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Author(s): Margaret Cohen

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Narratology in the Archive of Literature

Literary Studies' Return to the Archive

OVER THE PAST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS literary studies has experienced a “return to the archive,” a renewed interest in historical research on the part of literary critics trained in the era of theory. Rather than a well-defined movement with a unified program, the return to the archive constitutes a loose affiliation among critics who have come to the archive with questions as diverse as their informing theoretical paradigms. Once in the archive, they have continued to work with literary theory. Indeed, their concept of the archive itself had been shaped by this institution’s theoretical reformulation by Michel Foucault, who expanded the notion of the archive as a collection of the brute material records of the past to the discourses of which the records are the residue.

At the same time that critics have applied theory to discrete objects they have scaled back theory’s universalizing claims. In the return to the archive, literary theory has become what the historian of science Peter Galison called “specific theory” when he reflected on the future of literary theory in a conference on the subject organized by *Critical Inquiry* in 2003. By “specific theory,” Galison means theory that works at a productive intermediate scale “between the zero distance allowed by the dream of an extreme empiricism and the infinite scale of a magical universalism.”¹

In this article I am interested in the consequences for literary history of the return to one kind of archive in particular that sometimes gets lost in the conflation of the archive with history and materiality: the archive of literature. Specifically, I will discuss how the excavation of forgotten literary forms makes it once more possible to broach questions of literature’s aesthetic excellence. To propose the importance of literary excellence may seem

ABSTRACT To chart accurately the contours of the novel, literary historians are in the process of recovering the variety and complexity of its generic practice across its history. “Narratology in the Archive” surveys this recovery and discusses its methodology, differentiating this recovery from symptomatic reading. The article then illustrates this method with the recovery of sea adventure fiction as an influential transactional practice of the novel from Defoe to Conrad. I suggest that sea adventure plots are defined by readers’ playful manipulation of information to solve problems posed by the text. / REPRESENTATIONS 108. Fall 2009 © The Regents of the University of California. ISSN 0734-6018, electronic ISSN 1533-855X, pages 51-75. All rights reserved. Direct requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content to the University of California Press at <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp>. DOI:10.1525/rep.2009.108.1.51.



archaic for an article written in 2009. This measure, once assumed by any critical discussion, was thoroughly problematized in the canon debates of the 1980s. When the great tradition was exposed as the reification of institutional and social power relations, the self-evidence of an artifact's excellence was implicated as well. This self-evidence was further demolished in transnational inquiries of the last ten years, suggesting a cultural relativism in the diversity of poetic forms across space as well as time.

Yet the perception that value is intrinsic to literary works has not disappeared. It is of course proudly claimed by belletrists, but even those critics most active in demystifying the canon evince a working intuition that some literature is more valuable, interesting, productive—fill in your word of choice—in short, worth analyzing, than other literature. Even if this intuition is not articulated, it shapes scholars' choice of focus for their own work as well as teaching. The selection of texts offered to students remains extraordinarily restricted compared to all the literature that has been written. In addition, criteria of beauty and worth continue to be used in arguments to publics of administrators and donors concerning the value of literary study in an age that privileges science and instrumental reason. Critics on the front of the canon wars had considered jettisoning the notion of literary value itself, turning the study of literature into a branch of cultural history. But this approach lets go of the specificity that makes literary studies a distinctive enterprise, bypassing its most difficult yet constitutive questions. Literary critics study a mode of cultural expression that has its own specific power. They need not be afraid to own this power, particularly amid the reigning culture of instrumentality. What is "the literary"? Why and how does literature express itself in a way that is distinctive from other forms of cultural expression, textual or otherwise? Why do audiences find some artifacts endowed with exceptional power, and how extensive is these artifacts' reach? How do works manage to reach audiences very different from those for which they are intended, even if this relevance may take some critical analysis to perceive? Why do some works prove transmissible across time and space, in contrast to others bound to their own contexts and illegible when they are transported?

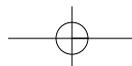
These are theoretical questions, but they play themselves out on local terrain. To ask about literary excellence is to inquire about taste. Taste entails social expectations, which is to say audiences that are historically and culturally situated. Though the predilections and judgments of these audiences were of interest in traditional literary history, they were not conceptualized in a coherent fashion. Rather, those expectations that mirrored critics' sensibilities were valued, while other judgments were discarded. The relative weight given by twentieth-century literary history to nineteenth-century judgments of Germaine de Staël or George Sand, on the one hand,



and of Stendhal on the other, exemplifies this incoherence. De Staël and Sand were authors who were preeminent across most of the nineteenth century, while Stendhal received mixed and spotty recognition until the late nineteenth century. However, until feminists reclaimed the writings of de Staël and Sand at the end of the last century, the nineteenth-century admiration for these authors was belittled by twentieth-century scholars. The widespread contemporary acclaim of de Staël and Sand did not serve as the gateway to an inquiry into the coherence of their practice. Rather, the fame of the two was explained as the notoriety of scandalous women whose lives were more important than their work (a statement I recall being made to a fellow student apropos of de Staël in graduate school in the 1980s).

In the case of Stendhal, in contrast, the comparatively scant contemporary reviews that existed were given disproportionate weight. In his introduction to *La Chartreuse de Parme*, Stendhal's Garnier editor, Henri Martineau, would cite as authoritative Honoré de Balzac's declaration that "*La Chartreuse de Parme* is in our period, and up to the present, in our ideas, the masterpiece of the literature of ideas."² Not only is Balzac's judgment unrepresentative; if we attend to the aesthetic of the novel during this period, we discover that it is a polemical move. When Balzac penned these words in 1840, what was called "the novel of ideas" was endowed with great prestige, and there was widespread consensus that Sand was its preeminent practitioner. Balzac's judgment on Stendhal proves to be a move in Balzac's own hostile takeover of the literature of ideas discussed by Naomi Schor, Christine Planté, and myself, among other critics.

In order to untangle the snarl of aesthetic criteria, habits, polemics, and prejudices that now inform our decisions to select some texts as more worthy than others, it would be helpful to have a systematic and thorough historical account of poetic taste. This account would trace the emergence, interplay, and transformation of distinctive poetic forms and how they mutated in tandem with other literary institutions. In the process, these recovered aesthetics would have an impact on our theoretical models, for the shadow of the canon extends beyond individual works. To reorganize the bookshelves of literary history, it is not enough to restore decanonized works or popular literature of the era. Rather, the theories and descriptions we use to make sense of individual works are thoroughly intertwined with the artifacts themselves. The searching, deconstructive inquiries focusing on selfhood and reading as inseparable from error and ambivalence are, for example, honed on a *longue durée* Romantic lineage evincing a fondness for an opaque psyche represented in tropes of conflict, ambiguity, and irony. Hence, it should come as no surprise that Romantic writers provide many examples for deconstructive analysis. Similarly, narratologists' models of the novel based on the forward movement of plot and penetrating the depths of character



and society abstract the mechanisms of the European realist lineage. Narratologists then use individual works in this lineage to exemplify the workings of their theories—admitting a modernist/fantastic twist on this aesthetic as the nineteenth century drew to a close.

The excavation of specific, though sometimes unnamed, textual practices like Romanticism or realism that shape seemingly transhistorical theories is a salutary way to understand their situatedness, in the spirit of Galison's "specific theory." This might be called an *archaeological* contextualization, recovering the epistemological and aesthetic horizon shared by a paradigm of literary theory and its privileged objects of study. What has recently been called the "mimetic" approach in literary criticism is another way to encourage consideration of the implicit situatedness of theory. In the mimetic approach, the critic foregrounds the similarity between her practice and its object, using writerly tools like style and rhetoric, as well as content. Both approaches belong to a *reflexive* critical turn: reflexive, as in reflexive sociology or reflexive anthropology, where the analyst includes the implications of her own stance in the material described.

The reading process itself, and particularly book history, provide an especially fertile ground for *reflexive* criticism. A good introduction to the variety of its local areas of investigation is offered by the articles in the journal *Book History*, edited by Ezra Greenspan and Jonathan Rose. The history of reception launched by the critics of Konstanz, notably Hans Robert Jauss and Rainer Warning, has enabled debate about the processes of located reading, as has work on the sociology of reading. In Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction*, for example, reading taste is implicated in the social positioning of different group identities in the postwar French public. Working from the small scale to the big picture, Janice Radway has anatomized the reading practices of romance readers by considering the responses of clients of a single celebrated bookstore in *Reading the Romance*. A description of the institutions of literary criticism also belongs to this reflective criticism, as in John Guillory's *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*, or Michael Warner's "Uncritical Reading," anthologized in Jane Gallop's *Polemic*. Since reading in the return to the archive entails historiographical techniques, literary critics can learn from the reflexive turn in archival scholarship on the part of historians as well. Examples in this vein include Arlette Farge's discussion of the emotional tonalities of archival work in her *Goût de l'archive* and Ann Laura Stoler's account of her difficulty making sense of the archives of Dutch colonial rule in *Along the Archival Grain*.³

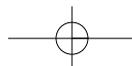
An emphasis on "reflexivity" might sound as if it opens the door to self-absorption. In the practice of literary history, however, the reflexive moment is the gateway to theoretical refinement. Once we understand how a critical



method emerges from reading a particular set of objects, we can also grasp the limits that this set of objects imposes on theory's categories. This understanding in turn gives us the possibility of transporting theory to other classes of objects, by transforming its categories and descriptions as necessary. A good example of a theoretical paradigm with the capacity to travel, if we are willing to undertake such transformation, is narratology. Narratological models of character, plot, and description work well to reveal the practices of certain subgenres across the development of the novel that come under the capacious tent of historical realism. However, these models do not adequately describe other equally important subgenres in the history of the novel, subgenres that were neglected in the postwar period of literary studies, sentimental and adventure fiction, for example. The process mistakenly called the rise of the novel is not the smooth evolution of historical realism to its modernist sublation, but rather a thick process of contestation and transformation among a range of competing and diverse narrative subgenres.

Narratology as classically practiced could focus only on the individual text because it worked within a realist horizon of expectation naturalized to the point of self-evidence. This horizon of expectation could be denaturalized, though, by applying narratology to the archive of neglected aesthetics. Roland Barthes could find the universe in a grain of sand, as he put it in the opening to *S/Z*, because the plot dynamics of Balzacian realism were so familiar that they were easily recognizable and hence susceptible to narratological simplification. But this familiarity does not obtain for the history of narrative considered more expansively. Even Barthes, that brilliant reader, would have been hard-pressed to pen a study like *S/Z* about an adventure tale by James Fenimore Cooper or a sentimental novel by Sand, to choose two of Balzac's contemporaries, who were arguably more appreciated by readers of his time.

In the case of the modern novel, genre is an essential scale for producing a thick history of the novel's diverse aesthetics. For novelists, genres are poetics that transcend the pages of a single example and have been adapted by a public. As Fredric Jameson wrote in *The Political Unconscious*: "Genres are essentially literary *institutions*, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact."⁴ We oversimplify, however, if we assume that genre is always the scale at which to look for poetics in their collective existence. The historical avant-garde, for example, contains movements whose contract between writers and publics manifests itself in other aesthetic expressions, and, indeed, the process of breaking genre may be part of that movement's intervention. But in the case of the novel, from Miguel de Cervantes, Madeleine de Scudéry, and Daniel Defoe to literary modernism, genres as well as subgenres have

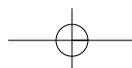


been the scales at which readers and writers have identified the coherence of forms and their transformations.

Some of the novel's subgenres are known, others are found on the pages of forgotten literature, and some are forgotten but shape works at the heart of the literary canon. The poetics of Balzac's fiction, for example, are in fact informed by the sentimental fiction of Sand and others, just as they are informed by Cooper's sea fiction and the comic novel, to name three now comparatively devalued aesthetics of the novel that were widely admired in 1830. Understanding how the realist novels of Balzac make use of these poetics is part of demystifying Balzacian realism as a work of genius and understanding it is a possibility within a historically evolving *literary system*, to use the terminology of Franco Moretti, or *literary field*, to use the language of Pierre Bourdieu.⁵ The accounts of Moretti and Bourdieu are compatible, though each places the emphasis on a different aspect of the social dimension of literature. Moretti, more interested in morphology, also emphasizes the geographical scope of the literary system, encompassing internationalism and regionalism. Bourdieu works, in contrast, with a model that does not reflect on scale. Rather, Bourdieu universalizes the case of France by assuming a literary field scaled to the nation, with a great metropolis at its epicenter. In addition, Bourdieu focuses on the different kinds of extrapoeitic institutions that define literature, though he shares with Moretti and Jameson the insight that genre is a social institution.

In the case of novel studies, the recovery by critics of the interlocking and evolving poetic patterns that constitute its history is well under way, though the recovery of these patterns has proceeded unevenly. There exist myriad models of realism, reaching back to Georg Lukács's work at the beginning of the twentieth century, and these models are still evolving today. One of the most recent contributions to this body of criticism has been a new interest in the importance of character, exemplified by Deidre Lynch's rehabilitation of eighteenth-century characters that do not fit the pattern of the realist novel's psychologically complex protagonist, and by Alex Woloch's study of the systems of "minor characters" as essential to the plot dynamic of nineteenth-century realism.⁶

But other subgenres have been put on the map of the novel's aesthetics as well. For the long lineages of adventure fiction, Mikhail Bakhtin's description in *The Dialogic Imagination* is an essential point of departure. The return to the archive by feminist literary critics has recovered subgenres associated with women writers and readers, as in the rehabilitation of the Gothic in the scholarship of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Kate Ellis, and April Alliston, to cite only a few among a number of pathbreaking archaeologies. Critics tempered by a Marxian interest in working-class cultures like Marc Angenot and Michael Denning have attended to popular fiction. Katie Trumpener's *Bardic*

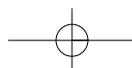


Nationalism is an example of a study that recovers the coherence of the national tale through looking at its connection to oral genres associated with the Celtic fringe. Postcolonial criticism has propelled interest in the interaction of non-Western narrative forms with the novel and has led to inquiries into how the oriental tale shaped the European novel such as those by Srinivas Aravamudan and Rosalind Ballaster, among others. Recovering the relationship of the novel to other genres, discourse, and media has opened a portal to the logic of forgotten poetics, and this study has taken critics to archives other than those of literature. Victorian social discourse, for example, has been used by Catherine Gallagher to grasp the coherence of the industrial fiction of Victorian England, while an archaeology of popular historical spectacle in postrevolutionary France has enabled Maurice Samuels to rethink the aesthetic of the French historical novel.⁷

I have cited just a handful among the many scholars who have been recovering the novel's poetic complexity by delving into the archive. And yet, there still remain a surprising number of aesthetics to recover, even within such a well-worked-over terrain as the nineteenth-century novel. Once we have pieced together the novel's evolution as a process of interlocking and conflicting aesthetics, it will be possible to gain a historically responsible understanding of different ways works have been judged to have literary merit across the history of the novel. It will also be possible to situate individual works in relation to their generic horizon. Both gestures open the door to a renewed attention to excellence in the novel: starting from historical differentiation among aesthetics, we may also be able to compare and contrast, establishing transhistorical qualities that are shared at least by some of them. The work of assembling this history from a range of critical studies is a version of what Moretti calls *distant reading* when he discusses the possibility of anatomizing the world literary system.⁸ Such excavation is, however, distant reading that starts close to home.

An Archaeology of Literary Value Is Not Symptomatic Reading

Such an inquiry into the forgotten poetics of literary history attends to the social dimension of literature. But it attends to an aspect of literature's social situation that is different from one of the most famous approaches to this question of the past twenty-five years within U.S. literary studies. This approach is known as symptomatic reading. As memorably laid out by Jameson in *The Political Unconscious*, symptomatic reading inquires into the repressed material history that shapes works of literature, delving into textual poetics to find the conflicts and contradictions that could not be articulated in propositional form. As Jameson declared in a famous statement,



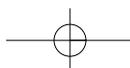
textual hermeneutics “always presupposes, if not a conception of the unconscious itself, then at least some mechanism of mystification or repression in terms of which it would make sense to seek a latent meaning behind a manifest one, or to rewrite the surface categories of a text in the stronger language of a more fundamental interpretive code.”⁹ For Jameson, and for symptomatic reading as it subsequently became practiced in the United States, the macrolevel historical conjuncture became the textual unconscious, and individual texts became the bearers of major, if traumatic and unacknowledged, historical developments.

Jameson and others applied symptomatic reading to realist and modernist narrative. However, in the case of novels that do not conform to the realist or modernist paradigms, symptomatic reading loses its bearings. To understand the poetics of a text, we need its generic horizon. As I have been emphasizing throughout this article: what has been called close reading is actually reading from the perspective of a horizon of generic expectation that has become naturalized and hence seems intuitive. Despite symptomatic reading’s interest in demystifying blindspots, symptomatic reading has an aesthetic blindspot, which is its predilection for the postwar critical canon. To express this critique of symptomatic reading using Marxian vocabulary: symptomatic reading does not sufficiently attend to how a work of literature’s representation of the historical conjuncture is *mediated* by aesthetic considerations, by its poetic conventions, and by its position in the literary system and the literary field. Symptomatic reading’s approach for generating the textual repressed by hermeneutic practices of close reading is also part of its unwitting perpetuation of the practices of postwar literary studies.

A literary archaeology of the novel’s interlocking, evolving system of poetics is not symptomatic reading. Nonetheless, its goal of returning to measures of literary value through recovering historical context is not necessarily in conflict with symptomatic reading. Far from it: once we reconstruct the lost horizon of the poetics that have shaped different kinds of novels, we may discover that the ways in which a text is symptomatic help to endow them with singular appeal. “Enjoy your symptom” is Slavoj Žižek’s famous phrase. Tweaking his notion of enjoyment from psychic to aesthetic enjoyment: one form of literary excellence may inhere in the poetic aspect of their symptomatic expression.

Narratology in the Archive Is Not Close Reading

The intensive reading of canonical texts was essential to the training of literary critics in the era of theory. It continues to dominate the teaching of literature today. Close reading of canonical texts is a preferred



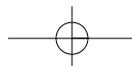
method in pedagogical and collegial situations even for scholars uncomfortable with the canon and the canonical values of the critics who first developed it. The reasons for its persistence are in part strategic: close reading is ideally suited to the seminar and to a twenty- or thirty-minute conference presentation. But as soon as scholars start to work on the archive of forgotten literature, techniques of close reading come up short. Problems range from the simple lack of time critics have to read closely all the texts that make up the great unread to the failure of some of these texts to signify in fashions that are meaningful using the criteria of close, formal analysis.

Critics returning to the archive of literature, and certainly those seeking to reconstruct forgotten poetics, have hence improvised alternative kinds of reading. Individual artifacts still remain the portal to structure; they are the raw data to be organized. But when first opened, the documents in the archive are often utterances within the framework of lost *langues* that need to be recovered before their full meaning emerges.

In *Graphs, Maps, and Trees* and elsewhere, Moretti has provocatively argued for the use of quantitative methods in yielding knowledge of forgotten literature. He and others are now exploring the power of the intensive data mining facilitated by digitization to enhance quantitative approaches. At the same time, though such tools may be useful in drawing attention to patterns, somewhere in that process the patterns need to be discerned. Words are a unit of recognition particularly helpful for data mining. So too, are categories derived from already validated narrative devices, like first-person narrative, description, and so on. But a search program has more trouble recognizing concepts than words. And how is one to search for categories and concepts that are not yet recognized as such? Discerning new patterns from the archive of literature still requires the critical act of perceptive reading. The question becomes, reading of what kind?

In the following section, I set down some guidelines for responding to the challenge of reading across a variety of unconceptualized texts and discerning coherent practices at a collective level:

Reading for patterns. Orienting oneself to extract a conceptual schema from a mass of untheorized, or in some cases unsatisfactorily theorized, texts involves looking for patterns that recur—be they poetic patterns or figures of thought and motif. Reading for patterns neither denies nor affirms the artistry of individual texts, although it still has questions of aesthetics and formal construction in view. Since the poetic practices we seek to discern may have been intuitively recognizable to contemporaries at the time they were produced, it can be useful to start grouping texts that attend to generic or other tags that were applied at the time, even if such designations were formulated to market the text rather than from any literary sensitivity.



The criterion for a pattern is not that it is always identical in different texts, but that there is a “family resemblance.” Rather than the coherence of a single text, the aim is to define the horizon of possibilities that shape an individual text’s construction and the range of variations within this horizon as well. In this effort to discern the family, it can also be useful to consult “the neighbors”: genres or other bodies of writing or the arts at the edges of the poetics the work of reading is starting to reveal.

This critical process involves abstraction along with organization. Patterns do not go about calling themselves by name: the function or identity of a particular pattern may be nowhere specifically identified in the literature in question. The individual texts are the raw material; the starting point and not the conclusion. The critical appreciation of contemporaries can also be useful in starting to grasp the contours of unfamiliar patterns. These appreciations may escape prejudices that blind us to the coherence of forgotten aesthetics, as well as illuminating them in sometimes unpredictable ways.

Once a pattern starts to take shape, it is generally important to read around in literature of the time. Sometimes, the question then emerges of a pattern’s provenance, which can lead to productive “regression”: working back along the generic chain from the pattern to the literature where it first appears.

Just reading. I take the term “reading for patterns” from Sharon Marcus, whom I first heard use it at the 1995 Nineteenth-Century French Studies Colloquium at UC Santa Barbara. In *Between Women*, Marcus elaborates a related concept scaled to a group of texts. This is the concept of “just reading,” which entails attending to material in cultural representations that is systematically present but seemingly inert. In *Between Women*, specifically, Marcus does not dismiss the intimate, often erotic representations of female friendship throughout the pages of Victorian fiction, but rather seeks “to account more fully for what texts present on their surface but critics have failed to notice.” Such reading recognizes the text as “complex and ample rather than as diminished by, or reduced to what it has had to repress.”¹⁰ “Just reading” shares the descriptive imperative of structuralism; however, it seeks a description of the residue that falls away in structuralist abstraction. In its interest in recovering the value of seemingly insignificant aspects of a text, “just reading” partakes of the Benjaminian imperative of rescuing critique. As Marcus shows in her archaeology of the complex practices of female friendship in Victorian culture, details only appear inert or trivial because we are lacking their epistemological frame.

Just enough reading. At the same time, constructing the framework to recover illegible details is time-consuming. To make headway, it is necessary

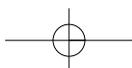


to delimit the material considered, along with the aim of inquiry. The standard for delimitation is “just enough reading”: to read through a large body of texts looking for the configuration that provides a coherent pattern, rather than prolonging analysis until one has read exhaustively. Exhaustive reading would indubitably be enriching, producing telling variations in the pattern, showing a pattern’s limitations, and revealing meaningful exceptions. The interest of such variety does not, however, negate the existence of patterns or their significance.

Another aspect of “just enough reading” is “restraint.” Reading in the great unread entails attentiveness to the materials of the archive. It also entails humility before the vastness of the task and a retreat from totalizing ambitions. Such modesty is in the spirit of Foucault’s reminder about the necessarily partial and fragmentary nature of knowledge, when he took structuralism into the archive in his *Archaeology of Knowledge*—though Foucault was interested in the concept of discourse that ranged across the social formation rather than the specific dynamics of the literary field.¹¹ Foucault’s master concept of discourse was specifically aimed against the semi-autonomy of literary history that I have identified as a crucial level of mediation in making sense of a work of literature’s cultural position.

The representative example. In presenting the epistemology or aesthetics garnered from reading for patterns, there is a heuristic problem. The narratologist in the archive is constructing a model based on reading a number of works that will be unfamiliar to all but a handful of specialists. At the same time, presentation of the range of examples used to draw up this model can be confusing. This difficulty can be overcome by focusing on one example where the features under discussion emerge with particular force. This example might be a work in a genre where many of the features are clustered together. Or it might be a work in a genre at the time it was emergent. Precisely because such a work’s features are incompletely perfected, the genres framing it are visible and can help define the genre’s specificity. Such a use of the representative example could be confused with close reading, since it focuses on a single text. But the text takes on its importance as the abstraction of a class rather than in its unique specificity.

Scaling to the case. This principle concerns an analysis that takes scale into consideration, but where scale is understood as a frame of analysis to be produced rather than assumed. The scales that we use to make sense of texts are not handed down from on high but, rather, need to be constructed as revealing for the artifacts under consideration. This process is dynamic: one goes into the analysis with a received set of categories for organizing history or literary history, and then progressively revises them as conceptual formations



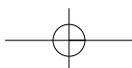
emerge. Scales of analysis that could be altered include literary periodization, genres, geographies, or concepts. They could also include periodizations external to literature, once we discover the nonsynchronous nature of literary history with other kinds of practices in the social formation, such as political history.

Different modes of forgetting. Forgotten literature is the portal to the recovery of lost poetics. At the same time, the term *forgotten literature* is a little vague and misleading. First, it implies that the aim of archival recovery is the literature itself, rather than the poetic horizon in which a single piece of literature takes shape. Second, it conflates different ways in which texts and patterns have gone missing in our time. At the scale of the individual novel, forgotten literature includes texts once celebrated as masterpieces and subsequently decanonized, as well as works that were disregarded when they appeared. At the scale of subgenre, forgotten literature includes works belonging to genres that were low in the aesthetic hierarchy of an era or genres that were major and then decanonized, as well as minor examples of successful genres and experiments that were what Bourdieu calls “position-taking” in relation to established poetics, but that had no collective impact. These differences could also be put in terms of forgotten literature’s critical treatment. Some forgotten literature is completely unread. Some forgotten texts have been preserved as the province of specialists, who have offered useful, if not theoretical description. And forgotten literature can even encompass works that have been analyzed extensively, but whose coherence and significance changes, sometimes radically, once they are reframed within a horizon of aesthetic expectation that has been erased. This leads to one more guideline:

The forgotten canon. The fact that well-known texts may in fact be shaped by unrecognized, forgotten aesthetics entails recognition of the illegibility even of canonical works. The need to reformulate received categories in light of the aesthetics yielded from the archive of literature has the potential to transform our view of works at the heart of the literary canon.

The Case of Sea Adventure Fiction

Narratology in the archive of literature is expanding our understanding of the novel’s formal flexibility and diversity. In particular, such an approach enables us to understand the important roles played in the history of the novel by narrative aesthetics that make no sense from the vantage point of close reading. The remainder of this article gives a brief



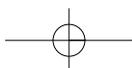
description of one such recovered narrative subgenre, sea adventure fiction, whose interest and coherence is impervious to close reading's search for hermeneutic depth. This subgenre was one of the major trans-Atlantic genres of the novel in the nineteenth century, dating back, in fact, to *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and extending into the twentieth century with Joseph Conrad.

Sea adventure fiction is not susceptible to intensive reading for two reasons. First, the plot of such adventure novels unfolds in the performance of action. The performance entails a form of human agency skilled at overcoming dangers. Across the era of global ocean travel, mariners epitomized an ability to negotiate highly risky situations successfully through advanced skills and finely tuned practical reason. This is a capacity we can follow Joseph Conrad in calling craft. In novels, too, mariner heroes are represented from the vantage point of their mastery of action rather than psychological depth. Nor do their actions involving problem-solving otherwise engage in a hermeneutic search for revelation. Indeed, the reader's interaction with the character in large measure entails sharing his or her problems and seeking to solve them at the level of the imagination, calling on information found both in novels and in the surrounding world.

The importance of information (in the sense of facts or data) for the reader in solving these problems raises another aspect of sea adventure fiction impervious to close reading. Walter Benjamin noted the importance of information in the novel in his famous essay "The Storyteller" and lamented that it impoverished the rich overlays of significance found in the tale. However, the use of information only impoverishes the novel from the standpoint of a poetic tradition privileging exegesis over performance.

To wrest from the archive of literature the coherence of this pattern, which differs from the novel we prize for its hidden recesses, I followed the guidelines of literary historical excavation cited earlier. The well-known generically tagged sea novels of the nineteenth century, by Jameson Fenimore Cooper, Frederick Marryat, Joseph Conrad, and others serve as an obvious starting point. From this group the international scale of the genre already starts to emerge, showing that it extended across the Atlantic. This international scale prompts the need to rescale the history of the novel to the particular case. The nineteenth-century novel has until recently been associated with the rise of modern cultural nationalism and evaluated within the frame of national traditions. But sea adventure fiction offers an instance of a subgenre whose full importance cohered at the international scale.

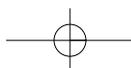
Working back through this history of the novel to the first appearance of this pattern, led me to Daniel Defoe's *Life and Strange, Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner*. On account of its innovations, as well as its



subsequent fame and influence, this text became my representative example. Contemporary appreciations of sea fiction in the nineteenth century already suggested the importance of thrilling dangers and heroic performance in sea adventure fiction. Such patterns turned out to date to Defoe's innovations in *Robinson Crusoe*, a fact that emerged in consulting the literature in the neighborhood of Defoe in 1719. These neighbors were the nonfictional accounts of pathbreaking navigations. Such accounts, of both recent voyages in the time of Defoe, like those of William Dampier and Woodes Rogers, and of more distant exploits reaching back centuries, were the best-sellers of Defoe's age, outstripping even devotional literature in popularity. Defoe was keenly aware of his literary neighbors as competition, both drawing on their patterns for narrating dangers and self-consciously improving on their poetics.

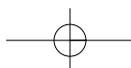
The core of narrative poetics in nonfictional maritime literature turned on a particular kind of saltwater adventure. This saltwater adventure portrayed extreme danger and the mariner's methods of alleviating it. Nonfiction took this adventure from the ship's log, a kind of record keeping using written language as a technology of maritime work. The ship's log was a journal kept in the course of a voyage that was updated every twenty-four hours. Developed in an era not only before global positioning systems (GPS) but also before it was possible to calculate longitude at sea, it contained details about bearings, weather, and other conditions that would help mariners determine their position. It also memorialized the events of the voyage and was used by members of the ship's company as the voyage was unfolding and for a diverse professional audience, including other mariners, back on land. Any event outside the routine was recorded in the ship's log in a category called "the remarkable occurrence."

Historians of early modern science like Lorraine Daston and Kathleen Parks have noticed the recurrence of the remarkable occurrence in overseas travel narrative.¹² In their accounts, they explain this concept as applied to phenomena that exceed existing epistemological frames. But a large share of the information in ships' logs, as in their incorporation into retrospective narratives, concerned the work of the sea. The category of the remarkable occurrence was the journal site where mariners described unexpected, difficult conditions and serious dangers, along with the remedies they devised to sail through them to safety. When these events made their way from the ship's log to retrospective accounts of sea voyages, the remarkable occurrence formed the kernel of a narrative sequence composed of danger followed by remedy. As the mariner came up with an expedient in a potentially life-threatening situation, he displayed his "craft," the strength, expertise, intelligence, and judgment that enabled him to contend with the high-risk zones of the world's oceans.



When Benjamin opposed novel to story, looking at the novel's traffic in information, he treated information as a creature of the printing press and represented it as impoverished compared to the rich layers of meaning around what Benjamin called "storytelling" in traditional oral cultures. In Benjamin's words, "storytelling . . . thrives for a long time in the milieu of work—the rural, the maritime, and the urban." Rather than aiming to "convey the pure essence of a thing, like information or a report," storytelling "sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again."¹³ However, the maritime use of information reminds us that information comes in historically situated forms. The data recorded by mariners in their logs and then memorialized for a broader public in nonfictional narratives differs in significance and utility from the sensational *fait-divers* of the mass press that served as Benjamin's model for information in the novel. This information is, first of all, accumulated in the hard and dangerous work of sailing across what were then the largely unknown zones of the world's oceans rather than manufactured to sell newspapers. The information in mariners' accounts is also self-consciously partial and always subject to revision by subsequent observation. Most important for modifying Benjamin's characterization, this information is not primarily shared for entertainment value. The records of oceangoing voyages were a contribution to science and of great value for professionals of the maritime world. This information was a lifeline for seamen, providing details that could help them survive amid great danger. It also served science, conquest, and profit in a multiplicity of ways. Mariners' journals charted unknown waters and coastlines; they provided details on the peoples and resources around the globe; and they recorded geological, biological, and astronomical information, among their many other yields. The audiences for nonfictional narratives were accordingly first and foremost professional. At the same time, this practical literature was also entertaining and found a second audience among armchair sailors. The remarkable occurrences from the ships' logs were the basis of thrilling adventures that were particularly popular among readers for entertainment. Other synonyms for *remarkable* were *extraordinary*, *surprising*, and even *strange*, which was also used as a synonym for dangerous, as in *The Life and Strange, Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner*.

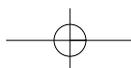
From this contextualization of the sea adventure pattern in relation to the mariner authors who were Defoe's neighbors, the narrative aesthetic of maritime adventure fiction heaves into view. The pattern then can be sharpened as it is tested on other examples of the genre. Variations and transformations in its practice emerge, but a core pattern is perceptible as well. This continuous and mutating pattern is the test of "just enough reading," which indicates the moment to stop the excavation and to draw some conclusions.



In his innovative and influential reworking of the neighbors, Defoe devised a plot that reworked remarkable occurrences. The plot strung together the hero's dangers and remedies, which then became the problems and solutions of trafficking in information for the reader. The hero solved these problems with embodied agency, while the reader solved them by managing and organizing information that was provided either by the narrative or the more general cultural context. Sometimes the work of problem solving on the part of hero and reader are one and the same, as, for example, when the reader shadows Crusoe in his struggle to hunt goats and then tame them for a reliable food source. But sometimes the challenges facing reader and protagonist diverge. Crusoe confronts cannibals as a practical problem, while the reader confronts them as a philosophical problem framed by famous anthropological discussions reaching back to Montaigne. And sometimes the information available to character and reader diverges as well. Thus, the reader can glean the location of Crusoe's island off the Oroonooko Delta long before Crusoe, whether by consulting the title page or by putting together the geography where the shipwreck occurred with Crusoe's musings on the current around his island. In this work of organizing data to come up with a solution, the reader is generating something that is not yet spelled out in the text, but such work of practical problem solving is qualitatively different from plumbing the novel's hidden depths in search of revelation and truth.

Once we understand the specificity of such a pattern, we can pinpoint how sea adventure fiction addresses the historical conjuncture of its era. This gesture resembles symptomatic reading, except that we look at what the text is performing rather than what it hides. In the version of sea fiction practiced by Defoe, for example, the problem solving includes the reconciliation of speculative, high-risk capitalism with the rational capitalism made famous by Max Weber. In this version of symptomatic reading, one does not delve for what is repressed in the text: the contradiction is spelled out throughout, from the time Crusoe forsakes the "middle station" and apprentices himself to a sea captain. And the solution is spelled out as well. Crusoe survives because he acquires the traits of the skilled mariner in his experiences at sea. This character, Defoe suggests, is able to manage the high risk of capitalist speculation, possessing the demeanor best suited to taking on risk and making it yield profit.

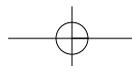
I call the problem-solving reader of sea adventure fiction the "cunning reader" because in early modern parlance to cun was to steer the ship in a feedback system, altering course in response to changing information. Steering a ship is, indeed, a paradigmatic feedback system, leading Norbert Wiener to take the Greek word for steersman, *kubernetes*, as his inspiration in baptizing his new science of information *cybernetics* in 1949. Wiener's nomenclature



indicates the exemplary status of navigation in modernity's romance with information, a romance that sea fiction, too, takes seamanship as the opportunity to explore. This exploration was of interest to armchair sailors who themselves would never venture out to sea. Wolfgang Iser has noted the importance of information games in his narratological analysis of British fiction, *The Implied Reader*, coining a notion of *cybernetic reading*.¹⁴ However, Defoe is a noteworthy absence in Iser's chronology, perhaps because Iser cannot accept the "just reading" required of sea adventure fiction, which does not lay claim to ethical instruction or psychological penetration.

For a pathbreaking mariner like Defoe's contemporary William Dampier, evaluating information found in previous narratives could be a matter of life and death. The cunning reader of Defoe's sea adventure fiction, in contrast, plays with information in the aesthetic mode, as entertainment. At the same time, such playful work has practical application. Through shadowing the struggle of maritime protagonists, the reader learns entertaining factoids about the work of the sea and the far side of the world. She also exercises flexibility and creativity that are part of practical capacity, organizing information at her disposal with a pragmatic experience of the imagination to come up with a solution. The reader of sea adventure fiction hence plays at work and practice. The genre ducks the charge of Quixotism that is sometimes applied to other forms of narrative dealing with adventures that diverge from everyday life. One residue of such pragmatism is the commonplace that novels of work at sea are good for children, voiced from Rousseau, who recommended *Robinson Crusoe* to Emile, to Arthur Ransome, author of the *Swallows and Amazons* series, who told his readers, "It's a very important book for those of you who want to know what to do on a desert island. It is also good about shipwrecks and voyage."¹⁵

In sea adventure fiction, work appears in the guise of the playful organization and transformation of information. Work is an activity that occupies much of our waking lives, yet it has played a comparatively minor role in critical accounts of the novel to this point. From the archive of forgotten aesthetics, then, comes a form of the novel driven by the performance of skilled work. Perhaps adventure genres more generally are the genres of the novel that represent *the labor process*. And perhaps, with sea adventure fiction as a model for comparison, we could elaborate a taxonomy of adventure genres based on the different kinds of work performed in the narrative. In this taxonomy, the sea adventure fiction inaugurated by Defoe would be distinctive in framing work as problem-solving by the practical imagination, embodied on the part of the mariner, and performed at the level of information organization by the armchair sailor. There are other features of Defoe's adventure pattern that are innovations on previous adventure forms. Bakhtin has famously written, for example, about time in premodern adventure forms



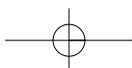
as empty, in contrast to the replete psychological time of the novel of manners. But in sea adventure fiction, adventure time is replete—not with psychology but with problems, work, and the struggle for survival.

Lord Jim:
Narration as Navigation

Once we understand sea adventure fiction's aesthetic of information performance, it is possible to go back and find this pattern shaping novels across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These novels include once popular works now neglected by Alain-René Lesage, the Abbé Prévost, Cooper, and others, but they also include major works of the Western late twentieth-century canon, including novels by Melville, Poe, Hugo, and Conrad. I end this article by using the sea adventure pattern to reframe *Lord Jim* by Conrad as another example of "the forgotten canon." *Lord Jim* is a bookend at the other end of the history of sea adventure fiction from *Robinson Crusoe*, for it transports its patterns to other vanguard frontiers of modernity beyond the seas. We are used to calling this transport the modernism of Melville, Conrad, and so forth. However, understanding such novels from within the horizon of sea adventure fiction, we get a somewhat different account of this modernism than that usually given by Marxian literary history and by symptomatic reading specifically.

For Marxian critics like Jameson, the modernist novel registers a crisis in the power of literature to represent that is triggered by the advent of late capitalist modernity attended by its abstraction, fragmentation, and degradation of labor. With such a crisis, the totalizing stance of realism is no longer possible, nor is the realist illusion of plenitude persuasive. Around the middle of the nineteenth century, then, as late capitalism increasingly expands its reach, novelists start to abandon the project of holding a mirror up to the world. They retreat from realism into aestheticism, exploring the capacities of language and poetics.

However, in arguing that the modernist novel compensates for degraded work, the critic must take account of the specificity of the kind of work that is at issue rather than treat work as a decontextualized abstraction. It is also essential to establish the relevant aesthetic horizon. Once novels like *Moby-Dick* and *Lord Jim* are framed by sea adventure poetics, they turn out to have invented modernism in response to the impact of fundamental transformations in seagoing transport on sea adventure fiction. These transformations are, notably, the routinization of seafaring, capped by the passage from sail to steam. What looks like an aestheticizing turn in the case of Melville, Conrad, and others as well, turns out to respond to the fact that the craft of the mariner becomes archaic in the later nineteenth century. With the demise



of this skilled activity, sea adventure fiction turns nostalgic as well. The authors who invent modernism from sea adventure fiction prize its explorations on the expanding edges of modernity and seek new domains of adventure for the novel. They find these domains in an intellectual work of speculation and poesis. From the vantage point of sea adventure fiction, literary modernism turns to art not as a retreat, but rather as the project of plumbing modernity's as yet uncharted, if increasingly abstract, frontiers.

In Conrad's novels, the signature of such exploration is Conrad's impressionist mode of writing. This impressionism has been noted by critics since the time of Ian Watt; Jameson calls it Conrad's "will to style." For Jameson, Conrad's will to style creates a new parallel, vibrant world of sensuality that offsets the degradation of late capitalism. With this style, Conrad remakes degraded conditions into something beautiful and finds a new unity at the level of the aesthetic—thereby also alleviating the phenomenal experience of fragmentation that characterizes late capitalism. When Jameson devotes a chapter to *Lord Jim* in *The Political Unconscious*, he frames Conrad's use of sea adventure fiction as a way to encapsulate such degraded experience. Jim is led astray by what Conrad calls "the sea life of light literature," a statement that Jameson, lacking a sense of the powerful pattern of sea adventure fiction, takes at face value as referring to trivial entertainment literature that epitomizes the pervasive commodification of late capitalism.¹⁶

But in fact, once we restore the full power of sea adventure fiction to Conrad's generic horizon, it is clear that Jim's problems begin not with sea novels per se but with his mode of reading. Jim enjoys sea fiction's escapism and ignores its portrait of craft. Conrad wrote admiringly about novels by Cooper and Marryat, notably, as prompting his own interest in the work of the sea. And Conrad in fact drapes a number of his sea tales on the scaffold of sea adventure fiction's poetics. The mariner narrators of *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* *The Shadow-Line,* and *Typhoon* relate dangers at sea and how they are overcome through the performance of skilled labor.

Across the Marlow trilogy, in contrast, adventures at sea will yield to the narrator's work of wresting intelligibility from partial information. In this enterprise, Conrad experiments with portraying events, characters, and the phenomenal world as becoming intelligible through a series of intellectual processes resembling the work of navigation. Conrad was familiar with this skilled form of work from his own days at sea, as would his character Marlow have been, for navigation was part of the training of officers. In the era before GPS, the navigator lacked any immediate information on the ship's position once out of sight of land. To figure out this position, the navigator had to make a series of partial observations and then reconcile them. These observations included calculations like measuring the angles of the planets in relation the horizon to gauge the ship's latitude and comparing the time



when the sun was at its zenith (noon) on any day to noon back in Greenwich to gauge the ship's longitude. They also included cross-checking the measurements with estimations of where the ship should be based on its course by the compass, along with estimations about speed adjusted for current and drift. To such calculations, they added observations of flora, fauna, and any known physical features, as well as measurements of depth and examination of the sand at the bottom of the ocean.

This work of cross-checking partial information that is so fundamental to navigation is one that Edwin Hutchins called "processes of representation and re-representation" when he analyzed how information was assembled by the Sea and Anchor Detail, the navigation team on the USS *Palau*, sailing off, San Diego in the 1980s. While the technologies on the *Palau* differ from those used at the time of Conrad, both are part of the same era in navigation from the introduction of the marine chronometer to the development of the GPS. Hutchins writes, "The ship's situation is represented and re-represented until the answer to the navigator's question is transparent."¹⁷ The goal in such representation and re-representation is what Hutchins calls, "the *propagation of representational states* across a series of *representational media*" (117). In other words, evidence in different kinds of media—compass bearings, depth sounding, celestial calculations—need to be aligned so they all give the same answer as to location. This process may sound straightforward, but calculations made by people using sensitive technologies, however finely tuned, are like any human process subject to error. Sometimes there are minute differences in these calculations that need to be reconciled, calling on an aspect of the mariner's skill that involves the imagination; not an escapist or decorative use of it, but rather a pragmatic application, coordinating partial knowledge to approximate reality as closely as possible. The imagination strives for reality because precision is the grail of navigation. If the calculations are off, even by a minimal amount, they can result in a difference of even the few feet that separate a deep channel from a dangerous shoal. These gaps are part of the reason navigation before GPS was viewed as an activity where science meets art.

This craft of lining up partial observations across different media to yield an accurate calculation of orientation is essential to *Lord Jim*. It is essential to the novel's adventures, which portray Marlow combing through the facts of Jim's case and Jim's life, trying to salvage some shred of the mariner's ethos of craft. Marlow also seeks to coordinate different kinds of partial information in his narration of the events of the plot and, indeed, in conjuring the phenomenal world itself. This work of giving partially accurate though obscure findings, which must then be reconciled by the narrator and by the reader shadowing his perceptions, is what Ian Watt called Conrad's "delayed decoding."¹⁸ In this version of cunning reading, however, the challenge is no

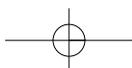


longer survival on the world's remote waters and coasts; it is to understand the world and events depicted in narrative.

To see how Conrad transfers the work of navigation to narration, we can take the example of a scene Watt uses to explicate Conrad's delayed decoding. In the scene, Marlow portrays how he first meets Jim, a meeting precipitated by a misunderstanding. Jim confronts Marlow, having misconstrued a statement made by a man speaking to the latter. The overheard statement is "Look at that wretched cur," which Jim takes to apply to himself, when it in fact applies to a dog. However, Marlow does not narrate this miscommunication in straightforward fashion. Rather, he starts off with partial information on various aspects of the misunderstanding using the different devices by which fiction creates its referential illusion—setting, character, dialogue, and so on—and only eventually coordinates them to produce an explanation.

In surveying the setting, for example, Marlow first uses the device of description, portraying the mangy dog in question hunting for fleas. He then turns to dialogue, where the words between Marlow and Jim intimate a grave insult. Interior monologue is added when we enter Marlow's mind with his "supernatural efforts of memory," to recall the misunderstanding, while there is interference in obtaining this information from the referential world: "I was hindered by the oriental voice within the courtroom" (91). Such interference from the environment is a common problem in the work of collecting information at sea: in the midst of a fog, for example, it is difficult to gauge when the sun is at its zenith and hence to obtain a calculation essential to longitude. The interference recurs throughout Marlow's collection of partial information from different media. Tellingly, when Marlow scans Jim's face in the attempt to read character from it, he compares it to bad weather, to the kind of conditions when the navigator's observations are disrupted: "a darkening sky before a clap of thunder, shade upon shade imperceptibly coming on, the gloom growing mysteriously intense in the calm of maturing violence" (95). Indeed, throughout his struggles to grasp Jim's character, Marlow will emphasize Jim's similarity to those foggy or stormy conditions at sea that impede the information collection in navigation. Hence, the recurrence of statements like, "I don't pretend I understood him. The views he let me have of himself were like those glimpses through the shifting rents in a thick fog—bits of vivid and vanishing detail, giving no connected idea of the general aspect of a country. They fed one's curiosity without satisfying it; they were no good for purposes of orientation" (99).

In the scene of the wretched cur, in contrast to the more general problem of Jim's character, however, Marlow does eventually succeed in lining up all the details across different representations and grasp the misunderstanding. Once the misunderstanding has been clarified, it can be dispelled. Even in clarification, there is double-checking, as in navigation. To bolster his

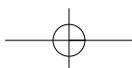


denial that he had called Jim a cur, Marlow not only describes his intent but also points Jim toward the actual dog. “‘Don’t be a fool,’ I cried in exasperation. . . . ‘I’ve heard’ . . . ‘Don’t be a fool,’ I repeated. ‘But the other man said it’ . . . At last his eyes followed downwards the direction of my pointing finger. He appeared at first uncomprehending, and confounded, and at last amazed and scared as though a dog had been a monster and he had never seen a dog before. ‘Nobody dreamt of insulting you,’ I said” (98).

Conrad’s parallels between narration and navigation resonate in other writings. In *The Mirror of the Sea*, Conrad remarks on the struggle to see, in the sense at once of vision and intelligibility, as essential to the work of the sea: “To see! to see! . . . is the craving of the sailor.”¹⁹ In his preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, Conrad characterizes the struggle to wrest sight, at once physical perception and intelligibility, from obscurity, as the work of the novelist in similar terms: “My task, which I am trying to achieve, is, by the power of the written word . . . to make you *see!*” (147). Conrad further underscores the parallel between mariner and novelist, as well as the origins of his modernism, in their shared ethos of skilled labor when he styles the novelist in this preface “the worker in prose” (146).

Lord Jim was the last work of the Marlow trilogy, which also includes *Youth* and *Heart of Darkness*. Only five years after *Lord Jim*, Conrad published the first of what were to be his two works of spy fiction, a genre in which the chase after information becomes an essential motor of the adventure.²⁰ Conrad nods to the superceded work of navigation at sea in *The Secret Agent* by putting the destruction of an emblem of navigation at the center of the novel’s plot, in the sense of story. The terrorist plot takes aim at the Greenwich observatory, the epicenter not only of astronomy but also of the prime meridian that anchors the calculation of longitude essential to producing orientation on the globe.

For the navigator, the goal of such information organization is to yield location. And in some measure, orientation, or at least intelligibility, is the grail of Marlow’s narrative sleuthing. But Conrad also casts his own work as a novelist as more obscure and philosophical when he depicts the novelist as undertaking a pathbreaking exploration whose aim is unknown. In the preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, Conrad writes that “the aim of art . . . like life itself, is inspiring, difficult—obscured by mists. It is not in the clear logic of triumphant conclusion; it is not in the unveiling of one of those heartless secrets, which are called the Laws of Nature. It is not less great, but only more difficult” (148). Transmuting sea adventure fiction into the artist’s exploration of a murky realism in search of an unspecified something, Conrad dissociates adventure from an immediate practical aim. With this notion of the work of art as a noninstrumental exploration of a land veiled in mists, Conrad picks up the Kantian idea of art—purposive form without purpose.



For Kant, this notion qualifies the effect generated by the finished artwork. For Conrad, in contrast, literary exploration is conceived as a dynamic and ongoing process joining artist and cunning reader.

The narratologist in the archive of literature shares with the mariner and the reader the craving “to see, to see.” This “worker in prose,” too, relies on precise techniques coupled with the pragmatic imagination and the tact honed through practice and experience in her efforts to make the unknown intelligible through piecing together partial information. The remarkable ability of navigators to thread a path across the oceans of the globe for almost three hundred years (from the voyages of Vasco da Gama and Columbus until the dissemination of the marine chronometer) lacking complete information about their position on the earth speaks eloquently to the fact that knowledge can be usefully pursued, even amid uncertainty. Across history and indeed to the present day, navigation has been qualified as at once a science, relying on quantitative techniques and measurements, and an art, requiring intuition, tact, and experience. Whether literary scholarship is a science or an art is a question that has provoked lively debate in literary studies across the last hundred years. Neither science nor art, narratology in the archive is artisanal; it may be more accurately characterized as a *craft* in Conrad’s sense of the term.

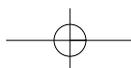
Notes

This paper began as a talk at the conference “The Way We Read Now: Symptomatic Reading and Its Aftermath.” Held in May 2008, the conference was co-organized by Emily Apter, Elaine Freedgood, and Sharon Marcus at Columbia and NYU. I thank conference participants, and in particular Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best, for their perspicacious comments on drafts as I transformed my talk into a substantively different article. The sections on critical reading in the archive and the maritime novel synthesize arguments from my book *The Novel and the Sea*, forthcoming from Princeton University Press in Spring 2010.

1. Peter Galison, “Specific Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2. Available online at <http://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu/issues/v30/30n2.Galison.html>.
2. Henri Martineau, introduction to Stendhal, *La Chartreuse de Parme* (Paris, 1954), xv; my translation.
3. *Book History* can be accessed online at <http://www.sharpweb.org/bookhist.html#TOC9>. On reception theory, see Rainer Warning’s *Rezeptionsästhetik. Theorie und Praxis* (Stuttgart, 1994), and Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti, intro. Paul de Man (Minneapolis, 1982). For seminal examples of sociological approaches to cultural and literary taste, see Pierre Bourdieu’s *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans.



- Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA, 1987), and his *Rules of Art*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford, 1996). See also Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance* (Chapel Hill, 1991). On the institutions of literary criticism in the postwar United States, see John Guillory's *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago, 1995). For a provocative challenge to close reading, see Michael Warner's "Uncritical Reading," in *Polemic: Critical or Uncritical*, ed. Jane Gallop (New York, 2004). See also the other essays in the Gallop volume that take the pulse of contemporary reading practices. On the practice of working in the archive, see Arlette Farge, *Le Goût de l'archive* (Paris, 1997), and Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain* (Princeton, 2009).
4. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca, 1981), 106.
 5. Bourdieu elaborates the notion of the literary field in his *Rules of Art* cited in note 3. Franco Moretti maps the international world system of the novel throughout his writing of the last ten years, and notably in *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800–1900* (New York, 1998), and *Graphs, Maps, and Trees* (New York, 2005). Moretti first introduced the term itself in "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review* (Jan.–Feb. 2000): 54–68.
 6. See Deidre Lynch, *The Economy of Character* (Chicago, 1998), and Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton, 2003).
 7. The foundational theorization of adventure forms is Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin, 1981). Pioneering feminist works on the Gothic include Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York, 1986), Kate Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Champaign, IL, 1989), and April Alliston's paradigm of the Gothic heroine in *Virtue's Faults* (Stanford, 1996). On popular fiction, see Marc Angenot, *Le Roman populaire* (Montreal, 1975), and Michael Denning's *Mechanic Accents*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1998). On the national tale, see Katie Trumpener's *Bardic Nationalism* (Princeton, 1997). On the oriental tale, see Srinivas Aravamudan "In the Wake of the Novel: The Oriental Tale as National Allegory," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 33 (Fall 1999): 5–31, and Rosalind Ballaster, *Fabulous Orient: Fictions of the East in England, 1662–1785* (New York, 2005). On the industrial novel, see Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832–67* (Chicago, 1985). On popular spectacle and the historical novel, see Maurice Samuels, *The Spectacular Past: Popular History and the Novel in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, 2004).
 8. See Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature" cited in note 5.
 9. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 60.
 10. Sharon Marcus, *Between Women* (Princeton, 2007), 75.
 11. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. Alan Sheridan, 2nd ed. (New York, 2002).
 12. See, for example, Lorraine Daston and Kathleen Parks, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York, 1998).
 13. Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, 1969), 91.
 14. Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction* (Baltimore, 1978).
 15. Cited in Richard Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire* (New York, 1997), 5.



16. Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (New York, 1986), 47. Subsequent page numbers are referenced within the text.
17. Edwin Hutchins, *Cognition in the Wild* (Cambridge, MA, 1995), 126.
18. See Ian Watt's chapter on Lord Jim in *Conrad and the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1979), notably 269 ff. The maritime framework reveals that these different techniques are all part of the same work of information processing, and that the goal is clarity, rather than obscurity.
19. Joseph Conrad, *The Mirror of the Sea* (Marlboro, VT, 1988), 78.
20. Erskine Childers's *Riddle of the Sands* (1903) is another early work of spy fiction that emerges from the adventure of the sea. In the navigation of the misty, convoluted marshes of the North Sea, a crafty seaman and his friend, who thinks he is off on a sea holiday of light literature, uncover information that leads them to a German plot to invade Britain.

