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In contemporary culture the term network has become firmly associated with computer circuits, and the global forms of communication exchange made possible by our new digital economy. Amidst all the hype, and the marvelling at the speed of communication, or the numbers following a celebrity’s twitter account across the globe, it is easy to forget that there are other forms of network. As the various essays in this collection illustrate, networks provide the foundations for cultural, social and economic life, whether we look at the circulation of pirated editions, the interconnections of Victorian industrial success and the slave trade, or the intersections of Eastern and Western Europe in Herta Müller's work. Many scholarly projects are now addressing the networks of the past, such as the Oxford based “Cultures of Knowledge” project (www.culturesofknowledge.org), or “Networking the Republic of Letters, 1550-1750” which aims to track the extraordinary correspondence cultures of the early modern world, when figures such as Samuel Hartlib or Jan Amos Comenius maintained huge epistolary networks which spread across both Eastern and Western Europe.

I am also running a project which explores networks, in both contemporary and historical perspective. “Constructing Scientific Communities: Citizen Science in the 19th and 21st Centuries” brings together work with the world’s largest online platform for citizen science, Zooniverse (www.zooniverse.org) with research into community forms of involvement in science in the Victorian period. Zooniverse started in 2007 when astrophysicists in Oxford, overwhelmed by the sheer size of the data they needed to process, with images of 900,000 galaxies produced by the Sloan Digital Sky Survey, set up an online project to call on members of the public to help with the task of morphological classification. The success was immediate and stunning, with 150,000 contributors producing more than 50 million classifications in the first year. The platform has grown since then, with numerous other astronomy projects, but also ones in biology, such as “Snapshot Serengeht”, where citizen scientists are asked to identify animals as they appear on photographs taken by cameras placed across the Serengeht. What distinguishes this work from mere crowd sourcing is that the 'citizens' are asked to contribute directly to the research, and in the case of the astronomy projects, major discoveries have been made by online participants. More recently Zooniverse has extended into humanities projects such as “Old Weather” where reading old ships’ logs can contribute to our understanding of weather patterns in the past, and hence to questions of climate change in the present. For our
own project we have set up “Science Gossip” where participants are asked to identify images in nineteenth-century science magazines, and “Orchid Observers”, in conjunction with the Natural History Museum in London, which involved working with the amateur naturalist communities to set up and design the project. Participants contribute photographs of orchids, and their flowering times are then measured against nineteenth-century records from the Museum’s archives which citizens also transcribe, thus giving us further insight into climate change.

All this might seem a far cry from my usual work on Victorian literature and science, so why are we doing all this? In part, because I am fascinated by the parallels between the Zooniverse community, with their 1.3 million participants worldwide, and the networks and communities created in the nineteenth century by local scientific societies and their journals. The scale and format are clearly radically different, but there is much to be learnt from exploring these early networks of communication at a period before science was harshly divided into “professional science” and that of “amateurs”. At the heart of the project lies the scientific periodical. At the beginning of the 19th century there were around 100 scientific journals, but by the end one estimate suggests there were around 10,000 titles worldwide. Apart from a few major titles, little work has been done on these journals, but they played a major role in facilitating the growth of science in this period. They also help us understand the interconnections between local and international science, as well as patterns of social and geographical participation.

One particular area of interest we are pursuing is that of the large networks of scientific observers in the latter part of the century, such as the British Rainfall Organisation, set up by George J. Symons. He ran this network between 1860 and his death in 1900, when over 3000 observers were involved across the British Isles, each sending in detailed daily readings, whatever the weather. Symons published an annual compilation of results, but also the *Monthly Meteorological Magazine*, which permitted observers to exchange views and information, and to develop their theories, in much the same way that the “Talk” fora operate in today’s Zooniverse projects. Another large scale project was the network created by the entomologist Eleanor Ormerod, who drew together observers from across the country and beyond, to contribute to her annual reports on the "Injurious Insects", insects which threatened crops or livestock. Hers is a colourful tale, of a woman entering science on her own terms (she was independently wealthy) to become the leading UK expert on harmful insects, consulted by governments at home and abroad, but of course not awarded the recognition of an FRS or official post. Her networks extended from the schoolchildren she trained in pest eradication to learned societies and government advisors, from America to China. Virginia Woolf devoted an excellent short story to
Ormerod, although its placement in a series on “Lives of the Obscure” scarcely does justice to the almost celebratory status Ormerod held in late-Victorian society.

Why should such work be undertaken in a literary department? In part the answer must be because the focus is on language, and the ways in which journals, both of local and national constituencies, worked to create communities, both “imagined” in Benedict Anderson’s sense, and actual. Local natural history societies, for example, would send copies of their journal to their counterparts, both within the UK and abroad, so that a lively system of exchange developed. Many of the magazines were devoted to science and art in equal measure, undercutting our assumptions of appropriate content which have been nurtured by decades of specialised science journals, whose content is accessible only to a narrowly trained expert audience. Citizen science is helping to open up those doors, promoting once again a wider involvement in the realm of science, and also redefining what it means to 'do' science. In an excellent example of cross-period fertilisation, one of the participants in our “Science Gossip” projected highlighted for the community an address in the *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* 1854, delivered by the Reverend Jackson at a Conversazione to celebrate the founding of the society. Jackson suggests that the aim of the society is “that of effecting by the cooperation of many, a task which you will not easily find one person fit to undertake alone.” He continues, “it needs no oracle to tell you, that many are better than one, when hard work is to be done.” The rhyme and rhythm of those final phrases are almost those of a hymn, introducing both a moral and religious tone into the address. Yet it clearly spoke to our “citizen scientist” a century and a half later, capturing the sense so strongly felt across this online community that they are united in a large enterprise, in which each individual contribution plays its part. Our project will continue to illuminate, we hope, the construction and operation of scientific networks, both in the Victorian period and our own digital age.

Constructing Scientific Communities: Citizen Science in the 19th and 21st Centuries ([www.conscicom.org](http://www.conscicom.org)) is based at the Universities of Oxford and Leicester, and works in partnership with the Natural History Museum, London; the Royal College of Surgeons of England, and the Royal Society. It is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.
Editors are untethered workers, sharing professional space within the interdependent worlds of authors and printers but inhabiting neither; their guiding objective is the clarity of authorial content. How do editors achieve this objective while also successfully negotiating between, and aligning, these two worlds to satisfy their respective expectations? More specifically, what devices do editors utilise to communicate effectively between them to benefit the transmission of content? One vital way that editors strive to achieve clarity of content is through their interpretation and implementation of editorial standards as delineated in their style guides. In early-modern England, these were generally referred to as printers’ manuals or grammars, notable examples of which are Joseph Moxon’s *Mechanick Exercises or, The Doctrine of handy-works. Applied to the art of printing* (1683) and John Smith’s *The Printer’s Grammar* (1755).

The editorial standards provided in *The Printer’s Grammar*, which was printed by Caleb Stower in 1808 and which reproduced and built on the editorial legacies of Moxon and Smith, were commonplace in the nineteenth century. These standards undoubtedly informed Thomas Dunham Whitaker’s editorial decisions and presentation of his 1813 edition of William Langland’s *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, or *Visio Willi de Petro Plouhman*. To appreciate the extent of this influence, this essay presents a comparative textual analysis of Whitaker’s 1813 text with his contemporaneous style guide, Stower’s *The Printer’s Grammar*. The specific purpose of this is to bring, using Kantian terminology, the “disinterested delights” of Whitaker and Stower together. Through an examination of first Whitaker’s usage of blackletter and red ink, and then his punctuation style in his commentary, or “paraphrasing”, this paper will demonstrate how Whitaker’s interpretative but practical application of contemporary editorial practice assured clarity of authorial content—more specifically, it enabled his presentation of Langland’s fourteenth-century living history to his nineteenth-century readers. Simply put, such comparative textual analysis exemplifies Whitaker and Stower’s shared editorial network in practice.

Jocelyn Hargrave is a final-year PhD candidate and recipient of an Australian Postgraduate Award in the Literary and Cultural Studies Program at Monash University. Her PhD thesis, entitled ‘Style matters: the influence of editorial style on the publishing of English’, investigates the evolution of editorial practice in England from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries and its impact on the publishing of content. Her first article based on her doctoral research, ‘Joseph Moxon: a re-fashioned appraisal’, has been published in the September 2015 issue of the journal *Scripts & Print*. Prior to this, she worked in educational publishing for sixteen years, fourteen as an editor.
Stower, McCreery and Kant: the creation of an editorial network

Little is known, or published, about printer Caleb Stower (1779–1816). The person who provides a glimpse into Stower’s historical circumstances is his contemporary, Charles H. Timperley (1794–1869). In A Dictionary of Printers and Printing, Timperley dedicates a deferential paragraph to Stower, whom he describes as “a very ingenious and industrious printer” (Timperley 864). Originally from Taunton, in Somersetshire, Stower established his “first [...] business in Paternoster-row, London”; before his death on 23 May 1816, Stower relocated to Hackney and “carried on a respectable business” (864). No specific dates are supplied, however.

Timperley enumerates Stower’s publications in his Dictionary, though curiously identifies him only as their author: “Typographical Marks used in correcting Proofs explained and exemplified, 8vo. 1805. The Compositor’s and Pressman’s Guide to the Art of Printing, royal 12mo. 1808. The Printer’s Grammar, 8vo. 1808. The Printer’s Price Book, 8vo. 1814” (864). While Stower unquestionably authored these publications, he was also their editor and printer. The imprint on the title page of the second edition of Typographical Marks, published in 1806, labels Stower as the printer: “London: Printed by C. Stower, Paternoster-Row”. Slightly differently, the first edition of The Compositor’s and Pressman’s Guide states: “London: Printed by the Editor, 32, Paternoster-Row”, which mirrors the first edition of The Printer’s Grammar, published in the same year. The only publication produced at the Hackney premises, The Printer’s Price Book not only confirms Stower as author and publisher but also designates him as editor, an ambiguity perhaps unwittingly perpetrated by the earlier imprints. The title page of The Printer’s Price Book details the following: “By C. Stower, Editor of the Printer’s Grammar. London: Printed by the Editor, Hackney, for C. Cradock and W. Joy, Paternoster-Row”.

Research to uncover any other publications not included in Timperley’s brief biography of Stower yields a noteworthy discovery: Stower had established premises in Charles Street, Hatton Garden, Holburn, before moving to Paternoster Row. Here, Stower appears to have worked exclusively as printer. His earliest publication found to date is The Use of Life and its End, a sermon commemorating Caleb Stower, a clothier, written by Joshua Toulmin and published in 1804.¹ The following year, Stower printed “the eight-page Dialogue between Mrs Knowles and Dr Johnson”, as well as “reissued Knowles’s Compendium of a Controversy of a Water Baptism, written more than 40 years before” (Jennings 155–56). From this it would appear that Stower relocated from Taunton, Somersetshire, to Charles Street, Hatton Garden, some time

¹ Caleb Stower, clothier, appears to be a relative of Caleb Stower, printer; however, the nature of their relationship has not been defined (Humphreys 681).
before 1804, where his wholly commercial printing endeavours focused on religious publications; moved to Paternoster Row closely afterwards, where he combined commercial imperatives with his personal, authorial interests—the print trade, specifically the professional lives of compositors and printers; and then established his final business in Hackney between 1808 and 1814, where he continued to concentrate on the print trade until his death in 1816.

From the outset, Stower is unequivocal regarding his manual's intentions: he intends “to convey a practical knowledge of the Art of Printing” (Stower, *The Printer's Grammar* v). Notwithstanding his manual's typographical title, Stower creates this expectation vividly by featuring an extract from John McCreery's *The Press, a Poem. Published as a specimen of typography*, published in 1803 (McCreery 23), on the title page of *The Printer's Grammar*:

```
Aided by thee—O Art sublime ! our race
Spurns the opposing bonds of time and space,
With Fame's swift flight to hold an equal course,
And taste the stream from Reason's purest source,
Vice and her hydra sons, they powers can bind,
And cast in Virtue's mould the plastic mind.
```

McCreery's flamboyant hyperbole is striking on first reading the extract; however, beyond his words is a Kantian philosophy representative not only of the Enlightenment but also of Stower's professional mindset. The visual textual markers to be briefly considered here are 'sublime', 'Reason', 'taste' and 'Art'.

According to Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790), the “sublime [...] cannot be contained in any sensuous form, but rather concerns ideas of reason” (76). Eva Schaper encapsulates this well for the twenty-first-century reader in her article "Taste, sublimity and genius: The aesthetics of nature and art": she writes, “[the] sublime resides in us, in the powers of the human mind to rise above what threatens to engulf or annihilate us [...] the triumph of our rational sensible nature” (382). The definition of the word 'reason' therefore is the power of the mind to think or understand in a logical way, without sentiment. Kant extends this treatment to Art and nature and humanity's capacity to 'taste' them. By definition, taste is “the capacity for judging something to be beautiful on the basis of an entirely ‘disinterested’ delight” (Kant 89). While beauty and the sublime apply differently—beauty is “an object in regard to its form”; and the sublime is the formlessness or limitlessness of an object (Schaper 382)—humanity's analyses of these depend on aesthetic or 'reflective' judgement, which is empirical; that is, “where the particular is given and the rule or concept under which it falls has to be found or discovered” (Schaper 369).
As previously mentioned, Stower’s stated objective for *The Printer’s Grammar* is “to convey a practical knowledge of the Art of Printing”. Stower reinforces his practical approach to his Art when he acknowledges in his introduction the contributions of others, those notably employed in the print trade: his “principal obligations and thanks are due to some of the most respectable master-printers of the metropolis, for the readiness they have at all times evinced” (Stower, *The Printer’s Grammar* v). Among those attributed are John McCreery (1768–1832), “the intelligent author and printer of an elegant poem entitled ‘the Press’, published as a specimen of typography”, who assisted Stower with his article “Fine Printing” placed in the appendices; Joseph Nightingale (1775–1824), “author of a ‘Portraiture of Methodism’, who holds the situation of Reader in one of [Stower’s] largest printing-offices” and who assisted with “the principal part of that ‘On the Qualifications of a Reader or Corrector of the Press’”; and printer Richard Taylor (1781–1858), whose name forms part of the still-current Taylor & Francis and who “obligingly favoured [him] with a few observations on the Greek, intended to assist compositors and readers who are not Greek scholars” (Stower, *The Printer’s Grammar* vi–vii).

Stower’s *Printer’s Grammar* is therefore a “practical application of reason” (Kant 7–8), a ‘disinterested delight’. Adapting Kantian rhetoric to provide an editorial viewpoint, the passion for the sublime, of the limitlessness of content and achieving its purity, is tempered by the interpretative use of editorial reason. Hence, the application of Kantian philosophy by McCreery in his long poem *The Press* and Stower in *The Printer’s Grammar*, which was in turn interpreted and practised by Whitaker (which is evidenced below), created an editorial network through which authorial content could be negotiated.

**Stower and Whitaker: the editorial network in practice**

Based on the C text of *The Vision of Piers Plowman* by English poet William Langland (c. 1330–c. 1386), Lancastrian vicar and editor Thomas Dunham Whitaker (1759–1821) published in 1813 his edition, lengthily entitled *Visio Willi De Petro Plouhman: Item Visiones Ejusdem De Dowel, Dobet, Et Dobest, or, the Vision of William Concerning Peirs Plouhman, and the Visions of the Same Concerning the Origin, Progress, and Perfection of the Christian Life*. Its publication occurred more than two hundred years after Robert Crowley published his first edition of the B text in 1550; Crowley’s second edition appeared the following year. Owen Rogers’s reprint of Crowley was published in 1561 (Brewer 7, 20, 37; Cole and Galloway xiv; Dahl 66; Hanna 38; Matthews 90; Schmidt xviii).
Visio Willi de Petro Plouhman has been acknowledged as the first recognised scholarly edition of Piers Plowman (Brewer 35), owing to the inclusion of a comprehensive introduction in the preliminaries; a commentary, or paraphrasing translation of Langland's medieval vernacular, at the bottom of each page (see Figure 1); and notes in the end matter, providing pertinent historical information and explanations for complex pieces of translation. Whitaker’s critical departure is first evidenced on the title page, where he states that his text is “printed from a manuscript contemporary with the author, collated with two others of great antiquity, and exhibiting the original text”. Next, readers encounter a scathing review of his predecessor’s B text in the introduction: “Crowley’s editions of the Visions are printed from a MS of late date and little authority, in which the division of the passus’s [sic] is extremely confused, and the whole distribution of the work perplexed” (Langland and Whitaker xix). Whitaker does concede that Crowley’s edition was hampered by the difficulties inherent in the original text: “The work is altogether the most obscure in the English language, both respect to phraseology, to the immediate connection of the author’s ideas, and to the leading divisions of the subject” (xix). However, the implied criticism here is that Crowley neglected to resolve these issues, and that they remained unresolved until Whitaker produced his critical edition: “In this edition the first of these difficulties, it is hoped, will be removed by the glossary, the second the commentary, and the third, at least diminished, by the following attempt at an analysis of the entire work” (xix). Whitaker provides this passus-by-passus analysis directly after articulating this objective (Langland and Whitaker xix–xxx). In this way, Whitaker promotes the authority of his text over Crowley’s own. He reinforces his authority shortly afterwards when he contrasts the manuscripts he used to compile his edition with those selected by Crowley. While Crowley’s manuscripts derived from “lower authority”, Whitaker acquired his through significantly more collegial means: “To the friendship of Mr Heber the present Editor has been indebted for two MSS of these Visions, severally marked in the notes A and B; and to the kindness of Mr Copleston for a third, belonging to Oriel College in Oxford” (Langland and Whitaker xxxi).

Appearing five years after Stower’s Printer’s Grammar, Whitaker employs a similar empirical, disinterested approach to that of Stower. His delight in his content is representative of the movement from the Enlightenment to Romantic ideology: a renewed interest in medieval literature, no longer disdainful of the past (Brewer 26–7; Stock 538); his endeavour is purity of living history, of “introducing readers to Langland on Langland’s own terms” (Kelen 124). That is, Whitaker desired to present Langland’s fourteenth-century text as the author originally intended but in a fashion that would be appreciated by his nineteenth-century audience. He communicates this later in his introduction, when he reiterates his objectives:
Figure 1 First page of Passus I of Thomas Dunham Whitaker’s *Visio Willi de Petro Plouhman*, featuring the medieval vernacular body text typeset using blackletter, specific applications of red ink and Whitaker’s translation of the medieval vernacular under the heading “Paraphrase” to accommodate his nineteenth-century audience.

*Reproduced from the print version held at Fisher Library, University of Sydney Library, Australia.*
first, to disentangle the whole plan of the visions, which had never been attempted before; secondly, to lay open the obscurities, and to reconcile the apparent inconsistencies of the allegory; afterwards, to clear the connection of the author's ideas and the transitions from one argument to another; and, lastly, to trace innumerable allusions, of which, from their fugitive and temporary nature, at the distance of more than four centuries, many must, after all, be abandoned as hopeless. (Langland and Whitaker xl)

However, Whitaker is mindful of applying reason to his aesthetic presentation of living history; certainly, his is an “unmapped journey” (Justice 55) as the first scholarly edition of Piers Plowman. Tempering this living history is exercised through his interpretative application of editorial practice. For example, when describing the purpose of his commentary, Whitaker writes: “This part of the work, the single use of which was perspicuity, has been written with the greatest possible simplicity of style, as well as with a certain air of antiquity, which suited the subject and the text” (Langland and Whitaker xl). Whitaker’s usage of blackletter and red ink, together with his punctuation style, exemplify this further.

In regard to blackletter, Stower makes his opinion very clear in the Printer’s Grammar:

It is descended from the Gothic character, and is therefore by others termed Gothic. It is now abolished in England, except in very few instances; and even in acts of parliament it is, in a great measure, dispensed with. Its extinction altogether cannot be regretted by printers, to whom it is more expensive than Roman or Italic, its broad face requiring an extraordinary quantity of ink, which always gives the best coloured paper a yellow cast, unless worked with that of a superior quality. (Stower, The Printer’s Grammar 41)

Nicolas Barker confirms in his article “The Morphology of the Page” that “black letter’,... which was first adopted by English printers for vernacular texts”, was “[a]lready rare by the seventeenth century” (250). Therefore, it is not surprising that Whitaker’s edition, “which faithfully represented the author’s original” (Dahl 66) by reproducing Langland’s C text entirely in blackletter in its medieval vernacular (see Figure 1), received condemnation for being “barbarous”, too expensive and “inaccessible” to readers (Brewer 45). One notable nineteenth-century English critic is Isaac D’Israeli (1766–1848), who wrote in the first volume of Amenities of Literature, published in 1841, that the text “must remain a sealed book. The last edition of Dr Whitaker, the most magnificent and frightful volume that was ever beheld in black letter, was edited by one whose delicacy of taste unfitted him for this homely task” (D’Israeli 303; Brewer 45). Furthermore, D’Israeli admitted that “[much] was expected from this splendid edition”;
nonetheless, “the subscription price was quadrupled, and on its publication every one would rid himself of the mutilated author” (D’Israeli 303). However, Whitaker’s Romantic aesthetic, albeit expensive to produce and purchase, was unquestionably nostalgic, a “yearning to touch history” (Justice 56), to represent Langland’s authorial intention in its purest form and thereby reveal early-modern England’s literary origins (Brewer 29).

While Stower does not mention red ink or its application in The Printer’s Grammar, Joseph Moxon describes the two kinds of red used in typesetting for different text types in his Mechanick Exercises (1683): he states that vermillion “is the deepest and purest Red, and always used to Books of Price”. In contrast, “Red-Lead is much more faint and foul, and though more used than Vermillion, yet used only to Books of Vulgar Sale and Low price” (Moxon and De Vinne 330). Owing to the vividness of the red ink on the page (see Figure 2, for example) and the text’s elaborate presentation overall, it can be assumed that the printer of Whitaker’s edition, Joseph Harding, used a red more similar to vermillion than red-lead.

The function of red ink traditionally served to separate certain textual elements from the main text. According to Margaret Smith, this “textual articulation” was a hierarchical “system within a book that signals to the reader the structure of the text and the relationships of parts of a text to each other” (Smith, “Red as a Textual Element” 187–88). In regard to Piers Plowman, specifically Oxford’s Corpus Christi College’s MS 201, an early fifteenth-century scribal manuscript of the poem, Noelle Phillips explains that the scribes applied red ink to accent “the voices of the text: public voices, unstable and shifting voices, the corrupt voices of flatterers, the importance of mutual dialogue” (Phillips 440), thereby separating and emphasising these voices from the body text. Later in her article, Phillips observes more generally that red rubrication “directs readers’ attention and privileges certain ideas and characters; because it influences one’s visual absorption of the page, it also shapes the reading experience as a whole” (Phillips 445). However, similar to blackletter, the usage of red ink petered out during the sixteenth century when printing monochromatic texts became standard, with the temporary exception of, for example, liturgical and legal books (Smith “Red as a Textual Element” 188). Why then does Whitaker employ this anachronistic textual element?

Whitaker faithfully utilises red ink in its traditional sense, as described by Margaret Smith and Noelle Phillips, to not only enhance the reading experience but also to present Langland’s living history in a similar manner to his scribal predecessors. As Phillips explains: “The way the scribe’s style mimics and modifies Langland’s own [...] suggests his interest in presenting his version of the poem as both authoritative and authorial” (445). Whitaker employs
Figure 2 Page 8 of Passus I of Thomas Dunham Whitaker’s *Visio Willi de Petro Plouhman*, featuring red ink for Latin text, which is also the direct speech of personified Conscience, the names of God (“Criste”, “Lorde”) and the place name “Malverne”.

*Reproduced from the print version held at Fisher Library, University of Sydney Library, Australia.*
red ink to separate specific textual elements from the body text, such as Latin scriptural text, quotations and the various voices in dialogue—that is, direct speech. For example, Figure 2 features red ink for Latin scriptural text, which is also the direct speech of personified Conscience who is providing instruction for king and clergy (Langland and Whitaker 8). However, this employment of red ink also encompasses, and symbolises, Whitaker’s application and interpretation of editorial standards, namely italics, from both the nineteenth century and earlier. For the first, italic’s function is to convey textual emphasis or importance; for the second, it both communicates emphasis and distinguishes proper nouns from general body text—that is, prioritising certain voices over others and highlighting place names. It is through the latter application that Whitaker further places his readers in closer proximity to Langland’s living history.

In regard to nineteenth-century application of italics, Stower writes in The Printer’s Grammar that italics served as a “more elegant mode of introducing extracts within inverted commas, and poetry and annotations in a smaller-sized type”, and “often in the displaying of a title-page, or distinguishing the head or subject-matter of a chapter from the chapter itself”; additionally, italics was “made use of to mark emphatical sentences” (Stower, The Printer’s Grammar 39; see also Bray 108). Stower derived his instruction on italics from John Smith’s own Printer’s Grammar, in which he detailed that the correct functions of italics were:

- for varying the different Parts and Fragments, abstracted from the Body of a work—for passages which differ from the language of a Text—for literal citations from Scripture
- for words, terms, or expressions which some authors would have regarded as more nervous; and by which they intend to convey to the reader either instructing, satyrizing, admiring, or other hints and remarks. (Smith, The Printer’s Grammar 13)

For a contemporary definition of the word emphasis, John Greenwood’s An Essay towards a Practical English Grammar, published in 1711, is instructive: “An Emphasis is used for the Distinction of such Word or Words, wherein the force of the Sense doth more peculiarly consist, and is usually expressed by putting such kind of Words into another Character, as the Italick, &c.” (Greenwood 226–27; see also Bray 111).

Understanding italic’s function in regard to textual emphasis and proper nouns prior to the eighteenth century requires referring to Moxon’s Mechanick Exercises. He explained that body text typeset in roman requires proper nouns to be set in italic, and body text in italic necessitates proper nouns in roman; words of “great Emphasis” are typeset in italic and, depending on the distinction to be conveyed, sometimes start with a capital (Moxon and De Vinne 225–6). Not long after the publication of Mechanick Exercises, Robert Monteith confirmed
Moxon’s instruction on italics in *The True and Genuine Art, of Exact Pointing*, which was published in 1704: “Proper Names of Persons, Places, Dignitaries, Offices; &c. together with the Words of Foreign Languages” (15).

However, in 1676 Joseph Moxon authored and printed *Regulæ trium ordinum literarum typographicarum: or The rules of the three orders of print letters: viz. the roman, italick, English, capitals and small*. For this, he utilised architectural principles to illustrate literally how each letter is constructed and displayed. Examining *Regulæ trium ordinum literarum typographicarum* reveals that blackletter did not feature italic (for an example, see Figure 3); Whitaker’s edition is consistent with this observation: no instances of italics in blackletter are featured. How then did Whitaker communicate emphasis and distinguish proper nouns without italics?

Analysing *Visio Willi de Petro Plouhman* reveals Whitaker’s approach using red ink. Figures 1 and 2 provide examples of red ink employed for the place name “Malverne” (though Whitaker does not apply this to “hulles”), where Will, the weary main character, decides to rest one May morning and eventually falls asleep (Langland and Whitaker 1, 8). Figure 2 features red ink for the various proper names of God: “Criste” and “Lordes”; further examples are included in Figure 4: “Messias” and “God”. Figure 4 contains instances of red ink not only for Latin text but also for the proper name “Moses” and the personifications of “Mede” and “Conscience”; moreover, Whitaker highlights on this page the words “placebo and “dirige”—the Roman Catholic Church now labels these as the Vespers or Matins of the Dead (Kuhn 986). This latter example demonstrates Whitaker’s application of red ink for emphasis, which is verified by the italicisation of *placebo* and *dirige* in his commentary, or paraphrasing translation of the medieval vernacular, at the bottom of the page (Langland and Whitaker 61).

Considering the substantial use of blackletter and red ink in *Visio Willi de Petro Plouhman*, it is apparent why Whitaker’s very personal endeavour was commercially unsuccessful: considerably more ink was required for printing the text in blackletter and red ink in comparison to monochromatic Roman and italic, making the enterprise more expensive; moreover, two impressions were required, which meant the printing press was in use longer than for a monochromatic version similar to Crowley’s and Rogers’. This would have translated into fewer texts being printed and therefore fewer books being distributed and sold. However, given that Whitaker’s perceived intention was to touch living history, to represent Langland’s authorial intention in its purest form, it can be argued that he succeeded in this endeavour, at least, by employing visual typographical elements reminiscent of Langland’s lifetime.
Figure 3 Unnumbered end matter page featuring blackletter outlines from Joseph Moxon’s *Regulæ trium ordinum literarum typographicarum* (Don. e.679).

Reproduced from the print version held at the Bodleian Library, Oxford.
Figure 4 Page 61 of Passus VIII from Thomas Dunham Whitaker’s Visio Willi de Petro Plouhman, featuring red ink for the names of God (“Messias”, “God”), Latin text, the proper name of “Moses” and the personifications of “Mede” and “Conscience”. Additionally, the page includes italicised text of placebo and dirige in the paraphrasing text at the bottom of the page.

Reproduced from the print version held at Fisher Library, University of Sydney Library, Australia.
Editorially, Whitaker utilises a similar visual, living approach, yet the rules underlying this are consistent with those delineated in Stower’s *Printer’s Grammar*. Where his application differs—specifically, his “pointing”, or punctuation, style—actually further reveals Whitaker’s visual, living approach. The points to be considered here are colons, semicolons, inverted commas (or quotation marks), parentheses and em-rules (now termed *em dashes*, each physically measuring the length of the letter *m*). In general, according to Stower, “[all] the points, except the comma and the full stop, have a hair space placed between them and the matter to distinguish them” (*The Printer’s Grammar* 83), a technique demonstrated in *Visio Willi de Petro Plouhman* (see Figure 5). Therefore, how does Whitaker utilise each of the points in a visually editorial manner to express, and temper, Langland’s living history?

For the colon, Stower writes only: “The colon [...] has been superseded in almost every instance, either by the semicolon, ellipsis line, or metal rule, and in some cases the comma” (*The Printer’s Grammar* 83). However, texts from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, such as Whitaker’s *Visio Willi de Petro Plouhman*, manifest consistent, standard use of colons and thus prove Stower’s remark incorrect—not to mention the colon’s modern, and very necessary, persistence. Therefore, for a contemporaneous definition of the colon, it is necessary to refer to John Smith’s *Printer’s Grammar*. Smith writes: “[The colon] shews where the first part of a paragraph has been digested by Comma’s and Semicolons, for making observations, objections, or enlargement upon it, before the Full-point puts a stop to it” (Smith, *The Printer’s Grammar* 93). That is, the text after the colon features an elucidation, elaboration or further observation about the text that preceded the colon. The first two lines of paraphrasing text in Figure 6 demonstrate Whitaker’s non-conformist interpretative application of the colon that reflects his visual, living approach. It reads: “beheld all the wealth and woe of the world : together with its virtues and vices, truth and treachery” (Langland and Whitaker 2). While a comma here would be more accurate than a colon, because the items (wealth, woe, virtues, vices, truth and treachery) are sequentially listed, Whitaker has an agenda in mind: to bring to the reader’s attention and reinforce certain themes, and thereby engage the reader further into Langland’s textual world. The colon achieves this in two ways. First, the allocated pause for the colon is greater than that for the comma: Stower writes that the colons’ “allowed time is till the reader can count three” (*The Printer’s Grammar* 83), rather than the comma’s short pause of one count. Therefore, the reader is compelled here to pause to reflect rather than continue to read after a one-second pause. Second, the colon visually separates this remaining text from the preceding text in the sentence. Hence, Whitaker conveys more thematic emphasis through visual editorial means.
Figure 5 Page 18 of Passus II from Thomas Dunham Whitaker's *Visio Willi de Petro Plouhman*, with the paraphrasing text featuring hair spaces between such points as question marks, commas and semicolons.

*Reproduced from the print version held at Fisher Library, University of Sydney Library, Australia.*
Figure 6 Page 2 of Passus I from Thomas Dunham Whitaker’s *Visio Willi de Petro Plouhman*, featuring Whitaker’s non-conformist interpretative application of the semicolon, rather than the more traditionally correct colon, and inverted commas, or quotation marks.

*Reproduced from the print version held at Fisher Library, University of Sydney Library, Australia.*
Moving on to semicolons, Stower writes: “The semicolon is allowed double the space of time for its pause to the comma [...] it enforces what has been illustrated by the comma, and allows the reader an opportunity to acquire a perfect view of the sentence, before it is terminated by the full point” (The Printer’s Grammar 82). That is, the text after the semicolon is attached conceptually to the text that preceded it, so closely aligned that a full stop between them would negate the wider meaning; as Smith states: “[i]t keeps part of the argument together” (Smith, The Printer’s Grammar 92). However, the semicolon use in the fifth line of the paraphrasing text in Figure 6 does not conform to Stower’s rule, indicating Whitaker’s interpretative editorial application. It reads: “men of every condition, occupied in their several callings; some laboring long, and resting seldom” (Langland and Whitaker 2). If punctuated strictly according to Stower’s instruction, a colon would have been inserted here rather than a semicolon as the text after the semicolon contains observations about the “men of every condition”—that is, he identifies who these men are and judges their labours as virtuous or corrupt. It does not enforce the text before it but elucidates it. Why then the semicolon? While the semicolon certainly keeps each section of the sentence, or argument, together, the semicolon acts purely as a slight respite between the comparatively short start of the sentence and the longer cataloguing afterwards, which includes numerous commas. It also serves to pause the reader sufficiently enough to consider who these men might be before answering their silent query, but a pause not long enough to draw their own conclusions—they need to heed the text that follows.

For inverted commas, or quotation marks, Stower explains that they are “used to denote extracts or quotations from other works, in dialogue matter, or any passages or expressions not original” (The Printer’s Grammar 82). Whitaker appears to disrupt this rule in the second-last line of the paraphrasing text in Figure 6; the relevant text reads: “while many for the love of God, ‘live hard,’ and deny themselves” (Langland and Whitaker 2). Rather than the inverted commas designating text that is not original, it appears to denote text that has been given more or less verbatim. Moreover, similar to many modern-day editors, Whitaker utilises inverted commas to convey rhetorical emphasis visually. The paraphrasing text in Figure 7 provides further examples of inverted comma use consistent with what has so far been described; for example, “So ‘indirect’ a thing it is inwardly to covet to agree in all genders” and “But ‘relation rect’ is a rightful custom” (Langland and Whitaker 57). Furthermore, note the second sentence of the paraphrasing text in Figure 8: “He lived with love, the first of the cardinal virtues, and closing gates (hinges) of the kingdom of heaven” (Langland and Whitaker 7). This sentence is intriguing for two reasons: first, the earlier interpretation of Whitaker’s use of inverted commas to communicate a verbatim translation does not apply here—no inverted commas surround
Figure 7 Page 57 from Passus IV from Thomas Dunham Whitaker’s *Visio Willi de Petro Plouhman*, demonstrates how Whitaker’s upends Stower’s rule regarding quotation marks.

*Reproduced from the print version held at Fisher Library, University of Sydney Library, Australia.*
Figure 8 Page 7 of Passus I from Thomas Dunham Whitaker's *Visio Willi de Petro Plouhman*, featuring Whitaker's interpretative editorial application of parentheses.

*Reproduced from the print version held at Fisher Library, University of Sydney Library, Australia.*
“closing gates”; and second, Whitaker’s use of parentheses after this phrase, for “(hinges)”. Why no inverted commas? Was it perhaps an oversight? Perhaps Whitaker did not require more emphasis at this point? Perhaps the line would have appeared too “busy” with the parenthetical text following directly afterwards? Or perhaps his emphasis focused more on the parenthetical text than the translation? Having no answer to this quandary is frustrating, though no less exciting for its interpretative possibilities.

For parentheses, Stower explains that “[the] use of the parenthesis is to inclose such words or sentences of a period as make no part of the subject, yet at the same time strengthen the argument; which, however, would read smoothly on were the enclosed matter taken away” (The Printer’s Grammar 87). Simply put, the parenthetical text is not integral to the argument of the sentence but strengthens it; if removed, the sentence would still make sense. Whitaker’s text certainly conforms to this rule. Returning to the paraphrasing text in Figure 8, he inserts his commentary on the phrase “closing gates” within parentheses in order to strengthen his argument; they also serve to visually separate from, but also add to, the original text, emphasising his own interpretation for the reader (Langland and Whitaker 7). Other examples include: “For a great cat of the court (a king, now become a tyrant) overleapt them at pleasure” (9), “we shall go eastward to Heaven (the source of light)” (19), and “David himself (endeth ? defineth) it—as the sentence sheweth” (26). The latter example is significant as Whitaker expresses his uncertainty regarding his translation. The question mark ostensibly invites his readers to confirm his translation or suggest an alternative.

Lastly, Stower writes for the em rule, or today’s em dash: “The m-metal rule, though it cannot be denominated a point, is frequently used in peculiar works; sometimes as a substitute for the comma, at others for the colon; and is found particularly serviceable in rhapsodical writing, where half sentences frequently occur” (Stower, The Printer’s Grammar 83–4). In the second-last line of the middle paragraph in Figure 8, Whitaker inserts an em dash; it reads: “I will not impugn it, although love and learning ought to govern the great election—besides that conscience forbids me to plead against it for the church’s sake” (Langland and Whitaker 7). Any of the usages enumerated by Stower are applicable here, particularly the one relating to rhapsodical writing; however, once again, Whitaker provides a visual editorial distinction, or physical separation, here to impart further emphasis and meaning. Other examples include: “I do remember the words of David—and his sentence will not lie” (26) and “That is the gift which God bestoweth on all true men living—namely, grave to die an happy death, and great bliss thereafter” (55). For the first example, the em dash could substitute for a comma; for the second, a colon.
Conclusion

According to Immanuel Kant, but very simply described, the limitlessness of the sublime is tempered by the rational mind—it is a disinterested delight. Similarly, editing brings the authorial voice to a more pure intention; that is, the sublime limitlessness of content is being tempered by rational, editorial practices.

Thomas Dunham Whitaker’s Romantic medievalism is epitomised by presenting living history, by introducing William Langland to his nineteenth-century audience on Langland’s own terms. The delight and awe with which he perceives Langland’s content are unmistakeable in *Visio Willi de Petro Plouhman*, evidenced by the anachronistic blackletter and red ink and the text’s elaborate presentation. Therefore, how does Whitaker temper his personal connection with the sublime, with Langland’s living history, while simultaneously achieving clarity of content? He achieves these interdependent objectives through his negotiation within the editorial network—that is, his interpretative application of nineteenth-century editorial standards as delineated in Caleb Stower’s *Printer’s Grammar*, albeit often wilfully deviating from them to achieve his passionate vision.

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Writing to his epistolary friend and early supporter John Ballantine on 24 February 1787, Robert Burns expressed his excitement at the imminent publication of his Poems, Chiefly in The Scottish Dialect with characteristic self-deprecatory humour. The second appearance of Burns’ poetry “in guid black prent”, sold by William Creech in Edinburgh on 21 April, 1787, famously catapulted Burns into the social and cultural stratum of the nation’s most eminent literati. The edition proved hugely popular in Scotland, attracting more subscribers than anticipated and establishing the poet’s literary reputation through favourable reviews in the periodical press. In another letter to his trusted advisor and correspondent Mrs. Frances Anna Dunlop dated 22 March, 1787, Burns remarked on a possible “third” edition since “the second was begun with too small a number of copies—The whole I have printed is three thousand” (Ferguson and Roy 90). Indeed, William Creech, in collaboration with London printers A. Strahan and T. Cadell, arranged for another printing of Poems in the same year, further adding to the increasing fame and recognition of the so-called ‘Heaven-taught ploughman’ (Low 1).

Arun Sood recently submitted his PhD thesis on the reception and influence of Robert Burns in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth century United States of America. Arun’s doctoral project is attached to the AHRC-funded project ‘Editing Robert Burns For the 21st Century’, which will produce a multi-volume edition of Robert Burns's work – to be published by Oxford University Press. He also continues to moonlight as a freelance writer and videographer for a range of print and online media.
While Robert Burns entertained possible future patrons in the months following the 1787 Edinburgh and London editions, his volume, quite remarkably, was already being sold and advertised several thousand miles away, across the Atlantic Ocean in the early American Republic. Just three months after its publication in Edinburgh, bookseller John Reid advertised *Poems, Chiefly In The Scottish Dialect* in the New York-based *Independent Journal* on Saturday, 7 July 1787:

John Reid Bookseller and Stationer, Respectfully informs his Friends and the Public in general, that he has opened STORE, No. 17, Water-Street, nearly opposite the Coffee-House, where may be had a choice Collection of BOOKS (Painter 435).

Following this bold announcement, a considerable number of books were listed including, just under Seneca's *Morals*, Burns' *Poems, Chiefly in The Scottish Dialect*. A Scottish emigrant originally from Glasgow, it is likely that Reid arrived in New York with a stock of books from Scotland and set up shop in New York, a possibility bolstered by the fact that the *Independent Journal* regularly advertised books that were carried as cargo on ships arriving from Scotland. Thus, the transatlantic circulation of Burns' work had begun as early as July 1787. Unbeknownst to Burns, *Poems, Chiefly in The Scottish Dialect* was transported and repeatedly pirated in the United States following the 1787 publication of the Edinburgh edition, primarily due to—in addition to the poet's popularity among emigrant Scots—the absence of any international copyright legislation following the American Revolution. As this paper will subsequently discuss, the widespread reprinting and piracy of Burns' poetry in the early United States can be, partly, attributed to the geopolitical climate of post-revolutionary America. Unbound by law to pay royalties or seek editorial permission, networks of publishers were able to widely reprint, repackage and distribute the work of European writers. Burns' widespread fame and popularity on the American side of the Atlantic not only coincided with, but was a direct result of, timely convergences in mass media and print culture.

The evolution of twenty-first-century new media, abundant with global networks of instantly accessible shared information, has effected a wider critical re-examination of the origins, effects and naturalisation of media developments in past ages, such as the advent of the popular printing press in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Combined with recent scholarship, namely by William St. Clair in his book *The Reading Nation in The Romantic Period*, on the mass marketing and commodification of literature in the nineteenth century.

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These developments have provided the scope for a thorough reconsideration of the processes by which Robert Burns and his poetry became widely known and distributed in the United States. In his recording of “a spectacle unprecedented in the history of the world” (Ballantine 1), James Ballantine’s *Chronicle of the Hundredth Birthday of Robert Burns* notes that 61 celebratory events took place across the United States to commemorate the birth of Robert Burns in 1859. These multiple and simultaneous celebrations, diverse in their scale, location and appropriations, provide evidence of the widespread American fame and recognition of the poet by the mid-nineteenth century. Yet, questions over how and why Burns came to be so widely recognised and revered in the United States remain to be fully answered. The 2012 publication of *Robert Burns and Transatlantic Culture*, edited by Sharon Alker, Leith Davis and Holly Faith Nelson, helped shed further light on Burns’ reception and influence in the Americas, opening up new critical perspectives that continued to veer from dated Scottish ‘nationalist’ readings of the poet. However, a comprehensive bibliographic study of the numerous pirated editions in the United States is yet to be undertaken or discussed. This paper seeks to highlight the extent to which post-Revolutionary print networks reproduced and disseminated Burns’ poetry, consequently leading to the commemoration of the poet’s life and work later in the nineteenth century.

*Atlantic Crossing*

When considering the dissemination of Burns’ work in the Early Republic, it would be wrong to dismiss the influence of emigrants who travelled to North America clutching copies of his poems as they made the Atlantic crossing. Before making claims for the influence of pirated editions, it is important to briefly consider the manner in which Burns’ poetry first appeared on American shores.

Trading links in the late eighteenth century meant that Scottish merchants were regularly in contact with North American seaports, particularly Philadelphia, the main trading hub of the mid-Atlantic colonies. Historian Jacob M. Price notes that these trading links extended beyond commerce, and that news, books and political ideas were regularly exchanged back and forth across the Atlantic:

> The ministers, lawyers, teachers, artisans, the books, letters, ideas that made the ocean crossing from Scotland to North America in the eighteenth century went as freight in vessels bound upon other business. More often than not, these vessels were outward bound from the Clyde for the Chesapeake to bring home tobacco for all the North and West of Europe (Price 179).

It is likely that Burns’ *Poems* was often among the books making the ocean crossing that Price
refers to, as was the case with the bookseller John Reid who first advertised the Edinburgh edition in the United States as previously discussed. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that Burns was popular among traveling, transatlantic merchants. Just months after the first appearance of Burns’ poetry in Scotland, William Richardson, Professor of Humanity at the University of Glasgow, wrote a letter to his friend S. Rose stating:

One Burns a Plowman near Kilmarnock has lately published a volume of Poems that draw much attention. They are wonderful from a mere Plowman - and some of them pretty - but you will perhaps think that [illegible]. For the members of the Caledonian Hunt & the Glasgow Manufacturers & Merchants, [illegible] who never read a verse before in their days are all furiously fond of them... (“W. Richardson to S. Rose 1 Jan, 1787” MS 520/2).

A known member of Glasgow’s ‘Pig Club’, a social collective for aristocratic tobacco merchants, it is almost certain that Richardson was partly referring to colonial merchants in this letter, many of whom were trading in North America at the time. The fact that the merchants “never read a verse before in their days” yet “were furiously fond” of Burns also reveals that his poetry spoke to individuals who were usually less concerned with the Arts and more focused on commercial pursuits.

That Burns’ poetry appealed to transatlantic merchants is certainly one way his work was afforded quick passage across the ocean. Yet, it is also important not to over-emphasise the effects of this process of transmission. As Andrew Hook notes, emigration statistics, though useful in determining the movement of people, “hardly amount to proof” of any form of “cultural influence” (Hook 227). It was not the individual merchants who occasionally read Burns’ poems for pleasure that would shape the poet’s future reputation and influence in the United States, but rather, the entrepreneurial emigrant printers who subsequently pirated his poems for profit.

*American Copyright Laws & Profitable Proposals*

The relatively recent development of transatlantic literary studies as a discipline has continued to provide fresh perspectives on the dissemination and publication of literature between Europe and the Americas. In regard to the United States specifically, Claudia Stokes recently outlined how post-revolutionary American copyright laws, instituted in 1790, restrictively preserved authors’ rights within the nation’s boundaries and “neither protected the American author from unauthorized reprinting abroad nor guarded foreign authors from piracy within the United States” (Stokes 292).
On August 29, 1787, the *Independent Journal* in New York called on readers to subscribe for copies of a forthcoming American edition of Burns’ poems, stating that the “fame of this Author is spreading rapidly” and “the Merit of his Works is acknowledged by all who have had an opportunity of seeing them” (qtd in Painter 438). The proposal, printed by influential Scots emigrant printers John and Archibald Maclean (known professionally as J & A Maclean) is a convincing example of entrepreneurial book advertising, having promised potential subscribers that the “work will be printed on a new Type and good paper, in one handsome Volume Octavo” and that “Those who subscribe for twelve Copies, will have a thirteenth gratis” (Painter 438). Natives of Glasgow who moved to New York in 1783 to set up a publishing company, J & A Maclean were also editors of the *Independent Journal*, —which would famously be remembered for printing the first ‘Federalist Papers’—which urged citizens to ratify the United States Constitution. In addition to their politically-engaged journalistic pursuits, the printers, aware that Burns’ *Poems* were receiving an increasing amount of attention in the press, seized the opportunity to attract subscribers for an American edition. Interestingly, the advert also chose to include extracts from Henry Mackenzie’s unsigned essay in the Edinburgh-based literary magazine *The Lounger*, “the most influential contemporary account of Burns’s poetry” (Low 67), originally published in December 1786. The editors, undoubtedly with good commerce in mind, selected the parts of Mackenzie’s review that seemed most appropriate for their book proposal. Though J & A Maclean advertised their proposal as early as August 1787, the actual reprinting was delayed for over a year, most likely due to a lack of subscribers. This does not accurately suggest a lack of interest in the book, as matters may have been complicated by the increasing availability of the London and Edinburgh editions in America. The same advert was reprinted in New York’s *Daily Advertiser* and *New York Morning Post* between August and October 1787, yet it wasn’t until over a year later, in December 1788, that their edition finally appeared (Painter 442). However, while J & A Maclean were gathering subscriptions over the course of a year in New York, Peter Stewart and George Hyde had already started printing the first American edition in Philadelphia.

*The Philadelphia & New York Editions, 1788*

Peter Stewart and George Hyde produced a small, cheap printing of Burns’ *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* on poor-quality paper in Philadelphia, July 1788. The first advert for the edition came in the Philadelphia-based *Pennsylvania Packet*, with references to some of the individual poems that had appeared in the preceding year. While J & A Maclean’s proposals contained extracts from Henry Mackenzie’s unsigned review in *The Lounger*, the advert for the


There were also significant differences between the New York edition and the earlier Philadelphia publication. With no official or legally-binding imprints to follow, the pirated editions of Burns’ poetry that began to appear at the turn of the nineteenth century differed in quality, content and layout, a pattern which would continue throughout the nineteenth century as different publishers attempted to outdo each other with unique selling points, often in the form of ‘new’ poems or textual variants. J & A Maclean’s New York edition was printed on high quality paper and contained an engraving of Burns copied from the 1787 Edinburgh portrait. The editors also ‘introduced slight variations in mechanical details, and were careless about punctuation’ (Painter 445).

One of the most interesting variations was that the New York printers took the liberty of printing the full names of the politicians in Burns’ “Fragment” or “Ballad on the American War”. Burns was cautious to disguise the actual names of political figures in fear of persecution, and both the Edinburgh and Philadelphia editions omitted letters from their full titles as he had seemingly intended. However, in the New York edition, the sixteen names of prominent political figures from the American War were printed in full. Thus, with no danger of libel litigation, the pirated American editions contained small, yet significant, textual variations. While it is possible that J & A Maclean did this – bearing in mind the political inflection of their *Independent Journal* – with purposeful intent, it is more likely that the full names appeared due to careless editing. Nonetheless, the appearance of Burns’ “Fragment” in the New York edition, with political names in full, made no secret of where its political sympathies lay.

Another interesting addition to the New York edition was the inclusion of nine Robert Fergusson poems, tacked onto the final pages of the book (see Figure 1). Following Burns’ final poem “A Bard’s Epitaph”, Fergusson’s “An Ecolouge”, “The Farmer’s Ingle”, “Braid Claith”, “Hallow Fair”, “Ode to the Bee”, “On Seeing a Butterfly in the Street”, “Ode to Gowdspink”, “Caller Water” and “Epilouge Spoken by Mr. Wilson” were printed. In the *Independent Journal* of 12 July 1788, an advert stated that Fergusson’s poems made the New York edition more appealing:

This American Edition of Burns’ Poems will be ornamented with a HEAD of the Author, neatly engraved by Mr. Scott. Of Philadelphia, and, to render the Work more worthy of public patronage, will be added, without any additional Expence a number of POEMS selected from the Works of the celebrated R. Ferguson. [sic]
Figure 1: Burns, Robert. *Poems, Chiefly in The Scottish Dialect to which are added Scots Poems selected from the works of Robert Fergusson*. New York: J & A Maclean, 1788. Print.

This was, perhaps, J & A Maclean’s attempt at compensating subscribers who were still waiting for their copy after some months, and assuring them that the edition would surpass the earlier Philadelphia printing. That the advertisement describes Fergusson as “celebrated” also suggests American readers may have been familiar with his poetry, despite there being no known American re-printing of his earlier *Poems on Various Subjects*. As Fergusson’s work was a fixture in the Scottish periodical press, it is likely that individual poems also made their way to America via trading ships that carried news, books, and other reading matter. Perhaps most notably, the New York pirated edition was also the one owned by George Washington, although he would never live to see the birthday “Ode” written by Burns in his honour, which did not surface until 1873, when American bookseller Robert Clarke purchased a manuscript in London and subsequently transported it to Ohio.³

‘Legal’ Piracies

With both the Philadelphia and New York editions in circulation by the end of 1788, the two pirated editions began to spread throughout other states and were subsequently copied and sold by other printers and booksellers. By 1789 adverts for *Poems, Chiefly in The Scottish Dialect* appeared in Virginia, North Carolina, Massachusetts, Maryland and Rhode Island. The *Virginia Independent Chronicle* printed the following advert for Thomas Brend, a local bookseller:

He (Brend) has just come to hand a collection of Books on various subjects, all of which are American Editions, and many of them neatly bound and lettered, and the prices as low as any English book of the same size. Among them, in one neat Pocket volume, price only Six Shillings, Handsomely bound and lettered, (although the Edinburgh Copy sold for Six Shillings Sterling in blue Boards) POEMS, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect. By Robert Burns, the Celebrated Ayrshire Ploughman (Painter 453).

The emphasis on the books being priced ‘as low as any English book’ is telling. Book prices fluctuated depending on individual sellers, who, with no legal restrictions, had the right to advertise products for as much or as little as they pleased. An example of this can be found in a later advert in the same newspaper that offered the edition for ‘four shillings’ instead of six. This also reveals the accessibility of the book to potential readers, an accessibility that was not equaled in Britain. William St. Clair comments on the absence of intellectual property laws following the American Revolution:

One of the earliest results of the success of the American revolution was the tearing

down of the intellectual property structures which had favoured the London and Edinburgh industries [...] What was most innovative, indeed the single most important determinant of the reading of the new republic for nearly a century, is that the new American regime gave copyright protection only to the works of local American authors. Indeed it specifically excluded texts initially printed outside the United States [...] All the printed writings in English that had originated in Great Britain, old and new, were now available to be reprinted in the United States, as well as all the printed texts printed in any language in the rest of the world. The way was thus opened to a huge expansion of local printing (St. Clair 282).

The absence of legal restrictions resulted in a wave of Scottish and Irish printers arriving in Philadelphia and New York (the major hubs of the American printing press) in the late eighteenth century. John Reid, J & A Maclean, Peter Stewart and George Hyde—all Scottish expatriates—were a prime example of this, and seemingly wasted no time in reproducing and selling Burns' first book of poems at relatively little cost. The American laws—or their absence—also had other ramifications that played a vital part in the dissemination of other British poets in America. The prices of pirated British books were considerably lower than locally produced texts, meaning that Americans not only were liable to opt for such copies, but also that they had easier access to literature than their contemporaries across the ocean. William St. Clair goes as far to state that the works of Coleridge, Shelley and Keats “were available to mainstream readerships in the United States a generation before they reached such audiences in Britain” (St Clair 282).

While it would be merely suggestive to claim that this was also the case for Burns, the lack of intellectual property laws certainly played some part in the way his work was rapidly diffused throughout America. Moreover, lower prices meant that *Poems, Chiefly in The Scottish Dialect* was available to a broader audience, with socio-economic status playing less of a part (in regards to accessing books) than it did in Britain. This egalitarian aspect of the American editions, it seems, was resonant with some of the major themes in Burns' poems. After the initial two pirated editions, there would not be another American reprinting of *Poems, Chiefly in The Scottish Dialect* until 1798, two years after the poet's death (see Figure 2). However, both the New York and Philadelphia editions continued to be advertised in newspapers such as the *Herald of Freedom* (Boston), *New York Daily Gazette*, *Salem Gazette*, and *State Gazette of North Carolina* between 1790 and 1796 (Painter 452–454).
Figure 2. Burns, Robert. *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*. Philadelphia: Patterson & Cochran, 1798.

One other notable Burns-related piracy that occurred before the turn of the nineteenth century was an American edition of James Johnson’s *Scots Musical Museum* (edited by John Aitken, printed in Philadelphia in 1797). The dissemination of Burns’ songs in America had slightly different processes of transmission and thus cannot be used as evidence for arguing the effects of copyright laws on the distribution of books. The popularity of Scots songs in America preceded Burns, and many of the songs he did work on “arrived in the New World on the lips and fiddles of the early Scottish immigrants” rather than on the printed page. Scottish ballads often travelled to America anonymously, transforming and assimilating into American culture through oral and musical means (Roy 37). In the first volume of *The Robert Burns Song Book*, Serge Hovey notes that Scots songs “settled and evolved new variants in the Appalachians” (Hovey 12), using the example of the “Soldier’s Joy” which came to be regarded as a classic of the American fiddle canon, but was initially used by Burns for his cantata “The Jolly Beggars”. It is true that the oral and musical transmission of Scots songs should not be divorced from print culture. Naturally, the two cultural forms frequently overlapped, and while many of the songs featured in Aitken’s volume would have already been familiar to Scots emigrants, the signed songs by Burns may well have increased awareness of his hand in writing, collecting and reworking Scottish ballads. Thus, the piracy of sheet music could also, to some extent, be considered as further increasing Burns’ fame and stature across the Atlantic. Even prior to Burns’ popularity there is evidence to suggest that sheet music was produced and pirated as readily as novels, plays, and poetry. A year before the first American edition of *Poems* appeared, for example, a work by Alexander Reinagle titled *A Select Collection of the most favourite Scots Tunes. With variations for the piano forte or harpsichord* was being printed and sold in Philadelphia.

*Currie’s Works, Continuing Piracies & “The Ocean of Ink”*

By 1799, then, there had been at the very least five separately printed pirated editions of Burns’ work in the United States (if we are to include the Philadelphia reprinting of *The Scots Musical Museum*). Over the following decades, this number would multiply rapidly due to two main factors, the first being the continued absence of any international copyright laws in the United States, and the second the immense popularity and influence of James Currie’s *The Works of Robert Burns*, which included a full biography of the poet. First printed in 1800, Currie’s edition was hugely popular in Britain, going through approximately five editions and 10,000 copies by 1805, and an estimated twenty editions by 1820 (Leask 266). Just one year after it appeared in Britain, Thomas Dobson of Philadelphia produced the first pirated American
edition of *The Works of Robert Burns* in 1801. Three years later, a second American edition was printed in Philadelphia by William Fairbairn, and by 1815 there were four available editions of Currie’s work in Philadelphia alone. In addition to the pirated American editions, the frequency with which Currie’s edition was being reprinted in Britain meant that originals also made their way across the Atlantic, and into the hands of American booksellers and readers.

Peppered amongst Currie’s narrative of Burns were also American reprints of R.H. Cromek’s *Reliques of Robert Burns* (first printed in America in 1809), and both John Lockhart and Allan Cunningham’s versions of Currie’s *Works* (pirated in 1832 and 1834 respectively). Despite Lockhart and Cunningham’s ideological editorial revisions, they also borrowed directly from Currie’s original text. Consequently, most early nineteenth century American critical reviews of Burns, for better or worse, reveal some influence from Currie’s moralising edition. Critics have been quick to pick up on Currie’s rhetoric of moral blame that depicted Burns as a flawed individual responsible for his own demise. Yet, as Gerrard Carruthers and Pauline Mackay have recently pointed out in their essay “Re-reading James Currie; Robert Burns’s First Editor”, there is still much work to be done to fully understand Currie’s motivations for the edition and his consequential editorial choices. Regardless, the popularity of the Currie edition in Britain was mirrored across the Atlantic as result of repeated piracies and its influence on subsequent biographies which heavily borrowed from it (and were, incidentally, also to be widely pirated).4

If the last decade of the eighteenth century marked the first pirated editions of Burns’ poems in America, then the turn of the nineteenth century saw the dawn of multiple pirated biographies of the poet. This apparent response to a wider interest in Burns’ ‘life’ was, of course, tied to the burgeoning creation of a (literary) celebrity culture on both sides of the Atlantic; a development that undoubtedly had some impact on the posthumous fame of Burns in nineteenth-century America. Through his rustic self-fashioning and ability to craft intriguing personae, Burns was ripe for a popular market that had an increasing thirst for knowledge about the lives of poets. Indeed, nineteenth-century ‘literary celebrity’ has become a topic of increasing scholarly interest recently, with Byron usually being the focal point of research. Most recently Eric Eisner published *Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Literary Celebrity*, a critical work that followed and responded to both Ghislaine McDayter’s *Byromania and the Birth of Celebrity Culture* and Tom Mole’s edited collection, *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture, 1750–1850*.

Though differing by minor deviations in their subtitles, several books titled *The Poetical...*
Works of Robert Burns were to be published from 1804 onwards at an almost annual rate across several states, complete with a biographical prose introduction. With the legal freedom to print, edit, and repackaging British books, American publishers continued to produce their own idiosyncratic editions, often with new elements that offered up some original epithet or fresh piece of information about Burns (such as Benjamin Johnson’s “With the Author’s Life Written by Himself” in Philadelphia 1804 or Peter Stewart’s “Together with a new Appendix, and a Concise History of his Life” also in Philadelphia, 1807). Though Currie’s narrative continued to pervade these editions, they were not always pirated directly from his Works, which suggests that new editions from London were continuing to be carried (and subsequently copied) across the Atlantic. As new materials—in the form of letters, biographies, and poems—surfaced in Britain, it usually did not take long for profitable piracies to occur several thousands of miles across the Atlantic. By 1815, there had been approximately 22 independently printed, pirated versions of Burns’ poetry and by 1859, the centenary year of Burns’ birth, there was, rather astonishingly, over 140 estimated editions available to the reading public.

Conclusion

In her excellent critical analysis of the numerous debates and struggles over copyright reform in late-nineteenth-century America, Claudia Stokes asserts that writers continued to participate and organise “activism in support of international copyright legislation” well into the last decades of the century (Stokes 292). After the Civil War, the copyright movement emerged as a formally organised campaign, as famed writers such as Mark Twain, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Henry James, E. P. Roe, and Edmund Stedman became active members of the American Copyright League, which counted “over seven hundred members and presided over a lengthy campaign that included petitions, boycotts, and lobbying” (Stokes 292). Just as Burns had been subject to (albeit posthumous) piracy in the United States, American writers were also suffering from the effects of print networks in Britain. An 1887 pamphlet by Brander Matthews titled American Authors and British Pirates, for example, provided a meticulous catalogue of pirated American books for sale in Britain and further discussed the effects of piracy on writers such as Cooper, Hawthorne, and Longfellow. Indeed, when considering the transatlantic reception of British and American nineteenth-century writers and poets on both sides of the Atlantic, it is imperative to acknowledge the impact, whether negative or positive, of these influential print networks. In an earlier essay the outspoken Matthews, while discussing the effects of piracy in both Britain and the United States, complained in an almost exhausted tone:

The struggle to secure the protection of our laws for literary property produced by citizens of foreign countries has been long and wearisome. To some it may seem
fruitless. An ocean of ink has been spilt and a myriad of speeches made; and yet there are no positive results set down in black and white in the revisited Statues of the United States (Stokes 297).

The “ocean of ink” that Matthews refers to might easily, in hindsight, include the wide reprinting, piracy, and transatlantic distribution of Burns’ poetry in the United States. Undoubtedly, the poet’s meteoric rise to prominence in America, beginning with the first ‘American edition’ in 1788, by Peter Stewart and George Hyde of Philadelphia, was enabled by the absence of copyright legislation that could protect British authors in America and by a network of entrepreneurial printers (many of whom were emigrants already familiar with Burns’ work) who collectively reproduced and distributed altered editions of his poetry throughout the nineteenth century.

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Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* has, until recently, been read almost solely as an English novel depicting relations between different social and industrial groups in nineteenth-century England. Indeed, the cover of the 1970 Penguin edition introduces the text as: “primarily a study of the contrast between the values of rural southern England and the industrial north” and “a profound comment on the need for reconciliation among the English classes” (Gaskell, Penguin). This positioning of the novel “along the domestic axis” (Lee 2) is far from surprising, given that the events of the main plot and the narrative viewpoint are concretely fixed on English soil, with only brief second-hand accounts of activities abroad. Furthermore, the notion that the novel is concerned with “reconciliation” is justified by the apparent resolutions in the final chapters: a marriage between representatives of the “industrial north” and “rural” south, and the equalising of labour relations between a mill owner and his workers. While this conclusion and aforementioned interpretation of the novel may seem satisfactory when viewed within a national frame, such face-value acceptance is highly problematic, due to its failure to consider the complete global network of slavery and labour relations of the nineteenth-century fabrics industry.

Despite its preoccupation with the labour relations and power balance of the textiles industry, Gaskell’s text fails to devote any narrative space to the slaves who pick the cotton that underpins the entire process. This absence is worthy of analysis because Gaskell’s awareness of contemporary slavery¹ and the glancing references to international issues in the text situate such a silence as an outright exclusion, rather than a mere oversight. I argue that this omission constitutes a cognitive fragmentation of the cotton industry, which separates, and thus absolves, the profits of English mill owners, mill workers and consumers from the physical realities of slave labour. This estrangement of slavery from British industry is not unique to Gaskell, but reflects the attitude of many of her contemporaries, including high profile abolitionists, as well as echoing public opinion at large. Examination of contemporary newspaper articles reveals that

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¹ Gaskell is known to have met and corresponded with high profile abolitionists including Harriet Beecher Stowe (Sabiston 96) and the Weston sisters (Chambers 171).
this outlook permeated the forms in which readers encountered both literary and journalistic representations of the slavery question. An issue of the Manchester Times from 1853 is particularly revealing. The article reports a lecture given by George Thompson, a leading English abolitionist, to the people of Manchester. Thompson’s American critics reportedly argue that “[his] country is answerable for slavery in America; that slavery was planted in America by the mother country, and by laws which were sanctioned by the imperial government, it was sustained and perpetuated in America” (“American Slavery” 3). Thompson’s response completely absolves contemporary Britons of any part in the existence of slavery across the Atlantic, stating that “the Americans had fully taken upon themselves the responsibility of retaining slavery in that country, and could not charge upon England any portion of the guilt of the existing system” (3). However, in the same speech he cites “the commercial relations between the slave-holding class and the mercantile people of New York and elsewhere” as a reason for strengthened “pro-slavery interest” (3). In so doing, Thompson fails to recognise that Britain is the “elsewhere” of his argument, and is therefore deeply embroiled in not only the historical origins of slavery, but more significantly in its contemporary continuation. Even while located at the heart of England’s industrial North, surrounded by people who draw their living from the cotton industry, Thompson does not position the nation as part of a global supply chain. This article regarding “American Slavery” is printed on the same page as one entitled “Wages Movement,” describing operative strikes in Preston. Despite their shared space and audience, neither article makes reference to the issues discussed in the other. This lack of interaction suggests that the topics of British labour and American slavery were being encountered in the same medium by the same groups, in a way that presented them as issues that were perhaps comparable, but not explicitly part of the same network. While this example cannot be taken as unequivocally representative of British public opinion during the 1850s, it is a useful insight into the cultural landscape of Gaskell’s contemporary readership. I would argue that this framework of dislocation is perpetuated by modern-day discussion of North and South as a nationally-focused ‘condition of England’ novel.

Critics such as Julia Sun-Joo Lee and Suzanne Daly have in recent years begun the important work of expanding the scholarly treatment of North and South to include the topic of slavery. Lee’s “Return of the Unnative” is highly valuable in drawing parallels between Frederick Hale’s sub-plot and the slave narrative of Frederick Douglass, a high-profile American

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2 I have selected the newspaper form because it is through this medium that contemporary readers would have accessed reports of slavery and British industry. This particular issue of the Manchester times was in circulation at the same time as Gaskell’s serialised text, and so, crucially, is likely to have had a shared readership, particularly given the local interest for Mancunian readers.
abolitionist who escaped slavery in 1838. However, in constructing such a connection, Lee fails to interrogate the palpable absence of direct references to slave labour in the novel. Daly’s discussion of Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* and Disraeli’s *Sybil* in relation to the Indian cotton industry is perhaps more advanced in its consideration of these texts in Indian and American contexts. However, I suggest that scholarly attention to date has been too focused on finding references to slavery in the form or material objects of the text, meaning that critics largely overlook the significance of its absence from the novel’s foreground. I will instead analyse the implications of the canonisation of a work that largely contributes to the cognitive estrangement of slavery from the domestic and economic success that it facilitated in England. I suggest that slavery is not only absent from the text, but that its final resolution is only possible due to the concealment of the position of slavery in the global supply chain. Reading the text through a world-systems perspective, it becomes clear that this erasure is indicative of a global system whose core is reliant on both the subjugation of a periphery, and the simultaneous denial of this dependence (Moretti 56).

Gaskell’s “permanent place in the canon,” (d’Albertis 9) makes this issue of paramount importance, because each time we read *North and South* without viewing it as a direct product of both slavery and the disassociation of slave labour from English prosperity, we contribute to this legacy of denial. Since this process is reliant upon separating the two issues, it is the task of critics to illuminate, and thereby restore, the connection between these two elements of the supply chain by bringing them into the same space. With this in mind, I will attempt to not only illustrate the silencing of slavery in Gaskell’s text, but counteract it, by reading the novel in relation to the non-canonical slave narrative of Mary-Ella Grandberry. Grandberry was born on a cotton plantation in Alabama in the 1840s, and was interviewed as part of the *Slave Narrative Collection*, compiled between 1936 and 1938 by the Federal Writers Project. Her account details the daily realities of life as a slave during the period in which Gaskell was writing. In this paper, I will argue that the two cultural products are not only comparable, but part of a single network. Foucault has stated that “power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms” (86). As such, by remapping canonical texts as products of a global framework of subjugation that they deny, or merely hint at, the techniques of hegemony become the tools of its destruction.

“Gettin’ Together Talkin’” (Grandberry, Yetman 145)

From its outset, *North and South* is concerned with the task of negotiating the relationship of two apparently antagonistic, but clearly connected groups. Even the book’s title
introduces the notion of two positions at the extremes of a single axis. This issue of contrast has been highlighted in much of the critical response to the novel, from Brodetsky’s 1986 study to Henry’s more recent 2007 commentary on social transformation in *North and South*. Brodetsky has posited binary conflict as integral to the novel’s functioning, stating that: “much of the interest in *North and South* centres on the use of contrast” (64). The primary struggle of the novel is that between the mill owners and labourers of England’s industrial North. It is Gaskell’s portrayal of this “balancing of workers’ and manufacturers’ views in *North and South*” that has led critics such as Henry to highlight the author’s capacity to sympathise with “seemingly opposing perspectives” (Henry 149). Both assessments echo the text’s presentation of the issue as concerning only two parties. Thornton’s description of the origins of the cotton trade similarly maps it in purely dualistic terms: “men of the same level, as regarded education and station, took suddenly the different positions of masters and men, owing to the mother wit” (Gaskell 37). This model portrays the notion of a single class, divided into two groups separated only by distinctions of “mother wit,” and therefore capable of being brought back into agreement.

The conceptualisation of this issue as concerning only two parties, as seen in both the novel and critical responses to it, constructs an image of the industrial system as a simple exchange between those with labour to sell, and those buying it, thereby ignoring the global scale of the cotton trade. Given that, during the 1850s, the cotton processed in England “was cultivated overwhelmingly by slaves” (Heuman and Walvin 80), this omission serves to conceal the forced labour of 1,800,000 individuals (Olmsted 17). This means that we can, and predominantly do, read *North and South* as an even-handed novelistic depiction of the cotton trade, without considering the role of Mary-Ella Grandberry “choppin’ cotton” (Yetman 144). Brodetsky has suggested that “Money … is considered in Milton (Northern) as the keystone of human relationships” (60). This is true in that the relationship between the masters and workers is based on the exchange of labour for capital, and the two classes intersect when the stakes of this exchange are being renegotiated. I would argue that this formula is also the basis of the battle for narrative space in the novel; it is these moments of renegotiation that facilitate claims that “Gaskell’s fiction is preoccupied with questions of social transformation” (Henry 148). Grandberry’s narrative suggests that: “Half de time a slave didn’t know dat he was sold till de massa’d call him to de Big House and tell him he had a new massa from den on” (Yetman 146). Lacking this opportunity to negotiate, enslaved people do not feature in the novel’s schema. In order to reposition Gaskell’s novel within a global framework, we must investigate the means by which such an omission is engineered, and consider why the text operates in this way.
The dualistic dimension of the text’s discursive field could be seen as resulting from “Gaskell’s belief in the possibility of progress through more contact on a personal level” (Brodetsky 62). Clearly, if industrial relations can only be negotiated through personal contact, the enslaved individuals in America cannot even enter a debate situated in England, let alone have a stake in its resolution. Interaction between individuals is repeatedly lauded by characters in the text as the primary means of resolving, not only interpersonal, but inter-class conflicts. An example of this is seen when Thornton suggests that:

no mere institutions, however wise, and however much thought may have been required to organise and arrange them, can attach class to class as they should be attached, unless the working out of such institutions bring the individuals of the different classes into actual personal contact. Such intercourse is the very breath of life (Gaskell 221).

The progression of the plot is wholly dependent upon this interaction of characters in apparently antagonistic class positions on a personal level. For example, it is the unlikely friendship between Higgins, Thornton and Margaret Hale that allows Thornton to learn the truth about Margaret’s apparent falsehood, thus leading to the marriage with which the novel ends (Gaskell 207).

Furthermore, on a formal level, the ‘working out’ of the novel fulfils this purpose of bringing different groups into the same physical space: within a single volume of text. The novel itself becomes a space in which social problems can be resolved. It is this characteristic that has led to North and South frequently being positioned within the ‘condition of England’ subgenre (Giles 38). While the physical confines of the book allow inter-class debates to take place, its portrayal of resolution is only possible when a specific, neutral space is created within the narrative. This project is realised with Thornton’s announcement that he is “building a dining-room— for the men I mean— the hands” (Gaskell 177). The mill owner’s momentary slip into viewing the workers as “men” rather than merely units of alienated labour (Marx 3175) indicates the significance of the construction of a space outside of the system of labour exchange. This neutral zone creates “the opportunity of cultivating some intercourse with the hands beyond the mere ‘cash nexus’” (Gaskell 211). However, in positing this social, unindustrialised space as the only arena for class reconciliation, Gaskell is explicitly excluding slaves from entering the sphere of negotiation. By reading this space as fundamentally inaccessible to slaves, we come to realise that the very system which allows Higgins and Thornton to be “brought face to face, man to man” (Gaskell 205) simultaneously denies such interaction to the slaves whose labour bolsters the cotton industry: “dey was ’fraid we’d get together and try to run away to de North, and dat ... was why dey didn’t want us gettin’ together talkin’” (Grandberry, Yetman 145). As such,
while Thornton’s employees achieve the status of “men,” Grandberry, as late as 1936-8, continued to describe herself and others on the cotton plantation as “de hands,” (Yetman 145) linguistically reflecting the division between ‘massas’ (Yetman 144) and slaves. Gaskell’s novel and Grandberry’s account of slave life are both cultural products of a system in which one’s freedom to interact with others dictates access to social transformation.

This concentration on personal relations means that the novel presents each social group as only aware of those aspects of the production process with which they have direct involvement or contact. Higgins is an example of this: as a labourer he is primarily concerned with the sufferings of the working class, and as an employee he comes to understand the viewpoint of his employer. However, beyond this, Higgins displays no awareness of, or interest in the cotton trade in which he is embroiled. The weaver is consistently presented in relation to ideas of collaboration within the confines of his immediate situation. This begins at the very basic, formal level of his function as the representative voice of the working classes in the novel. As the only labourer who occupies a prominent place in the text, he becomes a single figure in whom the woes of thousands of industrial workers are brought together into a consolidated whole. This role is emphasised by Higgins’ position as a union committee member. He repeatedly declares the importance of “binding men together in one common interest” (Gaskell 113). These calls for cooperation are specifically concerned with uniting individuals within the same industry: “them that is of a trade mun hang together” (Gaskell 112). Such collaboration is posited as integral to the task of renegotiating labour relations: “It’s the only way working men can get their rights, by all joining together” (Gaskell 141). Given that Higgins works in the same “trade” as slaves, we may be tempted to view him as perfectly positioned to act as a force for uniting the causes of the slaves and labourers of the cotton industry in a single, united movement for reform. However, this is not the case. Such an interpretation is made impossible by the tendency of both Higgins and the novelistic viewpoint to concentrate on what is “close at hand” (Gaskell 24) and “set to work on what yo’ see and know” (Gaskell 41). While Gaskell undoubtedly uses the figure of Higgins to promote the cause of English workers, the character’s unwavering concentration on local issues resists interpretations that align him with the plight of slaves.

**Workers and Slaves:** “we had to work and slave all de time” (Grandberry, Yetman 144)

Jean Sabiston has suggested that Gaskell was “aware of the popular analogy between factory workers and slaves” (101). Sabiston’s assertion is largely drawn from Gaskell’s familiarity with the work of writers such as Mrs Tonna and Frances Trollope, whose novels spanned both
topics (101). While the accuracy of this statement is difficult to gauge, it is important to note that Gaskell’s text does not situate the two groups of labourers within the same system. In his recent analysis, Lawrence Buell suggests that Gaskell’s novel “transposes the schema” of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s canonical anti-slavery tale, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (248). Buell reads both as undertaking a “reconnaissance of social niches from lofty to low,” (248) without positing that Stowe’s depiction of American slavery, and Gaskell’s portrayal of British labour relations, are part of a single global system. This notion of transposition is a useful way of conceptualising Gaskell’s depiction of the working classes. Gaskell addresses concerns that are frequently viewed in the context of slavery, but employs an explicitly local viewpoint that serves to strip them of these connotations. As such, it is possible that the author drew comparisons between the working conditions of American slaves and English labourers, but there is no indication in the text that this association serves to introduce an abolitionist agenda into the novel. Higgins asks: “if neighbours doesn’t see after neighbours, I dunno who will” (Gaskell 75). The novel’s dynamic reflects this inclination towards local concerns.

This localised perspective is limited in that it presents what is in reality a small part of a global system as an almost autonomous entity, largely unconnected to exterior factors and locations. In so doing, the novel cognitively severs the ties which connect different elements of a single system of production and trade. The near-sighted perspective, with which the novel endows both its characters and readers, effectively isolates the English manufacturing industry from slavery. The effectiveness of this fragmentation of the supply chain into seemingly unconnected elements is seen in the textual representation of Irish “knobsticks” (Gaskell 97). Thornton’s primary concern regarding the Irish workers is “to secure them from all chance of communication with the discontented work-people of Milton” (Gaskell 100). Just as Mr Thornton is determined to prevent contact between the two groups of workers, Gaskell is similarly careful to deprive readers of direct access to the Irish labourers, who are neither seen nor heard in the text. In this sense, they occupy the same position as slaves in the novel; simultaneously essential to the functioning of the plot, but receiving no direct narrative space. Just as the slaves produce the cotton that facilitates the narrative, the Irish workers spark the riot that dictates the course of the novel’s romantic and industrial plotlines (Gaskell 83). Both groups facilitate the existence of the narrative, without directly featuring in it. The comparison between the “knobsticks” and slaves is furthered by the consistent description of the Irish workers as Thornton’s possessions: “his Irish people” (Gaskell 87). Peter Giles has highlighted the role of Frederick Douglass, a high profile escaped slave, in the construction of analogies between the Irish and American slaves. He suggests that “from Douglass’s point of view the mutual hostility
between the English and the Irish was a political mirror of internal racial conflicts in the United States” (39) and goes as far as to state that Douglass “identifies with the Irish when he is in Britain: from his perspective, they appear as honorary blacks, engaged in a power struggle with the white oppressor” (Giles 39). Douglass’ international reputation and lecture tour in Manchester mean that Gaskell was almost certainly aware of his work. She is known to have received a disparaging letter regarding Douglass from the abolitionist Maria Weston Chapman, describing his as an example of “clever black men who wish to make money out of their colour” (Chambers 171). This makes the position of the Irish “knobsticks” in *North and South* even more significant. If the Irish workers can be equated with black slaves, Thornton’s efforts to conceal them from the white workers and readers can be read as further concealment of slavery. Regardless of Gaskell’s possible consciousness of this association, it is important to note that the Irish workers, as units of foreign labour, are isolated from the rest of the industrial system, and are presented as a disruption to the normal course of action, rather than an institutionalised part of strike-breaking.

While the practice of fragmentation described above may be interpreted as merely an attempt to focus attention on one particular aspect of the issue in hand, its result is far more damaging than may first appear. In devoting narrative space solely to the section of the production process that occurs in England, and the social problems that this engenders, Gaskell creates the illusion of a complete system. Furthermore, by identifying and portraying the reconciliation of the conflicts at work in this limited arena, she provides the reader with the impression that the work of “social transformation” is in hand (Henry 148). The reader is thus inclined to believe Mrs Thornton when she claims: “I am not become so fine as to desire to forget the source of my son’s wealth and power” (Gaskell 77). Residing at the heart of the factory complex that funds her lifestyle, amid the workers, smoke and society it entails, Mrs Thornton appears fully aware of, and in constant contact with the source of her son’s wealth. Despite this, the blatancy of Mrs Thornton’s awareness of industrial life in Milton Northern merely serves to conceal the fact that she has indeed forgotten, or is at least making a valiant effort to forget, the forced human labour and enslavement that makes her son’s enterprise possible. Margaret, at one point in the novel, asks Mr Thornton “if he did not think that buying in the cheapest and selling in the dearest market proved some want of ... transparent justice” (Gaskell 147). We must similarly interrogate the transparency with which the mill owner’s mounting success is dislocated from Grandberry’s account of the human cost of the pressure to increase production levels, in order to supply market demand:

*dey was always somebody what could work faster dan de rest of de folks and dis fellow*
was always de leader, and everybody else was supposed to keep up with him or her whatsoever it was. Iffen you didn’t keep up with de leader you got a good thrashin’ (Grandberry, Yetman 145).

While the industrial setting and position of workers in the foreground of the novel would appear to indicate an awareness of the materiality and labour of the textile industry, they instead conceal the deeper human cost of commercial success such as described in Grandberry’s narrative. The apparently complete depiction of social injustice does more than hide the issue of slavery; its supposed totality convinces the reader that the problem has been revealed, and they need look no further than the page before their eyes. As such, by presenting part of the system as its whole, Gaskell’s narrative contributes to a culture that facilitates detachment from slavery.

*Concealment: “I never knowed nothin’ about ‘em” (Grandberry 145)*

This partial awareness can be read as part of the drive towards concealment that arguably prevails throughout the novel. D’Albertis’ in-depth analysis of this feature of Gaskell’s work argues that “some form of concealment was always necessary to the shaping of her novels” (5). In *North and South*, when a character encounters something unpleasant, be that an emotion, thoughts of death, or the reality of labour, the most frequently exercised response is to hide it. D’Albertis often refers to Gaskell’s use of concealment as “dissembling”, which he defines as “the process whereby one passes over, ignores or neglects an uncomfortable reality, an inconvenient fact” (8). The practice of “dissembling” unpleasantness is frequently depicted in the work, and is predominantly associated with the middle and upper classes. One of Margaret’s defining characteristics is the apparent “haughtiness of her manner” (Gaskell 131). This proud demeanour is presented as a display of “rigid self-control” (Gaskell 21), under which Margaret is able to hide her emotions. Mr Hale is similarly concerned with concealing emotion. However, in the case of the parson, he goes as far as to hide fear, not just from the outside world, but also from himself, being “in exactly that stage of apprehension which, in men of his stamp, takes the shape of wilful blindness” (Gaskell 48). This description of Mr Hale’s denial of his wife’s impending death is particularly significant in the positioning of concealment as practiced largely by the middle and upper classes. That this blindness is typical of “men of his stamp” (Gaskell 48) suggests that, in this instance, Hale’s behaviour is dictated by his class position. In contrast, Fanny Thornton is described as being of “weak character” (Gaskell 43) due to her inability to “endure hardships patiently, or face difficulties bravely” (Gaskell 43). Fanny’s failure to conceal her emotions is thus equated with a lack of strength. Grandberry’s account of pain provides an interesting comparison with Gaskell’s depiction of stoicism:

one day dey whupped po’ Leah twell she fall out like she was daid. Den dey rubbed salt
an’ pepper on de blisters to make ‘em burn real good. She was so so’ twell she couldn’ lay on her back nights, an’ she jes’ couldn’ stan’ for no clo’s to tech back whatsomever (Grandberry, Yetman 145).

Here both the gruesome cause of pain and the reaction of its victim are clearly delineated, without the attempts at concealment or passing of judgement that dominate in Gaskell’s novel. While the contrasting approaches of the two texts is unsurprising due to their distinct genres and forms, the comparison is of note in the context of this discussion, allowing us to situate the vivid atrocities of slavery in relation to a text from which they are omitted.

Gaskell’s novel illustrates this “dissembling” of important information not only through its characters, but also through its narrative form. As readers, we frequently find ourselves excluded from key moments at which information is exchanged between characters. This generally takes the form of a scene which builds towards a moment of disclosure. At the crucial instant of revealing, the narrative voice switches to indirect discourse, informing us of the conversation, without allowing direct readerly access. An example of this is the doctor’s visit to Mrs Hale. Rather than hearing the doctor’s diagnosis, we are simply told that “he spoke two short sentences in a low voice, watching her all the time; for the pupils of her eyes dilated into a black horror and the whiteness of her complexion became livid” (Gaskell 59). This sentence falls in the middle of a passage of dialogue, and its isolated format on the page, coupled with the shift to indirect speech, highlight the significance of this omission. Margaret’s reaction denotes the nature of the information disclosed, suggesting that the diagnosis is concealed for its very unpleasantness. We see this strategy at work again during the Thorntons’ dinner party scene. Despite it being the most important shared concern of those present, “no allusion was made to the strike” (Gaskell 78). When it is finally discussed, Margaret, and therefore the reader, is not privy to the conversation: “[Thornton] was called away by some of the eager manufacturers, whose speeches she could not hear, though she could guess at their import by the short clear answers Mr. Thornton gave ... They were evidently talking of the turn-out, and suggesting what course had best be pursued” (Gaskell 79). Here the concealment of information could be read as alluding to not only the unpalatability of the topic, but perhaps the underhandedness of an otherwise openly held dispute. Such an analysis of Gaskell’s presentation of concealment can be of use in interpreting the omission of slavery from the foreground of her novel. After all, I am not suggesting that Gaskell’s depiction of the cotton industry without slaves is due to a conscious support for institutionalised slavery, even if it ultimately contributes to a cultural legacy that facilitates the continuation of such practices. Rather, I would argue that this selective approach is the result of an unwillingness to contaminate the reputation of England’s illustrious industrial
cities with the unpalatable reality of the slavery on which they were built.

*Domesticated Foreignness: “Dey is livin’ just like kings and queens” (Grandberry 145)*

In this discussion of the absence of narrative space dedicated to slavery in Gaskell’s novel, I have emphasised that this omission is from the novel’s *foreground*. I do not wish to counter this with the suggestion that the issue receives adequate attention in minor sections of the text, but it is important to establish that Gaskell was fully aware of both institutionalised slavery and the international trade community, and that this consciousness is manifested in the novel’s cultural references. The term “slave” is used a handful of times throughout the text, predominantly within a domestic context. The most arresting example of this is the scene in which Margaret is described as handing Thornton “his cup of tea with the proud air of an unwilling slave” (Gaskell 36). This highly domesticated and stereotypically ‘English’ scene is strikingly incongruous with the image of slavery with which it is paired. However, it is consistently during depictions of ‘Englishness’ that the international character of the novel is revealed. The subtlety of this trend is notable in Margaret’s view of the vicarage: “the long low parsonage home, half-covered with China-roses and pyracanthus—more homelike than ever” (Gaskell 25). Even while emphasising the homeliness of the building, the details which are highlighted are flowers that have been imported from China and the West coast of America. As such, the novel’s construction of England and Englishness are formed by domesticating the ‘foreign’. Lee has noted this pattern, stating that: “The foreign is safely domesticated or, more accurately, deracinated ... when the international context does intrude” (5). We have a similarly limited awareness of the position of Thornton’s business within a global market: he travels to Havre in order to “detect the secret of the great rise in the price of cotton” (Gaskell 172). Furthermore, he is ultimately threatened with bankruptcy because: “His agent had largely trusted a house in the American trade, which went down, along with several others, just at this time, like a pack of cards, the fall of one compelling other failures” (Gaskell 207). This illustration of the wider scope of industry functions on the level of markets, but undeniably ignores the existence of foreign labour. Edward Said suggested in *Cultural Imperialism* that:

> As a reference, as a point of definition, as an easily assumed place of travel, wealth, and service, the empire functions for much of the European nineteenth century as a codified, if only marginally visible, presence in fiction, very much like the servants in grand households and in novels, whose work is taken for granted but scarcely ever more than named (63).

Said’s description of the global landscape as “codified” and “marginally visible” is significant here because, as we have established, the novel’s dynamic relies on direct interaction. As such, slavery
as a distant notion forms part of its cultural context, but the physical realities of slave labour do not receive narrative attention.

Contrary to this, Lee has suggested that the slavery debate is conspicuously present in *North and South*. She goes as far as to argue that slavery is not only part of the narrative, but that the novel positions slaves within the same system as the labourers of Milton. Frederick Hale’s narrative is the cornerstone of Lee’s argument. She suggests that: “as a mariner, Frederick is the novel’s most direct link between the cotton-producing American South and the cotton-manufacturing British North” (Lee 4). Moreover, Lee positions Frederick as “the ‘middleman’ or lateral mediator between cotton picking slave and cotton-weaving worker, revealing a transatlantic brotherhood that transcends racial and national boundaries” (7). I agree with Lee’s identification of Frederick as the “most direct link” between the two elements of the textiles supply chain. However, I would question her uncritical acceptance of this as a sufficient way to “import... cultural and political debates about industrialization, slavery, and international commerce” (Lee 5) into the novel. The scale of the slavery question and its prominence in the cotton industry is incongruous with its relegation to “codified” references within a sub plot. Lee’s analysis also suggests a neutral viewpoint that gives equal representation to each member of the “transatlantic brotherhood” (7). Such an interpretation overlooks the fact of slaves being the only one of the three groups supposedly represented here that is given no voice.

*Literary Appropriation: ‘De white folks didn’t allow us to even look at a book’* (Grandberry, Yetman 146)

The positioning of Frederick Hale in the apparently neutral role of ‘mediator’ ignores the fact that he profits from slavery. Frederick’s income from his father’s teaching is only possible because mill owners such as Thornton have profited sufficiently from slave labour to pay for tuition (Gaskell 17). Lee also suggests that the narrative form of Frederick’s tale is a hint towards slavery: as a post-rebellion fugitive, Frederick’s narrative “introduces the conventional saga of the runaway slave” (8). She suggests that “Frederick Hale’s story bears some striking resemblances to Frederick Douglass’s narrative” (Lee 10). As we have established, it is likely that Gaskell would have been aware of Douglass when writing her novel. As such, Lee’s comparison of the two texts is highly credible. However, it is also problematic. If Gaskell, as Lee has suggested, incorporated the slave narrative form into her novel, she has appropriated a peripheral form of expression into a hegemonic one. In so doing, the author has, far from introducing peripheral voices into the literary market place, merely used them to increase the global reach of the novel genre. Moretti has termed this process the development of “symbolic hegemony across
the world” (64). Gaskell’s appropriation of the slave narrative form does not give a voice to the oppressed enslaved labourers of the American South; rather it robs the slave of his or her mode of expression, and awards it to one that has in fact profited from the products of this forced labour. Lee has suggested that: “the fragmentary and disjunctive quality to the slave narrative’s appearance suggests a kind of genre tectonics, a collision between two separate but adjacent genres” (11). While this interpretation is successful in establishing a relationship between the two genres, it does not situate them as part of a single, congruous system. Edward Said has suggested that “without empire….there is no European novel as we know it” (69) and that “the novel is fundamentally tied to bourgeois society” (70). Given that both the empire and bourgeois society were built on and generated slave labour, Said’s argument posits the novel as a product of slavery. Similarly, the slave narrative form would not exist as a genre without the institutionalisation of slave labour. As such, the two forms must be positioned not only within a single system, but as forms that contribute to one another’s production. Just as the reconciliations of Gaskell’s novel are reliant upon slavery and its concealment, the very form of the text draws upon the cultural products of slavery. The slave narrative is thus assimilated into the novel form as little more than a trope, so when we read the “slave narrative” of Frederick Hale, we hear the voice of a white man who profits from slavery. If, as Moretti has suggested, “forms are the abstract of social relationships” (64), this formal usurpation is a symptom of transatlantic social relationships built on subjugation and underrepresentation.

The production, dissemination and reading of slave narratives such as Grandberry’s are clearly integral to combatting this issue of the underrepresentation of enslaved people. The account in hand is particularly notable in its use of dialect, and what appears to be the direct transcription of Mary-Ella Grandberry’s speech and even song (Grandberry, Yetman 145). In this way, the slave narrative can be understood as providing a mouthpiece for individuals who are ordinarily denied a voice in ‘top-down’ historical and literary accounts. However, while accounts such as Grandberry’s are clearly invaluable as cultural artefacts, it is essential to consider them as literary texts. As such, they are subject to editing from both publishers, and in this case, interviewers. The effects of this are revealed through comparison of two editions of the same interview. Although the content is largely the same, the apparently authentic dialect differs between each, for example the same word appears as “‘twell” (Grandberry, Lewis 144) in one text, and “til” in another (Grandberry, Yetman 146). These small differences are seen throughout the two versions, and while not altering the account’s meaning, such variations do illustrate the literary nature of the text, as a representation rather than a direct and objective projection. One of the most striking incidents of editorial interjection can be seen in the Lewis edition.
Following two apparently contradictory anecdotes cited by Grandberry regarding reading and its prohibition, the author or editor has added in brackets: “Mary Ella apparently forgot her previous comment on penalties for learning to read” (Grandberry, Lewis 145). Similarly, the same edition begins with the assertion that the account is drawn from Grandberry’s “ninety-year old memory” (Grandberry, Lewis 143) despite the fact that the subject’s first statement is “I don’t know jes’ how old I is” (Grandberry, Lewis 143). These examples highlight the extent to which, even within apparently first-hand accounts of slavery, full representation is almost impossible due to mediation. By considering Gaskell’s assimilation of slave narratives into the novel form, alongside the inherent limits of ‘first-hand’ accounts, we can perhaps conclude that the underrepresentation of enslaved peoples is not limited to a single genre, but rather endemic to dominance of the written form.

Conclusion

In recent years, the task of revealing global cultural networks has been undertaken by the growing field of World Literature. Building on the formative theories of Marx, Pierre Bourdieu and Immanuel Wallerstein, critics such as Moretti and Lazarus et al have applied the theory of ‘combined and uneven development’ to the fields of cultural and literary production. Through this mapping of a single world system we are able to situate cultural products within the wider global context of their creation. The task here has been to put this process into practice in relation to Gaskell’s *North and South*; not only connecting this text to contemporary slave narratives, but also revealing the intensely unequal positions of the two texts within the literary market place. We have here established Gaskell’s novel and the novel form more widely, as dependent upon both slavery and the denial of its own position as the product of slave labour. The value systems employed in Gaskell’s text engender a fragmented local perspective that excludes, or at least greatly underestimates the role of global labour networks in English industrial and cultural production. By reinforcing an outlook that supported the hegemonic ideology of 1850s England, Gaskell’s novel secured its position in the canon for the lifespan of this ideological framework. The continuation of Gaskell’s place in the canon suggests that this ideology remains prevalent. We can perhaps consider the use of sweat shops in the modern-day fashion industry in this light. With this in mind we must expose the means by which global subjugation is concealed by nationally-focused critiques of canonical literature. This is the task I have attempted here. However, more than that, I have sought to bring two apparently disparate narratives are into the same physical space on the page, revealing them as elements of a single network. Future readings of this, and other canonical works should not focus on a single aspect of the global supply chain, but should instead recover the viewpoint expressed by Sarah Remond,
an African American abolitionist during the period:

When I walk through the streets of Manchester and meet load after load of cotton, I think of those eighty thousand cotton plantations on which was grown the one hundred and twenty-five million dollars’ worth of cotton which supply your market, and I remember that not one cent of that money ever reached the hands of the labourers (“American Slavery” 1859).

**Works Cited**


Herta Müller’s East/Central European Network: Romania, Russia and Germany in *The Passport*

Lucy Gasser, Freie Universität Berlin

*The Problem of “Europe”: A Spatial Investigation*

When Herta Müller was awarded the Nobel Prize in 2009, she was lauded as a writer who, “with the concentration of poetry and the frankness of prose, depicts the landscape of the dispossessed” (Nobelprize.org). Though the significance of situatedness in her writing is signalled in this assessment, precisely how we are to understand this “landscape” has remained largely critically unexplored. While her oeuvre has predominantly been read through the lenses of feminist criticism, trauma studies, and as a mode of self-writing (Marven 2011 and 2005, Haines 2002, Haines and Littler 2004, Brandt and Glajar 2013), her sustained evocation of Romania, the land she fled in 1987, prompts us to inquire specifically into this literary space as more than a mere fictional backdrop.

The problem of “Europe” has been explored by thinkers for centuries, from Mme de Staël to George Steiner, and the often problematic distinction between its Eastern and Western halves was thrown into stark contrast by the Cold War. This distinction entails a differentiation that is often geographically arbitrary: “[w]hen Mozart headed west from Vienna en route for Prague in 1787, he described himself as crossing an oriental border. East and West, Asia and Europe, were always walls in the mind at least as much as lines on the earth” (Judt, *Postwar* 752, original emphasis). Central/Eastern Europe has historically been characterised by the persistent porosity of its national borders and a sustained awareness of their arbitrary nature. The area can thus be appropriately understood as what Emily Apter has termed a “translation zone”: “an area of border trouble where the lines dividing discrete languages are muddy and disputatious” (129). Indeed, Apter suggests that this is a particular thematic concern of literature emerging from the South Eastern part of Europe (130). In *Exit into History*, a travel narrative of her return to Eastern Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain, academic and author Eva Hoffman describes this region:

*[It] remained for me an idealized landscape of the mind... For many centuries, it had*
been, to some extent, cut off, separated, and – for all the insignificant geographic
distances – strangely unknown...

In the imagination of the West, it never quite ceased being ‘the other Europe’ – less
developed, less civilized, more turbulent and strife-ridden than the Europe we think of
as the real thing. (ix-xii)

The region, then, remains elusive for the literary and cultural imagination of the West. In this
paper, I focus on Müller's depiction of her Romanian setting, specifically of the village in her
1986 text Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt, or The Passport, to interrogate her
portrayal of this “other Europe”, and whether she conjures a literary space open and connectable
to a wider world within the fiction she produces. I do this by positioning my reading of Müller
within current debates in world literature studies, adapting in particular Franco Moretti's use of
Network Theory and Eric Hayot’s suggestion of “connectedness” as tools to understand literary
texts beyond the entrenched Western literary taxonomy. Both scholars draw on the work of Alex
Woloch in The One vs the Many in order to develop their methodologies, but in so doing
arguably lose sight of the specific literary quality of the text itself. Certainly, this is a criticism
that has been levelled at the quantitative bent in much of Moretti’s recent work, and there is, in
this approach, something that seems to overtake the text’s specificity. Hayot, while also occupied
with more general categorical concerns, denies that this must come at the expense of the text’s
particularity. In order to recuperate something of the nuance facilitated by close reading (but
with an eye to what is made possible by Moretti’s much-cited “distant reading”), I propose a
return to Woloch’s initial suggestions of character-space and character-system, and a reworking
of how to apply them in relation to one particular text. Crucially, however, I am here occupied
not with literary character, but with literary place.

The place in question here is the rural Romania where Müller was born and raised as
ethnically German, in the Banat region of the country. She studied languages at the University
of Timisoara from 1973 to 1976 and came to the attention of the Romanian Securitate for her
writing critical of the Ceauşescu regime. As a result, she was forced to flee to West Germany in
1987. Nonetheless, in much of her writing, she enacts a(n imagined) return to the place of her
birth. The Passport, in fragmentary vignettes, tells the story of Windisch, a miller, and his
family, and their struggle to emigrate from an unnamed Romanian village to Germany. In this
paper, I investigate the literary map produced by this text and the movements across it, in order
to indicate the imaginative existence Müller gives to this locale, and the networks of mobility
and interaction enabled and disabled in her representations. I show that she constructs a
representation of Central/Eastern Europe that to a large extent reproduces historically assumed
relations of power between East and West Europe, and that her text does little to render the space between Russia and Germany accessible to the literary imagination. However, the generic and stylistic ambivalence of *The Passport* doesn’t allow such a conclusion to be taken as fully comprehensive.

In *The One vs the Many*, Woloch focuses on the function minor characters play in literature, predominantly in the 19th-century realist novel, and the way narrative attention is distributed amongst them and the protagonist. To develop his argument, he proposes two new narratological categories:

- *character-space* (that particular and charged encounter between an individual human personality and a determined space and position within the narrative as a whole) and
- *character-system* (the arrangement of multiple and differentiated character-spaces – differentiated configurations and manipulations of the human figure – into a unified narrative structure). (14, original emphasis)

The extent to which concepts developed for reading the 19th-century realist novel are altogether transferable to a text as ambiguous in genre as Müller’s is questionable, but beyond the scope of the current article. For the moment, I want to manoeuvre these categories to talk not about character but about place. Woloch’s concepts can be used to open up different ways of thinking about the *character of place*, the narrative distribution of attention to different places within the text, and their configuration within a larger network of world-space as produced within the fiction.

The way fictional places are represented has much to do with their actual position in the cultural imagination and the world. French sociologist Henri Lefebvre in his seminal study *The Production of Space* distinguishes between physical, mental and social space. He proposes that “representations of space have a practical impact, [and]... a substantial role and a specific influence in the production of space” (42). Looking to the representation of space in, for one, literature, is crucial to understand how that “lived, conceived, and perceived” (40) space is produced. Similarly, for academic geographer David Harvey, place is socially constructed (5). Both Lefebvre and Harvey are occupied principally with how we are to understand actual place and space,¹ and emphasise that place is not blank uninscribed earth, but rather the product of processes of social and cultural activity. By examining Müller’s representation of the Romanian

¹ The distinctions between space and place has been extensively argued by Edward S. Casey, and I will henceforth work predominantly with the term “place” as it corresponds most closely to the particular sense in which I intend my analysis. Nonetheless, I take Lefebvre’s arguments about space as useable for this understanding of place.
Herta Müller’s East/Central European Network

place in *The Passport*, I unravel not only by which means this literary place is constructed, but also the “practical impact” of such representation.

In working out his categorical suggestions, Woloch frames a number of questions that facilitate his approach to character study (13-14). These questions can be refigured to elucidate how place is working in the text: what narrative purpose is fulfilled by different places in the text? How is narrative attention distributed amongst the different locales depicted in the text? Which places make appearances, for how long, and to what effect? How is this positioned in relation to larger thematic developments of the text?

*Müller’s Romanian Rural: The Village in The Passport*

*The Passport’s* positioning of the rural at the centre of the narrative’s world is worth reading alongside historian Tony Judt’s observation that, “[b]ecause so many of the minorities [in Romania] lived in towns and pursued commerce or the professions, nationalists associated Romanian-ness with the peasantry” (Judt, “Romania: Bottom of the Heap”). The rural setting was thus associated by Romanian nationalism with “true Romanian identity”, but of course Müller’s characters, as devoutly ethnically German, are anything but. They represent a marginalised minority in Romania, and question the nationalist association between countryside and “Romanian-ness”. The countryside also figured prominently in Romania’s own brand of Communism, with Ceaușescu’s proposed “systematization”, which entailed plans for “[h]alf of the country’s 13 000 villages (disproportionately selected from minority communities)...to be forcibly razed, their residents transferred into 558 ‘agro-towns’” (Judt, *Postwar* 623). Most of Müller’s story unfolds in the village, and it is the most precisely mapped of any of the settings the text offers. In his influential study of the rural and the urban *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams signals the traditional associations that have settled on the country as a place of “a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue...[but simultaneously] as a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation” (1). Müller’s village is characterised most powerfully by these traditional negative associations, and indeed inverts this “innocence and simple virtue” absolutely in evoking a place permeated by the greed, sin and corruption that conventionally represent the dark side of the city (Williams 61). The town serves as the site of the state apparatus that oversees the village: “‘Then came the expropriation,’ said Windisch... ‘All the farmers were shaking with fear. Some men came from town. They surveyed the fields’” 2

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2 “‘Dann ist die Enteignung gekommen’, sagte Windisch... ‘Alle Bauern haben gezittert. Aus der Stadt sind Männer gekommen. Sie haben das Feld vermessen’” (28).
the village Müller depicts as the most visible site of corruption, as it is from the first a place one wants to leave, associated with stagnation: “‘The end is here.’ Since Windisch made the decision to emigrate, he sees the end everywhere in the village. And time standing still for those who want to stay”; \(^3\) and later, “The village is very large at night,’ thinks Windisch, ‘and its end is everywhere’”. \(^4\)

Rather than the pastoral idyll of “a simple community, living on narrow margins and experiencing the delights of summer and fertility” (Williams 25), *The Passport* reveals a village characterised by sterility: not beginnings, but endings; not fertile, but “parched”\(^5\). This is further emphasised by the constant, pervasive presence of death through the many references to the cemetery and coffins. In his exploration of the evolution of ideas of place and space, philosopher Edward S. Casey indicates that “a given place takes on the qualities of its occupants” (27), and indeed the townspeople in *The Passport* are referred to constantly as “das Dorf” (the village), merging the identity of the community with the locale that houses them. Thus the moral corruption of the villagers seems to have bled into the literary place they occupy. This becomes most evident in the incident involving the apple tree that eats its own apples. The tree is given life, but in the most sinister of ways, animated by a rot that appears to have infected the town’s very soil: “The apples puffed up. They burst. The juice hissed, and whined in the fire like living flesh”. \(^6\) Interestingly, the incident of the tree occurred before the war, which seems to suggest that the corruption contaminating this soil predates it and the evils it brought; the village is not a place of evil because of it, but rather seems always to have been this way. This is reinforced by the text’s description of the villagers as victims of an awful fate, yet as largely unsympathetic: they deserve the misfortunes that come to them. In an article on borders and their dissolution in *The Passport*, Nicole Bary indeed reads the incident of the apple tree explicitly as a punishment meted out on the villagers (117). And if the villagers are not victims to the war, it raises the possibility that they are part of the evil that brought it about. This is, moreover, in tune with the historical fact that many ethnic Germans living in Romania indeed willingly fought for Hitler. The apple tree incident implicitly suggests that the problem emerges from within the village, and is not merely the result of forces acting from without; it is not merely a narrative of the innocents destroyed by Soviet Communism.

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3 “Seit Windisch auswandern will, sieht er überall das Ende. Und die stehende Zeit, für die, die bleiben wollen” (5).
5 “ausgedorrt” (26).
6 “Der Saft jaulte im Feuer wie lebendes Fleisch” (36).
Williams describes how a village constitutes a kind of “knowable community”: “a country community, most typically a village, is an epitome of direct relationships: of face-to-face contacts within which we can find and value the real substance of personal relationships...the structure of the community is in many ways more visible” (203). And indeed, Müller’s village is a knowable community. Everyone knows everyone, and the various tragic personal histories of their co-inhabitants. But rather than allowing for the closeness of face-to-face contact, this means that everyone knows enough about each other’s business to enable malice, for instance, to laugh at the night watchman’s being cuckolded: “The whole village laughed at me”.

Rather than producing the careful mesh of moral strictures that Williams develops as a result of his knowable community, how knowable the community is here adds to its moral corruption: everyone is aware that the postmaster, priest and mayor are corrupt and exploitative, yet this does little to stop them from being so. In fact, by paying their bribes, the villagers tacitly condone and perpetuate a state of moral rot. Here, the visibility indicated by Williams must take on the more sinister personality of what “visibility” means in a totalitarian state, and specifically one as riddled with surveillance as Ceauşescu’s Romania, where estimates suggest that “one out of every four Romanians supposedly worked for the secret police; some say the true number was one in three” (Echikson 50). The Securitate, Romania’s internal security force until 1989, is in fact remarkably absent in *The Passport*, in comparison with other works where Müller explicitly problematises the extent of its infiltration, such as *Herztier* (*The Land of Green Plums*) and *Heute wär ich mir lieber nicht begegnet* (*The Appointment*). Nonetheless, it casts its long shadow in this text, too. In the Romania produced in this writer’s fiction, knowing things about each other is knowing what to use against each other; visibility is vulnerability, perhaps all the more chilling as it is willingly exploited not by the totalitarian state, but by the villagers themselves.

The sinister aspects of the totalitarian state have often been given form in allegory, the most famous instance of which is George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*. Williams has underlined the link between allegory and the pastoral (32), and there are certainly elements of the allegorical at play in *The Passport*, as the text’s ambivalent genre and poetic form call to be read as playing on more levels than just the literal. The village remains unnamed, as do many of the characters, whom we come to know rather by their professions. Many of the descriptions locate the village rather cryptically, and engage “animal” presences reminiscent of fables. For instance: “One winter’s day, when the fog was driving white hoops across the village, the caterpillar went out into the fields”; “The unknown owl always finds its way here to the village at night. No one

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7 “das ganze Dorf hat mich ausgelacht” (9).
8 “An einem Wintertag, als der Nebel weiße Reifen übers Dorf trieb, ist die Raupe ins Feld gegangen” (28).
knows where it rests its wings by day. No one knows where it closes its beak and sleeps”. Of course, “the caterpillar” is not actually a creature, but a nickname, but it is a nickname that adds to the text’s fable-like quality. And the owl may also be read, as Bary has done, as a symbol of omni-present death (116). Nonetheless, images such as these keep the thread between what the text shows overtly, and what this might represent tacitly, taut.

However, Müller also locates her setting very specifically:

Amalie hangs the map of Romania on the wall... ‘This is our Fatherland’, she says. With her fingertip she searches for the black dots on the map. ‘These are the towns of our Fatherland...Just as the father in the house in which we live is our father, so Comrade Nicolae Ceauşescu is the father of our country’. Irony glints through the scene as Amalie imparts the party dogma to her young students: “All the children love comrade Nicolae and comrade Elena, because they are their parents”. This map pretends to make visible the “fatherland”, and yet really it is used for propagandistic purposes; it creates a false, dubious visibility. This highlights the potential a map has to tell lies, and to act as “a manifestation of the desire for control” (Huggan 116): a manifestation of the desire to command power over place by controlling the ways of knowing it.

This tension between what I here call the allegorical and the very specifically Romanian setting is perhaps best read in the terms posited by Fredric Jameson in The Political Unconscious, “[a]llegory is here the opening up of the text to multiple meanings, to successive rewritings and overwritings which are generated as so many levels and as so many supplementary interpretations” (29-30). Elsewhere, he stresses the “optional nature” of allegorical readings (“Third World Literature” 79). Müller’s text allows us to oscillate between the two, taking in the mythic dimensions of her tale while pinning it decisively to a specific point on a map of Europe.

Despite the corruption and rot that characterise it, the village is also the site of homesickness: “One thing is hard, says the skinner in his letter. An illness we all know from the war. Homesickness”. Humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan in Space and Place: The
Perspectives of Experience suggests that a homeland is “viewed as mother, and it nourishes; place is an archive of fond memories” (154). Yet The Passport plays ambivalently with any idea of homesickness. It paints a homeland that cannot nourish, and that acts rather as a repository of bad memories. The physical place represented in the text bears the traces of this: the war memorial, its very first image, at which, in his daily routine, Windisch counts the years; the place where grass still will not grow after the grotesque public slaughtering of a goat; “Even today no grass grows on the spot,” said Windisch’s wife, ‘where the goat bled to death”. These memories are made manifest in actual, physical place. Yet how this space maintains a sense of belonging strong enough to make the inhabitants miss it remains mysterious. The Romanian setting is a much more plausible locus of homesickness in Müller’s Atemschaukel (The Hunger Angel), but this is because its primary setting is a Russian labour camp, in which the memory of a childhood at home in Romania is able to take on a more nostalgic hue.

The Network of East/Central Europe

The Passport sends tendrils outward from its primary setting, through the desired move to Germany, and the memory of exile to Russia which many of the characters experienced. However, these movements outward ultimately form an emotional closed circuit as the wish to return to the homeland ostensibly remains, in spite of its profoundly negative representation. Is there a corrosive irony in this suggestion of homesickness, indicating how thoroughly embedded in this rotten place the villagers are? Regardless of how awful it is, they don’t know better than to miss it. Yet simultaneously, there is something sincere in its representation as Windisch and his family make their way to the train that will take them away from the village: “Around the pond only silent mountains. Grey mountain ranges heavy with longing for home”. The mountains themselves house this sense of attachment. But how precisely are we best to understand the relationship established between the village and the wider world? How possible does the text render movement across this map?

Manoeuvring Franco Moretti’s work on Network Theory as he applies it to distant reading can enable answers to these questions. For his purposes, he defines Network Theory as:

a theory that studies connections within large groups of objects…usually called nodes or vertices; their connections are usually called edges; and the analysis of how vertices

(80).

13 “Windisch zählt jeden Morgen wenn er ganz allein über die Straße in die Mühle fährt, den Tag. Vor dem Kriegerdenkmal zählt er die Jahre” (5).
14 “An der Stelle wo der Bock verblutet ist”, sagte Windischs Frau, „wächst heute noch kein Gras” (30).
15 “Um den Teich steht nur stilles Gebirg. Graues Gebirg voll mit Heimweh” (105).
are linked by edges has revealed many unexpected features of large systems. (“Distant Reading” 212)

He uses Woloch’s narrative categories as nodes in the development of his analysis and creates a schematic representation of Hamlet. He thus suggests that this kind of illustration offers “time turned into space: a character-system arising out of many character-spaces” (215). Now the spatial dimension again seems implicit (and in Atlas of the European Novel, Moretti was indeed explicitly occupied with place and how cartography can help us read literature), but in his reading of Hamlet, Moretti uses characters as his nodes. Such a schematic analysis of place in Müller’s novel reveals a sparsely mapped world, with very particular inflections. The Romanian village is at the centre, and there is a vague sense of a wider Romania. There are mentions of neighbouring villages, such as the one the gypsy girl comes from and the one the owl disappears to. There is also derogatory reference to “‘Wallachians[, who] don’t even know how to feed pigs’”16. But the clearest distinction is made between “Germans” (the ethnically German inhabitants of a geographical location housed in the Romanian state) and “Romanians”: “The priest says that the graves of the Romanians don’t belong in the churchyard. That the graves of the Romanians smell different from the graves of the Germans”;17 “Rudi was the only German in the glass factory. ‘He’s the only German in the whole district,’ said the skinner. ‘At first the Romanians were amazed that there were still Germans after Hitler. ‘Still Germans,’ the manager’s secretary had said, ‘still Germans. Even in Romania’.”18

The Germans in the novel go out of their way to self-identify as German rather than Romanian, and an awareness of the distinction between the two is signaled constantly: “‘A cloudburst,’ she says. ‘Over the whole country.’... ‘Only in the Banat,’ she says. ‘Our weather comes from Austria, not from Bucharest.’”19 Even in terms of weather, they identify with the German-speaking lands to the West. The chosen vector of influence thus also implies specific mental lines drawn across the text’s Europe. The villagers are defined by the influences from what they see as their cultural homeland in the West, rather than the Romanian state capital. This speaks to the different vectors of influence (cultural, linguistic, political, geographical)

17 “Der Pfarrer sagt, dass die Gräber der Rumänen nicht zum Friedhof gehören. Dass die Gräber der Rumänen anders riechen als die Gräber der Deutschen” (43).
acting on identity, which the text implicitly stages, and highlights their often arbitrary nature. “The Romanian has a cigarette in the corner of his mouth. It’s wet from his saliva. He laughs. ‘No more German,’ he says. Then in Romanian: ‘This is Romania’.” This bar scene not only foregrounds the antagonism between the different ethnic groups, but also reveals the tension between the languages spoken in the region, making of it a “translation zone”, where the (political, geographical) lines between languages, as between their associated cultures, are muddy and shifting. This thematic concern throws up many questions about ethnicity and nationhood in the sense that French philosopher Ernest Renan, for instance, has discussed. What ties groups such as these ethnic Germans together remains unsettled. Certainly, the shared language plays a role, but it is also more complex than this. In the influential lecture “What is a Nation?” Renan suggested that “forgetting, I would even say historical error, is an essential factor in the creation of a nation” (3), and there may be some of this at play in the projected ethnicity of the Germans in the text. While this is a potentially rich field of enquiry, it is beyond the scope of this paper.

Milan Kundera asks, “Central Europe: What is it? The whole collection of small nations between two powers, Russia and Germany. The eastern-most edge of the West...And what about Romania, tugged toward the East by the Orthodox church, towards the West by its Romance language?” (45). He thus hints at the difficulty in crisply defining Romania’s “place” in Europe, and at the binaries that structure its cultural image. There are “small nations” and “powers”, Russia and Germany. Indeed, the only other significant geographical connections Müller’s text makes are to Russia and Germany. The countries in between practically do not exist in the text. The literary map constructed in *The Passport* effectively reproduces the visibility of these two “powers”, and the invisibility of the region lying between the two, echoing Moretti’s remark that maps also show us what isn’t there (*Atlas* 13-14). Eric Hayot suggests,

Networkedness in aesthetic worlds allows us to talk about the sense of diegetic world-space created by the village marketplace’s selling of tea or casual mention of an Oriental carpet, but also about how the world theorizes the set of relations among its various characters. Highly networked worlds are “small” not because of their spatial extension but because of their high interconnectivity; likewise referentially ‘small’ spaces...can be ‘large’ or disconnected worlds if action there creates diegetic effects only within the immediate sphere of its production. (76)

*The Passport* reveals commercial networks that indicate what is desirable, and where power lies.

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Russian commodities are most common in the Romania of the text, and regarded derogatorily. Amalie complains to Dietmar at the cinema: “‘Another Russian film’,... ‘at least it’s in colour’.” Commodities from Romania are not desirable, “‘The lace is nice,’ she says, ‘it’s definitely not from Romania’.” This stands in contrast to what Windisch’s wife is able to give as a gift when they return for a visit: “a bar of Ritter Sport chocolate”, a quintessentially German consumable.

Primarily though, Russia is remembered by characters in the text in terms of the war, and associated with starvation, death, and the “whoring” of the Romanian women. In Müller’s writing women are almost always indicted for their sexuality in one way or another, but this text suggests that going to Russia exacerbated their sexual corruption. “In Russia she spread her legs for a piece of bread”; “You should know, you should know from Russia. You weren’t bothered about shame then”; “People starved to death in Russia, and you lived from whoring. And after the war you would have gone on whoring, if I hadn’t married you.” Russia thus exists in the text very much as a version of Hoffman’s “other Europe”, an amorphous space, not fully visible nor graspable; the site of horrors, hunger and sexual corruption. The desired line of movement is always away from it, reproducing the well-trod post-1945 (and more recently relevant) European trajectory of “escaping west into a better life” (Judt, Postwar 30), and in this ethnically German Romania, that better life is in Germany.

Germany, in the text, is more knowable than Kundera’s other “power”. It is mapped with specific cities to which connections exist for the villagers: Berlin, Munich, Stuttgart. Germany exists in the minds of the villagers, from Udo’s “black, red and gold” flag, to the night watchman’s denial of homesickness in Germany: “‘I wouldn’t feel homesick,’ he says, ‘After all, you’re among Germans there’.” This obviously calls the text’s representation of a homeland into question. Evidently, for the night watchman, it has less to do with geographical placing and

21 “Wieder ein Russischer Film” (67).
22 “Schön sind die Spitzen’, sagt sie, ’sie sind bestimmt nicht aus Rumänien’” (92).
23 “eine Tafel Ritter-Sport-Schokolade” (109).
24 “’In Rußland hat sie die Beine für ein Stück Brot gespreizt’, sagten die Leute nach dem Krieg” (46).
25 “’Du musst es ja wissen’, schreit er, ’aus Rußland musst du es wissen. Dort ist es dir auch nicht um die Schande gegangen’” (74)
26 “In Rußland sind die Leute verhungert, und du hast vom Huren gelebt. Und nach dem Krieg hättest du weiter gehurt, wenn ich dich nicht geheiratet hätte” (74).
27 “schwarzrotgold”. In the English translation this is further clarified with “A German flag”, for which there would be no need to a German-language reader.
more to do with ethnic similarity. Yet the skinner experiences a longing for the specific place of his birth, as must Windisch and his wife as the final scene has them returning home to visit. Nevertheless desired movement is always directed from the village towards Germany. The text thus repeatedly stages the only direction of movement desired by its characters as one from East to West.

The other major “power” of international politics during this Cold War setting is of course the USA, which, however, features in the text just once:

‘This religion comes from America,’ says the night watchman. Windisch breathes through his salty sneeze. ‘That’s across the water.’ ‘The devil crosses the water too,’ says the night watchman, ‘They’ve got the devil in their bodies... ‘The skinner always said,’ says Windisch, ‘that the Jews run America. ’Yes,’ says the night watchman, ‘the Jews are the ruin of the world. Jews and women.”

Reproducing the anti-Semitic sentiment that was still rampant in Romania during Communist rule, this exchange calls back to the ethnic origins of these men, some of whom fought with the Nazis. In the text’s world map, the USA is a far-flung and little-known place, relegated to a distant periphery due to the villagers’ relative ignorance of it. This literary map echoes the map of the “world” taught to children in geography classes at school under Soviet Communism, the map of the “known world” Amalie teaches her pupils.

Under Eastern (European) Eyes

The extent to which Müller is sketching an alternative to this “other Europe” understood as “less developed, less civilized, more turbulent and strife-ridden” (Hoffman xii) is thus, in one sense, very limited. Her chosen primary setting of a “backward” village certainly points towards such a view, and the allegorical qualities of her text reinforce the representation of this part of Eastern Europe as an “idealised landscape of the mind” (ix). Russia is the most negatively represented of the places she describes, depicted exclusively as the locale of a violent history. Germany is the land to which, with perhaps a backward glance, the novel’s characters wish to move. It represents the possibility of a better life, albeit somewhat dubiously. The trajectory desired by the characters always runs from East to West, and the further East the place, the less desirable it is. This to some extent reinforces an old concern, “a deep-rooted anxiety about Russian, and more generally ‘Eastern’ inferiority” (Jutd, Postwar 188), and

recreates the resentment many East Europeans felt about Sovietisation as decreed from Moscow. The text thus in one sense reproduces the established power relations between East and West Europe, as well as a selective blindness to the “small nations” between Russia and Germany. Significant, however, is the extent to which these evaluations of desirability are focalised through the text’s characters, through which the text is also able to stage a literary map of (in)visibility that it needn’t endorse, as the world view of its characters is up for scrutiny.

*The Passport* is finally an ambivalent text. The generic ambiguity fostered by Müller in blurring biography and fiction – “autofiction” as she calls it – means that her work cannot be taken at face value (see, for instance, Marven “Herta Müller’s *Herztier*” 186). The fragmentary vignettes which compose the narrative prohibit the suspension of disbelief encouraged by the realist novel, and, for Lyn Marven, “form...part of Müller’s political intent: the reader is forced to experience the same effects, but also to (re)construct links between sentences or episodes, thus becoming critically engaged” (“In Allem ist der Riss” 400). Müller’s disruptive merging of verisimilitude with the surreal further troubles the reader’s credulity and invites critical awareness. This critical engagement spurs attentiveness to both what the text shows, and what it doesn’t. Manoeuvring the scholarly contributions of Woloch, Moretti and Hayot activates questions about the text that reveal the kind of map it produces and the networks of movement it does or doesn’t facilitate. *The Passport* does not render its Romania particularly graspable to a Western imagination, but it positions a world view that looks outward from it and thus stages the problem of “Europe” during the Cold War from a vantage point within this elusive landscape of the mind.

**Works cited**


"A fervid intensity of connectedness": Zadie Smith, the Cosmopolitan Novel, and the Ethics of Community

Anique Kruger, University of Oxford

...we share meaning
only as bodies
in collision
Kelwyn Sole

A Fervid Intensity of Connectedness

The critical term “hysterical realism” originates from James Wood’s New Republic review of Zadie Smith’s first novel, White Teeth (2000) (“Human, All Too Inhuman”). In his appraisal of Smith’s debut, Wood coins this pejorative term to describe a stylistic trend which, he contends, characterises many turn-of-the-millennium incarnations of the “big ambitious novel” by authors such as Salman Rushdie, Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, David Foster Wallace, and Zadie Smith. He accuses these authors of having disingenuously “exhausted and overworked” the conventions of realism in order to conceal or compensate for their own “awkwardness” when it comes to the representation of character. Wood attempts to demonstrate these shortcomings in the following excoriating parody:

If, say, a character is introduced in London, call him Toby Awknotuby (that is, “To be or not to be” — ha!) then we will be swiftly told that he has a twin in Delhi (called Boyt, which is an anagram of Toby, of course), who, like Toby, has the same very curious genital deformation, and that their mother belongs to a religious cult based, oddly enough, in the Orkney Islands, and that their father (who was born at the exact second that the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima) has been a Hell’s Angel for the last thirteen years (but a very curious Hell’s Angels group it is, devoted only to the fanatical study of late Wordsworth), and that Toby’s mad left-wing aunt was curiously struck dumb when Mrs. Thatcher was elected prime minister in 1979 and has not spoken a word since. And all this, over many pages, before poor Toby Awknotuby has done a

Anique Kruger completed her Master's Degree in English Literature at the University of Oxford in 2015, for which she was awarded a distinction. Born and bred in South Africa, she also holds two degrees in English and French Literature from the University of Cape Town. The author would like to thank the Skye Foundation for generously funding her Master's Degree at Oxford University. It was during this time that the original version of this paper was written and submitted for coursework assessment.
thing, or thought a thought!

This excessively long sentence features a dizzying accumulation of clauses, subclauses, and parenthetical digressions, which Wood employs in an effort to convey the sense of narrative “hysteria” to which his stylistic epithet refers. As his parody aims to demonstrate, this narrative approach entails bombarding the reader with a relentless barrage of information, connections, and coincidences. Wood expresses his concern that, due to the manner in which this cacophonous narrative technique privileges information over characterisation, it threatens to obscure characters’ psychological depth and to compromise their authenticity. While this is Wood’s primary preoccupation, his observation regarding the “fervid intensity of connectedness” that hysterical realism often insists upon also merits critical scrutiny. Wood’s objection to this authorial inclination to weave endless webs of connection among characters hinges on his argument that these links often remain conceptual, failing to affirm that these characters exist as part of a network of other human beings. While the coincidences appearing in Wood’s parody—for example, Toby and Boyt’s mysteriously identical genital deformations—suggest a compelling sympathetic logic which promises to reveal its hidden significance, Wood contends that this sort of connection has the paradoxical outcome of making these characters seem isolated. Furthermore, Wood argues that Smith’s interconnected narrative gives the impression that the book lacks moral seriousness. This conclusion does not account for Smith’s self-professed ethical undertaking to use her fiction to expand her readers’ ways of seeing and being in the world by emphasising connection and universal humanity. As Smith states in her own artistic manifesto, “[w]hen we read with fine attention, we find ourselves caring about people who are various, muddled, uncertain and not quite like us (and this is good)” (“Love, actually”).

This paper focuses on Zadie Smith’s experimentation with the possibilities that arise when fiction is used to imagine networks, connections, and communities in a globalised and multicultural world. Her sustained exploration of the ways in which E. M. Forster’s famous ethical injunction, “only connect”, has come to be differently inflected in the twenty-first century is arguably the driving force behind her œuvre, and this analysis will focus on two of her later works, On Beauty (2005) and NW (2012). The paper will draw on Berthold Schoene’s study, The Cosmopolitan Novel (2009), with particular focus on Schoene’s appropriation of Jean-Luc Nancy’s theory of “inoperative communities”. This will be used as the framework for a more charitable interpretation of the “fervid intensity of connectedness” that Wood’s review dismisses

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1 This argument self-consciously echoes the debate regarding the nature of character in fiction that took place between Arnold Bennett and Virginia Woolf in 1923. See Bennett’s “Is the Novel Decaying?” and Virginia Woolf’s “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown”. 
so readily. Via a sustained analysis of Zadie Smith’s exploration of community and connection, this paper aims to contribute to the ongoing critical conversation regarding her ethical commitment to exploring literature’s potential to foster mutual recognition and sympathy.  

The Cosmopolitan Novel

Cosmopolitan discourse spans various fields of study, including political theory, philosophy, economics, sociology, history, and literary theory. Discussions of “new” cosmopolitanism began to gain momentum at the turn of the millennium, spurred on by the publication of a special edition of *Public Culture* in 2000 (Pollock et al.). Broadly speaking, new cosmopolitanism seeks to address the ramifications of the “complex, accelerating, integrating process of global connectivity” (Tomlinson n.p.) that characterises the twenty-first century. In his study, *The Cosmopolitan Novel* (2009), Berthold Schoene contributes to this expansive discourse by considering the impact that the intersection of nationalism, globalisation and multiculturalism has on contemporary literary production. Drawing on Benedict Anderson’s work in *Imagined Communities* (1983), Schoene wonders whether “in our increasingly globalised world, the [contemporary British] novel may already have begun to adapt and renew itself by imagining the world instead of the nation” (12-13). In order to delimit the bounds of “the contemporary”, Schoene identifies the 9/11 World Trade Centre attacks (2001) as a significant historical marker. He argues that this event engendered a sense of paranoia related to rapid globalisation and tempered the optimism that had followed the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and its promise of a more cosmopolitan world (6-8).

Schoene is not the only critic to have identified 9/11 as an important date in literary history. In “Tell me how does it feel?”, a critical article published in *The Guardian* less than a month after 9/11, James Wood reopened the debate on hysterical realism as part of his reflection on the impact that the World Trade Centre attacks would have on the future of the American novel. Wood posited that, in response to the technological boom and the unprecedented access to information that accompanied the rise of the internet, writers of the “big ambitious novel” had undertaken to capture the enormity of this multifaceted cultural expansion. However, in light of the trauma inflicted on America’s conceptual apparatus by the attacks, Wood pronounced that these encyclopaedic ambitions had been reduced to absurdity. Declaring hysterical realism to be one of the casualties of this violent rupture, he made an urgent call for

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2 See Carbajal, Itakura, Marcus, and Smith’s own article entitled “Love, actually”.  
3 For an exemplary sample of how cosmopolitanism is approached in various fields, see Beck, Mignolo, and Tomlinson.  
4 See also Marcus.
novelists to respond to this trauma by producing a type of fiction which he deemed more appropriate: one that was aesthetic, contemplative, and committed to representing the enduring truth of “the human” by creating characters with emotional centres.

Five days later, the *Guardian* published Zadie Smith’s response to Wood, “This is how it feels to me”. Affirming his prognosis of hysterical realism’s curtailed life-span, Smith conceded that her own comic writing had been rendered incongruous and obsolete by the attacks: “the wrong words, the wrong time, the wrong medium”. Although she capitulated to Wood’s rejection of hysterical realism, she questioned his call for a return to interiorised characterisation as the most promising mode for writing “the human”. If the contemporary novel is to respond meaningfully to a post-9/11 world, she argued, it “[would] take sympathy—a natural instinct, a sentimental reflex—but it [would] also take empathy, which [she still contended] is largely a matter for the intellect”. While this polemicising undoubtedly oversimplified the impact that 9/11 would come to have on the contemporary novel, it does, nonetheless, signal a decisive shift in Smith’s career. In this post-*White Teeth* moment she made a commitment to writing novels of greater moral seriousness and it is for this reason that this paper seeks to consider only Smith’s later works in terms of Schoene’s conceptualisation of the cosmopolitan novel.

Schoene adopts a theoretical approach in order to analyse the ways in which the contemporary novel has begun to imagine the world instead of the nation. Using a sample of novels which he deems to be responsive to the pressures of the twenty-first century, he speculates about which of their thematic and stylistic features are definitive of the ideal cosmopolitan novel. Schoene specifies that although a novel might engage in the representation of cosmopolitan communities or themes, for it to be considered cosmopolitan by his definition it must be dedicated to imagining an alternative to “contemporary society’s predicament of individualist, localist and nationalist self-identification” (176). This might be achieved, he suggests, by dispensing with the novel’s current tendency to focus on individual consciousness. In this way, Schoene posits, the cosmopolitan novel will demonstrate an ethical commitment to fostering a sense of global community, united by a universal humanity.

Although Schoene does not deliberately engage with Wood’s critique of hysterical realism, his articulation of the cosmopolitan novel’s ethical preoccupations instantiates an uncannily direct transvaluation of the “fervid intensity of connectedness” that Wood’s review so readily dismisses. Accordingly, Schoene’s ideal cosmopolitan novel privileges anecdotal detail over

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5 Smith accepted hysterical realism as “a painfully accurate term for the sort of overblown, manic prose to be found in novels like [her] own *White Teeth*” (“This is how it feels to me” n.p.).
psychological depth and interiority. Every character’s personal history, Schoene argues, should be equally important, and none should be allowed to “[pale] into the background as purely vehicular supernumeraries” (170). Stylistically this implies that each one of them is to be infused with liveliness by a barrage of information similar to that which Wood objects to in his critique of hysterical realism. Schoene emphasises that the cosmopolitan novel should be concerned with “stories of connection” (171) in which it is gradually revealed that even the most coincidental occurrences have significant repercussions for a vast network of characters who would otherwise appear to be unconnected. Whereas Wood accuses Smith’s interconnected novelistic architecture of lacking moral seriousness, Schoene considers this emphasis on connection to be the source of the cosmopolitan novel’s ethical commitment.

Wood and Schoene, then, occupy polar ends of a spectrum. Both critics make a morally-inflected argument for the novel’s capacity to capture some intangible quality of what it means to be human. The disagreement lies in whether this end should be achieved by creating memorable characters who are “fully human” (Wood), or by emphasising a transcendent idea of humanity by revealing characters’ connectedness (Schoene). The dynamics of this conundrum are replicated in many disciplines concerned with addressing the temporal and spatial compression that characterises the cosmopolitan world.\footnote{For one example of this ubiquitous debate see Beck.} Roland Robertson offers critics a useful shorthand term for referring to this well-known contradiction, which he calls “the universalism-particularism issue” (22). This issue sees two major principles of modernity—universal human rights and the acknowledgement of personal and cultural difference—pitted against each other in an irreconcilable paradox.

As a proponent of an ethical cosmopolitan commitment, Schoene is in the company of other critics, such as Jessica Berman—author of \textit{Modernist Commitments} (2011) —and Rebecca Walkowitz—author of \textit{Cosmopolitan Style} (2006). These critics base their studies on a shared conviction that, through storytelling, literature has the potential to reimagine the world in powerful ways that can initiate significant political and critical paradigm shifts.\footnote{For extended discussion, see Berman \textit{Modernist Commitments} 1-38 and Walkowitz 18-20.} Through this singular quality of literature they believe that the novel has the potential to imagine ways of honouring ideas of universal human rights while also attending to the distinctiveness of particular cultures, communities, and persons. In this sense, literature has the potential to suggest ways of transcending the universalism–particularism issue that are not yet possible in practice.
Inoperative Communities

Schoene suggests that authors of the cosmopolitan novel should deploy the trope of community as a means of transcending the universalism-particularism paradox without having to resort to either utopian or dystopian paradigms. It is in Jean-Luc Nancy’s seminal work, *La communauté désœuvrée* (1986), that Schoene identifies a theoretical model with the potential to realise this goal: the notion of the ‘inoperative community’. The advantage of such a community is that it does not rely on political consensus, a universal mode of identity, or allegiance to a collective entirety in order to exist in the world. This absence of a definitive collective marker or shared set of aims means that the inoperative community is said to be “without telos” (Schoene 159). In literary texts, characters that form part of inoperative communities are able to maintain their particularity, as they are not obliged to conform to the homogenising demands of a collective identity label. “Compearance” is the term used to explain how such inoperative communities are able to exist without telos. Nancy’s notion of compearance assumes that the individual exists as a relational self, intrinsically embedded in a network or community of people and existing only in plurality (Schoene 159). Compearance is also referred to as “being-in-common” and is considered to be an involuntary and constant state of being which is not necessarily always recognised. It is the task of the cosmopolitan novel to make this compearance visible so that fictional characters and readers alike might realise that they do not merely coexist with those around them. Rather, as Schoene explains, recognition of one’s place in an inoperative community—of one’s involuntary compearance—means that “being human [...] becomes an ethical impulse” (159).

Inoperative communities have the ability to bridge class divides due to the fact that they exist in ephemeral flashes of recognition which engender mutual sympathy among members. Schoene provides a concrete example of community without telos when he cites Jon McGregor’s *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things* (2002). In this novel “a near-fatal car accident disrupts the quotidian uneventfulness of life in [a suburban] street” (Schoene 157), uniting its inhabitants momentarily in a community of compearance based on their ethical commitment to the vulnerable crash victim. There is a degree of disinterestedness in this ethical encounter which distances the members of this ephemeral community from the event that catalysed its formation, allowing them to become part of a momentary inoperative community which transcends the constraints of each character’s subjectivity. Another example, cited by both Schoene and Berman, is *Mrs Dalloway’s* portrayal of the “parallel lives of mutual strangers” (Schoene 157). Woolf’s use of modernist narrative strategies to suggest a sympathetic connection between Septimus Smith and Clarissa Dalloway is illustrative of how compearance might be imagined
With the concept of inoperative communities in mind, this paper will now undertake an analysis of Smith’s later fiction. By examining the different kinds of community that Smith imagines in *On Beauty* and *NW*, this paper aims to gain a more nuanced understanding of her ethical commitment to exploring literature’s potential to foster mutual recognition and sympathy. The communities represented in these novels will be analysed according to the Nancean concepts that Schoene adopts for his theorisation of the cosmopolitan novel. In light of this analysis, this paper will also reflect on the value of inoperative communities in the realms of theory and praxis, and will consider both the advantages and the shortcomings of the cosmopolitan imagination.

*On Beauty*

As the discourse on global citizenship took shape over the first decade of the twenty-first century, Smith began to act on the resolution she expressed in the 2001 *Guardian* polemic. Consciously moving towards a more ethical realism, she adopted a new approach to the representation of community in her 2005 novel, *On Beauty*. Presented as paying homage to *Howards End*, the novel mimics E. M. Forster’s structural frame in order to encourage an intertextual, or palimpsestic, reading which is alert to the famous Forsterian injunction, “only connect”. In addition, the novel’s titular reference to Elaine Scarry’s *On Beauty and Being Just* (1999) suggests that Smith intends to draw attention to the relationship between morals and aesthetics.  

Throughout the novel, Smith attempts to use art and aesthetic experience to create connections among strangers. The Belsey family come into contact with Carl Thomas (the Leonard Bast counterpart) at a performance of Mozart’s *Requiem* on the Boston Common, yet Kiki Belsey is acutely aware that every member of the audience remains isolated by their different personal experiences of the music (77–79). Zora Belsey and Carl confront each other directly when their identical Discmans coincidentally fall into each other’s hands, and it is the ensuing revelation of Levi Belsey and Carl’s shared passion for hip-hop that leads to their faltering, but well-intentioned, class-crossing friendship (81–84). Spoken Word poetry sessions at “the Bus Stop” bring the privileged university students of Wellington into the same orbit as

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8 Proponents of the cosmopolitan novel are turning increasingly towards modernist literary strategies as powerful representational modes with the potential to depict *the human* as well as the community. See Berman and Walkowitz.

9 See Itakura.
the Haitian immigrants who use the event as a channel for their protest poetry. However, sympathetic connection between the students and the immigrants remains unachieved because the urgency of the Haitians’ plight is obscured by Claire Malcolm’s abstract aesthetic critique that “[t]hey have a little to learn about integration of idea and form—you break a form in two if you have all this undigested fury in it” (228). In all of these cases, the characters are unable to recognise their shared condition of being-in-common. Their compearance remains unremarked due to the disparity between their particular aesthetic experiences, the barriers thrown-up by class divisions, and a wilful blindness to the plight of the other.

As a supplement to this experimentation with the transcendent potential of the aesthetic, it is Smith’s treatment of the entanglements of race, ethnicity, and place, embodied by the figure of Levi Belsey, which suggests an alternative channel for imagining community. Levi’s personality is defined by his performative cultivation of an ‘authentic’ American identity based on his own personal philosophy of “street” culture. His love of hip-hop in conjunction with his funky limp, faux Brooklyn accent, behoodied style of dress, professed residence in Roxbury (when in fact he comes from the affluent academic enclave of Wellington), all form part of the persona that serves to identify him with an imagined community of black “brothers”. Indeed, his cultivated identity is entirely dependent on this sense of belonging to a homogenous, racially identifiable group. Levi claims to be offended by racism, yet every gawking stare and pedestrian evasion gratifyingly affirms the supposed authenticity of his street identity. At one stage he even muses about getting a t-shirt that reads, “YO—I’M NOT GOING TO RAPE YOU” (80). Prefacing this ostensibly reassuring statement with “YO” — a greeting embedded in the linguistic codes of street culture—the t-shirt’s self-mockery betrays Levi’s secret delight in his incongruous presence in the Wellington community.

It is when he imposes himself on a group of Haitian immigrant street-hawkers, with the naïve confidence that their racial “essence” guarantees their mutuality, that the paucity of his street philosophy is revealed. When Chouchou morosely confides that he “really fucking [hates] to sell things”, Levi espouses his street philosophy in a quixotic attempt to console this “brother”:

‘Choo—you ain’t selling, man,’ said Levi keenly in reply. Now that he understood the problem he was happy—it was so easily solved! It was just a matter of attitude. He said, ‘This ain’t like working the counter at CVS! You hustling, man. And that’s a different thing. That’s street. To hustle is to be alive—you dead if you don’t know how to hustle. And you ain’t a brother if you can’t hustle. That’s what joins us all together—whether we be on Wall Street or on MTV or sitting on a corner with a dime-bag. It’s a beautiful
thing, man. We hustling!’ (245. Original emphasis throughout)

As the casual slang of Levi’s speech and the controlled prose of the narrator’s wry commentary jar against each other, the dramatic irony engendered by this use of free indirect style heightens awareness of the ethical shortcomings of Levi’s cosmopolitan imagination. He succeeds in articulating the existence of a text-book-perfect inoperative community of hustlers, connected across space and time through their separate participation in a common activity. However, Levi’s naïveté is exposed when the narrator’s ironic remark that Choo’s problem is “so easily solved!” undermines this idealistic vision. The ethical value of recognising Levi and Choo’s compearance with these global hustlers is negated by Levi’s own class-based astigmatism. Indeed, he cannot see that romanticising words such as “bustler” and “street” provides no solace to the man for whom hustling is actually just selling, no matter how enthusiastically he says it.

It is only when Levi begins reading about Haiti that he experiences his first pangs of political conscience. Carried forward by “the lovely sadness of [the] Haitian music” (408) he listens to in the university’s music library, aesthetics and politics cohere in an instant and Levi realises his ethical commitment to the Haitians is not based on ethnic brotherhood, but on a more universal concept of humanity. In a misguided attempt to bring justice to his Haitian brothers, he conspires with Choo to steal the Kipps’s valuable painting of the Maitresse Erzulie by Haitian artist, Hector Hyppolyte, with the intention of selling it and donating the profits to the Haitian Support Group. This criminal collaboration earns Levi the approval of the immigrant community and he is warmly received as the Haitian Support Group’s “American mascot” (404). Levi maintains his American identity even as he is incorporated into a group usually defined by nationality. Transcending the constraints of this conventional identifying marker, Levi illustrates the possibilities that arise when a community without telos is imagined.

In the end, however, Jerome and Kiki are left to explain to Levi that stealing a valuable painting and redistributing the funds is not a viable way to go about implementing social change. The endearing naïveté of Levi’s failed restitutive act serves to draw attention to the potential shortcomings of the cosmopolitan imagination. Levi’s inability to provide material aid to the Haitian Support Group calls into question how much value there is in a theoretical recognition of universal humanity if this ethical conviction cannot carry over into the realm of praxis. Throughout On Beauty Smith challenges readers to think more deeply about the ethical value of a cosmopolitan outlook. Indeed, even within her potentially boundless fictional world, Smith must limit the practical outcomes of Levi’s goodwill.
Published seven years after *On Beauty*, *NW* constitutes Smith’s latest inquiry in her sustained experimentation with fiction’s capacity to reimagine networks, connections, and communities. Once again, she reinvents her approach. Whereas *White Teeth* and *On Beauty* portray characters struggling to find their place within a community, *NW* depicts characters trying to escape it. The novel focuses on five characters—Leah Hanwell, Keisha/Natalie Blake, Nathan Bogle, Shar, and Felix Cooper—all of whom (bar Felix) grew up in Northwest London’s fictional Caldwell estate and “went Brayton” (243). This common background creates an involuntary community based on shared financial hardship and physical proximity. Keisha Blake’s decision to change her name to Natalie is symptomatic of her desire to transcend this stagnant existence. Despite Leah and Natalie’s upward mobility and Shar and Nathan’s decline into drug addiction, these characters are unable to dissociate themselves entirely from their origin with the result that they are inescapably aware of their ethical responsibility to one another. Their lives are inextricably linked to their inhabitation of a “London village” (6) in which everyone’s face is familiar and their ten-year-old selves are reflected back at them in other people’s eyes. *NW* can be read as a case study of the fleeting coagulation and dissolution of inoperative communities, as the inhabitants of London confront each other in apparently arbitrary and unpredictable ways. On one occasion Felix makes eye-contact with a stranger in a parallel tube carriage before their trains depart (135). On another, he has a strangely tender collision with a young man outside a video emporium in which they connect briefly, laughing and calling each other “Boss”, before going their separate ways (157). These brief moments of urban connection flirt with the tantalising possibilities of inoperative community. However, they do not lead to the recognition of compearance and, rather, echo modernism’s lamentation of the insurmountable chasm separating urban lives.

*NW*’s experimentation with fleeting connection reveals that the Nancean inoperative community is, in fact, a narrowly defined and elusive ideal. In this paper’s earlier discussion of Nancy’s theory, Schoene’s instructive example of an inoperative community being formed around the event of a near-fatal car crash is cited in order to emphasise the fact that, for a community that is truly without *telos* to come into being, there must be a degree of disinterested distance. One of the few instances in which *NW* succeeds in imagining community on these terms is in the event of Colin Hanwell’s funeral, when “a hundred people who had shared the

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10 “Some schools you ‘attended’” remarks *NW*’s narrator. “Brayton you ‘went’ to” (Smith 278).
same square mile of streets with the man now recognized that relation, which was both intimate and accidental, close and distant” (340).

As *NW* demonstrates, however, the circumstances that give rise to transitory communities are more often teleological in the sense that they are engendered by a need to exclude others. One such moment sees four unlikely strangers, Natalie Blake, “the old white lady” (335), a “formidable-looking Rasta [woman]” (336), and an “Indian man” (337), banding together in a “circle of judgement” (337) to scold a belligerent young man for smoking cigarettes in a children’s playground. For an instant, the imperative to protect the children from second-hand smoke allows these strangers to transcend their differences, uniting in solidarity against the threat to their children, whilst scapegoating the smoking boy. Another such moment stages the crucial encounter which ultimately leads to Felix’s death. A pregnant white woman boards the tube and, looking for a place to sit, addresses Felix, requesting that he ask his “friend” (192) to remove his feet from the only spare seat. When Felix reluctantly obliges, the other boy’s aggressive response, “[w]ho you calling blud? I ain’t your blud” (193), registers his offense at the woman’s racialised assumption that he and Felix are connected. Eventually Felix offers his own seat to the woman and, after sitting down, she admonishes the other boy and his companion (Nathan Bogle), declaring that they should be ashamed of themselves. Again, a circle of judgement is formed:

The carriage was silent. No one looked—or they looked so quickly their glances were undetectable. Felix felt a great wave of approval, smothering and unwanted, directed towards him, and just as surely, contempt and disgust enveloping the two men and separating them, from Felix, from the rest of the carriage, from humanity. (193)

The irony at the heart of these confrontations is that both the smoking boy and the boy with his feet on the seat refuse to cooperate because they are not insensible to the class and racial prejudice underpinning these interactions. They feel that the condescending or dismissive manner in which these demands are made is belittling, and yet, their desire to be treated with dignity is thwarted by their retaliation which, ultimately, exacerbates their “[separation] from humanity” (193). These confrontations are symptomatic of the indignation and rage felt by these socially disempowered young men, however, this insight eludes the ephemeral community formed in solidarity with the pregnant woman. Only Felix recognises their struggle when, looking into the dilated pupils of his murderers, he pities them, remembering his own days of drug addiction, “when being the big man was all that mattered” (196). The value in this recognition lies in the insight it affords to Smith’s readers, not to her characters. If his murderers
had also been aware of their deeper connection to Felix, the fatal outcome of the interaction might have been different.

Smith also explores other ways of creating community within liminal spaces such as internet chat rooms. Notably, the ubiquitous presence and consumption of drugs in NW functions as a multivalent motif with the capacity to forge unexpected connections among individuals. The illicit status as well as the social nature of drug use imbues narcotics with potential to create conspiratorial links among users, engendering moments of unlikely intimacy among characters from different social strata. The recreational use of drugs enables Leah and Natalie to spend their varsity days “hugging strangers on dance floors” (251). Their decadent aura makes Felix indispensable in his film-industry job as the guy who “[gets] the coffees [and] coke” (177), and it is through this connection that he begins his love-affair with the eccentric and reclusive Annie. The social chasm between Felix and the Oxbridge boy who sells him an old MG is almost bridged by the mention of marijuana, a potential basis for common ground (150). As a social lubricant, the “badly cut cocaine” (265) on the mirror becomes the symbol of Leah and Frank de Angelis’s first meeting, in which he seeks to win the approval of his future wife’s best friend. Natalie partakes of a joint to ease the awkwardness among JJ, Honey and herself in one of her unconsummated cyber-initiated sexual encounters (342). Nathan Bogle’s invitation to Natalie to smoke with him—“Come join me. I’m flying” (362)—grants him a rare opportunity to play host. Furthermore, the mind-altering aesthetic of highness itself allows Leah’s psychotropically baked mind to draw associative connections concerning vegetarianism, death, and Shar (56) and fuels Felix’s mother’s utopian fantasy of a secular, moneyless society (192).

Arguably the most significant feature of Smith’s frequent reference to drugs is that the connections forged through this medium are a result of her characters’ own agency. Unlike in White Teeth, NW’s networks formed around drug consumption are not the result of an omniscient authorial hand spinning a web of coincidental connections. Instead, the presence of drugs in NW points towards a profoundly human desire—a desperation even—for intimacy and connection with others. The destructive consequences of drug abuse are acknowledged as both a cause and an effect of the social immobility and poverty suffocating many members of the Caldwell community. As Pauline Hanwell warns Leah’s antipodean neighbour, Ned, “[dope will] rob you of your ambition” (86). The telling contrast between the ambitious Felix—“Nine months, two weeks, three days” (122) clean—and his father, and Annie, who both spend their days languishing in an intoxicated stupor in their filthy apartments, emphasises the destructive potential of this pervasive element of social life. Smith’s poignant treatment of drug use and abuse depicts the more concrete ways in which characters actively seek out human connection.
The capacity that this motif has to fuel fantasies of ideal communities whilst injuring real ones complements this paper’s consideration of inoperative communities by presenting the human need for connection in a less abstract manner.

When Shar crosses Leah’s threshold in a desperate ploy for drug money, and when Natalie spends the night walking the streets and smoking with Nathan Bogle, it becomes clear that Smith’s commitment to emphasising ethical responsibility to others is most significantly realised when she re-establishes the connections that already exist within a community: not among strangers, but among the estranged. Though she is unable to transcend her NW upbringing entirely, Natalie’s success as a lawyer has distanced her so thoroughly from her Caldwell origin that she is incapable of making the intellectual leap required to empathise with Bogle’s disempowerment. Thoughtlessly regurgitating the self-righteous rhetoric of the privileged, a stoned Natalie Blake urges Bogle:

> Be responsible for yourself! You’re free!
> Nah, man, that’s where you’re wrong. I ain’t free. Ain’t never been free.
> We’re all free!
> But I don’t live like you though. (382)

In one sentence, the twenty-first century’s myth of equal opportunity and limitless upward mobility is shattered by the stark reality of Bogle’s circumstances.\(^\text{11}\) The same revelation renders the encounter with Shar traumatic for the compassionate Leah Hanwell. Recognising her ethical commitment to the destitute woman, Leah’s attempts to help her are doomed by the worn clichés of rehabilitation discourse which remind her that “nobody can force anyone else to get the help they need” (62). Unable to reconcile the jarring disparity between her own relative prosperity and the poverty of these members of her community, Leah’s crisis is articulated in the simple statement, “I just don’t understand why I have this life” (399).

True to Smith’s formula, NW culminates in a grand ethical gesture when Leah and Natalie report Nathan Bogle to the police on the suspicion of his involvement in the murder of Felix Cooper. This action epitomises the ethical obstacle that Smith engages with most consistently in NW: the fact that communities are often formed on the teleological basis of exclusion, with the inevitable result that an ethical commitment to one person entails denying an ethical commitment to another. In this case, Leah and Natalie act in solidarity with Felix, despite the fact that neither of them actually knew him. Throughout the novel Smith experiments with a combination of realist, modernist, and postmodernist techniques, and the

\(^{11}\) See Marcus for a cogent analysis of Smith’s NW as a “new social realism (...) capable of capturing both the mechanics and experience of today’s growing inequality” (n.p. emphasis original).
Felix-narrative is deliberately designed to echo the typically modernist single-day structure that appears in the work of Woolf and Joyce. Felix’s death is foreshadowed in “Visitation” and, as reports of the event recur in Leah and Natalie’s respective chapters, it becomes possible to piece together a chronological narrative in which these three lives run in parallel to one another. Just as the inhabitants of London are presented to the reader as members of a fleeting inoperative community when they observe the skywriting in Mrs Dalloway, so the lives of the Londoners of NW are all momentarily oriented towards the event of the Notting Hill Carnival and Felix’s death. This technique of portraying compearance through disinterested attention to an independent event unites these characters in an inoperative community which accounts for the women’s decision to report Bogle. In spite of her intimate encounter with Bogle as a member of her originary community, Natalie chooses to act on her commitment to Felix whose humanity is drawn to her attention by a newspaper article (393). Leah, on the other hand, is motivated by the disillusionment that emerges from the trauma she experiences due to the emotional inextricability of her confrontation with Shar, the violent death of her dog, and her refusal to bring a child into a world which seems so arbitrary and unfair. Her collaboration in reporting Bogle constitutes an attempt to disentangle some kind of meaning from the web of connections that has become more intricate as Smith’s novels have matured.

Conclusion

Smith’s latest attempt to respond to the contemporary moment realises the cosmopolitan novel’s aim to make visible the ways in which even characters who have never met can determine vital aspects of one another’s lives. Her sustained commitment to exploring stories of connection throughout the development of her œuvre corroborates Schoene’s conviction that there is value in the cosmopolitan novel’s insistence on connectedness. It is clear that, over the course of her career, Smith’s exploration of networks and communities has been repeatedly, and deliberately, reinvented. While she has undoubtedly tempered the “fervid intensity of connectedness” that Wood identifies in his review of White Teeth, she has never abandoned her self-professedly ethical project of exploring networks and connections.

As for Nancy’s theory of inoperative communities, this analysis of Smith’s later work has provided an opportunity to think more deeply about the value of this concept in the realms of theory and praxis. On Beauty was read as a novel that repeatedly exposes the obstacles that class-based prejudice and a wilful blindness to the plight of the other pose to the formation of

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12 For an admirably astute and comprehensive account of Smith’s stylistic experimentation and wide-ranging intertextual play, see Guignery.
inoperative communities. Levi’s character is used to explore the outcome of an ethical realisation of universal humanity. Happily, Levi’s ethical epiphany does succeed in facilitating his incorporation into the Haitian community. However, his inability to provide them with material aid calls into question how much value there is in a theoretical recognition of universal humanity if this ethical conviction cannot carry over into the realm of praxis.

*NW* was read as a novel which provides glimpses of the kind of cosmopolitan community articulated by Nancy and Schoene, whilst simultaneously applying pressure to the very notion of community in order to expose the shortcomings of the idealistic cosmopolitan imagination. Smith’s use of drugs as a multivalent motif for forging connection was presented as a poignant treatment of a profoundly human desire for intimacy and connection with others. The drug motif was distinguished from other forms of community-making because of the way in which it places the agency involved in creating these links in the hands of the characters themselves. Furthermore, two confrontational scenes—one involving the belligerent smoker in the public park, the other involving the pregnant woman on the London Underground—were scrutinised in order to identify the ethical obstacle that Smith engages with most consistently in *NW*: the fact that communities are often formed on the teleological basis of exclusion, with the inevitable result that an ethical commitment to one person entails denying an ethical commitment to another.

Overall, Smith’s sustained exploration the twenty-first century’s new inflection of Forster’s injunction to connect emphasises that, more than ever before, there is no excuse for ethical inaction; there are no horses swerving apart, there are no voices saying “[n]o, not yet” (*Forster Passage to India* 376). As Forster himself might conclude, the time is now: the internet wants it, mobility wants it, global connectivity wants it. And although this goal may be chimerical, with each novel she writes, Smith comes closer to imagining ways in which human connections might be brought to light through fiction and harnessed for the purpose of ethical action.

**Works cited**


Ashley Maher, the Stevenson Junior Research Fellow (JRF) at University College, Oxford, is currently undertaking a postdoctoral project on “the largely unexplored influence of modernist architecture on British writers of the twentieth century”. As she explains to me in Oxford’s Nosebag café, a very un-modernist location, this ‘network’ of influences throws up some surprising connections. For instance, she informs me that “the poet John Betjeman—someone we don’t really associate with modernism but with Victorian preservationism and church architecture—was assistant editor of the Architectural Review, which was one of the major proponents of modernist architecture in Britain”. Unsurprisingly perhaps, “he’d gotten the job through people he had known at Oxford and then he enlisted some of his Oxford acquaintances to write for it, people like Evelyn Waugh, W. H. Auden, and Louis MacNeice. It’s also interesting to trace the people he met through that world; he was a friend of the Bauhaus artist Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, someone with whom you probably wouldn’t expect him to spend a lot of time. Frederick Etchells was also a good friend”. How, you might be wondering, did this disparate group of people manage to form such a network? Maher explains that “places like Hampstead allowed writers to meet architects, H.G. Wells connected with Berthold Lubetkin, Stephen Spender met Erno Goldfinger, etc. So I think there are these networks that form through geographical proximity but also through sites of publishing, like the Architectural Review and Cyril Connolly’s magazine Horizon”.

In establishing this network of unexpected connections and influences, Maher’s research helps us to rethink the aesthetics and politics of certain modernist writers, like Betjeman, but also modernism more broadly. As she puts it: “modernism as a term was contemplated by a wide range of authors, not only authors that were considered to be modernists themselves. Modernism was at the centre of a wide range of cultural debates, it wasn’t just about aesthetics, but also politics, because the idea was that by changing people’s environment you could open their eyes to new social possibilities. Wyndham Lewis talked about renovating the city as a way to provide “a new form-content for our everyday vision”.

Part of the fascination comes in tracing the major shifts these writers underwent throughout their lives. For Maher, “Aldous Huxley is an interesting example because in his architectural criticism in the early 1920s he advocated for the state to ‘lacerate our individualistic feelings’ by imposing architectural unity. But then there’s a huge shift in his criticism right before he wrote Brave New World (1931), as he starts to describe literature as a medium opposed
to modernist architecture. Later, in *Brave New World Revisited* (1958), he addressed the 'nightmare of total organisation' that can come if you apply modernism’s heightened formal discipline to political systems. He starts to think about literature as the very medium for liberalism, the medium best able to communicate individualism and individual expression as he sees architecture being more and more associated with collectivist political projects. He directly compares modernist art to collectivist politics – the sort of abstraction that happens in modernist art, such as cubism, he considers a form of dehumanisation, a move away from organic shape to pure geometry, a collapsing of individuality that he associates with communism. He reads a politics into pure geometry”.

Having described the intricate architectural-literary ‘networks’ at the heart of her research, Maher then provides some helpful advice for PhD students, like myself, regarding the all-important viva: “the advice that was given to me and that I found helpful was to think about it not only as an examination but also a way to have really intelligent helpful people in a room together giving you advice for revision, especially if you want to turn your project into a book. This helps you to think about what you’ll do differently. That’s one of the hardest things, once you’ve grown so set in thinking about your project in a certain form. The viva can be helpful to imagine all the other ways you could write it. Having this discussion also allows you to think about your project’s importance in the field. The viva helped me to go back and revise my introduction, to think more about the wider stakes of the work”.

Maher is currently turning her own PhD, awarded by Washington University in St Louis, into a book. As she explains, “with the first book, as I understand it, it’s better to get quite a bit of revision done before sending out a proposal, as the press will want to see more of your writing than it might with more established scholars. Conferences I think are good for meeting publishers and getting a sense of what presses are doing what sort of work”.