Realism's Empire

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(a) **Space, Form, Content: The Fate of Distance**

And now—no emotion, my boy!—there are no great distances nowadays on our little earth.

—Gustav Freytag, *Soll und Haben* (244)

At the close of Montaigne’s “Des cannibales,” published in his *Essais* in 1581, the New World arrives in the Old one. Three Native Americans, the narrator tells us, “were at Rouen, at the time that King Charles IX was there. The King spoke to them for a long time; they were shown our fashion, our pomp, the style of a proper city. After that, somebody asked them their opinion” (1.263).¹ The natives respond with commonsensical critiques of royalism and social inequality in Europe, bold addenda to the text’s earlier denigration of Catholicism and corruption. This ending is marked partly by humor, but it serves more importantly to concretize, as critiques supposedly launched on French soil, the essay’s more allusive and trans-Atlantic earlier comparisons of society in Europe and in the Americas. Contrast, with this image of Montaigne’s, the remarkable closing pages of Daniel Defoe’s novel, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Having returned to Europe with the novel’s title character, the island native Friday takes center stage in an apparently gratuitous episode which the narrator introduces thus: “Never was a fight managed so hardly, and in such a surprizing manner, as that which followed between Friday and the bear, which gave us all (though at first we were surprized and afraid for

¹. For all quotations not originally in English, page numbers refer to the original-language editions cited. Where other translations have been consulted, they have usually been substantially modified but are also listed in the works cited.
him) the greatest diversion imaginable” (287). Montaigne’s and Defoe’s texts are similarly built on the cultural difference between the domestic and the foreign, but they employ this difference to radically incongruous ends: Montaigne to the critique of French culture and its excesses, and Defoe to the “greatest diversion imaginable,” an episode that is out of place in both the structure and tone of Robinson Crusoe.

The difference here is as important as the parity. Montesquieu, one of Defoe’s contemporaries, later meshes the two aims of diversion and critique, using humor derived from radical cultural difference to leaven a broadside at his own society in the Lettres persanes (1721), a series of letters offering comical but critical Persian perspectives on France. Tracing the development within the French tradition offers a view of how this device changes over the next century, up to the beginning of Balzac’s career as a novelist. As the eighteenth century progresses toward the apex of Enlightenment in form of the Encyclopédie (1751–80) a pattern appears to emerge in a slow reduction of humor and a continual amplification of the text’s design as social critique. Madame de Graffigny’s Lettres d’une Péruvienne (1747), modeled on Montesquieu’s epistolary work, performs a similar critique while adopting a much more serious tone, as does Voltaire’s L’Ingénu (1767), one of his least comical shorter prose works. Like Montaigne’s essay, L’Ingénu brings a Native American to France, but Voltaire’s version of this crossing begins to address the difficulties of assimilation, placing equal emphasis on the character of the immigrant and the culture in which that immigrant settles. By the time Claire de Duras writes Ourika (1826), in which a Senegalese woman struggles unsuccessfully to find acceptance in a Parisian culture that pretends to cherish ideals of enlightened racial tolerance, the narrative fate of the foreigner in Europe appears essentially tragic. These earlier works rely consistently on an imaginable and preservable distance between the Old World and the New World, a distance both geographical and cultural. Geared as these texts are toward a symbolic instrumentalization of the foreigner within a larger ideological attack on Europe, the portrayal of the foreign arrivals to Europe often positions them as possessors of virtue and commonsensical reason that are lacking in the cultures of their colonizers. As the condition of possibility for the value of foreignness on which the critiques rely, distance—relations of space—remains uncontested in these works. The nineteenth-century works by Balzac, Trollope, and Fontane discussed below can also be situated within this tradition, in the sense that they likewise deploy foreign figures and characters. However, because their deployment adopts a fundamentally different narrative form, and because it seems motivated by narrative needs that vary from author to author, it must be seen as a momentous shift within that tradition. This tradition itself is not the primary aim of this study, but it reveals the
thematic terrain on which the authors examined chose to engage their changing world. Through an investigation of the relationship between the use of foreign figures in the nineteenth-century novel and the effect of these figures on the novels’ articulation of space (and especially urban space), diminishing distance, and the authors’ particular method of realism, we can begin to sketch the impact this shift has on the form of the novel.

The nineteenth-century evocations of the foreigner-in-Europe motif begin in the metropolis, which had already begun, in the years leading up to Balzac’s first novels, enjoying a certain privileged position in the construction of narrative. In Franco Moretti’s *Atlas of the European Novel 1800–1900*, for example, a handy map represents graphically the location of major “narrative complications” in six Jane Austen novels. The largest concentration of these “complications” is in London, where, according to Moretti, all but one of the novels sees its course change sharply. This should perhaps be surprising, given the associations that usually spring to mind when one considers the typical locale of an Austen novel; London is not her primary domain. Moretti himself, though, is *not* surprised by the density of complication in London, ascribing it quickly to the idea that it is “the busiest city in the world” (18). Because this is Moretti’s introduction to what will become a critique of Edward Said’s reading of the narrative space of Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, it merits a closer look. If Said and Moretti are both grappling with the relationship of national domestic center and colonial periphery to the structure and narrative demands of the nineteenth-century novel in and beyond Austen, then the idea of the city is crucial here, in ways that Said’s important contributions never elevate to the level of a central concern. The city can be said to serve as, simultaneously, the locus of a domesticity and reason that counter the novels’ “irrational” colonial energies, and as the site where these energies infiltrate and come to complicate even nonurban novels like those of Austen. The opposition between Said’s and Moretti’s differing approaches to the ordering of novelistic space provides valuable context for one of the elemental issues in my argument: the avowal, within certain novels of the nineteenth century, of the disappearance of regions of mystery and romance due to cartographical and general scientific advancements. Pivotal moments in the work of Balzac, Trollope, and Fontane illustrate the crucial role that remappings or unmappings of narrative space play in the development and complication of novels that have been implicated in (or that implicate themselves in) the project of literary realism.

As attempts to organize space coherently, realist narrative and the activity of empire-building can be partnered, to a degree. Said certainly sees them as close relatives, since they both arise from what he calls “imaginative geography,” the capacity to envision the commanding and ordering of raw space
(Orientalism 71). In both Orientalism and Culture and Imperialism, Said is careful to situate physical space as the base around which all other concerns organize: “Underlying social spaces are territories, lands, geographical domains, the actual geographical underpinnings of the imperial, and also the cultural contest. To think about distant places, to colonize them, to populate or depopulate them: all of this occurs on, about, or because of land” (Culture 78). This “geographical notation, the theoretical mapping and charting of territory that underlies Western fiction, historical writing, and philosophical discourse,” thus opens the possibility of the physical act of colonization (58; emphasis in original). It comprises the accumulation of imperial potential, the paradigm formation required for the shift to late capitalism. One ultimate result of this process—a consequence crucial to the novels of the period—is the production of what Said calls a “hierarchy of spaces” that situates the “metropolitan center” at the nucleus of a constellation of less domestic, less controlled territories whose force in this structure serves to provide “stability and prosperity at home.” Under the aegis of its centrality, the word “home” accrues “extremely potent resonances” in relation to the foreign that counters it (58–59). These are already weighty claims for the importance of a geographical inclination and the schism between home and away, but Said articulates far weightier ones, ultimately tethering the geographical to the epistemological. “The geographical sense,” he argues, “makes projections—imaginary, cartographic, military, economic, historical, or in a general sense cultural. It also makes possible the construction of knowledge” (78). Such confidence in the absolute authority of space for the production of culture creates a decidedly unequal relationship between space and the literary text. Moretti, in an effective but reductive phrase, characterizes this sort of inequality as a belief that “space acts upon style,” that space determines style (Atlas 43). Despite Moretti’s curt assessment, though, Said’s particular attention to map-making is important here.

Because it expresses and concretizes acquired knowledge, cartography acts as an agent of disenchantment, a process that will become an immediate and obvious concern to writers of fiction. Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities specifically addresses the potentially secularizing and demystifying consequences of the cartographical project in an important but largely unnoticed leitmotif. Along with the census and the museum—which inform my reading of Balzac’s Peau de chagrin and, briefly, of Fontane’s Effi Briest—maps were, Anderson claims, powerful tools toward hegemonic legitimation within imperial culture (164). However, as a constituted form of knowledge, they have the related and perhaps unintended effect of evis-

2. The year after Anderson’s book appeared, Susan Stewart’s On Longing further developed this idea of the museum as a “mode of control and containment” (160).
cerating or displacing other forms of knowledge. As the world found itself mapped, all its darker and unknown corners reduced to grid and number, “Cairo and Mecca were beginning to be visualized in a strange new way, no longer simply as sites in a sacred Muslim geography, but also as dots on paper sheets which included dots for Paris, Moscow, Manila and Caracas, . . . these indifferently profane and sacred dots” (170–71). Anderson sees this loss of one “style of continuity”—the master narrative of religion—as the birthplace of another: the master narrative of nationalism (11). Anderson’s theory of the birth of the nation from the death of religion is provocative here, because it relates interestingly to two other genealogical pronouncements: Moretti’s story, in *Atlas of the European Novel 1800–1900*, of the birth of the nation-state as it is negotiated and concretized by novelists, by their willful drawing and redrawing of boundaries both cultural and ethnographical; and Lukács’s earlier account of the birth of the novel as a substitute or glue for the now “broken” “circle whose closed nature was the transcendental essence of” the lives of the ancients (*Theory of the Novel* 33).

Lukács posits the novel as both result of and potential remedy for the modern discontinuity represented by the broken circle. His essay imagines a key if not foundational role, within the history of the novel, for the process of desacralization to which Anderson directs our attention, and thus, if we pair these two thinkers, a commensurate role for the imperial pursuits that Anderson finds partly culpable of such desacralization.

To state the problem only in this way, though, is to miss half of imperialism. If, by partnering Anderson and Lukács, one can situate empire at the source of the demystification that necessitates the rise of the novel, one must also see it as the enabler of adventure narratives like *Robinson Crusoe* and of the mystery at work in the imported foreigners of Balzac, Trollope, and Fontane, whose novels often envision foreign figures as romantic potential. Fiction invokes the unstable relationship between colony and imperial center—even at the most bureaucratized level of this relationship—as a narrative possibility. Moretti suggests this in the course of his disagreement with Said over Austen’s *Mansfield Park*. Said claims, in *Culture and Imperialism*, that Austen’s structure of the novel and the crucial role that the Bertrams’ colonial plantation plays in it, demonstrate or reproduce in novelistic form the national domestic center’s absolute, factual economic need for the colonies: “What sustains this life [at Mansfield Park] materially is the Bertram estate in Antigua. . . . [N]o matter how isolated and insulated the English place

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3. Peter Brooks will later speculate, like Lukács, that “[t]he emergence of narrative plot as a dominant mode of ordering and explanation may belong to the large process of secularization . . . which marks a falling-away from those revealed plots . . . that appeared to subsume transitory human time to the timeless” (*Reading* 6).
(e.g., Mansfield Park), it requires overseas sustenance. . . . The Bertrams could not have been possible without the slave trade, sugar, and the colonial planter class” (85, 89, 94). Moretti’s objections to this are both historical and narratological. On historical grounds, he explicitly doubts that the English economic need for the colonies was as dire as Said claims, and he adduces a number of historical analyses of British imperialism to support this doubt. On narratological grounds, Moretti offers another reason for Austen’s use of Antigua in *Mansfield Park*, one that encapsulates the idea of the demands of narrative: tension, complication. In order to allow for some chaos at Mansfield Park, without which we have no novel, Sir Bertram’s watchful presence must be sent far, far away. According to Moretti, Sir Bertram “goes, not because he needs the money, but because Austen needs him out of the way” (26). In other words, it is the English novel, and not the English economy, that absolutely needs the colonies in *Mansfield Park*. By repositioning narrative articulations of space at the center of national imaginings of it, as *Atlas of the European Novel* does, Moretti ultimately claims that Austen creates her novels’ England. Or, to warp his earlier pronouncement: The novel acts upon space. Henri Mitterand has similarly claimed that novelistic space is “a topology that imposes its own laws on real cartography” (*L’Illusion réaliste* 8). Yet between the novel that acts on space and the space that acts on the novel, there exists a more complex arrangement endemic to the enterprise of literary realism—a type of novel which, in its efforts *realistically to record or reflect a certain space* (space acting upon style), finds its mere recording of space challenged by its need to accede to the demands of the narrative and to *complicate that fixed space* (style acting upon space). “Crooked paths” rather than straight ones, writes Viktor Shklovsky in his *Theory of Prose*, “are called into being by specific conditions—by the demands of the plot” (36).

This tension between *style* and *space* can be recast as one more familiar to the long tradition of aesthetics, the tension between narrative *form*, the manner and structure of narration, and narrative *content*, the object of narration. It animates the novels analyzed here, just as it silently anchors the disagreement between Moretti and Said. Despite their differences, however, Moretti, Said and Anderson are all invested in the question of how Western imperial projections come to construct the world outside, be it by cartographical or cultural imposition. This question has crucial resonance within

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4. These multiple ellipses in the quotes from Said mirror Moretti’s quoting of Said’s text.

5. Austen’s novel is not the first to use a trip to the colonies to generate domestic fiction. In Sarah Scott’s 1762 novel, *A Description of Millenium Hall*, the narrator George Ellison writes that his entire journey through western England—which makes possible his visit to Millenium Hall and thus the novel describing it—is the product of a doctor’s prescribed remedy for “the ill effects of my long abode in the hot and unwholesome climate of Jamaica, where, while I increased my fortune, I gradually impaired my constitution” (54).
the unfolding of a novel, whether because geography and national socioeconomic necessity can dictate the course of the novel (Said) or because the novel’s formal need for complication dictates its geographical projections, the space that it treats as content (Moretti). Neither Said nor Moretti considers in particular the role that secularization or disenchantment—the sudden perceived limitation of the possibilities for narrative complication—may play in addressing the question of the novel’s complex relationship with its own space. John McClure’s book on what he calls *Late Imperial Romance* is extremely useful to that end, though. McClure writes that British novelists at the turn of the twentieth century—he refers specifically to H. Rider Haggard, Virginia Woolf, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Joseph Conrad—were so troubled by the disappearance of mysterious, story-engendering places occasioned by the complete mapping of the world, that they sought to either unmap the mapped and known world or find fictional potential in new, siteless geopolitical phenomena, like espionage.6

Thus in 1894, almost a decade after the onset of the scramble for Africa, H. Rider Haggard complains that “soon the ancient mystery of Africa will have vanished” and wonders where “will the romance writers of future generations find a safe and secret place, unknown to the pestilent accuracy of the geographer, to lay their plots?” In Haggard’s paradigmatic version of what is to become an oft-repeated tale, the key terms are “Africa,” “mystery,” “romance,” and “geographer.” The first three are aligned, of course, against the fourth: the geographer, apt representative of rationalizing forces, threatens to map Africa and rob it of its mystery, leaving “romance writers” without a setting for their stories. Eighteen years later in another imperial romance, Arthur Conan Doyle combines the same elements in a strikingly similar lament. Now that “the big blank spaces in the map are all being filled in,” a character declares in *The Lost World* (1912), “there’s no room for romance anywhere.” And just three years later, in Virginia Woolf’s first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915), we find a character condemning imperial entrepreneurs for “robbing a whole continent of mystery.” (11)

McClure records this preoccupation with the fate of the imagination as cul-

6. Lenin, in *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, envisions a different yet equally claustrophobic possibility brought on by the complete mapping and colonization of the world, one that will be acted out in the form of the Cold War beginning with World War II:

As there are no unoccupied territories—that is, territories that do not belong to any state—in Asia and America, . . . we must say that the characteristic feature of this period is the final partition of the globe—not in the sense that a new partition is impossible—on the contrary, new partitions are possible and inevitable—but in the sense that the colonial policy of the capitalist countries has completed the seizure of the unoccupied territories on our planet. For the first time the world is completely divided up, so that in the future only redivision is possible; territories can only pass from one “owner” to another, instead of passing as unowned territory to an “owner.” (76)
minating in the waning moments of the nineteenth century, the moment at which the completion of the global cartographical project finally “eradicat[es] the last elsewhere,” but it is in fact a much older concern. Goethe could, in 1804, already quote Wilhelm von Humboldt’s complaint that archaeological advances were being made only “at the cost of the imagination” [auf Kosten der Phantasie] (12.109). Later in the nineteenth century, George Eliot’s characters make similar laments in Middlemarch (1871–72), complaining, for example, that “There should be some unknown regions preserved as hunting-grounds for the poetic imagination” (75). As we shall see, these worries over the fate of the imagination are inextricable from the development of realism in the authors discussed in this project.

Such sentiments might be surprising from the architect of Berlin’s public museums and from the pages of English realism, but the tension at work here—between exploration and the imagination—is reproduced repeatedly in realist novels well before the turn of the twentieth century. Fredric Jameson’s The Political Unconscious accounts for it in a chapter on Balzac, and McClure’s Late Imperial Romance is, in many ways, a long answer to Jameson’s question of how romance can be understood to have survived the processes of disenchantment and secularization. Jameson has more fundamental generic categories in mind, though. Leading into a discussion of Balzac and Dreiser, he proposes that

the problem raised by the persistence of romance as a mode is that of substitutions, adaptations, and appropriations, and raises the question of what, under wholly altered historical circumstances, can have been found to replace the raw materials of magic and Otherness which medieval romance found ready to hand in its socioeconomic environment. A history of romance as a mode becomes possible, in other words, when we explore the substitute codes and raw materials, which, in the increasingly secularized and rationalized world that emerges from the collapse of feudalism, are pressed into service to replace the older magical categories of Otherness which have now become so many dead languages. (130–31)

With Jameson’s question and with McClure’s observations in mind, one can reconsider the relationship between the novel and geography, and in so doing offer three theses. This book will address the manner in which, first, certain nineteenth-century novels rely on an imported colonial figure

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7. Moretti poses a different question of substitutions in a footnote to Atlas of the European Novel: “Did the novel replace devotional literature because it was a fundamentally secular form—or because it was religion under a new guise?” (169 n30; emphasis in original)
to generate or organize their fiction (the “complications” to which Moretti alludes, the “substitute codes” for romance, in Jameson’s wording). Second, in an affront to any established disenchantment or routine expressed by the novel, this peripheral figure occasions a remapping or unmapping of mapped and ordered urban space. And, third, the city becomes an indispensable component of this analysis, by virtue of both its centrality within an imperial infrastructure and its centrality within the narrative structure of many purportedly realist novels. (“Realism,” Peter Brooks claims in *Realist Vision*, “is nothing if not urban” [131].) Finally, following Said’s equating of space and knowledge, if these novels by Balzac, Trollope, and Fontane are partial contestations of cartography, they must also, by extension, be legible as epistemological testings, perhaps even as duels between different styles of knowledge.

(b) Imperial Knowledge, Colonial Knowledge: The Fate of Difference

I left the temple and stood in the blinding sunlight feeling quite benumbed by what I had seen. My European mentality boggled at the experience.

—Heinrich Harrer, *Seven Years in Tibet*

[As the nationalist B.G. Tilak was later to recall, people “were dazzled at first by the discipline of the British. Railways, Telegraph, Roads, Schools bewildered the people.”

—Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital*

The notion of a duel within these novels presupposes a decidedly binarizing paradigm, one that is actually invested in the production of conflict. In his introduction to *Late Imperial Romance*, McClure points out that this conflict arises in the context of a spatial opposition: “most imperial adventure fiction translates the basic imperial division of the world (metropolis and colonies or potential colonies) into a familiar romance division, with the West represented as a zone of relative order, security and secularity, the non-Western world as a zone of magic, mystery, and disorder” (8). It is important, though, that this division holds true as well for domestic realist fiction in the age of imperialism. Jane Eyre, for example, at the youthful outset of the novel named for her, confesses in 1847 that she thought Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* to be fact rather than fiction and that, “as to the elves, having sought them in vain among foxglove leaves and bells, under mushrooms and beneath the
ground-ivy mantling old wall-nooks, I had at length made up my mind to the
sad truth that they were all gone out of England to some savage country,
where the woods were wilder and thicker, and the population more scant”
(21). Jane’s “sad truth” is that England has been disenchanted, and romance
is now the property of other regions. If the particular valences between
East and West are not as blatant in realist fiction as they are in romance
adventures—that scholarship on realism as a mode has largely ignored them
attests to their relative subtlety—it is because realist fiction only rarely
makes obvious forays into those zones of “the non-Western world” that are
coded as locational opposites to Western order and domesticity. The division
and its symbolic power still pertain, though, and the imported foreign figure
represents a convenient shorthand for the partition and its lingering tensions;
the authors can thus recall or summon the idea of geographical division with-
out abandoning the typical domestic setting of the novel. Jameson writes of
the “smuggling” of “magic and providential mystery” that is meant to counter
the effects of “rationalization” and provide a sort of “symbolic appeasement”
(Political Unconscious 134). The divide between domestic and foreign is
often, but not always, cast simply as a divide between imperial and colo-
nial in the novels by Balzac, Trollope, and Fontane to be analyzed here. It
expresses itself also as an epistemological tension, a competition between
what the text envisions as two radically different forms of knowledge. This
tension is perfectly suited to realist fiction, which is itself a narrative mode
premised on questions of knowledge and the representation of truth, accord-
ing to George Levine: “Whatever else [realism] means, it always implies an
attempt to use language to get beyond language, to discover some non-verbal
truth out there. The history of English realism obviously depended in large
measure on changing notions of what is ‘out there,’ of how best to ‘represent’
it, and of whether, after all, representation is possible or the ‘out there’ know-
able” (Realistic Imagination 6). Novels that bring the “out there” into the
“in here” foreground and amplify the contrasting epistemologies represented
by the two terms.

8. Eliot, in *Adam Bede* (1859), scripts a similarly rustic moment of disenchantment: “It was a
wood of beeches and limes, with here and there a light silver-stemmed birch—just the sort of wood
most haunted by the nympha: you see their white sunlit limbs gleaming athwart the boughs, or
peeping from behind the smooth-sweeping outline of a tall lime; you hear their soft liquid laughter—
but if you look with a too curious sacrilegious eye, they vanish behind the silvery beeches, they
make you believe that their voice was only a running brooklet, perhaps they metamorphose
themselves into a tawny squirrel that scampers away and mocks you from the topmost bough”
(130).

9. Note that Levine stresses an attempt to get beyond language. Levine demonstrates that
the authors of realist novels were not at all duped by their own narrative mode; they try to get
beyond language but are not naïve enough to think it always possible. Raymond Tallis’s *In Defence
of Realism* addresses this stereotype, along with numerous others, in an insightful treatment of
“Misconceptions About Realism” (195–98).
Alongside McClure’s notion of the basic division of the imperial world into zones of order (the imperial center) and zones of disorder (the colonies, the uncharted), many critics and historians have mapped differing epistemologies as a split between East and West or between colonizer and colonized. These debates have remained absent from scholarship on realism, though, and, because they question or complicate some of the fundamental assumptions underlying our views of literary realism, their absence has only aided realism’s long-standing reputation as a ploddingly monological mode whose basic assumptions always go unquestioned. Empirical science, one of the central influences on realism, is in this debate consistently allied with the forces of Western empire. Partha Chatterjee, for example, sees in imperial culture and in anticolonial nationalism a division between two domains—the material and the spiritual. The material is the domain of the “outside,” of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed. In this domain, then, Western superiority had to be acknowledged and its accomplishments carefully studied and replicated. The spiritual, on the other hand, is an “inner” domain bearing the “essential” marks of cultural identity. (6)

It is in this “inner” domain, Chatterjee claims, the domain of the “spiritual,” that the East can gain leverage against the West. 10 Said also explicitly links science with the Western impulse toward imperialism in Orientalism: “The greatest names are, of course, Linnaeus and Buffon, but the intellectual process by which bodily (and soon moral, intellectual, and spiritual) extension—the typical materiality of an object—could be transformed from mere spectacle to the precise measurement of characteristic elements was very widespread” (119). Buffon will be acknowledged as a major influence by Balzac’s Comédie humaine, which mentions him no less than five times in its famous general preface. Said’s picture of a scientific and rational imperialism becomes complicated if not self-contradictory later, however, when he allies empire with religious fanaticism in a passage whose inner tensions will guide most of the chapters in this book. Ashis Nandy, like Chatterjee, most specifically scripts the differences as a contest between styles of knowledge. 11

10. Recent scholarship on nineteenth-century Europe’s interest in the occult strengthens the notion of a duel between empirical and spiritual epistemologies. As Richard Noakes has pointed out, “Victorian investigators of Spiritualism believed” that such “erratic phenomena” could ultimately “be reduced to natural laws” (24). By 1908, Frank Podmore could write a book called The Naturalisation of the Supernatural. Some go so far as to map this duel (as Chatterjee and others do) onto the geographical divisions of imperialism. See Luckhurst and Viswanathan.

11. See also Azim, who writes that “The secular nature of British education in India split the colonial terrain further along lines of secular (colonial) or religious (native) education” (14). As
“Resistance,” Nandy asserts, “takes many forms in the savage world. It may take the form of a full-blooded rejection of the modern world’s deepest faith, scientific rationality” (“Shamans” 269). Resistance and the combat implied by it are central as well to the dueling “philosophies of knowledge” that Nandy describes in “The Savage Freud” (96). Nandy points to Freud’s own observation, in a letter to Lou Andreas-Salomé, that certain of his first Indian readers conceived of him as an Englishman, neatly capturing the manner in which the invasion of a new science or form of knowledge (psychoanalysis) became quickly conflated with a more familiar imperial invasion (101–2).

Science and the empirical epistemology in general are opposed to the epistemology of the oppressed in the colonial equation, as many critics have expressed it. However, certain narrative avatars of scientism in the nineteenth century are even more specifically adduced as uniquely useful to imperialism, and are, not coincidentally, intimately related to the creation of realist narrative. Ranajit Guha, in an essay on the narrative strategies of colonial power, refers to “historiography . . . as a form of colonialist knowledge” where it is bound up with policy (70; emphasis in original). This assumption is already at work in 1811, when William Playfair publishes his study of British Family Antiquity: Containing the Baronetage of Ireland and dismisses all accounts of events in Irish history “previous to the era of authentic history, which began with the invasion of Henry II” (quoted in Gilmartin 30). History, in this context, does not exist in any credible form until the colonialists arrive, and one could state more strongly Guha’s declaration of historiography as colonialist knowledge; proper history, for Playfair in 1811, simply belongs to Britain.¹² Playfair’s idea of two histories at odds with each other complements Guha’s expression of history as a battleground: “every struggle for power by the historically ascendant classes in any epoch involves a bid to acquire a tradition” (77). Nandy, too, articulates the notion of resisting the narrative of history within the colonial cultures to which he refers as, by turns, “savage” and “ahistorical”: “The old classification between the historical and ahistorical societies may not have broken down, but all large ahistorical societies now have sizeable sections of population which have become, through a process of over-correction, entirely captive to the historical mode” (“Shamans” 263). Whether in Guha’s idea of historiography, Nandy points out, Kaylan Chatterjee extends this idea of a duel to the domain of literary study, when he treats Lukács’s dismissal, in 1922, of Rabindranath Tagore’s The Home and the World (1915). Lukács objects to what he perceives as a Ghandist “religiosity,” and Nandy draws from this critique a collision between secular literary hermeneutics and texts inflected with religion; see “Lukács’s Choice” (Nandy, Illegitimacy of Nationalism 15–19).

¹² In a chapter on “The Concept of Archaism in Anthropology” in Structural Anthropology, Lévi-Strauss observes a similar dynamic in one of two problematic criteria anthropologists use to categorize societies as “primitive”: “the history of these peoples is completely unknown to us, and on account of the lack or paucity of oral traditions and archaeological remains, it is forever beyond our reach” (109; emphasis mine).
Playfair’s idea of “authentic history,” or Eric Hobsbawm’s mention of “unhistorical” or “semi-historical” cultures in *The Age of Capital*’s chapter on “Building Nations” (85), history as a type of knowledge becomes a means of categorizing nations.

The preoccupation with history here is important in a discussion of realism, for the increasing prominence of historiography in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is often read alongside the rise of realist narrative, by critics as diverse as Erich Auerbach, who refers to the “historism” of Balzac; Lukács; Ian Watt; and Peter Brooks, who writes of “the nineteenth century’s . . . foregrounding of the historical narrative as par excellence the necessary mode of explanation and understanding” (*Reading* 6–7). Historical consciousness is, furthermore, repeatedly tethered to secular consciousness, a point that Said’s closing remarks in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* make abundantly clear, as he explicitly equates “a sense of history” with “a purely secular view of reality” (290–91). Bearing in mind the realist novel’s debt to historiography and history’s supposed secularism, one must recall as well Guha’s and Dipesh Chakrabarty’s warnings on the limitations of purely secular historiography. Guha, for example, points out that Western historiography “fails to comprehend . . . the religious element in rebel consciousness” when writing about Indian uprisings against the British (83), while Chakrabarty sees such failure as a symptom of more general methodological shortcomings, which the next chapter discusses in more depth. Following Guha’s and Chakrabarty’s pronouncements, attention to what seems un secular or unrealist in realist narratives forces us to reappraise the relationship between secularism and realism. The novels of Balzac, Trollope, and Fontane on which this project focuses have all been said to employ realist narrative strategies or to belong, simply put, to a body of work or a literary-historical epoch termed “realist.” Yet these novels also rely on energies or epistemologies irreducible to the historiographical and empirical allegiances of realism as most critics—and most realist novels themselves—have understood and constructed it.

**c) The Problem with Progress: The Fate of Fiction**

The form of the novel is closely linked to the process of demystification, not merely in Lukács’s understanding of demystification as the condition necessary for the rise of the novel, but in an ongoing way, throughout the history of the genre, as Michael McKeon has argued. This becomes clear when one focuses on negotiations of space in the novel, which are especially dynamic.
in the works treated in this project. In elaborating on the idea of the development of homogeneous, disenchanted, grid-like space, Jameson writes that

[t]he emergence of this kind of space will probably not involve problems of figuration so acute as those we will confront in the later stages of capitalism, since here, for the moment, we witness that familiar process long generally associated with the Enlightenment, namely, the desacralization of the world, the decoding and secularization of the older forms of the sacred or the transcendent, the slow colonization of use value by exchange value, the “realistic” demystification of the older kinds of transcendent narratives in novels like *Don Quixote,* . . . and so on. (“Cognitive Mapping” 349)

The “familiar” Enlightenment desacralization to which he refers is much more complex in the novels treated below, in which it is cast more often against a willful reenchantment.13 In other words, there is a measure of resistance to this “slow colonization.” Jameson first raises the issue of disenchantment earlier, in *The Political Unconscious’s* chapter on realism in Balzac discussed briefly above. He reiterates what “any number of ‘definitions’ of realism assert”: “that processing operation variously called narrative mimesis or realistic representation has as its historic function the systematic undermining and demystification, the secular ‘decoding,’ of those preexisting inherited traditional or sacred narrative paradigms which are its initial givens” (152). One must measure these arguments against Jameson’s notion of a “longing for magic and providential mystery,” which might ruthlessly complicate a narrative mode such as realism, whose very aims are, according to Jameson, incompatible with such energies. The conflict between rational demystification and the irrational longing for mystery that Jameson sees in narrative matches the paradox that Said recognizes in *Orientalism.* In a paragraph meant to delineate the book’s title term, Said unites within his definition of “Orientalism” both realism—which he describes as a mercilessly normative, empirical, and disciplinary discourse—and paranoia, which he opposes to such normativity, empiricism, and history (72).14

To envision realism alongside or even in collusion with its opposite, as Said and Jameson appear to do, is to problematize most scholarship on real-

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13. I use the idea of reenchantment here differently than Payne does in his book, *The Reenchantment of Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot and Serialization.* While Payne convincingly teases out a “discourse of benevolence and self-sacrifice from a lost Christian culture” (147) in the writings, behavior, and serialization of the three authors he treats, I deploy the term in a manner less restricted to religious tradition and more in line with an aesthetic ancestry of magic, mystery, and romance. This can include, but not be restricted to, religion.

14. Homi Bhabha, in his reading of this passage, repeats the link between “colonial power” and “realism,” claiming that the former’s “system of representation, a regime of truth, . . . is structurally similar to realism” (*Location* 71).
ism. Since at least Hippolyte Taine, realism as a narrative mode has commonly been viewed as an agent or reflection of scientific positivism and positivist historiography. Eric Downing has pointed out, in a recent study of German realist fiction, that even prominent Germanists such as Robert Holub and Russell Berman have lately constructed realism as “a heavily normed discourse, or style, that purports to universal, transparent, natural, and ahistorical status, and that simultaneously and necessarily excludes or represses both self-consciousness and otherness” (11–12). Katherine Kearns also captures these criticisms well, when she writes that “Realism” is “often charged with blindsiding social, political, and epistemological complexities, with throwing its considerable materialistic weight against all that would challenge or suborn the status quo” (7). Early in the history of the term, realism’s supposedly direct reference to external reality was looked on favorably as a fulfillment of art’s truest mimetic aims, and unfavorably as a pandering to reality that abandoned the Renaissance and neoclassical injunction to improve the world in art, following the aesthetics of Sir Philip Sidney or Boileau, for example. The positive association of realism with an admirable mimetic project—with an attempt to, in Levine’s phrasing, “get beyond words” to some truth or reality—is surely behind the claims of certain modernist critics and writers who proudly described works of modernism as “realist” or “realistic,” even where the version of “reality” and the strategies for representing it are markedly different from those of nineteenth-century authors. Thus can Auerbach speak in *Mimesis* of Virginia Woolf’s realism just a few years after Woolf herself all but labels James Joyce a realist in her essay, “Modern Fiction.” Lukács, fearful of the modernist trend toward a broader application and muddying of the term realism, attempts to reinstall a barrier in 1957, in his *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*. We are faced, Lukács claims, with “the dilemma of the choice between an aesthetically appealing, but decadent modernism, and a fruitful critical realism. It is the choice between Franz Kafka and Thomas Mann” (92). For Lukács, then, if his choice of Kafka and Mann as the exemplary dichotomy is any indication, realism opposes modernism because it is constituted by a reality immediately familiar and recognizable as such. This is clearly not the “reality” that is meaningless outside of quotation marks, to

15. Mortimer gives a useful and brief version: “Realism is a historical term. It became a widespread critical concept in France only in the late 1840s and 1850s and was sanctioned in 1856 when a journal of that name appeared, Duranty’s *Le Réalisme*, or in 1857 when Champfleury’s essays in defense of the concept were published, with the same title” (3). Marshall Brown reaches further back, examining the genealogy of the word “real” in aesthetic and philosophical discourse in the mid- to late-eighteenth century (226) and ultimately measuring it against Hegelian *Wirklichkeit* and its impact on Auerbach’s influential conception of the representation of reality.

16. The essay’s German title is *Wider den mißverstandenen Realismus*, or *Against Misunderstood Realism*, which was somewhat defanged in English. Theodor Adorno takes issue with many of Lukács’s points in Adorno’s “Extorted Reconciliation,” and especially contests his claims about the choice between Mann and Kafka.
which Vladimir Nabokov refers later in the century in his postscript to *Lolita* (314). The consequences of this sort of split can be seen more broadly in the modernist caricature of realism as a naïve faith in its own referentiality to a knowable reality. The novels of Samuel Beckett, for example, repeatedly lampoon this trust as a troubling dishonesty on the part of writers who gesture toward external realities as context or condition for their narratives.  

Even critics who would defend realist narrative against accusations of referential naïveté have nonetheless demeaned it as “régressive” because of its attempt to construct a “referential fullness” [plénitude référentielle] within itself, an idea sponsored by both Roland Barthes, in the celebrated “L’effet de réel,” and Pierre Macherey, in his chapter on Balzac’s *Les Paysans* in *A Theory of Literary Production* (Barthes 90). Acknowledging that there are already instances of aggressive anti-realism in the later nineteenth century (Nietzsche, for example), the more strident and enduring critiques are born in the modernist moment and piqued further by poststructuralist recontextualizations of the idea of representation itself.

Realism escapes these attacks—and becomes much more complex—when one reads it, not merely as the disciplinary narrative that it partly is, but also as the counternarrative that unfolds simultaneously. In responses to critiques of realism by both modernist and poststructuralist critics, George Levine and Marshall Brown in 1981 offer more nuanced and capacious conceptions of realist narrative as a site of struggle. Their posture provides a framework in which to reconsider the novels discussed in this book. These novels are explicitly implicated in the realist endeavor by both their narrators and their authors, but they are also works within which the value of realism can be and is contested. This contest is often initiated through the introduction of foreign figures. Partially a sign of its time, Levine’s study openly casts itself as a response to “the antireferential bias of our criticism and to the method of radical deconstruction that has become a commonplace” (*Realistic Imagination* 3). Against the stereotype of a monological realism, Levine asserts instead that “realism posits ‘mixed’ conditions” (4). Brown’s essay strives, similarly, to give “a flexible historical picture” (233) of realist narrative and of definitions of realism. Robert Holub derides Brown’s “flexibility”

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17. Raymond Tallis (112) cites Beckett’s *Molloy* (1951). The novel’s second part begins with the lines “It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows,” a realist assertion of place and time severely undercut—even mocked—by the novel’s final lines: “I went back into the house and wrote, ‘It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows.’ It was not midnight. It was not raining” (Beckett 92; 176). Beckett’s explicit attacks against a prime novel of European realism (Fontane’s *Effi Briest*) in the play, *La dernière bande* (*Krapp’s Last Tape*, 1958) have long been noted by scholars, largely for their comic value. See Turner (234).

18. Furst, too, offers a more nuanced picture: “The realist novel must be taken at one and the same time as a record (more or less faithful, as the case may be) of a past social situation and as a texture made of verbal signs” (*All Is True* 24). Kearns, like Furst, espouses a more complex view of realism from within a deconstructive stance, holding that realism cannot be monological, because everything written is already of (at least) two minds.
as “amorphousness” in his 1991 monograph on German realism, but the flexibility is, for Brown, precisely the point (14). Brown explains realist narrative as a product of “interplay” between “Jakobson’s metonymic or sequential order” and “metaphorical or substitutional order” (231); as “the ordered or hierarchical intersection of contrasting codes” (233); and as “a structure of ordered negations perceived within the text quite independently of any relationship between the text and what is assumed to be its ‘world’” (237). The emphasis is on realism’s internal struggles—struggles made explicit by all three of the authors studied here.

The present project, though, will endeavor to read an interplay between the strategies of realist narrative and the material that realist narrative describes and which, as we shall see, frequently challenges those strategies. Brown makes a useful distinction between “realisms of form” and “realisms of content” that is crucial here, because it maps readily onto Moretti’s distinction between *style* and *space* so important to the novels discussed below (233). Yet Brown’s distinction is no less important generally, because literary realism has always been theorized through discussions of either the form or the content of the work, or, less frequently if at all, of both. Balzac’s own appeal to natural history, for example, constructs a formal and structural ancestry for the strategies he hopes to develop in the *Comédie humaine*; his preoccupation with physical material and his painstaking description of it, on the other hand, have led some critics to see that material content (be it a social milieu writ large or a single room in a small Paris *pension*) as the real force of his realism. However, the divorce between the text and its world implied by this arrangement clashes, to some degree, with the stated missions of Balzac, Trollope, and Fontane, and with the discernible preoccupations of their works. All three of these authors can be said to adhere, in *both* the form and the content of the novels analyzed below, to an abiding interest in and debate over two developments related to the imperialist epistemology that Nandy, Chatterjee, Guha, and Said describe: historiography and empiricism. Some critics have linked these two terms as interrelated developments, but no deliberate link between them is necessary for one to appreciate the extent to which historiography and empiricism are equally essential in the fiction of Balzac, Trollope, and Fontane, and in the long tradition of scholarship on realist fiction.

19. Howells would likely abolish this distinction, claiming rather that true realism is a realism of both form and content: “Realism is nothing more than the truthful treatment of material,” he writes, in a formulation that simultaneously highlights *material* (content) and the manner of its *treatment* (form) (58). See also Keams, who claims that “Realism premises that observable realities can be and should be articulated novelistically through verisimilitude” (86).

20. Or of any realism. Bill Brown refers to a general “mimetic physicality of realism” (166).

21. See Hayden White’s *Figural Realism* (43) and McKeon (42–43, 68, 420–21).
To say that empiricism and historiography operate, in the nineteenth-century novel, at the levels of both content and form is to make a few specific claims in each case. First, it is to claim that, taking the example of historiography, these writers structure their novels (the level of form) according to conventions of historical narration, causal connection, and temporality. Trollope’s *The Way We Live Now* begins to challenge these conventions under extreme pressure from the shrinking of its world (content thus complicates form). Second, the novels simultaneously appeal, at the level of content and often in a strikingly explicit manner, to accepted historical or social reality outside of their narrative. This dual use of history, as both form and content, is not necessarily unique to the nineteenth century. Indeed, reliance on history as a source for narrative (history as content), and a view of historiography as a strategy (form) for arriving at or articulating truth, are at least as old as the modern novel. *Don Quijote’s* narrator speaks of “truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, storehouse of great deeds, witness of the past, example and lesson to the present, warning to the future” [la verdad, cuya madre es la historia, émula del tiempo, depósito de las acciones, testigo de lo pasado, ejemplo y aviso de lo presente, advertencia de lo por venir] (1.95). The notion of history as depósito de las acciones hints simultaneously at the levels of content and form, for in addition to “deeds,” isolated historical episodes, the word acciones also denotes the plots of literary works. History is, therefore, not just as external source for content or isolated episode (deed) but also an organizer of larger structure (plot). Balzac, Fontane, and—perhaps most explicitly—Trollope all lean on history in both the form and content of their works: in the form, because their narratives follow the historiographical rules of causal connection; and in the content, because they rely on external historical reality as backdrop for their plots, as the familiar, material frame of reference, what Richard Altick has called the “presence of the present” (the Parliamentary interests of Trollope’s novels, for example). These authors also foreground empiricism and the knowledge of the senses, albeit in different ways and to different ends. The deployment of empiricism in their novels goes beyond what one critic has seen as realistic détaillisme (Dubois 88), and it surpasses the preoccupation with material things and places, or attempts at cartographical verity, to which so many critics have called attention. Rather, like historiography, empiricism also becomes an element of narrative form simultaneously deployed by and disputed within the novels treated below. Ian Watt, in *The Rise of the Novel*, goes so far as to pinpoint empiricism as the single starting point for realism: “Modern realism, of course, begins from the position that truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses” (12). When Balzac’s narrator in *La Peau de chagrin*, for example, proceeds by revealing only what is externally observ-
able before making deductions or hypotheses based on what is observable, the novel is adopting the form of empirical science. Balzac deploys that mode of narration everywhere in *La Comédie humaine*.

Historiography and empiricism organize the fiction of Balzac, Trollope, and Fontane, and the particular confluence of the two in the novels treated below constitutes an important moment of literary-historical development. These preoccupations are not the sole property of the nineteenth century, but they are most central there. Indeed, Marshall Brown points out that such “elements of realism can undoubtedly be found in the literature of all ages, though it seems undeniable that their frequency and prominence increased in the nineteenth century” (233). Critical though he is of Brown, even Holub concedes this point, the notion of a certain “era” of realism grounded on the sudden historical prominence of realist strategies (174). Fundamentally, the two forces of historiography and empiricism, taken together, articulate another narrative (or collective fantasy), that of progress: the history of science, one might say, or the workings of science within history. That much is already implied in Max Weber’s claim, “Scientific work is chained to the course of progress” (137). Weber makes this statement in the very essay, “Science as a Vocation,” in which he famously articulates the costs of that progress as “disenchantment” [Entzauberung], the eradication of mystery through knowledge. If the narrative of progress—or, as Chakrabarty would have it, the “metanarrative of progress”—is so “deeply embedded in our institutional lives however much we may develop . . . an attitude of incredulity toward such metanarratives,” this notion of progress is no less a cornerstone of the novels to be analyzed below, several of which are directly interested in the lives of institutions (Chakrabarty 88). Though coded differently by each author and by each novel, progress is both foregrounded and feared in these texts through the use of the imported foreign figure and the specific significance of each importation. Balzac’s novels of the early 1830s tend to script the advances of science and empire as an explicit dissolution of mystery or romance, challenged by the marginal characters and objects that become central to the texts. Trollope demonstrates, over the course of his six Palliser novels and the contemporaneous *The Way We Live Now*, the difficulties for narrative in light of this disenchantment and the assault of progress on tradition. Progress is linked, for a distressed Trollope, to the increasingly easy communication of England with the outside world, the communication that facilitates in the first place the arrival of the foreign in the space of the domestic. Fontane, too, relies on the technological tropes of simplified communication, both verbal (in the image of a character in *Cécile* who is employed laying

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22. Hobsbawm refers to the “secular ideology of progress” (*Age of Capital* 271).
telegraph wires all over the world) and physical (in the image of Effi Briest’s port town as a node of global commerce and exchange), as emblem of the struggle between historical advancement and mystery.

One can return here to Moretti’s concept of novels that build nations, where this introduction began, for the nation is itself partially a product of the collective fantasy or narrative of progress. Homi Bhabha has claimed that the narrative of the nation is an attempt to “mediate between the teleology of progress” and the “timeless’ discourse of irrationality” (“DisseminiNation” 294). The same is certainly true of realist novels, even when studies of realist novels have failed to notice the extent to which the relationship with the irrational is in fact one of mediation rather than simple exclusion. The irrationality of which Bhabha speaks is, however, neither timeless nor nationless in the novels treated below. It is, rather, constructed precisely through its historical and extranational associations. As such, it is content to challenge the form of realism.

(d) Précis of Chapters

The rise of the museum embodies a slow merger of empiricism and historiography. In chapter 1, this merger provides a means of reading the introduction, into Balzac’s novelistic output and main metropolitan setting, of a foreign figure, the titular Peau de chagrin. A famous scene early in the novel, in which the protagonist browses a collection of antiquities in a shop before bringing them into a historical coherence, has been read by some critics as an example of the fantastic (e.g., Tzvetan Todorov) and by others (e.g., Henri Mitterand) as a nascent realism. The novel fosters a duel between these two modes, though, between a rigidly empirical narrative method and an object—the Middle Eastern talisman found in the shop—that cannot be explained by empirical science and that lies outside the necessities and causalities of history. La Peau de chagrin finally allegorizes a disenchantment that is explicitly linked to science; the talisman dwindles to nothing and, in the final scene, Balzac’s narrator reckons the costs of technology.

Chapter 2 places the imperial contexts of La Peau de chagrin—largely ignored by critics—into sharper relief, introducing the manner in which empire and questions of colonial violence come to structure Balzac’s Le Père Goriot. Both novels lean on references to the colonies, but Goriot’s allegory of the Mandarin, when read against the domestic machinations on which it passes judgment, links exoticism, colonial violence, and money. The criminal Vautrin and his embodiment of a global criminal underworld appear to open
the city as a site of mystery; however, he only serves, finally, to underline the
text’s ambivalence toward vestiges of romantic thought and action, which
are consistently undercut by the language of rationalization. The Mandarin
represents the notion, introduced in *La Peau de chagrin*, that domestic gains
come at the expense of colonial others, but it also highlights the dubious
position of the foreign in the novel.

Paris is embedded in a global imperial geography in *Le Père Goriot*, but
*La Fille aux yeux d’or* makes this arrangement even more immediate. It
seems, in the latter novel, that the entire world comes to Paris, and chapter 3
investigates the narrative consequences of this diminished distance. The city
is methodically unmapped, rendered foreign and mysterious in order to meet
the demands of a disenchanted, romance-hungry Parisian. Against prevailing
readings of this text, which have inevitably divorced the anthropological
tones of the first portion from the more comfortably narrative tones of the
second portion, I argue that the two halves function together in an attempted
description of Paris and progress. France’s capital becomes, through the
imported colonial figures in Balzac’s early novels, both the specific site and
paradigm of disenchantment and the site of timid resistance to this process.

Chapter 4 charts the shifting and problematic mobilizations of foreign-
ness—specifically, Irishness—in Trollope’s *Phineas Finn*. In this second
of the six Palliser novels, Trollope draws his title hero from Ireland, which
he explicitly equates with romance and even refers to as “the colonies next
door.” This novel and its sequel are aberrant in the English tradition because
Trollope situates the Irish in them so centrally, and the novels begin to con-
front a problem of realistic representation. Forced to grapple with vestiges
of romance in an otherwise realist text, *Phineas Finn* codes and recodes the
value and location of Irishness in a clumsy effort to balance romance and the
real. Trollope’s Pallisers share with Balzac’s early fiction a concern over the
fate of romance even as they attempt to meticulously record the political and
colonial history of the time.

The challenges that *Phineas Finn* cannot quite meet are hyperbolized in
the perennially underappreciated *Phineas Redux*. Chapter 5 examines the
manner in which the quandary over how to represent “romantic” foreigners
within a realist novel begins to alter Trollope’s conception of space. The Pal-
liser novels also weigh disenchantment within this conflict, from *Phineas
Finn*’s demystification of Scott’s romantic territories to the reenchantment
of these same territories in its sequel, which is marked finally by a startling urban
chaos and stylistic slippage. *Phineas Redux* introduces foreign energies into
the English capital—murderous Scots, Continental rogues—and this tension
occasions, by the end of the novel, an epistemological crisis explicitly wedded
to a crisis of fiction. As Phineas Redux ends, Trollope begins the work of placing the city in a global geography that will ultimately be expressed in terms of the burgeoning global market in The Way We Live Now.

Chapter 6 examines the continued, ambivalent portrayal of foreign figures as simultaneous signifiers of the romantic and the rational in The Way We Live Now, with specific focus on the Americans. The railway speculator Augustus Melmotte, the novel’s most enduring and villainous character, is a quasi-Gothic figure borrowed from Goethe, Charles Maturin, and Balzac. Though Melmotte is too often—and mistakenly—read as Jewish, The Way We Live Now’s uncertainty as to his origins is important, and Trollope uses him to anchor a stark portrait of global commerce and the dangerous interconnectedness of distant places. As in Balzac’s La Fille aux yeux d’or, the outside world becomes increasingly present in London, and Trollope’s narrative retreats to the countryside, the novel’s last bastion of Englishness and stability. The demands of Trollope’s portrayal of the shrinking world ruthlessly complicate his normal, staid pattern of narrative exposition, as the city and world he depicts become irrevocably compact.

Chapter 7 begins by acknowledging some of the complexities that attend any analysis of imperialism in the context of Germany, which differs significantly from that of other European national traditions in which colonial undertakings occurred earlier and were more entrenched. Fontane’s fiction begins by constructing a German metropolis that can then be inserted into a global geography, and, when seen in this light, his novels build toward a crucial moment in Cécile when a character declares Berlin a Weltstadt or World-City. Cécile foregrounds the differences between the urban and rural at a time when those differences, as one character remarks, are seen to steadily decrease. Despite this, the novel marks Berlin off as a site of struggle between disenchantment and the desire for romance, through the character of Gordon, a Scot who emblematizes simultaneously the processes of globalization through technology and the possibility for romance and narrative complication.

Cécile sets the stage, in a sense, for Fontane’s masterpiece, Effi Briest, through a damaging depiction of (quasi-)adultery that clashes with Fontane’s earlier, more optimistic portrayal of it in L’Adultera (1882), and through an attention to the shrinking world. This shrinking—the reduction of unknown regions to tourist sites and ordered maps—and the linked issue of disenchantment are keys to understanding what Fontane called the “pivot” [Drehpunkt] of Effi Briest: the novel’s Chinese ghost. Scholarly attention to the ghost reflects the limitations of common understandings of “realism,” which can readily account for the ethnicity of the ghost but is at a loss in the face of its supposed supernatural property. Moreover, the spatial situating of adultery,
for which the ghost stands as partial symbol, complicates its potential as a romantic alternative. Finally, pronouncements on imperialist organization of space by Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Raymond Williams enable a discussion of Fontane’s arrangement of zones of order and zones of romance, where this introduction began. Marginal areas become portals for the reintroduction of enchantment into a secularized domestic space organized by metropolitan Berlin. On these attempted reenchantments, though, Fontane remains ambivalent. The world’s mysterious places have been quotidianized, the novel asserts. The figure of the Chinese ghost foregrounds the duel between romance and the real, and its movements and shifting status circumscribe a simultaneous longing for enchantment and a final acknowledgment of its impossibility.