to account for the smallest package, rarely lost a bullock, and had never drowned a single passenger, the name of the OS.N. stood very high for trustworthiness. People declared that under the Company’s care their lives and property were safer on the water than in their own houses on shore” (24). Our very access to history itself in Sulaco, then, is mediated by capitalist imperialism.

It is entirely in keeping with this theme that the “O.S.N.’s superintendent of Sulaco,” Captain Mitchell, an Englishman, interjects to tell the triumphant story of Sulaco’s separation from the rest of Costaguana and the formation of the Occidental Republic, a new nation (24). Mitchell’s story looks backward and allows us to not only understand that, in the present, Europeans and Americans with investment interests continue to visit Sulaco (it is to them that Captain Mitchell tells the tale), but also that Sulaco’s breakaway from Costaguana is framed by
the English as necessary to the Province’s survival. This is because, Captain Mitchell explains, Costaguana endures “frequent changes of government” and a “political atmosphere” that “was generally stormy” before separation (24). As Martin Decoud later describes to his friends in Europe:

Imagine an atmosphere of opera-bouffe in which all the comic business of stage statesmen, brigands, etc., etc., all their farcical stealing, intriguing, and stabbing is done in dead earnest. It is screamingly funny, the blood flows all the time, and the actors believe themselves to be influencing the fate of the universe. Of course, government in general, any government anywhere, is a thing of exquisite comicality to a discerning mind; but really we Spanish-Americans do overstep the bounds. No man of ordinary intelligence can take part in the intrigues of une farce macabre. However, these Ribierists, of whom we hear so much just now, are really trying in their own comical way to make the country habitable. (130)

It is the rivalries for power among native Costaguaneros and not the Europeans, Decoud and Mitchell posit, that is at the heart of the country’s instability—even as this interpretation glazes over European occupation as a cause for both instability and a capitalistic paternalism dependent on sustaining it. Similarly, the supposedly localized upheavals form a part of Charles Gould’s justification to himself, and to various investors, that the San Tomé Mine (owned by the Gould family) must be made profitable. Gould reasons, along with foreign interests and the powerful elite of Sulaco, that the entire nation—a space and populace that will be more narrowly defined after separation—stands to benefit from the increased productivity of the mine. Parroted explanations for the development of the mine, understood as “the biggest thing in Sulaco, and even in the republic” (45), filter in from those with the potential to benefit from it; Señor Avellanos pontificates on “the patriotic nature of the San Tomé” while he reclines in a rocking chair imported from America (55), and both Mr. and Mrs. Gould echo, respectively, the Gould family’s fixation on the mine in patriotic but simultaneously essentializing terms: “I was born here,” “he was born here” (53, 62). The mine, they repeat, is of and for the nation.
What is needed to address the economic and governmental issues in Costaguana (which we have just been assured cannot be traced to European intervention), the elites all agree, is development. Indeed, despite having cited the long-established presence of European capital in Sulaco, the Goulds and other interested parties spend significant time stating out loud that Sulaco represents a natural landscape effectively untouched by a progress that they associate with Europe and America. During a visit to Sulaco from America, the chairman of the National Central Railway (which, despite its name, is quite obviously an international undertaking) expresses anxiety:

What concerned him most at the time was the acquisition of land for the railway. In the Sta. Marta Valley, where there was already one line in existence, the people were tractable, and it was only a matter of price. But in Sulaco—the Occidental Province for whose very development the railway was intended—there had been trouble. It had been lying for ages ensconced behind its natural barriers, repelling modern enterprise by the precipices of its mountain range, by its shallow harbour opening into the everlasting calms of a gulf full of clouds, by the benighted state of mind of the owners of its fertile territory—all these aristocratic old Spanish families. (44)

Here, the concept of Sulaco’s natural barrier captures not only the “ensconced” land intent on “repelling modern enterprise,” but more important an already-present upper class, with whom the railway has not yet forged a collaborative capital relationship. What must be contended with, then, is not merely “the clearing of the wilderness, the making of the road, the cutting of new paths up the cliff face of San Tome,” but also the paradoxical act of naturalizing the mine in the minds of powerful Costaguaneros so that its development, and the changes it will inevitably bring, is welcomed (97).

The “necessity” of the mine in and for Costaguana—consistently referred to by the Goulds and their benefactors as progress toward the future—highlights the complicated, even contradictory, nature of uneven development under capitalism. According to their appeals, the
mine will bring Costaguana, in addition to “steamers, a railway, a telegraph cable,” a “future in the great world” (43). This initial justification for the production of the mine—the “future”—rests on the idea that Sulaco has been left behind (we recall the “antiquity” of the gardens in the first paragraph), even when compared with the capital of Costaguana itself, Santa Marta. The mine is meant to bring “a rallying point for everything in the province that needed order and stability to live” (100). (Capital, in these moments, is absent as an explanation—and through the course of the novel comes to be synonymous with “good faith, order, honesty, peace,” or the “great development of material interests” (106).) Allusions to Sulaco’s antiquated existence populate conversations among interested parties; as Mrs. Gould observes of Sulaco to the head of the railway company: “They were more advanced over there [in Santa Marta]. Here in Sulaco they heard only the echoes of these great questions, and, of course, their official world changed each time coming to them over the rampart of mountains” (43). It is in this capacity, in the allusion to the frequent revolutions that take place in Costaguana, in the referent “they” (and not “we”) that we hear of the “rushes of the rabble,” of a desperate population whose history, opportunities, and government are imposed on them—and to whom Mrs. Gould purports to extend help to bring them out from the past (26). As the passage above indicates, Sulaco is troublesome because it initially rejected the prospect of the railway. The people there, the Goulds and the railway chairman suggest, do not seem willing to take the medicine prescribed them.

To establish a justification for their plan, the Goulds paint a portrait of Sulaco as uniquely contradictory (a quality in fact universally shared by regions under capitalism), simultaneously behind and ahead of its surroundings, able to usher in and sustain change in a way that other areas of Costaguana cannot, yet still in desperate need of progress. On a sightseeing tour through the land that her husband’s mine will eventually conquer in “the conquest of peace” (104), Mrs.
Gould marvels that “[she] seemed to come nearer to the soul of the land in the tremendous disclosure of this interior unaffected by the slight European veneer of the coast towns, a great land of plain and mountain and people, suffering and mute, waiting for the future” (83). Mrs. Gould, along with other upper-class Costaguaneros—who go “to England for their education and their wives”—imagine that they have access to a progress they are all too happy to share with the people in the form of work, brought by the mine and the National Central Railway (51). Just as important, then, the Goulds must form a relationship with the people of Sulaco based on perceived dependence; as Mrs. Gould tells the chairman of the railway,

All this brings nearer the sort of future we desire for the country, which has waited for it in sorrow long enough, God knows. But I will confess that the other day, during my afternoon drive when I suddenly saw an Indian boy ride out of a wood with the red flag of a surveying party in his hand, I felt something of a shock. The future means change—an utter change. And yet even here there are simple and picturesque things that one would like to preserve. (108)

In other words, the nature of the relationship between the Goulds and the people of Sulaco relies on private property and withholding ownership from the majority of the population. Mrs. Gould fails to articulate, when she confesses her desire to “preserve” the “simple and picturesque things,” if she refers to the landscape or the boy, effectively one in the same in her estimation. We need look no further than the evaluative tone and diction Mrs. Gould uses—“even here”—to describe the countryside, a phrase that betrays her dismissal. We sense, further, that part of what she wants to preserve is the nature of their relationship.

Outwardly and to one another, then, the Goulds propose that the bounty brought by the mine belongs to everyone, a philosophy buttressed by the fact that it employs some portion of Costaguana’s impoverished population. Citing a letter written by his father—the poor soul initially saddled with (or “robbed” by) the burden of a massive silver mine—Gould echoes the belief that to be Costaguanero is to inherit a legacy of suffering: “God looked wrathfully at these
countries or else He would let some ray of hope fall through a rift in the appalling darkness of intrigue, bloodshed, and crime that hunger over the ‘queen of continents”’ (80). Gould’s prescription for Costaguana is “law, good faith, order, security…That’s how your money-making is justified here in the face of lawlessness and disorder. It is justified because the security which it demands must be shared with an oppressed people” (80). What Charles Gould, variously referred to as the “King of Sulaco” (87, 106), means by suffering is, of course, subject to interpretation. Gould’s allusion to his father’s letter indicates that he considers himself and his father to be exploited, putting forth the idea that nationality and geography overcome class inequality and the senior Gould’s status as “one of the most wealthy merchants of Costaguana” (56). (Indeed, the Gould family history reads like an overview of the phases of capitalist development; they were “liberators, explorers, coffee planters, merchants, revolutionists” (52).)

At one level, the Goulds’ seemingly benevolent invitation to the people to work in the mines serves an ideological purpose in the form of a populist overture; as an “emissary” from the rebel Hernández’s camp tells Charles: “I have a brother, a sereno in your service in the San Tomé valley. You have proved yourself a just man. There has been no wrong done to anyone since you called upon the people to work in the mountains…Your own officials do not oppress the people in the gorge. Doubtless they are afraid of your severity. You are a just man and a powerful one” (288). Contained in the man’s statement of gratitude is the implication not only that Charles Gould might act cruelly if he chooses, but also the accepted idea that a wealthy man deserves thanks for his self-serving recognition that a moneymaking enterprise requires the labor of other men. At another level, then, the economic development of Sulaco—a place where people have been systematically deprived of the products of their labor and whose resources were extracted and exported—appears to be progress and improvement only from a perspective
intent on ignoring the truth of its social relationships and historical circumstances. And unequal social relations are never clearer than when we begin to consider the social perspective which dominates the novel: not that one of nationality, but of the upper class.

“The Indolence of the Upper Classes and the Mental Darkness of the Lower”

Indeed, the narrative perspective of the upper class is what opens the novel by suggesting that history in Sulaco begins with, and was ultimately protected by, Spanish and English rule, which we understand to be synonymous with capital accumulation. It is likewise this perspective that demarcates time according to Anglo-American initiated material development: “Those of us whom business or curiosity took to Sulaco…remember the steadying effect of the San Tomé mine,” observes an unnamed narrator, who speaks in terms of “before” and “after” in reference to the “advent” of the railway (88). And it is finally the explicit privileging of this perspective that permits the narrative to boast of the “hospitality” that “strangers” (re: foreign investors) experience upon entering the Aristocratic Club of Sulaco: “You turned in from the street, as if entering a secluded orchard…The chocolate-coloured faces of servants with mops of black hair peeped at you from above” (90-91). Here, the switch from third to second person narration, particularly in the description of a club whose membership is based on exclusive, or “secluded,” social standing (determined, to some extent, by race), demonstrates the novel is not interested in documenting a composite of Sulaco society, but rather in presenting, by personalizing and appealing to, the perspectives of those who belong to the upper class.

In fact, if we are attentive to perspective in *Nostromo*—not merely the thoughts and opinions of characters, but the way social class and relationships inform these—we find disproportionate time and space devoted to the upper class; extended passages abound about the
passing feelings, fleeting inclinations, and past and present motivations of Charles and Emilia Gould (as individuals and as a couple), Martin Decoud, and even Holroyd. The whims of this handful of individuals in Sulaco, because they are backed by wealth, dictate the lives of countless others. We discover in this same vein not only that Sulaco’s eventual separation from the rest of Costaguana is initially inspired by Decoud’s personal desires and predicament—“the mere idea of a new State evolved like this out of the head of a scoffing young man fleeing for his life” (255)—but likewise that the development of the San Tomé silver mine began as a personal, even inherited, fixation on the part of Charles Gould: “Mines had acquired for him a dramatic interest. He studied their peculiarities from a personal point of view, too, as one would study the varied characters of men. He visited them as one goes with curiosity to call upon remarkable persons” (61). It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the mine itself—partly owing to its importance to this particular upper class, but also given its place as a site of production in capitalism, generally—is gifted a kind of individuality withheld from the majority of people in the novel. At times, the mine is lauded for its “inviolable character,” which the Goulds and their investors vow to “preserve…at every cost” (102). Yet, at the same time, these explorations into the perspectives of Costaguana’s elite class—always in relation to the mine—are consistently challenged by their narrative proximity to depictions of the people, which often suggest the material conflict between the classes. These juxtapositions, and the generalizing of the people in particular, ultimately bears a truth which the elite, whose perspective represents the dominant narrative thread in the novel, seem intent to foreclose: the necessity of the working class to capitalism.

Characterizations of working-class people—or the “barefooted multitude” (51)—abound in the novel, relayed by the upper class in overtly classist, and often racialized, terms. These
descriptions suggest that inequality as it exists in Sulaco is both naturally occurring and unrelated to the drive for profit. At critical moments in the narrative, working-class people are called into the story of Sulaco, or the story of Sulaco told from the perspective the elite, to form the background of and to create ambience in particular scenes. In these moments, the working class almost inevitably appears (with the exception of Nostromo, whose special role in the novel I will address shortly) as a homogenous group without the dignity of individual thought or even designation—we think of the “innumerable Joses, Manuels, Ignacios,” whose “joyless faces…looked all alike” to Mrs. Gould and “the innumerable Marias and Brigidas” who help Father Roman “[feel] his own humanity expand” (92, 320). Descriptions of “sedate brown children” and a “small, staid urchin met wandering, naked and grave, along the road with a cigar in his baby mouth” are relayed as a way to celebrate the critical power of discernment possessed by Don Pepe who, with “one attentive, thoughtful glance” could “classify each woman, girl, or growing youth of his domain” (94). And Martin Decoud, after organizing and selling the idea of the revolution to the Goulds, remarks on the army of “poor peons and indios, that know nothing either of reason or politics” (152). In each of these cases, the upper-class speaker fails to recognize the material relation between the lived conditions of the working class and their pursuit of and stake in the capital produced through the mine.

It is worth noting that in addition to these failures to admit the true nature of social relations in Sulaco, there are also generalized statements about the working-class, which emanate from a narrator who, rather than epitomizing the perspective of a single character, seems instead to be a kind of amalgamation of a shared feeling held by the upper class (with whom the narrator apparently identifies) toward the lower. “Whole families,” we are told, move to the mining villages in anonymous but predictable fashion: “Father first, in a pointed straw hat, then the
mother with the bigger children, generally also a diminutive donkey” (93). Later, when the narrator details the “treachery” of Pedro Montero in manipulating the “plainsmen” to do his bidding, the passage continues: “The popular lore of all nations testifies that duplicity and cunning, together with bodily strength, were looked upon, even more than courage, as heroic virtues by primitive mankind… We have changed since… But the ignorant and barbarous plainsmen engaging in civil strife followed willingly a leader who often managed to deliver their enemies bound, as it were, into their hands” (309-310). That same narrator finishes the passage by explaining that Montero’s idea to launch a rebellion was inspired by French novels. “This will appear less incredibly by the reflection,” the narrator concludes, “that the fundamental causes were the same as ever, rooted in the political immaturity of the people, in the indolence of the upper classes and the mental darkness of the lower” (311). If only the elite could have exerted more energy, the narrator suggests, they might have had a more resounding historical victory; the “we,” then, speaks to a class camaraderie between the narrator and the upper class. This concretizes only a few pages later when Senor Gamacho, a part of Montero’s group, gives a speech: “His opinion was that war should be declared at once against France, England, Germany, and the United States, who, by introducing railways, mining enterprises, colonization, and under such shallow pretenses, aimed at robbing the people of their lands” (315). The narrator is quick to dismiss Gamacho, presenting him as captivating the people but ultimately failing to discern the reality of the situation, namely the upper-class struggle to make the San Tome mine productive and to ensure its ownership by a handful of people, the revolution as executed and told by the upper class. Indeed, the majority of the novel devotes itself to precisely this narrative. In the depiction of the mine and its relation to the nation, then, we see the ways in which the
novel privileges (and ultimately illustrates the limitations of) a fundamentally upper-class perspective.

“The Only Province in the Republic of Interest to European Capitalists”

Early in the novel, Mrs. Gould recounts the history of the mine to a room of powerful men invested in it. Without seeming to recognize the contradiction of her position as the wife of the owner and developer of the mine, or perhaps by virtue of it, she cites labor waged “mostly by means of lashes on the backs of slaves” and memorializes “whole tribes of Indians [who] had perished in the exploitation” (55). Mrs. Gould seeks to clarify the mine’s troubled past, we might surmise, not least because the previous era ended in insurrection: “the native miners, incited to revolt by the emissaries sent out from the capital,” a narrator tells us, “had risen upon their English chiefs and murdered them to a man” (56). Eager to avoid repeating history, the narrative (which is either a general narrator or Mrs. Gould—perhaps here one and the same) invokes the past to make a promise regarding the future: an allusion to a “decree” published in the newspaper after the insurrection, which warned, “The mine…shall remain closed till the sword drawn for the sacred defence of liberal principles has accomplished its mission” (56). The overall effect seems to culminate in Mrs. Gould’s desire to associate her and her husband’s new leadership of the San Tomé with the “liberal principles” cited in the decree, a kind of assurance for the mineworkers; the mine, she and her husband imply, has been newly polished and repackaged (as if as a gift) to native Costaguaneros. The speech, however, is delivered to a room full of upper-class investors.

These abstract ideas are contrasted, only a few pages later, with strikingly concrete depictions of the social and material realities that define Mrs. Gould’s relationship with a
laboring class. At home in the “Gould mansion,” she takes a moment to pause and marvel at her love for “the patio of her Spanish house” (68). We are treated to the sights and sounds that surround and engulf her senses: the “barefooted servants” who make up the rich tapestry of her life, including “laundry girls,” “the baker,” “Leonarda—her own camerista,” and “the old porter” (68). From the railing of a corridor connecting “lofty rooms,” Mrs. Gould, “like the lady of the medieval castle...could witness from above” the servants of her household as they “passed to and fro, issuing from dark, low doorways below” (68). Aside from the rather obvious language that insists on the differences between Mrs. Gould and her servants through dichotomy—“above” and “below,” “lofty” and “low,” “lady” and “servant”—we note also the general anonymity of the servants, apparently undeserving of names or stories. Indeed, the only name we receive is that of “Leonarda,” who Mrs. Gould refers to as “her own” and whose relevance to Mrs. Gould is betrayed by the latter’s parrot, whose refrain tells us not only how frequently Mrs. Gould calls on her camerista, but also her incommensurate positions regarding a free Costaguana on the one hand and her social relationship to the working class on the other: “Viva Costaguana!” the parrot screams, followed by “Leonarda! Leonarda!”, in imitation of Mrs. Gould’s voice” (69).

As the novel continues, pretense about the welfare of the people begins to fall away—and what appeared to be willful ignorance regarding the lives of working-class Costaguernos is instead unveiled as the cold calculus of profit. Observing a festival from inside a carriage, Charles Gould along with a handful of others invested in the mine take in a view of a “multitude of booths,” “Indian women, squatting on mats,” and “country people” (110). Rather than gather more details, however the narrative pivots to tell us that the railway and mine will expand the reach of their territory by purchasing and subsequently privatizing the public land typically used for celebrations by the people. The news is delivered by an emotionless Charles Gould: “All this
piece of land belongs now to the Railway Company. There will be no more popular feasts held here” (111). We gather, that is, that Mr. Gould views the laboring population of Sulaco as part and parcel of the sale of the land for the mine and the railway; Gould’s wiping away the humanity of the people with his remarks doubles as foreshadowing. The privatizing of the festival land represents not only a displacing of the marketplace economy, composed of “cana…dulces…fruit…cigars” and food, but quite likely community members reliant on it (110).

Moreover, the conversation takes place as Gould and several others invested in the mine travel from the dock to the Gould home in a carriage, a mode of transport that keeps those inside off the ground and away from the throes of the multitude. After receiving this news from Charles Gould, Mrs. Gould and Don José Avellanos, both passengers in the carriage, look out at the countryside, seeming to note, but then quickly dismissing, the “extended hands of beggars,” particularly vulnerable members of the population (110). Their indifference demonstrates not only the class relation between themselves and those gathered at the festival, but also the swiftly changing view offered from inside the comparatively quick carriage; as speed of the “progress” related to the mine and the railway—or the processes of production and distribution—increases, the carriage as a mode of transportation becomes a literal and figurative vehicle for the material relationship between the classes, one that is itself eventually ousted by the train, which too becomes a tool owned and largely utilized by the wealthy. Used by the Goulds and their friends to traverse Sulaco in the process of securing the continued productivity of the mine, the carriage is, at once, an expedient means of movement only available to the upper classes as well as a kind of symbol for remaining above the fray of poverty that inevitably attends wealth inequality. The conflict between the classes—only passingly registered or acknowledged by the elite in the
novel—reaches a crescendo in moments that depend upon the separation of the classes as well as the calculation of capital in motion, as wealthy passengers travelling inside the carriage look past (and sometimes down at) stationary people outside it.

With government overthrow looming, those with “material interests” in the San Tomé mine—railway engineers, Europeans, and the upper-class inhabitants of Sulaco (namely, the Goulds and their associates)—gather in a show of encouragement for the soldiers as the latter march away to defend Sulaco from the Montero rebellion, with the Goulds and friends seated inside the carriage. The soldiers, evidently working-class men, remain a nebulous and undefined entity, while General Barrios—whose position is a product of powerful connections within the Ribiera dictatorship—assures the wealthy: “Fear nothing, develop the country, work, work!” (139). We recognize the complicated, even contradictory, bind placed on the working class in an unequal economic system—the necessity of laboring to live—and the way that the upper class exploits this through an ideology constructed around and about the mine. At times, the mine is used as an appeal to a desperate people in an offer of protection. The narrator describes the way a man wearing the colors of the mine—one of the “white ponchos with a green stripe” available for purchase—is “somehow very seldom beaten to within an inch of his life on a charge of disrespect to the town police” and ultimately runs a lower “risk of being suddenly lassoed on the road by a recruiting party of lanceros—a method of voluntary enlistment looked upon as almost legal in the Republic” (90). Don Pepe’s performative pity regarding this method of forced labor—“What would you! Poor people! Pobrecitos! Pobrecitos! But the State must have its soldiers” (90)—provides a vivid instance of ideological contradiction, raising pity only to immediately dismiss it due to necessity.
Following the deployment of the soldiers, those inside the carriage turn away, literally and figuratively, to debate their choice of installed military general and to pontificate about the principles at stake in the defense of the mine. On the way back to the Gould mansion, they come across Giorgio Viola, the former soldier, who offers a thesis on his commitment to “the people” (142). His allusion informs our understanding of class relationships in Sulaco and beyond; Viola, once a part of Garibaldi’s Italian nationalist army (though the general himself was ironically and perhaps tellingly born in France), now resides under the patronage of Mrs. Gould, recognizing her at one point in the exchange as his “benefactress” (140). The whole of the encounter illuminates the ways that those in the carriage imagine themselves—as opposed to the general and historical movement of capital and the workers whose labor makes production possible—to be spearheading Costaguana’s development, responsible for the “railway” and “telegraph poles” visible from their perch, and representing the “vibrating feeler of that progress waiting outside for a moment of peace to enter and twine itself about the weary heart of the land” (140-1). (Of course, given the fact that those inside the carriage have just called for war to protect ownership of the mine, their equation of progress with peace is particularly rich.) The sense of patronage perpetuates itself through relationships like that between Mrs. Gould and Viola, where a capitalist class believes it offers benevolent charity to a dependent people, when the opposite is true instead.

The final calculus of the capitalist class regarding the mine makes plain not only the process taking place but also the motivations that ultimately inspire it: Charles Gould determines that a “provincial revolution” is “the only way of placing the enormous material interests involved in the prosperity and peace of Sulaco in a position of permanent safety” (305). The denouement takes place as tensions surrounding the revolution (which is, again, an effort to keep
the San Tomé mine in the hands of its current owners) mount. When it is determined that a mass exodus of Sulaco is ultimately necessary for survival given the impending onslaught from Sotillo and Montero (the latter of whom continuously cites the actual freedom of the people), class determines the means and expedience of escape: “Carretas full of ladies and children rolled swaying across the plaza…mounted parties followed on mules and horses; the poorest were setting out on foot” (287). As they cross the boundaries of the town, the Goulds and their companions, fleeing via carriage a chaos of their making, come across:

the scared faces of people standing aside in the road, sunk deep, like an English country lane, into the soft soil of the Campo. They cowered; their eyes glistened very big for a second; and then the light, running on, fell upon the half-denuded roots of a big tree, on another stretch of nopal hedge, caught up another bunch of faces glaring back apprehensively. Three women—of whom one was carrying a child—and a couple of men in civilian dress—one armed with a sabre and another with a gun—were grouped about a donkey carrying two bundles tied up in blankets… Near the ford of a shallow stream a roadside rancho of woven rushes and a roof of grass had been set on fire by accident, and the flames, roaring viciously, lit up an open space blocked with horses, mules, and a distracted, shouting crowd of people. When Ignacio pulled up, several ladies on foot assailed the carriage, begging Antonia for a seat. To their clamour she answered by pointing silently to her father. (289-290)

At first glance, the description of the working class here appears perhaps more empathetic than at many other moments in the novel. Those in the carriage seem to observe the general panic taking over Sulaco and the people desperate to escape. The comparatively sustained depiction of people and their plight within the scene, particularly the woman carrying a child and descriptions like “scared,” “cowered,” “apprehensively,” as the crowd tries to escape a blaze, suggest a cognizance of fear perhaps extending to pity.

Underneath this veneer of sympathy, however, the scene demonstrates the fundamental lack of interest shown by those inside the carriage toward the effect of the unfolding chaos on human lives—and their culpability in this chaos. We know, given our intimacy with the
conversations leading up to this moment, that it was precisely this scenario that the Goulds and others anticipated and even orchestrated, ultimately accepting it as a necessary expenditure: if the mine is to be preserved, they reasoned in the private rooms of the Gould mansion, the public will have to suffer. The preeminence afforded to Don Avellanos, one of the party responsible for the panic, illustrates precisely this: his recumbent position in the carriage makes it impossible for multiple others fleeing the fire to get into the carriage to escape. The carriage, then, speaks not only to the metaphorical value placed on the life of a single wealthy individual as compared with the lives of the working class generally, but also the literal computation of the value produced by the mine as an entity for its owners; a certain number of people, while potentially useful as labor provided to the mine, are “renewable” precisely because they are undifferentiated in the minds of upper-class characters. The perspective fails to account for the lives of working-people because, as Raymond Williams summarizes, “there are no masses; only ways of seeing people as masses” (“Culture” 10).

Perhaps just as striking as these blatant examples of disregard are those that are subtler, as, for instance, the description which introduces the passage: “the scared faces of people standing aside in the road, sunk deep, like an English country lane.” Here, the narrative perspective reveals its hand—the scene is rendered through not only an upper-class lens, but one that mediates experience by pretending difference (re: inequality) is the product of cosmopolitanism rather than class. The means by which this perspective makes meaning out of what it sees is to ignore the reality of the “scared faces,” and to instead find a comparative relation between the “sunk deep” road and “an English country lane,” thousands of miles away. The comparison seems to include perhaps even an evaluative denotation, where the latter, the “English country lane,” is treated as the origin point from which meaning is drawn. The working
class, of course, has no such frame of reference. With the upper-class’s application of this comparative framework, the working class fails to even be afforded the luxury of experiencing their own deaths.

The end result of what Gould refers to as “placing the enormous material interests involved in the prosperity and peace of Sulaco in a position of permanent safety,” or what we can see is the brazen pursuit of capital, is that the argument for the mine as a national investment meant to develop Costaguana for everyone falls apart. The idea of “improving” the nation gives way to the admission that the mine and thus international capitalism, have been the central focus all along—as Gould declares: “I shall write to Holroyd that the San Tome mine is big enough to take in hand the making of a new State” (306). In addition to the Goulds, those at the helm of Sulaco as a state comprises as Sulaco the city did, “the one or two foreign merchants, all the representatives of the old Spanish families then in town, the great owners of estates on the plain” for whom “The Occidental Province was [a] stronghold; their Blanco party had triumphed now; it was their President-Dictator, a Blanco of the Blancos, who sat smiling urbanely between the representatives of two friendly foreign powers” (42). The creation of a new state organized around ruling-class interests does not represent a new form of geopolitical organization, but rather one that lays bare the form of the state itself, as Sulaco represents the “only province in the republic of interest to European capitalists” (311). Indeed, it is not the state itself that matters, but its potential to offer protection for the mine as property within a capitalist world market. The mine exists no longer as an abstract idea for nationalism or for Charles Gould and other individual and collective investors, but as a site of capitalist production for the capitalist class; the owners would rather “destroy scientifically the whole plant, buildings, and workshops of the mine with heavy charges of dynamite” than cease to be its owners (321). While it was the alleged
principle of progress which initially buttressed the idea of the mine in the community, it is the potential loss of capital for a handful of people that comes to justify its possible destruction. Still, a nagging because central question remains: why is this particular story called *Nostromo* and where, precisely, does the eponymous character fit in the story of Sulaco’s independence and the San Tomé mine?

“A Break of Continuity in the Chain of Experience”

For roughly the first half of the novel, Nostromo functions in a supportive role not unlike the other working-class characters in the novel. He exists largely through the perspective of upper-class characters; his very name, a mispronunciation of the Italian “*nostro uomo,*” or “our man”—which “all the Europeans in Sulaco, following Captain Mitchell…were in the habit of calling” him, bears witness to this (49). When he appears, it is to do the bidding of the capitalist class, as a kind of caricature called forth to buttress claims made in the larger narrative of the San Tomé mine. Even in his private life, away from the view of public spectacle or accolades, Nostromo acts in much the same way, as if not only defined but also confined by the way the Goulds and others perceive him. Details about Nostromo come about secondhand, as smaller parts of the foregrounded thoughts and ideas of the wealthy, and always in relation to the ways that Nostromo enables the continuation of their wealth. From the very outset of the novel that bears his name, then, Nostromo’s place in his community is mediated.

 Appropriately, we meet his character not directly—neither through a narrator’s omniscient description of his qualities and actions nor a stylized delineation of his thoughts—but rather indirectly, through the lens of another character. That character, Captain Mitchell, the Englishman in charge of the English docks of Sulaco, brings to his interpretation of Nostromo
motivations that are the product of his own social position, which influence our understanding of the character for the rest of the novel. In introducing the readers to Nostromo, Mitchell cites his rescue of Ribiera, Sulaco’s dictator, from the clutches of revolutionary justice: “Providentially, Nostromo—invaluable fellow—with some Italian workmen, imported to work upon the National Central Railway, was at hand, and managed to snatch [Ribiera] away” (11). Mitchell invokes Nostromo, then, as a part of a conversation meant to highlight the new nation’s marketability to a touring investor—revolutions will be stopped here, his tale suggests, and the wealthy need not do any of the heavy lifting.

Perhaps most telling in Mitchell’s account of Nostromo is that, despite the “invaluable” moniker affixed to his name here and elsewhere, it is clear that Nostromo’s relationship to the upper class of Sulaco is a direct function of his measured value to them—he is “imported,” like a commodity, rather than immigrated, like a person. A short time later, the narrator tells us, in response to Sir John’s inquiries about Nostromo on a tour of the railway camp, that Captain Mitchell not only considers Nostromo to be “his discovery,” but further that he imagines him to be “one of those invaluable subordinates whom to possess is a legitimate cause of boasting” (49). Immediately following the recitation of Nostromo’s “invaluable” quality, the narrator clarifies that Captain Mitchell had gotten into the habit of “lending…[his] capataz de cargadores,” which apparently “[brought] Nostromo into personal contact, sooner or later, with every European in Sulaco” (49). This confirms what we have read a page earlier, when the engineer-in-chief of the railway answers Sir John’s question about Nostromo: “A most useful fellow, lent me by Captain Mitchell of the O.S.N. Company” (48). Nostromo’s value is, again, in his circulation amongst the owners of capital in Sulaco. More precisely, the wealthy engage in a strategic
Manipulation of Nostromo’s mediatory position in Sulaco as an amiable working-class European with ambitions to ascend.

That is, while it is the English captain who congratulates “himself on his profound knowledge of men and things in the country” (10), the narrative establishes that it is Nostromo’s tenure as an “imported” laborer that allows him to navigate the Occidental Province and its people—both the capitalists and working class—so well. This knowledge means that he arbitrates when the greed of those in charge angers the population to hostility, occupying the role of a go-between, a kind of leader among the cargadores, on the one hand, but ultimately imagining himself answerable to his employers, on the other. Given his allegiance to those in power, Nostromo ultimately exploits the trust of the common people by helping to suppress native uprisings “against the sinister land-grabbing designs of European powers” (107), even knocking on the doors of the individual homes of the cargadores to bring them back to work on the docks when they have gone on strike (88-89).

What is more, Nostromo’s acquiescence is actively recognized and harnessed by the Goulds, Decoud, and others, who relish Nostromo’s “extraordinary power over the lower classes” (183). As Decoud proudly declares of Nostromo: “He has promised me that if a riot took place for any reason—even for the most political of reasons, you understand—his cargadores, an important part of the populace, you will admit, will be found on the side of the Europeans” (183, 182). Decoud further cites “something to [Nostromo’s] advantage” in this arrangement, or the sailor’s interest in “personal prestige” (183).² Here, Decoud’s revelation regarding the

² Captain Mitchell poignantly represents the interests of the wealthy when he later tells the story to touring investors, emphasizing: “his natural anxiety lest ‘his fellow’ in charge of the lighter should make some mistake. Apart from the loss of so much precious metal, the life of Señor Martin Decoud, an agreeable, wealthy, and well-informed young gentleman,” expressing his gratitude “for the many kindnesses received from the best families of merchants…who, barely saved by us from the excesses of the mob, seemed…destined to become the prey in person and fortune of the native soldiery” (262). The narrative goes on to tell us that Mitchell was “crushed” by “the loss of the silver, the death of Nostromo”—in this order (277). Mitchell lists his concerns, in other words, in order of
strategy employed by the upper classes provides something quite insightful: the connection to Europe shared between the upper classes of Sulaco and Nostromo—not just Eurocentric but likewise imperialistic in its sentiment—seems to sustain Nostromo at the same time that it maintains the wealth of the upper class and therefore the continued exploitation of the working class, including Nostromo. In other words, part of Nostromo’s value, recognized and acknowledged by the upper class but not Nostromo himself, resides in his contributions toward helping the upper class continuously mask the reality of class relations. The contradiction presented by Nostromo’s mediatory role—his sense, in other words, that his social position is somehow more aligned with the upper than the lower class—however, comes to a head when Nostromo takes possession of the lighter of silver and comes to consciousness in the process.

“The Man for That Work”

As the plan to keep the San Tomé in the hands of the Goulds and other wealthy individuals—the reactionary impulse, in other words, to create the “new State” of Sulaco—takes shape, Nostromo is recruited to carry out a supposedly essential part of the mission. Particularly, Mrs. Gould and Decoud discuss the necessity of insuring their investment in the new state by hiding from Sotillo and those who wish to overtake the mine a portion of the silver. The “stream of silver,” Decoud explains, “must be kept flowing north to return in the form of financial backing from the great house of Holroyd…down to the harbor, ready for shipment” (182). More pointedly, the plan dictates that the silver “go north and return to us in the shape of credit,” traveling to Holroyd in America as insurance for the continuation of the San Tomé and its

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importance: the fact that Nostromo might make a mistake that will reflect poorly on him, the silver itself, the importance and “kindnesses” of Decoud and the other wealthy individuals and families in Sulaco, the way the poor victimize the rich, again the silver, and finally Nostromo.
product (183). Nostromo, alleged by Mrs. Gould to be “disinterested” (183), is determined to be “the man for that work” (202) precisely for his potential to be exploited: he is not only eager to “be well spoken of” (202), but remains “as poor as when he first came here,” even wondering out loud if “the señor administrator of San Tomé will reward [him] some day” for saving the silver (203-204). When Nostromo details his part in the scheme, Señora Teresa, on her deathbed, succinctly points out the problem with the free labor Nostromo provides to the upper class: “They have turned your head with their praises…They have been paying you with words. Your folly shall betray you into poverty, misery, and starvation” (211).

Nostromo and Decoud’s transportation of the silver—the collateral, so to speak, for the new State—offers a subtle exposition on the confused nature of Nostromo’s role in Sulaco, ultimately revealing that his status as a member of the working class bears out in exchanges small and large with the upper class. When Nostromo and Decoud set off in the lighter with the silver, the narrator sets the scene: “Most of the Europeans in Sulaco were there, rallied round Charles Gould, as if the silver of the mine had been the emblem of a common cause, the symbol of the supreme importance of material interests” (213). With the emphasis squarely on upper-class Europeans, the narrative flows comfortably to Decoud: “Martin Decoud called out from the lighter ‘Au revoir, messieurs, til we clasp hands again over the new-born Occidental republic” (214). It is Decoud’s perspective, too, that carries himself and Nostromo forward on their task, so much so that “it seemed to him that the wharf was floating away into the night,” when it is, in fact, “Nostromo, who was already pushing against a pile with one of the heavy sweeps” (214). So steeped are we in Decoud’s thoughts and impressions that we fail to recognize that Nostromo—again, the character whose name lends itself to the novel’s title—is entirely removed
from the scene, except to occasionally interrupt Decoud’s musings and to provide the necessary exertion to move the boat.

As Nostromo and Decoud take off from the shore, the narrative presents what appears to be Nostromo’s thoughts: “In the featureless night Nostromo was not even certain which way the lighter headed…He peered for the islands…He threw himself down by the side of Decoud at last, and whispered into his ear” (216). On the surface, this passage suggests that we are privy to Nostromo’s inner thoughts. We are told he is “not even certain,” that he “peered,” which together indicate that we are witnessing Nostromo in the process of contemplation. However, after a few short lines, the narrative concretely establishes that we still reside in Decoud’s point of view, as his thoughts register the “grimness of [Nostromo’s] anxiety” and the fact that “Nostromo, as if affected by the gloom around, seemed nervously resentful” (216). What exactly Nostromo feels, here, remains unnoted, as the descriptions of Nostromo’s uncertainty and general attempt to understand are revealed to be Decoud’s impression of Nostromo, the product of Decoud’s mediated observations and not a recognition by the narrative of what Nostromo actually thinks or feels.

Despite the fact that the contextual magnification on the boat leaves only two characters on which to focus, the narrative, true to form, remains focused on Decoud: “It was a new experience for Decoud, this mysteriousness of the great waters” (215). Even as Nostromo speaks, his words act as support to Decoud’s overall experience, which is recorded at length:

the enormous stillness, without light or sound, seemed to affect Decoud’s senses like a powerful drug. He didn’t even know at times whether he were asleep or awake. Like a man lost in slumber, he heard nothing, he saw nothing…it would have resembled death had it not been for the survival of his thoughts. In the foreshadowing of eternal peace they floated vivid and light, like unearthly clear dreams of earthly things that may haunt the souls freed by death from the misty atmosphere of regrets and hopes…Nostromo’s voice was speaking, though he, at the tiller, was also as if he were not. ‘Have you been asleep, Don Martin?’
Caramba! If it were possible I would think that I, too, have dozed off. I have a strange notion of having dreamt that there was...a sound a sorrowing man could make, somewhere near this boat...‘Strange!’ muttered Decoud, stretched upon the pile of treasure boxes...And when the breeze ceased, the blackness seemed to weigh upon Decoud like a stone. ‘This is overpowering,’ he muttered. ‘Do we move at all, capataz?’ (215).

This extended passage grants us a moment to pause and explore the role played by Nostromo, given the importance the novel places on him as its namesake. His near absence from the scene appears, on the surface, to be a product of Decoud’s dreamy musings. However, the scene also give us concrete reasons for Decoud’s repose; Decoud’s sense that the boat took off from the shore without his knowledge, and that he exists in “eternal peace,” with thoughts he labels “vivid and light,” have a material explanation which is revelatory of the class relation between the two men: Decoud is, almost symbolically, “stretched upon the pile of treasure boxes,” while Nostromo performs the labor of moving the lighter along with “one of the heavy sweeps.”

Nostromo’s comment, then, that he feels almost as if he too had “dozed off” highlights two critical things: first, that Nostromo seems to be having an out-of-body experience similar to Decoud’s, but it is ultimately one to which we are not privy; and second, that he actually cannot sleep (“if it were possible”), because the sole task of laboring on the lighter falls to him. The narrative disclosure that “had it not been for [Decoud’s] thoughts,” the very experience “would have resembled death” contains an implication regarding Nostromo specifically and class relations generally—Nostromo seems not to exist but through Decoud. We might extrapolate to say that without a recognition in the novel of his consciousness at this pivotal moment, Nostromo fails to exist as a fully developed character in his own narrative.

Decoud presumes that the two men share the same experience, then—“Do we move at all, capataz?”—while his sense that the boat’s stasis is “overpowering” directly contradicts this [emphasis mine]. Decoud’s description of the stasis as overpowering fails at both levels of
meaning. If “overpowering” is a physical descriptor, it is decidedly something he does not experience given his reclined position on the boat, while it also fails as an emotional descriptor given his failure to recognize Nostromo’s humanity. (Only a moment later in the text, the narrative describes how, when Decoud does eventually exert a physical effort to move the boat along, his “soft hands suffered cruelly” (218).) The physical, and likely mental, difficulty that attends moving the boat without the aid of the wind is something Nostromo bears singularly, which the narrative omission underscores. Moreover, he does this—like many other working-class characters in the novel, most notably those running for their lives along the road resembling, to the Goulds, an “English country lane”—without even the small luxury of consciously experiencing his own mortality.

Perhaps the most powerful illustration of this disparity is in the description of Nostromo interrupting Decoud’s trancelike state: “Nostromo’s voice was speaking, though he, at the tiller, was also as if he were not.” Interestingly, while the sentence begins with the suggestion that Nostromo’s voice is the subject, the diction transfers emphasis to the subject “he,” or Nostromo himself. For this reason, it is not “as if” Nostromo’s voice “were not,” but rather that Nostromo as a subject, as a person (or character), “were not.” It is more than the atmosphere of the water that colors Decoud’s perception leading to his erasure of Nostromo’s humanity; it is, instead, a direct product of class and material relations. Though the two men are relatively close to one another in terms of physical proximity, Decoud views them as quite distant—unlike Decoud, Nostromo is “at the tiller,” in the literal act of performing physical labor, contributing this effort to preserve the mine. The scene, then, stands as an exemplar of not only the relationship between the upper and lower classes, but of the explicit reliance of the upper class on the lower for
productivity and labor within capitalism—and the concerted effort to consistently minimize and in the end erase this dependence in their narrative.

Yet, in a moment grossly underexplored in criticism of the novel, the very nature of the project to carry away the silver—and with it, the novel’s formal approach to Nostromo’s character—changes shape when the two men encounter a steamship captained by Sotillo, the leader of the rebel army. The ship, destined for an attack on Sulaco, collides with the lighter carrying Decoud, Nostromo, and the silver, causing damage to the vessel resulting in a leak and threatening to sink it. The collision, the narrative tells us, is “hardly perceptible” to those on board the much larger steamship; instead, “All the violence of that collision was, as usual, felt only on board the smaller craft” (238). What follows is Decoud and Nostromo’s desperate attempt to save the silver to secure the ownership of the San Tomé mine as well as the simultaneous recognition onshore that saving a single lighter of silver was ultimately unnecessary—the wealth produced by the mine, Gould deduces, can subsidize a new state.

As if anticipating the decision made onshore, the collision between the two boats likewise produces a collision onboard the “smaller craft” between the two men. As they struggle to keep the lighter afloat while they make their way to the shore of a nearby island, the narrative (as if itself jostled by the collision) explicitly notes the conflict between their class positions as they engage the task at hand:

There was nothing in common between them but the knowledge that the damaged lighter must be slowly but surely sinking. In that knowledge…they seemed to have become completely estranged, as if they had discovered in the very shock of the collision that the loss of the lighter would not mean the same thing to them both. This common danger brought their differences in aim, in view, in character, and in position, into absolute prominence in the private vision of each. (241)

The men, then, seem cognizant for a moment of class. Safely on the shore of a nearby island, there is a quiet shift in Nostromo, whereby he considers for the first time the material differences
between Decoud and himself, reflecting almost to himself on his poverty: times he had gone without money (242), wages he had to wait to be paid, even when desperate (243), and his reputation as “a man of the people” (245). Nevertheless, Nostromo and Decoud decide to keep the silver on the island where Decoud will also stay, one of many decisions that leads to Nostromo’s infamous “theft” of the treasure. Ultimately, however, Nostromo’s decision to keep the silver for himself is less interesting for its moral implications than it is for its subtle ability to emphasize the importance played by class not only in narrative content, but also in the novel’s form.

Nostromo’s decision to keep the silver for himself appears to progress over time, taking place in stages as he both refuses to correct the prevailing assumption onshore that the silver has been lost and begins justifying to himself the dues he is owed by Gould and others. Yet, in the moments directly after he leaves Decoud on the island, the novel records for the first time Nostromo’s individual consciousness, suggesting a seachange in his character: “Then he, too, experienced that feeling of solitude which had weighed heavily on Decoud after the lighter had slipped off the shore” (246). This shift to Nostromo’s particular interiority, while relatively subtle, stands out in comparison with earlier descriptions of character consciousness.

The reason we finally hear directly from Nostromo is, I argue, tied directly to his possession of a significant amount of silver. He has, in other words, ascended to a position of relevance in a narrative about the upper class of Sulaco; “Then he, too, experienced that feeling of solitude.” The consistent comparison of Nostromo to Decoud is telling, as it references “the solitude which had weighed heavily on Decoud” as if Nostromo were not present for and possibly also experiencing the same sensation and concern. Once “alive” with relevance in the narrative, however, Nostromo’s specific thoughts and worries fill the page, leaving Decoud
behind (though he will reappear several times, as the value of his perspective apparently endures). The interruption to the plot orchestrated by the wealthy, then, shifts the focus of the novel to Nostromo, also shifting the novel’s formal treatment of the character. This shift materializes more starkly after Nostromo reemerges in the narrative, following a (nearly 100-page) pivot away from him to instead focus on the contemporaneous events that took place in Sulaco while he and Decoud were away on their errand.

Nostromo, having sunk the lighter and swum to safety, awakens to find himself on the shore of Sulaco once more, but with new access to wealth. The passage that follows is remarkable in and of itself, but all the more so when juxtaposed with the descriptions of Nostromo preceding it:

Nostromo woke up from a fourteen hours’ sleep, and arose full length from his lair in the long grass. He stood knee-amongst the whispering undulations…with the lost air a man just born into the world…as natural and free from evil in the moment of waking as a magnificent and unconscious wild beast. Then, in the suddenly steadied glance fixed upon nothing from under a thoughtful frown, appeared the man. (330)

The contradictions of Nostromo’s position are manifested in this passage and immediately afterward. The description seems tantamount to a rebirth; Nostromo is as “just born,” “natural and free from evil,” and, strangely, like a “magnificent and unconscious wild beast.” This is immediately juxtaposed, however, with Nostromo’s newly bestowed power of thought, which causes him to steady his “glance…upon nothing,” leads him to a “thoughtful frown,” and ultimately produces a narrative recognition of his humanity. The suggestion that Nostromo is a man only after acquiring wealth, and was, while in poverty, like a wild beast with no discernible thoughts, is here barely concealed. “It had been,” the narrative states in summary, “like a break in the continuity in the chain of experience” (332).
Interestingly, Nostromo’s tortured thoughts about the silver, and his desperate desire to have it, make the character more conscious of his class position than ever before, though he ultimately decides to keep the wealth for himself (the tendency, we might note, of the upper class). For the remainder of the novel, Nostromo wrestles with the complicated idea that he has a store of silver at his disposal and the ways that this affects his social relationship to both the upper and lower classes. Nostromo recalls ideas from Giorgio Viola: “Kings, ministers, aristocrats, the rich in general, kept the people in poverty and subjection; they keep them as they kept dogs, to fight and hunt for their service…He felt the pinch of poverty for the first time in his life” (332). Nostromo repeats and ponders the exploitation of a laboring class, noting to himself “Teresa was right,” (334). As he continues to work himself up, supposedly against the upper class and their careless disregard of the lower, he moves toward a fascinating conclusion: “Nostromo had made up his mind that the treasure should not be betrayed” (335). Citing his own sense of having been betrayed by Gould, Decoud, and others, “to whom everything is permitted,” Nostromo settles on saying nothing about the treasure, “which was of so little account to the people who had tied it round his neck” (348, 341). The decision to not betray the treasure leads Nostromo down a path whereby he justifies his accumulation of personal wealth, and plays a part in “saving…the San Tomé mine,” as he continues to aid the owners of the mine at the same time that he tells himself that he is helping the working class of Sulaco (400). He claims to have successfully “defeated the spell of poverty and starvation” not only for himself but also the people in the same breath that he utters, “I must grow rich very slowly” (400). The incommensurability of these positions makes still clearer the very real material and social relationship between the wealthy and working classes of Sulaco.

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As Nostromo grows slowly rich, the new nation of Sulaco develops more rapidly. True to Nostromo’s point, the relatively small amount of treasure, while “putting forth its latent power” on him as an individual, proves inconsequential for Sulaco. With the San Tomé producing silver at what seems full capacity, and with no direct outside threats or government claims to its ownership, Sulaco grows “rich swiftly on the hidden treasures of the earth…torn out by the laboring hands of the people” (400). Finally, the narrative suggests, Sulaco—what was previously “the only province in the republic of interest to European capitalists” (311)—captures the attention of the world: “It was like a second youth, like a new life, full of promise, of unrest, of toil, scattering lavishly its wealth to the four corners of an excited world” (400). The “material changes” once promised to the nation of Costaguana now materialize in Sulaco, what was until recently the Occidental Republic (400-401). The Goulds express a keen interest in establishing their status among the world’s elite, displaying a continued commitment to fashioning Sulaco after Europe, where they frequently travel; they seem “to believe themselves,” as Decoud scornfully observes of Sulaco’s wealthy (and thus himself), “to be influencing the fate of the universe” (401). And it is in these moments, when Sulaco and its elite are contextualized in the broader world of international capitalism—that obscure and contentious contract between “Englishmen, Frenchmen, Americans, Germans and God knows who else” (190)—that we see not only the individualism that marked their existence recede into the background, but their relative position in the world economy come into focus.

With the success of the mine and the creation of the state of Sulaco, Charles Gould becomes the wealthiest and most powerful man there. If we travel back to the beginning of the novel, when we are introduced to and join Gould in the process of building the railway line, it is not him that we find him looking down assuredly from the “highest point” the train will reach on
the mountain, but Sir John, the chairman of the railway, in Sulaco from Europe to “smooth the path for his railway” (46, 105).³ As Nostromo aptly puts it, the “old Englishman who has enough money to pay for a railway” is granted a view and position, literal and symbolic, afforded to no other character (112). Gould’s role in the endeavor to make the mine profitable, which initially appears to give him comprehensive access, is in fact quite limited by comparison, not only by the literal boundaries of Sulaco—a relatively small space according to Conrad’s elaborate descriptions—but in relation to a well-established and international capitalist class. This is iterated in Gould’s relationship to John Holroyd, a personage who never makes an appearance in Sulaco given his multiple other ventures. When Gould determines that the mine must be used to forge a new nation, he says he will write to Holroyd, the “head of silver and steel interests” who had entered into Costaguana affairs with a sort of passion. Costaguana had become necessary to his existence; in the San Tome mine he had found the imaginative satisfaction which other minds would get from drama, from art, or from a risky and fascinating sport. It was a special form of the great man’s extravagance, sanctioned by a moral intention, big enough to flatter his vanity. Even in this aberration of his genius he served the progress of the world. (304-305)

What consumes Charles Gould’s life is, for those operating in the capitalist core, a pet project or an opportunity for a small investment. In the same way that Nostromo provides the title for a novel in which he proves to be quite mediated, the narrative also impresses upon a reader Gould’s place within a larger social structure that no single character navigates with precision and understanding. In the larger scope of the world, Gould’s individualized perspective does not and cannot stand on its own in much the same way that Sulaco constitutes only a perhaps

³ Marx describes the railway in Capital Volume 1: “The world would still be without railways if it had had to wait until accumulation had got a few individual capitals far enough to be adequate for the construction of a railway. Centralization, however, accomplished this task in the twinkling of an eye, by means of joint stock companies. And while in this way centralization intensifies and accelerates the effects of accumulation, it simultaneously extends and speeds up those revolutions in the technical composition of capital which raise its constant portion at the expense of its variable portion, thus diminishing the relative demand for labor” (780).
peripheral part, each existing within a capitalist world system. For the novel, the desire to read a community through its structural relationship to history means recognizing of the impossibility of ever fully seeing the connectivity of social relations, even from a perspective seemingly tending toward totality.

It is not a revelation, following Lukács, Adorno, Jameson and even Moretti, to suggest that the novel form caters to and epitomizes a bourgeois perspective. Yet the methods by which this is accomplished in *Nostromo*—as a patient laying out of the justification for capitalist accumulation—show us how deeply social is even a seemingly isolated or alienated consciousness. When we examine, that is, the social relations engendered by and through the mine and the railway (including the carriage and the train as systems of transport)—or, as Marx has described, the “material relations between persons and social relations between things”—we are able to discern not simply inequality between the classes of the new nation of Sulaco, but the ways that both the working *and* upper class there are constituted by their relationships to international capitalism as *it* determines the conditions in which they all operate. *Nostromo*, then, becomes an apt title for a novel whose entire social world stands in relation to international capital as *Nostromo* the character does in relation to the local capitalists within Sulaco.
“Center of Paralysis”:

*Sons and Lovers and Ulysses*

occasionally the black valley space between was traced, violated by a great train rushing south to London or north to Scotland. The trains roared by like projectiles level on the darkness, fuming and burning, making the valley clang with their passage. They were gone, and the lights of the towns and villages glittered in silence.

*(Sons and Lovers 99)*

A divided drove of branded cattle passed the windows, lowing, slouching by on padded hoofs, whisking their tails slowly on their clotted bony croups. Outside them and through them ran raddled sheep bleating their fear.

—Emigrants, Mr Power said.

*(Ulysses 99)*
To write about D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce is to engage a long history of contention and contrast, perhaps best exemplified by Kingsley Widmer’s provocative declaration that Lawrence and Joyce were only “approximate contemporaries…who wrote prose fictions in English” and “hardly belonged to the same nation” (“Beyond Egotism” 351). Ignoring for a moment Widmer’s striking elision of the complicated relationship between Ireland and England (but returning to it shortly), his point is well taken. The differences in “literary styles, forms, purposes, and more generally in aesthetics, politics, metaphysics” of “Irish middle-class Catholic Joyce and Midlands lower-class puritan Lawrence” do emphasize “the polarities of different ‘cultures’ (in class, ethos, roles, sensibility), and even different Weltanschauungs” (“Beyond Egotism” 351).

Yet recent criticism, particularly the collective project represented in Modernists at Odds: Reconsidering Joyce and Lawrence (2015), does more than dabble in comparisons of the authors; it moves, instead, to justify pairing their oeuvres on socio-historical as well as aesthetic grounds (“Beyond Egotism” 351). Against the long-standing belief that D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce were “contraries…two elements in continual opposition,” forever and “eternally at

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1 We can attribute this resistance to comparison, in some part, to the authors themselves. During the years in which their shared space in the literary spotlight gave rise to comparisons, Lawrence and Joyce famously expressed confusion regarding both the literary merits of the other and the tendency to compare their work. “I am sorry,” Lawrence confessed in one letter to a friend, “Ulysses wearied me: so like a schoolmaster with dirt and stuff in his head: sometimes good, though: but too mental,” later summarizing his qualms: “I am one of those people who can’t read Ulysses…But I am glad I have seen the book, since in Europe they usually mention us together” (Ingersoll 4, 9). Joyce, for his part, expressed similar reservations about Lawrence after reading several of his works: “That man really writes very badly” (12), critiquing both “the first 2 pages of usual sloppy English [of what he called ‘Lady Chatterbox’s Lover’]” and “a lyrical bit about nudism in a wood and the end which is a piece of propaganda in favour of something, which outside of D.H.L.’s country at any rate, makes all the propaganda for itself” (14).

2 As early as 1915, Ezra Pound proclaimed: “So far as I know there are only two writers of prose fiction of my decade whom anyone takes in earnest. I mean Mr. Joyce and Mr. D. H. Lawrence” (“Non-Existence” 452). More recently, Michael Squires notes that hindsight on the period encourages comparison, pointing out that David Daiches’s 1960 version of The Novel and the Modern World — updated and altered from 1939 to reflect Daiches’s reflections on contemporary literary legacy — "added two chapters on Lawrence, and declared 'that the giants of the modern English novel are Conrad, Joyce, and Lawrence" (Challenge 4). As Squires summarizes, "In the last twenty years, Lawrence, Joyce, and Woolf have emerged as the central figures of modern English fiction" (4).
odds, each a Scyll to the other’s Charybdis” (x)—or the oft-unchallenged and -repeated notion that Lawrence styled “himself as the voice of the proletariat,” while Joyce alternatively “never saw a slum he didn’t want to fly the nets of” (x)—Sebastian D. G. Knowles and the contributors to the Modernists volume credit the authors for “their rebellion against their native lands, their un-Irishness and their un-Englishness,” and what we might call a shared sense of the international reality of capitalism (x). To this point, Heather Lusty appends each author’s “avowed preoccupations with his respective country’s paralysis” — evinced by the familiar anecdote of Joyce’s imagining the story of Dublin as “the center of paralysis,” alongside Lawrence’s belief that “the [rural] land and people were stifled” by industrialization, with class specifically acting as “the marker that restrains individuals and against which they strain in their efforts to ‘find themselves’” in the “general malaise of England’s Midlands” (2-3).

In what follows, I echo the sentiment that we should read D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce alongside one another, at the same time that I advocate that we reimagine the literary accounts—specifically from Sons and Lovers and Ulysses, only passingly compared before in criticism—of Bestwood and Dublin as contributing connected parts of the larger story of the semi-periphery of the English nation and thus the British Empire. More particularly, I argue that that Lawrence and Joyce each had a vested interest in putting to paper the stories of lives that had, in their time, not been fully explored by literature. Where Lawrence, Hugh Kenner writes, saw that “in his Eastwood people he had a subject…knew a life, lived by thousands, that had never been transmuted into fiction” (Sinking 109), Joyce, “an Irishman conceived of Bloom, [as] his gift to Ireland and the fulfillment of his old promise to forge abroad, in the smithy of his soul, the uncreated conscience of his race” (Ulysses 1).
Ultimately, I read *Sons and Lovers* and *Ulysses* as articulating—in ways different from earlier narratives of empire in *Kim* and *Nostromo*, which recognize the energy of imperial development in terms of crisis—the appearance of stagnation in Bestwood, England and Dublin, Ireland. I distinguish these narratives, in the same way, both from contemporary novels, like *Howards End* or *Mrs. Dalloway*, which focus on London (the “core”) as the temporal and spatial embodiment of modernity against a rural periphery, as well as narratives like *A Passage to India* and *The Voyage Out*, where the colonial periphery is portrayed as existing outside of time because of its perceived distance (geographical, cultural, and economic) from the core, as an anachronism always compared against, and not related to, that a center of accumulation.

Where Jed Esty recognizes the ways Lawrence and Joyce explore the “tension between the open-ended temporality of capitalism and the bounded, countertemporality of the nation,” I magnify the idea of “local” communities to consider how the English Midlands and Dublin were both paralyzed and enlivened in their proximity to and distance from capital accumulation disproportionately but not exclusively in England. In my comparison, I find that *Ulysses* and *Sons and Lovers* each address this relation through their portraits of consciousness, a formal approach to character interiority by which the novels incorporate the historically specific details of both local and universal experience—a way of reading what stasis and paralysis in peripheral sites tell us about the broader narrative of capitalism.

Particularly, consciousness in *Sons* and *Ulysses* allows me to better articulate the novels’ shared pattern of formally establishing and then disrupting the cohesion between character and narrative expectations of knowability. This, I argue, shows Bestwood and Dublin as, respectively, functioning along the lines of what Andre Gunder Frank has called the “metropoli-
satellite” relationship between spatial and economic locations across capitalism. Frank’s model of metropolis-satellite is useful for thinking about the economic particularities of Bestwood and Dublin, each part of the capitalist process of accumulation: Dublin draws rural populations to it as a metropolis, even as it occupies a peripheral relationship to the British Empire, while Bestwood is a satellite for Nottingham and London, though it is contained within the “metropolitan” country of England, which we find to be unevenly developed. Together, the novels identify the appearance of knowability in their communities as related to social and economic marginalization and the ways this is consistently used to challenge as well as confirm their incorporation into the world economy.

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By bringing together a consideration of Bestwood and Dublin, of Lawrence and Joyce, I hope to see a larger truth about the novel as a historical response to capitalism in the twentieth century with the unique ability to reorganize and reveal truths unavailable to individual consciousness. Particularly, if we compare the seemingly different conclusions reached by Paul Morel and Molly Bloom at the ends of the novels, we find each text corroborating an experience of regional life that evinces the impact of a world market. While Lawrence’s ending speaks to a social and economic reality that allows Paul to leave Bestwood for the nearby but economically

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3 Andre Frank develops the theory of dependency in *Capitalism and Underdevelopment: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil*. At stake for Frank is our ability to both understand the “structure and development of the capitalist system as a whole” and “to account for its simultaneous generation of underdevelopment in some of its parts and of economic development in others” (27-28). “Satellites,” as Frank categorizes underdeveloped locations, and developed “metropolitan countries” exist in relation to one another, but these relations do not mean that the former will be “generated or stimulated by diffusing capital, institutions, values, etc., to them the international and national capitalist metropoles” (28). This is because “the expansion of the capitalist system over the past centuries effectively and entirely penetrated even the apparently most isolated sectors of the underdeveloped world” and thus the “economic, political, social and cultural institutions and relations that we now observe there are the products of the historical development of the capitalist system no less than are the seemingly more modern or capitalist features of the national metropoles of these underdeveloped countries” (28-29). The “metropolis-satellite relations,” he says, “are not limited to the imperial or international level but penetrate and structure the very economic, political and social life” (29).
more viable Nottingham, this option is only available to Dubliners in emigration away from Ireland entirely. Still, as part of the same determining process that allows Molly’s confused meditation to express the experience of totality at the same time that it withholds any insights about it from her, Paul’s “opportunity” is, in reality, a job at a factory.

Against the historical reality of Dublin where, as Trevor Williams suggests, labor is hard to come by, steady work in Bestwood seems a comparative luxury, but such a position depends and relies upon an ideology that consistently demands that the products of labor separate from their creators. Where the worker is the “free proprietor of his own labour-capacity” and he and the capitalist “enter into relations with each other…equal in the eyes of the law,” the worker ultimately “manages to both alienate his labour power and…avoid renouncing his rights of ownership over it” (Capital 271). Thus, while a managerial job no doubt represents a slight step up the social ladder for the Morel family, it in no way mitigates the larger, harsher reality of capitalist expropriation: Paul’s labor, much like his father’s and even that performed by Bloom, does not belong to or benefit the true owner, but instead contributes to an accumulative force against which Dubliners and Bestwoodians can only struggle.

Actual labor is effectively absent in both novels, but for reasons that appear different on the surface. Critically, we recognize that Bestwood and Dublin represent two distinct classes: Bestwood is a working-class community while Dublin is, as Fredric Jameson argues, petit-bourgeois (Ulysses 145). This is part of the point in Ulysses—Dublin represents a masked capital where, as Marxist critics in the 1930s were given to say, “no one works.” If we consider the international class relation created by the capitalist world market, however, several things are illuminated by the comparison of Dublin with Bestwood: first, each represents a kind of uneven economy, wherein seemingly different (but of course deeply historical) capitalist epochs of
production, particularly in extracted raw materials destined for someplace else, seem to be combined. We see these industries, too, alongside the more obvious imported and exchange markers of a world market, brought to and away from the communities by trains and ships, which we might mistake for modern interruptions to a place frozen in the past were it not for its peripheral consciousness. Most important, we note that while mining in Bestwood and agricultural industry in Dublin seem omnipresent, the industries effectively benefit no one, at least anyone we know in the novels. The products of labor disappear, only reappearing in moments when we and the characters stand to miss them.

The comparison of Lawrence and Joyce, of Bestwood and Dublin, allows a view of social consciousness produced by the economic and historical duality of capitalism as it appeared in the near periphery, speaking to both limitations and possibilities of not just consciousness, but consciousness within society. This helps us to fine tune not just the ways Sons and Ulysses depict the experience of modernity but also the simultaneous way that British Lawrence and Irish Joyce trouble the notions of “national” literature, economy, and social relations by contending with the increasingly unknowable nature of universalizing capitalism inside the local community.

In both novels, then, individual consciousness shows exploited peoples doing the work of capitalism for it. We see this, in Paul Morel’s case, as the attempt to ascend the social ranks of Bestwood and see the world and, in the case of Dubliners, by being absorbed by the persuasiveness of a narrative that shows us the ways capitalism is allowed to hide in plain sight in the city. We see in the novels, too, a sense of unevenness in comparison with centers of accumulation. As the authors of Combined and Uneven Development write, “Uneven development is not a characteristic of ‘backward’ formations only. Middlesbrough and North East Lincolnshire are in the United Kingdom as well as London and the Home Counties—and
London itself, of course, is among the more radically unevenly developed cities in the world. To grasp the nettle here involves recognising that capitalist development does not smooth away but rather produces unevenness, systematically and as a matter of course” (12).

We are, in *Sons* and *Ulysses*, of course, only able to see certain truths about the larger world of which Joyce and Lawrence were a part, and the modernist project itself, by acknowledging the inevitable boundary made manifest in both Lawrence and Joyce's specific viewpoints on consciousness in the knowable community, bound by the realities of historical circumstance. Uneven development, like the imperialist process of which it was a part, and the still broader capitalist mode to which they were bound, moved forward by contradiction, a *modus operandi* sustained by the production of uneven and unequal economic opportunities, including the related realities and experiences of Paul and Gertrude Morel, Stephen Dedalus, and Molly and Leopold Bloom. Recognizing uneven development in this moment of capital means recognizing it inside and across Dublin and Bestwood, manifest in the seemingly different choices apparently *offered* to Bestwoodians—comprehend and transcend—and *afforded* to Dubliners—accept paralysis or emigration. And yet, by imagining *Sons and Lovers* and *Ulysses* as jointly subject to the contradictions of capitalist logic, what materializes is the world market’s evident indifference to the organizing principles of nation and instead its application of intensification to different ends in different moments in different locations, in the distinct modes of cultural or epistemological privilege and concrete exploitation that define life in Bestwood and Dublin, toward the singular and contradictory drive toward accumulation.
“Space Between”: Shifting Consciousness in *Sons and Lovers*

*Sons and Lovers* inspired immediate controversy when it was published in 1913. Critics found it either formless or inconsistent, as Frank O’Connor later bemoaned in 1956, “though it ends as a novel of the modern type, it begins as one of the classical kind, made familiar to us by nineteenth-century novelists” (*Twentieth Century* 101). More recently, Blake Morrison, in his 2013 centenary review of the novel in *The Guardian*, argues for reading the novel in terms of “shifts”:

It could be argued that the shift is already there in *Sons and Lovers*, Part 1 of which (set in childhood) is stronger on physical detail, whereas Part 2 (set in adolescence) charts a landscape of emotional vacillation. Another way of putting this would be to say that the first half of *Sons and Lovers* belongs in the tradition of the Victorian novel, whereas the second half shows Lawrence moving towards modernism. It is a difficult novel to classify, whatever the terms – not quite a *Bildungsroman*, a novel of growing up, since Paul isn’t exclusively the focus of attention; nor a *Kunstlerroman*, a novel about a writer or artist, since Lawrence, unlike Joyce in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, treats aesthetic aspirations as secondary to an emotional and sexual education. (“Sons and Lovers”)

This chapter argues that disruption, both formal and historical, is the key to reading *Sons and Lovers* as a whole.¹ By embracing the moments of disruption between the narrative and character consciousness in the novel, I square what appear to be its antithetical or diverging movements: the narrative of working-class life in Bestwood associated with a kind of knowability, on the one hand, and the extended retreats into individual consciousness that seem disconnected from this in their desire to be included in a modern world figured outside the community, on the other.

Reading *Sons and Lovers* in this way allows us, first, to test a set of claims about how realist modes, where narrators hover over and often summarize the social world of the text, are tied to knowability whereas modernist modes champion individualized meditations seemingly

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¹ Lawrence himself would say of the novel, in a letter to Edward Garnett in 1913, “It is rather a good novel—but if anything a bit difficult to grip as a whole, at first. Yet it is a unified whole, and I hate the dodge of putting a thick black line round the figures to throw out the composition” (*Twentieth Century* 87).
apart from this world. *Sons* makes us question the very nature of knowability at a communal and individual level; as we navigate unknowable interiority—characters’ feelings, we ultimately find, are often unknown even to themselves—we are better able to think about the historical and social conditions that make knowability nearly impossible. In the end, we see what are often considered to be the separate, “modernist” concerns of Lawrence’s text (the focus on sexuality and the psychologically complex mother-son relationship) brought into dialogue with its focus on historical and communal context.²

Following from this, then, we must acknowledge that, from its outset, and contrary to most criticism, formal disruption characterizes the entire novel and helps us to understand Bestwood in relation to the world around it. The novel opens with a narrative of knowability, which it uses to describe the community of Bestwood. Particularly, a narrator tells us that the mine and working-class life will form the content of the story, a belief that critical work on Lawrence has consistently emphasized.³ As we quickly learn in the novel’s first turn to character consciousness, however, portraits of mining and miners do not form the bulk of the work. In fact, rather than exploring the mining community that both Lawrence and critics have consistently

² Hugh Kenner writes that Lawrence’s novels are filled with “befores and afters” which “govern lives: “before and after sexual awakening, before and after marriage” (*Sinking* 116). See also Thomas Jeffers’s ““Sons and Lovers and the End of Sex,” *The Hudson Review* 52:2 (1999).

³ See Edward Garnett, “Art and the Moralists: Mr. D.H. Lawrence’s Work,” *The Dial* Vol. 61 (1916). Garnett’s lauds the books as “An epic of family life in a colliery district, a piece of social history on a large canvas, painted with a patient thoroughness and bold veracity which both Balzac and Flaubert might have envied. The central theme, an unhappy working-class marriage, a woman’s struggle to rear her children…is dissected in its innermost spiritual fibers with an unflinching and loving exactitude, while the family drama is seen against an impressive background of the harsh, driving realities of life in the colliery district. This novel is really the only one of any breadth of vision in contemporary English fiction that lifts working-class life out of middle-class hands, and restores it to its native atmosphere of hard veracity. The mining people, their mental outlook, ways of life, and habits, and the woof of their domestic joys and cares, are contrasted with some country farming types in a neighborhood village, where the smoky horizon of industrialism merges, to the passionate eyes of a girl and boy in love, in the magic of quiet woods and pastures…marred a little by a feeling of photographic accuracy” (380). Yet, as I note throughout this chapter, Walter and the mining community make up the background of the narrative, rarely if ever graced with individual thoughts. Walter is, in fact, generally despised and patronized by his entire family for crass, cruel behavior that the novel treats as a byproduct of his class.
cited as inspiring the narrative, the text instead devotes nearly all of its time to the conscious dilemmas of Gertrude and Paul Morel.

Throughout the novel, their individual meditations on escaping Bestwood formally disrupt a cohesive community narrative that would otherwise determine their paths in life. Indeed, if the narrative time and attention devoted to Walter Morel and the miners are any indication of their importance, we might say that the novel itself privileges an escape from precisely the way of life it is often celebrated for depicting. Not only are Gertrude and Paul granted complicated and rich interiorities entirely unafforded to Walter Morel or any other member of the mining community, but they are also defined by their perceived distance from the working class and life in Bestwood, which they suggest is stuck in the past. Their deliberations situate them on the periphery of the community, imagining themselves in many ways apart from and even above it. Reading moments of formal disruption, then, helps us to see the way that the characters and the community straddle, in both form and content, the line between Bestwood, London, and the world beyond it.

Yet, this is not the whole story. Throughout, we spy subtle instances where the narrative reemerges to interject in Gertrude and especially Paul’s thoughts, challenging their notions of ascendance and suggesting that it is the historical and social reality of class that determines their thoughts. At the end of the novel, for instance, and despite Paul’s insistence that he wants to get away from Bestwood, we note the relatively unchanged conditions of his life; tellingly, we find the issues he cites within Bestwood present also in Nottingham. We might better imagine Bestwood’s apparent knowability in the twentieth century, then, as evidence of its formal part in capitalist totality; what we find in the community are not reified social relations from the past,
but an international present rife with historical disruptions we can read through character consciousness.

We see this in the subtle but marked shift from Mrs. Morel to Paul’s sense of the community—while they each imagine Bestwood to be static, we can observe historical “progress” represented both by small shifts in character consciousness from one generation to the next, as well in the contemporaneity of the mine, the train, and a wider economy dependent on both. Late in the novel, as Paul tries to imagine something beyond Bestwood, we find the mine reasserting itself in his mind, telling us the extent to which consciousness emanates from present historical and social circumstances that also shape Bestwood. It is in this way that we discern the reality of working-class existence as it disrupts narratives that would place it in the past as well as individual attempts to exist outside of class structure. We might say that Bestwood, the mine, and most critically the working class, play a critical role in the novel and the world, one that allows us to see both exploitation and possibility in equal measure.

“What Happened in England”

O’Connor contends, much as Raymond Williams does when he describes Lawrence as an “autodidact,” given his self-education in the English midlands, that *Sons and Lovers* should also be understood in the context of socio-historical shifts. O’Connor describes a cultural shift not only from the middle to the working class, but also from the area of wealth to the area of industry…for the Midlands…seem to be a different country altogether from the South of England, and even at times to resemble Ireland more than England…It suggests that young people of Lawrence’s period did apparently recognize that in some ways their life was closer to Irish than English ways. (*Twentieth Century* 101-102).

Indeed, Lawrence had theorized that “the land and people were stifled” by the industrial age of England, with class acting as “the marker that restrains individuals and against which they strain
in their efforts to ‘find themselves’” in the “general malaise of England’s Midlands” (2-3). Hugh Kenner similarly muses that Lawrence saw “in his Eastwood people he had a subject…knew a life, lived by thousands, that had never been transmuted into fiction” (*Sinking* 109).

Imagining England as unevenly developed in the twentieth century allows us to think not only about the economic relation between English metropoles and the more ruralized places outside it, but also between the local and the global. Critically, Williams writes, the uneven development across England was “not, as is now sometimes seen, a case of 'development' here, 'failure to develop' elsewhere. What was happening in the 'city', the 'metropolitan' economy, determined and was determined by what was made to happen in the 'country'” (*City* 279). This fact exists, of course, in the context of England’s place in the world economy in the second decade of the twentieth century. As P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins note in their famous study, *British Imperialism*: “In 1913 Britain was the only nation whose economic interests were global and the only whose status as a great power rested upon world-wide commitments” (383). As an economic satellite in the sway of Britain’s world-wide commitments—an essential source of fuel but also socially and economically marginalized in distinction to England’s (and the world’s) cities—Bestwood comes with a set of benefits and disadvantages related to its place in this larger economy.

The economy of Bestwood as it actually existed in the second half of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth seemed, on the one hand, promising, as “miners and mine owners were becoming increasingly prosperous in an increasingly prosperous world” (Griffin 119).^4^ Lawrence’s portrait of the community in *Sons and Lovers* seems in some ways cognizant

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^4^ Griffin’s study also notes: “Between 1874 and 1920 the number of men employed underground in Nottinghamshire increased from 9,099 to 41,979; and the number employed both above and below ground increased from 12,228 to 52,883—a four-fold increase. The increased numbers were no doubt supplied in part by the natural increase in the mining population” (112).
of this, namely by suggesting that it might be possible for Paul Morel, unlike either of his parents, to transcend Bestwood for something outside it. Significantly, this appears unique to his character, as it “was certainly true of this period that miners’ sons were expected to follow their fathers into the pit…for the average boy in a mining village the thought of going anywhere else but to the colliery did not enter his head” (112). Reading the characters of Gertrude and then Paul as existing on the margins of Bestwood is critical, as is their belief that it belongs to the past. At the same time, however, they also believe that their belonging to the English nation might allow them to transcend this. It is only by first recognizing and then combining these details that we see the village and its working class, in their conspicuous absence and subtle reappearance, included not just in the novel but also worldwide capitalism.

“What Have I to Do with All This?”

The opening paragraphs of Sons and Lovers locate Bestwood in the history (and tone) of the past:

There lived the colliers who worked in the little gin-pits two fields away. The brook ran under the alder trees, scarcely soiled by these small mines, whose coal was drawn to the surface by donkeys that plodded wearily in a circle round a gin. And all over the countryside were these same pits, some of which had been worked in the time of Charles II., the few colliers and the donkeys burrowing down like ants into the earth, making queer mounds and little black places among the corn-fields and the meadows. And the cottages of these coal-miners, in blocks and pairs here and there, together with odd farms and homes of the stockingers, straying over the parish, formed the village of Bestwood. (3)

The novel begins, different from the in media res of its “modern” contemporaries, by signaling an origin point for the story of the social world to follow. From a perspective overlooking the scene, a narrator details a way of life, a pattern of existence, for the mining community whose
story, it is implied, has been largely ignored in the annals of history. Thus, before any individual characters materialize, we learn the collective story of “the colliers who worked in the little gin-pits,” whose work in the rural landscape of England dates back to “the time of Charles II.” What is more, the narrator tells us, “all over the countryside were these same pits”; so, while the community of Bestwood, with its “cottages” and “odd farms and homes” scattered “here and there,” will provide the setting for our particular story, we understand it to be one among many mining villages where lives carry on and have carried on in much the same way.

Here, in the carefully set scene, we sense a narrative “vividness of detail” (Danius 991) and a “presumed…wholeness to the English community” often associated with realism (Berman 20). The assured tone of the narrative voice articulates the widely accepted story about, but also presumably by, the whole of the community. Throughout the novel, this narrative form, privy to details small and large, suggests that Bestwood constitutes a knowable community—a village, in this case, on the near periphery of London, in which familiar routines and faces tell us something of what Williams calls “the real substance of personal relationships” (165). Indeed, the secure knowledge of such relationships proliferate in the narrative and even, at times, propel it: we know, for instance, that when Walter Morel gets injured on the job, meaningful and plentiful personal connections compel the community to collectively provide meals for the family (42, 78); we know, too, that some class distinctions exist in Bestwood—we hear of a small petty-bourgeois class, though it contains “nothing higher than the clergyman”—even as the realities of

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5 The first several paragraphs of Sons and Lovers borrow almost directly from Lawrence’s personal biography, but are also combined with the genealogy he provides of his grandfather in the 1929 his essay, “Nottingham and the Mining Community.” There, through description of his grandfather, he explores on the impact of industrial change for previous generations in rural English communities. Alfred Kazin’s Introduction to the 1962 edition of the book summarizes that the novel “opens as a nineteenth-century novel with a matter-of-fact description of the setting—the mine, the landscape of ‘Bestwood,’ the neighboring streets and houses. This opening could have been written by Arnold Bennett, or any other of the excellent ‘realists’ of the period….Lawrence is writing close to the actual facts…Literature has no rites in Sons and Lovers; everything follows as if from memory alone” (74-75).
working-class existence ostensibly form the bulk of the story (48); and we also know that though Paul and the still-married Clara Dawes attempt to hide their burgeoning sexual relationship from public scrutiny, the townspeople of Bestwood and nearby Nottingham find out easily by virtue of the “knowable” nature of both (309).

It is then with some confusion that we encounter, in the second paragraph of the novel, “a sudden change” with the potential to distort the portrait of community just painted: “Then, some sixty years ago, a sudden change took place, gin-pits were elbowed aside by the large mines of the financiers. The coal and iron field of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire was discovered. Carston, Waite and Co. appeared” (3). The articulation of change creates an uneasiness, a kind of tension, between history and the narrative—particularly given the persistence of an omniscient perspective that is both archival and expansive, but somehow unaffected by this change. The allusions to Charles II in the 17th-century suggest, then, the narrative effort to historicize the presence of the coal-mining communities in the countryside of England, there for some 200 years in the face of some more recent alteration. We might say that the narrative hopes to tell the story of the miners, a group perhaps underrepresented in the history (and literature) of England; in other words, the narrative helps to tell the story of the miners as something unchanging and yet also struggles against the reality of history.

The specific content of the sudden change, which took place sometime around the mid-nineteenth century, alludes to the arrival of the mining financiers in Bestwood, whose presence ushered in an epoch of intensified economic industrialization in the countryside. After the gin-pits of the earlier era “were elbowed aside by the large mines,” there was a need for smaller, more numerous homes, which leads us to the present circumstances in Bestwood. This is particularly important, the text suggests, because the miners’ lives were upended via their
relationship *with*—and not their distance *from*—the metropolitan financiers, even as the arrival of the latter further solidified the differences between the owning and the producing classes.

The living and working conditions of the miners, the text suggests, were altered for the benefit of the financiers; the “block of thatched, bulging cottages” which “through growing old had acquired an evil reputation,” were replaced by “great quadrangle dwellings” in “six blocks...two rows of three, like dots on a blank-six domino, and twelve houses in a block” (3-4). The narrator takes the liberty, in this moment, of theorizing that the new dwellings, while pleasant from the outside, offer a thin varnish over the destitute reality of the miners and their families, or “the actual conditions of living in the Bottoms” (4). The newly constructed homes, we are told, “were quite unsavory because people must live in the kitchen, and the kitchens opened on to that nasty alley of ash-pits” (4). The construction of the Bottoms, then, place the miners, as a collective, in the debt of the financiers: not only are their homes near their place of work to ensure that work goes on relatively uninterrupted, but these homes are also owned by the financiers, to whom they pay back a portion of their pay in rent. Though the story that follows is rich with details particular to this generation of miners, the narrative suggests, it belongs to the larger and longer narrative of mining communities across time. Much as the financialized model of mining represents a devolution in the lives of the miners at the end of the nineteenth century—a newly worsened set of conditions for this generation in Bestwood, the living conditions of which are no longer found in the scattered “cottages” of the past, but instead in the “quite unsavory” “quadrangles” of the Bottoms—this is to be understood as a widespread and *communal* predicament that this generation of miners share (3-4).

Significantly, it is here the narrative retreats in favor of moving forward; rather than pursue the line of “change” just introduced, the narrator offers an about face to tell us that what
characterizes Bestwood is the continuity between its past and present. After the shift to industrial mining, the new generation acclimates, the narrator opines, by bringing forward into the present what it “knew” in the past—the presumed wholeness of the community (represented, at this point in history, in the continued “knowability” of Bestwood) and the predictable quality of life ensured by mining. This is constituted not just by the livelihood that unites the community, but also in the conscious continuation of simple behaviors and rituals like the “wakes”—the “annual holiday and fair that was celebrated close to the feats of the saint associated with the local church” (4, n.5)—as well as those that generally emphasize the enclosed and proximal nature of village life.

It is in this spirit that the narrative proceeds, making summarizing gestures about the true content of life for most people in the Bottoms. This takes the form of universalizing adages about the “hearth [as] sacred to the family” (174) or in assertions that sleep “is still most perfect, in spite of hygienists, when it is shared with a beloved” (61). In still broader strokes, the narrator describes with conviction the idea that “all miners”—that is, not only the working class of Bestwood, but the entirety of mining communities throughout the English countryside—share essential qualities, beliefs, habits, and even superstitions, such as a love of medicines (41). The narrative even goes so far as to tell us that Walter Morel (as a representation of all miners, it seems) accesses “his real self” when he and his family “unite,” much as he does, in a kind of communion of labor, in the mines (57). While the narrative tells us, then, that this is the “persistence of an old way of life,” we instead see a disruption in the back and forth temporality of the passage that articulates both “change” and stasis. Thus, as we go forward in the novel, it is crucial to recognize that disruption is a sign of historical and social change, increasingly
recognized by consciousness in the novel. It is within this uneven formal and historical frame that the particular story of the Morel family unfolds in Bestwood.

In lieu of exploring the mining community that the text has just told us is vitally important, the novel then devotes nearly all of its time focusing on the conscious dilemmas of Gertrude and Paul Morel, who imagine themselves to stand apart from the community, which they see as stepping-stone by which they might overcome and transcend their present circumstances. Following her and Walter’s move to the Bottoms, and only a few years into their marriage (the early details of which we learn about in small backward glances throughout the novel), Mrs. Gertrude Morel considers her surroundings and poses a direct, existential question: “What have I to do with all this?” (7). Here, she identifies a trajectory for her life imposed from outside: “Even the child I am going to have! It doesn’t seem as if I were taken into account” (7). As if to highlight the deterministic quality of her story, the narrator interjects to explain the weight of her quandary and to frame it as a truth inherent in human, and perhaps more particularly working-class, experience: “Sometimes,” the voice tells us, “life takes hold of one, carries the body along, accomplishes one’s history, and yet is not real, but leaves oneself as it were slurred over” (7). The narrator, it seems, means to assure us that Mrs. Morel’s individual crisis fits neatly inside a communal (and thus typical) experience.

Perhaps more interesting is the effect. Essentially, the narrative absorbs Mrs. Morel’s experience, which confirms the rightness of her sense of feeling carried along by the circumstances it is the narrative’s job to describe. Here, the narrative forces Mrs. Morel back into the determinism that is its purview, nearly silencing her questions by rendering them “typical.” Of course, it is quite often the case that the characters at the heart of the story, the Morel family and their limited but close relations, confirm what the narrative has told us; Paul and his mother,
for instance, by virtue of sleeping next to one another, recover from an illness and fall into a
“profound sleep” respectively, a “healing” experience for both sleepers (61). Yet we have reason
to question, too, the moments where the protagonists appear to experience or recognize
something the narrative or other characters do not, particularly in the context of our introduction
to Mrs. Morel as juxtaposed with, but also a part of, the community of Bestwood.

In fact, it is against this shared narrative history that we learn about Mrs. Morel and her
uneasy connection to those in the Bestwood community. She is, from the outset, presented to us
as a character with a uniquely individual consciousness and history. In the earliest descriptions of
her, not only do we learn that she often “shrank” from interaction with her neighbors, but also
“enjoyed a kind of aristocracy” among them “because her rent was five shillings and sixpence
instead of five shillings a week,” the differing amounts of rent indicating that she believes in a
subtle but perceived class difference between them (4). Personal history, of course, springs from
social circumstance: her place in Bestwood is, we are told, the direct result of the economic fall
of her family—“a good old burgher family” from Nottingham which had “gone bankrupt in the
lacemarket” (8). Her family, it is implied, were forced to seek subsistence outside the class into
which they were born, pushed aside by financiers in another market, much like the financiers
who sought to increase the productivity of the mines when they took ownership. These details
contextualize her character’s tendency to approach life in Bestwood from a perspective slightly
outside it, a mode of observing and sense-making that retains some mental distance from her
community. We are meant to think of her (and later Paul’s) peculiarity, then, as struggling
against the threat of being pulled down into Bestwood’s generality, even as we learn she is
subject to the same dictates of finance capital that also control the miner’s lives.

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6 Lawrence characterized, in a letter to the editor Edward Garnett, the story of Gertrude Morel simply: “a
woman of character and refinement goes into the lower class, and has no satisfaction in her own life” (Letters 476).
Indeed, if we reexamine the family’s move to the Bottoms from the individual perspective of Gertrude Morel—who views the neighborhood in terms of its flaws, “already twelve years old and on the downward path” (4)—we see that for her it represents both a step down in station and a confrontation with the unhappy reality beneath the surface of her life as the wife of a miner (4). The family’s move holds meaning for her at multiple levels: her family’s fall from the middle class seems to narrate a cause and effect related to her marriage to Walter Morel, a working-class man, but also her uniquely distant place in the cohesively rendered community, situating her at the outskirts of the community (4). This shift from the story of the community to the experiences of Mrs. Morel—who is, in fact, the first of only two proper characters—establishes the formal pattern for the novel: developing expectations, in bits and pieces throughout the narrative, of social stability before contradicting them through character interiority. We sense, in other words, rumblings in the foundation of the community, even as the narrative voice assures us of the opposite.

If Mrs. Morel’s meditation is “natural,” it is all the more interesting that the text, having just told us a “general truth” about all people, simultaneously registers a disruption in its formal pattern, a disconnect between the narrative mode of telling and Mrs. Morel’s experience. The narrative of cohesive community continues to slip throughout the text in these moments of where Mrs. Morel’s, and later Paul’s, consciousness seeks to escape its environment. Indeed, the first section of the novel might easily be summarized as the continual attempt on the part of Mrs. Morel’s consciousness to wrestle with the question of what, if anything, she has to do with the process of her life set against a narrative that insists her life proceeds as it must. It is precisely in the moments where Mrs. Morel (and later Paul) tries to understand her place in her community—
when she asks why her experience cannot, does not or should not align with the story narrating her and the miners’ lives—that we most obviously experience conflict.

A particular instance of this dichotomy occurs early in the novel, a few months after Mrs. Morel’s initial existential quandary, and a mere 20 pages after we have been told of the typicality of such ponderings for most people. There, we encounter an aestheticized portrait of consciousness produced by what appears to be the personal circumstances of Mrs. Morel, but which is indeed part of a larger global historical moment that the community narrative cannot consciously accommodate. Locked out of her home after a fight with her husband Walter, who has thrown her out in a drunken rage, she grapples with her place in a familiar setting made strange by a new experience. In her garden at night, and without the domestic responsibility that typically attends her there, she finds her perception of her everyday world altered. “She could not control her consciousness” the narrator tells us in a description that seems to negotiate her agency within socially determined modes of narration: “mechanically she went over the last scene, then over it again, certain phrases, certain moments coming each time like a brand red-hot down on her soul” (22).

The break in her routine, combined with her frustration, estranges the familiar aspects of her world—or rather, she sees more keenly the trappings of her day-to-day existence:

She became aware of something about her. With an effort she roused herself to see what it was that penetrated her consciousness. The tall white lilies were reeling in the moonlight, and the air was charged with their perfume, as with a presence. Mrs. Morel gasped slightly in fear. She touched the big, pallid flowers on their petals, then shivered. They seemed to be stretching in the moonlight. She put her hand into one white bin: the gold scarcely showed on her fingers by moonlight. She bent down to look at the binful of yellow pollen; but it only appeared dusky. Then she drank a deep draught of the scent. It almost made her dizzy…

When she came to herself she was tired for sleep. Languidly she looked about her; the clumps of white phlox seemed like bushes spread with linen; a moth ricochetted over them, and right across the garden. Following it with her eye
roused her. A few whiffs of the raw, strong scent of phlox invigorated her. She passed along the path, hesitating at the white rose-bush. It smelled sweet and simple. She touched the white ruffles of the roses. Their fresh scent and cool, soft leaves reminded her of the morning-time and sunshine. She was very fond of them. But she was tired, and wanted to sleep. In the mysterious out-of-doors she felt forlorn.

There was no noise anywhere. Evidently the children had not been wakened, or had gone to sleep again. A train, three miles away, roared across the valley. The night was very large, and very strange, stretching its hoary distances infinitely. And out of the silver-grey fog of darkness came sounds vague and hoarse: a corncrake not far off, sound of a train like a sigh, and distant shouts of men. (22-23)

Making note of the natural life around her, Mrs. Morel interacts with the landscape in a kind of trance, but without a clear investment in rendering it into sense. She declines to think of the future and her physical senses bring her into the immediacy of experience; she notices “white lilies reeling” and “drank a deep draught of the scent” that “almost made her dizzy.” Significantly, these experiences do not offer the same kind of universalizing explications as those that come from the narrator overhead—they are particularized through her as an individual.7

Moreover, we are left wondering along with her what “it was that penetrated her consciousness,” as the natural world does not seem to be the cause.

The answer lies in the contradiction between “no noise” and the train that “roared across the valley.” That is, her impression that there was “no noise anywhere” at night in the quiet countryside of Bestwood, evokes a sensory quality not typically offered in the city. In this way, Mrs. Morel’s encounter with the content of her immediate world initially appears limited to a

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7 As Anca Mihaela Dobrinescu aptly argues, “Women in Love begins and at moments progresses in a realistic way, reason for which one finds it difficult to identify, under the formal realistic shell, the modernist renewal that Lawrence performed” (164). Citing Lawrence’s propensity to shift between formal narrative modes, Dobrinescu continues: “after having created the illusion of solid realism…Lawrence begins to investigate his characters’ consciousness, adopting a stream of consciousness technique, namely free indirect discourse” (164). Not only is Dobrinescu’s insight regarding Lawrence’s combining of formal modes succinct in its appraisal of Women in Love, but to her credit, it fine tunes a more general tendency in Lawrence’s writing. What complicates Dobrinescu’s latter claim is its suggestion that these modes cannot work together to tell us something about life in the twentieth century. That is, if we do not privilege the moments of interiority as merely aesthetic, then we have to consider the implications of locating these alongside the “formal realistic shell.”
kind of experience we might associate with geography that centers itself in the city, from which a
distant ruralism is considered quiet by comparison. And yet, the assumed absence of human life
illuminates, for a short stretch, that her isolation is not a separation from the world: she has not
escaped from the lived reality of Bestwood or her home—rather, her private contemplation is
shaped by them. As if to usher in the concrete ways in which Mrs. Morel’s slip away from her
life is deeply connected to the realities of Bestwood (and by extension the world), the narrative
interjects a train “three miles away, [that] roared across the valley.” With it come the sound of
men working, anonymous in much the same way the miners are.

Yet, as if in unconscious resistance to this, the brief sounds fail to penetrate her conscious
thoughts. Instead, what was only a moment before the “roar” of a train shifts into an
anthropomorphic “sigh,” essentially turning social and historical reality into subjective
experience, the latter colored by Mrs. Morel’s personal woe regarding her circumstances. In
juxtaposition with the precise distance of the train, the “three miles” measurable only by an
overhead narrator, Mrs. Morel’s perspective presses to tell us something more abstract—of the
immensity not just of the night which contains the train, “very large, and very strange, stretching
its hoary distances infinitely” but also the distances to which it might travel. In a single moment,
her experience manages to encapsulate the contradiction of life inside Bestwood at the turn of the
twentieth century: isolated, yet connected to the world. Here, we can distinguish the unique
formal perspective afforded by Mrs. Morel as a character whose consciousness straddles
Bestwood and the world.

In the “knowable” community of Bestwood, then, we find unreadability, but now as a
figure for England itself rather than its far-flung territories. That is, we are situated in the
supposedly unknowable or rural exterior—the train acting as the great and familiar 19c. symbol
for modernization and national unity seen in narratives like *Middlemarch*. Where the sublimity of the train in *Howard’s End* is a figure for imperialism, as Jameson notes, in this instance it also figures the relation between regions inside the nation and the national center itself. Here, we have the appearance of unity in the connection between Bestwood and the other places to which the train must travel—and yet national unity is also, in Mrs. Morel’s contemplation, overlain with the sublimity of empire—“stretching hoary distances infinitely”—of Jameson’s argument. At this moment, then, capitalism in Bestwood reveals an internally stratified “national” core to suggest that England, too, itself is part of global immensity; in other words, if we understand national unity to be aligned with the imperial project, then whatever power this holds disintegrates when the periphery appears inside the bounds of the English nation.

Indeed, the very institution of the railway, the men who operate it, and the perception of quiet in Bestwood are, this moment suggests, each and all a part of this immensity, all touched by something they cannot see and yet to which they all contribute, and by which they are all brought together—namely global capitalism. Gertrude’s presumed isolation, then, reveals the strangeness and impossibility of treating the traditional, local community as separate from the modernizing, global world, each a part of one another—a perspective offered not only by her personal history, but by the historical and economic circumstances that unevenly combine in Bestwood. That is, Mrs. Morel’s consciousness—both accessible to her (Bestwood) and also below her self-articulation (outside and beyond it), the latter which provides a certain resistance to having the experience neatly incorporated into the bounds of narrative exposition—incorporates what her eyes and mind can not: the haze of an international picture into which Bestwood is certainly painted. The omniscient narrative thread, of course, even as it orders these details, fails to fully explain her reverie, its cause, and the slips in consciousness, because they
cannot fit within the bounds of, or be generalized by, the narrative of Bestwood as knowable and producing a shared consciousness. Indeed, to the extent that the narrative and even Mrs. Morel identify knowability with the mine, we cannot yet make a connection between what Mrs. Morel experiences here with what has come before. Instead, as if in quiet deferral, the narrative moves on without explaining what her thoughts might mean for the rest of the community.

Mrs. Morel’s meditation, quite early in the novel, is striking for two reasons that have implications for the novel as a whole. First, it directly contradicts the critical tendency to treat the text as two formal halves or as an opportunity to celebrate Lawrence’s moments of modernist breakthrough. Second, her apparent ability to straddle the space outside and inside her community creates a contradiction between her consciousness and her daily existence, one that eludes the narrator’s ability to fully summarize or explain this as a well-understood historical response and place it inside the narrative of knowable community. The formal technique of the moment captivates our attention because we pause with a character in the process of thinking, which permits us to consider how largely invisible forces press on consciousness inside them.

“Precipitous Ascent”

Much like his mother, Paul considers Bestwood from a position slightly outside (and sometimes hovering above) it, but, unlike his mother, Paul and the narrator often seem in agreement that he can understand Bestwood, situated as it is in the past, to perhaps transcend and overcome it. The novel alludes to various reasons for what appear to be Paul’s desire to escape, many of which seem associated with the possible accruals that flow to Bestwood given its place in the English nation.8 We see the more cosmopolitan education offered to him—we are told

8 Hugh Kenner notes that Lawrence brought to literature a “…first-hand knowledge of a rural England where three eras could still be visited: where some tilled as in the Middle Ages while others got lowered by cables
through asides of his knowledge of “some French and German and mathematics,” all supposedly of no “commercial value” but which seem prepare him for cosmopolitan citizenship (79); the uniquely intimate connection between mother and son, partly biological, partly mental, that gives the novel its name, and which manifests in their shared dream to “go abroad,” among other things (306); or even Paul’s reclaimation of what Lawrence famously dubbed “blood consciousness,” a kind of sexual and primitive human energy Lawrence theorized was denied to humans in the industrialized era, which produced a generalized and uniquely modern malaise.

We might also consider the twenty odd years between Gertrude Morel’s and Paul’s contemplations of escape, which seem to register the passage of time and the economic realities of Britain’s largesse—including its mining industry, which presents “new opportunities.” The last of these forms the basis for Gertrude Morel’s belief that in places like Bestwood, with the right coaching, it was economically and socially possible for her sons to ascend to the “great centres of industry” of London and Nottingham (89), or “to climb into the middle classes, a thing not very difficult” (223). Chief among these reasons, however, is that Paul thinks of his village as frozen in its development, which is why he believes he can move beyond it for something more. In other words, it is Paul’s historical circumstances that inform his belief that he can evade Bestwood, rather than a sudden formal shift in the novel halfway through, that characterizes the
down the mineshafts, and others again heard college speculation about whether ‘life’ possessed any special quality…In the urban world there’s much falsity, much to irritate…Yet he’s not nostalgic for the lost timeless realm, knowing perfectly well as he does that, save for the pits his father toiled in and the schools ratepayers were supporting in the post-timeless money economy, he himself would not have so much as learned to read and write” (Sinking 123).

Lawrence had long championed “the duality of human consciousness, seeing a polarity between blood and mental consciousness. For him, mental consciousness was characterised by the exertion of human will, something that was demonstrated by an emphasis on science, mechanisation and materialism. In contrast, he viewed the consciousness of the blood as something inherent and more intuitive; it was as if the blood remembered older religious ideas than those imposed by Christianity, a different kind of relationship between humankind and the cosmos. Thus Lawrence’s particular interest in the notion of blood-consciousness indicates his preference for a more instinctive, rather than scientific, response to questions about man’s place in the world” (Costin 152).
potentially “modern” shift in the novel. Rather than understand what takes place as a stylistic change, then, we might better understand a generational, historical change; the desire to escape, which seems possible to Paul, was not entirely available to Gertrude 20 years before.

This explains, to some extent, Paul’s insistence that the modern world exists in contrast with life in Bestwood. In various existential meditations reminiscent of Gertrude’s, and quite typical of Lawrence’s artist figures, Paul pauses to overlook his town, sometimes symbolically it seems, from hilltops which offer him a comprehensive view of a world he sees frozen in time. Here, the narrative is, at one level, subordinated to his perspective:

And from the hilltop, on pitch-dark nights, he looked round on the villages five or six miles away, that shone like swarms of glittering living things, almost a heaven against his feet. Marlpool and Heanor scattered the far-off darkness with brilliance. And occasionally the black valley space between was traced, violated by a great train rushing south to London or north to Scotland. The trains roared by like projectiles level on the darkness, fuming and burning, making the valley clang with their passage. They were gone, and the lights of the towns and villages glittered in silence. (99)

Absorbed by the “villages five or six miles away, that shone like swarms of glittering living things, almost a heaven against his feet,” Paul appreciates the cohesive picture of small towns linked together by green space. Too, his position above the villages emphasizes his sense that he commands what he observes—if the town is a “heaven against his feet,” we can fairly deduce that the metaphor places him in a position that seems to transcend the surroundings. We see this perspective play out in the language of the passage: the towns, “five or six miles away,” appear small, “like swarms of glittering living things.” More than recognizing the life that the towns and villages represent, the passage casts a shadow of dehumanization—he views the towns “like…living things” which he equates with “swarms.”

However, just as his mother did some twenty years in the past, he too hears “the black valley space…violated by a great train.” Paul’s reverie suggests ambivalence: on the one hand,
he immediately identifies the train as a violation of Bestwood’s serenity; on the other, the railway system, a “projectile” flung through the rural landscape, suggests that the immense world outside Bestwood might also be attainable. While the villages “shone,” a verb that associates it with the past, the train is described in action, “fuming and burning.” Bestwood, he reasons, is a stop on the way to an actual destination, “south to London or north to Scotland.” Certainly for him, and not, seemingly, for the generation before his, the train fulfills a double purpose: as a means to and from work and by which he can access places too far away before the development of this form of transportation, but also as an interruption to his meditation on Bestwood as frozen in time. Paul reaches the limit of his understanding when he encounters this contradiction—the idea that Bestwood might be connected to, rather than violated by, the train is too difficult to imagine. Put differently, it is precisely when Paul attempts to pinpoint Bestwood as knowable that its unknowability surfaces.

In contradistinction to the train, a symbol of a development he seems to believe is happening elsewhere, Paul consistently identifies predictability and the absence of change in Bestwood with the mining pit. The narrative seems to sometimes work in concert with this, telling us that the mine around which the community formed is an established force against which Paul can consider the development of his personal feelings and growth. On a quick daytrip to a nearby farm with his mother, Paul observes the pit as a natural, even organic, piece of the countryside, proclaiming that he finds the pit “beautiful” as he overlooks it, elaborating “I like the feel of men on things, while they’re alive” (108). In this moment, the pit is not a place where Paul recognizes exploitation taking place or even the ability of human labor, but rather a source of inspiration for his individual contemplations—here, too, we see Lawrence’s connection between physical labor and sexuality.
Interestingly, both labor in the mine and sexual relationships are, for Paul, associated with mental strife, although to quite different effects—the former he avoids, the latter he pursues. This is perhaps why, in the moments where Paul’s burgeoning sexuality (a major, if not the major, theme referenced by Lawrence’s modernism) surfaces as the existential quandary dictating his existence, we frequently note his invocation of the mining pit. More particularly, if we take seriously Lawrence’s fixation on the importance of unconscious or physical desire, the appearance of the mine alongside it becomes critical to reading the novel. In scenes that begin to quickly accumulate, the associations between the mine and Paul’s sexual desire build. The narrative tells us in one such instance: “[Paul] was keenly alive on his walks on Sunday nights with Edgar and Miriam. He never went past the pits at night, by the lighted lamp-house, the tall black headstocks and lines of trucks, past the fans spinning slowly like shadows, without the feeling of Miriam returning to him, keen and almost unbearable” (168). The juxtaposition of the pit—the headstocks, the trucks, and the shadowy fans—alongside Paul’s affective and romanticized, but also bittersweet and confused longings for a young woman—“keen and unbearable”—are, at one level, almost comic; the contrast establishes, of course, young love’s ability to color perspective. At the same time, the moment highlights both the omnipresence of the pit in Paul’s life as well as his inability to think of the pit in any but the most personal terms. This perspective on the pit contextualizes and sets the stage for Paul’s further alienation and desire to transcend Bestwood at the same time that it insists on the importance of the working class, and places like Bestwood, to any understanding of Paul’s world.

As the text proceeds, the pit fleetingly but consistently reappears in the background of the narrative, haunting and inflecting Paul’s thoughts. Interestingly, the mine is never articulated as providing the fuel for the train and by extension London. Indeed, as time passes in the novel,
Walter Morel and the pit are further pushed into the background, a fact the text even acknowledges: “The family was coming on. Only Morel remained unchanged, or rather, lapsed slowly” (222). The missed connection between the mines and the train is, nevertheless, vital to our understanding of the historical development of capitalism and Bestwood within it, suggesting not only the relationship between the two, but also the socially-determined nature of Paul’s consciousness.

More particularly, Paul’s inability to see the train and mine as deeply related, despite his unconscious association between them, reveals a veiled and inverse dependency: the train sent from London to export coal is not separate from or more modern than Bestwood and the mine, but is entirely dependent upon, and coterminous with, the resource extraction and labor there. Indeed, even as Paul and the narrative voice tell us the opposite, it is these unrecognized disruptions that ultimately unfurl the link to a world system otherwise uncaptured by the narrative of Bestwood. It is the historical contradiction between, on the one side, a narrative of local knowability and of unknowable sublimity on the other that come to characterize the crisis moments for Paul’s consciousness, particularly as he struggles to contend with the realization that the local is itself unknowable.

In a kind of culmination of this idea, Paul and Clara, working in a factory in Nottingham where Paul is the manager, travel to a nearby castle on their lunchbreak. The climb up, the narrative tells us, offers a “precipitous ascent,” an allusion not just to the view made possible from this post, but also the particular historical context and social mobility that would perhaps accompany Paul’s promotion. From the height of the castle, the text describes their view of “tiny people” who “went scurrying about in almost ludicrous importance” (235). Here, Paul and the narrator seem to share a perspective—a dismissive interpretation of working-class people...
executing the tasks of their daily lives. This is echoed directly in Paul’s observation: “You feel as if you could scoop up the folk like tadpoles, and have a handful of them” (235). The context and the setting for the meditation, that of the castle, is symbolically important: Paul’s observation is at once reverent—tantamount to a cosmological recognition of the relative smallness of human life—but also imperious, suggesting simultaneously his belief in his ability to overcome working-class struggle.

As if to signal the way that Paul’s perspective travels with him outside Bestwood, the narrative voice reintroduces the train—now inflected with Paul’s sense that he can overcome, “scoop up,” the small world and bend it to his will, perhaps associated with his move to Nottingham. What was the earlier violation of “the great train” here appears to him as “smoking toy engines” with “little stacks of timber” beside it [emphasis mine] (236). To Paul, the physical distance from Bestwood registers as an opportunity to explore ascendance and even condescension; the cliffs across the way, along with the train and the whole of the picture, “looked puny” and seem ripe for manipulation (236). Clara’s reminder that “it is not necessary to get far off in order to see us proportionately,” and her suggestion that the visible boundaries of the developing town are a welcome sight, “only a little sore upon the country yet,” inspire Paul to confusedly meditate on modernization (235-236).

Here, uneven development within the nation of England—more particularly, Bestwood, Nottingham, and London’s unique places in the global economy—seems to perpetuate the confusion; the village of Bestwood is not the site of industrial valorization as such, but rather the place where raw materials are extracted and capitalism speculates, whereas the town of Nottingham moves us closer toward the center of capitalist valorization. Thus, Paul’s rendering of the toy train from a precipice in Nottingham seems to depict an unfair exchange between
metropolitan towns in comparison with Bestwood, highlighting the financializing impulse in the former that leads to the confiscation of resources from the latter. Yet while Clara celebrates the continued separation between towns like Nottingham and rural but industrializing spaces like Bestwood, Paul emphasizes Nottingham as an incomplete but still promising project in the context of the modernizing world (perhaps to the exclusion of Bestwood): “But the town’s all right,’ he said, ‘it’s only temporary. This is the crude, clumsy make-shift we’ve practiced on, till we find out what the idea is. The town will come all right” (236). The implication, it seems, is that the town’s “make-shift” quality is a step on its way to becoming fully metropolitan, which Paul suggests can, will, and perhaps should be remedied in the future.

Before we can fully reconcile Paul’s confusion, the valley—and Paul’s belief in the narrative of knowability and ascension—morphs still further. In distinction to the earlier moment where he thought of the valley’s connection to London and even Scotland, and in direct contrast to a future which he thinks he can predict, Paul’s contemplation experiences a further disruption. Paul frames the moment, which he seems to recognize as a kind of cognitive disruption, as the emotional consequence of a brief fight with Clara. Yet the moment directly contradicts what Paul has just articulated to himself. What was, only a moment before, a “puny,” “little, interesting, diversity of shapes” transforms into:

a vast, dark matrix of sorrow and tragedy, the same in all the houses and the river-flats and the people and the birds…And now that the forms seemed to have melted away, there remained the mass from which all the landscape was composed, a dark mass of struggle and pain. The factory, the girls, his mother, the large, uplifted church, the thicket of the town, merged into one atmosphere—dark, brooding, and sorrowful, every bit. (237)

The reverie is formally complicated, not least because the ideas seem to originate in Paul’s particular consciousness and life experiences—“the factory, the girls, his mother.” It is also not clear to what extent he, as opposed to the narrator, expresses this confusion. While Paul seems,
here, to consciously identify the essential components of life in his community, they cease to be
knowable when brought together in his mind, instead blending into a “vast, dark” “atmosphere,”
indicative of a hazy and perhaps revelatory. Interestingly, the “vast dark” sublimity seems to
undo Paul’s pretensions to mastery. In this way, too, it resituated him back among the puny
world he thought to master (the factory, the girls, his mother)

As the text continues, Paul’s struggle with his developing sexuality continues to emerge
as a potential, but ultimately insufficient, inspiration for unknowability—and it is here that the
connection to the pit is most crucial. In a truly bizarre moment following a sexual encounter
between Paul and Clara, the narrative begins to refer to Paul as “Morel,” as if he has taken the
place of his father by engaging in a physical, rather than mental, act (no doubt in part because he
is now a “man”). In the passage, Paul begins using language that mirrors his father’s, including
his working-class dialect, as if the resolution of sexual tension returns the narrative to a physical
and mental predictability associated with the miners and the knowable economic and social
relations of Bestwood:

When she arose, he, looking on the ground all the time, saw suddenly
sprinkled on the black wet beech-roots many scarlet carnation petals, like
splashed drops of blood; and red, small splashes fell from her bosom, streaming
down her dress to her feet.
“Your flowers are smashed,” he said.
She looked at him heavily as she put back her hair. Suddenly he put his
finger-tips on her cheek.
“Why dost look so heavy?” he reproached her.
She smiled sadly, as if she felt alone in herself. He caressed her cheek with
his fingers, and kissed her.
“Nay!” he said. “Never thee bother!”
She gripped his fingers tight, and laughed shakily. Then she dropped her
hand. He put the hair back from her brows, stroking her temples, kissing them
lightly.
“But tha shouldna worrit!” he said softly, pleading. (271)

Later, the narrator tells us, Paul becomes “instinct” in his sexual encounters:
As a rule, when he started love-making, the emotion was strong enough to carry with it everything—reason, soul, blood—in a great sweep, like the Trent carries bodily its back-swirls and intertwinnings, noiselessly. Gradually the little criticisms, the little sensations, were lost, thought also went, everything borne along in one flood. He became, not a man with a mind, but a great instinct. His hands were like creatures, living; his limbs, his body, were all life and consciousness, subject to no will of his, but living in themselves. (316)

Paul’s experiences, in these moments, are certainly linked to Lawrence’s sense of blood consciousness, or the vital way of living lost to modern men. But perhaps more telling is what is excluded from the narrative and ultimately unknowable to us: Walter Morel’s interiority. We note that the oddly phrased description of sex is reminiscent of the earlier depiction of Walter (or other miners) at work—“when he was his real self again…soldering…hammering…[and putting great patches on his moleskin pit-trousers” (57). Here, even as Paul imagines a transcendent plane of consciousness accomplished through sex or blood consciousness, the circumstances he has sought to escape manifest themselves not only in the narrative description of him, but in his sense of himself. In much the same way that Mrs. Morel’s reverie early in the novel formally disrupts the communal narrative to tell us about Bestwood’s connection to the world market, so do Paul’s contemplations about human connection highlight the social disconnect experienced by individuals within capitalism. In this way, then, Paul’s contradictory ideas manage to assert the importance of the working class into the narrative, even as he consciously cites his distance from this reality.

The novel ends with Paul in Nottingham, working at the same factory he did while his mother was alive. Different from the past, however, Paul newly senses that “There was nowhere to go, neither back…or forward anywhere. He felt stifled. There was nowhere for him. The stress grew inside him; he felt he should smash” (359). We find him struggling with “some other consciousness,” or his sense that he is disconnected from the world around him, momentarily
without the belief that he can transcend it (358). Though his mother’s death, and the absence he feels that often turns into a desire to “join her,” seems to be the explanation offered by the narrative, it is the estrangement and isolation that Paul feels, and the brief insights that this provides inside his familiar environment, which are most important.

In Nottingham, Paul experiences feelings quite similar to Mrs. Morel’s in her garden, a kind of retreat into the past. As he walks around the town, from bars to his lodging and even in interactions with old friends, he suspects he does not fit in with his surroundings. With his consciousness “working mechanically,” a euphemism that seems to suggest a kind of unconscious process, he pauses to ask himself “What am I doing?” (358). Once again, far off in the distance, there is a train: "Far away he could hear the sharp clinking of the trucks on the railway…They were there in their places. But where was he himself?” Rather than feel grounded by noises that suggest the presence of other people or the potential contained within the train, however, Paul instead senses distance. This culminates when Paul travels as a passenger on the train, noting outside its windows, “Beyond the town the country, little smouldering spots for more towns” (365). As if to escape the modernity he has craved throughout the novel, Paul exits the train and heads for the country, where “all was dead still” (365). There, he is overcome by the “vastness and terror of the immense night…On every side the immense dark silence seemed pressing him, so tiny a spark, into extinction, and yet, almost nothing, he could not be extinct” (365).

This moment is, on the face of it, a treatise on a general and timeless human condition, particularly the smallness of human life within the universe, which we discern in the allusions to the “Stars and sun” and their intimate connection with one another (365). Yet, there are other allusions, too, which have a much more concrete relationship to the narrative that we were told,
from the beginning, would be the focus of the novel. The references not only to “coal” and “the railway” in these final pages, but also to Paul’s sense that he is “alone” even among people and in the town, come together to show us (much as they did in Mrs. Morel’s garden) a blurring between and ultimately joining of the world and the mining community. It is not the difference between country and city that has inspired Paul’s consciousness to consistently encounter conflict with the world around him, the concluding pages hint, but rather the reality that Paul and the narrative manage to together avoid throughout the novel—that Paul is, of course, a part of the working class. Therefore, when he turns toward “the city’s gold phosphorescence” it is not to a reconciliation of the problem between town and country or past and present—it is, quite simply, Paul’s return to the factory (366). In this way, however, we have another kind of reconciliation, between the seemingly contradictory portraits of consciousness and community, brought together and drawn apart in the narrative of capitalism.
“Overseas or Halfseasover Empire”:

Character, Community, and Capitalist Determinism in *Ulysses*

*Ulysses* has often been read with determinism in mind, whether understood in terms of economic paralysis or stasis in Ireland. As Jeremy Hawthorne describes, Marxist critics in the 1930s were puzzled by what they saw as the text’s lack of determinism, “[drawing] attention to the fact that the novel contained no industrial workers, no sign of productive activity, and generally no concern with what Marxists refer to as the relations of production” (*James* 113).¹ More recently, of course, critics have argued that the cause for Marxist complaint was, in fact, a sign of Dublin’s and thus Ireland’s determinism. As Irinia Rasmussen Goloubeva argues, Stephen Dedalus

configures freedom in mystical terms as liberation from within. Reminded of the imperial attitude of self-entitlement and self-proclaimed right to appropriate other peoples' resources, he makes an about face to declare that humankind's destiny has been either to perpetrate or to be a perpetrator of ruthless exploitation. He demands a reversal of the Irish disempowerment, rejecting decisively this historical determinism. (“That’s the Music” 693)

Hugh Kenner similarly notes:

Early in *Ulysses* Joyce introduced something new, long passages we have learned to call ‘interior monologue’ which profess to transcribe the actual movement of a character’s thought…The same hand that arranged the events of the *Portrait* into a chiasmus is still writing “Proteus,”…The initial style creates as much as it records. It creates Stephen, and permits a certain ambiguity in all Stephen’s speculations on his entoilment in a web of determinism. (*Ulysses* 69-70)

The “web of determinism” to which Kenner, Goloubeva, and others allude is, as Stephen himself summarizes (in both long interior monologues and out loud to others), “The imperial British state…and the holy Roman catholic and apostolic church” (17). This chapter argues that the

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¹ Leonard Orr refers to a “paradigm shift” in 1990s criticism of Joyce, which applied a postcolonial lens to the way Joyce’s work considered Dublin and Ireland in relation to British Empire (*Joyce* 5).
characters and the community in *Ulysses* are determined, but not in the way they imagine.\(^2\)

While this seems, on the face of it, a familiar argument, reading character determinism in *Ulysses* as an economic and historical, but also aesthetic, process in *Ulysses* allows me to examine the relationship between individual and social experiences of capitalism. What is particularly critical about my reading of determinism in the novel is that I am able to highlight the importance of moments that have otherwise slipped by critical attention—and which certainly slip by the attention of the characters—to ultimately connect them across the text to tell a larger story about Joyce’s depiction of capitalism as well as capitalism in Ireland as a semi-peripheral site.

*Ulysses* shows characters to be determined, at one level, through their individual perceptions of Dublin’s relationship to the British Empire and the way colonization has shaped the social and economic realities of the city. The narrative construction of Dublin as a knowable community, in particular, builds throughout the text, largely by combining the partial perspectives offered by characters and a social world which places them in frequent proximity. As we travel across what at times seems a navigable Dublin, the text and the characters often acknowledge Ireland’s relationship to, and also as a way to differentiate it from, England. Significantly, however, characters’ interpretations and understandings of their world are varied;

\(^2\) Indeed, Stephen’s comment, only an hour or so later, that “history is the nightmare from which [he is] trying to wake” (34), chimes strikingly well with Marx’s theory of determinism in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, where he observes: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living” (*Marx-Engels* 595). Marx also outlines the way determinism effects in consciousness in *The Contribution to the Critique of Political*, where he argues: “In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” (*Marx-Engels* 4).
while the they have in common the belief that it is the colonial narrative which unites them, they experience empire and its effects in relatively individual, and often abstract, ways.3

The very form of the novel, and Joyce’s particular instantiation of it in Ulysses, affords us the ability to cut across narrative space to bring together the characters and the ways that their individual perspectives effectively mediate one another, corroborating or contradicting details about or even the truth behind particular incidents or interpretations of the same events. (This is a process familiar from “Ithaca,” in the list of Molly’s supposed infidelities, which are later confirmed in “Penelope” to be false—but it is at work much earlier in the novel, as I will argue.) Most important, even as individual characters do not always see or recognize it, the cumulative process of determinism allows us to see what Ernst Lohoff has called capital’s “asocial sociality” at play.4 Indeed, if the story that Dubliners think they know—that Ireland is an occupied imperial community—falls away when characters turn inward, then the everyday world itself is estranged.

My reading of character determinism in Ulysses further considers, at a deeply related level, places in the text where characters’ assumptions about or pronouncements of what they

3 Hugh Kenner writes, in his infamous study of modernism, The Pound Era, that “Joyce was never on a coinage commission, no ever, in the Yeatsian way that entranced his Stephen Dedalus, the forger of conscience hitherto uncreated. Instead he worked to illuminate from within the actual fictions by which Dublin lived. His stories contain not only stories he might have written but did not, they contain also the stories people tell themselves: that there exists for instance on the other side of the world happiness with a man named (properly) Frank. The contain also ghosts of stories that have been more majestically told” (40).

4 Lohoff writes: “Looked at from one side, the commodity’s rise to dominance as a form of wealth leads to the formation of a highly socialized system with a correspondingly highly developed division of labor. The historical advance of the commodity has as its logical horizon the world market and hence the fusion of production and consumption into one planetary, interconnected whole. Individual producers and commodity subjects act as the (mutually and fully interdependent) members of a gigantic social unit… At the same time, the reduction of wealth as such to wealth in its commodity form signifies a systematic desocialization… On one hand, desocialization is entailed by the domination of the commodity form, under which social relations exist only as relations between things… On the other hand… given the metamorphosis of all the manifold relationships to material goods into what now becomes exclusively a relationship to commodities, we are concerned here with a radically desocialized relational context that tolerates no other occupant besides itself within the seemingly limitless universe of commodities” (“Off Limits” 155). Roswitha Scholz also provides a useful delineation of Lohoff’s term: “people appear asocial and society appears to be constituted through things, which are mediated by the abstract quantity of value. The result is the alienation of members of society, as their own sociability is only bestowed upon them by commodities, dead things, thus entirely emptying sociability in its social form of representation of its concrete, sensual content” (“Patriarchy” 125-126).
know—particularly in their seeming agreements regarding the community of Dublin and its relationship to empire—overlook obvious examples of exploitation taking place across the city, itself determined in relation to capital. I find, then, that character determinism shows us the way that capitalism mediates consciousness, which *Ulysses* suggests is shaped by a much broader reality than the characters realize, namely a world market. I am keenly interested, then, in the social realities present in Dublin that cannot be explained by empire alone, where recognition is clouded by abstracted ideas of imperialism or Irish nationalism. The truly revealing moments in *Ulysses* are, I argue, those where suffering and exploitation—the real and lived consequences of the world market and their ubiquity for all people under capitalism—are allowed to hide in plain sight. We see, then, what happens when empire is considered without capital.

To read these moments, I resist focusing too narrowly on the formal distinctions between individual chapters, as has been done in criticism for some time. Instead, I consider formal nuances within and across chapters in conversation with character determinism. It is in this context, specifically, that I combine what are seemingly disconnected or individualized thoughts on water and drowning as tropes for unrecognized suffering, labor, and circulating capitalism. I identify these markers as together showing us the world market alive and active in Dublin.

Specifically, we travel with characters along the channels of Dublin Bay and the River Liffey—

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5 Tony Thwaites observes, in the first six episodes of *Ulysses*, the “clear demarcation of three elements: dialogue, interior monologue, and, enveloping both of these, the third-person narration” (“Mr. Bloom” 363). “Each of these has,” he claims, “its own distinctive tonality: the careful demotic speech of the dialogue, the elliptical and fragmentary nature of the interior monologues, and the frequent bareness and distantiation of the narration” (“Mr. Bloom” 363). Yet, in reading even the early episodes of *Ulysses*, we experience constant efforts to destabilize precisely these kinds of divisions; throughout, stream of consciousness fuses small and large orders of thought and proceeds even in the midst of the social interactions between characters, that produce both dialogue and interior responses to it. Leopold Bloom, much as he listens to and empathizes with Mrs. Breen in “Lestrygonians,” for instance, finds himself distracted by unavoidable stimuli—the people in the backdrop of Dublin, his own hunger, and his anxiety about the impending visit of his wife’s lover (156-159). What is more, we know perhaps from Bloom’s earliest episode, “Calypso,” that *Ulysses* will combine and intertwine these supposedly distinct elements as it does in the infamous exchange between Bloom and Molly regarding a word in a book she does not know. We encounter in *Ulysses*, as Hugh Kenner suggests, “a Heisenbergian trouble with the evidence” (*Ulysses* 81).
the literal byways for the import of internationally-produced goods and the export of exploited Irish labor and its products—into Nighttown—a space where a kind of reserve army of people expelled by or unrecognized by capital struggle within a market deemed “illegal”—to end up in Molly Bloom’s bedroom, where we see signs everywhere of capitalist mediation in a chapter that has been consistently referred to as “unmediated” by criticism. On the whole, then, it is my contention that reading determinism in *Ulysses* brings together the collective and subjective experience of life in Dublin as it is determined by a world economic system. By imagining that collected individual meditations and seemingly invisible exploitation together narrate the story of Dublin in the present, we see that the novel ultimately suggests that the social world transcends the individual, even when what we are explicitly told on the page points to the opposite.

**Reading Development in *Ulysses***

Determination in *Ulysses* is a contradictory process, perhaps doubly so given Dublin’s unique position as a kind of metropolitan site within the periphery of the United Kingdom. The city appears to move forward and stall economically at the same time, a process largely evident through what is often framed by the community of the novel as local knowledge. Local knowledge, then, or even the communal recognition of oppression under the British Empire, suggests to us that Dubliners are not only capable of articulating such forces, but also imagine themselves, to some extent, to be determined by them. This is partly because, Laura Winkiel suggests, Dublin represents a peculiar case; it is “close” to London in comparison with other colonies, existing neither within, nor separate from, the national culture of England (“Modernist Novel” 419). In Dublin, the nation effectively mediates a more immediate local, Dublin, to the
larger worlds of empire and the world market; in other words, the connection between the local and the universal, the nation, is always-already contested in the colony, especially in Ireland.⁶

The story of economy and uneven development in Dublin, and its history, is relayed to us from individuals’ observations and interpretations. In Dublin we encounter a complicated relationship between what seem older and newer economic and political forms; we observe the absence of a clearly demarcated industry in Dublin as we travel through it just as we recognize that empire long preceded capitalism there. As Paul Stasi argues, Ulysses navigates:

at least two broadly defined reading communities…Irish and non-Irish, local and “universal,” national and cosmopolitan. Each of these communities emerges from Joyce’s distinctive combination of transcendental reference and local detail, two moments of the way subjects inhabit spaces in which they live. Crucially, these two moments are present within Irish reality itself, for a colonial country is, in some important sense, always already international, constructed, in the Irish case, via England and Rome. (Modernism 106)

That is, it is largely the colonial control of Ireland and the effects on culture across hundreds of years that most Dubliners have in mind when they consider their ties to England. In contrast with Sons and Lovers, then, no story of community industry demarcating historical epochs surfaces in Ulysses—we note, rather, a collective recognition of the need for change, but a multiplication of individualized explanations and perspectives for why this has so far not been possible.

In Ulysses, Stephen, Bloom, Molly, and Dubliners more generally bear the weight of their stifled economy. Joyce’s Dublin alludes not just to the actual marked economic decline in the agricultural and manufacturing populations there (Crotty 44), but also to the fact that the “Profits from property in Irish land…were used either to finance the replacement of more people by livestock, which produced less but made more profit…adding to [England's capital] capacity to undermine and destroy Ireland's already weakened industrial capital” (48). Indeed, owing to

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⁶ Jameson on Ireland as a unique colony
the storied and visible experience of Irish exploitation under England, Dubliners in *Ulysses* readily identify the day-to-day presence of imperialism in their lives. It has been well-established that Dublin was “compelled to develop within constraints, sets of forces, and agendas—economic, political, cultural, intellectual—that have largely been prescribed or conditioned by developments in the metropolis” (Cleary 210). Indeed, Dublin, “[unlike] the core failed to predominate in international trade and thus did not benefit to the same extent as the core” (16). Yet Dublin is also in some ways metropolitan itself; it has access “to international banking” as a result of its proximity to British Empire, a fact that suggests that underdeveloped is not an adequate term (Wallerstein 16). Furthermore, if we think of Dublin’s place in the world economic system, we can see that London is, to some extent, also dependent on Dublin—at least for labor and raw materials. Ultimately, the complexity of Dublin’s place in empire makes it hard to fit into the binary categories the citizenry tends to use to view their social world.

“no more strangers in our house”

Knowability and the challenge to it work as a process in *Ulysses*. Initially, insularity or knowability manifests itself in social interactions suggestive of familiarity and predictability, a quality that defines the limits of Dublin’s community and its members’ seeming assurance in the pattern of their daily lives. When, for example, Leopold Bloom thinks of Blazes Boylan and encounters him an instant later—“Just that moment I was thinking”—we understand that this is not only a product of the fact that Bloom often thinks of Boylan given his wife’s affair with him, but that such closeness typifies life in Dublin (92). Likewise, the appearance of the Macintosh/M’Intosh character is notable because he is a stranger, someone whom no one can

7 Crotty specifies: “Ireland, in 1901-2, contributed 9.8millions, or 6.55% of total revenue to the UK exchequer” (59).
identify and who therefore garners attention (112). In Joyce’s Dublin, social stability depends on everyone knowing everyone, particularly because, as the Citizen suggests much later, Dubliners “want no more strangers in our house” (323). We can see knowability established also in the rumors that circulate about the personal lives of inhabitants; though the rumors seem to focus mostly on Molly and Bloom given our more intimate acquaintance with them, we can imagine there are similar stories about others—the side narratives that involve, as examples, Mr. and Mrs. Breen, Martin Cunningham and his wife, and even Cashel Boyle O’Connor Fitzmaurice Tisdall Farrell. As Hugh Kenner says, “all events in Dublin dissolve into gossip” (Pound 70). Thus, as critics suggest, the very nature of social interaction is limited by the environment of Dublin—Stephen and Bloom’s near misses throughout the day, while they map the Odyssean plot, are only made possible by the relatively enclosed nature of the community, where inhabitants are consistently in proximity.

The early chapters introduce us to the immense complexity contained within the community of Ulysses, the way Dublin’s historical and economic situation is deeply embedded in the stories Dublin’s members tell about their home. Indeed, what we might call the hidden anchor point of understanding in “Telemachus”—the local and historical “story” of the Martello Tower, the place that Stephen and his roommate Buck Mulligan call home—is rooted in these stories: the historical context in which the Tower was constructed, the extent to which this context is known and comprehended in the present by the community, and characters’ individual interpretations of these. Thus, the first chapters teach us what Dubliners “know” of their community and their historical exploitation while it also insists we pay close attention to portraits of characters subjectively narrating or interpreting events that have historical significance for the community, oftentimes to conflicting, because subjective, ends. So it is that we come to know
history in *Ulysses*, its details and the way that it not only shapes the lives of its characters but also the way that it shapes their consciousness, by identifying its effects in the present, in the cumulative effects that define characters and the community.

And yet as the text develops, the local community is continuously challenged as a reliable source of knowledge, even as it is consistently reestablished by characters. In later chapters, Joyce incorporates formal modes that draw in and envelop what seems like the whole of the community, a method that makes Dublin appear increasingly “knowable” to readers by linking together more and more characters in the narrative as the formal modes of the novel begin to become more formally complicated (even as they deliberately parody inherited narratives, such as the play on Victorian novels found in “Naussica” and the chronology of British literary forms outlined in “Oxen of the Sun”). Thus, as the chapters accumulate in *Ulysses*, communal narratives—where characters are brought into proximity to one another and the narrative captures what appears to be a representational view of the community—become dominant at the same time that they formally increase the reader’s sense of estrangement.

In our expanding the view of the community, as, for instance, in “Wandering Rocks,” we encounter an increased number of character voices as well as a depth of perspectives presented. While the broader portraits offer a more textured view of the dangerously static nature of Dublin’s economy, these later chapters also show us the way that consciousness reveals itself to be socially mediated by a reality not fully contained by or in Dublin, particularly in the allusions to suffering that cannot be explained solely by focusing on English occupation. As *Ulysses* proceeds, it builds community narratives from the collected sparks of interiority to suggest a

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8 As Hugh Kenner puts it, “…half of ‘Nausicaa’ is narrated by the Arranger imitating a Victorian lady novelist, and most of ‘Oxen of the Sun’ by a gallery of voices that do not even pretend to report words spoken in 1904 Dublin” (101).
general rather than exceptional lived experience.9 We see consciousness, here, as socially produced, demonstrating it as it is: alienated to its itself and from others, even in a community that Joyce has constructed to appear as “knowable.”

“We Have Treated You Rather Unfairly”

“Telemachus” begins by asking us to deduce the history of Dublin and its inhabitants from a perspective on the ground, in the minds and speech of characters. Here, the details of historical circumstances, and the implied impact that these inevitably have on the community, are not issued via a narrator hovering above, but are instead outlined by virtue of their relevance to the protagonist, Stephen Dedalus. Even in moments when the narrative records Stephen’s actions and movements in third person, we transition from these to his first-person thoughts without warning: “Stephen bent forward and peered at the mirror held out to him, cleft by a crooked crack. Hair on end. As he and others see me. Who chose this face for me? This dogsbody to rid of vermin. It asks me too” (6). The narrative voice observes Stephen as if hovering above him physically (“Stephen bent forward”), only to then shift to Stephen’s direct thoughts as they seem to be occurring. Throughout the chapter, associations we understand to be both personal to Stephen and culturally relevant to Dubliners (including Catholicism and Western culture more broadly) appear alongside allusions to Ireland’s colonial relationship to England, the latter especially important to our own knowledge of this history.10 Significantly, the novel’s method interpolates us from the start by assuming that we are, much like Dubliners,

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9 Kenner writes, “A character in Ulysses (in a city of talk) is an interference phenomenon between 'his' language and language not his, sometimes other characters', sometimes the author's. The second half of Ulysses dissolves into 'styles' the way all events in Dublin dissolve into gossip” (70).

10 Enda Duffy refers to these, in The Subaltern Ulysses, as "derivative interpelling narratives [of] the oppression of Ireland as a colony” (26-27).
familiar with the well-known narrative of English occupation. It is via Stephen’s individual predicament with the Englishman Haines that we begin to meditate on the broader community of Dublin and Ireland as a colony of British Empire. “Tell me, Mulligan,” Stephen asks, “how long is he going to stay in this tower? (4). It is Stephen, and not the narrator, who points out that the consequences of occupation and exploitation continue in the actions of British and Irish peoples alike. “I am the servant of two masters,” he tells Haines, “The imperial British state…and the holy Roman catholic and apostolic church” (20).

Here, by gathering associative tidbits from Stephen’s thoughts and synthesizing them with comments made by the characters in his proximity, we understand the story of the Martello Tower to implicate the visiting Englishman, Haines, for invading Stephen’s home and possibly exiling him from it. In this way, Stephen’s famous evaluation of Mulligan, and Irishman, as a “usurper” at the end of “Telemachus” indicates his personalization of Haines’s literal takeover of both his home in the Martello Tower and his country—and Joyce assumes that we will catch the reference (23). Interestingly, however, the explanation for the building of the towers and their place in the history of the community—namely an allusion to yet another Briton intruding on the Irish—comes from Buck Mulligan, who delivers this information without an explicit comment on its relevance to the current situation: “Billy Pitt had them built…when the French were on the sea” (17). Mulligan’s mention of the French “on the sea” alludes to England’s occupation of Ireland during an inter-imperial contest in the 18th century, tying Haines’s seemingly innocuous desire for a “tour” of Dublin to Britain’s historical territorializing of Ireland in the construction of the Tower (and, of course, for hundreds of years preceding this).

If we combine Stephen and Buck’s observations, we might say that the details surrounding the Tower work to display the community’s shared historical knowledge as well as
to construct a communal critique of what Haines represents in this context. The specific mention of the historical figure William Pitt, the British prime minister who had the towers built in Ireland to guard against the competing imperial interests of France, speaks not only to Stephen and Buck’s awareness of Ireland’s colonial relationship to England, but also the way that this history seems doomed to repeat itself in 1904. Haines’s role as a “usurper” of Martello speaks to an anxiety, both individual and communal, on the part of Irish people regarding the English presence in Ireland in both the past and present. As if to concretize the association between Haines and the English drive for conquest more broadly, Stephen notes Haines’s cigarette case, in which “twinkled a green stone” (20). Significantly, the moment passes without Stephen fully articulating to himself or the others the symbolic significance of the cigarette case (thoughts of “green stones” later reappear in Bloom’s, rather than Stephen’s, thoughts) (55); instead, we make the association, as we assume Stephen has that this is yet more evidence of England’s appropriation of Irish culture and resources.

The narrative of the Tower is, as Vincent Cheng puts it, “a figure and a parable for Ireland itself…a synecdoche for the Irish condition without Home Rule…and the longing for Irish autonomy from English occupation” (Joyce 151-152). Specifically, Stephen’s theses on the Martello Tower and the green stone imply the extent to which each Irishman encounters the world as an individual. Stephen’s comments and thoughts, then, imply that individual recognitions of the imperial relationship between Ireland and England, whether they come from Irish or British characters—“An Irishman must think like that, I daresay. We feel in England that we have treated you rather unfairly. It seems history is to blame” (20)—do little for Ireland in the present. Stephen also suggests that Irish nationalism may not resolve the economic predicament in which the Irish people find themselves: “The problem is to get money. From whom? From the
[Irish] milkwoman or from him. It’s a toss up, I think” (16). This point is then underlined by using “usurper” to talk about Mulligan. The first result of this, in other words, is to associate Mulligan with Haines and England more broadly. Then the second move is for the word—which in its immediate referent points to Mulligan—to speak to the larger historical context of the Tower and Haines. This is partly what is meant by the reflection offered by the Irish looking glass noted by Stephen: “It is a symbol of Irish art. The cracked lookingglass of a servant” (6).

The story of the Tower suggests that history repeats itself, but also that even as Stephen believes empire has a determining effect on his life, his individual story is saturated with a larger historical one. We observe history, here, as it shapes individual lives, a fact that, in the same moment that Stephen acknowledges it, envelops him. Hugh Kenner aptly identifies the novel’s underlying principle: “the reader should not be told what no one present would think worth an act of attention” (Ulysses 31). (Yet, as the novel goes on, we are certainly told many things by narrators that have not caught the attention of characters and to which it may be impossible for them to ever attune themselves.)

It is significant, then, that Ulysses builds its most sustained discussion of British Empire in “Cyclops,” which captures the perspective of a single, unnamed narrator who observes and argues with an Irish nationalist dubbed the Citizen. The Citizen’s infamous rants cover topics ranging from cows to literature, the navy, Edward VII, and current news. As the various critiques of the Citizen’s nationalism suggest, his views are notable not just for their myopia—specifically, his redirecting of every bit of information shared by someone else into praise for Ireland’s superiority—but for their explicit rendering of empire into political sound bites that highlight this as a limited view in terms of a single nation as opposed to an experience shared between colonized peoples across the borders of nations.
This is especially glaring in instances where it is possible to connect the oppression of the Irish with other colonized peoples in the British Empire. When, for instance, the Citizen reads aloud a “skit” from the United Irishman “about that Zulu chief that’s visiting England,” J.J. O’Molloy attempts to describe the atrocities perpetrated by “the Belgians in the Congo Free State” (335). The Citizen retorts by suggesting the man who blew the whistle, “Casement,” was “an Irishman”—a return to the problem of imagining Ireland to be the “omphalos” in an international story (335). What appears to be an opportunity to meditate on international solidarity among oppressed peoples is instead framed as the accomplishment of a single Irishman. Here, nationalism prevents a clear understanding of empire.

Kenner argues that in the transition to the “Cyclops” episode, or in “withdrawing emphasis from [the] idiosyncratic humanity—chiefly by suppressing the tang of [Stephen and Bloom’s] familiar voices, audible or silent—Joyce courted the danger that many pages of indirect discourse would drain the blood out of his book” (101). Kenner describes “Cyclops” as not just “composed of persons,” but of “numerous analogies with 'Aeolus', 'Naussica' with 'Proteus', 'Oxen of the Sun' with 'Scylla and Charybdis’” (101, 100). In this way, the episode is notable not just for the numerous angles from which it considers British Empire but, as Neil R. Davison summarizes that, “despite [the] subterfuge, the episode maintains a deadly seriousness about xenophobic nationalism, anti-Semitism, and call for compassion toward the Other (‘Cyclops’ 145). Kenner, that is, says the chapter moves from specific people to more general discourse. Indeed, he further suggests that it radiates out to all the chapters. Nevertheless, while the chapter has multiplicity, it still has a relatively clear focus, as Davison suggests.

More than this is the difficulty of drawing together the perspectives offered; each is interested, it seems, in British Empire and yet none of them are able to synthesize it into
understanding or genuine concern for or camaraderie with one another. Thus, J.J. and Bloom’s attempt to discuss methods to address English occupation—“impeach a nation” in “the court of world opinion” (Gifford 349, n. 12.1194-95)—and the Citizen’s obstinate response that “Any civilization they have they stole from us” are, respectively, too symbolic and too exaggerated (325). The evident interest in the question that flits in and out of not just the chapter (and the novel, as I will soon discuss)—the fact that a potential threat to Irish cattle by foot and mouth disease, and the expected English embargo, would sacrifice a major source of Irish export revenue—fails to make a mark on the Citizen. We see this even earlier in the chapter, when “Joe starts telling [him] about the foot and mouth disease and the cattle traders and taking action in the matter,” and the Citizen sends “them all to the rightabout” or explicitly ignores them (315), preferring to pontificate more abstractly about Ireland’s oppression by England in the midst of an opportunity to think concretely about the exploitative nature of England’s interest in Irish cattle.

The various perspectives are catalogued not just by their collection in the chapter, but in the form of the chapter, too; each comes as if from outside, mostly representing things the nameless one (as he’s often called in criticism) could not possibly think. These interruptions to his monologue suggest that the many intrusions are brought together not by the nationalism of the Citizen or the internationalism of Bloom, but by the fact that they are all rendered differently by characters’ individual consciousness. Ideally, the novel seems to suggest, if ever uttered aloud and made part of a community conversation, these individual angles would not only be tempered by one another, but usefully collected into a conversation leading to meaningful change. In some ideal world, the novel suggests, individual viewpoints might add up to something larger, but this does not happen here. That is, unconnected individualized interpretations of nationalism multiplied do not seem to produce understanding, but obscure it. The constellation of Dubliners’
perspectives, then, attune us to asocial sociality at the same time that they speak to the limits of nationalism as a solution.

In the strained exchanges between Stephen, Mulligan, Haines, the Citizen, Bloom, and an unnamed narrator, then, “Telemachus” and “Cyclops” weave subjective with communal knowledge to highlight the connections, both successful and missed, between individualized analyses of empire. By reading Stephen’s subjective narrative of the Martello Tower in the context of Ireland’s history more broadly, as well as the Citizen’s accumulated arguments about Ireland set against Bloom’s genuine interrogation of their truth, we articulate a formal and social negotiation that is key to reading the remainder of Ulysses. This negotiation involves recognizing, at one level, the necessity of communal knowledge for the possibility of Irish independence; in Ulysses characters consistently identify and name the exploitation of Ireland and their understanding of it to themselves or one another. At another level, communal knowledge is continuously challenged by individual interpretations that operate within a global reality. In the analyses that follow, I explore moments when Stephen, Bloom, and others’ meditations on English occupation are challenged. Particularly, we witness characters’ collective and individual inability to recognize capitalist exploitation taking place before their eyes. We see this not only at the perimeter of Dublin, along the Irish Sea literally connecting Ireland to the world, but also deep inside the city, where we are challenged to think about the creation of unrecognized but essential markets, where a reserve army performs labor not formally recognized by capitalism, and inside the domestic space of Molly Bloom’s bedroom.

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Shortly following his departure from Haines and Buck, and alone on the beach, Stephen considers the history of conquest at Dublin Bay and the fruitless efforts launched to wrestle
independence back. As he looks at the shoreline of Dublin, Stephen recites to himself the various
“kings’ sons” and “pretenders” who attempted to regain Ireland from English control:

All kings’ sons. Paradise of pretenders then and now. He saved men from
drowning and you shake at a cur’s yelping. But the courtiers who mocked Guido
in Or san Michele were in their own house. House of... We don’t want any of your
medieval abstrusiosities. Would you do what he did? A boat would be near, a
lifebuoy. Natürlich, put there for you. Would you or would you not? The man that
was drowned nine days ago off Maiden’s rock. They are waiting for him now.
The truth, spit it out. I would want to. I would try. I am not a strong swimmer.
Water cold soft. When I put my face into it in the basin at Clongowes. Can’t see!
Who’s behind me? Out quickly, quickly! Do you see the tide flowing quickly in
on all sides, sheeting the lows of sand quickly, shellcocoacoloured? If I had land
under my feet. I want his life still to be his, mine to be mine. A drowning man.
His human eyes scream to me out of horror of his death. I... With him together
down... I could not save her. Waters: bitter death: lost. (45)

Here, the allusion to “kings” is both a literal description of the various rulers of Ireland from the
15c. to 1745 (Gifford 60, n. 3.317) as well as a reference to and a repetition of the conversation
that he has just come away from with Mr. Deasy, whose confused theoretical notions of Irish
nationalism bespeak the more general problems with its community praxis (31). At the same
time, however, the reference is literary; Stephen, having just read John Milton’s “Lycidas,”
seems to also have in mind Edward King, the drowned friend about whom Milton wrote the
piece. Thus, even in his critique of colonial conquest, we find his understanding of history
subordinated to the literary obscuring of its origins; “Lycidas” can be read as literature by
Stephen despite the fact that Milton was an enthusiastic supporter of the very Cromwell who
decimated Ireland.

Stephen’s associative line of thought, particularly his meditation on Buck Mulligan’s
heroic rescue of a drowning man—“Would you do what he did?” (45)—inevitably leads him to a
subjective reflection on his personal connections to this body of water and to water more
generally: Buck’s ability to triumph where he might have failed in the green waves remind him
of his mother’s illness and the green bile it produced. This is less an illustration of Stephen’s egoism, however, than a reminder of the procession of alienated consciousness under capitalism, the way that thoughts inevitably move away from an interrogation of the social, the historical, and the communal and to the individualized, interiorized mediation of these precisely because they exist under alienated conditions. Consciousness will, the text seems to hint, turn to culturally familiar narratives—to Milton and even, for readers following Joyce, *Ulysses*—to understand the predicament of life.

It is, on one hand, this that leads Stephen to think about another man, less fortunate than the man rescued by Buck, who “drowned nine days ago off Maiden’s rock” (45). And yet, on the other, it is by virtue of Stephen’s individual musing that we are able to connect the drowned man more concretely to a world economic system. That is, even as *Ulysses* unravels the ability of the circulating narrative of empire in Dublin to ultimately explain the conditions of existence in Dublin, it simultaneously offers a substitution: what links Dubliners, aside from their belief in the narrative of empire, are the thoughts about empire that they imagine to be private or true, which we in fact find to be determined by their interaction with a capitalist world system. Here, empire, the narrative so familiar to Dublin, inevitably distracts Stephen from seeing how he is connected not just to other Dubliners, but to a larger world. To understand the significance of the drowned man and the way that this circulating story both unravels and brings together individuals in the community, then, requires a longer meditation on the details that build toward and around it.

An hour “earlier” than the time at which Stephen walks along the beach, but a few chapters further into the novel, Leopold Bloom muses over the same body of water, as if in concert with Stephen, on the “overseas or halfseasover empire” (73). Bloom’s recognition of his
proximity to English empire—“halfseasover”—suggests that he, like Stephen, considers the ties that bind Ireland, geographically and colonially, to the world. His thoughts are, however, interrupted by an encounter with M’Coy, who tells him the rumor Stephen has also heard and pondered, “There’s a drowning case at Sandycove may turn up” (75). The starts and stops of Bloom’s abstract consideration of Ireland’s colonial relationship to England here collide with the more concrete details about life, and death, in Dublin.

The novel’s compounding of multiple levels of formal and contextual difficulty, contained within a single day, also drowns the reader in innumerable references and things we might miss; Leopold Bloom simultaneously acknowledges that his vision of the Eastern world is “probably not a bit like it really” (57), but cannot help but return to assume almost immediately again: “the far east. Lovely spot it must be” (from here venturing an even darker, more sinister imagining of the “unknown” world) (5). It is in this context that we must read the story of a man drowning, around which the novel creates a link between the knowledge Dubliners believe they have and that which slips by their attention. Individually, Stephen and Bloom cannot make the explicit connection between the social conditions and reality of life in Dublin. Likewise, their focus on England as the target of critique consistently fails to show them the larger economic and social totality of which Ireland and empire itself are only a part. The novel as a whole, however, consistently provides the means by which a reader might do this.

Only a short time after Bloom and Stephen overlook the water, Bloom and several other men make their way to Paddy Dignam’s funeral. Inside the carriage, they share the rumor of Reuben J., a Jewish accountant whose son “tried to drown” by throwing himself “into the Liffey” (94). Reuben, the story goes, then “gave the boatman a florin,” a comically small amount, “for saving his son’s life” (94-95). Partly, of course, the tale demonstrates the anti-Semitic
environment in which Bloom finds himself, notably the men’s joke about a Jewish man paying too little, or in Simon’s droll joke, too much. In addition to this, however, the moment highlights the inability of the men to collectively recognize a less detectable pattern in the living conditions in Dublin: the characters have been summarizing but failing to fully comprehend the multiple, and apparently intentional, community drownings in the waterways. While the drownings appear to the men as incidental, accidental or, worse still, the result of personal decision (perhaps even a final one), we can more concretely relate them to not only the particular difficulty of living within Ireland before independence from England, but to the more general pattern of existence under capitalism. Here, context is crucial: not only do these tales of drowning follow Bloom’s meditations on English empire (and precede others, which I will discuss below), but they happen at the docks of the Dublin Bay, the geographical point of connection not only between Dublin and England, but Dublin and the world.

Criticism has linked the drownings and explicit mentions of water to Molly, to Mrs. Dedalus, Stephen’s related refusal to bathe, and a more general feminine principle. Though the drownings have the potential to seem merely circumstantial, given Dublin’s proximity to water, the multiple references in the span of less than 100 pages draws them together—and to our critical attention. The water is, of course, not only the place that Stephen links to kings, pretenders, and conquerors of the past, but the place that currently cradles ships for export of Irish resources which, even when they travel through the mediator of England, circulate around

11 See Michael Stanier’s “The Void Awaits Surely All Them that Weave the Wind,” Twentieth Century Literature 41:3 (1995). There, Stanier traces “the full extent of [Molly’s] feminine ‘language of flow,’” connecting her with the Sirens (321). Richard Ellmann also notes the verification of Molly’s fertility and her utterance of “yes” in the “Nostos”/“Return” section of Ulysses signifies a kind of “negotiated symbolic reconciliation” between Molly and Bloom, where “Joyce corrects Dante (and Plato) by placing sexual love above all other kinds of love,” an adherence to but a simultaneous alteration of the Odysseus/Penelope return myth (Ulysses on the Liffey 174)
the world. What looms in the background of Dublin Bay and the River Liffey is a social reality tied not just to Ireland’s economic situation but to a worldwide economy built upon exploitation.

The connection between the drownings, ship building, and the world market manages to slip by the conscious attention of every character in the novel (as well as criticism). While the men all seem drawn to ponder incidental details, it is the narrative combination of the details in the span of a few pages that asks that we consider them together. The Irish quay exports goods, provides supplies the labor and material for, in addition to housing, the vessels that ensure the country’s exploitation, but it also manages to capture the quite real consequences of this exploitation in the form of Irish lives. Particularly, the “newly emerging industry of iron-shipbuilding” in Ireland, largely associated with Belfast but here trickling upward to Dublin, represents an enterprise benefitting not only England, but capitalism in the years leading up to WWI and before Irish independence (Crotty 52). Finally, Stephen’s earlier allusion to the drowned man, in the context of his walk on the beach, itself suffused with meditations on previous colonial encounters, allows us to read the sea as fully invested with a set of colonial or imperial assumptions. As Nels Pearson usefully argues:

Especially in the colonies of a British empire for whom "ships and overseas trade were, as everyone knew, the lifeblood," local ports, rivers and navigable estuaries have not been vital arteries connecting the national organ to the international body, but sites that reveal the diseased perversion of such potentially reciprocal flows—sites of mass emigration, controlled immigration, embargoes and sanctions, human cargoes and fiercely exploitive imbalances of labor and capital. (628)

Not only do these allusions to drowning, water, and the sea link the first Dutch invaders to the British, but they further ask us to associate this continued narrative of colonial enterprise with the death and exploitation of Irish peoples in their current context: the larger narrative of worldwide
capitalism. Likewise, Stephen’s worry much later in the text that his sister, Dilly, “will drown me with her” offers an index of capital deprivations in the form of tangible poverty (243).

As if to concretize the connections between Ireland’s export industries, the way that they exploit and kill Irish people, and the inability of Dubliners to recognize this pattern in their lives, a drove of cattle being herded to the bay literally interrupt the progress of the carriage as it along the River Liffey:

The carriage galloped round a corner: stopped.
—What’s wrong now?
A divided drove of branded cattle passed the windows, lowing, slouching by on padded hoofs, whisking their tails slowly on their clotted bony croups. Outside them and through them ran raddled sheep bleating their fear.
—Emigrants, Mr Power said.
—Huuuh! the drover’s voice cried, his switch sounding on their flanks. Huuuh! out of that!
Thursday, of course. Tomorrow is killing day. Springers. Cuffe sold them about twentyseven quid each. For Liverpool probably. Roastbeef for old England. They buy up all the juicy ones. And then the fifth quarter lost: all that raw stuff, hide, hair, horns. Comes to a big thing in a year. Dead meat trade. Byproducts of the slaughterhouses for tanneries, soap, margarine. Wonder if that dodge works now getting dicky meat off the train at Clonsilla.

The carriage moved on through the drove.
—I can’t make out why the corporation doesn’t run a tramline from the parkgate to the quays, Mr Bloom said. All those animals could be taken in trucks down to the boats.
—Instead of blocking up the thoroughfare, Martin Cunningham said. Quite right. They ought to.
—Yes, Mr Bloom said, and another thing I often thought, is to have municipal funeral trams like they have in Milan, you know. Run the line out to the cemetery gates and have special trams, hearse and carriage and all. Don’t you see what I mean? (97)

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12 See Nels Pearson, “May I Trespass on your valuable space?: Ulysses on the Coast,” Modern Fiction Studies 57:4 (2011). There, Pearson locates in the novel Joyce’s “effort to reconcile Ireland and the universe in words, to merge the territory of the nation with the unappointed, circumfluent water of the world, also remains, in its entirety, so engaged” (646). Pearson’s analysis seems to suggest that Ulysses is interested in internationalism as a kind of argument for Ireland’s equal place in a global economy. Even as he cites decolonization, the end point is Ireland’s “transnational socioeconomic aspirations”: “we begin to see that Ulysses is shaped by its engagements with the challenges and contradictions of postcolonial internationalism, chief among which is the paradox that the insistence on a distinctly national phase of development is both a vehicle of decolonization and a threat to its ultimately transnational socioeconomic aspirations” (629).
Mr. Power characterizes the destination for the cattle and sheep by labeling them “Emigrants.” The men seem instantly able to articulate that the livestock are being exported and are destined for England; Bloom immediately muses: “For Liverpool probably. Roastbeef for old England. They buy up all the juicy ones.” And yet, for all the apparent recognition on the part of characters of such exploitation, both spoken and thought, the connection between Irish livestock destined for English stomachs and the preponderance of drowned men fails to fully make its mark. Bloom offers a typical suggestion for how the process might be made more efficient, “I can’t make out why the corporation doesn’t run a tramline from the parkgate to the quays” (98), and this sentiment is then confirmed by Martin Cunningham, himself in the pay of the Crown, without either reflecting on the complicity of this in maintenance of empire or participation in a world market system.

At issue, too, is the critical recognition of the way that Dublin serves a role as an agricultural storehouse even as it wears “the mask of a capital.”13 Put differently, we see a potential historical contradiction in Dublin’s present industrial circumstances—its place, on the one hand, as a metropole in the nation of Ireland, and yet also peripheral, on the other hand, to a world market dominated by England (at least in 1904). Significantly, each allusion to Dublin’s industries is accompanied by a concomitant and explicit reference to dead Irishmen; the economic activity that is keeping Ireland alive, the passages tell us as they accumulate, is also killing it, a poignant example of exploitation under capital. What is particularly interesting about

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13 Raymond Crotty elaborates: “Better sea and land transport made it easier in particular to ship livestock from the Irish hinterland to English urban consuming centers, thereby enhancing the relative profitability of the land-intensive and labor-intensive cattle and sheep production. Better transport also made it easier to distribute English manufactured products into the Irish hinterland, to compete there with the products of local cottage and craft industries. If industries in the Irish hinterland were to fight back successfully they would have had to attain the same scale as that of metropolitan industry. Given their own depleted market, to sustain such a scale of production they would have had to export most of their product. Meanwhile their English competitors, with a large market on their doorstep, only had to export a small fraction of their total product to achieve the lowest cost, large scale level of output” (Ireland 45).
the illustrations of Irish industry is that, while the text itself places these descriptions in proximity to one another—thereby forming a connection for the reader—the potential for characters to connect the plight of Ireland, the drowned man, and the lived reality of these remains out of reach. What Stephen, Bloom, and the others do not see, then, is that when they hear of any drowned Irishman on the quay—the drowning man whom Buck saved, the man whose body has yet to be found, and Reuben J’s son—a life has been lost in the process of exploitation.

Rather than build toward a collective consciousness in this moment, then, characters instead retreat to individualized concerns. Yet, in the process of this, the novel shows us the way the world market is masked through the inherited historical and community narrative of empire, a narrative that is critically important, but incomplete. Here, the particular circumstances of exploitation in Dublin evince the power of capitalism to sow asocial sociality at the same time that the novel constructively offers a gap between individual and communal narratives. Interestingly, this offers a bridge between many of the formal seachanges that are initially jarring for the reader. By connecting these seemingly isolated thoughts and narrative presentations to one another, the novel produces a broader portrait of the way Dublin, and consciousness inside it, is connected to a world that incorporates it.

That is, the novel invites further meditation on capitalism by suggesting that communal moments are, inevitably, privately mediated by the whole of Dublin—and thus determined by, and not separate from, the world market. We see this cycle repeat when the men in the carriage observe a man “on his dropping barge between clamps of turf” (99):

Their eyes watched him. On the slow weedy waterway he had floated on his raft coastward over Ireland drawn by a haulage rope past beds of reeds, over slime, mudchoked bottles, carrion dogs. Athlone, Mullingar, Moyvalley, I could make a walking tour to see Milly by the canal. Or cycle down. Hire some old crock,
The passage begins with a narrator telling us that the men watch the laborer, whose plight they seem on the verge of recognizing, in unison: “Their eyes watched him…drawn by a haulage rope…over slime, mudchoked bottles, carrion dogs.” Without warning, Bloom’s thoughts interrupt the narration, “I could make a walking tour to see Milly by the canal,” citing places that we initially assume detail the path the man’s raft might have taken him—“Athlone, Mullingar, Moyvalley.” Instead, these are the stops Bloom imagines he might make on the way to see Milly if he traveled near or by water. Here, the passage oscillates from a communal, omniscient point of view—“Their eyes watched”—to one interiorized by consciousness—“I could,” “I will” (99). That is, it is as if the men are on the cusp of envisioning the daily reality of the man’s life for a brief moment, and perhaps able to connect it with what they have heard, seen, and experienced. However, while they acknowledge and are even struck by the man, he passes by without such recognition. We see, however, that he is tethered to the thread just woven by the narrative to connect and explain exploitation and resource extraction—the Irish beef destined for English stomachs and the related suggestions of developing the waterways alongside hearses and drowning.

But exploitation under a capitalist market, Ulysses suggests, extends even to Dublin’s invisible economy, the survival eked out by a kind of reserve army, whose existence is a testament to the cruelty of capitalism to designate markets legal and illegal, and to expel people from the former and punish them for engaging in the latter. Labor, in the “Circe” episode, is initially difficult to detect; what is actually happening, and the undercurrent of individual
imaginations guiding it, are difficult to distinguish. Most important, it is not possible to entirely discern which thoughts belong to which character. Stephen, for instance, encounters Private Carr and Private Compton, whom the “stage directions” tell us are “redcoats” (430)—an allusion which, significantly, first appeared in Bloom’s thoughts in “Lotus Eaters” (72).

The overlapping of the characters’ thoughts regarding the soldiers, particularly in the moments when the two men are not physically together, inspires two potential explanations (the third being that the Arranger is playing with form and our desire for sensemaking in novels): first, that the frequent presence of British soldiers is recognized as a source of anxiety by Irish people, or second, that the circumstances in which the characters live evoke similar thoughts and experiences not just because they are Irish, but also because they are exploited by capital. Significantly, the moment—the British soldiers’ search of Nighttown with an Irish navvy for Irish prostitutes, a kind of pilfering of suffering—is situated in the most economically desperate part of Dublin. Moreover, and importantly, it is not only British soldiers who frequent Nighttown, but Irishmen, as well.

This is one of the critical points of the chapter that we stand to miss: the place that is treated by Bloom, Stephen, the soldiers, and the Dublin economy as the unconscious of the city, or the place where fantasies and hallucinations come to express themselves (“The Sins of the Past” are granted a speaking role in Bloom’s hallucination) is also in fact a place where poverty-stricken Dubliners attempt to make a living. In Nighttown, as Mary C. King notes, “the destitute seamy underworld of a commercial city, most of whose inhabitants are too impoverished to do more than beg for and consume its garbage, surfaces” (“Dissolution” 339). Thus, the fixation on the parts of Zoe and Bella, each engaged in prostitution, on getting money from Bloom and Stephen (“Who’s paying here?”, “It’s ten shillings here,” “Who’s to pay for that?”) speaks
directly to economic suffering under capital (556, 584). We note, in a similar vein, Zoe’s
description of the work of one of the women in Nighttown: “She’s on the job herself tonight with
the vet, her tipster, that gives her all the winners and pays for her son in Oxford. Working
overtime but her luck’s turned today” (475). Later, in a moment critical to reading the novel in
the context of a world market, Zoe reveals that she is not Irish, but English, suggesting the
necessity for English peoples to immigrate for work (477). The larger economic system of
capital, that is, does not ultimately make the kinds of national distinctions for individuals that the
Citizen assumes are all important. Rather, as a working-class woman in the capitalist system,
Zoe finds herself treated as collateral in much the same way she would if she were Irish.

What the portrait of Dublin’s Nighttown and its drowning citizens tell us, however, is that
no market is truly Irish, as no market exists independent of any other. Here, the formal rendering
of this reality remains crucial: the entire episode of “Circe” merges the fugue states—the
interiorities, and possibly even combined unconsciousnesses—of Stephen and Bloom. By
presenting these complicated meditations as beyond the conscious articulation of their characters,
“Circe” demonstrates that within the collective unconscious of Dublin exists the world market.
Thus, in the final analysis, perspectivalism allows for something larger to emerge—these
collected hallucinations are more than the sum of their parts.

“the world is divided in any case”

Contrary to what we might assume given the formal presentation of Molly Bloom’s
stream of consciousness, entirely free as it is from omniscient intrusion, we find in “Penelope” a
culmination of the novel, of the social world exceeding individual consciousness. We note, too, a
shift from the previous narrator-heavy chapters, “Eumaeus” and “Ithaca.” Molly’s ruminations
usher in a rounding out of her hitherto flat character, defined and impressed upon up to this point by the opinions and beliefs of others—most of them men. Inside the domestic space of her bedroom, alone with her thoughts, Molly seems separate from the novel’s at times claustraphobic portrait of community in Dublin. At the same time, her thoughts are, like those of every character in *Ulysses*, embedded not just in her personal history, but also in the historical realities that both encompass and extend beyond Dublin (including the precarious place of women in capitalist economy at this time) and shape her consciousness.

As Stasi suggests, the “position of Joycean narrative does not…reject history but rather situates it within the framework of subjective experience” (“Eveline” 47). We see this in the particular content of Molly’s thoughts, related not just to the “knowable” qualities of Dublin, wherein she confirms and denies what we have “heard” from other characters until this point and reflects on her interactions with them, but also what she will buy, how the past shapes her present, and how she might navigate a future that must somehow consider both the continuation or termination of her marriage but also “food and rent” (751). Where criticism has consistently read her chapter as unmediated, then, I instead read “Penelope” as determined not just by the text and social world preceding it, but also by the social and historical reality of capitalism.

One of the most important aspects of “Penelope” is the fact that Molly’s stream of consciousness expresses a certain ambivalence about empire. Particularly, throughout the

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14 The collection of essays, *James Joyce: The Augmented Ninth*, which focus on space in the city nearly all link an explicit discussion of Dublin with gender analysis. This, on one hand, combats what I believe are unfair critiques of Joyce’s absent feminism, and on the other, speaks to the larger critical trend of noting Joyce’s careful portraits of oppression in the 1980s and 1990s. See also Colin MacCabe’s *Future for English*, Manchester University Press: New York (1988) and Enda Duffy’s *The Subaltern Ulysses*, University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis (1994).

15 The “unmediated” nature of Molly’s chapter has consistently been read as related to her gender, associated with a nature. See Valérie Bénéjam’s “Molly Inside and Outside ‘Penelope’ in Joyce, “Penelope,” and the Body” (2006). Bénéjam’s describes “Penelope” as “the final aria or clou of [Molly’s] unmediated voice in the end” (64). See also Jean Kimball’s Odyssey of the Psyche: Jungian Patterns in Joyce’s Ulysses (1997).
chapter, empire hardly (if ever) seems to enter her head. While Molly uses certain localized terms and even ponders the idea of what it means to be Irish (“Poldy not Irish enough” (748)), we have the sense throughout that nations are, essentially, all the same to her. That is, it does not seem to matter whether it is “the Black Watch with their kilts” or “the 10th hussars…or the lancers O the lancers theyre grand or the Dublins that won Tugela” or “that lame sailor” because each of these captures and then loses her attention in equal measure (749, 747). This is less the product of Molly’s comparatively cosmopolitan upbringing outside Ireland, or the ridiculous notion of feminine consciousness, but rather something much broader at play, especially in moments she seems to focus on inanities.16

Particularly, we see how her thoughts are determined by the mediations of capitalism both in the present and in her past. Where Dublin seems to generally move quite slowly, even suggesting stagnation at certain moments, Molly’s thoughts represent a quickened pace, giving us the sense that each idea or notion has equal weight with all others (with, perhaps, the exception of her relationship with Bloom, a conundrum she returns to frequently). When, for instance, she thinks of Boylan and their affair, we see her thoughts construct associations between things whose only relationship is circulating capital:

well he could buy me a nice present up in Belfast after what I gave him they’ve lovely linen up there or one of those nice kimono things I must buy a mothball like I had before to keep in the drawer with them it would be exciting going round with him shopping buying those things in a new city better (749)

We see, in the passage, not only concepts particular to the epoch of capitalism, tourism—“going round… in a new city”—and also “shopping buying those things,” but also the availability of imported goods which are imagined via exchange value, or in relation to their “value”

16 See Philip Herring’s “Toward an Historical Molly Bloom,” Modern Fiction Studies 45:3 (1978) and Jonathan Quick’s “Molly Bloom’s Mother,” ELH 57:1 (1990) for more on Molly’s family lineage.
equivalents—“linen…or one of those nice kimono things.” These mediations inflect, too, her social relationships. That is, her sense that she wants Boylan to buy her something as a kind of recognition of their sexual encounter or his feelings for her is as much about the difficulty for women, not yet fully incorporated into a labor force, to get money (as Zoe and Bella do) as it is about the way that exchange mediates individuals’ understanding of their relation to one another within a capitalist system.

More concretely, in the context of a world market, a formally totalizing narrative takes on a new meaning. As Norbert Trenkle argues, “asocial sociality, by definition, disintegrates into countless particularities” (“Struggle” 214). Molly’s soliloquy, in its presentation of seemingly unfiltered thoughts, but also in its content, shows us the mediations of capitalism—“money, exchange, and private property”—which prevent consciousness from discerning the actual relationships that determine not just the social world, but individual experience of it (“Mediation” 374). Molly’s conclusion, a kind of addition to her final words “yes I said yes I will Yes,” is a simple one, befitting the attempt of individual consciousness to negotiate these immense complexities: “the world is divided in any case if its going to go on I want at least two other good chemises” (750). We see, here, Adorno’s notion not only that “in an individualistic society loneliness is socially mediated and so possesses a significant historical content” (Aesthetics 158) but also that, like Stephen, Molly’s place in relation to the totality or “the suggestion that the world is unknowable” is a potential “moment of knowledge” (162).

In the end, then, I read determinism, a much-maligned Marxist term, as a way to imagine the community of Dublin, and individual consciousness inside it, in relation to capital. We find, then, that determinism in Ulysses helps us to see “The historically variable problem of 'the individual and society…in that 'society' becomes an abstraction, and the collective flows only
through the most inward channels (Williams 246). In other words, I find consciousness and interiority is always, in *Ulysses*, examined against the background of a determinant economic and historical condition, one marked by its near distance from centers of capital accumulation, which evinces their deep relation.
Works Cited and Referenced


