

Allegories of the Contemporary

NATHAN K. HENSLEY

In *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (2005), his manifesto for distant reading, Franco Moretti invokes Fernand Braudel to identify three units of literary-historical temporality: the event, the cycle, and the *longue durée*. Moretti's immediate purpose in presenting this typology is to prepare the ground for his own theory of generic life cycles, those twenty-five-year-long "generations" or "changes of the mental climate" (21) during which (he says) literary forms seem to "arise and disappear . . . according to some hidden rhythm" (20)—the "hidden tempo" (29) of the novel's "ecosystem" (20). As his metaphors describing this cyclical recurrence shift and switch, Moretti identifies what he calls the most vexing, and least popular, model for imagining literary-historical time—the cycle:

Event, cycle, longue durée. . . . Most critics are perfectly at ease with the first one, the circumscribed domain of the event and of the individual case; most theorists are at home at the opposite end of the temporal spectrum, in the very long span of nearly unchanging structures. But the middle level [the cycle] has remained somewhat unexplored by literary historians; and it's not even that we don't work within that time frame, it's that we haven't yet fully understood its specificity: the fact, I mean, that cycles constitute temporary structures within the historical flow. . . . [T]he short span is all flow and no structure, the longue durée all structure and no flow, and cycles are the—unstable—border country between them. (14)

A kind of uneasy compromise between synchrony and diachrony, the cycle, he says later, is "the hidden thread of literary history" (26). In tugging at this thread, Moretti calls on the authority of Braudel and Nikolai Kondratiev, economic historians both. But his own story involves not the material oscillations of trade and exchange that concerned those economists but their conceptual mediations. Moretti's half-playful provocation, that is, reoutfits a model generated in an economic context and uses it to ground a second-order, cultural storyline, a narrative about genre's cyclical behavior that draws on materialist forms only to leave their contents behind. This unspoken shift from the material to the textual is signaled, perhaps, by Moretti's own prose, which refers to "critics" who work on precisely delimited synchronic instances (George Eliot's novels, say, or *Middlemarch*) and "theorists" who feel at home with diachronic—or properly, historical—structures (the Victorian period, the nineteenth century). Instead, the cycle: the "unstable border country" between stability and flow in which things change but also exhibit recursivities, reappearances, doublings. If Moretti's later reference to Darwin suggests how seriously he takes one set of his metaphors—those of "ruthless competition" among genres (72)—we might view the very profusion of conceptual

tropes in this slim book—graphs, maps, trees¹—as an invitation. Could attending to the “temporary structures” of historical cycles produce yet further literary models, spur more forms? Maybe, since, as Moretti writes, “if one reframes individual instances as moments of a cycle, then the nature of the questions changes” (27).

To change the nature of the question, this article proposes a model of discontinuous historicism aimed at comparing cultural forms that emerge at the end of what, with self-conscious figural reach, I will call imperial life cycles. Do specific aesthetic features emerge in the final phases of a world system’s long durational “lifespan” or “biorhythm”? Those organic metaphors are the tropes that economic historians like Braudel and Kondratiev—and later, Giovanni Arrighi—have used to explain the wave-based, cyclical logic of capitalist accumulation in our long modernity. I want to suggest that by following those historians in positing such transpersonal historical life cycles we both keep faith with the material grounding that Moretti abandons and produce a model of time that lets us fold discontinuous moments together, layering one stage of a given world-historical cycle over the corresponding stage of a later or earlier one. With such a cyclical model of political-economic time provisionally in place, we might as literary critics go further, to consider whether cultural productions from such structurally cognate moments might themselves show signs of connection, a recursivity of form to match the “objective situation” (in Fredric Jameson’s words; “Periodizing” 179) that those moments would now be seen to have in common. To posit such a discontinuous literary historicism would be to expand our categories of contemporaneity and reopen the question of literary mediation at a moment when that problem has begun receiving overdue attention.² My claim in what follows, then, is that by viewing world-historical situations recursively, layering different but structurally comparable moments on top of one another, we can produce new problems for literary history. With a process of split-level comparison, that is, might we see links between apparently discrete but (adding another metaphor) *rhyming* historical conjunctures—and the cultural forms that mediate them? As an initial test case, I focus on the residual or “late” phases of two successive cycles of global hegemony, British and American, respectively.³

Do empires have a late style? To evaluate the proposition, I examine three now canonical texts that would appear to translate different historical situations into different forms. All arrive at the late end of what Arrighi will allow us to call their respective phases of global rule. The first caused a publishing sensation when

¹ As his three-model title nearly advertises, Moretti is more interested in producing forms of thought than in endorsing them—a taste for polemic that’s especially visible when, after arguing at length for viewing literary-historical time in generational terms, he admits that “‘generation’ is itself a very questionable concept” (22).

² See, for example, the much-discussed special issue of *Representations* titled *The Way We Read Now* (Marcus and Best) and the essays in Clifford Siskin and William Warner’s edited volume, *This Is Enlightenment* (2010).

³ Jameson, explaining the dialectical method, says that “formal realizations, and formal defects, are taken as the signs of some deeper corresponding social and historical configuration which it is the task of criticism to explore” (*Marxism* 331).

it appeared in 1886, remaining its author's highest-selling work and a staple of introductory English syllabi to the present day. There, as in recent criticism, it is generally treated as cultural symptom—a shilling shocker, a pulp novel, and (as the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* says) “an expression of quintessentially fin de siècle anxieties” (Greenblatt et al. 1644). The second has acquired a different kind of canonicity, announcing itself not as symptom but as critical diagnosis. Yet Stanford University Press confirms that by fall 2009 it had sold in the neighborhood of thirty thousand copies since its 1998 translation from the Italian (Jackson), a number that will sound fantastic to anyone passingly familiar with today's academic publishing market. The title of a 2008 special issue of the *South Atlantic Quarterly*, “The Agamben Effect” (Ross), highlights this academic currency. My third example is the publishing sensation that pleased “high” and “low” outlets alike, thus functioning (it would seem) as symptom and critique at once. It was what the *New York Times* lauded as “both a devastating family portrait and a harrowing portrait of America in the late 1990's” (Kakutani) and what another, apparently more exhausted reviewer described as “a work of genius, the novel we have all been waiting for, the perfect delineation of American life at this juncture of history, etc., etc.” (Salij).

My claim will be that these three best sellers—Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* (1995, trans. 1998), and Jonathan Franzen's 2001 *The Corrections*—strategically mediate (a term I say more about at the end of this essay) their respective moments of dying empire. Each makes use of allegory to depict a late-imperial dynamic that they diagnose in common, documenting how brute physicality emerges with an almost mechanical inevitability in conditions of material downturn: like a dark double (in Stevenson), an atavistic exception (in Agamben), or a degenerating patriarch (in Franzen).⁴ In each example, allegory operates as the figural language able best to depict the reversal—or the dialectical interinvolvement—of order and force that characterizes moments of imperial transition. In this, the three figural refractions I will examine here concur with analysts of empire from David Harvey to Niall Ferguson, who observe that open violence shows that imperial power is on the wane: war is the sign that hegemony is slipping into dominance. Hannah Arendt turns this story line into a maxim: “[R]ule by sheer violence comes into play where power is being lost” (*Violence* 53). But if it has the ring of a transhistorical truism, applying to all empires in all contexts, this fact is not lost on these canny mediations either. Agamben's story aspires to be read as political metaphysics; Stevenson's and Franzen's works frame an apparently timeless story of evil emerging out of good, but they date that tale with nearly obsessive specificity. All three texts waver on a

⁴ I derive from Walter Benjamin my sense of allegory as a system of semiotic equivalences in which the very artificiality of the representational apparatus ($X = Y$) reveals not just the commonality between things but the disjunction on which its own process of representation relies. In allegory, that is, the equivalence between one code and its corresponding one is fractured, exposing both a link and a misfit between “levels” of meaning. For an account of this, see Jim Hansen, and for the original, Benjamin, *Arcades and Origin of German Tragic Drama*. For Gordon Teskey, allegory “oscillates between a project of reference and a project of capture” (8), hovering between difference and (desired) identity.

threshold separating transhistorical modes from historical ones, the eternalizing maxim from the particularizing date.

The pages that follow take a gamble: they notice a figural recurrence across the boundaries of standard periodization, as the same narrative reappears in three instances across two imperial cycles. They show how all three texts call on allegory to frame a “timeless” story that those texts then date with sometimes fanatical specificity to historically particular “late” moments, as power fades and violence lurches into the light. And they suggest that these stylistic commonalities—along with the texts’ shared tension between metaphysical and historical modes, or what Moretti called “structure” and “flow”—authorize a performative act of periodization, a linking of apparently separate contemporaries into a single (asynchronic) new one. If this is true, then those examples of empire’s late style might help us ask new questions about mediation and literary-historical time. What would happen to our habits of reading if we saw texts as tactically reconfiguring their moments rather than “reflecting” them, or “engaging” them, or doing something else to recapitulate the metaphors of symptoms and diagnoses, blindness and insight, that still structure our understanding of hermeneutic method? And how might our models of literary history change if the contemporary could be seen to cut across time? John Guillory has recently drawn on Raymond Williams to suggest that the metaphor of *representation* commits us to considering the unwitting ideological investments that a text betrays to critical readers savvy enough to decode them. As I argue below, a shift to *mediation* alerts us to the multiple ways a text might reconfigure its own historical moment. Such a shift would reposition the critic in relation to his or her object and would direct attention to how a given text might more explicitly register the critical recoding operations it performs, thus (as Guillory says of Locke) “bring[ing] the medium into greater visibility” (50) and foregrounding its status as a reconfiguration of a historical “context.”⁵

To begin, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. As criticism has long appreciated, this tale of a dark and apelike emergence is concerned more or less explicitly with imperial decline. For readers working in the broad arena of cultural studies, it reveals the “anxiety” of such a decline, an unease held to be legible across an array of cultural discourses including degeneration, the rise of professionalism, reverse colonization, even (for Patrick Brantlinger) anti-Irish racism (175). In attempting to use one of the novel’s multiple figural registers as an explanatory key—“*Jekyll and Hyde* is really about evolution”—such readings figure Stevenson’s novel as unwitting symptom, positioning the critic as diagnostician of the ideological investments that a naive text has obscured. In the process, they sidestep the problem of mediation, using the methodologies of Foucauldian cultural critique to avoid the question (as Stephen Arata puts it) of “whether British society was

⁵ For Guillory, “[t]he indispensable condition of mediation is the interposition of *distance* (spatial or temporal) between the terminal poles of the communication process” (62; emphasis added). I adapt this emphasis on communication between imagined subjects to consider the “distance” between the two poles of literary-historical analysis, the historical and the textual. By focusing on mediation in this sense (which is also Raymond Williams’s sense), we remain alert to the always figural distance between those “poles” and see how, in the cases I chart below, a text might comment in advance on its own negotiation of that hermeneutic distance.

declining ‘in fact’ during this period” (6). All we need to know is that the novel is worried about that fact.

For its part, *Strange Case* takes pains to show that its plot is keyed to a historically specific material downturn. The decline it charts is entirely economic and began years earlier, at midcentury. The center of wealth and culture that was London is now marked, we are told in the novel’s first pages, by crime and want and the blight that attends material impoverishment. It is characterized by a “prolonged and sordid negligence,” where knife-wielding schoolboys hide in doorways and where, “for close on a generation, no one had appeared to drive away these random visitors or to repair their ravages” (6). Rather than exhibiting symptomatic anxieties, Stevenson’s novel diagnoses them, positioning Hyde as the parasitical effect of this precisely dated material downshift, a haunter of darkened corners in a city that is poorer now than it has ever been.

In a novel that uses physical space to mirror the mental lives of its inhabitants (and vice versa), Jekyll’s house is an outpost amid creeping neglect. It is positioned among “a square of ancient, handsome houses, now for the most part decayed from their high estate and let in flats and chambers to all sorts and conditions of men; map-engravers, architects, shady lawyers and the agents of obscure enterprises” (16). Passages like this have been adduced as evidence of the text’s preoccupation with a new professionalism. But “anxiety” does not capture the project of historical documentation at work here: the novel is careful in its temporal sequence, since “now,” once grand houses have become “decayed from their high estate” and a once comfortable aristocratic economy has degenerated into apartment living and a penumbral money economy, where lawyers are “shady” and businessmen “obscure.” Already Stevenson’s style unites two levels of the novel’s allegorical procedure, as the economic transition of a fancy street becoming poorer is rendered in the gothic vocabulary that has sponsored any number of claims about the novel’s concern with the (timeless) “nature of man.” (Jekyll’s door is, for example, “plunged in darkness” [16].) But we can correct for this tendency to read only one side of Stevenson’s dialectic—the transhistorical, eternalizing one—by focusing on the historical transition being figured here, as representatives of each of the empire’s signal disciplines—mapping, building, law, and finance—move in while a formerly stable social order moves out.

Drawing careful distinction between “now” and before, this offhand micro-plot of a neighborhood gone bad serves both to materialize the Jekyll-and-Hyde dynamic and to date it precisely. As Jekyll’s final narration will explain, those processes of transformation conclude years later, in the book’s near-present. It is at that point, around 1886, that the doctor’s “bonds of obligation” find their “solution” (57) in a bare physicality, figured as Hyde, that breaks through the forms of restraint associated with the villain’s law-abiding host. (Jekyll is “one of your fellows who do what they call good” [9].) In a famous moment, the doctor drinks the potion, shudders, and

[t]hen these agonies began swiftly to subside, and I came to myself as if out of a great sickness. There was something strange in my sensations, something indescribably new and, from its very novelty, incredibly sweet. I felt younger, lighter, happier in

body; within I was conscious of a heady recklessness, a current of disordered sensual images running like a millrace in my fancy, a solution of the bonds of obligation, an unknown but not an innocent freedom of the soul. I knew myself, at the first breath of this new life, to be more wicked, tenfold more wicked, sold a slave to my original evil; and the thought, in that moment, braced and delighted me like wine. I stretched out my hands, exulting in the freshness of these sensations; and in the act, I was suddenly aware that I had lost in stature. (57)

As before, Stevenson's style here folds together material and idealist registers as it documents how a civilized body might "come to itself" as brute violence. When Jekyll-Hyde realizes he has "lost in stature," for example, we assume with nearly every film adaptation that he refers to physical height, but the "stretch[ing]" and "exulting" that precede the realization argue otherwise; they help us to understand that this socially striving doctor has lost something else, too: social respectability, moral uprightness, "stature." All are "lost," as Jekyll is simultaneously liberated and enslaved. "Solution" works as a hinge between conceptually exclusive readings, too, since the doctor's descent/ascent into physicality is both the answer (solution) to Jekyll's restrained and philanthropic liberalism—Hyde feels "younger, lighter, happier in body")—and its precise negation, a "[dis-]solution."

Stevenson's style, then, plays a double game, negotiating two sets of conceptual oppositions at once. It folds together first the physical and the social (stature/stature), and second, the theory that violence is the purest essence of liberal restraint with the (opposite) claim that it is liberalism's perfect abrogation. A solution. This collapse of opposed readings through the workings of style will become important later, when Agamben and Franzen deploy the same effect. The point is that both this arrival of brute force in the person of Hyde and the economic degeneration that occasions it have been marked in temporal terms by Stevenson's careful staging. Stevenson fixes the downward turn in England's global fortunes to the mid-1870s, "close on a generation ago" (16). If we understand the novel's present to be 1885, the year of its composition (it was published in January 1886), then when Dr. Lanyon says that "it is more than ten years since Henry Jekyll . . . began to go wrong, wrong in mind" (12), the physician dates Jekyll's deterioration—and Hyde's emergence—to 1875.

In this and others of its conspicuous but unremarked periodizing gestures, *Strange Case* anticipates the macrohistorical arguments of Arrighi, who like other historians fixes the mid 1870s as the turning point in the long-term fortunes of England's global power, the pivot in its transition from global hegemony to violent late-imperial dominance.⁶ In *The Long Twentieth Century*, Arrighi builds on and fleshes out the models produced by Braudel and Kondratiev, adapting Marx's general formula for capital (M-C-M) into an analytical tool for charting world-historical empires. What Arrighi describes as "systemic cycles of accumulation"

⁶ Historian Paul Kennedy emphasizes a similar timeline to Arrighi's, noting that "[a]fter 1870 . . . the shifting balance of world forces was eroding British supremacy" (226). For another account of British imperial finance—with similar periodizing conclusions—see P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins.

(8) constitute long-term arcs in geopolitical power, whereby a historical phase of globalized capital accumulation is centered in the territorial empire positioned to benefit from it. Arrighi charts four such *longues durées* of geopolitical ordering, each representing a distinct phase or life cycle in the history of world hegemony: Genoese, Dutch, British, and American.⁷

Within any leadership cycle, manufacturing output on a grand scale establishes and consolidates a global power, and speculative manias, such as the one after 1875 or in the late 1990s, mark the declining, or residual, phase of a given global system. In Arrighi's scheme, the explosion of financial speculation in the 1870s (documented in, for example, Trollope's *The Way We Live Now* [1876]) signaled the beginning of the *closing* phase of the London-based global order, just as the wave of financialization (and subsequent bubble and crash) of the 1990s augured the end, he suggests, of American hegemony. This focus on financialization as the indicator of upcoming geopolitical shifts enables Arrighi to cast in imperial terms Braudel's remark that "'the stage of financial expansion' is always 'a sign of autumn'" (qtd. in Arrighi, *Long* 6). It also recapitulates Stevenson's suggestion that when the "agents of obscure enterprises" move in, power has already started moving out.

Because the power struggles occasioned by such shifts produce violence, war is the symptom of a world system's waning, not (as is often assumed) its waxing. From this angle the "climax of empire" that many critics have located in the 1880s signals the coming of the British empire's macroeconomic *contraction* rather than its expansion, as geopolitical downturn brought with it increasingly open, "muscular" attempts to maintain England's position in the world. (No fewer than thirty-five imperial wars took place between 1875 and 1885, police actions in a destabilizing global order.) Stevenson plots the emergence of open violence on a similar timeline. Late in *Strange Case, Dr. Lanyon* particularizes the timing of Hyde's violent eruptions yet more precisely, noting that the spasms that Jekyll's careful dosages had controlled for a decade began to spin out of control "nearly a year ago" (50). Eighteen eighty-five was the year of Lord Gordon's epic failure in the Sudan and the year the Berlin Conference made explicit the rivalries of a newly multilateral world system. Arrighi's account helps make sense of Stevenson's chronology of emergent "atavistic" brutality, and vice versa. It also opens the door for a reframing of analysis away from the culturalist evaluations of any given text's "anxieties," whatever those may be, and toward the long-durational geopolitical oscillations that would conceivably occasion them.⁸

Attention to Stevenson's careful dramatization of a late-imperial timeline very much like Arrighi's enables us to reopen the problem of literary-historical peri-

⁷ "The cycles that emerge from the inquiry are neither subordinated parts of a preconceived whole nor independent instances of a condition; they are interconnected instances of a *single* historical process of capitalist expansion which they themselves constitute and modify" (Arrighi, *Long* 23). Arrighi's final book, *Adam Smith in Beijing*, speculates on possible power shifts in the future.

⁸ Philip Steer has recently shown how Stevenson grasped the economic nature of imperial activity in his later South Seas tales, referring to "Stevenson's sense that imperialism in the Pacific was primarily an economic phenomenon, rather than a military or racial project, and that the 'convulsive and transitory state' of the region was a byproduct of capitalism" (3).

odization at a moment when, as Marshall Brown puts it, the very notion of literary periods seems “discomfort[ing]” to criticism (“Periods” 311). In “Periodizing the ‘60s,” Fredric Jameson updates Williams’s categories of dominant, residual, and emergent to focus again on the problem of the period; he explains that “the ‘period’ in question is understood not as some omnipresent and uniform shared style or way of thinking and acting, but rather as the sharing of an objective situation, to which a whole range of varied responses and creative innovations are then possible, but always within that situation’s structural limits” (179). No longer akin to a Foucauldian discourse—a synchronic textual field framed by policed limits to the sayable—the period is now understood as a structure-concept that posits a shared material condition that itself produces a base horizon of discursive possibility. Here as in the later *Postmodernism*, Jameson is careful to emphasize that as a structure-concept, or “periodizing hypothesis” (qtd. in Brown, “Periods” 311), the period need not be “true” so much as operative. He invokes Foucault’s theoretical rival in the 1960s and 1970s, Louis Althusser, to describe the “gamble” of his own periodization effort, the goal of which, like Althusser’s, is “not any longer to produce some vivid representation of History ‘as it really happened,’ but rather to produce the *concept* of history” (180). As Brown points out, echoing a famous line of Jameson’s, it is far easier to critique literary periods than to do without them.⁹

A new model, then. In Jameson’s case, this means that “the ‘60s” should be understood to extend to “the general area of 1972–74,” those dates bracketed on the far end by the worldwide economic crisis of 1973–74, which provides, for him, “confirmation by the economic ‘level’ itself of periodizing reading derived from other, sample levels or instances of social life during the ‘60s” (205). With an economic storyline thus positioned to provide “confirmation” of the semiautonomous plotlines of cultural or theoretical activity, Jameson’s account proposes to use the cyclical economic functions of late capitalism—in his case, the seven- to ten-year business cycle (206)—to bracket cultural forms into a unit that, while provisional, nevertheless makes visible certain commonalities that other periodizing concepts could not see. Here as elsewhere, Jameson thinks of literary texts as symptoms or unconscious expressions rather than (as I will be arguing) strategic reconfigurations. Here we might note not only how Jameson’s bracketing of the 1960s produces a new configuration for literary history but also how it, like Stevenson’s framing of the 1870s and 1880s, accords with Arrighi’s yet more ambitious periodizing model. For Arrighi, the mid-1970s marked the beginning of the long phase of American hegemony’s waning, a phase finalized only, as we will see, in the massive financializations of the 1990s and early 2000s documented in *The Corrections*. This latter moment was one, as few will need reminding, when the United States turned its own military attention abroad in a late effort to secure a geopolitical hegemony it was then losing. As in the British case, decline triggered apparently “atavistic” violence, in the form of (among other conflicts) the second Iraq War.

⁹ “Without categories—such as periods—there can be no thought and no transcendence beyond mere fact toward understanding. Periods trouble our quiet so as to bring history to life” (Brown, “Periods” 312). See the special issue of *Modern Language Quarterly* devoted to this question (Brown, *Periodization*).

Jameson's strategy of bracketing cultural fields with reference to political-economic phases enables us to begin seeing how astutely Stevenson diagnosed and recoded the curiously inverse political dynamic between violence and geopolitical power in his (and other) late-imperial moments, whereby the *fading* of imperial power produces an apparently paradoxical increase in open violence. His allegorical procedure posits links among semiautonomous levels—professionalism, real estate, psychology—but grants causal status to the macrohistorical material transitions triggering responses in those spheres. In this way *Strange Case* tactically reconfigures the objective situation of the mid-1880s, when money capital had already begun taking flight outside the nation and the British phase of global hegemony was fading, the "profound duplicity of life" (55) that British power had once been able to hide now giving way to open violence, troped here as clubbings in the street and the "heady recklessness" that spurs them (57).

If *Strange Case* converts this late-imperial situation into allegory, its commitment to historical analysis forces it to call its own schematic ambitions into question. In lectures delivered at Cornell and Wesleyan between 1941 and 1958, one reader, Vladimir Nabokov, helps to underscore the tension the novel exhibits between historical modes and eternal ones. Concentrating on shadows and shades rather than dates and poverty, Nabokov follows half of the novel's dialectic (and Jekyll's own narration of it) to transform the precisely dated decline the novel charts into a timeless war between good and evil, dark and light—a transformation spatialized in Nabokov's diagrams of the plot, published with his lecture (figure 1). Surprisingly for the author of *Lolita*, the form of Stevenson's novel has tricked Nabokov, since he takes Jekyll's narration of his own "nameless situation" (47) as the novel's final word, where Stevenson has been careful to signal it as one (interested) retelling of that novel's events. The book's final chapter, "Henry Jekyll's Full Statement of the Case," is titled with overzealous and ironic totality, and refers two ways: "case" signals both the Jekyll-Hyde dynamic (a psychological or medical case) and the novel, *Strange Case*, itself. It is Jekyll's interested retelling of this anomalous but paradoxically representative instance. In passages that Nabokov, like many teachers, cites, Jekyll refers with conspicuous grandiosity to "man's dual nature" (55) and (on the next page) to "the thorough and primitive duality of man" (56). By uncritically repeating Jekyll's reading of his own "case," Nabokov transforms a novel of imperial transition into a timeless yarn about good and bad, framing for undergraduates a tale of an increasingly "parasit[ical]" relationship (Nabokov 182) between the "really damnable man" and "one of your fellows who do what they call good" (*Strange Case* 9). The philanthropist and the murderer, the trouncer of children and defender of modern civilization are one man. "[T]his, too," says Jekyll, "was myself" (58).

Following such clues, readers looking to part ways with *both* Nabokov's glib formalism *and* those ostensibly historical readings concerned to provide "cultural context" have repeated Jekyll's error in seeing his predicament as one relating to human nature. Jerrold Hogle, for example, draws on Julia Kristeva to read the novel through the lens of abjection. In this way do psychoanalytic readings repeat Jekyll's own metaphysicalizing gestures, calling on timeless psychodynamics to see Hyde as the irrepressible id, the dark return of an even darker desire. A simi-

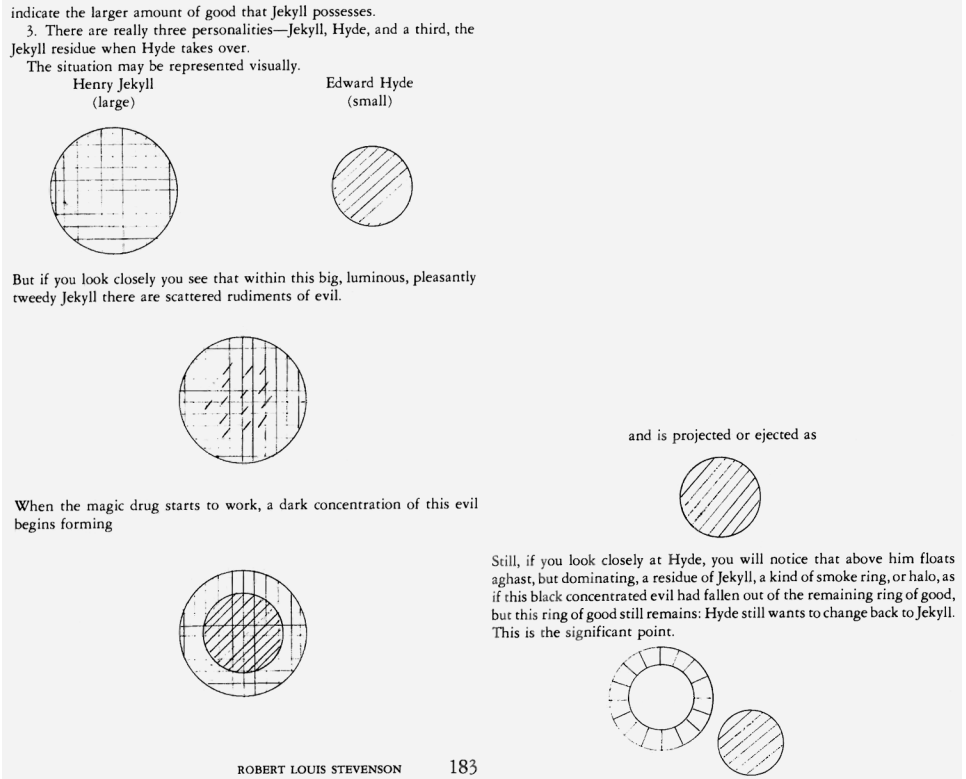


Figure 1 Vladimir Nabokov's diagram of the plot of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, ca. 1950. *Lectures on Literature* 183–84. Copyright © 1980 by the Estate of Vladimir Nabokov; used by permission of the Wylie Agency LLC

larly eternalizing misreading might analyze chemicals and handwriting to argue for the interlacing of good and evil via Jacques Derrida's *pharmakon*, the poison-cure that comes from Plato's *Phaedrus* but designates a capacity of language that is understood to transcend temporal context. By seeing the novel as an allegory of "man's nature" or "*différance*" or even "professionalization," readers choose one reading of the novel as a key rather than seeing all such readings as subsidiary manifestations, or symptoms, of what the novel figures as a material historical process, misreadings that the novel has in any case set up for us in advance.

What I am suggesting is that both Nabokov's account and its psychologizing descendants follow one set of cues laid by Stevenson to read his novel as a properly allegorical morality play about the eternal dynamics of dark and light, good and evil: what Nabokov calls "a fable" (180). For Stevenson, who ironizes these positions through (for example) the frame structure of his plot, it is a story about a metropolis in material transition available for interpretation as an allegory about man's nature. Instead of endorsing these (or other) antihistorical readings, then, I want to emphasize the novel's susceptibility to them: my emphasis is on how Stevenson's stylistic dialectic tempts readers into ahistorical analyses even as it

insists on the historicity of its own events—as is clear in its obsession with dating. What Stevenson’s novel finally discloses (and what Nabokov’s diagrams help to schematize) is how, in conditions of material decline, bare physicality becomes “neither external nor internal to” its law-abiding host: “[T]he problem of defining [it],” then, “concerns precisely a threshold, or a zone of indifference, where inside and outside do not exclude each other but rather blur with each other.” The words are Agamben’s (*State* 23), and they describe how the violence that inheres within any regime of law becomes visible when law is suspended. Hyde is nothing so much as a bodily version of this formerly invisible “zone of anomie” (*ibid.*).

In ways that accord with Arrighi’s long-durational sequence of imperial “life cycles,” the close of the American Century would find the narrative of anomic emergence appearing in a very different generic context, not as a shilling shocker but as a slim volume published in Stanford’s Meridian series. In *Homo Sacer* Agamben offers an elaborate, spatially imagined explanation of how the state of exception might exist both *within* and *outside* constituted law. Agamben calls on Hannah Arendt and Thomas Hobbes to imagine the law’s “outside” as a state of nature, a zone in which legal restraints have been abandoned or suspended; this means that the exceptional suspension of rule *within* the law and the generalized warfare *outside* it bear an uncanny, if difficult to figure, relationship: “The state of nature and the state of exception are nothing but two sides of a single topological process in which what was presupposed as external (the state of nature) now reappears, as in a Möbius strip or a Leyden jar, in the inside (as state of exception), and the sovereign power is this very impossibility of distinguishing between outside and inside” (37). The doubling of quasi-scientific spatial metaphors here—Möbius strip, Leyden jar—finds Agamben’s text reaching for a language that might describe coincidence or dialectical interinvolvement; these are tropes that, like an ape emerging from within a doctor by the agency of “solutions,” show how something that emblemizes civilized law might be both itself and its opposite simultaneously. Perhaps due to the difficulty in deciding on one metaphorical key, Agamben like Nabokov finds that the best language for explaining his argument’s structure is not language at all (figure 2).

As at least thirty thousand readers are presumably aware, Agamben’s densely figurative text argues that the outside comes inside: the violence perfected in an “external” state of nature returns to structure the political forms of the metropolitan center. While he follows Arendt’s *Origins of Totalitarianism* to imagine the proving ground of this lawless violence as the imperial periphery, Agamben sees the concentration camp as the embodiment of this atavistic mechanism, since it is a spatially articulated state of nature, a zone of barbarism wedged within a society supposedly ruled by legal forms. The state of exception realized in the camp is, in the words of one reader, “the consti-

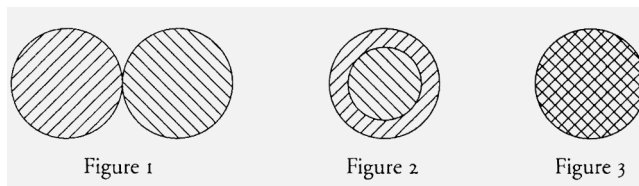


Figure 2 Giorgio Agamben’s diagram of the state of exception. *Homo Sacer* 38

tutive outside held inside, an inclusive exclusion" (Chare 44)—or what Agamben refers to as the "zone of indistinction, which had to remain hidden from the eyes of justice, that we must try to fix under our gaze" (37). This model of pure, embodied violence emerging from the heart of a philanthropic host—the dark obverse of civilization's coin, shuddering to light under the critic's gaze—recapitulates the architecture of (one reading of) Stevenson's novel. And like *Strange Case, Homo Sacer* and *State of Exception* (2005) can be read as efforts to walk the line separating historical dynamics from metaphysical ones.

As in Stevenson's account, that is, Agamben plays that tension two ways; unlike it, his texts evince an ambition to leave the historical behind. Where Stevenson hinged warring readings on the razor's edge of his style, inserting double signifiers like *stature* as switch points between opposed interpretive options, Agamben takes pains to recode specific processes and contexts as matters of ontological mechanics. The text's transhistorical ambitions are most apparent in the key concept itself: what would seem to be a historical *state of exception* (Weimar Germany or Euro-America in the mid-1990s) becomes, in the concept-making drama of the volume, a *state of exception*, a mode of being. This process of dehistoricization is most apparent in the easy interchange that his work effects between sources in Greek and Roman law and those seeking to explain later conjunctures like Weimar, Bosnia, or (in the later *State of Exception*) Guantánamo Bay. Thus Solon, Aristotle, and Pindar sit alongside Walter Benjamin, Carl Schmitt, and Leo Strauss, and all can be adduced as explicators of a single onto-political problem operative in the ancient world no less than in the present day.

Agamben's texts, that is, draw on particular historical occasions but look to transcend historical specificity by reaching toward the properly conceptual, in Theodor Adorno's sense of a reified, because transportable, intellectual unit (*Negative* 3–4, 8). This drama of reification may be crystallized most vividly in the explicitly topical *State of Exception*, which cites "the USA Patriot Act issued by the U.S. Senate on October 26, 2001" (3) but calls the state of exception "a Paradigm of Government." Dates and paradigms sit side by side. In this way does Agamben's figuration of what he calls "the inner solidarity between totalitarianism and democracy" (10) draw its occasion from what Arrighi would call the American cycle of global leadership in its late phase, even as it transforms this moment into something outside time: a paradigm. From the angle supplied by Arrighi, the wars that Agamben refers to in passing can be seen less as effects of an eternal juridical mechanism—a Jekyll-and-Hyde story for undergraduates—and more as what they are, symptoms of a particularly historical late-imperial militarism. Still, it is clear that like Stevenson, Agamben is interested in tracing the blowback effect of far-off violence, following the example of Arendt in *Origins* to show how blunt force "com[es] home," as Mr. Enfield says of his own late-night debauches, "from some place at the end of the world" (*Strange Case* 4).

Like Stevenson, Agamben writes into his presentations an irresolvable theoretical ambiguity between metaphysics and history, or what Moretti calls structure and flow, though in Agamben's case that ambiguity is weighted toward the metaphysical. With this in mind, we can return to Nabokov's moral vocabulary, which as I pointed out is borrowed from one side of the dialectic that Stevenson builds

into his novel. On one hand, *Strange Case* is a morality play, a story about the “primitive duality of man” (in Jekyll’s words [56]). On the other, this drama takes place in a specifically dated late-imperial metropolis, a London wrenched by the global economy’s post-1876 contraction. Agamben’s quasi-metaphysical allegory of 1995 wavers on a similar threshold, and through the timeless language of metaphysics and mechanisms we read an account that takes as its topic the complicated interinvolvement of force and law in a late or waning phase of America’s global hegemony. In this context Agamben’s notoriously “poetic” presentation style becomes legible as a symptom no less than a strategy, since like Stevenson’s elaborately figurative text, Agamben’s narrative mixes and stacks metaphors, seeking to figure via stylistic ingenuity a *mutual* relation between force and law. “What happened and is still happening before our eyes,” he writes, “is that the ‘juridically empty’ space of the state of exception . . . has transgressed its spatiotemporal boundaries and now, overflowing outside them, is starting to coincide with the normal order” (*State* 38). The doubled temporal logic of the passage—“what happened and is still happening”—reveals the shuttling between history and metaphysics that I have charted, while the proliferating spatial tropes give a picture of containers and flow, as the liquid energy of force (repetitively) “overflow[s] outside” its boundaries. The figurative profusion recalls Hyde’s emergence as a *parasite* or *dark double* or *secret truth* that ultimately exceeds its law-abiding container. Concerned with overflow, coincidence, and contamination, both accounts dramatize a complex mutual relation, showing how (as Stevenson has it) Hyde’s derelict lodging and Jekyll’s fancy mansion might have separate entrances but be *internally* connected. “[O]f the two that contended in the field of my consciousness,” Jekyll tells us, “even if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically both” (56).

It should be clear that I am not using Agamben’s text to illuminate Stevenson’s but, if anything, the reverse. That is, rather than seeing Agamben’s 1995 story as a way of decoding Stevenson’s 1886 plot, adducing it as the “theory” to illuminate Stevenson’s “literature,” I am stressing how both tales allegorize the specific dynamics of force and order that attend moments of geopolitical transition. Both narratives, in other words, emerge at specific historical instances and seek a figural language adequate to narrating the interrelationship of violence and law at moments when one world system’s global power is slipping from hegemony into a more openly violent dominance. From this perspective, the dramatic popularity of Stevenson’s fin de siècle bestseller might help us appreciate why Agamben’s stories have emerged as the preferred critical model for narrating what may be the final phase of US hegemony. They are its most successful theoretical emplotment.

In reaching toward perennial juridical mechanisms, Agamben does not key his analysis to economic shifts; I have deployed Arrighi in an effort to do so for him. That diagnostic work would be done by another allegorical retelling of the waning American century, Franzen’s *The Corrections*. Published in 2001, this sensationally popular novel drew on short pieces Franzen had published in the 1990s and an even larger-scale unpublished social novel; its final form was drafted in the year 2000 (Heller). But what would seem to be its historical “context” is actually the novel’s subject, a reversal of fields that achieves in advance the New Historicist ambition to restore obscured political “background” to the “foreground” through

the operation of reading.¹⁰ “Set during the longest boom in American history, on a financial bubble awaiting an inevitable correction,” as many critics could not fail to notice (here, Eric Hanson in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*), the novel self-consciously tropes the decline, or “correction,” of the American economy through a host of figurative registers, most signally the fractious relations of a midwestern family, the Lamberts.¹¹ Like *Strange Case* and *Homo Sacer*, then, *The Corrections* is a thickly allegorical work, one that uses a splintering family and the US economy as mutually reflecting story lines, each alternating between metaphor and diegesis, narrated action and figural trope, background and foreground. Both of those intermixed allegorical “levels,” meanwhile, in turn recapitulate at larger scale the slowly degenerating mind of the Lambert family patriarch, Alfred. Over the course of the novel, Parkinson’s casts Alfred into a downward spiral of mental and physical degeneration, “a kind of sinister decay” (11) that ends in dementia, hospitalization, and, at last, death. This personal unraveling, mirrored at the national and family scales, again reflects something else, the slow dismantling of the novel’s image for old-fashioned American industry, the Midland Pacific Railroad, or Midpac. Like Alfred’s mind and the American economy more generally, this once functional network has frayed: in a new immaterial economy, the formerly solid railroad has been sold off piecemeal to shady investors and transformed into a corporate conglomerate trading (ironically) in miracle cures for brain degeneration.

The hyperbolic tightness of this allegorical structure is nowhere more evident than when we are told that Alfred *is* his railroad. When, at the height of his career, he is sent to inspect the rival Erie line, Alfred “felt the Midland Pacific’s superior size, strength, and moral vitality in his own limbs and carriage” (243). Through a thin layer of figural coding, he sees the damage that will later be visited on his own mind, as his “will” is reflected back to him in decaying track:

Although its trunk lines were still generally hale, its branches and spurs were rotting like you couldn’t believe. Trains poked along at 10 mph on rails no straighter than limp string. Mile upon mile of hopelessly buckled Belt. Alfred saw crossties better suited to mulching than to gripping spikes. Rail anchors that had lost their heads

¹⁰ On this facet of New Historicist method, see the introduction to Alan Liu, *Wordsworth and the Sense of History*, and the later commentary on his own earlier procedure in *Local Transcendence*, especially “The New Historicism and the Work of Mourning.”

¹¹ The novel is perhaps obsessive in underscoring its concern with financial “context,” as is evident in passages such as Chip’s narration when he finds out he has lost his job teaching left-wing cultural critique (of the kind I am undertaking here):

But then, Chip had reason to be sensitive. Since D____ College had fired him, the market capitalization of publicly traded US companies had increased by thirty-five percent. In these same twenty-two months, Chip had liquidated a retirement fund, sold a good car, worked half-time at an eightieth-percentile wage, and still ended up on the brink of Chapter 11. These were years in America when it was nearly impossible not to make money, years when receptionists wrote MasterCard checks to their brokers at 13.9% APR and still cleared a profit, years of Buy, years of Call, and Chip had missed the boat. In his bones he knew that if he ever did sell [his screenplay], the markets would all have peaked the week before and any money he invested he would lose. Judging from Julia’s negative response to his script, the American economy was safe for a while yet. (103)

to rust, bodies wasting inside a crust of corrosion like shrimps in a shell of deep-fry. Ballast so badly washed out that ties were hanging from the rail rather than supporting it. Girders peeling and corrupted like German chocolate cake, the dark shavings, the miscellaneous crumble. . . . [W]ithout this track a train was ten thousand tons of ungovernable nothing. The will was in the track. (242)

Alfred is offered as the drama of the novel writ small, the master trope of a national allegory who bears the whole of America in his cerebrum, as all these figural levels descend, like his own “will,” toward “ungovernab[ility]”: “the final breakdown of the signal system” (as he earlier says of a railroad, 68) when his “copper nervous system,” like a railroad’s wiring, gets “dismantled” (70).¹²

The reversals effected by this multivalent spin into anomie are most clear, perhaps, when Alfred’s indolent, academic son takes psychotropic drugs with his student: the pill he takes is “a golden caplet marked with what appeared to be the old Midland Pacific Railroad logo” (55). In this conspicuous connection making, Franzen’s text turns the heraldry of solid American productivity into the emblem of a pathetic tryst between a Marxist critic and a nineteen-year-old, a reversal that finalizes the ironic perversion of Alfred’s lifetime in a mock-heroic encounter that is merely one of the novel’s many (obvious) figures for cataclysmic decline. Later, Alfred’s oldest son, Gary, takes his children to visit the St. Jude Museum of Transport, where exhibits on “THE GOLDEN AGE OF STEAM POWER. THE DAWN OF FLIGHT. A CENTURY OF AUTOMOTIVE SAFETY” (175) frame as relics Alfred’s heroic era of American achievement. The patriarch’s tragedy is to yearn for a time before these achievements became museum pieces. What I am emphasizing is how relentlessly Franzen’s novel works to close the gap between its figural levels, as the personal is economic and the economic is personal. Each register alternates between the X and Y level of an explicitly allegorical system: each works as the trope for the other, and Chip’s fall into desperate physicality with his student, we are conspicuously told, happens during “the longest sustained economic boom in American history” (91). Here as elsewhere, the novel advertises its own “meaning,” calling attention to the recoding operation it has just performed.

But, as this contextualizing gambit makes plain, Franzen’s rust-belt melodrama is keyed intimately to its dominant motif, the economy—those systemic, indeed global oscillations of financial markets that supply the novel with its title. A plotline that many readers singled out for critique as forced takes the novel to Lithuania, as a government falls victim to neoliberal market reforms and Chip loses the \$30,000 his sister has loaned him without any hope of repayment. In ways often subtler than this, matters of money and markets continually find their way back into the novel’s emotional plotlines, in processes of obvious allegorical layering. As the dejected Chip steals a piece of high-end salmon in his pants he sees a

¹² This obvious allegorical interlacing was not lost on reviewers: “The most passionate nostalgist is Alfred, who has seen the railway company to which he gave his life destroyed and asset-stripped, and whose vacuity is in part a metaphor: America used to belong to men like him, hard working, practical-minded and good with their hands, but now it’s cast them out and they’ve become empty husks” (Morrison).

TV describing the “tanking of two more economies in South America and fresh plunges in key Far Eastern markets” (102), while after his debauch with his student he feels “like a market inundated by a wave of panic selling” (57). Likewise does the alcoholic Gary experience dangerous fluctuations in his emotional economy, noticing (for example) that his “mental markets . . . were crashing” (159): “*What this stagnating economy needs, thought Federal Reserve Board Chairman Gary R. Lambert, is a massive infusion of Bombay Sapphire gin*” (160; italics in original). In such moments of explicit correspondence making, Franzen’s novel again works mock-heroically: the images earn what force they have by comparing things great with small, troping the massive systemic fluctuations of the world economy as the petty failings of (what reviewers could not help but say were) average Americans. What the *Village Voice* called the novel’s overlaid “frames of reference” (Berrett) assert the *smallness* of the average lives it documents: what is poignant and funny about Chip’s sell-off of his Frankfurt School books (92) is how pathetically it reflects things-in-the-world-that-matter, like failing national economies.

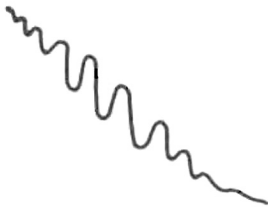
Elsewhere, though, *The Corrections* pursues its relentless economic allegory in denser and fuller terms, casting economies and mental lives as equal partners. These both bottom out into the blasted architecture of a family home:

Depressed? [Gary] was not depressed. Vital signs of the rambunctious American economy streamed numerically across this many-windowed television screen. Orfic Midland up a point and three-eighths for the day. The US dollar laughing at the euro, bugging the yen. Virginia Lin dropped in and proposed selling a block of Exxon at 104. Gary would see out across the river to the floodplain landscape of Camden, New Jersey, whose deep ruination, from this height and distance, gave the impression of a kitchen floor with the linoleum scraped off. (222)

Gary’s mental bubble (he is not depressed!) anticipates the crash already visible in the floodplain of New Jersey, which itself mirrors the decaying structure of his own family home back in St. Jude, where “everywhere he looked [he saw] the sag of entropy” (172). Both moments telescope from mental conditions to economic ones; both attend to the bust cycles that the boom times mask, an “entropy” figured finally as the decay of domesticity and its physical sign, the home. Chip, too, finds that “[t]he shame and disorder in his house were like the shame and disorder in his head” (83). This positioning of the domestic sphere as the novel’s ultimately significant allegorical level—where world-historical changes reveal their true costs—shows why reviewers liked to refer to the *human* element of the novel, its *return to character* and its concern with *timeless* emotional dilemmas (against empty postmodern trickery). Yet in the text these allegedly transhistorical concerns are always linked to the specifically dated spirals of an American economy on the verge of collapse. Humanist ontology and material history continually coincide, as two levels of interpretive coding fold into one while leaving that very process of connection making open to view. The novel is “dusted,” reviewers breathlessly noticed, with “trenchant meditations on tectonic shifts in American society during the last 50 years” (Heller, in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*); but not even this topicality could blunt “Franzen’s emphasis on the human”—which, so James Wood wrote in

the *Guardian*, “is welcome, and doubtless explains the novel’s enormous popularity in America.” Timelessness and historical consciousness come in a single package.

The challenge of the novel’s allegorical system is, of course, to connect the “timeless” human story lines to its historically specific economic ones, and it pursues this project relentlessly. In an essay titled “My Father’s Brain,” published in the *New Yorker* on an auspicious date for imagining world-historical shifts—September 10, 2001 (rpt. in *Alone*)—Franzen reflects on degenerative mental illness, here Alzheimer’s, in ways that predict how the novel published just days earlier would inscribe “tectonic shifts” in social life (as Heller called them) inside a single mind. As with Alfred’s decline, Franzen reports that his father’s Alzheimer’s was uncorrectable, a slow process by which the “[v]ital signs,” as Gary calls them (*Corrections* 225), of an economy or brain finally zero out. “Where the subtractive progress of Alzheimer’s,” Franzen writes, “might predict a steady downward trend like this—



What I saw of my father’s fall looked more like this:



These graphs of mental “decline,” “crash,” and “collaps[e]” (*Alone* 30, 31) look like nothing so much as electrocardiograms of the world economy circa 2000. In *The Corrections* they are exactly that, as Alfred’s collapse finds expression in stock market implosions—and vice versa. As the novel ends, those two allegorical layers fold silently together, until neither is identifiable as the text’s main or referential level. This is how the novel describes the death of its degenerating patriarch: “The correction, when it finally came, was not an overnight bursting of a bubble but a much more gentle letdown, a year-long leakage of value from key financial markets, a contraction too gradual to generate headlines and too predictable to seriously hurt anybody but fools and the working poor. . . . Nevertheless, the markets did collapse” (561). No further description follows. Alfred’s death is not narrated at all, and here one layer of the tale folds seamlessly and finally into its referent, until the X level is the Y, and vice versa; the market and Alfred die together. To this point I have argued for the obviousness of this metaphorical connection, for the fact that the novel’s main “reading” is planted conspicuously within the text itself. But the

point is also historical: *The Corrections* dates its linked declines precisely. Arrighi (like Jameson) concentrates on the 1970s as the initial phase of American downturn but also anticipates Franzen's suggestion that the financialization and speculative bubbles of the 1990s, culminating in or around 2000, augured the death of one phase of world-historical hegemony—the American one.¹³ It is a “collapse.”

That collapse meant violence. In *The Corrections* no less than in *Strange Case*, geopolitical transitions produce symptomatic expression in violence, as atavistic or naked physicality reemerges through the forms that once contained them. As Alfred's degenerative condition intensifies, the father's world takes shape as open combat between opposed forces; his relationship with Enid is a “civil war” (7) waged throughout their decaying house. As above, this war is mock-heroically fought via mail delivery and coupon-cutting:

Six days a week several pounds of mail came through the slot in the front door, and since nothing incidental was allowed to pile up downstairs . . . Enid faced a substantial tactical challenge. She didn't think of herself as a guerrilla, but a guerrilla was what she was. By day she ferried materiel from depot to depot, often just a step ahead of the governing force. By night . . . she staged various actions: paid bills, balanced checkbooks, attempted to decipher Medicare co-payment records. (5)

In this domestic insurgency, Enid fights against “the governing force” of Alfred—later he is “the tyranny” whose “legitimacy” is at stake (9)—in ways that show how a physical enmity once latent, covered over by the forms of civility, has become manifest in conditions of familial (and economic) decline. These politicized combat metaphors recur in later generations, too, as Gary and Caroline wage marital fights “in a spirit of trench warfare” (202) until Gary “surrender[s]” (234).

The novel positions these domestic wars as symptoms of the decline it diagnoses across linked metaphorical registers. But they are not the only way in which, like Agamben and Stevenson, Franzen suggests that force becomes newly visible in moments of geopolitical transition. “A shouter and a punisher” (22), Alfred was once able to keep that part of himself hidden. When, like “one of the overly civilized predators you hear about in zoos,” he nearly rapes his wife Enid in a darkened room, for example, he does so in “a mute mutual privacy of violence” (240). But as his condition advances, the civilized predator finds his once-private physicality butting shamefully into public view. On the cruise where Enid is duped into purchasing the miracle cure Correcktall, Alfred is assaulted by a slangy, trash-talking turd, both a physical thing and his mind's excremental vision of “a treacherous modernity” (287). The moralist is addressed by his feces:

¹³ By the year 2000, when Franzen wrote 80 percent of *The Corrections*, trade in financial derivatives had reached a value of \$100 trillion; that is a one followed by fourteen zeroes, and it is equal to the total manufacturing product of the entire globe for the past one thousand years (LiPuma 47); meanwhile, physical commodities in 1999 accounted for “no more than 0.6 percent of total contracts, whereas financial derivatives had risen to approximately 90% of all contracts” (ibid.).

"Me personally, I'm opposed to all strictures [the turd said]. If you feel it, let it rip. If you want it, go for it. Dude's gotta put his own interests first."

"Civilization depends on restraint," Alfred said.

"Civilization? Overrated. I ask you what it's ever done for me? Flushed me down the toilet! Treated me like shit!" (283)

In the bizarre episode, a voice of unreason speaks for the primacy of the body and the abrogation of "restraint." In so doing the turd both argues against and performatively demolishes Alfred's veneer of civilized reserve. This antithesis is a literal projection of Alfred: its appearance is a Hyde-like birth, a "project[ion] or eject[ion]," as Nabokov said, by which a vulgar physicality is *produced from within* the civilized host it both cancels and somehow emblemizes. Alfred's, then, is Jekyll's problem: of the private becoming public, of a shameful, hidden physicality emerging from within. "My father," wrote Franzen in his *New Yorker* essay, "was an intensely private person, and privacy for him had the connotation of keeping the shameful content of one's interior life out of public sight. Could there have been a worse disease for him than Alzheimer's?" (rpt. in *Alone* 24). Or as Alfred screams to his own excrement, invoking the very social order now dissolving around him: "You belong in jail!" (284).

In a controversial essay published in *Harper's* in April 1996, at the frenzied, moneyed height of the American bubble, Franzen wrote that "[e]xpecting a novel to bear the weight of our whole disturbed society . . . seems to me a particularly American delusion" (rpt. in *Alone* 84). But *The Corrections* would attempt, self-consciously, to do just that. It advertised itself as a temperature taking of its time, what the *New York Times* lauded as a diagnosis that "cracks open a window on a sullen country lurching its way toward the millennium" (Kakutani). To do so, Franzen's text, like its predecessors, devises a figural system able to trope decline and emergent physicality across a host of registers, from railroads and human relationships to the eroded synaptic links in one man's degenerating mind. The novel's opening passage is a catalog of this hyper-referential figural procedure; it serves as preview and index of the multiple allegorical registers the novel will work to collapse. And, as if to rework Braudel and Arrighi explicitly, its mood is literally autumnal:

The madness of an autumn prairie cold front coming through. You could feel it: something terrible was going to happen. The sun low in the sky, a minor light, a cooling star. Gust after gust of disorder. Trees restless, temperatures falling, the whole northern religion of things coming to an end. No children in the yards here. Shadows lengthened on yellowing zoysia. Red oaks and pin oaks and swamp white oaks rained acorns on houses with no mortgage. Storm windows shuddered in the empty bedrooms. And the drone and hiccup of a clothes dryer, the nasal contention of a leaf blower, the ripening of local apples in a paper bag, the smell of the gasoline with which Alfred Lambert had cleaned the paintbrush from his morning painting of the wicker love seat.

Three in the afternoon was a time of danger in these gerontocratic suburbs of St. Jude. (3)

Franzen's bravura prose compresses discrete levels of meaning and turns physical observations into metaphysical statements and vice versa: a gust of wind is a gust of "disorder"; the trees, like the larger world they emblemize, are "restless"; storm windows "shudder[] in the empty bedrooms," simultaneously sealing those rooms in repose and lurching violently into motion—*shuddering*. And in the sweeping figural embrace of "the whole northern religion of things coming to an end" are gathered all the levels of signification that the novel will spin together into anomie. The book's later emphasis on consumerism will put content to that ambiguous metaphysic, but "the religion of things" also refers to the once-secure ontological and political order that is now *dying, falling, cooling*.

These words and the passage's other gerunds and present participles—there are seven—suggest historical process even as they depict a self-consciously inert set-piece. They *seem* to mark decline from then to now: cooling, falling, yellowing, ripening. Yet these verbal nouns and adjectives also move nowhere, conspicuously freezing the very temporal process they apparently document. Specifically dated ("[t]hree in the afternoon"), the passage is also timeless: it crystallizes the tension between the eternal and the historical that I have observed in *Strange Case* and *Homo Sacer*, as style once more collapses a distinction between diachronic and synchronic modes, or what Moretti called the "structure and flow" that coexist uneasily in any analysis of historical cycles. *The Corrections*, like the other late-imperial allegories whose key formal features it shares, constitutes one such analysis. And as in those texts, the autumnal moment that *The Corrections* reconfigures is, across all its registers, "a time of danger."

In the unfinished *On Late Style* (2006), Edward Said provided an enigmatic and fragmentary final chapter to his own lifelong effort, since 1975's *Beginnings*, to understand the Aristotelian sequence of beginnings, middles, and ends at the level of an individual artist's production. To do so he updated Adorno's effort to come to terms with Beethoven's late work, those splintered and self-reflexive forms that emerge only in the final phase of a visionary composer's work, when "the thought of death" presses (Adorno, "Late" 566). Both accounts are joined by the claim that at the level of the individual subject, autumnal or "late" moments are marked—haunted and touched—by the foresight of death; both make the further claim that particular aesthetic forms emerge to give voice to this biological and metaphysical but also temporal and, finally, *narrative* situation. Adorno's suggestion is that because death is a category of experience available to human beings and not to their works (which are permanent), death appears in art "only in a refracted mode, as allegory" (566). The works by Agamben, Stevenson, and Franzen that I have read here exhibit a version of this deathly premonition. As allegories, they imagine the problematic simultaneity by which, in conditions of material decline, the very epitomes of civilized life might produce "atavistic" exceptions that are both their opposites and their very essence made explicit. They go further to put on self-conscious display the recoding operations they use to translate their historical situations into human ones. All three thus find in allegory the mode best suited to this recoding operation, and all give voice to Arendt's maxim—and to Arrighi's empirical observation, time after time—that violence flourishes when power fades. It is a time of danger.

My focus on the self-conscious translations accomplished by these texts differs from approaches now current in literary studies and means to contribute to recent work that seeks to reopen the question of mediation in literary-historical method. Guillory has recently pointed out that the ideology critique and discourse analysis undertaken by the New Historicism and Foucauldian cultural studies, respectively, rely on a metaphor of “representation” to understand the mediating work that a text is able to accomplish. Guillory draws on Williams’s foundational essay “From Reflection to Mediation” to argue that if a text is understood merely to “represent”—that is, to reflect or even to symptomatize its moment rather than to mediate it—then it can only be understood to do so ideologically. A commitment to the category of representation therefore guarantees that texts can only represent their moments in interested—that is, “bad”—ways, a fact that turns the work of criticism into an injunction to discover just these (inevitable) distances between “reality” and its “representation.” (The journal *Representations*, Guillory argues, owes its very existence to this model.) Representation thus precludes an engagement with the myriad ways in which a given text might reconfigure its material situation. Guillory warns that “[i]t is always possible to collapse the mediations performed by the media back into representations, which become vulnerable at once to exposure as ideological distortions. This has been the perennial strategy of cultural critique, and its reassertion in recent years has in effect set aside mediation once again even as the study of media has intensified” (62). Instead of focusing on such ideological distortions, I have tried here to describe tactical reconfigurations—the critical recoding operations accomplished, via allegory, by each of these texts. In the process I hope to have circumvented analyses that would see texts as symptoms of a cultural or political “disease” that literary critics might diagnose. Here the texts themselves do the diagnostic work, transfiguring their historical moments into complex figural constructions—works of literature—that allegorize the death of their respective world powers across any number of metaphorical “levels” in ways that call attention to that very meaning-making or mediating process. It is worth noting that both *Strange Case* and *The Corrections* prominently feature—that is, diagnose—patients experiencing “symptoms” and thus should be seen as containing within their own systems a commentary on the methodological value of symptoms and diagnoses.¹⁴

With all of this in place we are perhaps in a position to revisit the model of the cycle proposed by Moretti as well as to question the biological metaphors—of life cycles, phases, “death”—that organize the historical claims Arrighi has authorized. In Adorno’s terms, are empires natural “creatures” (like human beings) or artificial “constructions” (like artworks)? Are world-systems made and controlled

¹⁴ Agamben, too, is concerned to frame an interpretive procedure that would exceed the choices offered by the metaphor of symptoms; see *Signature of All Things*. And although remaining committed to metaphors of clinical diagnosis, Gilles Deleuze, taking a “symptomatological” approach, positions literature rather than criticism as the critical function, writing that “[a]uthors, if they are great, are more like doctors than patients. We mean that they are themselves astonishing diagnosticians or symptomatologists. . . . [A]rtists are clinicians, not with respect to their own case, nor even with respect to a case in general; rather, they are clinicians of civilization” (qtd. in Smith xvii).

by individual human wills, as a long tradition of humanistic analysis would suggest? Do Caesars, Disraelis, and Bushes control how empires “rise” and “fall”? Or, as economic histories such as Arrighi’s claim, are imperial systems instead governed by cyclical rhythms, quasi-biological processes or life cycles organizing themselves into phases of world-historical time? Might these *longues durées* of global imperium operate by logics that are not themselves created or willed in any simplistic way but that are not quite given, either, and that are caught in a process of morphology that aims them always toward death? And if this last, then might structural resemblances in the forms that emerge to mediate these late moments be read as the slanted testimony of a larger, more material recursivity—something in common, across historical time, that gives shape to what Jekyll, staring into the abyss of his own dissolution, calls his “nameless situation” (66)?

To answer this affirmatively, as I have, is to posit a revised sense of contemporaneity, whereby works from apparently disconnected situations can be seen to share another kind of as-yet-nameless situation: a chronological kinship across time, a lateness (in my example) whose very particularity as a moment in a cycle finds form—here, via allegory—in specific textual configurations common to other similar moments. It has become a truism that something called “the contemporary” must be imagined in synchronic terms, as a unit of time represented by brackets on a linear timeline drawing diverse items into a shared moment. Russell Berman suggests that “[t]he underlying assumption [of periodization] is that some contemporary condition is of defining importance for the diverse items grouped together under the periodic rubric” (320). Reading for empire’s late style posits and, by positing, reveals a different kind of asynchronous contemporaneity, where jump cuts across time reveal commonalities among works responding to structurally similar historical situations. Stevenson, Agamben, and Franzen: any such grouping occludes as much as it discloses. But a late-style periodization, a folding over of time’s ribbon, has the virtue of opening up discontinuous contemporaneities even as it subscribes to a longer-durational story of historical time, a macrohistorical plotline cast at a scale beyond those individual human agents who have so often been called on to unify historical “Ages”—Johnson, Shakespeare, or, to judge by a rare literary cover story in *Time* (Grossman, “Great American Novelist”), Jonathan Franzen himself.

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