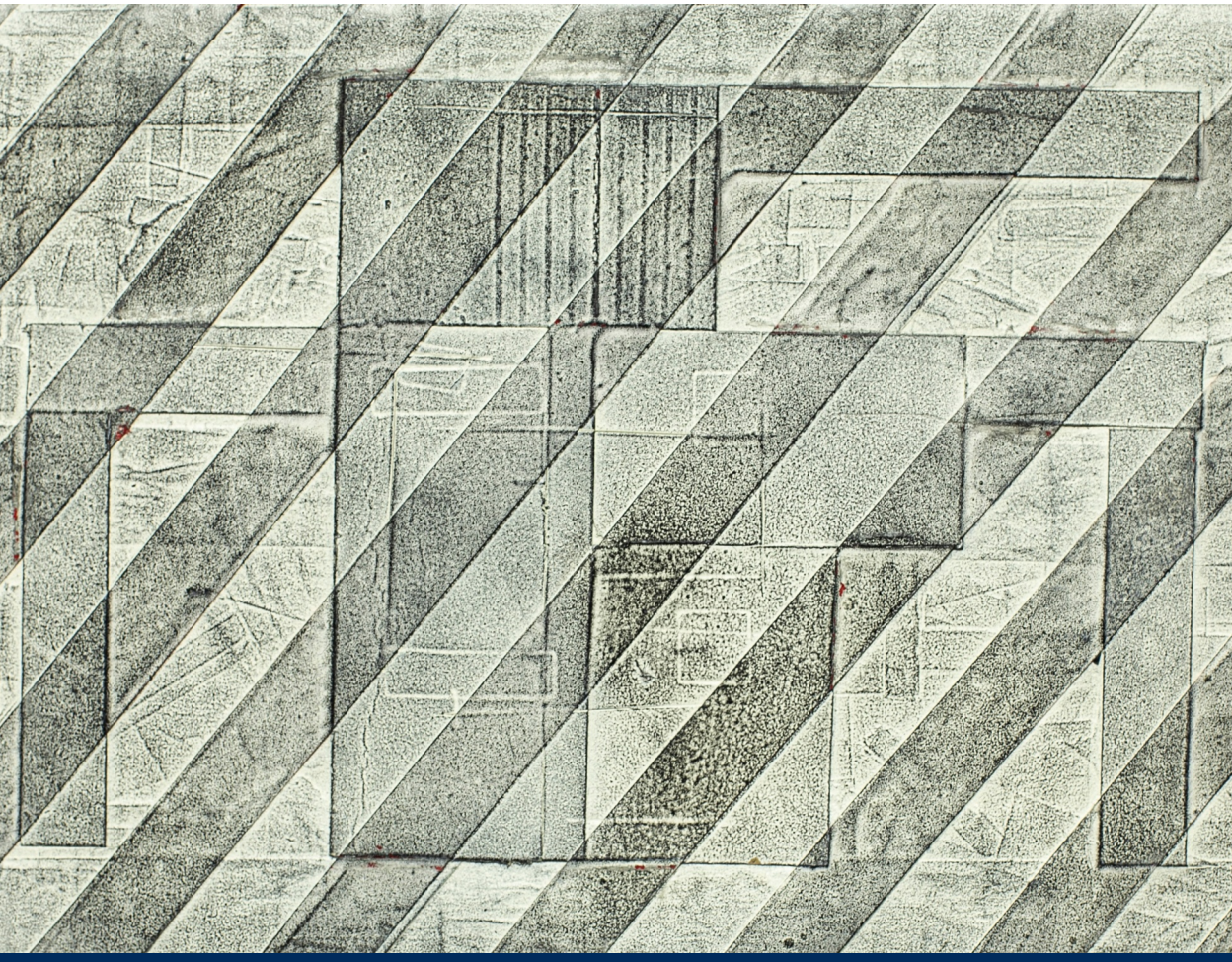
Stockholm University

Writing the State

Administrative Fiction in Long-Nineteenth-Century Britain

Jonathan Foster



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Jonathan Foster

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates how state bureaucracy was portrayed in British fiction during the long nineteenth century. This was a period of innovation and transformation in British public administration. It saw the invention of a host of administrative practices and official textual genres that live on today in various guises, such as the decennial census and competitive civil service entry exams. It was also the period in which the word "bureaucracy" entered the English language and public administration emerged as a prominent theme in popular literature. Previous studies of Victorian and modernist representations of British public administration have tended to foreground the importance of liberal anti-interventionist modes of governance (Goodlad) or else they have argued that the Victorian novel performed a disciplinary function in the service of the state (Miller). Moving away from such paradigmatic Foucauldian perspectives on the relationship between literature and the state, this thesis identifies a rich and multifaceted tradition of "writing the state" in long-nineteenth-century British fiction.

The dissertation explores the treatment of state administration in the work of Harriet Martineau, Charles Dickens, Joseph Conrad, and H. G. Wells, authors who intervened forcefully in ongoing debates about official institutions. Through an examination of the historical contexts in which these authors operated and through close readings of selected works, the dissertation delineates two key moments in the evolution of literary representations of state bureaucracy in long-nineteenth-century Britain. It shows that Martineau and Dickens responded to the rise of the administrative state by portraying the type of bureaucratic systems that Victorian readers increasingly came across in their everyday lives. These two authors pioneered a new type of story—the "bureaucratic horror story"—which centred on encounters between civilians and state functionaries, stories which were pedagogic in nature, highlighting the importance of bureaucratic literacy in the emergent institutional landscape. At the turn of the twentieth century, however, the bureaucratic state had become thoroughly familiar to the populace, partly through the efforts of writers such as Martineau and Dickens, and at this point the educational component of literary narratives about state bureaucracy shifted focus from familiarisation to defamiliarisation. That is, Conrad and Wells problematised ordinary citizens' habitual participation in administrative state culture, portraying it as an impediment to independent thought and perception, not least with respect to the state itself.

Through detailed analysis of the ways in which a select group of prominent long-nineteenth-century authors portrayed public administration, the study identifies recurring narrative techniques and tropes that were used during this period to characterise and critique the nascent administrative state. The dissertation interrogates the influence of the bureaucratic paradigm on Victorian and modernist literary aesthetics whilst also describing the role that narrative fiction played in the evolution of the modern British state imaginary. The dissertation thereby contributes new perspectives on and models for the study of literature and state administration in long-nineteenth-century Britain and beyond.

Keywords: *Harriet Martineau, Charles Dickens, Joseph Conrad, H. G. Wells, Victorian literature, modernism, Pierre Bourdieu, symbolic power, administrative fiction, state play, bureaucratic horror story, the British state, the state, bureaucracy, public administration, the civil service.*

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Introduction

The conversation about literature and state administration goes at least as far back as Plato's *Republic* (ca. 375 BCE), in which Plato famously bans poetry from the ideal state that he envisions lest it should disrupt the education of the youth and cause "pleasure and pain [to] rule" (437). What tends to be forgotten whenever this decree is mentioned is the fact that Plato also extends an olive branch to poets, allowing that poetry "may exist in a well-run state" if it can be demonstrated that poetry is in fact "beneficial to political systems" (439). In other words, the fate of poets in Plato's ideal republic was not necessarily sealed. Indeed, in the dialectic of Plato's dialogue, Socrates gives poetic representations of statecraft their due before providing his own critique, conceding that many of his compatriots were of the opinion that Homer's poetry had "educated Greece" through the light that it shed on "the administration and teaching of human affairs" (437). This tells us that poetry was viewed as an important influence on state affairs in ancient Greece both by its detractors and by those who regarded poetry as a source of wisdom.

The debate has continued regarding the part to be played by literature in the formation of a healthy state culture. If Plato perceived the oral poetic tradition as a force to be reckoned with in the city-states of ancient Greece, then Victorian critics and novelists similarly regarded popular literature as a formidable influence on matters of public administration in the age of print. That is, in nineteenth-century Britain, with the parallel rise of popular print culture and of the modern administrative state, politicians, writers, and other commentators recognised that literature played an important role in the evolution of the British state, for good or bad. In this dissertation, I will explore how administrative statecraft is portrayed in the fiction of Harriet Martineau, Charles Dickens, Joseph Conrad, and H. G. Wells, authors whose depictions of state institutions, real or imagined, in many ways, to borrow Plato's expression, "educated" Britain across the long nineteenth century (1789–1914).

Scholarly commentators on literature and state administration have generally described narrative fiction as a pivotal site for the interpretation and interrogation of modern administrative statecraft. The poster boy for this literary tradition is, of course, Franz Kafka, who was famously not only an author of haunting narratives about bureaucratic institutions,

but also a bureaucrat himself. And yet, as noted by Kafka's namesake, the scholar Ben Kafka, there is a longer line of authors who have written influential literary accounts of bureaucratic practices and institutions. Ben Kafka emphasises that, soon after the term "bureaucracy" was coined in mid-eighteenth-century France,

> stories about "bureaucracy" flourished, spreading from France to England and Germany and, eventually, around the world, transcending national, linguistic, and even ideological boundaries. The primary vehicles for the term's dissemination were not political or philosophical treatises, but popular literature. [...] [L]iterature was always one or two steps ahead of philosophy or sociology when it came to understanding the powers and failures of paperwork. (79)

Here, Ben Kafka delineates two important functions that literary accounts of bureaucracy served during the historical period in which the modern administrative state crystallised: literature helped popularise and spread the term "bureaucracy," thus bringing this phenomenon to the public's attention, and at the same time it was an important medium for investigating and conceptualising bureaucracy.

The importance of literature in this regard is also emphasised by Marco Diani, who describes discourse on bureaucracy as

> marked from the beginning by close contact between Literature and Politics, between Art and Social Science; a trademark that lasts into our own day. After Grimm and Diderot came Honoré de Balzac, Karl Marx, Gustave Flaubert and, in this century, Max Weber, Franz Kafka, and Robert Musil, to name only a few sublime examples of the "literature of Bureaucracy." ("Preface," 5–6)

For Diani, then, sociological and literary accounts of state bureaucracy stand side by side as fruitful modes of describing and analysing bureaucratic mechanisms and systems. The significance of literature in this regard has also been observed by Michel Foucault, who highlights the "visionary perception of administration that we find in Balzac, Dostoevsky, Courteline, or Kafka" (*Abnormal*, 12–13), as well as by the historian Waltraud Heindl, who emphasises the "richness of literary accounts" of state bureaucracy (qtd. in Becker and Clark 2). Indeed, the "richness" of narrative fiction dealing with state bureaucracy is such that literature has repeatedly been touted as an important pedagogical resource in public administration studies over the past decades.[1]

And yet, for reasons that I will be exploring in this thesis, British writers have seldom been included in the pantheon of great writers on bureaucracy. As becomes evident from the commentaries of Foucault and Diani, Francophone and Germanic writers tend to receive most

[1] Holzer et al. propose that "literature can provide a more interesting and perhaps more effective approach to

of the accolades when it comes to celebrating the "literature of Bureaucracy." Anglophone critics have occasionally sought to insert British writers into this conversation, with John Lucas suggesting that Charles Dickens accomplished "[w]hat Kafka was credited with introducing in *The Trial*" (86) and Daniel Bivona identifying Joseph Conrad as "[a]rguably the most important literary critic of bureaucracy before Kafka" (6). However, historian Patrick Joyce takes a more typical stance by declaring that, when compared to continental literatures of state bureaucracy, "the British state seems to have produced a far less penetrating literature on the subject" (*The State*, 3). Indeed, in recent scholarship on British modernism, researchers have continued to speak of "the literary omission of bureaucracy" in British fiction, highlighting a "disjunction between the literary silence about bureaucracy and its growing political power" (Hentea 285–86). There is, in other words, a widespread conception in Anglophone literary criticism that British literature lacks a significant tradition of engagement with state bureaucracy.

Discourse on the paucity of noteworthy representations of state administration in British literature may be traced back to H. G. Wells's 1911 essay on "The Contemporary Novel," in which Wells bemoans British authors' failure to realise the novel's potential as a medium for exploring the "immense cluster of difficulties that arises out of the increasing complexity of our state" (163). This viewpoint was later echoed by the poet Humbert Wolfe, who devoted his 1924 essay "Some Public Servants in Fiction" to highlighting the tame treatment of state bureaucracy in long-nineteenth-century fiction. Wolfe observed that Britain had undergone a "momentous revolution" with the rise of the administrative state over the Victorian era, and he bemoaned the fact that this important development had "completely escaped the notice" of several generations of British writers: "I have considered George Eliot, Charlotte Bronte, Charles Reade, of the earlier, and George Meredith and Thomas Hardy of the later giants. I can find no trace of the public servant" (50). For Wolfe, as for Wells, Dickens was the only Victorian writer on state bureaucracy worthy of note. Wolfe remarks that even in Anthony Trollope's midcentury novels about civil servants, the narrative tends to pass quickly from administrative matters to plot lines with little bearing on public administration. In frustration, he proclaims: "I am sure a single visit to a post office would give me a more lively impression of the public service than all the volumes of *The Three Clerks* and *The Small House at Allington*" (46).

And yet, contrary to the claims of Wells and Wolfe, there was, in fact, a steady stream of literary works portraying public service published throughout the long nineteenth century, over and above the fictional texts that will be examined in the present dissertation. Amongst

the pioneering works in this tradition may be mentioned Charles Lamb's *Essays of Elia* (1823) and Sir Henry Taylor's *The Statesman* (1836), which provide essayistic accounts of life in the civil service. As for the late Victorian era, Wolfe writes that "[a]fter Dickens and Trollope a great hush descends upon the public service" (49), and yet, this period in fact saw a spate of literary texts advertised precisely as stories about the civil service, beginning with Charles Marvin's fictionalised account of his time as a civil service clerk, *Our Public Offices* (1879), and followed by William Alexander Baillie Hamilton's *Mr. Montenello: A Romance of the Civil Service* (1885), John Alexander Steuart's *The Minister of State: A Novel* (1898), and, in the Edwardian era, Austin Phillips's *Red Tape* (1910) and *Pariah and Brahmin: A Story of the Home Civil Service* (1914). Moreover, this period saw a great proliferation of civil service magazines, with periodicals such as *Red Tape: A Civil Service Magazine*, founded in 1911, regularly featuring literary sketches dealing with civil service matters.[2]

Alongside this wealth of literary treatments of state bureaucracy, questions of state bureaucracy have received considerable attention in Victorian studies. Amongst the most thorough and illuminating scholarly studies of the treatment of state bureaucracy in long-nineteenth-century British fiction should be mentioned D. A. Miller's pioneering monograph *The Novel and the Police* (1988) and Lauren Goodlad's *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State* (2003). However, especially the latter of these foundational monographs has helped consolidate the conception that Victorian literature lacks a substantial engagement with state bureaucracy, particularly by emphasising "the Victorians' fierce allegiance to [...] liberal thought" (xi–ii). That is, Goodlad's monograph nominally focuses on literature and state administration but in actual fact provides an account of Victorian literature that consistently foregrounds liberal laissez-faire modes of governance, contending that Victorian authors were relatively disinclined to write about state administration as a consequence of Britain's comparatively non-bureaucratic "idiosyncratic modernisation" (2).

More recent monographs dealing with questions concerning literature, bureaucracy, and the state in long-nineteenth-century Britain have focused on topics other than representations of state bureaucracy. Benjamin Kohlmann's *British Literature and the Life of Institutions: Speculative States* (2021) identifies literature as "a crucial site for theorizations of the state" over the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but focuses on literary texts in which the state is figured as "intimately connected to the sphere of the social itself" rather than as an administrative apparatus (3, 28). Likewise, Daniel Jenkin-Smith's recent

[2] On literary sketches published in *Red Tape* during the Edwardian period, see Foster "The Literariness of Red Tape."

dissertation on French and British "office literature," which begins to uncover a rich tradition of nineteenth-century literary responses to bureaucratisation, reiterates the received notion that British bureaucratisation was predominantly industrial and corporate rather than governmental (29). As indicated above, the present dissertation seeks to dislodge this narrative about the putative dearth of meaningful engagements with state bureaucracy in British fiction, by showing that administrative statecraft constitutes a prominent theme in literary works from this period.

The long nineteenth century was a period of innovation and transformation both in British statecraft and in literary representations of the state. This dissertation explores what I consider to be the two key moments in the long-nineteenth-century literary response to the rise of the administrative state: a Victorian-era endeavour to "educate" readers by expanding their conceptual horizons and disseminating bureaucratic literacy, and an Edwardian-era attempt to re-educate readers who were comparatively acclimatised to bureaucratic institutional life. In other words, the present thesis investigates specific modes of figuring and narrativising the administrative state that are characteristic for Victorian "social problem" fiction and for early modernist literature respectively.

In chapters two and three, I juxtapose the treatment of state bureaucracy in the work of Harriet Martineau and Charles Dickens, authors and journalists who were "[a]t times working together, at times in parallel, at times adversarially" (Crawford, *Contested*, 2). On the face of it, no two Victorian writers on state bureaucracy could be more different: whereas Martineau wrote propagandist fiction in support of the nascent administrative state, Dickens emerged as one of Victorian officialdom's fiercest critics. However, responding to an early stage in the bureaucratisation of the British state, the fictional accounts of public administration in the work of Martineau and Dickens—in the 1830s and '50s respectively—are similarly defined by an exploratory impulse to conceptualise and narrativise novel administrative phenomena. This exploratory and educational streak in their work is indicative of the tenor of mid-nineteenth-century discourse on state bureaucracy more broadly. As Ben Kafka notes, it was at this time that bureaucracy emerged as a major talking-point throughout Europe:

> There is no trace of the idea in Montesquieu, Voltaire, Hume, Rousseau, Burke, or even Hegel. Yet by the 1850s it was all the rage. Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Tocqueville's *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, Mill's *On*

> *Liberty*—each took a turn denouncing bureaucracy and its agents in remarkably similar terms. (11)[3]

Martineau and Dickens should be recognised as important voices within this first generation of commentators on the modern administrative state, particularly given that their writings were directed to a broader readership. Moreover, as opposed to certain contemporary writers on state bureaucracy, such as Lamb and Taylor, who portrayed life within British officialdom, Martineau and Dickens focused on the complex relationship between state functionaries and ordinary citizens. In describing the ways in which state bureaucracy impacted on civilian non-bureaucrats, Martineau and Dickens produced a type of narrative oriented towards guiding readers within the changing institutional landscape.

Moving from the mid-nineteenth century to the turn of the twentieth century, my fourth and fifth chapters examine how administrative statecraft is portrayed in the work of Joseph Conrad and H. G. Wells. Whereas Martineau and Dickens sought to familiarise their readers with the administrative state, Conrad and Wells instead set about re-educating a readership immersed in, and culturally conditioned by, a fully-fledged bureaucratic state culture. For Conrad and Wells, then, the central literary and political problem was, in essence, that of breaking with the very conceptual frames that Martineau and Dickens had helped to solidify through their narrativisation of state bureaucracy. Whilst Dickens's key motif was the bureaucratic naivety of the Londoner entering a legal court or a government office for the first time, the Edwardian writers were instead exploring the condition of what may be termed the *bureaucratic native*, the modern individual who responds habitually and unquestioningly to administrative protocols. To borrow an influential metaphor from Max Weber's contemporaneous commentary on state bureaucracy in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), Conrad and Wells meant to rattle the bureaucratic "iron cage" that had formed over the latter half of the nineteenth century (181).

Other "moments" in the treatment of the British state over the long nineteenth century have been demarcated in previous research. Notably, Kohlmann reads a set of writers at the *fin-de-siècle* (including Wells) in light of British political theory's "Hegelian moment," highlighting the impact of Hegelian idealist thought on the literature of those decades. Kohlmann shows that the "speculative impulse" inspired by Hegelian theorisations of the state "made it possible to imagine new institutional arrangements, not merely in the abstract, as detached assemblages of legal and administrative structures, but as a concrete and lived

[3] Contra Ben Kafka, Hegel does in fact provide an incisive commentary on bureaucracy in *The Philosophy of Right* (1820).

social reality" (*British*, 3, 34). My study makes a complementary case: whilst the Hegelian (re)imagining of the state involved transcending the conception of the state as a set of administrative institutions and practices, my thesis conversely explores how those bureaucratic apparatuses were themselves first imagined and then reimagined by British authors.

My exploration of Victorian and modernist writers' treatment of the state also builds upon Anne Frey's *British State Romanticism* (2009), which discusses the interest that Romantic writers such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth showed in the nascent British administrative state. It was perhaps at this point in British literary history that the imagining of the modern administrative state began in earnest, though administrative statecraft is thematised by earlier writers, from Shakespeare to Lawrence Sterne. Frey suggests that the Romantics evolved into "State Romantics" during the later parts of their careers, as they veered away from their marquee emphasis on the power of the poetic imagination to instead explore "whether literature could carry out any of the state's tasks" (2). According to Frey, the Romantics sought to harness and extend the state's emergent institutional capacities by producing literary works that "carr[ied] state authority into areas it could not otherwise reach" (3, 14). This conception of the state's limitations in the domain of literature is one that my dissertation will interrogate, not least by exploring the example of the fiction that Martineau wrote on behalf of a state authority. How does the symbolic power of the administrative state operate within literary texts? Does the state need authors to actively intervene and write on its behalf?

Crucially, Frey suggests that the strength of the State Romantics' investment in state institutions may be attributed to the fact that they had "less experience with bureaucracy" than later generations of writers, and that they were free to "fantasize about administrative agencies' power to build communities in a way that Victorians, hardened into a skeptically realistic portrait of bureaucratic paralysis, [were] not" (6). This contrastive characterisation of early- and mid-nineteenth-century representations of state institutions is certainly apt, and it parallels the periodising that my own study proposes (in differentiating between Victorian and Edwardian literary engagements with the state), and yet, Frey's commentary also exemplifies a tendency to oversimplify that is perhaps inherent in broad-strokes investigations of literary-historical moments, insofar as Frey exaggerates the homogeneity of Victorian imaginings of the administrative state. The "hardening" of the state imaginary did not occur overnight, and, as my study will show, there were pockets of bureaucratic utopianism both in Victorian and Edwardian literature.

Whereas Frey examines the Romantics' response to the nascent administrative state, and Kohlmann's analysis centres on the relationship between reformism, idealism, and literature around the turn of the twentieth century, the two literary-historical moments that are examined in the present study may, as indicated above, be identified as the treatment of state bureaucracy in Victorian "social problem" fiction and in early modernist fiction. I do not examine representations of state bureaucracy during the intervening high Victorian period. This is partly because, as noted by Wells and Wolfe, there is a lack of engagement with the theme of state bureaucracy in the work of the major writers of this period. Perhaps the most significant development in literary representations of state bureaucracy during the final decades of the nineteenth century was the emergence of civil service fiction as a form of genre fiction, a stylised mode of writing informed by Dickens's midcentury depiction of officialdom (e.g. Marvin's *Our Public Offices* and Hamilton's *Mr. Montenello: A Romance of the Civil Service*).[4] This development will not be examined in detail in the present dissertation, but will instead be glossed in the "Conclusions" section of my Dickens chapter, leading into the chapter on Conrad. The late-nineteenth-century crystallisation of civil service fiction as a subgenre of sorts is pertinent to my exploration of Victorian and Edwardian representations of state bureaucracy primarily as it links them together. Like late-nineteenth-century authors of civil service fiction, Conrad and Wells frequently reference Dickens and recycle Dickensian tropes. However, whereas much civil service fiction was unapologetically derivative (and indeed fan-fictionesque) in its rehashing of Dickens's narratives about the civil service, Conrad and Wells sought to develop new ways of writing the state after Dickens.

The scope of the study is limited to representations of domestic, as opposed to imperial, bureaucracy, barring a short discussion of Conrad's colonial fiction. The long-nineteenth-century British state imaginary was, of course, profoundly shaped by Britain's imperial project, not least through fictional narratives about colonial administration. This has been shown by literary scholars such as Patrick Brantlinger, Daniel Bivona, Eddy Kent, Yumna Siddiqi, and James Mulholland, to name but a few prominent commentators on literary depictions of British colonial bureaucracy. The impositions of colonial administration were clearly starker than in domestic statecraft; the exigencies of paperwork were also greater, given the vastness of the imperial system (Joyce, "Filing," 104), which has been described as a "paper empire" (Richards 4). Thus, several late-Victorian British writers "found imperial service to be the best stage for dramatizing the evolution of bureaucratic

[4] On the rise of clerical fiction more broadly during this period, see Bishop (*Lower-Middle-Class*) and Wild.

power" (Bivona 4). Fictional representations of domestic and colonial administrative statecraft share many central themes and motifs—and yet, the narrativisation of the domestic administrative state is distinct from the writing of Empire in certain key respects. Crucially, fictional depictions of interactions between British colonial officials and colonial subjects would be interpreted in a wholly different light by the British reading public in terms of where its sympathies and interests lay, as compared to narratives about domestic state bureaucracy. In other words, the present study is delimited in a way which allows me to spotlight and interrogate the specifities of long-nineteenth-century narratives about the domestic British state.

Structure of the Study

The dissertation consists of the present introductory chapter, which is followed by a chapter on theory, method, and context, and then by four individual chapters on Martineau, Dickens, Conrad, and Wells, as well as a concluding chapter. In my next chapter—"Writing the State: Theory, Method, Context"—I present the conceptual framework within which my corpus of literary texts will be analysed, outlining the theoretical, methodological, and historical underpinnings of the dissertation. I justify my selection of literary works, whilst also situating my study within ongoing scholarly conversations about literature, bureaucracy, and statehood. In this chapter, I also expand upon my contention that literary representations of statehood "educated" Britain in the long nineteenth century. More broadly, this chapter will flesh out, and begin to answer, my principal research questions, which are: What kinds of stories were written about the emergent administrative state during the long nineteenth century? What were the socio-cultural functions and effects of those fictional narratives?

My second chapter—"Popularising State Bureaucracy: Harriet Martineau's Quasi-Official Fiction"—examines representations of Poor Law administration in the early fiction of Harriet Martineau, whose distinguished career spans almost half a century (1830–1876) and encompasses fiction, journalism, translation, travel writing, as well as the composition of abolitionist and sociological treatises. Martineau's literary writings "lapsed into obscurity" after her death, but recent decades have seen a considerable rekindling of interest in her fiction (Oražem 9). In this chapter, I focus on Martineau's portrayal of Poor Law administration in *Poor Laws and Paupers Illustrated* (1833–4), a series of novellas commissioned by official publishers to supplement the Poor Law Commissioners' Report of

1834. Here I foreground and interrogate the quasi-official positioning of Martineau's Poor Law novellas, thereby revealing formal, thematic, and ideological connections between Martineau's fiction and the nascent official print cultural context in which the novellas were produced. The first Whig government's reform of the Poor Laws represents a watershed moment not only in the evolution of parliamentary inquiries, but also in the rationalisation and centralisation of British public administration more broadly. Examining Martineau's depiction of the day-to-day administration of poor relief in *Poor Laws and Paupers Illustrated*, this chapter demonstrates that the crucible of Poor Law reform inspired a new type of literary narrative that revolved around the power dynamic of the relationship between administrators and ordinary citizens.

The third chapter—"Inspecting the Inspectors: Charles Dickens's Bureaucratic Horror Story"—examines Charles Dickens's portrayal of administrative statecraft in the 1850s. The chapter focuses on *Bleak House* (1853) and *Little Dorrit* (1857), but also brings a selection of Dickens's other novels, short stories, and articles dealing with administrative state culture into the discussion. Responding to societal tensions and conflicts that intensified as Britain evolved into a modern administrative state culture, Dickens's midcentury fiction registers the ways in which bureaucratic mechanisms and systems increasingly impacted on ordinary citizens' lives. In this chapter, I argue that Dickens portrayed bureaucratic institutions not only to guide, but also to empower, the civilian non-bureaucrat within the emergent institutional landscape, by strengthening his readers' bureaucratic literacy. I also show that Dickens presented his novelistic project as an alternative to the state's manner of describing the social world, weaponising fiction against the symbolic power of the state. That is, if Martineau aligned her Poor Law novellas with official publishing, then Dickens's response to Victorian official informational projects was fundamentally competitive and contestatory.

Moving from the mid-Victorian period to the early twentieth century, my fourth chapter—"Modernism Beyond the State: Bureaucracy and Anarchism in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*"—explores the treatment of state bureaucracy in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907), a novel which centres on the operations of London's Metropolitan Police. In Conrad's sarcastic and questioning treatment, the bureaucratic institution that is the official police department is juxtaposed with its ostensible opposite in the shape of a Soho-based group of anarchists. Crucially, Conrad indicates that the official policemen, who operate within rigid departmental structures, and the self-proclaimed anarchists of the novel are equally ensnared by the bureaucratic "iron cage." Conrad's anarchists are, in short, faced with the practical and philosophical difficulty of thinking beyond the extant state culture. Through

this problematising and defamiliarising treatment of state bureaucracy and anarchism, Conrad demonstrates the affordances of the novel as a medium for thinking about and perhaps also beyond the state.

My fifth chapter—"Utopia and the Bureaucratic Horror Story: H. G. Wells's Administrative Feeling"—examines H. G. Wells's portrayal of administrative statecraft in *A Modern Utopia* (1905), an essayistic novel that articulates a technocratic form of bureaucratic utopianism. I begin the chapter by situating Wells's statism in the context of his involvement with the Fabian Society, an influential London-based socialist organisation. I then discuss how the ideas that Wells advances in *A Modern Utopia* depart from Edwardian conceptions of administrative statecraft, including the Fabian model of social democracy. With *A Modern Utopia*, and with later novels such as *The New Machiavelli* (1911), Wells sought to renew the narrative about the administrative state and inspire enthusiasm about administrative technologies and systems. In *A Modern Utopia*, Wells outlined a utopian vision of an administrative world state in which global borderlessness would be enabled through a sophisticated system of biometric surveillance. However, in a bid to write a compelling story about this utopian administrative culture, Wells reverted to narrative tropes of bureaucratic confusion and horror, thus creating a highly equivocal story with dystopian undertones.

The concluding chapter summarises the project as a whole and offers some general reflections on the treatment of state administration in long-nineteenth-century fiction, whilst also identifying areas for further research. Depictions of public administration in later twentieth-century British literature are also briefly discussed in this chapter, in order to highlight the continued interest in administrative statecraft amongst British writers of later generations, as well as to underline the lasting impact of the narratives that I examine in this thesis.

Chapter One

Writing the State: Theory, Method, Context

Justifying the Selection and Surveying the Field

Whilst they are closely connected, statehood and bureaucracy need to be approached as distinct phenomena that pertain to the study of literature in markedly different ways. In short, there is more to "bureaucracy and literature" than questions concerning literature and *state* bureaucracy, and, vice versa, "literature and the state" may actualise questions that have little bearing on bureaucracy. The present dissertation straddles both "literature and bureaucracy" and "literature and the state" conceived as areas of study each in their own right. The dissertation builds upon recent work in these two interlocking fields of study (literature and bureaucracy / literature and the state), which have yet to fully crystallise as such, despite long-standing interest in literature in the field of public administration studies, and a corresponding interest in public administration in literary studies. Significant contributions have been made to these two areas of research in recent decades in Anglophone literary studies, in the shape of book-length studies of literature and bureaucracy (Wild 2006; Sullivan 2013; Robinson 2019; Bishop 2021; Jenkin-Smith 2021) and monographs on literature and the state (Robbins 2007; Frey 2009; Aslami 2012; McDonald 2017; Rogers 2020; Kohlmann 2021; Berman 2022; O'Hanlon 2024).[5] Additionally, numerous insightful monographs have been published over the last decades dealing with the relationship of modern British literature to various domains of administrative statecraft, such as colonial administration (Siddiqi 2007; Kent 2014; Mulholland 2021), information management (Weller 2009; Purdon 2015; Lee 2019), official archives (Price 2012), citizenship (Ho 2015), and government surveillance (Rosen and Santesso 2013). However, despite the steady growth of these areas of research, nothing like a unified scholarly subfield of "literature and the state," or for that matter "literature and bureaucracy," may be said to exist. In the absence of such scholarly formations, the

[5] Significant contributions to the study of literature and state bureaucracy have, of course, been made beyond Anglophone literary studies. See, for example, "Bureaux and Bureaucrats," a 1994 special issue of the French journal *L'Esprit Créateur* edited by Lawrence R. Schehr and Philippe Desan, and Kerstin Stüssel's 2004 monograph *In Vertretung: Literarische Mitschriften von Bürokratie zwischen früher Neuzeit und Gegenwart*.

conversation about literature and state administration has been fragmented and discontinuous. Most notably, the entire research tradition focusing on literature and administration in the field of public administration studies has effectively been siloed off from literary studies, and has broadly escaped the attention of literary scholars. This is a major oversight, but one which needs to be understood precisely as an effect of the non-integrated nature of the scholarly conversation about literature and state administration.

The most impactful contribution to the study of literature and administration in the field of public administration studies is Dwight Waldo's pioneering monograph, *The Novelist on Organization and Administration: An Inquiry Into the Relationship Between Two Worlds* (1968).[6] Building on Waldo's work, scholars of public administration have produced both essay collections and readers focusing on literary representations of public administration, celebrating "the administrative novel as a source of information about administrative phenomena" (McDaniel 548).[7] And yet, this area of study, which I believe has the potential to become a larger interdisciplinary subfield in its own right, akin to established counterparts such as "law and literature" or "the medical humanities," has remained largely confined to public administration studies in the US, without the type of cross-fertilisation and insight that comes from extended interdisciplinary conversations.

Over the past decades, scholarship in Anglophone literary studies has identified the need for a concerted investigation into questions concerning literature, the state, and bureaucracy.[8] However, the remit of this area of study has generally been delimited in counter-productive ways. For instance, in "Government is Good" (2008), Amanda Claybaugh describes a specific group of literary scholars working on the subject of literature and state administration as a "movement," likening their scholarly accomplishment to that represented by an influential edited volume by Homi K. Bhabha, suggesting that their research "will soon be recognized as the *Nation and Narration* of its day" (164). Whilst this commentary is timely in that it situates literature and the state as a potentially significant scholarly formation,

[6] Waldo's study includes an extensive list of administrative novels from around the world, an expanded version of which was published in 2004, compiled by Iryna Illiash and Tony Carrizales.

[7] Important contributions to scholarship on administrative fiction in public administration studies include *Literature in Bureaucracy: Readings in Administrative Fiction* (1979), edited by Marc Holzer, Kenneth Morris, and William Ludwin, as well as *Public Administration Illuminated and Inspired by the Arts* (1995), edited by Charles T. Goodsell and Nancy Murray. See also the flagship journal *Public Voices*, founded in 1993, edited by Marc Holzer.

[8] In 2008, Jim Hansen and Matthew Hart edited a special issue of *Contemporary Literature* that probed "the state as a literary theme and critical optic" (505). This was followed by a 2010 special issue of *Occasion*, edited by Lauren Goodlad and Michael Rothberg, which sought to instigate a "post-neoliberal" discourse on state welfare by exploring "culture's double-edged role in legitimating and resisting the reign of governmentalities" (5).

Claybaugh's intervention muddies the waters in a number of ways. Crucially, the movement that Claybaugh identifies is described as having a fairly narrow objective, which is to elucidate how fictional portraits of state institutions may remedy the "difficulty of perceiving government" so as to improve not only the visibility, but also the reputation of public administration, showing that "government is good" (162–65). In other words, rather than encouraging a broader and more inquisitive conversation about literature and the state, Claybaugh delineates a specific research agenda purportedly held by a group of researchers, one that privileges and valorises government-friendly literature.

Whilst Claybaugh compares research on literature and the state to a foundational study of literature and nationhood, Ceri Sullivan connects it to the field of law and literature in her influential 2013 study *Sublime Bureaucracy: Literature in the Public Service* (6). Much like Ben Kafka, Sullivan emphasises that "[l]iterary representation is influential in framing popular understanding of bureaucracy, and in modelling ways that the public organisation can understand itself and develop" (9). Focusing on the treatment of public service in the work of John Milton and Anthony Trollope, Sullivan delineates a highly productive framework for exploring the "aesthetic problems" produced by state bureaucracy, the usefulness of which is limited only by the author's pro-bureaucracy bias (19). Sullivan proposes that, "[a]uthors who deal with public institutions must find out how to make administrative systems interesting to a reader, how to embody abstract public values, and how to make an absence of individualism seem heroic" (19). Here Sullivan's exploration of state bureaucracy and literature gives way to a prescriptive understanding of what authors who thematise public administration "must" do. In other words, Sullivan's emphasis on the creative and benign dimension of public administration results in a lopsided analysis and a limited understanding of the aesthetic problems that characterise fictional representations of public institutions. Indeed, for a writer such as Dickens, the issue was never how to describe "heroic" administrative systems, but rather, as Goodlad notes, how to imagine "anti-bureaucratic" government (*Victorian*, xii); likewise, Conrad's challenge as a writer on bureaucracy was not how to glorify colonial bureaucrats, but rather how to capture their habit of "casting themselves in heroic roles" as a means of justifying brutal colonial oppression (Bivona 6). As the present study will demonstrate, long-nineteenth-century literary representations of state bureaucracy engage a broad range of aesthetic issues, encompassing not only the "sublime" aspects of state bureaucracy highlighted by Sullivan, but also what Foucault terms the "administrative grotesque" (*Abnormal*, 12). Indeed, it is in part by exploring the dynamic relationship

between these competing modes of narrativising state bureaucracy that the present study advances our understanding of literature's role in the evolution of the state imaginary.

Researchers seeking to initiate an extended conversation about literature and the state or literature and bureaucracy need to ensure that there is room for a variety of scholarly perspectives and interests. Numerous scholarly and disciplinary traditions converge on the topic of literature and state administration, and each of these traditions has its own theoretical underpinnings. Research in the field of public administration studies has broadly focused on what Waldo terms "administrative fiction," whereas Anglophone literary scholars have variously examined "civil service fiction" (Wolfe), "novels of state" (Goodlad, "Parliament"), "clerical fiction" (Wild; Bishop), and "office literature" (Jenkin-Smith).[9] These terms denote proximate but distinct fictional subgenres and traditions. For instance, "civil service fiction" is not quite identical with "clerical fiction" or "office literature." Equally, not all "novels of state" are works of "administrative fiction." Indeed, the burgeoning subfield of research on "literature and the state" that I am charting here encompasses both studies such as my own—a thesis which focuses on representations of administrative statecraft—and studies such as Kohlmann's recent monograph, which instead explores works of fiction that "imagine the state not as a set of administrative mechanisms and procedures that are imposed on the sphere of the social from without but as a concrete and lived social reality in its own right" (*British*, 4). Such inquiries inevitably lead in different directions, but there is much to be gained by considering them side by side, comparing and contrasting the findings that they yield.

For the purposes of the present dissertation, Waldo's rubric of "administrative fiction" stands out as particularly useful amongst the aforementioned analytical and generic categories, in that it encompasses different types of literary works dealing with various state institutions. I prefer "administrative fiction" to "bureaucratic fiction" because I am interested in works of fiction that portray not only state bureaucracy but also administrative practices that are less patently bureaucratic, such as the production of official statistics. A helpful definition of administrative fiction is provided by political scientist Rowland Egger in the 1959 article "The Administrative Novel." Egger suggests that administrative novels "represent life within the context of administrative situations," adding that an administrative novel "will touch upon at least half of the topic headings of a general [public administration studies] textbook, and will deal at some length with several" (449–50). The definition that

[9] Of these terms, "novels of state" is perhaps the most ambiguous. Goodlad does not define the concept, but instead provides illustrative examples such as Dickens's *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*, as well as Anthony Trollope's *He Knew He Was Right* (1869), distinguishing between parliamentary novels and novels of state in which administrative state institutions are overtly present ("Parliament," 447–48).

Egger provides is felicitous in that it conceptualises administrative fiction not in terms of genre but rather as a question of subject matter. However, Egger's definition is somewhat limited in its applications, in that it evaluates administrative fiction primarily in terms of its utility as an educational resource in the study of public administration. There is a similar pedagogical leaning in Waldo's commentary on administrative fiction, which underlies his suggestion that Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961) is a better example of an administrative novel than Dickens's *Little Dorrit* because "Dickens' picture of the Circumlocution Office is marginal, [whereas] Heller's picture of military administration is central" (23). To be sure, the account of public administration in *Little Dorrit* may well be too "marginal" for the novel to be included as assigned reading in a course on public administration, and yet, the historical and literary significance of the engagement with public administration in Dickens's novel is such that it nonetheless becomes "central" to any study of Victorian administrative fiction. In other words, whilst the present dissertation employs Waldo's analytical category of administrative fiction, it does not adopt the specific criteria used by Waldo and later interpreters of this concept, but instead considers factors such as historical context, cultural impact, and literary significance in deciding on a corpus of works of administrative fiction.

The literary texts that will be examined in this dissertation all share a focus on civilians' interactions with state functionaries.[10] This type of narrative differs from the Victorian genre of "office fiction" which Jenkin-Smith describes as reducible to three components: the clerk, the office, and the bureaucratic system (11). Missing in this triad is, of course, the ordinary citizen (or, the non-bureaucrat, the client). Offices are central to the works of administrative fiction examined in the present study, narratives which tend to be structured around what Mikhail Bakhtin terms the "chronotope of meeting," which he describes as integral to "the life of the state" ("Forms," 99); and yet, the meetings that take place in these fictional offices involve both state functionaries and civilian non-bureaucrats, rather than bureaucrats alone. By the same token, the present dissertation examines works of administrative fiction authored by writers outside the domain of state administration, giving pride of place to the popular imagination of state bureaucracy.

An enquiry into literary responses to Victorian state administration could range very wide indeed, and it has been necessary to omit many topics that could have been included in this type of study. For reasons explained in my introduction, the present dissertation does not

[10] The present study thus foregrounds "the public encounter," which Charles T. Goodsell defines as "the interaction of citizen and government official as they communicate to transact matters of mutual interest" (3). For a helpful overview of scholarship on such public encounters, see Hupe 2–10.

examine administrative fiction produced in colonial contexts. Furthermore, I do not explore the treatment of administrative statecraft in poetry or drama, since fiction appears to have been the primary literary genre in which administrative statecraft was portrayed during the long nineteenth century, with notable exceptions such as Rudyard Kipling's *Departmental Ditties* (1886).[11] My approach to investigating the relationship between literature and state administration is, of course, but one of many potential approaches, and other methods were considered along the way. When thinking about how state administration is portrayed in fiction, it is useful to distinguish between, on the one hand, fiction in which the state figures in the background without being the focus of narrative attention, and, on the other hand, fiction in which state administration is foregrounded. As indicated above, my dissertation focuses on administrative fiction, meaning novels and novellas in which administrative institutional practices are placed centre stage. However, a study investigating the "background" presence of state administration (perhaps using distant reading methods) would potentially be highly illuminating.

The four high-profile writers that are examined in this thesis are selected partly for their large outreach and influence. Their administrative fiction may be regarded as forming a literary tradition that had a significant impact on the popular imagination of the British state. This tradition may arguably be traced further back in British culture, given that bureaucratic themes are dealt with in the work of canonical writers such as William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Jonathan Swift, and Laurence Sterne. However, it was only in the nineteenth century that writers began to address questions of administrative statecraft in a more targeted manner, portraying more quotidian administrative situations, a development which reflects the increasing centrality of state bureaucracy in the everyday lives of ordinary people. As Jenkin-Smith puts it, it was in the nineteenth century that bureaucracy began to be portrayed "artistically" (27). Indeed, as the present dissertation will demonstrate, a variety of new narrative motifs, techniques, and tropes emerged during this period as a result of authors' efforts to characterise the phenomenon of state bureaucracy.

Literary State Effects

In emphasising the importance of cultural representations of the state, I am guided by Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of the "symbolic power" of the state, which represents a surprisingly underutilised resource in literary scholarship, as compared to the work of other major theorists

[11] Jenkin-Smith observes that "the office does not consistently appear as the major object of focus in many works of poetry or drama" in nineteenth-century British literature (32).

of modern state power such as Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser.[12] Whilst Foucauldian Victorianists such as D. A. Miller and Lauren Goodlad have provided highly compelling analyses of the relationship of literature and the state, the dominance of Foucauldian theory has also skewed, and indeed hampered, the scholarly conversation about literature and state administration. Referencing Stanley Aronowitz and Peter Bratsis's analysis of the lack of interest in the state as an object of study in academia at large, Andrew Pepper argued in 2005 that interest in the state in literary studies had long been "buried" by, amongst other factors, a Foucauldian "turn," and that its "resuscitation [wa]s long overdue" (467–68).

Crucially, Foucault's efforts to develop a nuanced understanding of societal power dynamics saw him contend that "the state is only a composite reality and a mythicized abstraction whose importance is much less than we think" (*Security*, 109). Foucault proposed that the received understanding of governance was too narrow, and that the state should be understood as a site of governance amongst many others—that "power" was "ambiguous" and dispersed rather than centrally coordinated ("Questions," 72). In his lecture series at the Collège de France over the late 1970s, Foucault provided a genealogy of the "major economies of power," tracing the dominant modes of power from feudal territorial *sovereignty*, via the emergence of *disciplinary* technologies targeting individuals, leading into the modern emphasis on managing *populations*, which Foucault discusses in terms of "biopolitics," "security, and "governmentality" (*Security*, 109–10). Needless to say, these immensely stimulating concepts have proven extraordinarily influential, featuring prominently in literary scholarship.

Drawing on Foucault, Goodlad argues that Victorian public administration exerted relatively little societal influence, proclaiming that "Britain's ruling classes strove to govern *indirectly*," avoiding state intervention, and that this was a liberal leaning which in turn defined Victorian literary responses to the state (*Victorian*, 14). The present dissertation disputes Goodlad's analysis, and instead highlights the many administrative measures of state intervention that were put in place during the long nineteenth century, as well as the richness of the literary engagement with public administration during this period. Indeed, rather than taking the state's character of an "abstraction" as evidence of its social and historical insignificance, I will argue that the very "mythicization" of the state needs to be studied as an expression of the symbolic power of the state, which is operative throughout the social world,

[12] Yumna Siddiqi and Asha Rogers draw on Bourdieusian theory in their analyses of Anglophone literature and the state, but they do not engage with Bourdieu's theorisation of the state as articulated in his lecture series on the state.

including in literary representations of social reality. There is, indeed, an intangible quality to "the state" which makes it hard to demarcate and define, and which, in turn, makes narrative fiction particularly consequential as a mode of writing the state into existence, as it were.

An awareness of the indistinctness of the concept of statehood may be found already in Victorian commentaries. "*The State—but what is the State?*" ponders Matthew Arnold in the essay "Democracy" (1861), noting that "[s]peculations on the idea of a State abound" (22). However, Arnold's problematisation of the idea of the state was hardly characteristic of the treatment of the state concept in nineteenth-century British political philosophy, a tradition in which statehood tended to be viewed as a transhistorical generic category. Hegelian political philosophers of the late nineteenth century, from Thomas Hill Green to Bernard Bosanquet, played an important part in revising conceptions of the state by "insist[ing] that the state, properly understood, never existed apart from society" (Kohlmann, *British*, 4); however, whilst this period saw a push to reconceptualise statehood, few political theorists questioned the centrality of the state concept itself.[13] Even after the rise of the discipline of political science at the turn of the twentieth century, scholars continued to regard statehood as a "permanent or even axiomatic presence" and as the very "source of political order in the world" (Bartelson 76).[14] It was only in the early twentieth century that the analytical concept of the state began to be problematised more rigorously, as scholars debated whether "the state" could in fact be "rendered accessible to empirical inquiry" (Bartelson 44, 87). The questioning of the state concept within early-twentieth-century political science culminated in C. J. Friedrich's 1939 essay on "The Deification of the State," which argues that whilst governments, peoples, countries and kings are readily observable, there is "no evidence in support of the idea that some sort of holy unity, some mystical transcendence need be attributed to them, that they indeed should be seen as a whole"—therefore, Friedrich concludes, "[w]e may go so far as to assert that *the state does not exist*" (29).[15]

[13] However, it should be noted that late-nineteenth-century political philosophy was markedly heterogeneous, comprising not only Hegelian liberalism, but also influential socialist and anarchist theorisations of the state. Karl Marx never realised his ambition to write a systematic study of statehood building on his analysis of the capitalist system in *Capital*, but, together with Friedrich Engels, Marx frequently commented on the state in his political writings, describing the capitalist state as an ideological construct and a means of domination.

[14] The emergence of political science as a discipline was catalysed by the founding of *Political Science Quarterly* in 1886, a journal which initially defined its subject matter as the historical and comparative study of the state (Bartelson 48).

[15] Likewise, influential political scientist David Easton argued that the state concept could be dispensed with (108); Abraham Kaplan and Harold Lasswell proclaimed that "every proposition about the abstraction 'state' can be replaced by a set of propositions referring only to the concrete acts of certain persons and groups" (184).

Viewed in light of these developments in political science, it becomes hard to accept Foucault's famous proclamation that "[i]n political thought and analysis, we still have not cut off the head of the king" (*History*, 88–9). In presenting his analysis of power and government, Foucault framed it as an intervention in academic discourses overly fascinated by "the love or horror of the state," bemoaning the scholarly attention paid to "the birth of the state, to its history, advance, power, and abuses" (*Security*, 109). In other words, Foucault objected to schematic analyses that located governmental power in the state apparatus, "making this into the major, privileged, capital and almost unique instrument of the power of one class over another" ("Questions," 72). However, as noted above, Foucault's critique of the state concept was, in fact, not so much a departure from the norm in political science, as it was the culmination of a longer history of dissatisfaction with the state concept in the discipline of political science.

Recontextualising Foucault's commentary in this way enables us to see how Foucault's framing of his commentary has shaped the reception of his ideas. Crucially, the field of Foucauldian "governmentality studies" that emerged in the 1990s saw itself as breaking new ground by "abandon[ing] the state as a level of analysis in favour of concrete practices and technologies of government" (Jessen and von Eggers 54). This analytical impulse resulted in a "tendency toward state phobia" in much Foucauldian scholarship (Dean and Villadsen 5). Though it would be wrong to suggest that Victorian studies has been mired in "state phobia," the dominance of Foucault (or of "governmentality studies") in Anglophone literary studies over the past decades helps explain the lack of extended scholarly conversations centring on the state—that is, the absence of a scholarly formation akin to more established scholarly fields such as law and literature or the medical humanities (which has a Foucauldian backbone). This is not to say that Foucault's work does not provide useful theoretical tools for thinking about the state. Indeed, in recent years, Foucault has been "revived as a thinker of the state" (Jessen and von Eggers 55).[16] Contesting the orthodox interpretation of Foucault in governmentality studies, Foucault's commentary is seen to

> open [...] up for an analysis of how and why the state continues to play such a central role as an imaginary, fictive or discursive object that links the multiplicity of governmental practices together and makes them appear as a given entity. (55)

[16] Foucault repeatedly addressed the "problem of the state" in his lectures during the late 1970s (*Birth of Biopolitics*, 76).

Here it is Foucault's analysis of the process of "statification" (*Birth*, 77)—not state formation, but the perpetual reproduction of the idea of the state—that is celebrated as his key contribution.

Foucault's emphasis on the continuous reproduction of statehood, as well as his commentary on the "mythicized" nature of the state, anticipates the analysis of statehood in the 1980s and '90s by theorists who operated outside the Foucauldian framework of governmentality studies. Statehood in fact re-emerged as an object of study in political science in the 1980s (precisely as "governmentality studies" was starting to take shape), through a concerted effort at *Bringing the State Back In*, as per the title of a 1985 volume of essays co-edited by Theda Skocpol, Peter B. Evans, and Dietrich Rueschemeyer.[17] In the wake of this influential volume, numerous scholars sought to establish firmer theoretical underpinnings for the study of the state. Bourdieu's theory of state power very much belongs to this moment. Bourdieu delineated his understanding of the state in a series of lectures at Collège de France in 1989–92, a transcript of which has been published as *On the State* (2012). In these lectures, Bourdieu confesses that he had previously avoided speaking of "the state": "I did not know what it was, but I did know enough to distrust the use of the concept, even as shorthand" (*On the State*, 113). The problem that not only Bourdieu, but also political scientists such as Michael Mann and Timothy Mitchell, grappled with during these years was the fact that scholarship on statehood was liable to reproduce the state's "imaginary coherence" (Mitchell 76). Rather than simply continuing to use the term "the state" under erasure—a term which Mann aptly describes as unacceptably "messy" (187)—Mitchell called for a reorientation of scholarship towards the "state effect," defined as "the powerful, apparently metaphysical effect of practices that make [state] structures appear to exist" (89), a scholarly project which harmonises with Bourdieu's endeavour of illuminating how the state "exist[s] by way of representations" (*On the State*, 373).[18]

This reorientation towards state representations and effects helped inspire a "cultural turn" in scholarship on the state in the 1990s—a concerted push to "grasp state forms culturally," as Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer put it in their important 1991 study *The Great*

[17] Already in the late 1960s and early '70s, Marxist theorists such as Nicos Poulantzas and Ralph Miliband helped constitute state theory as "an important and viable alternative to the orthodoxy of pluralism and structural functionalism/systems theory within political science and political sociology" (Aronwitz and Bratsis xii).

[18] Here, Bourdieu and Mitchell develop Philip Abrams' influential commentary on state power, in "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State" (1988), in which "the state" is described as a term "peculiarly apt to foster 'an atmosphere of illusion'—a fallacy of confusion at best, an 'official malefactor's screen' at worst, giving spurious concreteness and reality to that which has a merely abstract and formal existence" (58).

Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution (3).[19] Interestingly, Corrigan and Sayer conclude that "the supreme achievement of state formation" was "what George Eliot called 'the images that are habitually associated with abstract or collective terms'—'the picture-writing of the mind'" (51).[20] Later scholarly investigations into the role of cultural representations and perceptions of statehood have continued to shed light on the role of the "state imaginary" in modern state cultures (Mbembe 31; see also, Jessop 73, Neocleous 1), as well as on "languages of stateness" through which the state "strives to be a state for its citizen-subject" (Hansen and Stepputat 5–6), and on "the cultural practices of states" more broadly (Ferguson and Gupta 981).[21] Building on these analyses, the present thesis will highlight and interrogate the importance of the literary "picture-writing" of the state for the development of the British state imaginary over the long nineteenth century. This involves examining the figuration of administrative statecraft in terms of the concrete metaphors and images that writers employed when depicting state institutions, as well as exploring how "languages of stateness" operate, or are subverted, in literary narratives.

As indicated above, my approach to studying the writing of the state in long-nineteeth-century British literature is informed by Bourdieu's conceptualisation of state power. In his lectures on the state, Bourdieu revises the classical Weberian definition of state power which highlights the state's monopoly on "*legitimate*" physical violence within a specific territory (*From Max Weber*, 78), by emphasising that the state also holds the monopoly on "legitimate symbolic violence" (*On the State*, 84), and indeed declaring that the "grip of the state is felt most powerfully" in the "realm of symbolic production" ("Rethinking," 55). This emphasis on the state's symbolic power expands upon Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser's influential analysis of "ideological state apparatuses" such as educational and media institutions, which inculcate ways of seeing and interpreting the social world, and which operate alongside "repressive state apparatuses" such as the police (95). For Bourdieu, crucially, the state's symbolic power, which has a social, organisational basis, and which ultimately hinges on the state's monopoly on legitimate physical violence, is such that it has the capacity to "produce

[19] See also David Lloyd and Paul Thomas's *Culture and the State* (1998), and *State/Culture: State-Formation after the Cultural turn* (1999), a volume edited by George Steinmetz.

[20] In the essay cited by Corrigan and Sayer, Eliot provides a fairly extensive commentary on "the picture-writing of the mind," or the "associated images" which words produce, before dealing with the primary subject of her essay, which is German geography, culture, and politics (Eliot 51). Importantly, Eliot emphasises that mental images and personal associations are heterogeneous and shifting by nature (Eliot 51–2).

[21] The concept of the social imaginary is widely used in social theory. It is defined by Cornelius Castoriadis as a matter of a culture's active "creation of figures/forms/images" that underlie conceptions of social reality (*Imaginary*, 3), and by Charles Taylor as a set of expectations and learned models that enable communal social practices (91).

and impose [...] categories of thought that we spontaneously apply to all things of the social world—including the state itself" ("Rethinking," 53).[22] The state has "imposed the very cognitive structures through which it is perceived," and for this reason, it becomes well-nigh impossible to "think" the state without thinking the "thought of the state" (53, 69).[23] As Caroline Dufour puts it, the state's legitimate symbolic violence acts upon other social agents through "the internalization of categories of thought and systems of classification offered by the state" (126). This theorisation of state power as a form of symbolic violence that is ingrained in cultural modes of cognition and perception constitutes a theoretical lens which, as I will seek to show in this dissertation, may productively be brought to bear on the relationship between literature and the state.

My engagement with Bourdieusian thought is selective in the sense that I place the emphasis on Bourdieu the overlooked theorist of the state, rather than, for instance, Bourdieu the analysist of the literary field.[24] Moreover, whilst my thesis is informed by Bourdieu's analysis of the state, my close readings are not consistently articulated in Bourdieusian terms. Above all, I follow Bourdieu in interrogating the state's symbolic power, which he describes as "a power of constructing reality," in the shape of authoritative descriptions of social reality that hold sway insofar as they are recognised as legitimate ("On Symbolic," 166, 170). Bourdieu stresses that there is a constant power struggle in the "field of symbolic production" (of which the field of cultural production is a subset), as different socio-economic classes seek to impose their view of social reality, especially in the shape of taxonomies and hierarchies through which reality may be expressed and known (167–68).[25] The nineteenth century saw "the constitution of relatively autonomous fields," to borrow Bourdieu's expression, with the field of cultural production and the administrative field both gaining a new form of

[22] Bourdieu describes the state as "a producer of principles of classification, that is, of structuring structures" (*On the State*, 165). Bourdieu also conceptualises the symbolic power of the state in terms of the "logic of official nomination" or "consecration," whereby "the State wields a genuinely creative, quasi-divine, power" ("Rethinking," 66–7)—that is, as a form of "state magic" (*State Nobility*, 376).

[23] Bourdieu writes: "To endeavour to think the state is to take the risk of taking over (or being taken over by) a thought of the state, that is, of applying to the state categories of thought produced and guaranteed by the state and hence to misrecognize its most profound truth" ("Rethinking," 53).

[24] See Gisèle Sapiro for an incisive analysis of the relationship between the literary field and the state. Sapiro observes that "while the market helped literary activity to free itself from the supervision of the State, the State can also become an instrument for saving the rights and freedom of creation from the merciless sanction of the market" (457).

[25] Bourdieu notes that specialists in symbolic production (e.g. bureaucrats, artists, and intellectuals) do not necessarily belong to the dominant socio-economic class, but that they frequently serve as the ideologues of that class ("On Symbolic," 168).

professional autonomy ("Social Space," 236–37).[26] State-appointed specialists in symbolic production, such as public servants, royal commissioners, and official statisticians, are, in Bourdieu's words, essentially "saved" from "the symbolic struggle of all against all," as bearers of "the authorized perspective, the one recognized by all and thus universal" (239–40).[27] In short, the state's monopoly position—its character of a "central bank of symbolic capital" (*On the State*, 217)—skews the field of symbolic production considerably, making it anything but a level playing-field.

Bourdieu's analysis of the symbolic power of the state indicates that cultural perceptions of "the state" have historically been shaped primarily by the state's manner of self-representation. However, writers have also greatly influenced the state imaginary throughout the ages, particularly by creating powerful metaphors and images that help conceptualise statehood, such as that of the body politic, an idea elaborated by Plato and Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes's concept of the Leviathan, or George Orwell's Big Brother. In other words, the idea of the state is malleable and to some extent beyond the state's control. In modern administrative states, as Dufour emphasises,

> it would be a mistake to believe that the only possible agents of the administrative field are civil servants. Any agent or organization that has an interest in determining what service to the public [...] should be, can become involved in the stakes of the administrative field. (127)

As the present thesis will show, many writers of the long nineteenth century were profoundly concerned with the stakes of the administrative field (not least because they had great bearing on the literary field) and therefore tried their hand at shaping the narrative about public administration.

I propose that long-nineteenth-century administrative fiction greatly influenced the British state imaginary, and that, far from being bound to reproduce officialdom's understanding of what public service should be, writers took it upon themselves to narrativise and conceptualise the administrative state. Here I am guided by anthropologist Michael Herzfeld's suggestion that the "symbolic roots" of state bureaucracy "subsist above all in popular reactions to bureaucracy—in the ways in which ordinary people actually manage and conceptualize bureaucratic relations" (8). In other words, Herzfeld suggests that it is the "popular" response to bureaucracy—quite as much as the bureaucratic institution itself—that

[26] Bourdieu suggests that "[t]he state [...] is not a bloc, it is a field. The administrative field, as a particular sector of the field of power, is a field, that is, a space structured according to oppositions linked to specific forms of capital with differing interests" (*On the State*, 20).

[27] Bourdieu does not mean to say that the symbolic power of the state stands uncontested; elsewhere, he observes that "[t]he official truth is not universal and recognized by everyone or at all times" (*On the State*, 35).

defines its socio-cultural significance. In this respect, the images of statehood conveyed through "popular" administrative fiction need to be understood as semi-autonomous and sui generis, and not as deriving solely from the schema established by the state. It should be noted, here, that "popular" is a problematic term, in that it is highly elastic and ideologically charged (Bourdieu, "Did You," 90); when using this term here, and in the dissertation more broadly, I am referring to the civilian public's ideation and representation of the state, using the term "popular" in contradistinction to the term "official" (more on this below).

Narrative fiction played a key part in shaping the popular British state imaginary precisely because it was the dominant popular mode of story-telling of the long nineteenth century. The rise of the genre of the novel is often described as having helped consolidate the modern nation-state as a socio-political configuration, and yet, from Benedict Anderson's theorisation of national "imagined community" and onwards, the conversation has focused primarily on collective imaginations of *nationality*—not statehood. Franco Moretti famously describes the novel as "a symbolic form capable of making sense of the nation-state," in that the novel's nationally delimited sphere of action helps settle the questions "'Where' is it? What does it look like? How can one *see* it?" (17, 20). In the present dissertation, I argue that long-nineteenth-century fiction not only performed this function with respect to national space, but that it also helped settle the related conundrum, "Where is the state?", or, in Arnold's terms, "What is the state?"

Literary scholars have at times tended to forget that the state, like the nation, is culturally constructed. Addressing the role of literature in shaping conceptions of the nation-state, Claybaugh suggests that if literary works have the power to "make an imaginary entity (the nation) seem real," then they also have the capacity to "make a real entity (the state) more visible" ("Government," 164). This observation speaks to a fundamental premise of the present thesis—that cultural representations of state institutions inform our perception of statehood—and yet, Claybaugh establishes a misleading dichotomy in which the state stands as "real" as opposed to the "imaginary" nation. The state is, in fact, neither more nor less "real" than the nation. Indeed, Bourdieu suggests that, "[t]he state is this well-founded illusion, this place that exists essentially because people believe that it exists" (10). As indicated above, I propose that fictional representations of the state have not only rendered statehood more visible, but that they have also helped make the state "seem real."

Over the long nineteenth century, narrative fiction played its part in what Tony Bennett and Patrick Joyce term "the naturalisation of the state" (10). As Yumna Siddiqi aptly puts it, works of fiction have historically helped imbue the state with its "seeming quiddity"

(131). Drawing on Mitchell's aforementioned concept of the "state effect," we may, in other words, speak of *literary state effects*, narrative mediations of the state that accord with and thus consolidate the state's self-representation, thereby naturalising, hypostatizing, or reifying the state. The literary state effect is analogous with Roland Barthes's influential concept of the "reality effect," which delineates how unobtrusive details in narratives help make the story-world seem real (148); in line with Barthes's analysis, the naturalisation of the state may be presumed to be most effective when the state becomes part of the furniture, so to speak, of the fictional world.[28] Of course, the literary texts examined in the present study place state instutitons centre stage rather than in the background, and, as I argue in later chapters, Dickens and Conrad do so precisely in order to critique and destabilise state effects. Indeed, whilst the symbolic power of the state is operative in works of fiction, literature has also served as an important site of contestation and problematisation of the state's symbolic violence.[29] The literary "picture-writing" of the state can in this respect challenge the symbolic power of the state and counter-act state effects.

Bourdieu proposes that in order to understand the state "we must break through a series of screens and representations" (*On the State*, 3). To this end, Bourdieu's analyses consist in part of historical genealogies, an effort of "going back beyond the state" (*On the State*, 44–5) and examining processes of state formation, as a means of achieving a "rupture with the thought of the state" ("Rethinking," 54). The present dissertation proposes that fiction constitutes another potential site of "rupture" with the "thought of the state," which differs markedly from (but also complements) Bourdieusian genealogy. As Peter D. McDonald puts it, literature can profoundly challenge "the state's mappings of the world" (27). The present thesis examines works of fiction which generally remain within the spatial frame of the nation-state—unlike the "anti- or non-state" literary geographies that McDonald explores (27)—but which nonetheless problematise and de-naturalise the state's "mappings" of the social world and of the state's place within that world. Above all, drawing on Viktor Shklovsky's theorisation of art and literature, I propose that literature has the capacity to "defamiliarise" statehood, thus counteracting the naturalisation of the state (12). In short, paraphrasing Shklovsky, who famously suggests that art has the capacity "to make the stone

[28] For this reason, literary state effects could productively be explored through "distant reading" techniques (*à la* Moretti's exploration of the consolidation of national spatialities through the genre of the novel).

[29] As Corrigan and Sayer observe, "state formation is something that has ever been contested by those whom it seeks to regulate and rule," a resistance that "makes visible" the "particularity and fragility" of the otherwise "seemingly neutral and timeless" state (8).

stony" (12), the present study investigates, amongst other things, how literary texts are able to make the state "statey."

This form of defamiliarisation is a particularly potent means of undermining the symbolic power of the state, given that the "discourse of authority" only "exercises its specific effect [...] when it is recognized as such" (Bourdieu, "Did You," 113). Interestingly, in "Discourse in the Novel" (1973), Mikhail Bakhtin suggests that the genre of the novel replicates the linguistic heterogeneity and stratification of the social world in a manner which has important consequences for the ways in which discourses of authority can be voiced. Bakhtin argues that because official discourse is "hardedged, a thing in its own right," its representation in a novel, where it cannot hold the type of elevated, self-contained position that it lays claim to in the actual social world, is "impossible" ("Discourse in the Novel," 344). Yet, reading Bakhtin's commentary against the grain (especially in light of his theorisation of the carnivalesque), his analysis may be seen to highlight the affordances of the novel as a medium for satirising and undermining the symbolic power of the state. The present dissertation will examine both works of fiction that actively draw on the symbolic power of the state and those that satirise and critique official discourse. In other words, my close readings will explore works that generate state effects and those that seek to dispel them.

British Bureaucracy

The historian A. J. P. Taylor suggests that "until August 1914 a sensible, law-abiding Englishman could pass through life and hardly notice the existence of the state, beyond the post office and the policeman" (1). This claim is supported by the commentary of a Victorian sage such as Arnold, who averred, in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), that his countrymen wanted for "the notion, so familiar on the Continent and to antiquity, of the State" (83), an opinion echoed at the turn of the twentieth century by Wells, who bemoaned his fellow Britons' weak "sense of the state" (*Future*, 213). And yet, the commentary of Taylor, Arnold, and Wells cannot be taken as evidence of the actual state of affairs, but rather needs to be interrogated as reiterating a central trope in Britain's grand narrative about its own socio-political culture. Indeed, Taylor's claim that Britons hardly noticed the existence of the state prior to the country's mobilisation during WWI in fact skates over a range of state practices and administrative phenomena that Victorians and Edwardians would have been forced to

notice, if not through direct contact, then at least through journalistic and literary coverage that was intent on familiarising (if not already defamiliarising) the administrative state.

As indicated by Arnold's contrastive remarks, Victorian Britain's sense of its state was coloured by the country's competitive, and frequently antagonistic, relationship with continental nations such as France and Germany. Indeed, Thomas Carlyle's description of bureaucracy as a "Continental nuisance" was by all accounts the standard Victorian attitude towards state intervention ("New Downing," 121).[30] More broadly, both popular and scholarly discourse on state bureaucracy tends to be influenced by national stereotyping. As Herzfeld puts it, French state functionaries are often expected to be "rule-bound," their Greek counterparts to be "crafty," and British officials to be "haughty and 'nonbureaucratic'" (80). It is also worth nothing that whilst the Victorians' "sense" of their own state culture was arguably ridden with national stereotypes, it was not for a lack of rousing literary critiques. Dickens frequently satirised the clichés and dogmas of anti-statist "Englishness"—as with his portrayal of Mr Podsnap's ludicrous and unthinking opposition to "[c]entralization" in *Our Mutual Friend* (1865): "No. Never with my consent. Not English" (141).

Both historians and Victorianists have broadly reiterated the Podsnappian equation of Englishness with liberalism and local self-governance, emphasising the "nonbureaucratic" character of the Victorian state and thus simplifying a complex historical situation. There are various factors to consider when describing the evolution of the British state over the long nineteenth century. To begin with, the relatively slow expansion of the British central state needs to be understood within a longer time frame. It is certainly true that British governance prior to the nineteenth century was rooted in local administrative structures, forming "a complex mosaic of parochial, manorial, borough, and county institutions," as Martin Loughlin puts it (472). However, the very strength of the tradition of local governance in England does not necessarily stem from an age-old Anglo-Saxon constitution safeguarding rights of self-government, as per the so-called Whig interpretation of history; instead, local government practices evolved early on in England precisely as a result of the country's unusually high degree of centralization (Loughlin 453–55, 467).[31] Indeed, already in eleventh century, in the aftermath of the Norman Conquest, "[e]ven the humblest of people found that it was scarcely

[30] On Victorian attitudes regarding continental bureaucracy, see Bernard Porter.

[31] As early as the eleventh century, William the Conqueror introduced a highly centralized government, which was "the most advanced of its time" in Europe (Elias 120). Bourdieu notes that "England was a unified state long before any other European kingdom because there 'public office' was not completely identified with fiefdom" ("From the King's" 29). Weber also points out that Britain's comparatively slow rate of bureaucratization was largely an effect of the efficiency of the administrative systems already in place (*From Max Weber*, 210–11, 228).

possible to live their lives without running up against written records, prescribing, defining and codifying the world" (Fox 89).

It is not only the Whig interpretation of Britain's political history that needs to be critically reevaluated, but also the older textbook understanding of the Victorian period as the pinnacle of laissez-faire anti-statism. To be sure, British state administration lagged behind the major continental states in many respects—notably, British civil servants numbered only 21,300 in 1832, as opposed to France's circa one million civil servants at that time.[32] And yet, these figures do not tell the whole story. Zoë Laidlaw emphasises the uneven development, or "lumpiness," of Victorian state administration, observing that, whereas Britain's civil service was small, its imperial administration was vast, and it was domestically more effective in collecting taxes than France, and more adept at controlling public health than absolutist Prussia (330–1). Moreover, as Martin Pugh writes, "the bracing notions of classical economics were less respected than some of the rhetoric of Victorian England suggests. The whole era was characterized by a series of interventionist initiatives by governments" (58). In fact, the economic growth of the Victorian period was facilitated through state regulation and the rise of what left-wing critics describe as the bourgeois or capitalist state, which dramatically increased the rate of exploitation (Williams, *Country*, 105; Sassen 102). Parliament not only enforced the capitalist economy by siding with the owners of productive capital, but it also helped stabilise the market economy by establishing institutions of social control that contained and alleviated the environmental and societal crises that arose at a time of accelerating industrialisation and urbanisation (Pellew 3).[33]

In many ways, historiography on the expansion and bureaucratisation of the nineteenth-century British state describes a complicated case of combined and uneven development. The difficulty of describing the nineteenth-century state is indicated by political scientist H. R. G. Greaves's provocation that it "never existed": "[i]t eludes [historians] between the oligarchic maladministration and interfering paternalism of the eighteenth century, on the one hand, and the social service democracy of the twentieth century on the other. For the former was not dead before the latter had been born" (9). For Greaves, then, the

[32] Census figures show that the civil service grew from 50,485 officials in 1881 to 162,000 in 1911 (Halévy 6: 262). In 1851, public employment had been just 2.4 percent of the total employment, and by 1890 it had barely risen to 4 percent, but by 1901 there was a sharp increase to 6 percent (Smith, *Core Executive*, 39).

[33] The very notion of the "disinterestedness" of modern state institutions has been described as a means of securing "compliance and consent to government and tax payment" (Daunton 6). Industrialization, population growth, urbanisation, increased trade, and imperial competition, were all aspects of the nineteenth-century capitalist economy that played important parts in the emergence of modern administrative practices (Loughlin 473).

composite and transitional nature of the nineteenth-century state makes it difficult to typologise and unwieldy for periodising purposes. However, whereas Britain only became a fully-blown *welfare* state in the twentieth century, the nineteenth-century state was in many respects developing into a modern *administrative* state. In order to address the nomenclature gap identified by Greaves, then, one might say that the nineteenth century saw the emergence of an *administrative state culture*. I deploy this term as an amalgamation of "state culture," a term used by James C. Scott in reference to modern societies in which the state has a pervasive societal presence (*Seeing*, 72), and the adjacent term "administrative culture," which is used in the field of public administration studies to denote the governing styles or organisational characteristics of national bureaucracies and individual public institutions (MacCarthaigh and Saarniit). By introducing this term and using it in connection with Victorian Britain, I wish to characterise this period as one in which a number of administrative structures, practices, and technologies arose which together composed a new mode of governance that had a pervasive impact on society at large, literature included.

Whilst certain features of contemporary administrative state culture stem from the early modern period (e.g. fixed surnames that enable record keeping and personal identification) many of the administrative practices and customs that are integral to modern-day public administration were introduced during the nineteenth century, including decennial censuses, central registers, royal commissions of inquiry, an official police force, and the permanent civil service.[34] The emergence of this administrative apparatus at this time needs to be understood in relation to the major political transformations that occurred during this period. Crucially, in the wake of the French Revolution of 1789, there was a concerted push to expand the franchise in Britain, giving greater representation to the expanding population of the cities and manufacturing towns, and thus ending the parliamentary monopoly of the landowning aristocracy in their "rotten boroughs." The first major Whig reform, the 1832 Reform Act, restructured the constituencies and gave middle-class men the right to vote in Parliamentary elections—a political breakthrough that set a precedent for the various political

[34] The history of British administrative statecraft may be said to originate with the so-called "Domesday Book," a record of a survey of England and Wales ordered by King William the Conqueror in 1086. A number of informational administrative technologies were introduced over the early modern period, and, according to Steve Hindle, "the information-gathering resources of the English state [were] already formidable in the seventeenth century," especially following the introduction of parish registers, which Hindle terms "the most significant bureaucratic achievement" of the period (231). Moreover, popular expressions of opposition to administrative statecraft may be traced at least as far back as the Elizabethan era; notably, the increasing significance of administration in the early modern period brought a widespread hostility towards the spread of writing, perceived as "a tool of the authorities, a method of domination" (Chartier 122). On the other hand, as Derek Dunne observes, certain early modern works of literature bear the mark of the author's bureaucratic knowledge (137).

and administrative reforms that followed, if only by inspiring belief that the governmental system could be reformed.[35]

The years between 1780 and 1820 have been described as a "formative period" in the organisational evolution of the British state (Raadschelders 18). However, it was particularly in the 1830s that the modern "machinery of government" began to take shape, as public administration was increasingly "disentangled" from private interests and patronage (Corrigan and Sayer 123), especially through the formalisation of the civil service as a permanent body of salaried departmental staff at the service of successive cabinets (Parris 49). In Bourdieu's terms, this period saw the crystallisation of a British "administrative field" (*On the State*, 20). The second half of the century saw an increasing consolidation of the state apparatus, with the cabinet and ministers formally assuming responsibility for most government tasks (Smith, *Core Executive*, 55). Firmer local governance structures were also established over this period, especially with the Local Government Act of 1894, which instituted urban and rural district councils in place of the system of parish government by vestries.

As indicated above, the nineteenth century was also characterised by a series of administrative innovations that increased the state's informational capital, such as the introduction of the decennial census in 1801, followed by the advent of more ambitious commissioned inquiries into social questions and institutional practices in the 1830s, and the establishment, following the 1836 Births and Deaths Registration Act, of the General Register Office in 1837. The introduction of these three quintessential Victorian official "information genres" (Guillory 108)—the census, the commissioned inquiry, and the central register—combined to produce an "unprecedented amount of official information" (Eyler 21). Beyond these three Victorian administrative genres, the mid-nineteenth century also saw the introduction of a spate of innovative text types that went on to become classics of administrative textuality, including the official printed form (a requirement for new administrative techniques) and the official record of parliamentary debates, the so-called Hansard. The 1830s also saw the rise of the science of statistics, which further laid the foundations for the professionalisation and bureaucratisation of the state (Poovey, *Making*, 116). In 1834, statistical societies were established in London and Manchester in order to

[35] The restricted representation introduced by the Reform Act effectively broke the alliance between the radical Whigs and the working class movement of the Chartists, who had helped force changes through extra-parliamentary methods such as mass protests. The Whig campaigns for administrative reform of this period thus represented the interests of a "new, more covetous gentry" rather than the interests of a radically expanded demography (Lloyd and Thomas, "Culture," 44). This is epitomised by the hugely unpopular 1834 New Poor Law which followed in the wake of the Reform Act.

usher in a new "science of government"—a "bookkeeping or accounting of the state" that would dispel "official ignorance" (Eyler 16, 21, 28). These administrative-informational innovations and endeavours signalled the emergence of what Mary Poovey terms "government by information" (*History*, xxi), or, with Steven King, what might be termed the rise of the "information state" (51).[36]

The rapidly expanding public record soon became a matter of national pride. In the 1850s, John Stuart Mill declared that "no other [government] probably has a system of recordation so complete" (qtd. in Frankel, *States*, 37). Indeed, official administrative documentation was perceived as an "endeavour in which the British excelled, or a project that was particularly British" (Frankel, *States*, 40). In this sense, Victorian Britain's perception of the textual-informational dimension of its administrative state culture clearly clashed with the competing narrative about Britain's non-bureaucratic state culture. At the same time, whilst Mill and other Victorians valorised the state's expanding informational resources, government by information was not without its detractors, particularly amongst writers (Lee 2).[37] Long-nineteenth-century fiction was in many respects deeply entangled with the state's informational projects, a multifaceted connection that will be closely examined in the present dissertation.

For one, the administrative state's informational practices sparked a competitive impulse amongst many writers. That is, several long-nineteenth-century writers positioned their narrative fiction as representations of the social world that were comparable, if not superior, to the state's documentary information-gathering projects. Famously, Honoré de Balzac proclaimed that he would outdo the French civil registry ('de faire concurrence à l'État–Civil' [Balzac 13]) in and by the creation of the immense character gallery of his sprawling series of novels, *The Human Comedy* (1829–48). During the same period, the British state's growing administrative informational reserve inspired writers such as Martineau and Benjamin Disraeli to write literary works based on official reports known as Blue Books (Smith, "Blue Books"). The information genres that arose or became newly salient in the Victorian period also provoked a vexed and stridently competitive literary response exemplified by Dickens's polemic with the information state. This interest in official

[36] Several factors catalysed the emergence of a "bureaucratic, numerate state" in this period (Crook and O'Hara 6); not only was there a greater interest in the uses of information, there were also fiscal and political pressures on government to produce knowledge about the state of the country. There had, for instance, been a long-standing controversy about the size of the population (Headrick 77).

[37] As early as 1821, the Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley positioned his valorisation of literature and the imagination against a perceived societal preoccupation with the "accumulation of facts," which Shelley regarded as a fruitless generation of more information than could reasonably be "accommodated" (109).

information genres continued into the twentieth century, with Conrad and later modernists at times critiquing and at times drawing inspiration from bureaucratic and informational textual forms.[38]

The Bureaucratic Horror Story

The scholarly perception that nineteenth-century Britain was fundamentally non-bureaucratic arises not only from national stereotyping, but also from under-theorised conceptualisations of state bureaucracy. As indicated above, the nineteenth-century British state has been regarded as "non-bureaucratic" because it did not develop some of the administrative systems and capacities that were present in continental nation-states at this time. And yet, as Thomas Osborne observes, bureaucratisation does not follow "some hard and fast, trans-historical model" (310). The very definition of the concept of bureaucracy is quite ambiguous and remains contested. The difficulty of pinning down and explicating the concept of bureaucracy is evident from the "analytic oppositions" that Tess Lea has identified as permeating scholarship on this subject:

> Bureaucracy sucks the soul; bureaucracy is ethics in action. It stands in the way of freedom; it is freedom's insurance. It is a death threat with a baton behind its back; it is the rule of law. It has exploded under neoliberalism; it is the best defense against neoliberalism's predations. (Lea 60–1)

In short, bureaucratic statecraft has been both maligned and celebrated for a variety of reasons by scholars who have, to borrow Lea's term, "casted" or narrativised bureaucracy in radically different ways (65).[39]

Moreover, there is a fundamental lack of clarity regarding the very application of the term "bureaucracy." Michel Crozier provides a useful overview of what "bureaucracy" is generally taken to mean, demarcating three distinct usages: first, government by bureaus; second, the Weberian ideal-type understanding of bureaucracy as large-scale rational organisation; and third, the "vulgar" sense of the word, which refers to "dysfunctional" institutional practices characterised by slowness and systematic complication (3, 7). This

[38] For instance, Sam Alexander suggests that Joyce took the census as a "literary model" in writing *Ulysses* (1922), stimulated by its non-narrative, statistical, "egalitarian (and 'all including') representation" of the social world (434, 442).

[39] Of course, not all scholars have taken strong positions for or against bureaucracy. For instance, David Graeber arguably moves beyond the analytic oppositions observed by Lea in recognising but also distrusting "the appeal of bureaucracy," capturing this tension in his oxymoronic description of bureaucracy as the "utopia of rules" (*Utopia*, 163).

multivalency is, unfortunately, often brushed over in studies of literature and bureaucracy, leading to analytical imprecision and distortion. Witness Sayanika Banerjee's recent claim that the Circumlocution Office—the infamous government department of Dickens's *Little Dorrit*—represents "an example of a failed bureaucracy because it is profoundly unbureaucratic" (152). In describing the Circumlocution Office as "unbureaucratic," citing the fact that it is run like a "family dynasty" (152), Banerjee anachronistically holds Dickens's fictional government department to standards that had yet to be fully elaborated in Victorian Britain, ignoring the patently bureaucratic administrative textual practices of Dickens's institution. In actual fact, the Circumlocution Office is indubitably the quintessential bureaucracy, in the popular or "vulgar" (but not the Weberian) sense of the word.

The present thesis draws on Weber's analysis of bureaucracy, without cleaving to the Weberian definition of this phenomenon. Weber theorises bureaucracy as an organisational mode that gains its authority from its "rational" character—the fact that it is rule-bound, technical, and impersonal. For Weber, it is this rationality which distinguishes bureaucracy from "traditional" and "charismatic" forms of authority:

> [bureaucracy] develops the more perfectly, the more it is "dehumanized," the more it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational and emotional elements which escape calculation. This is the specific nature of bureaucracy and it is appraised as its special virtue. (*Essays*, 215–16)

Weber evidently appreciated the efficiency of bureaucratic organisation and believed that bureaucracy's impersonal nature would have a levelling societal effect (*Economy*, 811, 973). However, it should be noted that some of Weber's commentaries express a deep concern about bureaucracy's impact on modern culture.

Weber's ideal-type schema of bureaucracy as a mode of rational organisation remains a touchstone in scholarly conversations about bureaucracy, but continues to divide opinion. On the one hand, Paul du Gay's *In Praise of Bureaucracy* (2000) celebrates bureaucratic "depersonalization" as a force of "democratic equalization" which dismantles inequality through its "instituted blindness to inherited differences in status and prestige" (42, 53). On the other hand, in stark contrast with du Gay's rather idealistic interpretation of Weber, scholars such as Hannah Arendt and Zygmunt Bauman have provided powerful critiques of the Weberian understanding of state bureaucracy. Arendt famously argues that the depersonalising aspect of bureaucratic technologies, systems, and uses of language was an integral part of Nazi Germany's genocide of Jews and other minorities in the 1940s. Indeed,

Arendt characterises state bureaucracy more broadly as a tyrannical "rule of Nobody" (*Eichmann*, 289). Bauman similarly emphasises the dehumanising nature of bureaucratic systems that "extend the distance at which human action is able to bring effects" (193).

Du Gay is not only exceedingly quick to dismiss scholarly concerns about the pernicious effects of bureaucratic depersonalisation, but he also trivialises "popular" conceptions of bureaucracy by describing them as "confused and paradoxical" (2). This sweeping condemnation of the popular bureaucratic imaginary reads as an attempt to strip the term "bureaucracy" of its aforementioned multivalency, privileging the Weberian understanding of bureaucracy. And yet, it should be remembered that the word "bureaucracy" originates, and in popular discourse still primarily functions, as a pejorative term denoting excessive paperwork, government interference, and delay—and not as a rigorously defined analytical concept denoting rational modes of organisation. Indeed, the word "bureaucracy" remains the frustrated and embittered layperson's retort to "that wonderfully neutral word—'administration'" (Corrigan and Sayer 10). Moreover, as is demonstrated by Lea's aforementioned overview of the contradictory ways in which scholars have cast bureaucracy, scholarly conversations about this topic are no less "confused and paradoxical" than popular discourse.[40]

The significance of narrative structures and tropes in both literary and scholarly discourse on bureaucracy has recently been highlighted by anthropologist Nayanika Mathur, who observes that the terminology used in discussions of state administration frequently stems from works of fiction. Mathur gives the example of the "vocabulary" invented by George Orwell to describe totalitarian state bureaucracy—terms such as "newspeak," "think police," and "thoughtcrime" ("Bureaucracy"). Returning to the question of vocabulary in a different essay, Mathur emphasises the utility of coinages and precise terminology in scholarship: "[t]o ethnographically grasp the workings of bureaucracy," Mathur writes, "one needs a hook of some sort. Otherwise, one risks drowning in bureaucratic banality" ("Afterword," 117). Such conceptual keywords, or "hooks," are a salient feature not only in the work of a writer such as Orwell, but also, as we shall see, in the work of Dickens, who is another formidable bureaucratic wordsmith.

[40] Apropos the role of narratives in scholarly conceptualisations of bureaucracy, Fredric Jameson argues that Weber's typologisation of modes of authority in fact "conceals a kind of narrative behind its classificatory appearance," which is particularly evident in its construction of "ideal types" that are "explicitly organized into pairs of binary oppositions," such as bureaucracy versus charisma ("Vanishing," 63, 66).

The term "bureaucracy" is itself a catchy buzzword of this ilk—or at least it used to be in Victorian times. It dates back to the mid-eighteenth century and was coined by Jacques de Gournay essentially as a pun:

> To the classic three regimes, democracy, aristocracy, and monarchy—that is, rule by the many, the few, and the one—Gournay had added rule by a piece of office furniture. This piece of furniture was expandable, metonymically, to include the men who sat behind it, the offices in which they found themselves, and ultimately the entire state apparatus. (Kafka 77).

This playful and rather subversive addition to the political vocabulary had a meme-like imagistic quality, which is probably why it caught on (such is the "picture-writing of the mind"). In the early nineteenth century, the word "bureaucracy" seeped into the English language, which already had the analogous expression "red tape." The *OED* gives 1800 as the first use in English of "bureaucratic" and 1815 as the first use of its cognate "bureaucracy." In this sense, discourse on state "bureaucracy" may be understood precisely as a phenomenon of the nineteenth century.

As indicated above, the process of bureaucracy's interpretation and "casting" is fundamentally a process of narrativisation—even if bureaucracy tends to be narrativised precisely as un-narrativisable, as in Wolfe's suggestion that "the art of Government does not fit easily into the ordinary human passion for vivid conflict" (47), or in anthropologist David Graeber's description of bureaucracy as a "dead zone of the imagination," a phenomenon "devoid of any possibility of interpretive depth" ("Dead Zones," 123). Much as narrative tropes and mechanisms are operative in the scholarly conversation about bureaucracy, Herzfeld suggests that the popular response to bureaucracy follows a particular story-telling logic: "[e]veryone, it seems, has a bureaucratic horror story to tell, and few will challenge the conventions such stories demand. Hearers know that they will soon want to use the same stereotypical images in turn" (3). In light of this characterisation of the folkloric "bureaucratic horror story," two fundamental observations can be made about the defining characteristics of the popular narrativisation of state bureaucracy: firstly, the stories that people tell each other about state institutions, and about bureaucratic institutions more broadly, are predominantly tales of maladministration and victimisation (or "horror"); secondly, these folkloric tales are heavily convention-bound in the sense that they are composed of recyclable narrative structures and tropes. This is how state bureaucracy is narrativised in the popular imagination: as nightmarish, but also as comfortingly clichéd. The very predictability of these stories is arguably their *raison d'être* inasmuch as the stereotypes serve the important function of

reducing the daunting complexity of administrative state culture. Whilst the homogenising impulse of this story-telling tradition potentially hampers analysis by closing down more exploratory readings of bureaucratic phenomena, the rhetorical power of the bureaucratic horror story makes for attractive, memorable, and easily transmissible picture-writing.[41] It may also be observed that the bureaucratic horror story tends towards the affective register of other traditional "horror story" forms, including the Gothic novel and the folkloric morality tale. This fantastical or terrible aspect of the bureaucratic horror story finds its ultimate expression in Kafka's work, in genre-defining novels such as *The Trial* (1925) and *The Castle* (1926); and yet, it is in the nineteenth century that this mode of writing first crystallises, at least in British literature.

State Play: The Non-Bureaucrat's Guide to Officialdom

The emergence of the bureaucratic horror story and its literary manifestation in the administrative fiction of the long nineteenth century needs to be understood in relation to the conditions of the administrative state culture of this period. The nineteenth-century bureaucratic horror story is an expression of unease, perplexity, and discontent in the face of the evolution of British officialdom. This form of story-telling burgeoned in response to the disorienting institutional landscape that was taking shape at this time, with its new bureaucratic textual culture and its menacing new breed of specialised state bureaucrats, defined in 1861 by John Stuart Mill (a colonial civil servant himself) as "governors by profession" (245). What is sometimes overlooked in scholarship on the administrative state is the fact that the modernisation and professionalisation of officialdom in the nineteenth century in turn produced a more palpable divide between state officials and ordinary citizens, given that the newly-professionalised official came to possess a far greater "bureaucratic capital" (Bourdieu, *On the State*, 15) than the average citizen.[42] In the Victorian period, then, the civilian was reconstituted as a "layperson" in contradistinction with the new-fangled figure of the professional bureaucrat.[43] As the present study will show, dramatic encounters

[41] Tapping into and stoking anti-government sentiment, conservative politician Ronald Reagan, president of the United States during the 1980s, famously said, in a presidential speech on August 12, 1986, that "the nine most terrifying words in the English language are: I'm from the Government, and I'm here to help."
[42] Bourdieu describes "bureaucratic capital" as a form of cultural or symbolic capital that is not only available to administrators but also to other social agents, who may come to hold a form of bureaucratic know-how through familiarity with bureaucracy via, for instance, professional life (*On the State*, 15, 20).
[43] The *OED* gives the mid-1800s for the first use of the term "laity" for a "non-professional."

between public servants and their clients are at the heart of much long-nineteenth-century administrative fiction.

In an article from 1843, Karl Marx speaks of "the principle that there are two categories of citizens—the active, knowledgeable citizens in the administration, and the passive, uninformed citizens who are the object of administration" ("Justification," 345). These remarks upon the agency of bureaucratic experts anticipate Weber's characterisation of bureaucracy as a form of "domination through knowledge" exerted by "technical specialists" (*Economy*, 224–25).[44] And yet, whilst there is a marked power imbalance in many encounters between bureaucrats and their clients, the dyad of "knowledgeable" bureaucrats and "uninformed," dominated laypeople is, of course, a simplification, given the heterogeneity that exists amongst both bureaucrats and ordinary citizens. Indeed, there is a countervailing scholarly recognition that "nonbureaucrats often take the initiative by pursuing goals that bypass official control" (Heyman 264). In other words, people from all walks of life can become bureaucratically literate and bureaucracy can be used for various purposes. In this sense, the rise of the modern administrative state brought new opportunities as well as new challenges for ordinary people, which, as my study will show, is reflected in the administrative fiction of the period.[45]

Interactions between state functionaries and ordinary citizens have been studied in great detail by social scientists. Michael Lipsky's influential *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services* (1988) highlights the importance of public service workers, and not only policy-making legislatures, in shaping public policy (xii). Lipsky's study shows that the contests that take place between colleagues in official institutions can be quite as dramatic as encounters between state functionaries and ordinary people. For instance, examining the interplay between "managers" and "workers" in bureaucratic public institutions, Lipsky observes that "managers try to restrict workers' discretion in order to secure certain results, but street-level bureaucrats often regard such efforts as illegitimate and to some degree resist them successfully" (19). Building on Lipsky's work, anthropologists and political scientists have continued to explore the importance of

[44] In this respect, the administrative field resembles the legal field, which, in Bourdieu's words, is constructed through the "practical exclusion of laypeople," that is, the establishment of a divide between those qualified and those not qualified to "participate in the game" ("Force of Law," 828, 837). As Ben Kafka observes, clerks' positions within administrative systems give them a "degree of power completely out of proportion to their social and political status" (81).

[45] Walter Benjamin notes that canny French laypeople were adept at using administrative mechanisms to their own ends already in Napoleon's day, insofar as the "practice of bamboozling the municipal expropriations committee" became "an industry" during the renovation of Paris orchestrated by Georges-Eugène Haussmann (142).

discretion and interpersonal dynamics in street-level state bureaucracy. Vincent Dubois's trenchant study *The Bureaucrat and the Poor* (2010) examines the power dynamics not within officialdom, but rather between, on the one hand, bureaucrats in welfare institutions, and, on the one hand, ordinary citizens, emphasising that much is decided in such face-to-face interactions and that the agency of welfare recipients is a decisive factor in determining outcomes. Meanwhile, Marc Holzer's recent monograph *Rethinking Public Administration* (2023) emphasises the brutalising and demoralising nature of public service, declaring that the "bureaucrat" is one of "bureaucracy's victims" as well as one of its "instrument[s]" (5). Indeed, Holzer celebrates the public servant as somebody who makes "inordinate sacrifices for the public good" (4).

Such a view of the bureaucrat is not always shown in fiction however. In these stories, the bureaucrat tends to be figured as villainous, and the state institution as a dangerous and labyrinthine social domain. Public administration is portrayed in a variety of registers, including comedy and romance, but the key affect (as epitomised by Kafka's nightmarish stories of entrapment in bureaucratic systems) is the uncertainty and dread generated by various forms of bureaucratic "domination through knowledge." There is also a pedagogic logic to writers' tendency to characterise bureaucratic institutions as hazardous environments: depictions of civilians falling victim to bureaucrats should leave the reader with a heightened sense of the critical importance of developing bureaucratic literacy. With the rise of the administrative state over the long nineteenth century, bureaucratic literacy and sensibility became a vital resource in everyday life. This type of bureaucratic capital is typically gained, as Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta note in their introduction to *The Anthropology of the State* (2006), through direct encounters with bureaucratic systems. Indeed, according to Sharma and Gupta, first-hand experiences of public administration simultaneously inform non-bureaucrats' conceptions of the state and prepare them for future confrontations with bureaucratic institutions:

> Everyday statist encounters not only shape people's imagination of what the state is and how it is demarcated, but also enable people to devise strategies of resistance to this imagined state. Those who are the subjects or targets of state programs, and thus "outside" bureaucracies, learn to use the very same techniques that lower-level state agents use to sabotage official mandates and orders. They learn about paper pushing, leaving paper trails, and adopting official mannerisms. (17)

In the present thesis, I argue that this type of bureaucratic sensibility may be acquired vicariously, by reading narrative accounts of "everyday statist encounters." In other words, I

contend that popular literary representations of administrative statecraft serve an important pedagogical function in equipping readers for real-life encounters with state bureaucracy.

During the Victorian era, with the emergence of the administrative state, popular print cultural depictions of officialdom represented a particularly important educational resource.[46] Many Victorian publications dealing with public administration were pedagogic in nature. There was, for instance, an influx of guidebook-like texts aimed at civil servants and aspirants to the civil service during this period—not only actual manuals such as *The Complete Practical Guide to Her Majesty's Civil Service* (1860), but also essayistic commentaries such as Carlyle's "Downing Street" (1850), which warned prospective civil servants of an environment full of "blind obstructions, fatal indolencies, pedantries, stupidities," in short, a "jungle of redtape, inhabited by doleful creatures, deaf or nearly so to human reason or entreaty" (74). There was a particular proliferation of civil service guidebooks in the wake of the 1854 report of the Royal Commission on the British Civil Service, a report made by Stafford Northcote and Charles Trevelyan, which recommended that entry to the higher civil service should be subject to examination (Fyfe 575). At the same time, a novel such as Trollope's *The Three Clerks* (1857), which centred on internal civil service concerns such as office politics and career advancement, echoed and extended the recommendations that were expressed in civil service guidebooks.[47]

The same educational impulse may be traced in popular accounts of officialdom in Victorian fiction and journalism that were geared towards a general readership. As has been observed by Gregory Vargo, Chartist journals of the 1830s and '40s "train[ed] [...] readers to regard governmental documents sceptically," not least by publishing "didactic tales" (7, 72). Similarly, Michael Martel suggests that George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872) bolstered readers' "capacities to oversee local representative government" by portraying "local government in its depth and breadth" (585, 597). Miller also discusses this educational function of Victorian literature in his influential *The Novel and the Police* (1988), making a compelling, albeit one-sided, case for fiction as a form of bureaucratic training. Crucially, Miller proposes that

[46] During this era of transformation not only in administrative statecraft but also in British society at large, story-telling helped people make sense of their "unprecedented experiences" (Williams, *English Novel*, 28), and narrative fiction in particular allowed readers to "clarify their own experiences" and "broaden their own horizons" (Lukács 56).

[47] The most interesting nineteenth-century literary guidebook for civil servants is perhaps Taylor's *The Statesman* (1836), an equivocal account of the civil service which doubled as a "political satire on the arts of rising" and a "real mixture of advice and warning" (Sullivan 71). Educational literary texts geared towards prospective colonial civil servants were also produced during this period, from John Briggs's *Letters Addressed to a Young Person in India* (1828) to Georg Otto Trevelyan's *The Competition Wallah* (1864).

> despite or by means of its superficially hostile attitude to bureaucracy, a novel like *Bleak House* is profoundly concerned to train us—as, at least since the eighteenth century, play usually trains us for work—in the sensibility for inhabiting the new bureaucratic, administrative structures. (76)

In short, Miller suggests that "the Victorian novel establishes a little bureaucracy of its own" in the shape of a drawn-out and structurally convoluted plot, the navigation of which prepared Victorian readers for inhabiting bureaucratic structures by instilling an acceptance of deferred gratification and textual intricacy (88). Whilst Miller's analysis is helpful in that it spotlights the educational function of Victorian literature, his claim that fiction helped consolidate disciplinary state power puts a very one-sided (pessimistic) spin on this function, completely disregarding the potentially empowering aspect of fictional narratives that prime readers for real-life encounters with government institutions.

There were clearly incentives for for British officialdom in establishing a baseline bureaucratic literacy in the Victorian populace. And yet, as indicated above, comprehending institutional mechanisms is a precondition for agency in the bureaucratic field; for this reason, narrative fiction which underlined the importance of bureaucratic know-how in the emergent administrative state culture may be presumed to have empowered civilian Victorians to some extent vis-à-vis professional bureaucrats.[48] Indeed, the cultural influence of Martineau and Dickens as commentators on Victorian officialdom suggests that administrative fiction played a large part in bureaucratically educating non-bureaucrats. Political scientist Scott observes that ordinary civilians became reliant upon professional "guide[s]" such as teachers, notaries, clerks, and lawyers with the rise of the "new state culture" (*Seeing*, 72); I suggest that novelists may be added to this list of different types of bureaucratic "guides."

The bureaucratic manual or guidebook comes in various shapes and guises. It lives on in contemporary media ecologies in everything from literature—e.g. the Chinese popular genre of "officialdom literature"—to online tutorials. For instance, as demonstrated in a recent article by Erica Weiss, young people seeking to avoid military conscription in modern-day Israel make use of a "body of knowledge, a guide of best practices" made available through forums on the internet and by "personal consultants, who are experts on the bureaucratic process" (20). As Weiss observes, such pragmatic information-sharing practices constitute a form of "para-bureaucratic praxis," which "demonstrates that bureaucracy is not the exclusive purview of the state, but can be deployed against it" (21). Bringing this

[48] Miller's conceptualisation of play as a form of indoctrination is supported by Ranajit Guha's study of the role of government stimulus in an expanding colonial administration: "[i]n the first place, [the state] trains the subjects in the use of the institutions of colonial government, rewarding the learners" (185).

perspective to bear on Victorian administrative fiction, a delicious irony may be found in the manner in which the work of Dickens and Conrad turns the spotlight on the information state, by inspecting official institutions and identifying various forms of maladministration. I do not mean to imply that Victorian administrative fiction should be thought of as a "para-bureaucratic praxis" because I think this would be stretching the concept of bureaucracy a bit too far. Rather, I propose that the administrative fiction of this era may be read as a literary mode of "state play," a term coined by Davina Cooper to describe the type of immersive educational experiences provided by "simulated governmental and institutional fora," that are designed to expand awareness and change attitudes towards state institutions, often with the goal of promoting agential participation in state systems (159). Cooper's discussion of state play is germane to the present study in that it spotlights the value of play as an educational mode of knowledge production about the administrative state. *Literary state play*, then, is a concept that I use to describe the popular form of knowledge-production about the administrative field that I wish to delineate in both Victorian and modernist fiction.

Crucially, as Weber aptly puts it, one of the effects of the "peculiar impersonal character" of bureaucracy is that it is "easily made to work for anybody who knows how to gain control over it" (*From Max Weber*, 229). Weber makes this observation with respect to political history but it rings true also for the domain of street-level bureaucracy, insofar as bureaucratic systems and mechanisms can be "made to work" by bureaucratically-literate individuals who know how to control them.[49] In this respect, the rise of administrative state culture threatened to disrupt relations between different socio-economic classes. In the words of Weber, bureaucratisation unsettled traditional social structures and hierarchies because it "destroyed structures of domination which were not rational" (*Economy*, 1002–3). Indeed, much as the nineteenth century spawned bureaucratic horror stories about the victimisation of ordinary citizens, it also gave rise to its inverse: stories of proletarian empowerment via state bureaucracy which, from the perspective of the ruling classes, carried a sense of horror—the spectre of work-shy paupers exploiting loopholes in the Poor Law system, or, at the turn of the century, the fear of socialists gaining positions of strength in metropolitan municipal bodies and thus taking control of the country.

Given the dizzying nature of the emergent administrative state culture, the question "where, or what, is the administrative state?" had practical and political implications in

[49] However, Weber also emphasises that, "[t]he question is always who controls the existing bureaucratic machinery. And such control is possible only in a very limited degree to persons who are not technical specialists" (*Economy*, 224).

Victorian Britain. In his discussion of the affordances of administrative fiction for students of public administration, Waldo tempers expectations by conceding that "reading novels is not an economical way to achieve an adequate 'cognitive map' of organization and administration" (4); however, for the Victorian non-bureaucrat, it was perhaps the most economical method available. Whilst I draw primarily on Cooper's concept of state play in my analysis of the pedagogic dimension of long-nineteenth-century administrative fiction, the political dimensions of this cultural phenomenon become clearer if it is also understood in light of Fredric Jameson's concept of an *aesthetic of cognitive mapping*, which he defines as a "pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the subject with some new and heightened sense of its place in [a] system" (*Postmodernism*, 53). Jameson describes this aesthetic as a means of combating socio-spatial disorientation in "late" capitalism, the navigation of which requires new "perceptual equipment" (38). Tying the predicament of socio-spatial disorientation to late capitalism, Jameson is exceedingly non-committal about what the proposed aesthetic of cognitive mapping might actually comprise, professing: "I am not even sure how to imagine the kind of art I want to propose here, let alone affirm its possibility" ("Cognitive," 347). However, as indicated above, Victorian administrative state culture similarly made for a disorienting and conceptually challenging "system," and literary state play constituted a useful means of learning to cognitively map it.

Of course, Victorian civilians had different starting points and different objectives in seeking to navigate the emergent administrative state culture, linked to factors such as class, gender, civil status, and political convictions. In modern societies, as Herzfeld notes, it would seem that everybody has a bureaucratic horror story to tell. However, the rise of administrative state culture in Britain clearly affected people from different walks of life in diverse ways, and as Bruce Robbins aptly observes in his study of literary representations of the welfare state, "the empowering of professionalized bureaucrats is not, after all, a self-evident evil" (84). Referencing feminist analyses of the rise of the welfare state in the twentieth century, Robbins especially highlights the "positive meaning of state and professional intervention for working-class women" (84). This point is well taken. Whilst the present study concentrates on the bureaucrat-client dyad, I will remain attuned to the differences between various types of non-bureaucrats, and their differing relationships with the state.

Certain individuals, such as illiterates, may be expected to have been especially disadvantaged within the emergent administrative state culture. And yet, whilst bureaucratic literacy is closely linked to the ability to read and write, the idea of a direct correlation

between literacy and bureaucratic literacy is consistently problematised in the works of fiction examined in the present study. Indeed, the unexpected bureaucratic agency of otherwise relatively disempowered characters in long-nineteenth-century administrative fiction is a large part of what makes these narratives exciting to study. In an 1859 essay titled "Bureaucracy" in *The Rambler*, Richard Simpson observed that "[t]he poorer classes are already administered bureaucratically," and warned that "[t]he little end of the wedge is in, and a speculative systematic statesman may any day find occasion to drive it deeper" (122). If, as Simpson suggests, Victorian upper and middle classes had fewer dealings with state functionaries than the "poorer classes," then this also suggests that the poor would have had greater opportunity, and greater reason, to develop some form of bureaucratic capital, so as to avoid "the little end of the wedge."

The distribution of bureaucratic capital has historically been determined by several factors, including not only class, but also gender. Delineating a feminist theory of the state, Wendy Brown writes that the domain of politics and public administration "has been more exclusively limited to men than any other realm of endeavour and has been more intensely, self-consciously masculine than most other social practices" (*Manhood*, 4). Given that officialdom was historically a male preserve, fictional portraits of public administration likely constituted an especially important educational resource for women during the long nineteenth century. Whilst "bureaucratic survival manuals for women" first appeared in the twentieth century when women increasingly entered the civil service (Ferguson 187), Victorian print culture gave women "access to different types of knowledge" that were otherwise hard to come by (Flint 11, 81), including bureaucratic literacy. The importance of bureaucratic literacy is indicated in a late-eighteenth-century coming-of-age novel such as Frances Burney's *Evelina: Or The History of A Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778), which highlights gendered differences in experiential knowledge of legal-bureaucratic matters when Evelina (coquettishly) relates that Lord Orville, her fiancé, "would then have spoken of *settlements*; but I assured him, I was almost ignorant of the word" (380). A more critical cognitive mapping of the intersection of patriarchy and state power may be found in a novel such as Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria* (1798), which critiques the fact that women had "no voice in framing" the legal system (137).

Public administration has been the subject of intense scrutiny in feminist scholarship over the past decades. Scholars have theorised the "masculinisation" of bureaucratic authority (Franzway et al, 46) and the importance of "[g]rasping the ways in which institutions reflect, reinforce, and structure unequal gender norms" (Krook and Mackay 6). Feminist

commentators such as Rosemary Pringle have argued that "while the rational-legal or bureaucratic form presents itself as gender-neutral, it actually constitutes a new kind of patriarchal structure" (88). However, other feminist scholars find that "bureaucracy's involvement with masculine dominance does not require that bureaucratic power itself be masculinist, only that it be an effective instrument of domination and that the policies it executes are gendered" (Brown, "Finding," 28). Gendered meanings and expectations of state bureaucracy changed dramatically over the long nineteenth century, especially with the introduction of female state functionaries (or "white blouse" workers) during the final decades of the nineteenth century. Women gained formal public roles in the wake of an Act of Parliament in 1869 which granted women ratepayers the right to vote in local government elections. Initially, women served primarily as inspectors on school boards and Poor-Law boards, as well as municipal, district, and parish councils, and as telegraphists and clerks in the civil service (Pugh, *State*, 56).[50]

However, the question of the introduction of women civil servants barely registers in the works of administrative fiction that I explore in this dissertation. Wells's utopian novel is the only text in my corpus that features a female bureaucrat. My discussion of bureaucracy and gender is therefore oriented towards questions concerning the bureaucratic agency of female non-bureaucrats, which is more germane to these works of fiction. Whilst many of the female non-bureaucrats in the narratives examined in the thesis display a high degree of bureaucratic literacy (which goes against the powerful stereotype that Victorian women lived sheltered existences), gender disparities are also reflected insofar as female bureaucratic inexperience is shown to have fatal consequences. In addition to interrogating the gendered distribution of bureaucratic know-how in representations of administrative state culture in long-nineteenth-century fiction, the dissertation will examine how these stories perpetuate or create "image[s] of masculinity in public administration" (Stivers 7). Here it should also be noted that female authors are conspicuous by their absence in the canon of great writers on bureaucracy. Given the masculinised writing of the state in not only fiction but also through a genre such as as the "bureaucratic memoir" (Grewal 609), it is especially important to bring attention to pioneering female writers on administrative fiction, such as Martineau, as well as the treatment of state bureaucracy in the work of later women writers such as Virginia Woolf, which will be discussed briefly in my conclusion chapter.

[50] For a comprehensive account of the history of women in the British civil service, see Glew.

As indicated above, I propose that Victorian administrative fiction is defined by an impulse to make the emergent bureaucratic landscape familiar. By the turn of the twentieth century however, ordinary citizens were thoroughly immersed in the now more fully developed administrative state culture. In part through the efforts of writers such as Martineau and Dickens, "bureaucracy" and "red tape" had become household words. This increasing habituation to state bureaucracy changed the conditions for writing administrative fiction. This shift may be understood in light of Bourdieu's suggestion that the "state-made man" (*On the State*, 108)—that is, the bureaucratic native who is utterly at home with the state—is prevented from actively questioning state forms by "the intuitive half-understanding that springs from [...] familiarity with the finished state" ("From the King's," 31). In modernity, Bourdieu argues, people have gained an "immediate mastery of state things"—we have come to "understand the state perfectly"—and yet, for this reason we "understand nothing about it" (*On the State*, 108). In other words, if Victorian civilians faced the challenge of learning about state bureaucracy, then Britons at the turn of the twentieth century, who had been born into a fully-fledged administrative state culture, instead faced the challenge of unlearning what had become second nature. This problem of perception and cognition—the condition of the "state-made man" as articulated by Bourdieu—is at the heart of the modernist engagement with administrative state culture. This, then, is the second mode of literary state play that my thesis explores—one which emphasises defamiliarisation rather than familiarisation.

Competing with Officiality and Papereality

The authors examined in the present study were not simply seeking to influence the development of the administrative field or to provide salutary lessons in the art of navigating state bureaucracy, but they were also in it for themselves, so to speak, and for their art. This is especially evident with Dickens and Conrad, whose persistent critiques of state bureaucracy were inextricably linked to their celebration of narrative fiction. That is, these writers situated literature as a superior alternative to the state's informational mode of accounting for the social world. Dubois suggests that the antagonism of artists and writers towards the state is in part a product of the way in which the notion of artistic creation was constructed in opposition to state involvement, with the cultural field's crystallisation through a rejection of both economic logic and state control (Dubois, *Politique*, 12–3). During the nineteenth century, this tension between literature and the state was heightened by the state's expansion, or

intrusion, into the domain of print culture, with the rise of what Oz Frankel terms "print statism," whereby the "publication of official documents became part of governance" (*States*, 9, 28). As Frankel's study shows, the official print culture that arose in nineteenth-century Britain became a "cultural force" that in turn influenced the development of literary genres (30). Indeed, official information genres, such as censuses, registers, and commissioned inquiries, became fixtures of Victorian culture at the same time as realist "social problem" fiction arose, constituting parallel, if not competing, textual modes of representing the social world. According to Sullivan, who posits "a *mutually beneficial* relationship between literature and bureaucracy," literature and state bureaucracy may be understood as "affiliated" discourses (6, 9). However, the present dissertation will delineate and explore not only the supportive, but also the antagonistic and competitive dynamics of the relationship between literature and administrative textual forms.[51]

The conjunctions between nineteenth-century fiction and official information genres have been observed by numerous Victorianists, and the competitive edge has also frequently been noted. Patrick Brantlinger traces a "pattern of mutual development in subject matter" between early-Victorian Blue Books and novels (30); Frankel describes nineteenth-century state functionaries, journalists, and authors as having "battled and dialogued in an effort to document social predicaments" (*States*, 12); Goodlad describes novelists and official statisticians as "powerful rivals for epistemological authority" (*Victorian*, 19); Carolyn Velenga Berman spotlights the "rivalry" between popular literature and parliamentary publishing (2); and Nicholas Freeman describes late-nineteenth-century authors as "consciously compet[ing]" with official statisticians (41). Building on these analyses, the present dissertation argues that long-nineteenth-century authors were competing with officialdom for authority and symbolic capital in the field of symbolic production. The rise of the administrative state inspired certain writers (e.g. Martineau) to explicitly align their writing with official informational practices, but it also provoked a contestatory and competitive literary response, with writers such as Dickens and Conrad questioning the epistemological validity of official documentary accounts of the social world and proclaiming the relative superiority of narrative fiction. In other words, the very proximity of literary and administrative textual forms (at least in terms of subject matter) prompted rivalry and distancing tactics, as well as direct alliances and other forms of alignment.

[51] On the relationship between literature and bureaucratic textuality in the nineteenth century, see also Bryce Traister 78, David Rosen and Aaron Santesso 10, and Maurice. S. Lee.

The concentrated engagement with state bureaucracy in long-nineteenth-century fiction is not only an effect of the author's own professional relationship with textuality, or indeed an effect of the pressing need to cognitively map the emergent administrative state culture, but it is also a consequence of the fundamental fact that textual administrative practices are integral to the state's manner of "seeing" the social world, to cite James C. Scott's influential monograph *Seeing like a State* (1998). Indeed, the modern administrative state presupposes the use of writing, inasmuch as writing, as opposed to orality, is the medium of bureaucracy. Numeours prominent scholars have, in fact, argued that the modern state is "constituted through writing" (Gupta 143).[52] According to Michael Mann, the very technology of writing arose as an "infrastructural power" of (city-)states, before it spread to civil society and became a source of symbolic power that state and non-state agents fought for (193–94). This struggle arguably peaked in the nineteenth and twentieth century, at the zenith of text-based state administration and popular print culture, before the emergence and increasing dominance of digital "infrastructure" and new media forms in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.

During the long nineteenth century, officialdom alone possessed the technological-infrastructural capacity to produce numerate information and documentation about the population; it was also alone in producing texts that were "official." The rise of the administrative state was not only a matter of the state's bureaucratisation, but it also involved a process of "officialization" of various institutions and practices (Bourdieu, *On the State*, 373), through the segregation of "official activity as something distinct from the sphere of private life" (Weber, *Economy*, 957). Various societal practices were "officialised" by becoming incorporated into the state apparatus, including textual genres such as reports on parliamentary sittings, but also institutions such as the police force, with Sir Robert Peel's Metropolitan Police Act of 1829, and the East India Company, which was gradually incorporated into the state apparatus over the first half of the nineteenth century before it was replaced by the India Office in 1858.[53] Paralleling the popularisation of the word "bureaucracy," the term "official" also gained greater currency in the nineteenth century, reflecting the increasing importance of this social and discursive category. Numerous

[52] On the links between statehood and writing, see Weber, *From Max Weber*, 197; Bourdieu, *On the State*, 8; Vismann 1; Joyce, "Filing," 107; and Bennett and Joyce 14. Jack Goody stresses that "complex forms of government are possible without [writing]" (91), and that theories of state development are often Eurocentric, "skat[ing] over important differences among earlier states" and applying the term "'bureaucracy' in blanket manner" (125–26).

[53] On officialisation during the early modern period, see Sullivan 17, 28.

cognates of "official" appeared in the mid-nineteenth century, such as "officialise" (1832), "officialism" (1849), "officialdom" (1855), and "officialese" (1884), many of which have subsequently fallen out of use (*OED*). In other words, during the nineteenth century, "officiality"—a term used by Carlyle in *On Heroes* (1841) and *Past and Present* (1843) (*On Heroes*, 207; *Past*, 43)—was recognised as a distinct socio-cultural phenomenon or category.

If, as Bourdieu declares, the state is "the place from which the official is spoken" (*On the State*, 55), then, by the same token, information genres are the media through which the administrative state speaks. Whereas official textuality has a longer history—think of the official seal used in Britain since the eleventh century, signifying the sovereign's approval of the document—the nineteenth century is remarkable for its proliferation of official text types and its sheer mass of textual production. As Britain developed into a modern administrative state culture, official text types became more clearly demarcated. This segregation of official forms of writing was achieved by various stylistic, paratextual, and institutional inventions and practices, where "looking official" (Gitelman ix) was quite as important as the "rhetoric of the official" (Bourdieu, *On the State*, 44).[54] Drawing on Jacques Rancière's analysis of scientific discourses, one might say that official discourse was partly constituted through a "*poetics of knowledge*," a set of "literary procedures" or stylistic features that combine to distinguish official textuality (8). Seen in this light, "officiality" may be regarded as a discursive category akin to "fictionality" or "factuality," categories which became increasingly salient in the nineteenth century with the precipitous increase of textual production.

Some of the writers examined in the present thesis challenge "the official representation of the official" (Bourdieu, "Rethinking," 55), whereas others effectively become what Bourdieu terms "heroes of the official," by portraying state practices in ways that encourage people to "believe in the official" (*On the State*, 29). It is not surprising that authors such as Dickens and Conrad set out to compete with the official pen, so to speak, or that Martineau (and to a lesser extent Wells) seemingly wished to borrow it, given the far-reaching influence of state writing. As Thomas Richards puts it, the documentary practices of the Victorian British state combined to produce a "system of representational order—an order of social imagination so powerful that it [could], in effect, construct social reality" (16). Administrative institutions reshaped the social world through acts of official recording, such as the production official maps and statistical surveys. Writers understandably responded to

[54] For an illuminating discussion of early-nineteenth-century radical journalists' commentary on the "absurdity of the rhetoric of officialdom," see Vargo 92.

this mighty "representational order" with considerable interest—and, in certain cases, resentfulness.

Scholars of administrative statecraft such as Scott have argued that official information not only shapes social reality, but that it also creates what Scott terms "administrative fictions," entities that have "no social existence whatever outside the document" (*Seeing*, 68). In other words, bureaucratic documentation produces a text-based virtuality akin to a fictional world—a "papereality" to borrow political scientist David Dery's coinage (687). This phenomenon of what I term *administrative worlding* was recognised already by Marx in the article "Justification of the Correspondent from the Mosel" (1843), in which he notes that the state functionaries create a "bureaucratic reality" that stands "alongside the actual reality" (345). That is, Marx describes a type of virtual information world that represents a forerunner of the larger and more complex "data worlds" (Bode and Goodlad) that are generated today by both state and non-state organisations using digital information storage and computational tools.

Marx's concern in the aforementioned article is primarily to illustrate how civilians become subject to the peculiar logic of a bureaucratic papereality that is constructed through official documentation. Crucially, because the state functionaries are bound to privilege "the reality depicted in the dossiers, which is official and therefore of a state character," the civilians concerned in the matter are forced to live in that reality as well ("Justification," 344).[55] As I will show in later chapters, the ontological effects of administrative documentations is a major theme in the work of writers such as Dickens and Conrad. Frequently, these writers describe administrative worlding as a mode of symbolic violence that disempowers non-bureaucrats. However, it should be noted that administrative documents and registers in many cases function as interfaces that are open to inscription and manipulation not only by state functionaries, but also by civilian non-bureaucrats. Indeed, as Michel de Certeau notes, the limitations of administrative epistemology—officialdom's reliance on "data"—opens up a space of indeterminacy that may be manipulated in various ways (32). In other words, ordinary citizens can participate in the production of administrative worlding effects.[56] This form of documentary agency is portrayed in several of the works of fiction that will be examined in the present study.

[55] For further discussions of Marx's analysis of bureaucratic realities, see Ben Kafka 116 and Robinson 24–5.
[56] As Jane Caplan and John Torpey observe, laypeople have historically "taken up the state's tools" to engage in forgery and fraud, creating "new identities and names, a parallel world of revised or resistant identities and relationships" (6). Here, Caplan and Torpey describe the worlding dimension of official identification practices

The individual and collective agency of civilian non-bureaucrats in administrative state cultures is underlined by Graeber in his reflections upon the bureaucratic tactics employed by members of a rural Madagascan community:

> There were government offices, of course, and people sat in them typing and registering things, but it was mainly just for show—they were barely paid, received no materials (they had to buy their own paper), everyone lied on their tax assessments, and no one really paid the taxes anyway. [...] Yet everyone would talk about the government as if it actually existed, hoping outsiders wouldn't notice[.] (*Utopia*, 62–3)

Here, the ebbing of colonial state power has left a vacuum that the local community safeguards by preserving the empty shell of the decrepit institutional framework. The Madagascan quasi-clerks produce a holographic state presence, masquerading as state functionaries and tapping away at faux-official typewriters in the erstwhile locales of an absconded state. This thought-provoking *performance* of state administration shows not only the creativity and individual and collective agency that may be found in administrative contexts, but it also supports Bourdieu's provocation about the illusory nature of the state, which exists "because people believe that it exists" (see above).

Whilst bureauracy certainly provides avenues for creativity and agency on the part of civilian non-bureaucrats, the bureaucratic protocol fundamentally represents a mode of symbolic violence.[57] Graeber describes the "police truncheon" as the ultimate guarantee of "the state's bureaucratic imperative for imposing simple administrative schema," and highlights that state violence has often been directed towards actors who have "insist[ed] on alternative schemas or interpretations" ("Dead Zones," 120–21). Here one begins to see the importance of literary texts that break with or challenge the administrative state's modes of describing and structuring social reality. Whilst Martineau and Wells celebrate the epistemological and organisational benefits of administrative technologies, Dickens and Conrad provide trenchant critiques of bureaucratic textuality, highlighting the state's symbolic violence by debunking various forms of administrative worlding, not least by tauntingly indicating the commensurability of official paperealities and fictional worlds.

In the present thesis, I will examine various ways in which Victorian and modernist writers engaged with the worlding dimension of administrative statecraft, as a part of my broader investigation of literary responses to the rise of the administrative state. During this

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as arising from fraudsters' co-option of administrative tools, when those fraudsters are in fact only latching onto and utilising the ontological mechanisms that inhere in official documentation.

[57] The symbolic power of administrative practices is such that, within institutional contexts, they effectively "limit [...] reality to that which can be documented" (Coutin 30).

period, official informational accounts of social reality not only came to shape the lives of Britons in myriad ways, but they also reinforced the state's presence in the social world. For this reason, studying how authors positioned their work in relation to administrative textualies and paperealities helps illuminate the relationship between literary and official narratives about the state during the long nineteenth century.

Chapter Two

Popularising State Bureaucracy: Harriet Martineau's Quasi-Official Fiction

Introduction

Harriet Martineau made her name with *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832–34), a series of twenty-five didactic tales, published in monthly numbers, "popularising" the economic theories of Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, David Ricardo, Thomas Malthus, and James Mill.[58] This series was an astonishing success, reaching a wide range of readers and making her one of the best-selling authors of the 1830s (Caine 105; Hoecker-Drysdale 33–4). Martineau's novellas from this period deal with various social and political questions, frequently addressing matters concerning state institutions and administrative reform. Indeed, Martineau was not only interested in popularising the ideas of political economists, but also in familiarising her readers with issues concerning official institutions. Martineau addresses this subject in the novella *The Scholars of Arneside*—from the series *Illustrations of Taxation* (1834)—which follows an outspoken law reporter who comes to face intimidation from corrupt lawyers. The valiant reporter defiantly continues to expose legal malfeasance, championing newspapers as "almost the only guides of the subjects of the State as to their duty to the State" (104). By portraying journalistic coverage of official institutions in this celebratory manner—highlighting its instructive, or "guiding," function—Martineau's mouthpiece indicates the value of popular print culture more broadly as a pedagogic resource for the "subjects of the State." And here the link to Martineau's own didactic fiction is not the only obvious literary analogue—one thinks also of Dickens, who was transitioning at this time from working as a legal and parliamentary reporter into writing literary sketches that often dealt with legal and parliamentary affairs.

[58] This type of popularising didactic tale was an important fictional genre in early-nineteenth-century Britain, pioneered by writers such as Martineau, Jane Marcet, and Hannah More.

In *Poor Laws and Paupers Illustrated* (henceforth in this chapter, for the sake of brevity, *Paupers*), a series of four novellas published in 1833 and 1834, Martineau directed her attention as a literary "guide" to the institution of the Poor Law. These novellas were produced in support of a Royal Commission of Inquiry into the operations of the Poor Law system, an inquiry which had been commissioned by the newly elected Whig government. This inquiry would usher in the New Poor Law, an administrative reform that established a new centralised system of poor relief that laid the foundations for various later projects of civil registration and public health management. Indeed, the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 was a radical departure in British statecraft which challenged the old order of "local discretion under permissive laws," marking the onset of the paradigm of professionalised and centralised administration (Poynter xxi). The diversified publishing campaign that came out of the Commissioners' inquiry also represents a pioneering experiment in disseminating official information to a wider readership.

Examining Martineau's involvement in this project thus constitutes a highly fruitful starting point for the present study of British administrative fiction and of the relation between literature and administrative statecraft in the long nineteenth century. Martineau's *Paupers* holds great interest as a rare case of narrative fiction commissioned by British state functionaries as a part of an official inquiry (Vargo 54). *Paupers* also merits close examination as an early example of administrative fiction in British literature. In these novellas, Martineau depicts a social sphere that was unusually bureaucratised for its time, and thus foreshadows later developments both in British fiction and in society at large.[59]

At the time of writing *Paupers*, Martineau was firmly established as an important public commentator and was becoming increasingly embedded in official circles. In 1832, she moved from her family home in Norwich to London, settling in Fludyer Street, Westminster, a street that ran parallel with Downing Street, and which was demolished in 1864 to make way for the new premises of the Foreign Office. Here Martineau was "waited upon by ministers, secretaries, and the Lord Chancellor himself" (Webb, *Harriet*, 126), with both Whigs and Tories petitioning her to "popularise" their political projects (Claybaugh, *Novel*, 2). Martineau was also lionised by periodicals such as *Cobbett's Magazine* which publicised the fact that she was rubbing shoulders with ministers of state (Huzel 87). Martineau was prevented from entering into partliamentary politics herself due to the patriarchal nature of officialdom. In a letter to a friend, Martineau proclaimed that she would do "something with

[59] Martineau was not the first author to depict Poor Law administration—there was a large pamphlet literature on this subject both before and after the passing of the New Poor Law.

the pen, since no other means of action in politics are in a woman's power" (qtd. in Webb, *Harriet*, 114). And yet, using her authorial pen, Martineau could apparently do things that statesmen and politicians could not accomplish themselves.

The fact that Martineau's services as a populariser were so eagerly sought after by statesmen may be understood as a consequence of the challenges facing the fledgling British information state. Public relations officers did not yet exist as such, and a "populariser" such as Martineau was therefore a "very useful person to have around" (Webb, *Harriet*, 124–27). Indeed, Martineau's brand of popularising fiction had succeeded where other informational and didactic publishing projects had failed, provoking Whig politician Lord Brougham into lambasting his Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge—publishers of educational literature geared towards the working class—for letting itself get "driven out of the field by a little deaf woman at Norwich" (qtd. in Clarke 436).[60] As Martineau observes in her memoirs, it was Lord Brougham—an important figure not only in parliamentary publishing, but also in the House of Lords—who invited her to "illustrate the poor-laws, in aid of the Commission then appointed to the work of poor-law inquiry" (*Harriet*, 1: 219).[61] This Royal Commission of Inquiry was spearheaded by Oxford professor of political economy Nassau Senior, a Whig politician and co-founder of the Statistical Society of London, who worked closely with the Commission's secretary, Edwin Chadwick, former secretary to the influential legal thinker and institutional critic Jeremy Bentham. In order to produce the required evidentiary grounds, twenty-six travelling assistant commissioners visited 3,000 out of the 15,000 parishes and townships in England and Wales, using questionnaires to gather opinions *en masse* (Henriques 26–7). The commissioners were then tasked with processing this copious material, compiling a report in which they also proposed remedial measures. Senior and Chadwick noted that nobody but themselves could "be masters of the contents of all this evidence," and that it was "necessary that it should be in print," "any use of it in manuscript being exceedingly fatiguing" (*Poor Law*, 69).[62] The deluge of official and semi-official print material that resulted from the inquiry makes for a highly revealing case study of the dynamics of the emergent official print culture, one which is particularly interesting to consider from a literary standpoint given that it included Martineau's series of novellas.

[60] Richard Altick suggests that the deficiencies of Victorian "propaganda agencies" are patent in the "laborious treatises of the SDUK" (131, 152).
[61] Although Martineau's account of her role in the Poor Law reforms cannot always be taken at face value, it offers valuable insights into her attitude towards this undertaking. In the absence of conflicting accounts of her involvement, I will also accept the main features of her account.
[62] The appendices to the report ran to nearly 5000 pages (Brundage 65).

Crucially, Martineau's novellas gained a "quasi-official status" inasmuch as they served as an unofficial addendum to the official report (Vargo 54). In this respect, Martineau's novellas are emblematic of the conjunction of literature and administrative statecraft in nineteenth-century Britain. And yet, *Paupers* has "received scant attention from historians" (Huzel 4) and is often passed over in literary scholarship. Robert K. Webb is perhaps indicative of the broad critical tenor in his curt dismissal: "[w]ith *Poor Laws and Paupers Illustrated* it is unnecessary to stop long" (*Harriet*, 128). However, as indicated above, the circumstances of the germination of *Paupers* are well worth exploring for what Martineau's stint as a quasi-official author tells us about the relationship of official and popular print culture at this time, when fiction was apparently viewed as a viable mode of disseminating official information.

Martineau's Poor Law novellas have often been dismissed as mere propaganda, and interpreted as fully in line with the design of the New Poor Law, the administrative reform that brought a move from "outdoor" relief to the establishment of the infamous workhouse system. The workhouse—a paradigmatic Victorian state institution—came to represent a symbol of the British state, not least because it represented a decidedly non-bureaucratic solution to the administrative problems involved in poor relief. Yet, Martineau's *Paupers* not only advocated for the workhouse system, but it also explored properly administrative solutions to the problem of pauperism, championing bureaucratisation and centralisation as key elements in a well-functioning administrative system. Despite its character of a non-administrative solution to an administrative problem, the New Poor Law was in fact a part of the emergent bureaucratic mode of administration. The new system was in this respect Janus-faced: in economic terms, it helped to usher in the era of liberal capitalism (Kidd 5), but, in administrative terms, it brought an expansion of the central administrative apparatus, to organise and inspect the new workhouse system.

The lack of scholarly recognition of Martineau as a writer on public administration goes back at least as far as Webb's 1960 biography, in which she is described as a "better revolutionist than administrator" (*Harriet*, 89). Goodlad similarly depreciates Martineau's bureaucratic imagination, reading selectively and downplaying the significance and depth of her literary interrogation of administrative issues (*Victorian*, 53–60, 71). And whilst Martineau's administrative fiction has recently come to be re-evaluated and illuminated by scholars such as Gregory Vargo and Colleen Willenbring, even Vargo's edifying discussion fails to accentuate the crucial point that Martineau endorses administrative centralisation in her tales (58). As the present chapter will show, Martineau's *Paupers*, written during the spell

of administrative enthusiasm that was inspired by the passing of the Reform Act, both "illustrates" the flaws of the Old Poor Law and envisions alternative, more sophisticated modes of administration.

Martineau's series of novellas is interesting not only as an experiment in literary information management and as political commentary, but also as a pioneering work of administrative fiction. Centring on interactions between administrators and paupers within a complex institutional system, *Paupers* constitutes an important forerunner of the type of bureaucratic horror story that was made famous by Dickens. In fact, Martineau's Poor Law novellas were a direct influence on Dickens's earliest fictional representations of state institutions, including his representation of workhouses in *Oliver Twist* (1838). In this chapter, then, following Valerie Sanders, who observes that Martineau "explored new areas for the novel to claim" (195), I highlight Martineau's achievements as a pioneering writer of administrative fiction. By describing paupers and administrators whose lives revolve around matters of administration, *Paupers* characterises the nascent phenomenon of a bureaucratic *system*—its mechanisms, its spaces, and its socio-cultural ramifications. Martineau's accomplishment with *Paupers* thus complicates the scholarly consensus that the first fictional works of this kind appeared on the continent, with Balzac's *The Bureaucrats* (*Les Employés*) (1838) often regarded as inaugurating this "new literary *genre*" (Diani, "Balzac's," 42). Though Balzac's impact on the evolution of this "genre" is greater than Martineau's, it is significant that *The Bureaucrats* was preceded by several years by *Paupers*, a series of novellas "by a little deaf woman at Norwich," to borrow Brougham's expression.

Before analysing Martineau's representation of Poor Law administration in greater depth, I will discuss her role in the Poor Law inquiry. In the following section, I will examine the rise of the genre of the official report—the so-called "Blue Book"—over the first half of the nineteenth century, in order to situate Martineau's novellas within the emergent official print culture. I then compare Martineau's *Paupers* to Senior and Chadwick's *Report* in terms of structure and key claims. This mode of comparison accentuates correspondences and divergences between the two texts, serving as a means of teasing out the ways in which official print culture was influenced by developments in narrative fiction during this period and vice versa.[63] I then consider Martineau's method of composition and manner of framing

[63] The fruitfulness of a comparative approach to Martineau's fiction and the writing that she "popularised" has been demonstrated by Joanna Rostek, who explores how Martineau modelled her style of writing on the proto-scientific discourse of political economy (52), and by Claybaugh, who places Martineau's work in relation to reformist political discourse, observing that novelists and reformist writers developed similar discursive techniques in pursuit of a common "representational project" (*Novel*, 6–7).

her fiction when presenting it to the public. As a part of this discussion, I interrogate certain epistemological and ideological dissonances in the discursive construction of official print culture which are accentuated by the quasi-official fiction that it inspired. Building on this analysis, my close readings of Martineau's Poor Law tales further delineate and unpack the many-layered relationship between popular fiction and official print culture in the early nineteenth century.

The Nineteenth-Century Blue Book

The 1832 Royal Commission into the Operation of the Poor Laws greatly influenced Victorian officialdom not only through the reforms that it instigated, but also through the precedent that it set with its modus operandi. The commissioners engaged in an exploratory form of information management using print technology, which took the shape of an "unprecedented public relations campaign" in support of the proposed reforms (Vargo 55). While the commissioners Senior and Chadwick were still preparing the *Poor Law Commissioners' Report*, they were anxious that the proposed bill should receive "all direct and indirect aid that the press and good men can give" (Chadwick, qtd. in Webb, *British*, 125). They therefore collaborated with the SDUK in producing an array of commercially available publications, including Martineau's series of novellas. This choice of publisher—an organisation that was "safely removed from parliamentary politics and therefore free to endorse unpopular changes" (Vargo 40)—is significant because it shows the relative lack of differentiation between official and non-official publishing at this time (a topic which I will discuss in more detail below). Even before the investigation had concluded, extracts of the commissioners' notebooks were available on the market, published in a relatively inexpensive edition, outselling all "other state papers put together," according to the buoyant Chadwick (qtd. in Vargo 55). Once these pamphlets had prepared the ground, a volume was issued that contained "the essence of the evidence in something over four hundred octavo pages," followed by the *Poor Law Commissioners' Report* itself (Webb, *British*, 125).

The seven-volume report in which the commissioners presented their findings in condensed form has been heralded as "one of the classic documents of western social history" (Checkland and Checkland 9). It constituted a new breed of official report, with its impressive scope, analytical rigour, and "air of self-confidence" (Henriques 26). Indeed, in the report, Senior and Chadwick proclaimed that it was "the most extensive, and at the same time the

most consistent, body of evidence that was ever brought to bear on a single subject," presenting information "deriv[ing] from many thousand witnesses" (*Poor Law*, 72). Senior wrote the first part of the report, describing the shortcomings of the extant Poor Law system, and Chadwick wrote the second part, outlining the proposed reforms. Chadwick made the most of this opportunity and produced an "all-embracing plan" for the reform of the Poor Law—"an amazing *tour de force*" that sold uncommonly well (MacDonagh 102), breaking new ground by demonstrating that it was quite possible to become a best-selling author of an official report.

As indicated above, the Poor Law commissioners established a new model for the Royal Commission of Inquiry, of which there were more than 100 between 1832 and 1846 (Hamilton 80). With the Royal Commission coming into vogue as a part of the broader rise of government by information, the so-called Blue Book became a staple of Victorian official print culture. The nineteenth-century Blue Book represents an interesting case study of officialisation, both in terms of the publishing strategies that were developed by Parliamentary printers and publishers at this time, and in terms of the prose style adopted by Royal Commissioners. Gérard Genette notes that "[s]imply the color of the paper chosen for the cover can strongly indicate a type of book" (24). The very colour of the Blue Book may, in this respect, be understood as a marker of textual officiality, delimiting this form of official literature as a separate genre. Parliamentary records had been covered in blue velvet since the 15th century (the *OED* gives 1633 as the first use of the phrase "blue book"), and Victorian official printers retained this paratextual dimension in fashioning the mass-produced official report clothed in blue covering paper. This distinguishing paratextual feature is reminiscent of the similarly centuries-old practice of tying red ribbon around official documents. Interestingly, both of these modes of demarcating official texts inspired terminology that served to describe the state bureaucracy as such: "red tape" came to denote excessive bureaucracy, and "blue book" came to stand for official publications at large, not only those covered in blue.[64] Moreover, by the end of the nineteenth century, the term had also generated

[64] The *OED* gives the following definition of a Blue Book: "(A title given to) any of various books, characteristically bound in blue, and typically containing reports, records, instructions, and the like; spec. such a book containing an official British government publication, such as a report issued by Parliament or the Privy Council, a committee report, etc. Also in extended use." This definition highlights the slipperiness of the term: as the *OED* states, a blue book is only "characteristically" bound in blue (in other words, the term may refer to other forms of official literature), and it only "typically" contains an official report. The term continues to be used in the digital age; the annual United Kingdom National Accounts, compiled by the Office for National Statistics, are published online as *The Blue Book*. The fact that the somewhat imprecise, essentially colloquial, expression "blue book" continues to be used in contemporary official publishing, illustrates the complex dynamics of officialisation.

derived expressions such as "bluebooky" and "blue-bookiness" (the *OED* gives a first use as 1872 / 1909), terms which, alongside "bluebookish" (which is not listed in the *OED* but which Frankel mentions as a late-nineteenth-century coinage) "denote dry, tediously factual texts and individuals," in Frankel's words (*States*, 68). That is to say, the very material and paratextual practices that were employed to demarcate official texts in turn inspired the language that was used to conceptualise administrative state culture. Officialdom's means of differentiating official administrative artefacts gave the state, and its separateness, visibility; this visibility was then linguistically amplified through the colloquial terms that evolved as people sought to elucidate the phenomenon of officiality and state bureaucracy, the very focus on the act of separation and demarcation underlining the state's monopoly on symbolic violence, its power of nomination.

Whilst Victorian Blue Books were marked out as separate from non-official publications, they were also shaped by the conventions and dynamics of print culture at large. As Frankel highlights in his foundational study of "state printism," parliamentary publishing borrowed "sensibilities and language" from popular print culture (*States*, 9). Parliamentary printers had previously sought to replicate manuscripts in their original form when reproducing them in print, but from the 1830s onwards Blue Books were modelled on popular print forms. Parliamentary publications thus increasingly gained "the material appearance of a serial publishing project" (Frankel, *States*, 46). In taking the "commercial press as their paradigm for circulating knowledge" (Frankel, 41), official printers and publishers presumed that official literature would be "similarly consumed" (Frankel, "Blue Books," 314). In lieu of well-honed informational practices, official publications were "subjected to multiple inscriptions as, alternatively, archives, records, journals, and books" (Frankel, 314). That is, the emergent administrative state sought to accomplish two divergent, and often conflicting, ambitions: to provide useful, accessible information, but also to produce comprehensive information (Frankel, *States*, 34).

With the rise of the Blue Book, and of administrative information genres more broadly, there emerged a set of stylistic conventions that constituted a "rhetoric of the official," to borrow Bourdieu's expression, or, what Lisa Gitelman calls an "aesthetics of the official" (ix). In its textual design and in its prose, this official literature emulated (proto-)scientific discursive forms, with the unstated aim of presenting official information as "authorless facts" (Frankel, *States*, 33). In the absence of actual statistical data, Frankel suggests, nineteenth-century official reports affected a sense of scientificity in their language and layout, producing a veneer of scientific rigour through a "bureaucratic poetics" (184,

182). That is, consciously or unconsciously, state functionaries and parliamentary printers sought to achieve a sense of officialness via the design and layout of the books they produced. For instance, tabular forms were employed to frame prose as data, and typographic elements were used creatively to suggest an indexical proximity with the source of the information. And yet, at the same time, the language of Victorian official reports was far from consistently bureaucratic or "bluebookish." Scholars who have studied the style of Blue Books emphasise that their authors strove not only to achieve a sense of officiality, but also to appeal to a wide readership (Frankel, *States*, 9). Indeed, Vargo characterises the style of official reports as "scientific rhetoric" interspersed with "anecdotes laced with humor, irony, and dramatic conflict" (56). Furthermore, Vargo suggests that authors of Blue Books "adapted novelistic techniques to bureaucratic writing" in order to "increase popular appeal" (56). This form of stylistic influence worked both ways, insofar as the rise of official print culture generated new impulses in Victorian literature. In fact, as I will show in my close readings, writers such as Martineau and Dickens experimented with "bureaucratic poetics" in their fiction.

Another significant effect of the Victorian state's embrace of print culture was that it changed the conditions for individual Royal Commissioners, by giving rise to the figure of the "official author" (Frankel, *States*, 35). As Frankel puts it, "[p]rint culture afforded state officials and legislators the cultural capital entailed by authorship" (4). That is, widely circulated official publications such as the 1834 *Poor Law Commissioners' Report*, Thomas Babington Macaulay's "Minute upon Indian Education" of 1835, and the Northcote-Trevelyan Report of 1854, placed individual statesmen in the limelight. However, the celebrity status that state functionaries stood to gain as official authors clashed with the discursive production of "authorless" facts, which necessitated a practice of corporate, anonymous authorship. Indeed, as Frankel writes, "[a]t certain moments, the state appeared to dissolve into the subjectivity of office holders and lawmakers, who simply could not resist the opportunity to be authors" (*States*, 33). In other words, the symbolic power of the state was consolidated through the corporate voice that Royal Commissioners developed and were expected to assume. Against this background, we may appreciate the stakes of Martineau's involvement in the publishing campaign that grew out of the Poor Law inquiry. As an author of "quasi-official" fiction, Martineau potentially posed a greater threat to the potency of the aforementioned rhetorical state effects than the rise of the state functionary-cum-official author. My next section will explore how Martineau's *Paupers* threatened to "dissolve" the state into subjectivity.

Martineau's "Govt. Work"

Martineau produced several works of government propaganda in the 1830s—novellas and pamphlets that "popularised" government initiatives and reports—but her first and by far her most significant work of "quasi-official" fiction was *Paupers*. As indicated above, this series of novellas was produced in support of the 1832 Royal Commission on the Poor Law. In order to further the Whigs' chances of passing the prospective Poor Law Act, the novellas had to be published in advance of the parliamentary session that was to act on the recommendations of the Royal Commissioners. Having agreed terms with Lord Brougham, Martineau swiftly wrote the four novellas that comprise *Paupers*: *The Parish*, *The Hamlets*, *The Town*, and *The Land's End*. These novellas were made available during 1833 and 1834 by Martineau's publisher Charles Fox, under the superintendence of the SDUK.[65]

Headhunted by Lord Brougham, the sitting Lord Chancellor, and given access to the uncondensed findings of the inquiry, Martineau was, at least in her own opinion, acting in the capacity of a state functionary when writing her Poor Law novellas. In a letter to her friend Miss Bacon, on June 13, 1833, Martineau writes of "the Govt. work which [she had] undertaken" (qtd. in Webb, *Harriet*, 125). Martineau clearly gloried in her status as a state-backed author whose talents had been "officially acknowledged" (David 43). Writing to William Tait, one of her publishers, she proclaimed: "I have now direct access to the Cabinet, & feel that nothing is so important as to preach my sermons there" (*Selected*, 38), comments that, according to Claudia Oražem, convey a "decidedly exaggerated sense of her significance and influence" (150). At the same time, Martineau was not entirely comfortable with her "association with power" (Webb, *Harriet*, 128), given that the public alliance with the Whigs exposed her to the charge of partisanship. Indeed, Martineau's early decision to refuse a state pension suggests that she did not wish to become an official author on a permanent basis; in her memoirs, Martineau writes that she declined repeated offers of state pensions over the period 1832–1840 since she feared that she would "lose more independence in one way than [she] should gain in another" (Martineau, *Harriet*, 2: 176).

In 1833, while still working on her quasi-official Poor Law novellas, Martineau produced a similar series—*Illustrations of Taxation*—in support of an unpopular house tax reform. In her memoirs, Martineau describes her working relationship with government officials during this period as a matter of collaborative strategising:

[65] On the uncertainty of the dating of the different novellas, see Oražem 143.

> It struck me that some good might be done, and no harm, if my Illustrations [*Illustrations of Taxation*] proceeded *pari passu* with the financial reforms expected from the Whig government; and I spoke on the subject to Lord Drummond, who had just become private secretary to Lord Althorp. I was well acquainted with Mr. Drummond; and it occurred very naturally that I told him that if he knew of any mediated measure which would be aided by illustration, I would help, in all silence and discretion,—provided always that I approved of the scheme. (*Harriet*, 260–61)

These retrospective comments show Martineau willing to write propaganda on demand, covertly, "in all silence and discretion." It is also interesting to note that Martineau's novellas were to be presented to the public "*pari passu*" with official reforms, indicating both simultaneous publication and publication on equal footing, which again underlines the importance of Martineau's contributions, at least in her own estimation. Here, it is worth noting that despite the great disparity between a parliamentary report and a piece of propagandist fiction written on the request of a prominent state functionary, these texts are nonetheless commensurable precisely as works solicited by a state functionary or public institution in support of an official inquiry. Describing Royal Commissions as an "English invention," Bourdieu suggests that such commissions are endowed with "a quasi-official authority," that is bestowed by the state official "who, by asking for it, gave it an authority in advance" (24–6). In this respect, then, there is a basic parity between the authority of an official report and that of Martineau's quasi-official fiction.

By all accounts, Martineau operated as a form of public relations consultant *avant la lettre*, "illustrating" and "popularising" various schemes that met with her approval, but also weighing in with her own expertise. Martineau was made privy to highly confidential material by members of the Cabinet before it had been offered to Parliament, and was apparently consulted by government officials "in regard to principles and methods," as Martineau puts it in her memoirs (*Harriet*, 1: 262). Martineau's autobiographical account is, of course, potentially self-aggrandising—and yet, here it should be noted that writers in the press similarly credited Martineau with "extraordinary influence," making her a "symbol of government policy" (Vargo 54–7). The Radical newspaper *The Poor Man's Guardian* called the Poor Law Bill "the Mother Martineau bill" and there was even speculation in the Whig-affiliated *The True Sun*, for which Dickens was reporting at the time, that Martineau had been credited as the author of the Poor Law Bill at certain parish meetings (qtd. in Huzel 72). In other words, *Paupers* appears to have been conflated with the commissioners' *Report* in public discourse, a tendency in which one senses a derision of the Whigs with misogynist undertones. Indeed, in her memoirs, Martineau intimates that the popular press portrayed the

state officials' collaboration with Martineau as emasculating and ridiculous; that is, she notes that MPs were "taunted" in journalistic coverage "with going to a young lady in Fludyer Street for direction in [their] political conduct" (*Harriet*, 226).

It is hardly surprising that the Whigs' collaboration with a high-profile female writer drew sardonic remarks in the press. It was anomalous at this time for a woman writer to be involved in disseminating the findings of an official inquiry—it was, in fact, unusual for a woman to be doing any form of "Govt. work," to repeat the phrase that Martineau used to describe her role in the Poor Law reform campaign. The patriarchal nature of nineteenth-century officialdom is abundantly clear from the Poor Law commissioners' fundamentally masculine *Report*, in which "no female statements are quoted and we only hear what women have allegedly said or done from male interviewees" (Hamilton 84).[66] The same gender disparity is evident in the discourse on political economy that Martineau sought to popularise with her first series, *Illustrations of Political Economy*. In light of this male dominance, scholars have argued that Marinteau's first series of novellas constituted a subversive and demystifying feminisation of political economy, pointing to the hostile critical reception of Martineau's series as testament to its status as a provocative transgression of gender norms (Roberts 11, 14–15). However, in the case of *Paupers*, the feminising effects cut in a wholly different direction: it was not so much Martineau who suffered misogynous attacks in the press, but rather the Whig architects of the New Poor Law. Crucially, *Paupers* seems to have cast a shadow on the report that it supplemented. The inclusion of works of narrative fiction produced by a female author in the Whigs' informational PR campaign invited pressure onto the masculinist discursive construct of the commissioned report.

The collaborative enterprise had equally unwelcome consequences for Martineau. There was clearly an attraction to being aggrandised in the press as the grey eminence of the New Poor Law; and yet, Martineau came to regret her involvement in the partisan Poor Law debate (Vargo 56). In her memoirs, as mentioned above, Martineau sought to impress readers with the significance of her work as a propagandist, but she lamented her participation in the project, proclaiming, "all connexion with the Diffusion Society, and Lord Brougham, and the Whig government, was so much mere detriment to my usefulness and my influence" (*Harriet*, 1: 221). Nevertheless, Martineau continued to undertake "Govt. work" in the wake of *Paupers*, despite the fact that the series had sold poorly—one of few hiccups in Martineau's

[66] Moreover, the Sub-Commissioners' reports were packed with "sensational statements denouncing the immorality of the female labouring population"—especially in connection with the Bastardy Laws, the repeal of which was on the Whig agenda, "women of all ages, mothers and daughters, are portrayed as conspiring to bring about man's downfall" (Hamilton 84, 86).

illustrious career (Oražem 164).[67] Tellingly, on collaborating with Lord Brougham once more, this time on the production of a pamphlet directed to troublesome unionists, Martineau posed the question: "Should it carry [my] name or not?" (Webb, *Harriet*, 131). Here, one senses that Martineau would, in hindsight, have preferred that *Paupers* had been published anonymously, as "authorless facts," and not as the work of a quasi-official author.

Martineau and Blue Book Fiction

In her memoirs, Martineau writes that she was initially reluctant to undertake the project proposed by Brougham whilst still working on *Illustrations of Political Economy*, and that she was won over by the prospect of the evidence that would be "placed at [her] disposal" (*Harriet*, 1: 166). According to Martineau, then, it was the pull of official information, rather than the prestige of official print culture, that made her accept the commission. By this time, Martineau had already made a practice of consulting Blue Books, as well as the works of political economists, as a part of her method of composition. Before she moved to London, statesmen and politicians frequently sent her Blue Books in the hope that she would popularise their "pet projects" (Webb, *Harriet*, 114–5). Martineau recalls that "Members of Parliament sent down blue books through the post-office, to the astonishment of the postmaster, who one day sent word that I must send for my own share of the mail, for it could not be carried without a barrow" (Martineau, *Harriet*, 1: 179). In fact, when Martineau left Norwich for London, it was partly because her incoming mail exceeded the capacity of the local post office, and because she felt that she would be able to access more "extensive and varied information" in the capital (179). What is remarkable here is not only Martineau's voracious appetite for official information, but also the extent to which Blue Books were circulated and disseminated in a targeted and strategic manner.

Martineau clearly found Blue Books remarkably stimulating; in a letter to her friend William Tait dating to 28 December, 1832, Martineau wrote: "How long I shall go on, I do not know, [...] but I *might* go on for 50 years to come. I have materials for a thousand & one tales before me" (qtd. in Sanders, *Reason*, 49). With her immensely influential first novella series, Martineau helped popularise not only political economy, but also "Blue Book fiction" as a mode of writing. Numerous other early-Victorian authors sourced material from Blue

[67] Webb notes that Martineau's Poor Law tales' "circulation was almost entirely middle-class" (*Harriet*, 124). That is, despite Martineau's intended role as a populariser of the Poor Law Commissioners' report, *Paupers* did not reach beyond the socio-economic groups that might be expected to read official informational publications.

Books, including Elizabeth Barrett, Benjamin Disraeli, Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Kingsley and Frances Trollope.[68] The rise of the Blue Book in the early-nineteenth-century seemed to promise a new method of accounting for the social world, one that could be harnessed by authors. This literary practice, which Martineau pioneered, may be understood as a form of lay (or in Martineau's case quasi-official) second-hand information management. These writers were in effect "changing the facts into fiction," as Sheila Smith aptly puts it in her study of Victorian Blue Book fiction (29).

Martineau's remediating writing practice was later condemned by the late-Victorian critic Leslie Stephen, who described her work as

> a typical instance of the worst possible case of an unhallowed alliance between the artistic and scientific methods, which leads to the degradation of both, though we are almost cheated into admiration by the heroic audacity which tried to convert the "dismal science" into the raw material of romance. ("Moral," 36)

In Stephen's view, then, Martineau was guilty of "degrading" literature through her attempts to rework factual-scientific discourse into fiction. However, Stephen's compartmentalised conceptualisation of scientific and artistic traditions is not only reductive and essentialising, but it also does an injustice to the genius of a writer such as Martineau, who, as Dallas Liddle puts it, was "a remarkably skilled adapter of discourse genres—so skilled that she could catch the essential elements and tropes of a genre and reproduce them so that her versions were often better and fuller explorations of the genre's potential than her models" (71). Liddle gives the example of Martineau's transformation of the "useful-knowledge writing" of the SDUK (71), but Martineau's assimilation of official informational literature into her Poor Law novellas is similarly testament to the fruitfulness of Martineau's genre-transcending approach to literary composition.

Martineau's method of composition was not all too different from that of the Royal Commissioners, who collated the findings amassed by the assistant commissioners into a more focussed report. If *Paupers* (and Martineau's Blue Book fiction more broadly) represents an experimental form of literary information management, then this raises the question, what was Martineau's method of reworking the Commissioners' findings into fiction? According to Valerie Sanders, Martineau received "all the evidence collected by the Poor Law Commissioners, which she then processed into tales" (49). This description of Martineau's method of composition as a matter of "processing," a term belonging to the methodology of information management, is a far cry from the Romantic conception of

[68] On Blue Book fiction, see Brantlinger 28 and Sheila Smith.

literary composition. Of course, Sanders's characterisation of Martineau's writing practice, dating from the late twentieth century, reflects the viewpoint of a later informational culture; and yet, it also aligns with Martineau's conceptualisation of her method of composition during early parts of her career. As a populariser, Martineau downplayed her authorial agency, preferring to characterise herself as a mediator rather than an initiator or creator. For instance, commenting on her first series, Martineau suggests that "scientific discoverers must be followed by those who will popularise their discoveries" (*Moral*, v). Moreover, in the words of George Levine, Martineau rejected "the self for science," turning "self-consciously to a theory of scientific epistemology," valorising "externality, objectivity, disinterest, and the idea of universality" (132, 146). This anti-subjectivist authorial stance was very much aligned with the pseudo-scientific "authorlessness" of nascent official informational literature, further cementing Martineau's suitability as progenitor of quasi-official texts.[69]

Victorian authors' practice of consulting Blue Books was clearly more than a means of aiding the imagination, especially in cases where the informational basis of the fiction was publicised. Such works of Blue Book fiction represent attempts at laying claim to a form of quasi-official authority. For instance, in the opening "Advertisement" to *Sybil* (1844), the future Prime Minister Disraeli emphasised that his novel was based on "authentic evidence which has been received by Royal Commissions and Parliamentary Committees" (24). Here, Disraeli seeks to establish the validity of his narrative by invoking the authority of official "evidence." In emphasising that their fictional narratives were based on official reports, then, writers such as Martineau and Disraeli strove to retain something of the cachet of officiality, the symbolic power of the administrative state. In other words, these writers did not present their work as fictional depictions of social reality, but rather as literary remediations of official information.

The act of appropriating and redeploying official evidence was not only a literary phenomenon. Over the first half of the nineteenth century, references to contemporary official reports and statistics became a pronounced feature of popular print culture more broadly. Radical journalists and trade unionists would plunder official publications for "evidence that could confirm their grievances," republishing the evidence and "emphasizing that official investigations had produced these particular testimonies, figures, and facts" (Frankel, "Blue Books," 309). This mode of utilising official information—co-opting the symbolic power of the state for oppositional purposes—reached its dazzling apex, in the late-Victorian era, with

[69] On Martineau's use of anonymity in her journalism, see Liddle 51–2.

the work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, scholars who frequently cited official facts in their critique of British industrial capitalism.[70] Such journalistic and scholarly practices may be grouped with Blue Book fiction as a form of second-hand information management—a lay recycling of official facts that leveraged the symbolic power of the state.

If references to government reports could imbue popular discourse with a form of watered-down officiality, then Martineau's novellas supplementing a government report is a special case in point. With her commissioned Poor Law novellas, Martineau was not simply fictionalising facts, but she was in fact also writing state-backed stories. In the "Preface" to the series, prefixed to the first volume, Martineau proclaimed that her novellas drew on the data amassed by the Royal Commission:

> I beg to state that all that is most melancholy in my story is strictly true. I have unquestionable authority in the Reports of the Poor-Law Commissioners and the testimony of others who are occupied in the administration of parish affairs, for every parochial abuse and every pauper encroachment here exhibited; and I have taken no pains to select the worst instances of either that have come within my knowledge. (*The Parish*, i)

In this passage, Martineau seeks not only to "pre-empt accusations of sensationalism or exaggeration," as Oražem notes (150), but also to frame her novellas as resting on the "unquestionable authority" of official information, indicating that her stories are "strictly true," given that they are based on the findings of the inquiry.[71] Crucially, in her preface, Martineau states that she has "selected" and "exhibited" material from the reports, expressions that echo the Commissioners' task of summarising the key findings of the inquiry. In other words, in her presentation of *Paupers*, Martineau de-emphasises questions of narrative and literary form, and instead aligns her novelistic practice with official informational practices and epistemology.

The link to the official inquiry that Martineau establishes in the preface to her novellas also affects the status of the story worlds that are created through the narratives. Considered as a form of literary information management that remediates and extends the findings of the inquiry, Martineau's collection produces story-worlds that may be understood as enfolded within the greater "papereality" of the commissioners' reports. The quasi-official nature of *Paupers* is accentuated by Martineau's inclusion of statistical information garnered from the

[70] On Marx and Engels' use of Blue Books, see Kehler.

[71] This commentary on narrative truth foreshadows Dickens's preface to *Bleak House* (1853). As opposed to Martineau, who aligns her story's truth with the commissioners' inquiry, Dickens underlines the epistemological validity of his story by situating it as an alternative to official evidence. Dickens mischievously defends his story almost as though he were being heard in court, proclaiming that "everything set forth in these pages concerning the Court of Chancery is substantially true, and within the truth" (3).

inquiry. In *The Town*, for instance, the narrator suddenly interposes that there has been "a great and accelerated diminution in the number of representative vestries, three hundred having been closed of the 2868 which existed in 1827" (151). Such lapses in narrative form are scattered throughout the tales. In other words, Martineau's translation of facts into fiction did not preclude incorporating chunks of "unprocessed" information. The inclusion of such nuggets of information may be read as a marker of officiality, a form of bureaucratic poetics that points to the presence of an official papereality standing at the back of the novella's story-world.

The link that Martineau establishes between the novellas and the papereality of the official inquiry underlines the fact that the paupers of Martineau's tales correspond demographically to the population that is discussed in the commissioners' report. That is to say, as Vargo notes, Martineau's Poor Law tales concern a specific segment of the parish community—the indigent—and say next to nothing about the private lives of the middle-class parish inhabitants, mirroring the "objectifying" portrayal of the poor found in official reports (41, 59). In other words, there is a reifying and well-nigh ontological class-based stratification at play, which effectively places the poor and the middle and upper classes in "separate but interconnected universes" (Vargo 41). Much as British fictional genres such as the "social problem novel" (focusing on the poor) and the "silver-fork novel" (focusing on the upper classes) helped to create the Victorian idea of "two nations," the official paperealities that were produced by Victorian Blue Books tended to consist of "information" (often just anecdotes) about the poorer segments of the population.[72] Martineau's reproduction of this ontological order in her Blue Book fiction typifies the proximity of social problem literature and government by information during this period.

Having situated Martineau's Poor Law novellas in relation to the official inquiry in the first sections of the present chapter, my remaining sections will delve into the novellas themselves, exploring Martineau's narrativisation of Poor Law administration. I will begin, in the next section, by comparing Martineau's commentary in *Paupers* to the Commissioners' analysis in their *Report*.

[72] The lopsidedness of Martineau's tales in this sense is reminiscent of detective fiction, in which, as D. A. Miller aptly puts it, "the official police share their ghetto with an official criminality," away from the middle classes (3–4). On the correspondences between "social problem" fiction and the Victorian state's "panoptic effort at social research," see also Vargo 54.

A Comparison of the Schemes Proposed by Martineau and Chadwick

Each of the tales in Martineau's first series, *Illustrations of Political Economy*, conclude with clearly demarcated sections written in the style of political economy, sections which summarise the principles that are "illustrated" in the narrative proper. Tellingly, *Paupers* contains no such concluding meta-commentary. This structural and stylistic departure from the first series is symptomatic of the fact that the project of popularising official information differed qualitatively from Martineau's earlier endeavour of "illustrating" the doctrines or ideas of political economists. With *Paupers*, Martineau based her stories on the findings of the Commissioners' inquiry, a textual material that certainly harboured biases and incipient proposals, but which did not contain a theory or programme for her to repackage. In writing these tales, as Webb puts it, Martineau was "not hindered by the necessity of expounding doctrine" (*British*, 127). On the contrary, Lord Brougham had invited Martineau to give her own "share of conclusions and suggestions [...] in the form of a programme of doctrine for [the] illustrations," as Martineau proclaims in her memoirs (*Harriet*, 1: 221).

Martineau's role as a populariser of official information thus differs from that of the propagandist writer. She was invited to interpret the assistant commissioners' findings and make policy suggestions, rather than simply deliver a specific message. Indeed, judging by Martineau's own evaluation in the autobiography, Senior and Chadwick might have left the task of writing the report to her, inasmuch as there was remarkable simultaneity and concord between her own proposals and the Bill that resulted from the Commissioners' suggestions:

> My document actually crossed in the street one sent me by a Member of the government detailing the heads of the new Bill. I sat down to read it with no little emotion, and some apprehension; and the moment when, arriving at the end, I found that the government scheme and my own were identical, point by point, was not one to be easily forgotten. (*Harriet*, 1: 221–22)

In other words, Martineau felt that the remedial measures proposed in her "document"—a peculiarly bureaucratic and official-sounding term for her fiction—were "identical" with the reforms outlined in the Poor Law Bill, which was presented by Lord Althorp to the House of Commons on the 17th of April, 1834.

Any discussion of Martineau's position on the Poor Law needs to account for the equivocal nature of *Paupers*, which consists of four novellas that explore different social and administrative issues and present solutions to those specific problems.[73] The first novella—

[73] As a four-part exploration of the issue of Poor Law reform, Martineau's series of novellas arguably comes closer to the discourse of an official report than a novel would: as Sheila Smith notes, "the novelist's version of

The Parish—portrays extant workhouses as places of "Ease and Plenty" (as one of Martineau's chapter headings has it) and describes this excessive comfort as the driving force behind the increase in pauperism. Martineau later claimed that she "never wrote any thing with more glee than 'The Hamlets,'" the second novella, "in which the proposed reform is exemplified" (*Harriet*, 1: 222). Here, Martineau describes a community which has blossomed as a result of the industry and self-reliance instilled in the indigent by a sterner workhouse regime. The third novella—*The Town*—which I will be focusing on, portrays paupers exploiting, and administrators seeking to amend, the weaknesses of the parochial administrative structures of the Old Poor Law. The fourth novella—*The Land's End*—highlights the perceived virtues of a free market economy in contradiction with the social problems stemming from the administrative structures stood in the way of such an economy.

As indicated above, it is important to differentiate Martineau's proposed reforms from the New Poor Law system that was later put in place. The same goes for the scheme that Chadwick formulates in the *Report*, which is more radically statist in nature than its implementation through the New Poor Law might suggest (MacDonagh 103–5). In the place of the Old Poor Law system in which parishes had considerable autonomy, Chadwick envisioned a system of parish units merged into unions, organised by a central board and administered by professional state functionaries. Goodlad aptly describes Chadwick's scheme as a "dream of a bureaucratic utopia presided over by benevolent administrative experts" (*Victorian*, 10–1). As we shall see, "bureaucratic utopianism" is a fitting label also for Martineau's Poor Law novellas, though this does not come across in Goodlad's reading of *Paupers*.

In proposing Poor Law reforms, Martineau and Chadwick were commenting on a complex and highly contested issue, on which there was already a large literature, especially in pamphlet form (Poynter xxvi). Important commentators included Thomas Paine, whose influential *Rights of Man* (1791–2) offered a plan for the abolition of the Poor Law which saw local administration of poor relief replaced by a national system that in many ways anticipated modern welfare legislation, as well as Jeremy Bentham, who wrote several essays on poor relief in the 1790s, including *Pauper Management Improved* (1797), which is often cited as the model for the scheme put forth by Chadwick (Brundage 34; Higgs 27). Amidst a flurry of public commentary on the Poor Law in the 1830s, the Royal Commissioners were tasked with ending the confusion, discord, and indecision through a systematic investigation into the

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a Blue book problem is oversimplified just because, as a novelist, he cannot argue out the case fully, and weigh the evidence for and against, as the commissioner can" (39).

operations of the system as a whole, a system that that was "understood by nobody," as Chadwick put it (qtd. in Loughlin 476). The Royal Commission's objective was, quite simply, to unravel the mysteries of the Poor Law through systematic inquiry. In the *Report*, Chadwick suggests that

> The common administration is founded on blind impulse or on impressions derived from a few individual cases; when the only safe action must be regulated by extensive inductions or general rules derived from large classes of cases, which the annual officer has no means of observing. (*Poor Law*, 401)

In making the case for a data-based approach to investigating the underlying mechanisms of the Poor Laws, Chadwick was not only positioning the Commissioners' *Report* against earlier discourse on the Poor Law, but he was also indicating the shortcomings of the parochial organisation of poor relief. Under the Old Poor Law, that is, poor relief was organised by local vestries and administered by local rate-payers taking turns to serve as overseers for the duration of a year. In the *Report*, this system is decried as producing hopelessly incompetent overseers:

> neither diligence nor zeal are to be expected from persons on whom a disagreeable and unpaid office has been forced, and whose functions cease by the time that they have begun to acquire a knowledge of them; and even when zealous and diligent, they must often fail from want of experience and skill. (181)

Chadwick thus characterised the figure of the temporary (and often unrenumerated) amateur administrator as the antithesis of the informed perspective that the *Report* provided and the administrative "zeal" that it embodied. Indeed, by exposing the flaws of the non-professional administrator, Chadwick was simultaneously articulating the principles of rationalisation and bureaucratisation that would shape the administrative state culture that emerged over the Victorian era, foreshadowing the rise of the professional bureaucrat.[74]

Chadwick identified deficient cognisance as a key problem not only in debates about administrative reform, but also in the day-to-day administration of poor relief: "there is no province of administration for which more peculiar knowledge is requisite than the relief to the indigent, [and yet] there is no province from which such knowledge is more effectually excluded" (401). The "peculiar knowledge" required in Poor Law administration was a combination of administrative know-how and knowledge about the paupers in question. Both Chadwick and Martineau describe the administration of poor relief as having the character of

[74] In the *Report*, Chadwick valorises an 1818 act which authorised salaried permanent overseers to serve as assistants to the temporary annual overseers, citing the success of this act as grounds for further professionalisation (188–9).

a contest between administrators and paupers—one that was being lost by the former, on account of their insufficient grasp of the Poor Law system. Paupers, on the other hand, had gained a comparatively strong understanding of the ins and outs of the system, and could therefore find ways of extracting ever more poor relief from the non-plussed temporary administrators.[75]

The picture that Martineau paints in *The Hamlets* is in many respects reminiscent of Chadwick's account. She emphasises that the amateur annual overseers were not only incompetent, but also "shackled" by "incumbrances of private interest" (18). Martineau reiterates this point in *The Town* when she has one of her characters explain that "a vigilant and impartial authority" can only be created through the introduction of independent, salaried administrators who are shielded from "corrupt patronage, jobbing, and private interest" (90, 149). "Private feeling should be set aside" in Poor Law administration, Martineau suggests—and yet, such disinterestedness cannot be expected of local tradesmen serving as overseers, because they cannot "attend duly to their public and private duties" simultaneously (13, 144). In advocating for professionalisation, then, both Chadwick and Martineau articulate a conception of public service rooted in specialisation, detachment, and technical competence, thus anticipating Weber's conception of rational-bureaucratic organisation.

As indicated above, a central trope in Martineau's novellas, as well as in Chadwick's section of the *Report*, is that of the well-informed and fraudulent pauper. The trope of the fraudulent pauper dates back to the Elizabethan era, when "legislators experimented with various technologies of identification to distinguish between the worthy settled poor and the unworthy unsettled idle," as Steve Hindle writes (221). Hindle also notes that this period gave rise to a "rogue literature" in which the wiles of "tricksters carrying forged passes" were described (226). In Martineau's *The Hamlets*, the paupers share pieces of intelligence with each other and design schemes to be deployed against overseers. Some of the strategies employed are crude and opportunistic forms of extortionist intimidation. For instance, when the overseer Mr Reece is known to be away on parish business, "the wives of certain bold paupers [take] the opportunity of frightening Mrs. Reece into giving them money in her husband's absence" (5). However, the craftier paupers with sufficient bureaucratic know-how also engage in documentary forgery and other forms of administrative trickery. Martineau

[75] One of the sub-commissioners cited in the *Report* suggests that paupers "make themselves acquainted with the character of particular magistrates, and their decisions, and know them well. It is the class of paupers who come the most frequently, the young and able-bodied, who make this application" (233). However, according to the historian John Saville, the abuses of the system of poor relief were "much exaggerated" by the Commissioners (12).

emphasises the ease with which documentary fraud is accomplished by paupers in the absence of an adequate system of book-keeping and as a result of the parochial administrator's scant regard for, or knowledge of, administrative methods: "[a]s for parish-books, if there were any, Reece was guiltless of all knowledge of them" (20).

In *The Hamlets*, however, the paupers' reign of terror is brought to an end by the expedient arrival of a new overseer, who sets about reforming the parish poor relief system by establishing a workhouse-centred regime in which those seeking relief are simply asked, "Will you have an order for the house or not?" (99). The befuddled parish claimants persist in seeking outdoor relief, proffering documentary proof of inadequate income signed by their employers. "Please just look at the certificate, sir," pleads one farm labourer; but the new overseer shows no interest in the document, and when it is examined by an onlooker, this person exclaims, "Ho ho! I see! Here is a date very nicely altered. This certificate is a year old, and has been altered for the occasion" (100). In short, *The Hamlets* dramatises the negation of the threat of the bureaucratically-literate fraudster. By way of the so-called "workhouse test," the establishment regains control over the poorer classes, moving away from an administrative system in which paupers had seemingly gained the upper hand.

The establishment of the harsh workhouse system may indeed be understood not only as a means of reducing the costs involved in poor relief, but also as a way of checking the agency that the Old Poor Law afforded poor people. Indeed, Martineau describes the bureaucratic system qua system as producing adverse effects that pose a threat to society at large. In *The Hamlets*, before the parish is transformed by the introduction of the workhouse system, the community is rife with fraudulence, "spreading from the transactions of the overseer's office till it tainted all the dealings of the place" (16). Furthermore, it is suggested that not only recipients of poor relief, but also their employers, exploit the system, inasmuch as farmers "have drawn [certificates] out falsely, to get [their] men relieved out of the rate" (100). At a more fundamental level, administrative rules and regulations are described as threatening the traditional communal order:

> The story told was, that Charlotte's mother had once been travelling too long to get home before her confinement; that she had been hospitably received and nursed by an inhabitant of the country parish in question, and that Charlotte's birth within its bounds left no reasonable doubt of her having a settlement there. The parish, however, chose to doubt it, and was on the point of going to law about the matter. (101)

The parish community refutes the lone mother's claim to a settlement, since it is perceived to have no basis in social reality given the coincidental nature of the child's birth in the parish.

Here, one senses an underlying suggestion that the mother in question was taking advantage of a loophole in the Poor Law, and that this was perhaps even a premeditated act calculated to provide for her and her child.

It should be noted that state functionaries similarly discovered the opportunities for petty profiteering and embezzlement that the Old Poor Law provided. Historian Clive Emsley notes that in 1818 "two parish constables were indicted at the Bedfordshire Quarter Sessions after claiming expenses [...] for moving vagrants who had never existed" (*Crime*, 123). Whilst the administrative system made it possible to profit by cooking the books, insufficient book-keeping was also perceived as liable to foster or enable corruption. Indeed, Chadwick describes the local vestries charged with organising poor relief under the Old Poor Law as

> the most irresponsible bodies that ever were entrusted with the performance of public duties, or the distribution of public money. They render no account; no record need be kept of the names of the persons present, or of their speeches or their votes; they are not amenable, whatever be the profusion or malversation which they have sanctioned, or ordered, or turned to their own advantage. (191)

Here the issue is not fraudulent documentation, but rather the complete lack of records and, by extension, the lack of accountability.

The solution to these problems, as both Martineau and Chadwick saw it, was not only to to centralise and professionalise the administration of poor relief, but also to drastically simplify the system. Following Bentham, Chadwick made the case for uninviting workhouses to serve as deterrents, a "workhouse test" policy that was incorporated into law through the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. As formulated in the report, Chadwick described the workhouse as a "self-acting test of the claim of the applicant":

> the line between those who do and those who do not need relief is drawn, and drawn perfectly. If the claimant does not comply with the terms on which relief is given to the destitute, he gets nothing; and if he does comply, the compliance proves the truth of his claim—namely, his destitution. (*Poor Law*, 378)

In other words, *in lieu* of the administrative capacity to keep track of paupers and test their claims, the restriction of poor relief to workhouses would serve as a means of identifying the truly indigent. In *Paupers*, Martineau likewise advocated for the limitation of poor relief to inhospitable workhouses, as a means of bypassing the need for more sophisticated administrative controls. And yet, whilst advocating for the workhouse test, Martineau also called for administrative professionalisation and improved book-keeping, measures that might have enabled a system of outdoor relief akin to latter-day welfare systems.

Martineau's *The Town* provides a counter-vision of sorts to the celebration of the workhouse system in *The Hamlets*. That is, in *The Town*, Martineau explores the possibility of achieving control through administrative means, rather than through the workhouse test.[76] If the overseer who takes command in *The Hamlets* works wonders via the workhouse test, asking only "Will you have an order for the house or not?" (see above), then in *The Town* the newly instated parish overseer Orger instead performs heroic feats of surveillance and street-level bureaucracy. Indeed, the administrative programme formulated in *The Town* resembles the radically statist proposals that Chadwick put forth in the *Report*, and not the watered-down *laissez-faire* implementation of his scheme. Goodlad argues that Martineau's *Paupers* does not engage with the "epistemological quandaries" involved in the workhouse test, unlike later anti-Poor Law novels such as Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1838) or Frances Trollope's *Jessie Phillips: A Tale of the New Poor Law* (1843) (*Victorian*, 71). However, Goodlad limits her discussion of *Paupers* to the novella *The Hamlets*, failing to mention other novellas in Martineau's series, novellas which engage questions of administrative epistemology in considerable depth. Goodlad emphasises Martineau's commitment to the idea of the free market, describing her as a champion of individual responsibility (56). However, as a Radical reformist, Martineau belonged to a baggy movement that roomed both economic liberalism and Benthamite statism, and, as indicated above, Martineau's Poor Law novellas proposed centralising administrative measures as well as *laissez-faire* financial policies. Even in *The Hamlets*—a novella which highlights the purported socio-economic benefits of the workhouse test—Martineau underlines that this regime is enabled by the establishment of an impersonal rational administration. In *The Hamlets*, as Goodlad observes, the "materialism" of the workhouse test brings a cultural shift towards a bourgeois, materialist conception of social standing—a "culture of respectability" that "privilege[s] material prosperity and its signs" (53–5). And yet, as indicated, this cultural change is supported by a rationalisation and depersonalisation of the administrative culture. Thus, we learn that

> one of the advantages of the new plan was its freeing the administrators of parish affairs from all the odium and responsibility of inquiring into character; which appeared to [Mr Barry, the new overseer] to have nothing to do with whether a man should or should not be starved. (*Hamlets*, 100)

As seen, *pace* Goodlad, Martineau's commentary in *The Hamlets does* interrogate the epistemology of the workhouse test and the ethics of the impersonal mode of "seeing" the

[76] For an extended discussion of Martineau's analysis of free market policies in relation to the workhouse system, see Oražem 155–63.

social world that the workhouse test exemplified, delineating what sort of "inquiries" administrators should engage in.

Whilst the appeal of the workhouse test lay partly in its administrative simplicity relative to managing outdoor relief, Martineau's treatment of the bureaucratic dimension of Poor Law administration was neither shallow nor limited. In fact, Martineau's Poor Law novellas explore administrative mechanisms and systems in great depth, and her vision for the organisation of poor relief represents an expression of bureaucratic utopianism akin to that of Chadwick.

The *Bildung* of Bureaucratic Natives in *The Town*

In *The Town*, Martineau portrays the administrative malaise that the workhouse test was designed to circumvent and eliminate: the lack of an integrated system of record-keeping combined with the lack of able administrators. These frailties of the administrative system are shown to encourage pauperisation and create unnecessary public outlay, by enabling dissimulation and fraud. As observed in the previous section, both Martineau and Chadwick indicated that paupers understood the system better than the temporary parish overseers. Literary scholar Colleen Willenbring suggests that the administrative muddle of the Poor Law system was such that "only the fraudulent were motivated to master [it]" (60). More broadly, one might say that most paupers—not just the fraudsters—were likely to gain a form of bureaucratic literacy through exposure to the Poor Law system. Paupers were in this respect the first bureaucratic natives outside officialdom, insofar as they grew accustomed to operating within administrative structures.

The Town is essentially a tale of bureaucracy-savvy paupers exploiting the general administrative confusion of the Old Poor Law. As one of Martineau's characters puts it, the "out-paupers" are "ready about their business" (2). This characterisation is especially true for the dastardly villain Pleasance Nudd, who has an uncommonly good grasp of the administrative machinery. Nudd is a Fagin-like ringleader of a band of conspiring counterfeiters, except that, as opposed to Fagin and his gang's initiation of Oliver into the arts of pick-pocketing in Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, Nudd gives lessons in administrative fraudulence. That is, Nudd fosters a cooperative spirit of bureaucratic self-education amongst the parish paupers, by instructing fellow paupers in the art of duping the local officials: "O, you have been teaching Charlotte how to use the oath, have you, Mrs. Nudd? 'Tis a fine

power that" (61). In other words, under Nudd's tutelage, the pauper community has developed a menacing form of concerted bureaucratic literacy.

Collective bureaucratic self-education among paupers is a recurring theme in Martineau's early fiction. For instance, *Cousin Marshall* (1832), a novella from *Illustrations of Political Economy*, narrates the bureaucratic *Bildung* of a naive young pauper named Hunt, who, on his "admission to the pauper brotherhood," learns about fraudulence and begging from his "tutor," a debauched pauper named Childe (58, 66). Hunt and Childe meet while queueing to collect poor relief. Taking the new pauper under his wings, Childe demonstrates the ease with which he is able to trick the system. That is, he dupes "the men in authority" into giving him a larger allowance than that which he would normally receive, simply by changing his appearance and complaining of "a slight stroke of palsy this week" (60, 65). Impressed by Childe's scam, Hunt follows Childe and becomes his adept, receiving further "lesson[s] in the mysteries of begging" (65).

In *The Town*, as noted above, it is Pleasance Nudd who acts as a devilish guide to the system of poor relief. Indeed, Nudd orchestrates a systematic scamming operation involving several other paupers. Nudd and her adepts seek ever-more sophisticated ways of maximising their profits from the dysfunctional poor relief system; for instance, they "apply for relief when the vestry was sitting, to try what could be got, when the same parties would not think of going to an assistant overseer who was thoroughly informed of their circumstances" (104). The paupers have not acquired this form of bureaucratic know-how through mere exposure to the administrative system, but rather through actively studying administrative processes. Indeed, Nudd spends her days monitoring official meetings and acting as a "witness and reporter-general in this parish" (15). Whilst Nudd takes the lead in the project of gaining tactical information and studying the administrative system, the wider pauper community joins her in the pursuit of such knowledge, pooling an extensive tactical intelligence by frequently meeting "in by-places to consult about ways and means" (55). Martineau's paupers even come together from different parishes to "compar[e] notes under a hedge" (89). In *The Town*, then, the paupers' devising of "stratagem[s]" (154) for extracting poor relief amounts to a form of sustained, covert organisation, as is especially evident when Orger is re-elected as overseer:

> For another whole year, at least, the paupers must submit to be under the eye of one who knew all their circumstances, and kept a close watch over all their proceedings. All the devices which had been planned to be put in practice against a new officer must be laid aside for an entire year. (18)

The Town thus gives expression to widespread early-nineteenth-century anxieties not only about working class delinquency, but also about the collective agency of the lower social classes. That is to say, the energy that Nudd and her gang expend on strategic manoeuvring—attending official meetings, and waylaying administrators—is decried not only as perversely unproductive, but also as a threatening form of subaltern collectivity.

The system of poor relief is described as having an unwanted levelling effect, skewing the playing field in favour of the paupers who master the ins and outs of a system that is thoroughly opaque to the middle classes, giving paupers a degree of agency disproportionate to their socio-economic clout:

> by the law, any vagrant from a distance, or the worst, or the most ignorant person within our bounds may set the lawyer against the tradesman, and the manufacturer against the lawyer; and even bring the clergyman into judgment before the magistrate for inhumanity and oppression. (*Town*, 75)

The suggestion is clearly that paupers are empowered within this topsy-turvy legal-bureaucratic system, a system which skews, and and indeed threatens to upend, the socio-economic order. By emphasising the bureaucratic know-how that paupers were developing via the administration of poor relief under the Old Poor Law, Martineau indicates that this disproportionate bureaucratic capital might become a larger socetial problem, thus underlining the importance of creating a new administrative state culture that fortified the social order.

As noted above, Martineau characterises poor relief as a game played by wily paupers and nonplussed overseers. The crude book-keeping of the administrators, and the lack of checks on official interactions and transactions, creates ample opportunities for trickery; thus, in the absence of an integrated, centralised recording system, it is "next to impossible [...] to guard against [Nudd's] devices for getting money from all in turn; and what she obtained on her own account, was nothing in comparison with what she stirred up others to claim" (158). There is an almost messianic quality to Nudd's astonishing abilities as a swindler and a rabble-rouser. Inspired by Nudd's success as a fraudster, the roguish paupers glory in their own superior gamesmanship:

> "How many overseers and overseers' wives have you seen to-day, Mrs. Pleasance?" "There is Dixon's cheque to begin with,—that's one," said Bexley. "Where did you last see Orger, my woman?" "Before Gillingham's table, when he had to count down half-a-crown to her this morning," added Mrs. Stott. "It is a pity Guthrie is out of town." "His wife is not," said Pleasance. "O, ho! You got another half-crown from her, did you? That was well done, for Guthrie won't like to tell that to the vestry, and it will go down in the book as flax or brooms, you may depend upon it." (62–3)

This conversation shows the paupers taking great pleasure in their tactical superiority over the overseers. The paupers clearly recognise the importance of actively managing what goes into the official records. Nudd's bureaucratic know-how includes an ability to wield the administrators' documentary tools by proxy, curating an institutional trace or "papereality" that suits her purposes. Feigning illness, for instance, she makes sure to pay a visit to the infirmary in advance, thus ensuring that the infirmary's records will substantiate her claims if need be. However, Nudd's fraudulent creation of an institutional trace ultimately backfires, as Orger begins to unravel the truth about Nudd when he speaks to the manager of the infirmary. Impressed by what he has heard concerning Nudd's character, Orger puts her name forward as a suitable nurse—an idea that the manager rejects on the grounds that Nudd is unwell:

> "Pleasance Nudd always looks weakly; and now she is ill." "I was not aware of that. I saw her this morning, talking at Lucas's door. She looked just the same as usual." "I saw her at the infirmary at ten this morning. She came to ask for a blister, she was so ill." (52)

This exchange shows that the lack of integrated information management across institutions paves the way for dissimulation and fraud, but also that the discovery of inconsistencies in the information held by different institutions is key to combating fraudulence.

Nudd alo knows how to elude documentation where necessary. The extent of her manipulation of official records is underlined by the fact that "[s]he had not the credit of being a scribe. Not even the school master knew that she could handle a pen" (56). This indicates a far-going tactical approach of withholding information that seemingly stretches back to Nudd's school years. Nudd's secretive literacy represents a strange and dangerous oppositional form of literacy that is at odds with the goals of educational projects such as that of the SDUK: it is first and foremost a bureaucratic literacy, insofar as her writing skills are reserved for purposes of dissimulation and fraud. This idiosyncratic and deviant form of literacy anticipates the quasi-literacy of Krook in Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853), which will be examined in more detail in the next chapter. In short, whereas Martineau's Nudd pretends not to be able to read as a part of her crafty bureaucratic literacy, Dickens's Krook is, in fact, illiterate but nonetheless appears to be privy to facts about legal documents that are unknown to the reading public, including legal professionals.

Nudd's far-reaching fraudulence is foreshadowed by the trickery of a pauper named Mrs Bell in Martineau's earlier novella *Cousin Marshall*, from *Illustrations of Political Economy*. Crucially, Mrs Bell hides the fact of her son's death from the authorities (and from the parish community at large) so as to continue collecting his allowance of poor relief:

> Mrs. Bell, who always went herself to receive the weekly allowance, lest her husband, through his dislike of the business, should not "manage it cleverly," took credit herself for having given notice that the doctor need not take any more trouble about her poor boy, as he was past hope and nothing more could be done for him; but she omitted to state the reason for his being past hope, (viz., that he was dead,) because it would have been inconvenient to give up the allowance received on his account. (54)

Mrs Bell also visits charity societies to collect food and clothes items for "the patient," whilst instructing her children not to mention their deceased sibling in public. Mrs Bell is not ashamed of "tak[ing] parish money for [her] dead child," but rather "flatter[s] herself that she ha[s] 'managed very cleverly'" (55, 58). What is of particular note in this episode (the mother eventually gives up the scheme) is the haunting image of the (un)dead child who lives on as an administrative fiction in the books kept by the local Poor Law officers. The uncanny liminality of the child is underlined by the narrator's counterfactual references to the deceased child as "the patient," which seemingly give precedence to the papereality of the administrative records as opposed to the reality of the boy's death.

Martineau's parish overseers are broadly incompetent or corrupt. Competent overseers were in short supply, Martineau suggests, partly due to the lack of training and incentives for the temporary overseers to take their jobs seriously, but also due to corruption: influential local stakeholders profiteered on maladministration. And yet, *Paupers* also features certain capable administrators. Nudd finds a worthy adversary in the overseer Orger, who exemplifies Martineau's model professional administrator. Indeed, through the example of Orger, Martineau describes what a competent and well-informed administrator might accomplish in terms of reducing fraudulence amongst the paupers. Soon after his arrival, Orger manages to disrupt the status quo through his diligence, impartiality, and administrative know-how. Under Orger's regime, the fraudulent paupers begin to long for "a return of the good old days when the only overseers were tradesmen whose interests obliged them to be accommodating in their dispensation of the parish funds" (12–3). Like Pleasance Nudd, Orger is supremely well-informed. The paupers feel his "hawk's eye always over them," and are left wondering "how in the world this Mr. Orger always knew everything" (61, 67). In the absence of an efficient documentary system (or a non-bureaucratic solution such as the workhouse test), Orger embodies the type of epistemological-administrative capacity that would reduce fraud: "'Is not Orger thought to know a good deal about paupers?' [...] 'He could always tell me about every person I mentioned to him'" (35). Indeed, Orger possesses a form of exalted

knowledge of the social world that distinguishes him as a precursor to a seemingly omniscient detective such as Dickens's Inspector Bucket.

Had the system of poor relief been run by administrators of Orger's ilk, Martineau intimates, there would have been no need for the workhouse test. And yet, Martineau's characterisation of Orger simultaneously reflects a societal reluctance towards the expansion of administrative surveillance; that is, Martineau stresses that her model overseer recognises the fundamental sanctity of domesticity and privacy:

> No one was less disposed to play the spy than Orger. He was so scrupulous as to turn away his head when he passed the windows of humble houses,—windows too humble to have shutters or blinds. He felt uneasy when, by any chance, he saw a family collected in the firelight, or was an involuntary witness of any whipping or scolding of little boys who would not go to bed. (55)

In other words, Orger is no ogler; he only monitors that which lies within his remit, the activities of paupers "who, having put themselves under his care, with the profession of making him the guardian of their affairs, could properly have nothing of their daily proceedings to conceal from him" (56). Martineau is clearly careful to flag that her advocacy of increased surveillance of paupers does not make her a surveillance-enthusiast in any wider sense; and yet, at the same time, she sees no reason for concern in paupers being subjected to a form of Benthamite Panoptic gaze.[77]

Nudd's villainy is finally exposed by the overseer Orger, who catches her in the act of forging a check. On Nudd's arrest, Orger instructs the constabulary to debar Nudd from "use of pen and ink" (94). The tremendous potency that Orger ascribes to Nudd's pen highlights the immense power of bureaucratic literacy, a central trope also in the administrative fiction of laters writers such as Dickens and Conrad. Orger's concerns about Nudd's arrest prove prescient. After she is apprehended, Nudd's play-acting continues unabated: "Orger held up a bit of paper between his fingers, at the sight of which the woman began smiling and sidling, and pulling scraps of paper to pieces, as if she had been a perfect fool" (94). By pretending to be "a perfect fool," Nudd manages to avoid prison and is instead sent to a lunatic asylum; but when the authorities discover that she possesses "forty-seven pounds out at interest," she is "so much vexed at [their] finding it out, that you would hardly have taken her to be so wrong in the head as the judge and jury found her" (157).

Nudd's deceitful strategising raises a number of epistemological questions pertaining to administrative practices of identification and surveillance. Martineau's choice of the name

[77] See Rosen and Santesso for a discussion of the "increasingly fraught (and class-based) valuation of privacy within the liberal consensus" during the nineteenth century (128).

"Nudd" is significant, given that the name may be read as a play on "nude," which derives from the Latin "nūdus," meaning to be "open, simple, plain, naked, bare, [or] unclothed" (*OED*). The word "nude" has historically been used in Britain as a legal term denoting unattested or insufficiently recorded statements and promises (as in "nude testaments"), as well as unenforceable contracts (as in "nude pacts"), a terminological usage which chimes with Martineau's emphasis on Nudd's deceitful handling of documents (*OED*). *The Town* effectively challenges the reader to recognise the deceptively "simple" Nudd for the canny swindler that she is, before she is unmasked in the narrative. As Willenbring puts it, the reader (much like Orger) faces the "serious problems of 'reading' Nudd's character" (62). And yet, Nudd's villainy is in actual fact not especially hard to detect. From early on in the narrative, the reader is alerted to Nudd's machinating and fraudulent ways. More opaque in this respect are the attitudes and objectives of the paupers at large, given that many poor people in the parish seem complicit to some extent in Nudd's schemes. At times, the parish community appear to be oblivious to her play-acting, but at other times everybody seems to be in on the act: "Pleasance, as she passed out, looked as idiotic as anybody had ever seen her. Even the widow said at the moment that she would go on looking so till she was out of this scrape" (137). Indeed, whereas the extent of Nudd's wickedness is soon revealed, the allegiances of the parish poor are never fully divulged, thus leaving Martineau's contemporary readers to contemplate the possible connections between bureaucratic literacy and working-class political organisation more broadly, a concern that is registered in Martineau's many images of paupers engaged in oppositional forms of self-education and strategising. This connection between pauper agency and the revolutionary potential of the poor is made more explicit in Chadwick's section of the *Report*:

> The present race, which this illegal perversion of the Poor Laws has created, are playing the game of cunning with the magistrates and overseers; give them ten years, and they will convert it into the dreadful game of force. My humble opinion is that if some measure be not adopted to arrest the progress of the evil, a fearful and bloody contest *must* ensue. (219)

The "game of cunning" that Chadwick sees turning into "a fearful and bloody contest" clearly does not pertain only to the system of poor relief, but also to class conflict and the ability of the poor to organise an opposition to the ruling class.

The emphasis on paupers' fraudulent self-education in *The Town* is interesting to consider also in relation to the pedagogic dimension of Martineau's popularising fiction. As noted in the introduction to the present chapter, Martineau was a firm believer in the value of

popular print culture as a vehicle for familiarising ordinary civilians with state culture. In another novella written at this time, Martineau's hero-journalist suggests that reporters were the best "guides of the subjects of the State as to their duty to the State" (*Illustrations of Taxation*, 104). However, during the nineteenth century, such pedagogical journalistic reportage was not solely oriented towards familiarising people with their "duties" vis-à-vis the state—subversive ideas were also disseminated through the popular press. And this is where Martineau's characterisation of Pleasance Nudd as a teacher and "reporter" begins to reflect back on Martineau's attempt at popularising an informed position on the Poor Law. In fact, Nudd's efforts as a disseminator of bureaucratic know-how mirrors Martineau's educational-propagandist project in a rather ironic fashion. Indeed, who was to say that Martineau was not unwittingly performing a Nudd-like function in and by "illustrating" the mechanisms of Poor Law administration for the benefit of the reading public?

This potentially self-defeating aspect of Martineau's work is indicated by Vargo's observation that the Poor Law novellas offer "a prescient geography of the resistance to poor law reform, mapping the variety of techniques available to the popular movement" (57). As Mike Sanders notes, there is a "significant disjuncture" in Martineau's stories from this period more broadly between the "claims made at the level of the narration and the evidence furnished by the narrative itself" ("From 'Political,'" 194). Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy*—a series of novellas that deal with subjects like economic deprivation, strikes, and riots—is, in Sanders's words, a collection of "fantasies of rebellion and control that generate a complex network of potential identifications" (195). In short, Martineau's didacticism fails to "control" the forceful subject matter. This point is highly germane also to the novellas in *Paupers*, which at times "pull the reader's sympathy in ways that do not easily align with the core of her didactic message," as Vargo observes (65). Indeed, whereas Martineau set out to convince her readers of the need for reform, the bureaucratic agency exhibited by Nudd and other paupers in her novellas could just as well embolden working-class readers to take up a similarly strategic approach to encounters with public officials. In short, Martineau's Poor Law novellas were a far cry from the insipid informational literature of the SDUK, and their narrative richness produces an uncertainty regarding the types of knowledge that her work was "diffusing" and the ways in which that knowledge might prove to be "useful."

Martineau's Bureaucratic Utopianism

Whilst much of the commentary in Martineau's Poor Law novellas pertains to the flaws of the extant mode of administration, there is also a forward-looking component. *Paupers* is, in other words, more than an exposé of administrative incompetence and failure; the novellas also explore what sort of administrative state culture the Poor Law reforms might catalyse. As noted above, some of the novellas in the series paint a rosy picture of the socio-cultural changes that a workhouse-based system would bring. However, in *The Town* Martineau offers a well-nigh utopian vision of professionalised bureaucracy, as manifest in Orger's uncommon administrative capacities and sensibilities. As stated in the previous section, here Martineau's examination of the shortcomings of Old Poor Law culminates not in a call for the end of outdoor relief and the implementation of the workhouse test, but instead in a speculative vision of what a robust, centrally orchestrated system of outdoor poor relief might accomplish. Orger's victory over Nudd, then, symbolises the possibility of a properly administrative solution to the problem of poor relief. The idea of the workhouse test is mentioned briefly in *The Town*, but figures only as a part of Martineau's broader vision of a new administrative system:

> if the diet and clothes were the same in every workhouse, and if there was a fit resident officer in all; the whole being under the impartial management of a central board, through paid, and therefore disinterested, agents; all vagrancy [...], all individual speculation and trickery, would be swept away at once, and contract management would follow of course, as being the easiest and most economical under a system of regularity, and safe, while under the superintendence of a vigilant and impartial authority. (90)

Here, Martineau advocates for centralisation and professionalisation, suggesting that a superior system of administration would play a large part in the cessation of pauper fraudulence. Combined with the idealising portrait of the overseer Orger, this expression of faith in the power of a centralised administrative system constitutes a form of bureaucratic utopianism.

In both *The Hamlets* and *The Town*, Martineau portrays feats of administrative innovation instigated, or at least attempted, by supremely competent parish overseers. These heroic administrators operate at the local level, but their projects clearly stand in for the planning of Poor Law reformers such as the commissioners and Martineau herself. Martineau contrasts this administrative heroism with the conservative attitudes of rate-paying members of the parishes in question. In *The Hamlets*, notably, the overhaul of the Old Poor Law system is prefigured by a form of meta-commentary on overzealous administrative reformism, where

the rate-payers vent their misgivings about the ongoing "change of administration," supposing that the new overseer is likely to "fail in some wild scheme or another for the improvement of parish affairs" (21, 18). This administrative conservatism proves unjustified, insofar as the new overseer's implementation of the workhouse test swiftly reduces public expenditure on paupers. In principle, however, the pessimistic outlook of Martineau's rate-payers was quite justified, if we are to believe the longer history of administrative reform that Chadwick provides in the commissioners' *Report*:

> The history of the Poor Laws abounds with instances of a legislation which has been worse than unsuccessful, which has not merely failed in effecting its purposes, but has been active in producing effects which were directly opposed to them, has created whatever it was intended to prevent, and fostered whatever it was intended to discourage. (206)

This discussion, as well as Martineau's inclusion of administrative sceptics in her novella, may be read as a means of demonstrating an awareness of the poor track-record of Poor Law reformers in a bid to pre-empt accusations of naive administrative utopianism. Indeed, Martineau not only contextualises her reformist ideas in relation to the issue of misspent reformist energies, but also dramatises parochial forms of resistance to bureaucratic centralisation. More so than Chadwick, then, Martineau's bureaucratic utopianism is circumscribed by an acute awareness of the challenges involved in bringing about institutional change. In fact, Martineau's tales highlight the type of obstacles that Chadwick would face in seeking to implement his ideas.

As shown above, Martineau characterises Orger as a sort of all-knowing master detective. Orger is also a skillful organiser who seeks to bring about far-reaching changes in the local poor relief system. This reformist zeal makes Orger an unpopular figure in the parish. He has to contend not only with organised fraudulent paupers, but also with corrupt landholders in the parish hierarchy. In short, Orger was "too active and determined an enemy to abuses to be any favourite with those who profited by abuses" (12). Orger's efforts are, in fact, ultimately thwarted. For Martineau's narrator, this disappointment demonstrates "how little individual wisdom can do against the influences of a bad system" (79). Orger's inability to bring about meaningful structural change in the parish, then, serves to show that local solutions are inherently futile, and that wholesale reform of the Poor Law system is the only way forward:

> "An important step is gained by the institution of a disinterested executive power,—of a paid overseer; but still the parochial constitution is infirm, and liable to lapse into deformity. All this is clear enough."

> "Clear enough: and it follows that the supreme direction must rest where there can be no bias of interest. There must be a general and uniform administration which shall go far to preclude abuse." (74)

Martineau calls also for "a blessed society of three or four wise men in London [...] appointed to superintend" (113). This figuration of a central state institution as a "blessed society" is crudely propagandistic, and is suggestive of an attempt to provide a counter-image to the popular picture-writing of central authorities as power-hungry or oppressive. Much as Martineau's characterisation of Orger seeks to forestall negative responses to the expanded surveillance apparatus that he embodies, her figuration of the proposed superintendents in this traditional, patriarchal-religious guise ("three [...] wise men") may, in other words, be understood as an attempt to render the idea of increased central authority less objectionable or threatening.

With the failure of Orger's reformist enterprise, Martineau indicates that the bureaucratic utopia that she gestures towards in *The Town* must remain a dream until administrative zealots in parliament win the day over jobbery and conservativism. This analysis was prescient given the opposition that the reorganisation of the system faced even after the passage of the Poor Law Amendment Act. A Poor Law Commission was then established to oversee the reconstruction of the system, and Chadwick, who had hoped to be made commissioner, was in fact only appointed as secretary. Such a relegated position had the effect that Chadwick's plans for wholesale administrative restructuring were derailed by the decidedly anti-bureaucratic Poor Law Commission. "From 1837 on," Oliver MacDonagh writes, "the commission paid no attention whatsoever to Chadwick's advice" (105). Indeed, Chadwick became an almost tragic figure bearing marked similarity with Orger: not only did the commission go against his plans for a centrally orchestrated system of poor relief, but the public blamed him for the cruelties of the new system. The anticlimactic denouement of *The Town* is thus emblematic of the discontinuous, partial, and indeed stunted development of administrative state culture at this historical juncture. Ironically, the widespread unpopularity of the New Poor Law stemmed the reformist administrative enthusiasm that the Reform Act of 1832 had inspired.

Conclusions

The case of Martineau's literary "Govt. work" illustrates the conjunction of literature and administrative statecraft in long-nineteenth-century Britain. The manner in which Martineau's

novellas were commissioned and presented to the public shows that fiction was deemed a viable mode of managing and disseminating official information within early-nineteenth-century officialdom; and yet, the mixed reception of Martineau's novellas seemingly put a dampener on this type of experimentation with literature as a supplement to Blue Books. And yet, whilst *Paupers* was not as influential in the literary sphere as the Poor Law Commissioners' report was in parliamentary publishing, Martineau's novellas helped establish Blue Books fiction as a mode of writing, a practice which became fairly widespread in Victorian literature.

Martineau's Poor Law novellas also catalysed the rise of Victorian administrative fiction. As I have shown in this chapter, Martineau's sophisticated treatment of the problems involved in the administration of poor relief, as well as her articulation of the reforms envisioned in the novellas, heralded the emergence of a fully developed administrative state culture. The bureaucratic utopianism of *Paupers* reflected an ongoing shift in Britain's state apparatus towards professionalisation and rationalisation, and Martineau clearly sought to inspire trust and belief in the project of centralising Britain's traditionally parochial administrative culture. At the same time, Martineau's narratives about the day-to-day relationship between paupers and overseers established a new type of narrative that centred on interactions between bureaucrats and non-bureaucrats, a type of narrative that Dickens would further popularise in the midcentury. Moreover, Martineau's Poor Law novellas highlighted the importance of bureaucratic literacy in administrative encounters and systems, both by foregrounding the agency of paupers accustomed to operating within an administrative system and by calling for the professionalisation of local administration. This focus on bureaucratic literacy would remain a key concern in administrative fiction over the Victorian period, especially as the figure of the professional bureaucrat grew increasingly prominent. In the next chapter, I will examine the directions in which Dickens took administrative fiction, partly in response to Martineau's work.

Chapter Three

Inspecting the Inspectors: Charles Dickens's Bureaucratic Horror Story

Introduction

Given Charles Dickens's status as the Victorian writer *par excellence*, his portrayal of officialdom is often interpreted as revealing a British sense of the state, much as Balzac's *Les Employees* is read as an expression of the early bureaucratisation of France, and Kafka's work is taken as confirmation of the bureaucratic character of central European states. Therefore, it is worth beginning this chapter by highlighting the very centrality of institutional critique in Dickens's oeuvre, as this may serve as a corrective to the notion that British literature lacks a substantial engagement with state bureaucracy. As James Fitzjames Stephen notes in "Mr. Dickens as a Politician" (1857):

> Mr. Dickens is the author of some twelve or fourteen books, each as long as three ordinary novels; and in each of them, in addition to the usual tasks which writers of fiction imposed on themselves, he has discharged a self-imposed obligation of attacking some part or other of our rotten institutions. (8)

A tireless critic of government policies and institutions of all stripes, Dickens made himself a political force to be reckoned with. In the mid-1850s, at the height of his powers as a social and political commentator, Dickens wrote to his friend William Henry Wills, declaring, "I don't know what [John] Forster quite expects to ensue from Mr Bull's Somnambulist, but, I think, the Downfall of the Ministry at least" (qtd. in Slater 248). Here, Dickens referred to Forster's fears that Dickens had gone too far with his essay "Mr. Bull's Somnambulist," a vitriolic attack on the sitting Prime Minister, the Earl of Aberdeen, for his perceived mismanagement of the Crimean War and neglect of urgently needed domestic reforms (Slater 248).

In the words of another canonical British writer on state bureaucracy, George Orwell, "Dickens attacked English institutions with a ferocity that has never since been approached" ("Charles," 8). And yet, Dickens's interventions were not such that they could be pinned to a

specific political position or ideology.[78] Indeed, nothing like a political programme can be extracted from Dickens's writings, as he generally veered away from party politics. For this reason, Dickens has at times been criticised for a lack of stringency or consistency in his commentary on the Victorian state. Goodlad suggests that Dickens desired a state that was "rational but unbureaucratic, omnipresent but personal, authoritative but liberatory, efficient but English" (21). Likewise, observing Dickens's changeability as a critic of the state, A. O. J. Cockshut goes so far as to dismiss his interventions as a form of "loud-mouthed evasiveness" (59).[79] Whilst there is certainly a grain of truth to these characterisations, the variance in Dickens's administrative fiction may also be explained as an effect of his entanglement in the *ad hoc* evolution of Victorian administrative state culture, the fact that he was responding polemically to specific developments in the rapidly changing institutional landscape.

The expansion and idiosyncratic modernisation of the British state during the mid-Victorian period elicited a strong but conflicted response from Dickens, who played the "1850s parlour game" of debating administrative reform with both gusto and bravado (Sullivan 72). In the 1850s alone, Dickens wrote two major works of administrative fiction in *Bleak House* (1853) and *Little Dorrit* (1857), whilst also penning numerous sketches dealing with officialdom, such as "A Poor Man's Tale of a Patent" (1850), "Red Tape" (1851), "Mr. Bull's Somnambulist" (1854), "Prince Bull. A Fairy Tale" (1855), "Thousand and One Humbugs" (1855), "Our Commission" (1855), "Cheap Patriotism" (1855), "Nobody, Somebody, and Everybody" (1856), and "Stores for the First of April" (1857). At the same time, Dickens became a leading figure in the Administrative Reform Association (ARA), a popular, middle-class movement of the 1850s which called for the use of more business-like methods in public administration (Olive Anderson 240).

[78] Whereas Dickens was intensely critical of the status quo, he did not go so far as to embrace Chartism nor did he subscribe to the idea of the historical agency of the working class (Sanders, "Politics," 208). Ledger suggests that Dickens and Chartist writers shared the same discursive space (2), but Vargo observes that Dickens did not have to worry about the Home Office "perus[ing] his journal for evidence for future prosecutions," unlike many contemporary Chartist writers, of whom a fair share were imprisoned on account of their "direct explorations of the power of the state" (26, 17). Sambudha Sen suggests that Dickens drew on the tradition of radicalism in which literature served as an "instrument of political mobilization," but that he reshaped this literary practice into "a socially acceptable, relatively nonthreatening mode of political entertainment" (10).

[79] Richard Maxwell argues that there is a divergence between, on the one hand, Dickens's commentary on administrative textuality in his weekly magazine *Household Words*, where he generally eulogises emergent "archival systems" and concedes that a complex modern society really needs its "acres of paperwork," and, on the other hand, his revulsion with bureaucratic textuality in novels like *Bleak House*, in which, as Maxwell puts it, he is able to "confront possibilities that the magazine chooses to suppress for its own polemical purposes" (171). However, Maxwell's dichotomous reading of Dickens's treatment of administrative textual culture is somewhat tenuous. In fact, Dickens's critique of official institutions' management of wills in a novel such as *David Copperfield* clearly aligns with his commentary in "The Doom of English Wills," a series of literary sketches published in *Household Words* in 1850.

Little Dorrit has been described by Humbert Wolfe as the "obvious place at which to begin," when discussing British civil service fiction (43). Similarly, Goodlad writes,

> Were we to coin a term for a genre called "novels of state," *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit* would epitomize it, standing out for their engagement with public health and Poor Law reforms as well as institutions such as Chancery, the Treasury, prisons, the police, and, of course, Parliament. ("Parliament," 448)

As Wolfe and Goodlad indicate, these two midcentury novels—*Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*—provide a rich and many-sided account of the Victorian administrative state, and rank amongst the most influential literary works dealing with state administration in British literature. *Little Dorrit* arguably represents the apex of Dickens's career as a critic of official institutions. It is described by George Bernard Shaw as "a more seditious book than *Das Kapital*" ("*Great*," 51) and has been referenced time and time again by later writers on British public administration.

However, Dickens had set the tone for his institutional critiques two decades earlier with his highly influential account of the New Poor Law in *Oliver Twist* (1838). Significantly, Dickens wrote *Oliver Twist* in response to Martineau's Poor Law novellas (Sanders, "From 'Political,'" 51), meaning that a direct line may be drawn from the administrative fiction of Martineau to that of Dickens. Indeed, whereas Dickens's narratives about bureaucratic institutions have been touted as "the first efforts to grasp what Max Weber would later describe more neutrally as the techniques of rational administration" (Claybaugh, "Bureaucracy," 206), numerous British nineteenth-century writers had, in fact, addressed the topic of state bureaucracy before Dickens, including not only Martineau, but also Charles Lamb, Sir Henry Taylor, and Thomas Carlyle. Indeed, the originality of Dickens's administrative fiction was far from obvious to contemporary critics, many of whom rejected his portraits of state institutions as riddled with clichés. In a review of *Little Dorrit* in *Blackwood's Magazine* (April 1857), E. B. Hamley (who would go on to become an MP for the Conservative Party) suggests that Dickens's critique of the civil service is "as inartificial as if he had cut half-a-dozen leading articles out of an Opposition newspaper, and stuck them in anyhow, anywhere" (371). Whether or not one thinks that Dickens articulated a cogent political analysis in portraying the civil service—which, following scholars such as Claybaugh, I will argue that he did—Dickens's *literary* treatment of officialdom was indubitably innovative.

The connection to Martineau is particularly germane to the present study, given that Dickens's administrative fiction resembles Martineau's work in certain important respects. In

writing *Oliver Twist*, Dickens drew on the very same official reports that Martineau had sampled in writing *Poor Laws and Paupers Illustrated* (Altholz 137). Moreover, in terms of the style of his administrative fiction, Dickens followed Martineau in writing stories that centred on interactions between state functionaries and ordinary citizens. By contrast, other early-nineteenth-century writers on public administration such as Charles Lamb and Sir Henry Taylor focussed exclusively on office life. The pedagogical thrust of Dickens's administrative fiction is another dimension of his work that resembles Martineau's treatment of state bureaucracy; and yet, whereas Martineau primarily strove to alert the state's "subjects" as to their "duty" towards the state, Dickens's instead embraced the pedagogic value of fiction as a means of empowering civilians within the emergent administrative state culture. There are, in other words, noteworthy differences in terms of outlook and orientation between these two pioneering writers of administrative fiction.

In the early 1850s, Martineau was a regular contributor to Dickens's journal *Household Words*. This journalistic alliance was forged partly through the two writers' shared conviction that popular print culture held great potential as an educational force, not least with respect to illuminating the complex institutional landscape of the state. However, as indicated above, Dickens and Martineau did not always see eye to eye regarding social and administrative reform. Dickens made himself unpopular with Martineau by heading the popular outcry against the draconian aspects of the New Poor Law in the 1830s and '40s. Moreover, whereas Martineau had placed her authorial pen at the disposal of a Royal Commission of Inquiry, Dickens joined the ARA, embracing the role of a spokesman for the people vis-à-vis officialdom. This form of populism provoked the ire of Martineau, who dismissed Dickens in the acerbic pamphlet "The Factory Controversy" (1855) as a "humanity-monger" unfit to "meddle with affairs in which rationality of judgment is required" (qtd. in Crawford, "Harriet," 456).[80]

With *Poor Laws and Paupers Illustrated*, Martineau had set an important precedent for the type of administrative fiction that Dickens would write in the midcentury. Like Martineau, Dickens critiqued maladministration and promoted specific reforms, performing

[80] Ledger describes Martineau's writing for Dickens's journal as a tactically motivated and highly unstable "five-year alliance" based on their "shared opposition to American slavery and on a broad faith in progress" (189). Highlighting the political differences of Martineau and Dickens, K. J. Fielding and Anne Smith delineate Dickens's response to the "dogma" of Martineau's "scientifically established" doctrines of political economy which embody "all that the fable of *Hard Times* rejects" (414). However, Iain Crawford complicates Fielding and Smith's take on the Martineau/Dickens relationship, criticising the broader tendency to "dichotomize two writers for whom the degree to which their values coincided was an essential element in their conflict and contributed to the intensity with which they engaged one another" ("Harriet," 454–55).

the conceptual work of elucidating the emerging administrative state culture for the benefit of his readers. However, whereas Martineau's Poor Law tales emphasised the threat of working-class bureaucratic literacy, Dickens instead portrays the dangers of bureaucratic state institutions for members of the public. By telling bureaucratic horror stories about ordinary civilians suffering at the hand of bureaucrats, Dickens implied that laypeople had to take responsibility for their own bureaucratic education lest they remain perennially at the mercy of state functionaries with finer bureaucratic sensibilities.

Dickens's administrative fiction is steeped in a folkloric mythologising discourse about officialdom, particularly as it both participates in, and examines the preconditions for, the public's knowledge production about officialdom. Above all, Dickens suggests that the emergent administrative state culture was dividing Victorian society along new lines. If quick-witted paupers are consistently able to outsmart parochial overseers in Martineau's Poor Law novellas, then the power dynamic between state functionaries and laypeople has swung in the opposite direction in Dickens's fiction, where the newly prominent figure of the professional bureaucrat is firmly in control of administrative mechanisms and systems. Building on my analysis of Martineau's administrative fiction in the previous chapter, the present chapter will investigate the educational and critical dimensions of Dickens's administrative fiction, whilst also exploring the cultural significance of his representations of state bureaucracy. I will begin, in the next section, by situating Dickens's administrative fiction in relation to his involvement with the ARA, as well as by discussing the contemporary critical response to his administrative fiction.

"The Governors and the Governed"

Dickens famously rejected several entreaties to enter into parliamentary politics, and broadly avoided getting directly involved in political campaigning. However, he did elect to join the Administrative Reform Association, a popular movement born out of displeasure with the mismanagement of the Crimean War of 1853–1856. At a meeting of the ARA on June 27, 1855, Dickens gave a speech in which he commented on the civil service and outlined his hopes for what the ARA might accomplish. Interestingly, Dickens began his speech by declaring that he would "do his public service through Literature" (*Speeches*, 201). This was not only Dickens's way of reiterating his commitment to literature as opposed to politics, but it was also a barb aimed at public servants. That is, by appropriating the term "public service,"

Dickens destabilised the meaning of that term in a rather subversive manner. For Dickens, non-official forms of social influence, like popular literature or indeed extra-official political organisation, could substitute for state-ratified services. This kind of manner of styling himself an unofficial literary public servant was the antithesis of Martineau's quasi-official involvement in an official informational-propagandist project: Dickens's literary practice represented a challenge to officialdom, rather than an attempt at assimilation. Indeed, Dickens's proclamation is suggestive of a literary programme of sorts, an ambition to outdo the Victorian state in serving the public.

In his speech, Dickens also defended the ARA against the political establishment's "objection" that the popular organisation would set "class against class," by emphasising that it would in fact "avoid placing in opposition [...] the two words Aristocracy and People," and that he personally found it more useful to speak of "the governors and the governed" (*Speeches*, 203). These comments cannot be taken at face value; in actual fact, the ARA's campaign constituted a confrontational move in a class-based struggle for influence in the emergent administrative field; moreover, as Trey Philpotts notes, most of Dickens's energies as a commentator on administrative reform were directed towards "tossing the aristocratic rascals out of office" (286). Dickens privately commiserated that Britain was caught in "meshes of aristocratic red tape," as he put it in a March 1855 letter to E. E. Morgan (qtd. in Moore 87), but he evidently found it expedient to downplay his anti-aristocratic leanings in his ARA speech.[81] That is not to say that Dickens's binary model of "governors" and "the governed" was false or unimportant. Whilst this dichotomy arguably elides the question of class, it nonetheless represents a lynchpin in Dickens's narration and analysis of the nascent administrative state.

The nineteenth century did, in fact, see a growing divide between the governors and the governed, insofar as the mid-nineteenth-century professionalisation of the civil service created a class of specialised bureaucrats. In his speech, Dickens valorises the ARA as an effort "to bring together those two fronts looking now so strangely upon each other, [...] to bridge over that abyss" (*Speeches*, 203). And yet, Dickens's professed peace-making ambitions are belied by his derisive comments about officialdom. He motivates the ARA's existence in markedly paternalistic terms, proclaiming that government departments are in "a sufficiently invalided state to require close watching, and the occasional application of sharp

[81] Dickens responded forcefully to the "aristocratic attacks" of the Northcote-Trevelyan report, which blamed the problems of the civil service on the shortcomings of lower-level clerks (Philpotts 297). Taking the opposite view, he declared that "[t]he official system is upside down, and the roots are at the top. Begin there, and the little branches will soon come right" ("Cheap Patriotism," 310).

stimulants"—that they needed to be "hustled and pinched in a friendly way" (202). This suggestion that somebody needed to keep a "close watch" on the civil service anticipates Bourdieu's trenchant question, "who will inspect the inspectors?" (*On the State*, 11). Of course, Dickens was well placed to identify the need for an organisation such as the ARA; after all, he had made a career out of "hustling and pinching" officialdom.

It is no coincidence that the establishment of the ARA concurred with the midcentury professionalisation of public administration. The wave of popular criticism sparked by the mismanagement of the Crimean War clashed with officialdom's developing sense of professional autonomy, a contradiction which comes to the fore also in the heated debates about the role of the writer vis-à-vis the state that were sparked by Dickens's midcentury writings. The barrister and legal theorist, James Fitzjames Stephen—son of the colonial administrator Sir James Stephen—was particularly scathing about Dickens's administrative fiction in reviews such as "Mr. Dickens as a Politician" (1857) and "License of Modern Novelists" (1857). The heart of the problem, as Stephen saw it, was that Dickens's depictions of British officialdom were liable to influence the "moral and political opinions of the young, the ignorant, and the inexperienced," thus "beget[ting] hasty generalizations and false conclusions" ("License," 125). In other words, echoing Plato's concerns about the adverse effects of poetry on Greek youths, Stephen argued that Dickens's fiction would give an impressionable readership the wrong idea of the state. Stephen averred that Dickens should leave matters of state to statesmen, sardonically proclaiming,

> The greatest of our statesmen, lawyers, and philosophers would shrink from delivering any trenchant and unqualified opinion upon so complicated and obscure a subject as the merits of the whole administrative Government of the empire. To Mr. Dickens the question presents no such difficulty. ("License," 128)

In "The Moral Element in English Literature" (1881), Leslie Stephen reiterated his elder brother's critique, arguing that when a writer such as Dickens was "discharging his proper function," he "threw much light upon facts which every statesman should take into account," but that when Dickens directly addressed political or administrative issues in his fiction, as he was prone to do, he "invade[d] the province of the statesman" and his art lost "all serious value" (36). In other words, the Stephen brothers maintained that official matters should be left to state officials with the requisite professional knowledge. Here, it should be mentioned that the Stephen brothers' proconsular critiques of Dickens were not only politically or ideologically motivated interventions, but also expressions of a familial vendetta: their censorious lampooning of Dickens stemmed from their feeling that Tite Barnacle, the

infamous civil servant of Dickens's *Little Dorrit*, was a poorly disguised caricature of their father, Sir James Stephen (Stephen, *The Life*, 159).

Dickens was, of course, more than capable of holding his own in the Victorian public sphere. In the sketch "The Great Tasmania's Cargo" (21 April, 1860), Dickens insisted upon the prerogatives of "the governed" to speak out against perceived maladministration:

> we civilians, seated in outer darkness cheerfully meditating on an Income Tax, have considered the matter as being our business, and have shown a tendency to declare that we would rather not have it [the administration of the country] misregulated, if such declaration may, without violence to the Church Catechism, be hinted to those who are put in authority over us. (37)

With these remarks, Dickens situated his sketch—a critique of Britain's colonial administration—as a contribution to a broader popular conversation about officialdom, whilst also criticising those in "authority" for considering "civilians" ignorant, in what reads as a direct riposte to James Fitzjames Stephen's aforementioned reviews. Prior to this, Dickens had, in fact, responded directly to Stephen. In "Curious Misprint in the *Edinburgh Review*" (*Household Words*, August 1857), Dickens lambasted Stephen for thinking that novelists should confine themselves to "the mere amusement of their readers" (97). For Dickens, it was absolutely within his remit as an author of popular fiction not only to comment on administrative matters, but also to educate and guide his readers. If authors did not supply the education that their readers—"the young, the ignorant, and the inexperienced," to repeat Fitzjames Stephen's words—apparently lacked with respect to the domain of public administration, then who else would provide this form of guidance?[82]

Dickens rejected the dichotomy of well-informed insiders and "outer darkness" as fallacious. This problematisation of officialdom's authority and competence is a large part of what makes Dickens's administrative fiction so very explosive. In other words, Dickens contested the very basis of bureaucratic rationality (as Weber would late define it). Given Dickens's stance, it is somewhat ironic that the Stephenses and later critics rejected Dickens's writings on public administration as uninformed. This patronising attitude was expressed, for instance, by the civil servant and author Anthony Trollope, who dubbed Dickens "Mr Popular Sentiment" in *The Warden* (1855) (208). Orwell also proclaimed that Dickens's critique of Victorian officialdom was curtailed by Dickens's lack of "contact with the governing classes"

[82] In the preface to *Bleak House*, Dickens clearly intimates an awareness of, and a sense of pride in, the fact that his writings had helped to stoke popular dissatisfaction with officialdom: "[a] Chancery judge once had the kindness to inform me [...] that the Court of Chancery, though the shining subject of much popular prejudice (at which point I thought the judge's eye had a cast in my direction), was almost immaculate" (3).

(Orwell, "Charles," 22, 24).[83] And yet, contrary to Orwell's suggestion, Dickens in fact had numerous points of contact with Victorian officialdom that might have afforded him a degree of insight. Early in Dickens's childhood, his father—John Dickens—served as a government clerk in the Royal Navy Pay Office and in Somerset House. Dickens himself enjoyed a short legal career during his teenage years, copying documents and registering wills as a clerk in the solicitor's office of Ellis and Blackmore, in Gray's Inn (Ackroyd 115). Dickens then went on to work as a reporter on law courts and on the Police Court, before freelancing as a parliamentary reporter in the House of Commons, writing for *Mirror of Parliament*, the *True Sun*, and *The Morning Chronicle*, an experience that left him thoroughly disillusioned with party politics.

Dickens was, in other words, well-placed to write about various aspects of the emergent administrative state culture. And yet, as a writer of administrative fiction, Dickens did not invoke any special insight that his professional life might have afforded him. On the contrary, in the preface to the first edition of *Little Dorrit*, Dickens presented his novel precisely as an attempt to express a civilian non-bureaucrat's understanding of the civil service: "If I might make an apology for so exaggerated a fiction as the Barnacles and the Circumlocution Office, I would seek it in the common experience of an Englishman [...] in the days of a Russian War, and of a Court of Enquiry at Chelsea" (5). Here, then, Dickens invokes the "common experience" of administration as a legitimate source of inspiration for a novel dealing with matters of public administration. This position is interesting for a number of reasons. For one, it flies in the face of James Fitzjames Stephen's criticism of Dickens as an uninformed outsider. It is also antithetical to the position taken by authors of Blue Book fiction *à la* Martineau who tended to present their work as based on official information. Moreover, it signified a distinct departure from the reportorial methods that Dickens had previously been using when writing about official institutions, in which his writing process would begin with an investigation of the institution that he wished to portray. Dickens frequently inspected state institutions and institutional practices in person, visiting establishments such as schools, prisons, and workhouses, both in England and abroad (Carey 31). This was an important source of information and inspiration for Dickens's journalistic

[83] Likewise, in "Dickens and the Public Service" (1970), the author and civil servant C. P. Snow suggests that "[o]ur immediate impression, as we keep having the Circumlocution Office drummed into our ears, is that this is altogether too black-and-white. Which is precisely what Dickens's sophisticated contemporaries thought" (133). Conversely, Ledger suggests that the hostile critical reception of *Little Dorrit* may be read as an indication that the "intelligentsia of the 1850s was somewhat out of step with the cultural interests and political concerns of 'the People' whom Dickens was addressing" (232).

and literary production. For instance, in the *Household Words*-article "On Duty with Inspector Field" (1851), Dickens chronicled the experience of joining his friend Inspector Charles Field of Scotland Yard on his nightly beat. However, as noted above, *Little Dorrit* was not a well-researched exposé, but an exploration of how the governed in fact viewed those who governed.

Dickens was not alone in claiming an epistemological high ground for ordinary citizens as opposed to professional administrators in matters of state. Calling out the snobbery of "Certain University-bred reviewers," the author of an unsigned review in *The Leader* (27 June 1857) argued that the "truth" of Dickens's satire on the Circumlocution Office was "shown by the fact of its being at once adopted by the popular mind" (Collins, *Charles*, 373–374). Dickens's impact on the popular understanding of the administrative state was indeed immense, a point to which I will return later in this chapter. Tellingly, Trollope, a "suspiciously well-adjusted bureaucrat" (Luckhurst 246), flew to the defence of the civil service, not only by dismissing Dickens's as "Mr Popular Sentiment," but also by writing *The Three Clerks* (1857) in a bid to supplant Dickens's zesty bureaucratic imaginary with a government-friendly narrativisation of the civil service. That is, in *The Three Clerks*, Trollope portrays a fictive department—the Office of the Board of Commissioners for Regulating Weights and Measures—that is introduced as a "well-conducted public office" that is "exactly antipodistic of the Circumlocution Office" (7). In short, high-profile state-affiliated writers and critics such as Stephen and Trollope defended officialdom against Dickens's critiques, thus asserting the authority of the professional bureaucrat in the administrative domain. Having situated Dickens's midcentury administrative fiction as an intervention in the 1850s "parlour game" of administrative reform, I will, in my next section, begin to explore Dickens's treatment of state bureaucracy in his fiction, focusing on the ways in which his novels thematise questions of bureaucratic literacy.

Dickensian State Play

In the densely metaphorical opening pages of *Bleak House*, Dickens famously situates the High Court of Chancery "at the very heart of the fog" (6). Dickens's narrator further emphasises Chancery's opaqueness by suggesting that "well may the uninitiated from the streets, who peep in through the glass panes in the door, be deterred from entrance by its owlish aspect" (6). Through this description of Chancery's daunting bureaucratic ambience, Dickens establishes, at the very outset, the issue of conceptual inaccessibility that his novel

will seek to rectify, by initiating the "uninitiated" into the mysteries of Chancery Court. In short, Dickens seeks to embolden his reader to push open the proverbial Chancery door. The sections dealing with state bureaucracy in *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit* are essentially cautionary tales of officialdom written for the benefit of non-bureaucrats, stories that highlight the dangers of entering the administrative field without the requisite bureaucratic sensibility or capital. More clearly than Martineau's *Poor Laws and Paupers Illustrated*, then, Dickens's administrative fiction constitutes a literary version of what Cooper terms "state play"—that is, an immersive learning situation designed to endow participants (in this case readers) with an improved understanding of the administrative state.

Dickens's accomplishments as a writer on state bureaucracy are often likened to those of Kafka. In a 1963 essay on Dickens's Circumlocution Office, John D. Jump suggests that "[a]rbitrary, tyrannical, and absurd, the Circumlocution Office is an authority akin to those that Kafka has made familiar to us" (106).[84] Jump credits Kafka with making the absurdities of the twentieth-century administrative state "familiar." As noted above, I propose that Dickens's fiction performed a similar familiarising function in the mid-nineteenth century. In this respect, the administrative fiction of Dickens and Kafka performed similar socio-cultural functions. However, if Dickens's work foreshadows Kafka's representation of faceless legal bureaucracy, then the comparison with Kafka also illuminates the historical specificity of Dickens's administrative fiction. Given the relative novelty of modern bureaucratic practices in the mid-nineteenth century, it is not surprising that Dickens, as compared to Kafka, places greater emphasis on the sheer unrecognisability of this phenomenon. In *Bleak House*, Dickens's laypeople decry Chancery as a "monstrous system" (193), the monstrosity of which is precisely that it is a "system," an organisation "so complicated, that no man alive knows what it means" (7).[85] The phenomenon of the bureaucratic system, then, appears to radically depart from the horizon of expectation of Dickens's civilian non-bureaucrats.

The pertinence of Cooper's concept of "state play" to Dickens's work is underlined by the fact that Dickens's fiction contains numerous scenes in which laypeople jointly work

[84] John Lucas suggests that, "[w]hat Kafka was credited with introducing in *The Trial*—namely a new awareness of our lives as governed by Law—Dickens had found a fictional means of addressing some seventy years earlier" (86). Lucas's comments are echoed by several other scholars, including Richard Posner, who finds that, "[t]he impenetrable mystery and futility of [Chancery] proceedings resemble those of the court in *The Trial*. This should not be a surprise [...] because Kafka greatly admired Dickens's novels" (140). However, John Carey cautions against comparisons with Kafka that "make Dickens look more modern than he is" (174).

[85] As I discuss at greater length in a recent article, the decentred structures and drawn-out processes of Chancery bureaucracy contradict Dickens's laity's notions of time and space. The non-bureaucrats of Dickens's novel would need to adjust their conceptions of time, as well as revise their notions of space, in order to avoid being victimised by Chancery's "disorienting effects" (Foster, "Bureaucratic Sensibility," 33).

through matters pertaining to officialdom. One example of this form of embedded state play is the scene in *David Copperfield* (1850) in which David's friends and family arrange a domestic "private Parliament" so as to give David, who is going to try his hand at parliamentary reporting, the opportunity to practice transcribing speeches:

> I should like to see such a Parliament anywhere else! My aunt and Mr. Dick represented the Government or the Opposition (as the case might be), and Traddles, with the assistance of Enfield's Speaker or a volume of parliamentary orations, thundered astonishing invectives against them. (552)

This jovial parliamentary re-enactment shows civilians taking a purposeful collaborative approach to preparing for operating within officialdom, a scene of state play which underlines the pedagogic streak in Dickens's administrative fiction.

The narrative of *Bleak House* also contains a scene in which official proceedings are re-enacted. After the cause of Captain Hawdon's death has been established by the coroner (the erroneous verdict is "Accidental death"), some of the Jurymen linger "colloquially" at the public house Sol's Arms, where the actor Little Swills playfully "characterises" the inquest that has just taken place:

> Little Swills says, Gentlemen, if you'll permit me, I'll attempt a short description of a scene of real life that came off here to-day. Is much applauded and encouraged; goes out of the room as Swills; comes in as the Coroner (not the least in the world like him); describes the Inquest, with recreative intervals of piano-forte accompaniment to the refrain—With his (the Coroner's) tippy tol li doll, tippy tol lo doll, tippy tol li doll, Dee! (136)

This vaudevillian parody (presented by Swills as "a scene of real life") on the coroner's inquest reads as a *mise en abyme* of Dickens's comedic and critical literary treatment of official institutions. Like Swills's playful and carnivalesque performance, Dickens's satirical description of the inquest—and of administrative state culture more broadly—provides his readers with an opportunity to digest official administrative practices.

Moreover, Dickens's novels feature numerous scenes of instruction in which bureaucratic know-how is shared. For instance, in *Great Expectations* (1861), Pip is informed by Wemmick, a legal clerk who is senior to him, that "it's a good rule never to leave documentary evidence if you can help it, because you don't know when it may be put in" (328).[86] Dickens indicates that such tutoring is necessary because civilians will fail to gain an understanding of institutional mechanisms simply by observing or being subjected to state

[86] Similarly, Mr. Guppy, another legal clerk well-versed in bureaucratic documentary culture, declares that "[b]eing in the law, I have learnt the habit of not committing myself in writing" (*Bleak House* 359).

bureaucracy. Indeed, Dickens problematises the idea, put forth by James Fitzjames Stephen amongst others, that knowledge of the administrative field is directly linked to experience. Esther Summerson's narration of her encounters with Chancery Court is a fascinating case in point. In relating her first visit to Chancery, Esther professes: "I felt very ignorant, but what could I do? I was so entirely unacquainted with the subject, that I understood nothing about it even then" (*Bleak House*, 22). These remarks typify both Esther's bashfulness and Chancery's enigma. What is especially interesting here is Esther's sense that she could make little of Chancery "even then," which suggests that she came to understand even less (than "nothing") in the process of becoming better acquainted with the workings of Chancery Court. Indeed, having observed Chancery praxis on several occasions, Esther declares, "[it] was so curious and self-contradictory to me, who had no experience of it, that it was at first incredible and I could not comprehend it" (308). Developing her perplexed but discerning analysis of the proceedings, Esther declares: "I counted twenty-three gentlemen in wigs, who said they were 'in it'; and none of them appeared to understand it much better than I" (308). Esther's mystification speaks to the underlying paradox that Dickens is articulating, namely that familiarity with officialdom appears to lead away from comprehension, rather than, as might be presumed, towards a fuller understanding.

Via Esther's encounter with Chancery, Dickens articulates a key observation in Bourdieu's theory of the state, by indicating that whilst there are distinct practical advantages to being familiar with the bureaucratic apparatus, such familiarity may also become an impediment to thinking about and understanding the state. This epistemological impasse is underlined by Esther's observation that "there seemed to be no reality in the whole scene, except poor little Miss Flite, the madwoman standing on a bench, and nodding at it" (308). Tellingly, it seems as though Flite has lost her mind partly due to her all too frequent visits to Chancery; and yet, Esther implies that Flite's state of mind is the only reasonable response to the unedifying spectacle on display. What ordinary civilians need in order to make sense of state bureaucracy, then, is not more experience per se, but rather guidance, especially in the shape of state play *à la* Little Swills's "characterisation" of the coroner's inquiry, the type of forum that provides a pedagogical safe space for working through experiences of state bureaucracy.

Dickens's fictional accounts of state institutions essentially provided this type of bureaucratic education or guidance. His account of Chancery Court was not only a vituperative critique of that particular institution, but it also had a greater utility as a road map for navigating the phenomenon of state bureaucracy more broadly. This is indicated by the

fact that Dickens's representation of these institutions repeatedly spills over onto a larger canvass. In fact, at one point, via Krook's sudden demise, Dickens links Chancery bureaucracy to "all authorities in all places under all names soever, where false pretences are made" (403). This emblematic dimension of Dickens's administrative fiction has been noted by D. A. Miller in his influential analysis of *Bleak House*, which identifies Dickens's Chancery with the "emergence of a new kind of bureaucratic organization" (75). And yet, Miller's emphasis on the "newness" of Chancery bureaucracy has raised many a scholar's eyebrow. Notably, Pam Morris writes that "Miller, in his reading of *Bleak House*, associates the Court of Chancery with a labyrinthine modern policing and surveillance regime, even though the text is at pains to associate it with the *ancien régime* of the Dedlocks and foreground its 'hoary' antiquity" (679), and, similarly, Goodlad refutes Miller's reading, arguing that "Chancery's 'evident archaism' symbolizes nothing so much as the pernicious tenacity of that archaism" (97). These critiques of Miller's analysis are misleading, I believe; they overlook the pedagogical overtones of Dickens's representation of Chancery—the ways in which the focus on the suitors' struggle to navigate the legal-bureaucratic system speaks to the increasingly pressing issue of acclimatising to the administrative state culture that was developing at this time.

The aforementioned scholarly disagreement regarding Dickens's treatment of Chancery actualises a number of questions not only about Dickens's administrative fiction, but also about the historicity of state institutions and the nature of institutional change. As Caroline Levine notes, state institutions "compel us to live in multiple periods at once," in so far as they "are constituted by their own multiple and conflicting temporalities stretching backward and forward in time" (60–1). The evolution of Chancery amply illustrates the complexity of institutional developmental trajectories, given that Chancery arose as secretarial bureau (thereof the name) long before it became a ministry of justice which subsequently grew increasingly bureaucratic. Furthermore, it should be noted that the notion of bureaucratisation was itself a heavily contested and variously attributed concept in mid-nineteenth-century Britain. As Claybaugh puts it, there were

> considerable divisions among British elites in how to think about bureaucrats and bureaucratic institutions: had England always had a bureaucracy, or was the bureaucracy new? were bureaucrats aristocratic or democratic? and, most urgently, was it possible to make bureaucratic institutions more efficient without further reinforcing the power of bureaucrats as a class? ("Bureaucracy," 206)

As noted in the previous section, Dickens lamented the pernicious effects of "aristocratic red tape" during the Crimean War. In such moments, *pace* Morris and Goodlad, Dickens clearly viewed the expanding and modernising administrative state as entangled with the *ancien regime*.[87] Viewed in this light, and in light of the protean mid-century discourse on British bureaucracy, Miller's contention that Dickens's Chancery simultaneusly stood for something new and something old is not incongruous or hard to accept.

Whilst I follow Miller in reading Dickens's engagement with Chancery as a response to the rise of the modern bureaucratic state, I also wish to highlight certain mismatches and omissions in Miller's interpretation of *Bleak House*. As noted in my introductory chapter, Miller, who advances a Foucauldian perspective on Victorian literature, reads Dickens's fiction as implicated in disciplinary power structures, proposing that a novel like *Bleak House* "trains us to abide in Chancery-like structures" (92). However, recognising that laypeople have a degree of agency in administrative situations that is proportionate to their bureaucratic know-how, Miller's argument may easily be flipped on its head. That is to say, the training that Miller speaks of may be understood as empowering rather than suppressive in nature. The Victorian novel is, in this sense, not simply an extension of the ideological state apparatus. This is certainly one of the lessons imparted by Dickens's administrative fiction: laypeople had to develop bureaucratic acumen if they were to get by in the emergent administrative state culture.

Crucially, Miller's analysis of *Bleak House* neglects the emphasis on the social basis of bureaucratic power that pervades Dickens's bureaucratic horror stories. Chancery-suitor Richard Carstone's tragic fate is not, as Miller claims, simply the consequence of Foucauldian *productive* power, which depends "on being voluntarily assumed by its subjects, who, seduced by it, addicted to it, internalise the requirements for maintaining its hold" (61)—rather, Richard's fall is directly engineered by the lawyer Vholes, who profits greatly by it. In short, having made Skimpole "a present of five pounds" in order to gain an introduction to Richard, the "Vampire" Vholes in fact convinces Richard to invest time and money in Chancery, goading him on until he has "swallowed up the last morsel of his client" (*Bleak House*, 522, 720, 760). This characterisation of Vholes as a vampire epitomises the Gothic elements of Dickens's representation of the legal domain (Ballinger 42–44). Motioning to the desk in his office, Vholes proclaims, "This desk is your rock, sir!" before proceeding to tap

[87] In the mid-nineteenth century, civil service reformers such as Edwin Chadwick argued that the system of patronage was the cause of "bureaucracy in the derogatory sense" (Osborne 306). Administrative professionalisation and modernisation would stem the problem of bureaucracy.

his desk, which, as the narrator (but not Richard) observes, "sounds as hollow as a coffin" (485). In other words, Vholes's vampiric legal practice entails not only "rule by desk" (the original meaning of the word "bureaucracy") but also death by desk.

Befuddled by state bureaucracy, Dickens's suitors engage in hopelessly quixotic tactical manoeuvres, "fighting with shadows and being defeated by them" (489). Meanwhile, Dickens's lawyers are shown to be actively engaged in obfuscating Chancery proceedings, flinging dust "in the eyes of the laity," even as they claim to have set their businesses up "with a view to everything being openly carried on" (273, 720). In other words, Dickens describes Chancery as an elaborate "conjurer's trick" that is made all the more effective by the laity's undeveloped grasp of the very phenomenon of bureaucracy (13). The implication is that this laity is in dire need of precisely the type of guidance that Dickens's readers find in *Bleak House*, which will lead them through the dangerous and exploitative institutional landscape that they seemingly must face.

The pedagogical dimension of Dickens's administrative fiction has been observed by several literary critics. Richard Menke describes Dickens's novels as "cautiously existential tale[s] about navigating a world of information," at a time when "the idea of information was still new" (26, 22). Similarly, Richard Maxwell suggests that the reader of *Bleak House* becomes better "able to grasp [legal-bureaucratic] situations" and that the "ignorance of Jo and of everybody else is replaced by a new, substantial knowledge" (175). This pedagogical thrust of Dickens's administrative fiction is devoted primarily to illuminating the agentive dynamics of the legal-bureaucratic field. Dieter Polloczek notes this in his discussion of *Bleak House*, but exaggerates the resourcefulness of Dickens's laypeople, in claiming that they deal with lawyers through an "agility of practices that may allow them to take advantage of sudden circumstances in order to seize the initiative in times of crisis" (139). In actual fact, in stark contrast with the paupers of Martineau's Poor Law novellas, the non-bureaucrats of *Bleak House* generally fail to utilise, or even comprehend, legal-bureaucratic mechanisms. In this respect, Dickens describes Chancery bureaucracy as a decidedly uneven social playing field, in which laypeople are at the mercy of legal professionals. In other words, Dickens's administrative fiction establishes a dichotomy of predatory state functionaries—even a lowly clerk such as Mr Guppy is able to use "his administrative knowledge to pursue his own ends" (Hofer-Robinson 153)—and a victimised laity; "governors and the governed," as Dickens put it in his ARA speech.

The vulnerability of the bureaucratically-naive layperson is epitomised by the naivety of the trooper George, who requests guidance on visiting Chancery Court for the first time.

Timidly, he confesses, "I don't understand these places," thereby making a perfect contrast with the "gentlemen of the bar in wigs and gowns" who are "perfectly at their ease, by no means in a hurry, very unconcerned, and extremely comfortable" (307, 309). A similar gulf in institutional familiarity underlies the power dynamic of Mr Snagsby's visit to the lawyer Tulkinghorn's office, where Snagsby's unease is contrasted with Inspector Bucket's sure-footedness:

> Mr. Snagsby is dismayed to see, standing with an attentive face between himself and the lawyer at a little distance from the table, a person with a hat and stick in his hand who was not there when he himself came in and has not since entered by the door or by either of the windows. There is a press in the room, but its hinges have not creaked, nor has a step been audible upon the floor. Yet this third person stands there with his attentive face, and his hat and stick in his hands, and his hands behind him, a composed and quiet listener. (275)

The stealth displayed by Bucket in this scene points forward to the agility of crime fighters in later detective fiction, but also gestures backwards to the genre of the Gothic, in so far as his "ghostly manner of appearing" takes on an almost fantastic character (275). This flirtation with the supernatural highlights the proximity of the Victorian bureaucratic horror story to earlier horror fiction genres.

The pedagogical dimension of Dickens's treatment of state bureaucracy is encapsulated in the discerning Mrs Bagnet's response to George's embroilment in a legal case. Crucially, she instructs George—who is dealing with "matters he does not understand"—"never to put his foot where he cannot see the ground" (345). This maxim highlights how, for Dickens's laypeople, the judicial-bureaucratic system constitutes a problem of cognitive mapping, as is also evident in Dickens's narrator's ambition to show that Chancery bureaucracy is animated by a "coherent scheme"—one of calculation, trickery and greed—and that, from this perspective, it is "not the monstrous maze the laity are apt to think it" (482).

In Miss Flite's words, "Chancery justice is so ve-ry difficult to follow": "I sleep but little, and think much. That is of course unavoidable; being in Chancery" (47, 53). Having "thought much," Flite perceives that she has cracked the code, when she has in fact lost her wits. Similar foggy misrecognition is evident in Richard's deluded notion that John Jarndyce, as opposed to himself, "is only an outsider, and is not in the mysteries. We have gone into them, and he has not. He can't be expected to know much of such a labyrinth" (612). Of course, in actual fact, Jarndyce's prescient reluctance to enter the "labyrinth" indicates that his understanding of Chancery's mysteries far surpasses Richard's. In *Bleak House*, then,

Dickens emphasises that the layperson's degree of preparedness is a determining factor in shaping the outcome of statist encounters. That is, whereas the bewildered Richard and George are outmanoeuvred by clerks and lawyers, the lucid Mrs Bagnet and John Jarndyce, who display greater comprehension of bureaucratic systems, observe the rules of the game. Notably—and this is another point of correspondence with Martineau's account of paupers' dealings with parish overseers—there is no lack of bureaucratic nous on the part of the female characters in *Bleak House*. Each in their own way, Mrs Bagnet, Miss Flite, and Esther Summerson display various forms of insight and preparedness in their dealings with the domain of state bureaucracy, frequently serving as guides and commentators, rather than being directly involved.

By spotlighting the importance of bureaucratic literacy, Dickens's narrative disperses some of the fog surrounding the emergent administrative state culture; and yet, the account of Chancery in *Bleak House* is itself notoriously complex and, at times, difficult to follow. Dickens's "notions of law," Stephen superciliously remarks, "are precisely those of an attorney's clerk" (Collins, *Charles Dickens*, 379). For Stephen, such experiences as a clerk were not the "solid acquirements" required of a commentator on the legal-bureaucratic field, or on officialdom at large (379). And yet, Dickens's time as a junior legal clerk in the office of Ellis and Blackmore, where his duties "included the copying of documents, administering the registration of wills and visiting on errands the various lawyers' offices and courts of law" (Ackroyd 115), had, in fact, made him conversant with various domains of the legal profession. George Ford and Sylvère Monod observe that "[a]lthough not formally qualified as a lawyer, Dickens had acquired an extraordinarily rich knowledge of the world of lawyers and law practice, and *Bleak House* bristles with references to the technicalities of a legal system that may sometimes prove baffling" (xvi).[88] Indeed, whilst Ford and Monod describe Dickens's "special knowledge" of the judiciary as "one of the assets of his storytelling," they also warn prospective readers of Dickens's novel that "it is a quality that can also cut in opposite directions" (xvi). Highlighting the disorienting effects of Dickens's portrait of Chancery, Ford and Monod propose that readers must "allow the novelist his assumption that his readers have some rudimentary understanding of how a mid-nineteenth-century court

[88] It should also be noted that Dickens's account of the law is not always factually accurate. Richard Posner argues that Dickens's account of Chancery "confuses will contests with guardianships. Jarndyce v. Jarndyce is a will contest and should therefore have been tried in the probate court rather than in the chancery court" (141). Anthony Julius argues that Dickens's "account of the legal system, its lawyers and judges, its rules and procedures, owes far more to previous literary accounts than to any textbook description of the system's actual functioning" (46).

functioned" (xvi). This discussion of Victorian readers' degree of familiarity with legal practices ties in with Dickens's thematisation of the conceptual inaccessibility of the bureaucratic legal system to laypeople. Ford and Monod presume that Dickens trusted contemporary readers to possess a "rudimentary" understanding of the legal field, and yet, as shown above, Dickens consistently emphasises the civilian non-bureaucrat's lack of familiarity with legal bureaucracy. In other words, if Dickens's contemporary readers were anything like his characters, they would have found Chancery proceedings quite as confusing as modern-day readers of *Bleak House*.

The portrayal of civilian non-bureaucrats in a work of administrative fiction is, of course, not necessarily the most precise barometer of a historical culture's general level of bureaucratic literacy. In the case of *Bleak House*, the fact that the novel is set earlier in the nineteenth century also needs to be taken into account. Dickens's characterisation of laypeople like Miss Flite and Richard Carstone could be read as a bureaucratic native's retrospective account of the naivety of an earlier era. Nevertheless, any discussion of the role of legal complexity for the reception of *Bleak House* certainly needs to factor in Dickens's emphasis on the opacity of Chancery to the non-bureaucrats of his novel. Understood as a form of state play, Dickens's complex, jargon-laden account of the judiciary in *Bleak House* emulates a conceptually challenging bureaucratic environment. In this respect, the very opaqueness of Dickens's account of Chancery may be read as a provocation aimed at his contemporary readers, who, it should be remembered, had to make sense of the "legal prolixeties" of the novel without paratextual guidance.

In *Little Dorrit*, Dickens's second major bureaucratic horror story of the 1850s, he moves away from the theme which is arguably his metier—the victimisation of the governed—to instead explore the extent of the agency of ordinary civilians in bureaucratic encounters, insofar as the novel provides an inspirational account of a bureaucratically-clued-in layperson.[89] Indeed, Dickens's story of Arthur Clennam's clash with the Circumlocution Office in *Little Dorrit* gives us the heroism of the layperson who prevails against red tape and maladministration. Early on in the narrative, Clennam takes an interest in the young seamstress Amy Dorrit, and discovers that her father is imprisoned in the Marshalsea prison for debtors. When Clennam asks Amy about the circumstances of her father's imprisonment, Amy relates her understanding of her father's creditors and the connection to the Circumlocution Office:

[89] John Carey notes that documentary mastery counts in the favour of virtuous Dickensian characters like John Harmon and Arthur Clennam, but "tells heavily against Carker, the villain of *Dombey and Son*" (36).

> Dorrit said, after considering a little, that she used to hear long ago of Mr Tite Barnacle as a man of great power. He was a commissioner, or a board, or a trustee, "or something." He lived in Grosvenor Square, she thought, or very near it. He was under Government—high in the Circumlocution Office. She appeared to have acquired, in her infancy, some awful impression of the might of this formidable Mr Tite Barnacle of Grosvenor Square, or very near it, and the Circumlocution Office, which quite crushed her when she mentioned him. (113)

Amy's hazy account of the situation indicates that the idea of seeking to change her father's situation seems "hopeless" partly as a consequence of her incomplete picture of the official institutions that are involved, the might of which are connected in her mind with her impression of the "formidable" Barnacle (113). Clennam, on the other hand, has lived in China for two decades and has not been conditioned by bureaucratic horror stories about the Circumlocution Office; he is not fazed by the prospect of making inquiries about Mr Dorrit's situation with the institutions concerned in the matter.

The main administrative saga of *Little Dorrit*, centring on the Dorrits, Arthur Clennam, and the Circumlocution Office, is paralleled by the story of the bureaucratic travails of an inventor named Daniel Doyce, who is prevented from patenting an important mechanical invention by the red tape of the Circumlocution Office. This part of the novel's plot is an expanded version of Dickens's 1850 *Household Words* sketch "A Poor Man's Tale of a Patent." In this earlier story, an inventor who wishes to secure a patent is told that he has to "prepare a petition unto Queen Victoria," and is given to understand that a "declaration before a Master in Chancery [is] to be added to it" (74). It turns out that such a declaration cannot be gained without an inordinately lengthy and expensive tail of fee-bound signatures:

> After a deal of trouble I found out a Master, in Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, nigh Temple Bar, where I made the declaration, and paid eighteen-pence. I was told to take the declaration and petition to the Home Office, in Whitehall, where I left it to be signed by the Home Secretary (after I had found the office out), and where I paid two pound, two, and sixpence. In six days he signed it, and I was told to take it to the Attorney-General's chambers, and leave it there for a report. I did so, and paid four pound, four. (74)

Ultimately, the protagonist requires signatures from, and thus has to pays fees to

> the Home Secretary, the Attorney-General, the Patent Office, the Engrossing Clerk, the Lord Chancellor, the Privy Seal, the Clerk of the Patents, the Lord Chancellor's Purse-bearer, the Clerk of the Hanaper, the Deputy Clerk of the Hanaper, the Deputy Sealer, and the Deputy Chaff-wax. (75)[90]

[90] As a legal clerk, Dickens "trudged to and fro between such public offices as the Alienation Office, the Sixpenny Receivers Office, the Prothonotaries Office, the Clerk of Escheats, the Dispensation Office, the

Repelled by this extortionist bureaucratic system—parts of which were already being abolished (e.g. the office of clerk of the Hanaper, which was disbanded in 1852)—the inventor commiserates with his friend William Butcher, a Chartist organiser who agrees that the patent system constitutes "a Patent way of making Chartists" (74).[91] The patent seeker's ordeal leads not only to reform-mindedness (he concludes that the "whole gang of Hanapers and Chaff-waxes must be done away with" [75]), but also to a greater awareness of the importance of mental fortitude and a combative disposition when dealing with bureaucrats: "[i]f William Butcher had wanted to Patent an invention, he might have been sharper than myself when hustled backwards and forwards among all those offices, though I doubt if so patient" (75).

The negotiation of administrative structures, then, requires considerable steeliness. This is demonstrated again in *Little Dorrit*, through Arthur Clennam's "storming of the Circumlocution Office" (129). Already by the time of his first encounter with the Circumlocution Office, Clennam recognises that his undertaking is fundamentally "an exercise in perseverance" (128). Crucially, during this first visit, Clennam meets two other members of the public who are on a similar mission: the inventor Daniel Doyce, who is seeking to obtain a patent for an invention, and Doyce's accomplice, Mr Meagles. Meagles describes the "interminable attendance and correspondence, [...] infinite impertinences, ignorances, and insults," that Doyce has suffered in seeking to patent his invention (135). Having listened to this account, Clennam tells Doyce that he admires his "great patience" and "great forebearance" (136). Clennam's fortuitous meeting with fellow laypeople who are contending with the Circumlocution Office represents another key moment in Dickens's administrative fiction where the experiential knowledge that is articulated by the character in the novel mirrors and extends the pedagogic dimension of Dickens's writing. What is noteworthy here is both the collaborative, strategic approach taken by Meagles and Doyce, and Meagles's instructive manner of characterising the Circumlocution Office for the benefit of the inexperienced Clennam. Furthermore, Dickens's framing of Meagles's bureaucratic horror story indicates that this mode of story-telling has become all too common: "Mr Meagles went through the narrative; the established narrative, which has become tiresome; the matter of course narrative which we all know by heart" (135). The bureaucratic horror story related in *Little Dorrit* is in this way framed as unremarkable—as a continuation of a popular,

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Affidavit Office, the Filazer's, Exigenter's and Clerk of the Outlawry's Office, the Hanaper Office and Six-Clerk's Office" (Ackroyd 116). Clearly, this experience left its mark.

[91] "The new Patent Office was opened in 1852. It was designed to bring an end to centuries of confusion, a world where the publication of patents, and even their need, were matters for debate" (McKitterick 537).

clichéd story-telling tradition, the popularity of which is itself an indictment on the administrative system.

The Circumlocution Office, true to its name and reputation, proves quite a challenge also for Clennam. Clennam endures "the long and hopeless labor of striving to make way with the Circumlocution Office," since he is "resolved to stick to the great Department" and to persevere with "the work of form-filling, corresponding, minuting, memorandum-making, signing, counter-signing, counter-counter-signing, referring backwards and forwards, and referring sideways, crosswise, and zig-zag" (542). Clennam's grit and determination makes him a "familiar" of the "waiting-rooms" of the Circumlocution Office, much as Miss Flite is a familiar of the High Court of Chancery in *Bleak House*. And yet, as revealed by the tragic fates of Dickens's Chancery suitors, merely persevering in the face of bureaucratic slowness is not necessarily an effective strategy. Indeed, officialdom holds grave danger for laypeople—as Dickens's narrator proclaims, "[n]umbers of people were lost in the Circumlocution Office" (120).

It is Clennam's bureaucratic sensibility in combination with his tenacity that enables him to challenge the Barnacles of the Circumlocution Office. Crucially, Clennam "fully underst[ands] the Department to be a politico diplomatic hocus pocus piece of machinery" (131). His bureaucratic acumen is on display in his first meeting with Barnacle Junior, where he manages to unsettle the state functionary's air of self-confidence by his very determination:

> Its effect upon young Barnacle was to make him repeat in a defenceless way, 'Look here! Upon my SOUL you mustn't come into the place, saying you want to know, you know!' The effect of that upon Arthur Clennam was to make him repeat his inquiry in exactly the same words and tone as before. The effect of that upon young Barnacle was to make him a wonderful spectacle of failure and helplessness.
>
> "Well, I tell you what. Look here. You had better try the Secretarial Department," he said at last, sidling to the bell and ringing it. (128–29)

As Sullivan aptly puts it, Clennam's mode of confrontation involves unflinchingly "mirror[ing] the Barnacles' formalism back to them" (98). The shift in the power dynamic between the governor and the governed that is portrayed in this scene represents a significant departure from the power dynamics of *Bleak House*, providing a positive image of the agency that bureaucratic know-how may bring.

As a site of state play, then, Dickens's administrative fiction essentially treats its Victorian reader to a crash course in bureaucratic literacy. Readers are invited to participate vicariously in administrative situations that will equip them for navigating administrative state

culture, thus ensuring that they will not find themselves "lost in the Circumlocution Office." In addition to highlighting the vulnerability of the bureaucratically illiterate in the emergent administrative state culture, Dickens's provided non-bureaucrats with conceptual resources and tools. In the next section, I will explore the role of terminology and linguistic invention in Dickens's pedagogical and exploratory treatment of state bureaucracy.

"It's the Only Name I Know for the Thing": Dickens's Bureaucratic Glossary

Many of the civilian non-bureaucrats of *Bleak House* may be described as bureaucratically illiterate. They do not speak the language of official institutions, nor do they have a language for bureaucratic phenomena. Mr Guppy, whose head is ever bent over legal documents, is conversely incapable of adapting his linguistic register to non-bureaucratic speech in attempting to court Esther Summerson, using the only language he knows—"our law terms, miss" (113)—in proposing to Esther by "fil[ing] a declaration" (113). In other words, Guppy's mastery of the language of bureaucracy has come at the expense of colloquial fluency. Throughout the novel, Dickens describes the specialised discourse of legal practitioners as a language of its own: "legal 'chaff' inexplicable to the uninitiated and to most of the initiated too" (233). This notion of a linguistic barrier between legal practitioners and "the uninitiated" is especially evident in the lawyer Mr Vholes's rhetorical manipulation of his client Richard.[92] When Richard professes that he is making progress with the suit, he comes across as a mere ventriloquist's dummy; his use of Vholes's phraseology and terminology makes abundantly clear that his understanding of the law suit is informed by the savvy lawyer's framing of it.

In portraying state institutions such as Chancery, Dickens made the most of the fact that he was working with the same medium as the bureaucratic institution: that of writing. Seeking to move beyond the scholarly emphasis on Dickens's negative critique of bureaucracy, Sukanya Banerjee identifies "a bureaucratic sensibility" in Dickens's narrative style and method of composition (144). Banerjee characterises Dickens's "daily regimen of writing" as bureaucracy-adjacent, noting that Dickens employed a particularly "bureaucratic mode of writing" when writing *Little Dorrit*, a method of composition that involved keeping a separate book for memoranda in order to manage the elaborate plot (151). It is indeed ironic that Dickens developed a method of book-keeping in writing this novel dealing with state

[92] In this respect, Dickens's account of law shows that the social division between lawyers and laypeople is "visible particularly in relation to language" (Bourdieu, "Force," 829).

bureaucracy, and perhaps Dickens drew on skills that he had learnt as a legal clerk. However, labelling Dickens's literary book-keeping "bureaucratic" collapses an important distinction between institutionalised official administrative practices and private methods of annotation, thus arguably diluting the concept of bureaucracy.

As seen in the previous section, Dickens frequently produces a form of bureaucratic poetics in order to amplify his critique of Victorian officialdom, playfully imitating bureaucratic textuality by listing administrative forms and institutions so as to manifest sprawling red tape on the page. In such passages, the accretion of bureaucratic writing threatens to go on indefinitely, stalling the narrative, a style of writing that anticipates the type of formal experimentation with lists and repetition that may be found in later modernist literature. Dean de la Motte highlights the role of bureaucratic textuality as a source of inspiration for nineteenth-century French "decadent" writers such as Théophile Gautier, Gustave Flaubert, and Joris-Karl Huysmans, arguing that administrative practices helped propel the development of narrative form "from linearity and referentiality and toward circularity and textuality" (27–8). Like the aforementioned French writers, who experimented with typically bureaucratic textual forms, including the "accretion of writing, circularity, stasis, re-production, rewriting, postponement" (de la Motte 29), Dickens developed a bureaucratic poetics of sorts—albeit not a distinctly "decadent" style—through his imitation of bureaucratic writing.[93]

However, there is more to Dickens's creative use of language in his administrative fiction than his satirical imitation of bureaucratic textuality. In order to avoid falling victim to bureaucratic predations, Dickens suggests, the laity would have to do more than simply study the language of bureaucrats. Victorian laypeople had to produce counter-knowledge, including their own bureaucratic vocabulary. As a writer who famously coined or popularised a great number of new words, a large part of Dickens's engagement with the issue of bureaucratisation was linguistic in nature. This approach is accentuated in *Bleak House* by John Jarndyce's coinage of the expression "Wiglomeration" to connote opaque, long-winded legal discourse. Jarndyce professes that "[i]t's the only name I know for the thing" (91). This neologistic endeavour spotlights a perceived lack of terminology for describing state bureaucracy, indicating a state of *hypocognition*, to use an anthropological term that denotes the position of "lacking a cognitive or linguistic representation of a concept" (Wu and Dunning 25). Dickens's wordplay is, of course, a factor of his linguistic creativity, but it also

[93] For a discussion of the links between Dickens, Decadence, and the higher civil service, see Foster ("Maladministration").

implies that the author perceived a hypocognitive situation with respect to state bureaucracy. Another example may be found in Dickens's sketch "Our Commission," where a mock-scientific experiment is performed to determine what the "bitter drug called Public Offices" actually consists of and what it should be called: "It was sometimes called Routine, sometimes Gentlemanly Business, sometimes The Best Intentions, and sometimes Amiable Incapacity; but, call it what you would, analysis always resolved it into Noodledom" (319–20). The issue of nomination ("call it what you would") is clearly essential to Dickens's project of conceptualising state bureaucracy.

And yet, the Victorians were hardly bereft of terminology for administrative statecraft. The French term "bureaucracy," coined in the mid-eighteenth century, had, as noted in my introductory chapter, entered the English language in the early nineteenth century. Yet, for some reason, Dickens was not inclined to use the word "bureaucracy" or its cognates in his fiction, preferring analogous terms like "red tape," coupled with his own coinages. Viewed in this light, Dickens's emphasis on the need for new terminology seems rather disingenuous, in that it reads as a strategic, self-serving evasion of the term "bureaucracy." Dickens did however use the older term "red tape," which, as indicated in my previous chapter, derived from the practice of binding official documents with red tape, gaining its figurative meaning in the eighteenth century.[94] Dickens's fondness for this term had much to do with its picture-writing qualities. In *David Copperfield*, typically, Dickens employs this already-metaphorical term as a conceit, suggesting that the country has been tied down by red tape: "Britannia, that unfortunate female, is always before me, like a trussed fowl: skewered through and through with office-pens, and bound hand and foot with red tape" (632); similarly, in *Little Dorrit*, the civil servants are described as winding "tape and paper round the neck of the country" (126); and in "The Toady Tree" it is suggested that a "Gordian knot of red tape [...] must be cut'" for the civil service to truly serve the people (301). Moreover, one of the characters in "Cheap Patriotism" goes by the name of "Mr. Tapenham," whereas a character in the fairy tale "Prince Bull" is simply named "Tape." It is hardly surprising, given Dickens's persistent and highly colourful use of this particular term, that the 1894 edition of Brewer's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* should credit Dickens with having introduced the phrase (1047). The fact that this erroneous claim was made in the dictionary is testament to Dickens's stature as a writer on bureaucracy, underlining his impact on the late-nineteenth-century statist lexicon and imagination.

[94] The *OED* gives 1736 as the first figurative use of "red tape."

In "Mr Dickens and his Critics" (*The Train*, August 1857), John Hollingshead defended Dickens against accusations that his literary representation of officialdom was merely regurgitating popular stereotypes and clichés. Importantly, Hollingshead emphasises that Dickens not only "echo[ed] the old cry of 'red tape'" but also added "two new cries in the shape of 'Barnacles' and 'Circumlocution Office'" (388). Dickens was, in other words, credited with producing new "cries," which signifies something more than linguistic innovation—something along the lines of a conceptual model or heuristic device. Indeed, more than any other Victorian writer on bureaucracy, Dickens was able to tap into and amplify the popular ideation and discourse about state bureaucracy, transforming disgruntled chatter into powerful "cries."[95]

As Hollingshead and other critics have noted, Dickens significantly bolstered the vocabulary for discussing bureaucracy through inspired catchphrases such as "Circumlocution Office," "Barnacles," and "How not to do it," which have a meme-like quality akin to that of terms such as "red tape" or "bureaucracy." As literary critic David Masson noted in 1859, "[t]he Administrative Reform Association might have worked for ten years without producing half of the effect which Mr Dickens has produced in the same direction, by flinging out the phrase, 'The Circumlocution Office'" (qtd. in Collins, *Charles*, 247). Dickens's penchant for crafting bureaucratic terminology is highlighted also by C. P. Snow, who has himself been credited as the inventor of the phrase "corridors of power":

> Dickens had had a stroke of genius, journalistic genius if you like, in hitting on the name for his office. He was well aware of it, and consequently overdid it. In fact, he went on overdoing it, not only throughout *Little Dorrit* but in later publications. He inserted it with proprietary pride, as though unnecessary to explain, in essays in *The Uncommercial Traveller*. It became a cliché of his time. [...] It is quite possible that, without this brilliant catchphrase, the entire treatment of government in the novel would have passed with far less notice. (131)

Here, Snow is clearly nodding to his own accomplishments as an inventor of a "brilliant catchphrase," but the point about Dickens's phraseology is nonetheless germane: "the Circumlocution Office" encapsulates his critique of state bureaucracy and rhetorically amplifies his message, its repetition throughout *Little Dorrit* (it is used 77 times in the novel) performing an important didactic function in hammering home the message.

This pedagogy of keywords is integral to Dickens's administrative fiction. In certain respects, Dickens's use of keywords in his administrative fiction resembles the style of the

[95] Sullivan writes that Dickens's writings had a "pestilential effect on the image of office life" (99–100). This phrase reflects Sullivan's impatience with Dickens's negative critique of bureaucracy, but it also underscores the far-reaching influence of Dickens's administrative fiction.

crammers and guidebooks of the 1850s that were directed to would-be civil servants, with the catchphrase "How not to do it" reading as a satirical inversion of the titles of such instructive publications. However, it would be reductive to identify Dickens's brand of administrative fiction simply with educational catchphrases; indeed, Dickens's catchwords are also motifs, and much is lost if his bureaucratic terminology is extracted from his texts and viewed in isolation. The sketch "Red Tape" (1851) is an excellent example of Dickens's manner of interlacing his keywords in a dense textual fabric. In "Red Tape," Dickens is determined to extract every ounce of figurative and comedic potential from the titular phrase. Thus, Dickens adumbrates the doctrines of what he terms "Red Tapeosophy," whilst also presenting fatuous images such as that of a state functionary "roll[ing] himself over and over in Red Tape, like the Hippopotamus wallowing in his bath," before ending with a flourish about the "Red-Tape-Worms," that have been "extracted" from people's stomachs only to be displayed in bottles in a London shop-window with plans for them to be housed in a museum (482–85). This ghastly, visceral image of bureaucratic infestation illustrates the lengths to which Dickens's would go in order to expand the bureaucratic lexicon and enrich the bureaucratic state imaginary.

Moreover, as indicated above, alongside the significance of Dickens's inventive phraseology, one needs to consider the words that he left out, such as "bureaucracy." Another notable omission in this respect is the rather conspicuous absence of the term "the state" from Dickens's midcentury administrative fiction. Indeed, especially in *Little Dorrit*—a novel dealing with "State Departments" (427)—the absence of the reifying hold-all concept of "the state" is highly significant. Rather than figuring officialdom as a unified, centrally coordinated entity, Dickens foregrounds the competition between various departments, whilst also spotlighting and interrogating associated terms such as "official," "public," "government," and "under government." Dickens's narrator proclaims that the Circumlocution Office had been "early in the field" and that it had therefore been "beforehand with all the public departments in the art of perceiving—HOW NOT TO DO IT," a pioneering spirit which had enabled it to "over-top all the public departments" (119). This account of the Circumlocution Office's rise to the top of the hierarchy of public departments reflects the dominant position of the Treasury during the nineteenth century, an institution which, as Philpotts has clarified, is in many ways the direct object of Dickens's critique (283–84). And yet, in and by characterising officialdom as a "field" consisting of competing actors, Dickens foregrounds the contingency involved in the historical evolution of state departments,

emphasising inter-departmental conflict in a way that runs counter to the idea of a unified state apparatus.

As noted in my introductory chapter, critics such as Bourdieu and Mitchell point out that the very term "the state" helps naturalise statehood and consolidate the state's authority. However, when the term "the state" figures in Dickens's work, it does so pointedly, as a part of Dickens's contestation of the state's symbolic power—it becomes, in effect, an "anti-state effect." Thus, in *Bleak House*, for instance, it is the aesthete con artist Harold Skimpole who speaks of "the State," invoking its authority as a means of exonerating himself, following his mercenary betrayal of Jo to Inspector Bucket: "[t]he State," he proclaims, "expressly asks him to trust to Bucket" (729). Zarena Aslami's highly illuminating discussion of the personification of statehood in Victorian fiction identifies Skimpole's words to Inspector Bucket as a prime example of "state fantasy" (4). For Aslami, Skimpole's reference to the purported wishes of the state encapsulates the Victorians' affective and psychological investment in the figure of the state. Whilst this contention raises a number of tantalising questions regarding the role of fiction in shaping the Victorian state imaginary, Aslami's analysis passes over the critical dimension of Dickens's writing, failing to note that Skimpole's deference to the wishes of "the state" casts a negative light on state fantasy. Rather than producing a state effect in the sense of conveying an idea of a personified, unified state, Dickens's fiction in fact dresses down and demystifies such figurations of officialdom.

In this section I have shown that Dickens's administrative fiction enriched the ongoing popular conversation about state bureaucracy by adding new terms and phrases to the bureaucratic glossary. At the same time, Dickens's restrictive use of the term "the state" appears to tie in with his figuration of the state as a field composed of stakeholders pulling in various directions, rather than as a unified entity. However, more detailed analysis of Dickens's nomenclature would be required in order to establish a clearer picture of the effects produced by his diction in this respect. Having explored how Dickens's administrative fiction addresses the problem of the Victorian civilian's lack of bureaucratic nous both through state play and through lexical innovation, the following section will explore the role that defamiliarisation plays in Dickens's project of making administrative state culture familiar to his readers.

Dickens's Defamiliarisation of the State

In previous sections I have highlighted the pedagogic side of Dickens's administrative fiction, but I do not wish to imply that it is one-dimensionally educational. Dickens does not simply

provide object lessons in how to negotiate vampyric bureaucrats. Indeed, as the example of Kafka's phantasmagoric bureaucratic horror stories highlights, familiarisation does not necessarily occur through a straightforward mapping out of the unfamiliar. Like Kafka, Dickens employs various literary devices to bring out the complexities of bureaucratic systems. Interestingly, Dickens adopts the conventions of Gothic stories and fairy tales in some of his shorter fiction dealing with officialdom, an allegorical mode of writing about the state that takes the reader out of the administrative state culture so to speak, rather than guiding the reader through it. A notable example is "Prince Bull. A Fairy Tale" (1855), in which the protagonist, Prince Bull, is enthralled by his fairy godmother, Tape. Another example is "A Haunted House" (1853), in which the Houses of Parliament are portrayed as haunted places of darkness, where, mysteriously, "in the dead of the night" one hears "words, words, words" (482). A third example is "The Thousand and One Humbugs" (1855), a story about British officialdom that is written as a spoof on Scheherezade's *A Thousand and One Nights*, an exoticising parable which implies that Victorian maladministration has "reached such absurd proportions as to have become almost mythical" (Moore 86). Here, Dickens figures the Hansard as "Hansardadade," the House of Commons as "Howsa Kummauns," and Lord Palmerston as "Grand Vizier Parmarstoon" ("Thousand," 265–67). That is, in these allegorical short stories, Dickens portrays officialdom in fantastical terms and thus renders the British state strange. In addition to the familiarising function outlined in previous sections of this chapter, then, Dickens's midcentury fiction also *defamiliarises* well-known names and institutions, thus destabilising the habituated perception of statehood.

An analogous mode of defamiliarisation operates in *Bleak House*, in which, as noted above, Dickens incorporates Gothic tropes in order to tell a tale of legal-bureaucratic horror. More broadly, in *Bleak House*, Dickens "purposely dwelt upon the romantic side of familiar things," as he puts it in the preface (4).[96] Crucially, Dickens's novel invites the reader to see administrative state culture through the eyes of individuals who are "outsiders," to use Richard Carstone's expression. Dickens's illiterate characters are particularly defenceless in the face of the symbolic violence of the administrative state, but they also represent unexpected loci of comprehension within Dickens's narrative economy (e.g. Miss Flite's garbled lucidity). The prime example is the illiterate street-sweeper Jo, who is the very antithesis of a bureaucratic native. Jo's testimony before the coroner inquiring about Captain Hawdon is refused precisely on account of Jo's documentary illiteracy, the fact that he is

[96] Terry Eagleton observes that "'Dickensian' realism involves an imaginative caricaturing of the familiar" (24).

incapable of giving his full name. Exasperated by Jo's inability to answer questions in accord with bureaucratic protocol, the coroner exclaims,

> Don't know that everybody has two names. Never heerd of sich a think. Don't know that Jo is short for a longer name. Thinks it long enough for HIM. HE don't find no fault with it. Spell it? No. HE can't spell it. No father, no mother, no friends. Never been to school. What's home? (134)

The nameless and homeless Jo evidently has no place in a bureaucratised society that increasingly revolves around modes of identification that are linked to textual culture.

By virtue of being excluded from social and institutional contexts organised around textual practices, Jo becomes an emblem of the possibility of a radically different mode of perception of administrative state culture. Dickens's narrator ponders Jo's anomalous perception of officialdom: "Jo's ideas of a Criminal Trial or a Judge or a Bishop or a Government or that inestimable jewel to him the Constitution, should be strange!" (198). These othering comments about Jo underline the fact that there is a broadly homogeneous state imaginary (one that is shared by the literate community), but they also point towards the possibility of seeing the state differently. The suggestion is not that Jo's illiteracy renders him oblivious to state culture, but rather that his perception transcends the habitual perception of statehood. Jo's illiteracy, then, shields him against the influence of ideological state apparatuses: he has not had the benefit of learning about officialdom at school, nor has he begun to acquire the bureaucratic sensibility that results from active participation in textual administrative culture, nor does he hold particular views on the state that have been mediated to him through popular discourse. At a time when administrative state culture was becoming a part of the texture of everyday life, then, Jo's "immaterial life" seems "wonderfully strange" because it manifests the possibility of transcending state culture and seeing it from the outside.

Krook is another illiterate outsider character in *Bleak House* whose relationship to administrative state culture serves a revelatory function in Dickens's narrative. Krook's "Rag and Bones Shop" is one of many "satirical mirrors" (Ledger 198) that enhance Dickens's critique of Chancery, bringing out its phantasmagoric dimension. In describing the judiciary, Dickens depicts a wider paper network that consists not merely of the actual courts, but also of clerk offices, clerk supplies-shops, abodes of copyists, and, by extension, Krook's shop. Krook's shop is colloquially known as "the Court of Chancery" and is described as having "the air of being in a legal neighbourhood, and of being, as it were, a dirty hanger-on and disowned relation of the law" (*Bleak House*, 49–50). Krook is primarily linked to Chancery

Court through his peculiar interest in "old parchmentses," items held in great "stock" in his shop, a practice of "storing a quantity of packets of waste paper, in a kind of well in the floor" that comes to represent an unexpected analogue or double for Chancery's documentary culture (50, 55).

Here it is worth noting that the organisation of official archives was a topical question in the mid-nineteenth century. A new institution named the Public Record Office was established following the Public Records Act of 1838, as a part of a concerted effort to centralise and improve the archiving of government records (McKitterick 555). Dickens weighed in on this subject in *David Copperfield*, casting doubt over the archival practices of state institutions by having his narrator ponder "whether they have lost many [wills], or whether they sell any, now and then, to the butter shops" (487). In *Bleak House*, Dickens again indicates the inadequacy of official archives, inasmuch as important Chancery documents have found their way into Krook's hands. It would almost appear that Krook, who cannot read, and who amasses "parchmentses" seemingly indiscriminately, is doing a better job at keeping track of important documents than Chancery Court. Krook engages in a quasi-archival form of hoarding which, one presumes, will have struck middle-class Victorian readers as a decidedly *unheimlich* way of handling paper. Indeed, there is an uncanny sense that, for all his eccentricity, Krook knows something about documents that the literate characters of the novel fail to perceive.[97] Despite not being able to read, the mysterious Krook seems prescient that his collection will be found to contain the all-important lost will required in order to settle the central lawsuit of the novel—at least, he is quite capable of scribbling the words "Bleak House," by "copying from memory" (56). Puzzled and captivated by Krook's obsessive storing of waste paper, people surmise that there must be some form of monetary value to Krook's collection of legal documents. Tony Jobling lodges with Krook in the hope of discovering his secret, only to realise that Krook's "whole stock from beginning to end, may easily be the waste paper he bought it as […]. It's a monomania with him, to think he is possessed of documents" (401). Jobling's characterization of Krook suggests that Krook not only believes himself to be in possession *of* documents, but also that Krook is possessed *by* documents. Like Miss Flite, Krook appears to have lost his mind "by hanging about the Lord Chancellor's Court and hearing of documents for ever" (401). With this vision of an illiterate's descent into madness through unremitting exposure to incomprehensible

[97] As Leah Price notes, "a negative quality (illiteracy) goes together with a positive one (expertise in the use value and exchange value of different weights, textures, and colors of paper)" (220).

documentary practices, Dickens incorporates further elements of the Gothic into his bureauratic horror story.

Krook's distorted mirroring of an official archive is an intriguing example of the "administrative grotesque" as theorised by Foucault. As Weber notes, the "official secret" is the bureaucrat's "fanatically defended" prize possession (*From Max Weber*, 234); but in *Bleak House*, it turns out that it is Krook, with his warped bureaucratic literacy, who possesses the truly important "official secret." Krook's strange handling of paper, and his large collection of waste paper, ultimately casts a shadow over Chancery's documentary culture, defamiliarising the storage of official paperwork and undermining the very idea of an official archive.[98] What is at stake in Krook's uncanny documentary practice, then, is the concept of officiality, which comes into question through the analogy that Dickens establishes between Chancery's records and Krook's waste paper collection. This deflating treatment of Chancery's documentary practices encapsulates Dickens strategic defamiliarisation of administrative state culture, which served to undermine or check the symbolic power of the state. As indicated above, this subversive, defamiliarising mode of writing the state is also on display in Dickens's playful and exoticising figuration of the House of Commons as "Howsa Kummauns." In the next section, I will further investigate Dickens's problematising treatment of the concept of officiality, which is a key aspect of his critique of the state's symbolic power.

Officiality in Dickens's Fiction

Like bureaucratisation, officialisation is anything but a linear process. This is evident in the case of the history of the *Hansard*, Britain's official record of parliamentary sessions. Until the late eighteenth century, the publication of remarks made in the House had been a punishable breach of Parliamentary privilege. However, towards the turn of the century, censorship grew weaker and coverage of parliamentary debates increased, with MPs gaining celebrity status through extended coverage in newspapers like the *Parliamentary Register*. Moving into the early nineteenth century, various newspapers sought to achieve recognition as the definitive, or "official," parliamentary record. One of these newspapers was *Mirror of Parliament*, which was owned and run by Dickens's maternal uncle, John Henry Barrow. In

[98] In this respect, Krook's mania for documents foreshadows Flaubert's *Bouvard and Pécuchet* (1881), in which two clerks escape the drudgery of office life but end up indulging in a copying extravaganza: "They copy haphazardly, whatever falls into their hands, all the papers and manuscripts they come across, tobacco packets, old newspapers, lost letters, believing it all to be important and worth preserving" (280).

the early 1830s, both Charles Dickens and his father John wrote for this newspaper, which clearly felt the pull of official print culture in a manner akin to the midcentury authors of Blue Book fiction discussed in my previous chapter, in so far as it sought to "mirror" parliament. From 1835, *Mirror of Parliament* embarked on the ambitious project of summarising parliamentary papers in a weekly column. This undertaking was roundly mocked for its "pretensions of complete coverage," betraying an effort to become "an official parliamentary publication" (Berman 101, 125). Unsurprisingly, given that the Dickens family lacked the state's informational infrastructural resources, its quasi-official journalistic enterprise soon resulted in bankruptcy. Its demise in 1843 left the field open for Thomas Curson Hansard's *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, a publication which outlasted competition from other newspapers and went on to become the de facto official account of parliamentary debates, before being officialised in 1909, when the Parliament started producing *The Hansard*, a state-ratified comprehensive account of parliamentary proceedings.

If Dickens came close to following in Martineau's tracks as a quasi-official writer of sorts when reporting for *Mirror of Parliament*, then this experience potentially explains the acute awareness of the dynamics of officiality that pervades his fiction. Another Victorian commentator who showed a marked interest in the concept of officiality was Carlyle, one of Dickens's major sources of inspiration, who, as observed in my introductory chapter, is credited with the earliest use of the term "officiality" in his writings of the 1840s. Dickens's use of "official" as a descriptor is stylistically quite as interesting as Carlyle's neologism. In *Bleak House*, for instance, the lawyer Mr Vholes's office is described as an "official den" replete with an "official cat" (484–85); in *Great Expectations*, similarly, the lawyer Mr Jaggers's office, full of books and "solid and good" furniture, is described as having an "official look" (188); in "The Toady Tree," there is mention of "little revolvers of special official intelligence [...] ready and loaded" (300); in "Cheap Patriotism" one of Dickens's state functionaries speaks with "severe official gravity" (308); likewise, in "Red Tape," Dickens wryly adorns the worst conceivable forms of bureaucratic bungling with "a wreath of blushing Tape of the first official quality" (483). What, one wonders, is this "official" quality in the wreath or, indeed, the cat? More than a stylistic quirk of Dickens's fiction, this use of the term "official," as an empty signifier so to speak, may be read as a kind of grammar of bureaucracy as excess, imitating and satirising the ways in which officialdom produces documents for documentation's sake, or words for words' sake (wiglomeration and circumlocution), akin to the decadent bureaucratic aesthetics that de la Motte identifies in the work of Huysmans and Flaubert. Dickens's pointedly blunt use of "official" may also be read

as a subtle comment on the symbolic violence of the state, in the sense that it presents officiality as reduced to a form of empty denominative authority.

In addition to employing the term "official" in a light-hearted and almost derisory fashion, Dickens thematises and interrogates how the socio-cultural dichotomy of the official and the unofficial shapes everyday life. This issue comes to the fore in *Great Expectations* through Pip and his colleague Wemmick's negotiation of the different roles that they inhabit as employees of a law firm. Wemmick is very particular about maintaining a strict division between work and personal life, withholding information about his domestic situation until he is ready to invite Pip into his home, upon which he announces: "[w]e are in our private and personal capacities, and we have been engaged in a confidential transaction before today. Official sentiments are one thing. We are extra official" (328). In other words, Wemmick separates the official and the "extra official" and compartmentalises his life so as to preserve the sanctity of his home against the pressures of work life. The rigid barrier that Wemmick raises to shield his "castle" (as he calls his home) from official matters also underlines the almost ontological weight that officiality was gaining in Victorian society (185). Indeed, Pip feels that there are "twin Wemmicks" (346).

The official / unofficial distinction is a recurring theme in Dickens's oeuvre. Officialisation is a central concern, for instance, in Dickens's representation of the London Metropolitan Police, the official police force which was introduced by Home Secretary Robert Peel in 1829 to replace amateur varieties of policing. As numerous scholars have observed, Dickens used his influence as a writer to support the newly founded official police, "cast[ing] the force, still a recent phenomenon, in the best light for an unconvinced readership" (Rosen and Santesso 130; see also Orwell 23; Carey 39). However, he did not write propaganda on their behalf; in fact, Dickens's portrayal of the new police force indicated that it "conceal[ed] its animus and class and gender position behind its concern with technique and professional skill" (Tambling 11).

The *Bleak House* character Inspector Bucket is perhaps Dickens's most noteworthy representation of the official police force. Echoing Wemmick's painstaking separation of "official" and "extra official" domains, Inspector Bucket proclaims that there is more to his existence than his public persona as a state functionary: "what is public life without private ties? He is in his humble way a public man, but it is not in that sphere that he finds happiness. No, it must be sought within the confines of domestic bliss" (596). And yet, ironically, these sentiments are offered by Bucket while he is busy masquerading as a friend of the Bagnets, purportedly visiting their home in private capacity, when he is in fact there to arrest George.

The duplicity of Bucket's remarks, then, suggests that he is never really wholly off duty. More broadly, as Miller notes, Bucket's modus operandi in *Bleak House* prompts the question,

> on behalf of whom or what does the Detective Police do its policing? Answers in the text, accurately reflecting a historical ambiguity, are various. Bucket works now in capacity of a private detective employed by individuals such as Tulkinghorn; now as the public official of a state apparatus, that enjoins him, for instance, to secure Gridley for contempt of court[.] (79)

In other words, Bucket appears to stray well beyond his remit as an official police inspector, if that is indeed what he is. Dickens's characterisation of Bucket may thus be read as reflecting the gradual, *ad hoc* nature of the process of officialisation.

The remit of the Metropolitan Police was officially crime prevention, and yet policemen were soon asked to perform a number of purely administrative tasks, such as overseeing aspects of administration of the Poor Law (Emsley, *The English*, 3, 83). Graeber suggests that accounts of the police in contemporary popular culture rarely show policemen for the "bureaucrats with weapons" that they are (*Utopia*, 73)—and yet, Dickens's fiction actually foregrounds the administrative side of police work.[99] In *Bleak House*, for instance, Esther Summerson accompanies Inspector Bucket on a visit to a decidedly clerical police station, where "police officers, looking in their perfectly neat uniform not at all like people who were up all night were quietly writing at a desk" (675). If the police are described as rather bookish in *Bleak House*, this bureaucratic leaning is still more pronounced in *Our Mutual Friend*, where the lead detective, Mr Inspector, is described as a "recluse much given to study" who is generally to be found "with a pen and ink, and ruler, posting up his books in a whitewashed office, as studiously as if he were in a monastery on the top of a mountain" (24). Here, then, Dickens's policeman becomes an anonymous, clerkish functionary, a far cry from the man of action that is Inspector Bucket.

As opposed to Bucket, Mr Inspector sticks exceedingly conscientiously to well-demarcated official duties; indeed, when Mr Inspector reads aloud, he does so "in an official manner," when he speaks he "announce[s] his official intention" or gives an "official rejoinder," and when his eyes beam they do so "with an official lustre" (158, 176, 442, 760). This somewhat ludicrous mode of characterisation is the epitome of Dickens's satire on the concept of officiality, subtly undermining the state's symbolic power. Whilst Inspector

[99] Graeber claims that "a very small proportion of what police actually do has anything to do with enforcing criminal law—or with criminal matters of any kind. Most of it has to do with regulations [...] or the threat of physical force, to aid in the resolution of administrative problems" (*Utopia*, 73).

Bucket straddles the roles of public official and private detective, thus blurring the line between the official and non-official, Mr Inspector has conversely been thoroughly officialised. Indeed, the character of Mr Inspector may be read as an example of a perfectly disinterested bureaucrat, akin to the ideal overseers introduced in Martineau's Poor Law novellas. In this specific case, the frequently remarked upon flatness of Dickensian minor characters serves the author well. In Weber's analysis, bureaucracy involves a form of depersonalisation or "dehumanization," and Weber observes that administration becomes more efficient "the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation" (*From Max Weber*, 215). Mr Inspector has perfected this side of bureaucratic impersonality, going beyond emotionless execution of official tasks to instead manifest (that seeming oxymoron) bureaucratic emotion. As such, Mr Inspector corresponds to the "bureaucrat qua bureaucrat" that Banerjee, in her discussion of the limits of literary representations of rational administration, suggests cannot be characterised as such, "couched as [the bureaucrat] would have to be in terms of sociality, interiority, familialism, and familiarity" (153). Banerjee concludes that a "functional bureaucracy" (as opposed to the maladministration of the Circumlocution Office) is unrepresentable due to "its necessarily depersonalized nature" (153). Yet, Dickens's Mr Inspector arguably answers to Banerjee's description of a purely bureaucratic state functionary character. Indeed, through Dickens's pointedly flat characterisation, Mr Inspector becomes Mr Official—bureaucratic depersonalisation personified.

Dickens targets the spurious distinctions that uphold officialness also in *Little Dorrit*, by describing a bureaucratic dispute that hinges on the question of officialness. Clennam visits the Circumlocution Office to inquire about the status of the injunction on the imprisoned debtor Mr Dorrit, and Barnacle Jr in turn responds, "Look here! Is this public business?" and goes on to ask, "Is it private business?" (123–24). Tellingly, this question comes from a state functionary who confesses, further ahead in the narrative, "I never am official when I can help it" (770). Clennam does not know whether his visit concerns "public" or "private" business, and Barnacle Jr, who cannot or will not help Clennam ascertain the status of the injunction, instructs him to "call at our house, if you are going that way. Twenty-four, Mews Street, Grosvenor Square. My father's got a slight touch of the gout, and is kept at home by it" (124). That is, Clennam is directed to Tite Barnacle's home, and thus the scene of the adventure moves from the Circumlocution Office proper to "a squeezed house, with a ramshackle bowed front, little dingy windows, and a little dark area like a damp waistcoat-

pocket" (125). Ironically, the process of answering Clennam's query—which hinges on the question of the public / private (or official / unofficial) distinction—necessitates visiting a civil servant in his private lodgings. This paradoxical turn of events typifies Dickens's destabilisation of the dichotomy of official and unofficial.

Officiality is also the bone of contention in Clennam's subsequent conversation about the case with Tite Barnacle:

> "On behalf of the Crown, may I ask, or as a private individual?"
>
> "The Circumlocution Department, sir," Mr. Barnacle replied, "may have possibly recommended—possibly—I cannot say—that some public claim against the insolvent estate of a firm or copartnership to which this person may have belonged, should be enforced. The question may have been, in the course of official business, referred to the Circumlocution Department for its consideration. The Department may have either originated, or confirmed, a Minute making that recommendation." (127)

Barnacle avoids giving a clear-cut answer regarding the status of the case, creating another layer of ambiguity and indistinctness through his deflective officialese. Ultimately, Clennam's clash with the Barnacles serves to illustrate the importance of the official / unofficial distinction in bureaucratic protocol. Clennam appreciates what is at stake in this categorical distinction, as shown by his dogged response to Tite Barnacle, whom he continues to press for information regarding the status of Dorrit's case: "May I inquire how I can obtain official information as to the real state of the case?" (127). In *Little Dorrit*, then, Dickens spotlights the importance of officiality as an institutional construct that increasingly shaped social reality with the rise of administrative state culture, describing the Barnacles' self-serving and unregulated management of "official information" as a particularly brazen form of symbolic violence.

As I have shown in the present section, Dickens's midcentury fiction problematises and interrogates the concept of the official. This is epitomised by Dickens's characterisation of state functionaries who, in various ways, embody officiality, as well as by his exploration of the symbolic power of officiality as a bureaucratic and social category. Emphasising the fact that there is a competitive edge to Dickens's treatment of official textuality, the section that follows will explore how Dickens situates his administrative fiction in relation to the Victorian state's informational projects.

“Our Commission”: Dickens and the General Register Office

H. G. Wells once proclaimed that the socio-political commentary of *Oliver Twist* was “worth a hundred Royal Commissions” for its illumination of the problems of Poor Law administration (“Contemporary,” 146). This typifies the tendency to read Dickens’s work, and the social problem novel more broadly, as a mode of describing the social world that parallels and indeed surpasses the information-gathering technologies of the Victorian state. Such readings were invited by Dickens, who frequently presented his narrative fiction as an alternative to the state’s informational modes of accounting for the social world.

There are numerous insightful studies of Dickens’s engagement with official textual genres. My discussion in the present section is particularly indebted to Carolyn Vellenga Berman’s recent monograph *Dickens and Democracy in the Age of Paper: Representing the People* (2022), which teases out numerous points of contact between Dickens’s work and parliamentary publishing, identifying four key modes of engagement that characterise Dickens’s literary response to Blue Books. Firstly, Berman notes the centrality of parody in Dickens’s critique of Blue Books—in *Hard Times*, for instance, Dickens does not simply criticise parliamentary publications, but rather “engages with them by mimicking them, staging the sort of fact-finding interview they described” (217); secondly, Berman highlights the pedagogic impulse that runs through Dickens’s portrayal of Blue Books—the fact that Dickens’s writing “train[s] us to spot the dangers in government reports” (241); thirdly, Berman observes the stylistic convergences between Dickens’s fiction and the genre of the Blue Book—for instance, by suggesting that “Esther’s narration functions like an extended monologue drawn from the testimony in the Parliamentary Papers” (93); and fourthly, Berman notes that Dickens at times publicly endorsed parliamentary publishing projects—for instance, by championing Edwin Chadwick’s 1842 *Report upon the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (185, 204). By studying Dickens’s engagement with parliamentary print culture, then, Berman elucidates Dickens’s multifaceted literary response to Blue Books. However, at times Berman’s persistent focus on the parliamentary context results in an elision or misrepresentation of other aspects of Dickens’s engagement with administrative state culture. For instance, Berman describes Dickens’s Circumlocution Office as “an extreme case of *parliamentary* dysfunction,” passing over the specificity of Dickens’s critique of the civil service (my italics, 256). Rather than subsuming Dickens’s engagement with questions of public administration under his treatment of parliamentary democracy,

Dickens's complex engagement with Victorian administrative state culture needs to be examined on its own terms.

Indeed, the 1830s and '40s saw the rise not only of Blue Books—which were "easy to caricature for their mixture of calculated solemnity and artificial thoroughness" (McKitterick 535)—but also of other complementary information genres such as of the register, the census, and the statistical compilation. The emergence of these instruments of state-backed knowledge production about the social world paralleled the rise of so-called "social problem" fiction, and each of these information genres play a prominent part in Dickens's fiction. Crucially, 1836—the year that Dickens's first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, appeared—was also the year of the Births and Deaths Registration Act. Following inquiries into the shortcomings of Britain's system of registration, this act, and the Marriage Act of the same year, brought the establishment of the General Register Office (GRO), which instituted a national system of registration for marriages, births, and deaths. Over the subsequent decades, the GRO utilised administrative structures that had already been put in place by the New Poor Law, in order to regulate, centralise, and improve modes of registration and documentary storage, aided in this project by the Public Records Office. This new pervasive system of registration was organised and maintained by the Registrar General of the GRO in London, which also made use of the publishing capital of the Victorian state to disseminate publications concerning vital statistics, including the *Annual Reports of the Registrar General for England and Wales* from 1839, as well as a set of published tables, which came to be known as the *Population tables*.

During this period, the GRO also assumed responsibility for the decennial censuses. The first four censuses (1801, 1811, 1822, and 1831) had been simple head-counts, but when the GRO organised the census of 1841 it elected to gather a broader range of information (Higgs 41–2). During this period, the medical statistician William Farr emerged as a leading figure in the GRO, bringing a more sophisticated statistical approach to the institution's informational practices. Farr also gained an increasingly prominent role in the London Statistical Society, and, in 1853, the year in which *Bleak House* was published, he attended the inaugural International Statistical Congress, in Brussels, where he proposed "a general framework for national statistics to facilitate international comparisons" (Higgs 61). Farr was, in other words, at the forefront of developments in statistics internationally. Given that Dickens and Farr were contemporaries, Farr's epistemological outlook represents an interesting point of comparison when thinking about Dickens's relationship with official informational projects and technologies. In the *Supplement to the 35th Annual Report of the*

Registrar General, a letter written in 1875, Farr celebrated statistical epistemology on the grounds that it shows human beings

> divested of all colour, form, character, passion, and the infinite individualities of life: by abstraction they are reduced to mere units undergoing changes as purely physical as the setting stars of astronomy or the decomposing atoms of chemistry; and as in those sciences so in this, the elementary facts observed in their various relations to time and place will shed new light on the more complicated phenomena of national life. (qtd. in Higgs 63)

This celebration of depersonalising statistical "abstraction" and aggregation contrasts starkly with Dickens's novelistic project, which sought to capture and elucidate the very "infinite individualities of life" that Farr sought to move beyond through his statistical inquiries. And yet, ironically, Farr's celestial imagery echoes Dickens's description of Gradgrindian statistics as a matter of constructing a "starry universe solely by pen, ink and paper" (*Hard Times*, 95).

At this point, then, official statisticians and novelists sought with greater urgency to account for the lives of the populace, but through very different modes of writing. In "Thoughts about People" (1835), Dickens's narrator muses:

> It is strange with how little notice, good, bad, or indifferent, a man may live and die in London. [...] His existence is a matter of interest to no one save himself; he cannot be said to be forgotten when he dies, for no one remembered him when he was alive. (251)

Dickens's mournful remarks about the Londoner's atomised anonymity may be read as a declaration of intent, especially in light of the author's later accomplishments: ordinary Londoners were to be "noticed" through his fiction. The Victorian state was similarly interested in documenting the lives (and indeed the deaths) of ordinary Londoners, but its information-gathering apparatus was, of course, shaped by specific administrative objectives, objectives that did not always align with the interests of a novelist like Dickens. On the other hand, the state's informational projects concerned real people, as opposed to the novelist's concern with fictional characters. Dickens's competitive engagement with the nascent information state involved grappling with various ontological and epistemological questions that were central to his literary project. Was fiction—as opposed to official statistics—a viable mode of recognising ordinary people? And in what respect was the fictional character—as opposed to the statistical person—real or true to life?

In his fiction, Dickens frequently referenced the officially commissioned inquiry as a model for producing knowledge about the social world. In the sketch "Our Commission" (1855), Dickens explicitly turns a quasi-informational lens on officialdom itself:

> The first subject of inquiry was that article of universal consumption familiarly known in England as "Government." Mr Bull produced a sample of this commodity, purchased [...] in Downing Street. [...]
>
> The bitter drug called Public Offices, formed the next subject of inquiry. Mr Bull produced an immense number of samples of the drug, obtained from shops in Downing Street, Whitehall, Palace Yard, the Strand, and elsewhere. Analysis had detected in every one of them, from seventy-five to ninety-eight per cent of Noodledom. (319–20)

In this mock official report, Dickens deftly parodies the pseudo-scientific methods of official inquiries and rhetorics of official reportage. Similarly, *Bleak House* features a fictional inquiry in the shape of "blue minutes" from a Parliamentary committee hearing, in which the lawyer Vholes is queried about the cost efficiency of Chancery Court:

> Question (number five hundred and seventeen thousand eight hundred and sixty-nine.). If I understand you, these forms of practice indisputably occasion delay? Answer. Yes, some delay. Question. And great expense? Answer. Most assuredly they cannot be gone through for nothing. Question. And unspeakable vexation? Answer. I am not prepared to say that. They have never given me any vexation; quite the contrary. Question. But you think that their abolition would damage a class of practitioners? Answer. I have no doubt of it. (622)

This playful imitation of a verbatim record (perhaps inspired by Dickens's days as a parliamentary reporter) and the rosy picture painted by Vholes satirises government inquiries where the need for administrative reform is evaluated through interviews conducted with state functionaries (as with the Poor Law commission) seemingly without any consideration of a potential conflict of interest. Moreover, this parody of an official inquiry serves as a backdrop to Dickens's own exposé of Chancery in the novel, which brings to light the harsh reality that Vholes's testimony conceals.

The title "Our Commission" is significant in that it frames Dickens's fiction—his parodies of official inquiries, but also his novelistic explorations of social problems—as a popular, literary-journalistic alternative to officialdom's committees and commissions. This polemical framing is a running theme in Dickens's oeuvre, from his earliest sketches to his later novels. In "A Visit to Newgate" (1836), for example, Dickens begins by offering the following assurance:

> we do not intend to fatigue the reader with any statistical accounts of the prison: they will be found at length in numerous reports of numerous committees, and a variety of authorities of equal weight. We took no notes, made no memoranda, measured none of the yards, ascertained the exact number of inches in no particular room; are unable even to report of how many apartments the jail is composed.

> We saw the prison, and saw the prisoners; and what we did see, and what we thought, we will tell at once in our own way. (235)

The narrator's reportorial method is presented as immediate and commonsensical, in contradistinction with the "fatigue"-inducing distantiated epistemological devices of the administrative state.

In *Bleak House*, similarly, Dickens stages a competition between, on the one hand, knowledge of the poor deriving from "intimate physical closeness and shared perspectives," embodied in the social work of Esther and Woodcourt—and by extension in Dickens's fiction—and, on the other hand, statistical information about the poor as an "aggregated mass," constructed through "objectivity and distance" (Morris, "Bleak," 693).[100] This epistemological competition ultimately comes to revolve around the homeless child Jo, who stands outside the administered society not only as an undocumented person, but also in and by his illiteracy. Rosen and Santesso propose that "the machinery of the State shudders to a halt" when dealing with somebody like Jo, who eludes bureaucratic documentary forms (129). However, as seen, the state machinery does, in fact, have a fairly effective response to such situations—it "simplifies" social reality, by simply "put[ting] the boy aside." The coroner's failure to take Jo's testimony is not so much a direct problem for the state, though Dickens implies that it constitutes a legitimacy problem. Rather, this episode highlights the gaps that inevitably exist in official accounts of social reality, given that the state does not "see" aspects of social reality that cannot be managed through bureaucratic formulae, but which can perhaps be accounted for in narrative fiction.

Dickens continued his polemic with the information state in his next novel, *Hard Times*, which had the working title "Fact" (Collins, *Dickens and Crime* xxi). "Fact, fact, fact!" is repeated as a baneful mantra throughout the novel, as part of Dickens's satire on the "ideology of mid-Victorian positivism" (Richards 4). The contrast that Dickens sets up between imaginative literature and fact-focused positivism may be read against the background of Auguste Comte's promotion of a positive science of society during the 1830s and '40s. However, the immediate target of Dickens's critique of fact-focused doctrines in *Hard Times* is the Utilitarian school of thought—which would itself later reinterpret positivist doctrines, as in John Stuart Mill's *Auguste Comte and Positivism* (1865)—a school of thought which Dickens viewed as partly to blame for the callous treatment of factory workers in industrial towns and the instrumentalisation of education at this time. In the novel, Dickens's

[100] On the "discursive competition" between "empiricism and the imagination" in Dickens's fiction, see also Jan-Melissa Schramm (269); on Dickens and factual epistemology, see Amanda Anderson 82 and Richard Menke 16.

utilitarian headmaster Thomas Gradgrind, a fanatical adherent of "system, schedule, blue book, report, and tabular statements A to Z," envisions a new factual era that is to be ushered in by a "board of fact, composed of commissioners of fact, who will force the people to be a people of fact, and of nothing but fact" (*Hard Times*, 14, 59). In seeking to establish this new factual order, Gradgrind collaborates with M'Choakumchild, a visiting "government officer" sent by a "high authority to bring about the great public-office Millennium, when Commissioners should reign upon earth" (12). The arch-statistician Gradgrind enters parliamentary politics armed with a briefcase full of statistics, helping to usher in the new "public-office Millenium."

Gradgrind's determination to create a social world "of nothing but fact" highlights the procrustean dimension of official statistics. In short, Dickens characterises statistics as a crude simplification of social reality, a paper-thin papereality derived from an exceedingly superficial positivist epistemology. Moreover, the professed scientificity of Gradgrind's factual outlook soon comes into question; like Farr, Gradgrind is a statistical zealot, and yet the "tabular statements" that he advances are in fact "derived from [his] own personal experience, and illustrated by cases [he] had known and seen" (29). Gradgrind's bluebookish demeanour is, in other words, a mere front: he employs a bureaucratic poetics to lend a veneer of scientificity to wholly subjective observations. Gradgrind is forced to recognise the epistemological shortcomings of the science of statistics when confronted with the enigma of the kind-hearted girl Sissy Jupe, in whom Grandgrind finds something that "could hardly be set forth in a tabular form" (92). That is, Grandgrind admits that "he was not sure that if he had been required, for example, to tick her off into columns in a parliamentary return, he would have quite known how to divide her" (92). Here, Dickens points to the social construction of knowledge in the census, and the epistemological limitations of official statistics more broadly, which fail to capture "all those subtle essences of humanity which will elude the utmost cunning of algebra" (99). By contrast, this area of investigation, which lies beyond the purview of the statistician, is the novelist's *forte*.[101]

Dickens's critique of official statistics frequently serves to accentuate the richness of fiction as a mode of describing social reality. The opposition that Dickens stages between literature and statistics is encapsulated in Gradgrind's hostility towards the local library:

[101] The competitive dimension is underscored through M'Choakumchild's ludicrous lecture on household aesthetics, whereby Dickens pushes back against state commissioners' interference in the realm of art and literature, in a "satire on the recently established Department of Practical Art" (Collins, "Introduction" xx).

> There was a library in Coketown, to which general access was easy. Mr. Gradgrind greatly tormented his mind about what the people read in this library: a point whereon little rivers of tabular statements periodically flowed into the howling ocean of tabular statements, which no diver ever got to any depth in and came up sane. It was a disheartening circumstance, but a melancholy fact, that even these readers persisted in wondering. They wondered about human nature, human passions, human hopes and fears, the struggles, triumphs and defeats, the cares and joys and sorrows, the lives and deaths of common men and women! (53)

Here, then, Dickens pits popular fiction against the "howling ocean of tabular statements" found in official reports. Gradgrind disapproves of the fact that "the people" are reading and "wondering" about the lives and deaths of common people, a reading practice that suggests not only rapturous fascination, but also inquisitiveness and reflection. There is, in other words, a sense that Gradgrind's displeasure with popular literature stems from the fact that it constitutes a rivalling mode of social investigation.

Whilst Dickens consistently situated his work as a superior alternative to the inquiries of royal commissions and official statisticians, then already by the midcentury, according to Elaine Hadley, Dickens interrogated "not only the efficaciousness of bureaucratic systems [...], but also the reformist capacity of his own forms of public address—in particular, the novel and its emphasis on character" (67). Crucially, unlike the census-taker who went knocking on doors on a fact-finding mission, Dickens's mission extended to capturing the inner lives of Londoners. In a late novel like *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), Dickens highlights the many epistemological challenges that a metropolitan community composes:

> A solemn consideration, when I enter a great city by night, that every one of those darkly clustered houses encloses its own secret; that every room in every one of them encloses its own secret; that every beating heart in the hundreds of thousands of breasts there, is, in some of its imaginings, a secret to the heart nearest it! (14–5)

According to Rosen and Santesso, this passage "stands out as a singular admission of defeat [...], with Dickens essentially throwing up his hands and admitting that inner lives can never be represented accurately" (132–33). In light of Hadley's observation that Dickens's critique of bureaucratic epistemologies became increasingly interwoven with authorial self-evaluation, it becomes clear that there was more to Dickens's engagement with official informational practices than self-aggrandising polemics. Censuses, statistical inquiries, and registers, served as a springboard for a self-reflexive exploration of the limits of representing social reality. It should also be noted that Dickens's polemic with official informational projects continued till his final completed novel, *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), in which the narrator proudly, but also

bitterly, describes aspects of social reality that would never be of concern "in the Returns of the Board of Trade" (503).

As has been established in this section, Dickens consistently positioned his work vis-à-vis administrative genres such as inquiries and registers, valorising fiction as an epistemologically superior mode of describing the social world. And yet, as this polemic indicates, there are also certain fundamental similarities between official documentation and narrative fiction, which I will discuss in my next section.

Novelistic Register Worlds: Dickens's London vs. Official London

In the literary sketch "The Last Cab-Driver, and the First Omnibus Cad" (1836), Dickens's narrator mockingly remarks upon the necessity of documentation not only in administrative state culture, but also in narrative fiction:

> Mr. William Barker was born—but why need we recount where Mr. William Barker was born, or when? Why scrutinize the entries in parochial ledgers; why penetrate into the Lucinian mysteries of lying-in hospitals? Mr. William Barker *was* born, or he had never been. There is a son—there was a father. There is an effect—there was a cause. Surely this is sufficient information for the most Fatima-like curiosity; and, if it be not, we regret our inability to supply any further evidence on the point. (177)

As seen, the narrator, who seems rather flustered and irate, pauses (in a distinctly Sternean fashion), midway through the initial presentation of the protagonist, to question the importance that tends to be placed on factual biographical information of the kind that may be found in institutional records. This reads as an expression of impatience with the evolving conventions of Victorian administrative state culture, which threatens to encroach upon the world of the imagination. Protesting against this development, Dickens refuses to give William Barker the informational trappings of a real person in the shape of papereal depth. By abstaining from providing documentary information, Dickens positions narrative fiction as a safe haven that provides much-needed respite from the strictures of administrative state culture.

There is a similar polemic with the ontology of registration in *Oliver Twist* (1838). As Patrick Parrinder notes, "[y]oung Oliver Twist begins as a mere 'item of mortality,' an entry in the workhouse ledger" (*Nation*, 215). That is, Oliver's eventful and emotional story is presented against the backdrop of an administrative inscription, thus framing Dickens's novel as an alternative to the stale book-keeping of the authorities. Oliver's story is, in this sense,

the story of an escape from (the anonymity of) state records. Oliver comes close to following Noah Claypole in becoming "a Public Character in the Metropolis" (*Oliver*, 348)—that is, "someone with a police record" (Parrinder, *Nation*, 216)—but he ultimately manages to avoid having his name taken by the police.

The relationship that Dickens establishes between the fictional character and the "public character" tends to be contrastive and dichotomous. And yet, Dickens frequently also indicates the commensurability of fiction and official information, as analogous textual modes. In *Little Dorrit*, for instance, when Amy Dorrit signs her marital bond, this inspires a metaphorical aside in which "the Register" is figured as a holder of life-stories:

> Little Dorrit's old friend held the inkstand as she signed her name, and the clerk paused in taking off the good clergyman's surplice, and all the witnesses looked on with special interest. "For, you see," said Little Dorrit's old friend, "this young lady is one of our curiosities, and has come now to the third volume of our Registers. Her birth is in what I call the first volume; she lay asleep on this very floor, with her pretty head on what I call the second volume; and she's now a-writing her little name as a bride, in what I call the third volume." (859)

In this conceit, Dorrit's signing of the marital bond is conceptualised as the latest inscription in a sequence of entries in an official register that contains the story of her life. In other words, if Oliver Twist leaves the workhouse ledger and police register behind in becoming a full-blown fictional (as opposed to a public) character, then Amy Dorrit's trajectory is instead interwoven with the facts recorded in the register. Furthermore, Dickens's division of the register into three volumes establishes a link to the three-volume novel, the recognised standard in Victorian publishing.

Scholars have drawn comparisons between Dickens's novelistic style and that of various administrative textual genres. Miller views Dickens's fiction as supplementary to state knowledge regimes, arguing that *Bleak House* resembles a Chancery suit on account of the novel's sheer size and many plot-line deferrals (9, 75, 88); similarly, Patrick Brantlinger cites *Bleak House* as an example of a census-like novel (32); Emily Steinlight describes Dickens's fiction as "consummately statistical," despite the overt polemic with official statistics (115); and, more recently, Sukanya Banerjee has described Dickens's "holding back (as it were) on character development" as a form of "bureaucratic writing" (154).[102] Extrapolating from the aforementioned structural and stylistic similarities between Dickens's work and Victorian

[102] Despite his professed aversion towards Gradgrindian official information, Dickens drew on statistical inquiries and Blue Books as part of his writing practice, studying Henry Mayhew's research to "supplement his own observations" (Toker 54), and sourcing material from official reports like that of the Sebastopol committee of 1855 (Philpotts 293).

administrative textual genres, one possible explanation for Dickens's intense polemics with administrative textuality would be that it betokens an anxiety of influence (to borrow Harold Bloom's phrase), an impulse on Dickens's part to differentiate his fiction from Blue Books and official registers lest they should come too close for comfort.

The comparison that Dickens's administrative fiction invites us to make between literary writing and official information also extends to his fictional worlds and the ways in which they compare to official paperealities. Archival theorist Arlette Farge notes that official archives sustain a "hidden world," capturing and representing life stories that "ordinarily would not have been thought worth discussing, much less being written down"—and yet, Farge also emphasises that records produced by state authorities are endowed with their own form of "anonymity" (5, 7, 13). By describing the lives of ordinary Londoners in detail, Dickens arguably sought to dispel not only the anonymity of the metropolis, but also that of the official register. Nicholas Freeman proposes that Dickens's London-centric fiction "created a 'shadow' city that offered an alternative version of it from the 1780s to the 1860s" (441). Dickens generally wrote about the working class (and regularly about criminals, orphans, and paupers), chronicling the lives of the type of people whose names would typically be found in official registers. In this sense, there is an ontological overlap or correspondence between Dickens's Londoners and those of the official census or the police records.

Of course, Dickens's "shadow city" comprises not only fictional Londoners, but also an account of the urban environment. Estelle Murail and Sara Thornton characterise Dickens's fiction as a form of "counter-mapping" that redraws the "accepted boundaries of the city space both geographically and ideologically by questioning official maps" (9). In short, Murail and Thornton suggest that Dickens's fiction "crumples the official map of the city" by portraying the subaltern experience of the city (11). This analytical concept of "counter-mapping"—reminiscent of the Jamesonian conceptualisation of an oppositional aesthetic of cognitive mapping—is germane to my exploration of how Dickens situates his fiction as a corrective to official representations of social reality. However, "counter-mapping" fails somewhat as a description of Dickens's fiction, given the lack of authoritative official mappings of London to counter-map in the midcentury. There were various visualisations of London in the mid-nineteenth century (city sketches, panoramas, and stereoscopes), but no cohesive official maps.[103] As Patricia Garside and Ken Young observe,

[103] On the importance of Hogarth's prints and later visualisations of London for Dickens's aesthetic, see Sen 10.

not only was London an "administrative maze" in the mid-nineteenth century, but its "precise extent" was unknown (14, 21). Perhaps Dickens's fiction could be read as counter-mapping the Ordnance Map of 1851, which considerably advanced the cartographic representation of London (Garside and Young 17). Garside and Young write that "[b]efore 1851 there was no readily available definition of 'London'; *The Times* in 1855 was scarcely pedantic in claiming that 'there is no such place as London at all'" (14). But at least during the first decades of Dickens's writing career, there were, quite simply, no "accepted" official metropolitan boundaries for his fiction to redraw.

Dickens's fictional "shadow city" certainly problematised official representations of London, but it also participated in the broader project of (cognitively) mapping London. Garside and Young write that the idea of "Metropolitan London" crystallised in the midcentury through an "imaginative" shift catalysed by cartographers, statisticians, and social reformers (16). Writers were certainly also instrumental in this process, not least by helping to create a metropolitan "imagined community," to cite Benedict Anderson. That is, if Dickens's representations of the metropolis occasionally challenged official cartography, then they also coincided and harmonised with the statist project of consolidating a bureaucratically legible London. In *Our Mutual Friend*, tellingly, Dickens's narrator evokes the official delimitation of London as a means of imagining the metropolitan community, proclaiming: "it is likely enough that ten thousand other young men, within the limits of the London Post-office town-delivery, made the same hopeful remark in the course of the same evening" (20). Here, the post office's demarcation of its delivery area serves as shorthand for the London population at large and gives a sense of the physical boundaries of the city; this idea thus constitutes an administrative *ersatz* for a more organic socio-spatial concept of the city limits. This enfolding of Dickens's London within the postal directory constitutes a striking example of the ways in which administrative structures and institutional systems serve as conceptual frames in structuring social reality and narrative form. If the Victorian novel helped consolidate the imagined national and metropolitan community, as thinkers like Anderson and Moretti famously argue, then it is interesting to note that Dickens essentially used the postal directory in order to imagine urban community in his fiction.

In an 1854 article in *Household Words*, one of Dickens's protégés, George Augustus Sala, paints a vivid picture of the Post Office's London directory in a piece titled "The Great Red Book." Sala describes the postal directory as a wondrous "Domesday Book of London" that holds "the names, addresses, and avocations of persons in every rank and condition of

life" (404–5).[104] Sala emphasises that the postal directory is an official publication—"[i]t has the scarlet and gold, the Royal arms, the Post-office imprimatur"—and describes its evolution over the first half of the century: it was first published in "pamphlet form" in 1800, and had grown from 11,000 names in the early years to 170,000 by the 1850s (404–5). Evidently intrigued by the gargantuan effort of maintenance that was involved in the upkeep of the "Great Red Book," Sala details a painstaking process of revision which involves sending out queries to all registered individuals:

> directly the Great Red Book for eighteen fifty-five is published, the merry or studious men thereunto attached commence the compilation of the scarlet calendar for eighteen fifty-six. For though court is always court, and commerce commerce, and law law—though streets are streets, and trades trades to the end of the chapter, men change. (405–6)

Sala notes that the directory is updated annually to reflect the merest changes in Londoners' private and professional circumstances. Finally, they "make a last register of your name, with 'Take out' affixed to it, and your name will be erased from the book of London, and from the book of life" (407). The plaintive note that Sala strikes in describing the excision of the dead ennobles this administrative practice, indicating that it has an ontological or existential dimension. Sala's characterisation of the register as the "book of life" also anticipates Dickens's metaphorical treatment of "the Register" in *Little Dorrit*; of course, the third and final volume of Amy's register will also ultimately conclude.

In this section I have explored how Dickens situates his fiction in relation to the state's documentation of individual lives, noting that administrative informational ontologies play a large part in his narratives. As I have shown, a certain order is imposed upon the social reality depicted in Dickens's fiction by administrative information genres, an order which in turn informs Dickens's figuration of that reality; the Londoner's life is but a series of inscriptions in a register and metropolitan community is imagined by recourse to administrative constructs such as the postal area.

"The Best of All Possible Official Worlds": Dickens's Paperealities

In the *Uncommercial Traveller* sketch "The Great Tasmania's Cargo" (1860), Dickens critiques Britain's colonial bureaucracy in India, which he dubs "the Pagoda Department of

[104] The very first number of *Household Words* contains a reportorial piece, co-authored by Dickens and William Henry Wills, titled "Valentine's Day at the Post-Office." In this article, the authors recount a visit to the central post office—"the mighty heart of the postal system of this country"—which they describe as an "extraordinary establishment" that is capable of sorting a tremendous volume of letters through its spectacularly well-ordered "drill and subdivision of duties" (11–2).

that great Circumlocution Office on which the sun never sets and the light of reason never rises" (37). More precisely, this sketch is a fictionalised rendition of Dickens's visit to a workhouse in which British soldiers were recovering having been discharged from colonial service in India and sent home to England onboard a ship with insufficient provisions, leading to malnutrition, disease, and mass death. On his way to the workhouse, Dickens's narrator meets his "official friend Pangloss [who] is lineally descended from a learned doctor of that name, who was once tutor to Candide" (38). Pangloss refuses to entertain the idea that the colonial authorities were in any way at fault for the soldiers' catastrophic return journey, maintaining that British officialdom is in every way impeccable: "in his official capacity, he unfortunately preaches the doctrines of his renowned ancestor, by demonstrating on all occasions that we live in the best of all possible official worlds" (38). Pangloss's refrain about the "best of all possible official worlds" plays upon German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz's famous treatise on the problem of evil, later parodied by Voltaire, from whose *Candide* (1759) Dickens takes the name Pangloss. Besides indicating officialdom's perceived strategies of shirking responsibility, the refrain underlines Dickens's abiding interest in the ontological dimensions of administrative statecraft.

In fact, administrative worlding constitutes an unacknowledged *leitmotif* in Dickens's fiction. Building on my analysis of Dickens's treatment of official information genres in the previous section, this section will examine Dickens's figuration of bureaucrats and official documentation as having the capacity to transform and indeed create social phenomena. In *Bleak House*, for instance, Chancery lawyers are able to "warp" people out of reality, causing "objects [to] lose their natural aspects" (434). John Jarndyce, commenting on the central suit of the novel, complains that "[t]he Lawyers have twisted it into such a state of bedevilment that the original merits of the case have long disappeared from the face of the earth" (88). The suggestion of illusionism that inheres in Dickens's take on Chancery is brilliantly underscored when "Jarndyce and Jarndyce" at long last comes to an end, not because the court has reached a verdict, but because the entire estate has been "absorbed in costs": nothing whatsoever comes of the suit, it simply "lapses and melts away" (760). In other words, when people and things become caught up in bureaucratic proceedings they are, to all intents and purposes, whisked away from the social world and transported to a purely official plane of existence, through what is described as an elaborate "conjurer's trick" (13).

In *Little Dorrit*, similarly, Dickens emphasises the transformations that people and affairs undergo in and by becoming official concerns: "[t]he moment he addresses himself to

the Government, he becomes a public offender!" (134). All manner of things and people are "indiscriminately tucked up under the foolscap paper of the Circumlocution Office" (99):

> Unfortunates with wrongs, or with projects for the general welfare (and they had better have had wrongs at first, than have taken that bitter English recipe for certainly getting them), who in slow lapse of time and agony had passed safely through other public departments; who, according to rule, had been bullied in this, over-reached by that, and evaded by the other; got referred at last to the Circumlocution Office, and never reappeared in the light of day. Boards sat upon them, secretaries minuted upon them, commissioners gabbled about them, clerks registered, entered, checked, and ticked them off, and they melted away. In short, all the business of the country went through the Circumlocution Office, except the business that never came out of it; and *its* name was Legion. (120–21)

Here, Dickens describes state bureaucracy as a demonic system that draws concerns, people and estates—"all the business of the country," in fact—into an official papereality, an ontological transformation that represents a loss of reality, inasmuch as it brings social inaccessibility. Furthermore, Dickens disparages this form of bureaucratic symbolic violence as a "bitter English recipe," indicating that red tape is a quintessentially English phenomenon. At the same time, Dickens's representation of public administration also spotlights the adverse effects of *not* being included in the officially ratified account of the social world. For instance, in *Bleak House*, the homeless and illiterate Jo falls outside of the social fabric because he is unable to provide the type of identifiers that would allow for meaningful incorporation into the bureaucratic papereality that was increasingly becoming interwoven with everyday social life. The same brutal dynamic of exclusion is evident in the Lord Chancellor's attitude regarding his responsibilities towards member of the public: unless obliged to engage with somebody as a part of his official remit, then "the Chancellor is legally ignorant of [this person's] existence" (7).

There is a similar focus on questions of ontology in Dickens's characterisation of official statistics in *Hard Times*. Crucially, Gradgrind's misguided factual inquiries into social reality serve to illustrate not only the epistemological limitations of such investigations, but also the effects of official symbolic violence. This critique is especially evident in the following account of Gradgrind's office:

> Although Mr Gradgrind did not take after Blue Beard, his room was quite a blue chamber in its abundance of blue books. Whatever they could prove (which is usually anything you like), they proved there, in an army constantly strengthening by the arrival of new recruits. In that charmed apartment, the most complicated social questions were cast up, got into exact totals, and finally settled—if those concerned could only have been brought to know it. As if an astronomical observatory should be made without any windows, and the astronomer within

> should arrange the starry universe solely by pen, ink and paper, so Mr Gradgrind, in *his* Observatory (and there are many like it), had no need to cast an eye upon the teeming myriads of human beings around him, but could settle all their destinies on a slate, and wipe out all their tears with one dirty little bit of sponge. (95)

Gradgrind secludes himself in a chamber full of Blue Books to construct a solipsistic representation of the social world—in effect a universe to itself. Using "pen, ink, and paper" to create a world "on a slate," Gradgrind is able to observe and manipulate things that do not exist in the social world, but only in his "charmed" observatory. There is an underlying sense of threat and violence in this passage, with the reference to the folkloric murderer Blue Beard, the figuration of Blue Books as "an army," and the image of the "wiping out" of human emotion. The statistician Gradgrind is in this respect a forerunner of the faceless bureaucrat who, in Arendt's critique of bureaucratic violence, controls the "destinies" of large populations through actions performed at a distance.

Administrative worlding is thematised also in Dickens's 1851 sketch "Red Tape." Contradicting the notion that Victorian Britain was bureaucratically conservative, Dickens finds red tape to be ubiquitous in Victorian society:

> Your public functionary who delights in Red Tape—the purpose of whose existence is to tie up public questions, great and small, in an abundance of this official article—to make the neatest possible parcels of them, ticket them, and carefully put them away on a top shelf out of human reach—is the peculiar curse and nuisance of England. [...]
>
> Your Red Tapist is everywhere. He is always at hand, with a coil of Red Tape, prepared to make a small official parcel of the largest subject. (481)

This passage typifies Dickens's tendency to not only vehemently critique the excesses of British officialdom, but also to capture them stylistically through hyperbole and colourful metaphors. In other words, bureaucracy evidently sparked a creative impulse in Dickens. Not coincidentally, a salient feature of Dickens's figuration of what he terms "Red Tapeosophy" is the creativity of the bureaucratic miscreant. That is, Dickens's account of the "Red Tapist" leads away from the idea of bureaucracy as drab and monotonous both stylistically and in terms of his commentary. Rather than portraying the state functionary as inactive, as he frequently did elsewhere, Dickens here describes the Red Tapist as energetically pursuing his "delight" and indeed making an art of official obstruction. When the bureaucrat removes "public questions" from the public by elaborately wrapping them up and transferring them to "the shelf," this is both an act of reconfigurative symbolic violence and a virtuoso display of administrative skill. Rather than simply signifying bureaucratic blockage and institutional

slowness, then, red tape is associated with a form of creativity that is nefarious but also captivating and fun in its weird and quasi-magical effects.

As indicated above, Dickens seems imaginatively invested in the perverse productivity of the Red Tapist, giving expression to the type of "administrative frisson" (Lea 68) that de la Motte observes in French decadent literature. In a hyperbolic style that matches his subject, Dickens catalogues the improbable accomplishments and creations of the Red Tapist:

> In either House of Parliament, he will pull more Red Tape out of his mouth, at a moment's notice, than a conjuror at a Fair. In letters, memoranda, and dispatches, he will spin himself into Red Tape, by the thousand yards. [...] He will put a girdle of Red Tape round the earth, in quicker time than Ariel. He will measure, from Downing Street to the North Pole, or the heart of New Zealand, or the highest summit of the Himalaya Mountains, by inches of Red Tape. He will rig all the ships in the British Navy with it, weave all the colours in the British Army from it, completely equip and fit out the officers and men of both services in it. He bound NELSON and WELLINGTON hand and foot with it—ornamented them, all over, with bunches of it—and sent them forth to do impossibilities. He will stand over the side of the steam-ship of the state, sounding with Red Tape, for imaginary obstacles; and when the office-seal at the end of his pet line touches a floating weed, will cry majestically, "Back her! Stop her!" (481)

In short, like a "conjuror at a Fair," the Red Tapist seemingly subverts and extends the limits of the real; he creates "imaginary obstacles" and deals in "impossibilities." Ultimately, the Red Tapist thus comes to resemble the author of "Red Tape" himself, who engages in a kindred virtuoso act of fantastical portraiture, cataloguing a spectacular array of bureaucratic misdeeds. Bureaucracy is thereby (re)configured as a source of enchantment and delight; the excesses and impossibilities of red tape, and the ingenuity of the Red Tapist, become associated with the imagination and the act of creation, mirroring Dickens's authorial bravura. In fact, the bureaucrat's capacity to create things that have "no existence out of [Red] Tape" in many ways resembles the author's power of invention (483).

Whilst Dickens's engagement with state bureaucracy in his novels is less jocular, there is often a similar sense of creative excitement associated with bureaucratic (un)productivity. In *Bleak House*, Chancery court is overflowing with texts, with lawyers producing "bills, cross-bills, answers, rejoinders, injunctions, affidavits, issues, references to masters, masters' reports, mountains of costly nonsense, piled before them" (6). Similarly, in describing the Circumlocution Office, the narrator of *Little Dorrit* proclaims that the "great principle of the office" is simply to create and circulate paperwork (130). There is a grotesque celebration of red tape more broadly in *Little Dorrit*, where administrative productivity is measured by the mass of documents produced. By reducing administration to needless paperwork, Dickens

intimates that "the whole apparatus of government is unnecessary" (Orwell, "Charles," 24). In *Bleak House*, notably, Dickens's narrator delights in the fact that although the country goes for a period without government, "England has not appeared to care very much about it, but has gone on eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage" (496). In other words, Dickens wields the intangibility of "the state" against it, implying that it is chimerical in nature.[105] The state is, in this sense, performing a "conjurer's trick" in making the public believe that it exists and that it performs a vital role in society.

Bringing the pedagogical side of Dickens's administrative fiction back into focus, it is interesting to note that Dickens's fiction not only portrays the creativity of Red Tapists, but also shows "the governed" using documentation creatively. As noted in previous chapters, administrative worlding is multidirectional in the sense that civilian non-bureaucrats are co-creators of official paperealities. Identification and naming practices are amongst the main avenues for lay bureaucratic creativity in Dickens's fiction. His novels are famously full of aliases, names invented for purposes of concealment. In *David Copperfield*, for instance, Micawber changes his name to Mortimer so as to escape creditors; in *Great Expectations*, Abel Magwitch enters the country incognito using made-up names; in *Bleak House*, Captain Hawdon takes the name Nemo (meaning "no name"); and in *Our Mutual Friend*, John Harmon assumes the name John Rokesmith when he fakes his own death. In *David Copperfield*, a truly minor character displays considerable bureaucratic nous in taking advantage of an "ingenious little statute" in order to bring about a divorce-suit:

> The husband, whose name was Thomas Benjamin, had taken out his marriage licence as Thomas only; suppressing the Benjamin, in case he should not find himself as comfortable as he expected. *Not* finding himself as comfortable as he expected, or being a little fatigued with his wife, poor fellow, he now came forward by a friend, after being married a year or two, and declared that his name was Thomas Benjamin, and therefore he was not married at all. Which the Court confirmed, to his great satisfaction. (485)

This anecdote underlines the power of the official record, which overrules the seemingly self-evident, commonsensical experiential side of social reality. Thomas Benjamin's devious manipulation of the documentary basis of his marriage is not exactly the creation of a papereal administrative fiction, but it points towards a splintering of ontologies, raising the question: to

[105] This viewpoint is reiterated in *Our Mutual Friend*, where it is suggested that "[m]ore is done, or considered to be done—which does as well—by taking cabs, and 'going about,' than the fair Tippins knew of. Many vast vague reputations have been made, solely by taking cabs and going about. This particularly obtains in all Parliamentary affairs" (250).

whom was the unsuspecting woman married during those years, if she was indeed married at all?

Another villainous Dickensian layperson who recognises the importance of documentation is Rogue Riderhood in *Our Mutual Friend*, who makes good use of his bureaucratic know-how in his dealings with lawyers:

> "Now," began Lightwood, "what's your name?" "Why, there you're rather fast, Lawyer Lightwood," he replied, in a remonstrant manner. "[...] is it likely I can afford to part with so much as my name without its being took down?" Deferring to the man's sense of the binding powers of pen and ink and paper, Lightwood nodded acceptance of Eugene's nodded proposal to take those spells in hand. Eugene, bringing them to the table, sat down as clerk or notary. "Now," said Lightwood, "what's your name?" But further precaution was still due to the sweat of this honest fellow's brow. "I should wish, Lawyer Lightwood," he stipulated, "to have that T'other Governor as my witness that what I said I said. Consequent, will the T'other Governor be so good as chuck me his name and where he lives?" (149–50)

Wise to the "binding powers" of documentation, Riderhood refuses to say as much as his name until he knows that his testimony is being taken down. Indeed, Riderhood is very particular about following bureaucratic protocols—he is reminiscent in this sense of the coroner who refuses to take Jo's testimony as evidence in *Bleak House*. This expression of bureaucratic sensibility on the part of Dickens's ruffian is faintly ridiculous, but also somewhat menacing, indicating that documentary literacy may be acquired outside of formal educational settings and that even barely literate crooks can use bureaucracy to their advantage in dealings with lawyers. In fact, Riderhood's bureaucratic know-how is clearly not coincidental, but rather a product of his rogue ways. That is, Dickens's criminal, much like Martineau's savvy pauper, has seemingly become bureaucratically literate through frequent exposure to administrative mechanisms.

Conclusions

Over Dickens's writing career, and especially during the 1850s, when he wrote most of his administrative fiction, Dickens played an important role as an interpreter of the emergent administrative state culture, particularly by highlighting the challenges that it posed for ordinary citizens. Dickens substantially expanded the British state imaginary through his popularisation of the bureaucratic horror story, in which non-bureaucrats struggle to navigate a labyrinthine and unfamiliar administrative landscape. Through his representation of

encounters between the governed and the governors, as well as his conceptualisation of the symbolic power of the administrative state, Dickens provided his readers with new tools for thinking and talking about state bureaucracy. Dickens's fictional portraits of official institutions were seemingly addressed to a naive readership, comparatively unfamiliar with the phenomenon of state bureaucracy. That is not to say that Dickens's contemporary reader constituted a *tabula rasa* in terms of their understanding of administrative statecraft. Indeed, in narrativising the new administrative state culture, Dickens was questioning pre-existing ideas about statehood as much as he was filling in the blanks.

Dickens's bureaucratic horror stories particularly emphasise the importance of street-level bureaucratic smarts, mainly by portraying the victimisation of bureaucratically naive civilians, but also by providing edifying and quirky, memorable examples of laypeople using administrative mechanisms to their advantage. Indeed, characters like Arthur Clennam and Rogue Riderhood are eminently well-prepared for encounters with state functionaries and legal professionals. This emphasis on the empowering nature of bureaucratic literacy was an integral part of Dickens's broader illumination and characterisation of bureaucratic phenomena in his midcentury fiction.

Through his popularisation of the bureaucratic horror story, Dickens changed the conditions for writing about British state institutions. As noted in my introductory chapter, Dickens's administrative fiction became a touchstone for later writers on the civil service. *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit* not only provided a narrative mould in which further stories about state bureaucracy could be cast, but through their celebrity they also formed a common point of reference. Dickens's legacy as a critic of officialdom is too broad a topic to be examined in detail here, but a brief characterisation of his impact on late-Victorian and early-twentieth-century fiction evokes the climate in which writers such as Joseph Conrad and H. G. Wells operated, which is the subject of my two remaining chapters.

The fecundity and influence of Dickens's bureaucratic imaginary is evidenced by the fact that several works of administrative fiction produced during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century featured their own Barnacles and their own Circumlocution Office. The Circumlocution Office in particular took on a life of its own, beginning with Trollope's reference to the Circumlocution Office in *The Three Clerks*. Later writers such as Charles Marvin and Edward Shanks wrote about public administration from the inside, having worked in the civil service, and yet they chose to steep their narratives in Dickensian terminology, thus creating heavily mediated stories of public administration that in many ways resemble fan fiction. Thus, Marvin's *Our Public Offices* (1879) portrays life in "the

Barnacle Office" and in "the Barnacle Service" more broadly (8, 69), whereas Shanks's humorous portrayal of WWI officialdom in *The Old Indispensables* (1919) is presented as a sequel to Dickens's *Little Dorrit* that takes the Circumlocution Office into the twentieth century. Notably, in Shanks's novel, the Circumlocution Office is joined by the "department of delays and evasions," the "Divagation Commission," and the "department of Interference" (17, 21). This patterned proliferation of offices is symptomatic of the bureaucratisation that Shanks wishes to critique, but it also represents a rather formulaic emulation of Dickens, underscoring the fact that the Circumlocution Office had become something of a cliché. Given the recurrence of this mode of writing about officialdom (the recycling of Dickensian tropes and vocabulary) in both Marvin and Shanks, I propose that it needs to be understood not only as a way of paying homage to Dickens but also as a communicative strategy: these writers continued to inhabit Dickens's bureaucratic imaginary because it structured and amplified their critiques of state bureaucracy, much as Dickens had coined those phrases to give clearer shape to popular discourse on public administration in the 1850s.

Dickens's far-reaching influence on the perception of British administrative state culture century is satirised in the sketch "Etienne in England" by E. J. Gough, published in a 1911 issue of *Red Tape: A Civil Service Magazine*. In this short story, a civil service clerk is visited by a French acquaintance whose notions about English officialdom are derived entirely from Dickens's writings. "I have read of the Civil Servants of England," the Frenchman proclaims, before adding, in non-grammatical English, "The great Charles Dickens has wrote a count of the most precise of the Circumlocution Office and the Somersault House. But I find the office of my friend not such" (5). Observing that the British civil service clerks appear to be industrious (due, in fact, to a shortage of employment), the Frenchman exclaims, "Never have I not known such zeal! It is noble, it is magnifique!" (5). Whilst the gullible Frenchman comes to believe that Dickens's criticisms were false, or else that British civil service has changed beyond recognition, the reader infers that Dickens's account of civil service indolence and inaptitude remains accurate. Indeed, Gough's affirmation of Dickens's critique is baked into the very style of the sketch, which is very much in keeping with Dickens's satirical treatment of British officialdom (e.g. the substitution of "Somersault House" for "Somerset House," which comes particularly close to Dickensian wordplay). However, Gough's sketch also indicates the ways in which an over-reliance on Dickensian narrativisation of state bureaucracy muddies the waters.

In my next chapter, I will explore how Conrad's fictional treatment of administrative state culture breaks new ground at a time when the bureaucratic horror story popularised by Dickens had grown somewhat formulaic and stale.

Chapter Four

Modernism Beyond the State: Bureaucracy and Anarchism in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*

Introduction

Joseph Conrad wrote *The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale* (1907) amidst a statist turn in British politics, epitomised by the decisive steps that the Liberal government of 1906 took towards the creation of a modern welfare society. "A very serious change was taking place and for the first time attracting notice," historian Élie Halévy suggests in describing this era, "England was becoming bureaucratic" (6: 262). In a 1909 letter to John Galsworthy, Conrad vented his displeasure with the interventionist policies of the Liberal government, sarcastically proclaiming that "the writing of novels shall no doubt become (like maternity) a 'municipal function' with an eight hour day and a living wage; and then perhaps I shall be offered the chance along with the crowd of becoming a government employé" (*Collected Letters*, 289). Echoing Dickens's idea of literature as a form of public service, Conrad's somewhat histrionic critique of the incipient welfare state envisages a comprehensive societal bureaucratisation that would not spare creative writing. Conrad's notion of literature becoming enclosed in the iron cage of bureaucracy would likely have been unimaginable to previous generations of writers, but this prospect was not exactly a specter of Conrad's imagination; ironically, despite reviling the idea of the writer as a "government employé," Conrad in fact accepted a government grant—a "civil list" pension—awarded him the very next year, which he held until 1917 (Najder 420, 495).[106]

At the turn of the century, Conrad had already had a long and complex personal history with bureaucracy and state power. His political outlook was shaped to a great extent by his early experiences in his native Poland, which at the time was annexed by imperial Prussia, Austria, and Russia. Indeed, Conrad's aversion towards political life stems partly from the ways in which colonialism had ravaged his family and homeland, leaving him an

[106] Whilst Conrad was alarmed by the municipalisation of literature, many British modernists of the 1910s and '20s conversely advocated for an expansion of state subsides for writers (Kohlmann, *British*, 227).

orphan and, with time, an émigré.[107] Conrad's understanding of bureaucracy was also shaped by his experiences as a youth working in the French and British merchant navies. Between 1874, when Conrad left Kraków, and 1894, Conrad spent about eight years at sea (Najder 187). As a merchant marine during a period of imperial expansion, Conrad became intimately acquainted not only with naval bureaucracy, but also with the operations of European states' colonial administrations in Africa and the East Indies.

Conrad's concerns about literature being swallowed up by the burgeoning administrative state is symptomatic of his broader sense that bureaucratisation posed a threat to intellectual freedom. An early articulation of Conrad's critique of bureaucracy as a threat to the imagination may be found in "An Outpost of Progress" (1897), a short story about two agents of a colonial organisation—Kayerts and Carlier—who are placed at a remote outpost where they become isolated from their company's organisational network. Cut off from "civilisation," with very limited food supplies, Kayerts and Carlier undergo a form of psychosocial deterioration that ends in tragedy. Conrad's narrator suggests that these characters might have withstood these conditions had they not been rendered cognitively infirm by the conditioning of a Western civilisation "that believe[d] blindly in the irresistible force of its institutions and of its morals, in the power of its police and of its opinion" (40). This type of social conditioning comes undone, Conrad suggests, through "contact with pure unmitigated savagery, with primitive nature and primitive man" and in "the negation of the habitual" that such encounters represent (40). In other words, Conrad portrays the situation in which Kayerts and Carlier find themselves as a missed opportunity: the "civilized nerves" of the two colonial agents are shocked in a manner which "excites the imagination," but they recoil from the ensuing perceptual clarity and self-recognition due to their civilized bureaucratic sensibilities (40).

Indeed, when Conrad's protagonists are "released from the fostering care of men with pens behind their ears," they do "not know what use to make of their faculties, being both, through want of practice, incapable of independent thought" (41–2). Crucially, when they begin to pine for home, it is the very habitual and thought-free nature of their previous mode of existence that they long for. Kayerts, who "had been in the Administration of the Telegraphs," particularly mourns the comparative emptiness of his office headspace, "the thoughts effortless, monotonous, and soothing of a Government clerk" (39, 42). This

[107] Conrad's father Apollo Korzeniowski was a Polish writer and nationalist who played a leading part in the struggle against Russian rule. Korzeniowski was convicted for his conspiratorial activities in the independence movement, and sentenced to exile. Shortly thereafter both Korzeniowski and Conrad's mother, Ewa Bobrowska Korzeniowski, died of tuberculosis.

figuration of the ennui of office life as a secure and relatively pleasant state of being may be contrasted with the tendency to describe the clerk's life as dreary and claustrophobic in civil service fiction of this period. In other words, Conrad's short story provides an externalising perspective on domestic state bureaucracy that goes against and defamiliarises the conventional understanding of administrative state culture. Conrad implicitly urges his reader to resist the temptation to accept the protection and care of "men with pens behind their ears," and instead think independently.

In "An Outpost of Progress," Conrad portrays an extreme situation wherein two colonial agents are "released" from bureaucratically organised society. Conrad thereby highlights the problem of "state thought," to borrow Bourdieu's expression, an issue which is central to his treatment of state bureaucracy. Crucially, in "An Outpost of Progress," Conrad indicates that the modes of perception and cognition that have been instilled through bureaucratic institutional life may be transcended by "the negation of the habitual." This observation clearly pertains to Conrad's conception of the function of narrative fiction. That is, Conrad intimates that literary works may produce the conditions for breaking with habitual state thought. In the case of "An Outpost of Progress," Conrad's reader is allowed to experience the colonial agents' situation vicariously, while the narrator's commentary spells out the message that should be taken from their example. In this chapter I will argue that this is a key feature of Conrad's administrative fiction more bradly: it describes the deadening effects of institutional life on thought and the imagination, whilst stylistically counteracting the habitual perception of administrative state culture.

Given this emphasis on problems of perception and thought, Conrad's administrative fiction differs significantly from that of Dickens, whose bureaucratic horror stories were geared towards preparing readers for encounters with state bureaucracy. Indeed, whilst Conrad follows Dickens in critiquing administrative statecraft on epistemological and ethical grounds, and in foregrounding the importance of bureaucratic literacy in administrative situations, Conrad's administrative fiction represents a significant departure from, or evolution of, Dickens's midcentury tales of state bureaucracy. Conrad deals more directly with the perceived stifling and homogenising effects of societal bureaucratisation. In Dickens's *Bleak House*, a novel which Conrad claimed to have read "innumerable times" (*Personal*, 124), as in *Little Dorrit*, Dickens's main concern in describing administrative state culture is bureaucratic bildung; however, Conrad's major theme is state-made man's problem of thinking independently within an administrative state culture.

In *How Institutions Think* (1987), Mary Douglas emphasises that "intellectual independence" may be achieved in and by understanding "how the institutional grip is laid upon our mind" (92). This form of intellectual resistance to the power of ideological state apparatuses was a project to which many modernist writers were deeply committed. Indeed, according to prominent scholars of modernist literature such as Ernst Bloch and Theodor Adorno, the politically progressive dimension of much modernist writing lies precisely in its formal complexity and experimental nature, which unsettled habitual patterns of writing, reading, and thinking. For Conrad, the value of art and literature lay primarily in its ability to renew perception of social reality. Far from a purely artistic or aesthetic enterprise, Conrad's style of writing was wedded to a form of civilisational critique; it was intended not only as a form of artistic expression, but also, as will be discussed in greater depth below, as a means of combating habitual and institutionalised thought, which Conrad regarded as a defining, and highly problematic, feature of modernity. Bringing this artistic programme to bear on administrative state culture, Conrad produced a new type of administrative fiction. As Daniel Bivona notes, Conrad's treatment of bureaucracy is "'proto-existentialist'" in that it highlights the "'psychological' complexities inherent in the bureaucratic problematization of intention and purpose" (105). In other words, Conrad's fiction explores how the symbolic power of the state shapes individual consciousness and cognition. This emphasis on psychological proceses, I argue, is characteristic of Conrad's engagement with state bureaucracy, as is his defamiliarising use of literary devices to destabilise and offset the effects of the state's symbolic violence. Such are the stakes of Condradian state play.

Like Dickens, Conrad celebrates the representational tools at the disposal of the novelist by situating narrative fiction *vis-à-vis* the state's informational and documentary modes of writing. More precisely, Conrad positions his impressionism—that is, his narrative style, with its emphasis on questions of individual consciousness and modes of perception—in opposition to the informational epistemology of administrative statecraft. As James Purdon aptly puts it, the emphasis that Conrad places on "uncertainty and complexity" in *The Secret Agent* is entwined with a critique of officialdom's attempts to reduce "complex relations into manageable, securable categories" (54).[108] This polemical pitting of the psychological depth of literary writing against the alleged superficiality of bureaucratic epistemology is evident also in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), in which, as Marius Hentea points out, Woolf

[108] Historicizing Conrad's concern with information management in *The Secret Agent*, Purdon argues that it reflects the "transformation of Victorian statistics into Modernist informatics," which Purdon defines as an increasing concern with controlling informational "access and channels" (5–6).

stages a clash of two competing "poetics," where state bureaucracy, embodied by the civil servant Hugh Whitbread and his "compartmentalization of language and regulatory impulses," is contrasted with the protagonist Clarissa Dalloway's "meandering" narrative and attentiveness to matters of psychological complexity (291). Nicola Bishop has also highlighted "a convergence of clerkly and modernist concerns," observing that the anonymity and depersonalisation of the "clerical world" became an important motif for modernists who were grappling with "the loss of originality and distinctiveness" in modern life more broadly ("Middlebrow," 108, 111). Drawing on the insightful investigations of Purdon, Hentea, and Bishop into the relationship between state bureauracy and modernist literature, the present chapter will illuminate the ways in which Conrad's critique of administrative state culture informs his exploration of questions of aesthetics and epistemology.

My investigation of this subject is also guided by Rebecca L. Walkowitz's *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (2006), which celebrates modernist writing concerned with "thinking beyond the nation" (2). Highlighting Conrad's artistic interest in the "perception of perception, the recognition of habit and the process of defamiliarization," Walkowitz reads the "impressionism" of *The Secret Agent* in terms of an "aesthetic cosmopolitanism" that resides in the fluid identities of the novel's characters and in the ambiguities of Conrad's narrative style (36–7, 44). By the same token, as the present chapter will show, Conrad's fiction has significant affordances for readers interested in the problem of thinking "beyond" the *state*. Indeed, it should be noted that the principal "cosmopolitan" characters in *The Secret Agent* are also self-professed anarchists, which gives some indication that Conrad's treatment of questions of identity, ambiguity, and fluidity pertains not only to the framework of the nation, but also to that of the state. However, there is a stark contrast between, on the one hand, Conrad's cosmopolitan anarchists' ability to navigate matters of national belonging and, on the other hand, the dullness and inertia of their politics, which betrays an inability to think beyond the state. That is, much as the colonial agents of "An Outpost of Progress" are psychologically tethered to the administrative state culture that they have been separated from, the anarchists of *The Secret Agent* cannot quite break an attachment to the state culture that they are, by their own accounts, seeking to abolish.

In the "Author's Note" to the 1920 edition of *The Secret Agent*, Conrad writes that there were "moments during the writing of the book when I was an extreme revolutionist" (8). The present chapter examines the textual imprints of those moments, locating them not only in Conrad's characterisation of the anarchists of the novel, but also in his critical and satirical

figuration of state institutions. Inspired by Conrad's prefatorial commentary on aesthetics and politics, I argue that Conrad's administrative fiction shares an affinity with the anarchist project in that it represents an attempt to promote a cognitive and perceptual estrangement or emancipation from administrative state culture.

The Secret Agent needs to be read in light of the evolution of British officialdom over the final decades of the nineteenth century and at the turn of the twentieth century. Robert Hampson, describing the "heterotopic" temporality of *The Secret Agent*, notes that the novel "brings together three periods: the period just prior to 1886, when [Conrad's] own visits to the Russian embassy overlapped with the end of the Fenian bombing campaign; 1894 when the Greenwich bombing took place; and the period December 1905 to May 1907 when he was writing the novel" (98–9). For this reason, Conrad's represention of the British state apparatus is not tied to any specific historical moment; the novel may be read as responding to developments in administrative state culture over the final decades of the century, and continuing into the twentieth century, reflecting Conrad's experiences and impressions of the British state.

In terms of the intellectual history of this era, it should be noted that the late nineteenth century saw not only an intensification of anarchist and socialist writings about the state, but also a renewed scholarly discourse on governance that culminated in the formation of the field of political science at the turn of the century. In other words, the consolidation of administrative state culture in the final decades of the nineteenth century coincided with a period of intense philosophical, scientific, ideological, and artistic scrutiny or problematisation of state power. Conrad's treatment of administrative statecraft clearly belongs to this moment. Interestingly, *The Secret Agent* partakes of the tone and register of the nascent discipline of political science, in that Conrad's narrator and fictional characters frequently offer authoritative analytical pronouncements about the nature of state bureaucracy. However, in *The Secret Agent* Conrad employs such analytical language only to undercut it through unexpected and profane reversals, or with sudden bursts of poetic imagery.

Comparing the impact of the artist to that of the scientist and the thinker, in the preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* (1897), Conrad proclaims that, the artist's "appeal is less loud, more profound, less distinct, more stirring—and sooner forgotten. Yet its effect endures forever" (3). Such is the training that Conradian state play provides: it is temperamental, to use a term favoured by Conrad, rather than instrumental (*à la* Dickens's cognitive mapping of the emergent administrative state culture). And it is in the

aforementioned lyrical passages and unexpected reversals in the juxtaposition of bureaucrats and anarchists that this distinctively Conradian mode of state play stands out most clearly. Those moments when the author becomes an "extreme revolutionist" have their corollary, then, in passages in the narrative, which produce those "rare moments of awakening" that Marlow speaks of in *Lord Jim* "when we see, hear, understand ever so much—everything—in a flash," after which, Marlow hastens to add, "we fall back again into our agreeable somnolence" (143). Those moments in the narrative cannot, perhaps, bring a lasting break with state thought, but on some level, to borrow Conrad's words, their effects may endure.

State bureaucracy constitutes a central theme throughout Conrad's oeuvre, as previous scholarship has shown. Whilst the present chapter focuses on *The Secret Agent*, I will at times highlight structural and thematic correspondences between Conrad's London novel and his depiction of colonial and naval bureaucracy, in order to bring out those patterns and in order to place my discussion in a more free-ranging conversation with Conradian scholarship. However, I will not discuss Conrad's later novels dealing with Eastern European politics, despite the closeness of *Under Western Eyes* (1911) in its concerns with *The Secret Agent*. In *Under Western Eyes*, Conrad continues to explore questions of state power similar to those dealt with in *The Secret Agent*, but his development of these themes pertain to Russian imperialism and totalitarianism rather than to the British state. In the first section of this chapter, I begin by discussing the fact that Conrad's fiction often revolves around an official inquiry or report that is being produced by or about the main characters. Moving from an examination of Conrad's colonial and naval fiction to *The Secret Agent*, my second section examines Conrad's representation of the London Metropolitan Police as a bureaucratic institution embedded in the larger structures of an administrative state. Building on a discussion of departmental informational practices, I next explore how Conrad situates his representation of the metropolis vis-à-vis officialdom's documentary accounts of metropolitan social reality. The final sections of the chapter then turn more directly to Conrad's engagement with anarchism and the problem of state thought. Taken together, the present chapter demonstrates the continuity of Conrad's administrative fiction with the work of Martineau and Dickens, but it also shows that *The Secret Agent* represents a new departure in the treatment of state bureaucracy in British literature.

"The Supremacy of Paper and Ink": Reports, Inquiries, and Registers in Conrad's Colonial and Naval Fiction

In *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance* (1924), Ford Madox Ford describes the rationale behind the impressionist "new form" that he sought to develop together with Conrad at the turn of the twentieth century, proclaiming that "[w]e agreed that the general effect of a novel must be the general effect that life makes on mankind. A novel must therefore not be a narration, a report" (192). Whilst this is far from a verbatim account of the conversations that Conrad and Ford had decades earlier, the choice of the word "report" to describe the style of writing which is being rejected accords with Conrad's tendency to situate his aesthetic project vis-à-vis not only the conventions of realist fiction, but also official documentary modes of representation such as reports and registers.

A central motif in Conrad's colonial and sea fiction is that of the barren soullessness of administrative textuality. Conrad routinely disavows official inquiries, reports, and other informational genres as epistemologically flawed, a critique that is interwoven with his celebration of the insight that may be gained through narrative fiction and other forms of story-telling. This may be seen in the persona of Charles Marlow, who narrates many of Conrad's most famous fictional works, and who often positions his narratives as correctives to official investigations regarding the characters of his stories. In *Lord Jim* (1900), for instance, a seaman named Jim is subject to trial by a magistrate's court for his role as a part of a crew that has abandoned a ship in distress without aiding its passengers. The competitive, contestatory dimension of Marlow's account of Jim's story is quite explicit, insofar as Marlow rejects the official inquiry's epistemological approach: "[t]hey wanted facts. Facts! They demanded facts from him, as if facts could explain anything!" (29). Exasperated with "facts," Marlow focuses on questions concerning Jim's psychology when telling his story. As with Dickens's polemics with factual epistemology in a novel such as *Hard Times*, Conrad's narrator's denunciation of the fact-oriented investigation situates story-telling as a superior alternative to the methods of official inquiries.

Conrad's literary project of finding a "new form" resides to a great extent in his "evolving the convention of a Marlow who should narrate, in presentation, the whole story of a novel, just as, without much sequence or pursued chronology, the story will come up in the mind of a narrator" (Ford, "Techniques," 33). In other words, much as Marlow is interested in Jim's psychology, Conrad is interested in the psychology of the narrator. This facet of Conrad's writing is equally central in *Heart of Darkness* (1899), in which Marlow relates his

experiences as a river steamboat captain in the service of a Belgian colonial company in Western Africa. Part of the narrative's interest lies in what it says about Marlow's psyche and his manner of dealing with his experiences as a colonial agent. Bivona stresses that Marlow's narration involves a mode of deflection, an "inability or unwillingness to scrutinize his own bureaucratic position" (111). It is at the level of Marlow's narrative reconstruction of events, then, that Bivona identifies a bureaucratic existentialism in *Heart of Darkness*; it concerns the issue of acknowledging agency in, and thus culpability for, violence perpetrated as an agent of a bureaucratic system.[109]

Much as the official inquiry is a central motif in *Lord Jim*, the commissioned report holds a similar significance in *Heart of Darkness*, in which Marlow is tasked by his employers with writing a report on his colleague Kurtz. Marlow searches for Kurtz and discovers that his colleague has become an authority figure in a tribal community far beyond even the remotest colonial outpost. Having investigated the situation, Marlow decides to renounce his reportorial task, informing his manager that he will have to find someone else to "make a readable report," implying that any attempt to write a report in accordance with established norms would involve a falsification of the reality (indeed, the horror) of Kurtz's situation (62). In Peter Brooks's words, the underlying suggestion is that the situation calls for "an *unreadable* report—something like Kurtz's *Report*, perhaps, with its utterly contradictory messages, or perhaps Marlow's eventual retelling of the whole affair" (70). Of course, this analogy or continuum may ultimately be extended to include Conrad's novel itself.

In his colonial fiction, then, Conrad valorises story-telling as an investigation of social reality that uncovers truths that are unacknowledged, and indeed effectively concealed, in official inquiries and bureaucratic documents. However, as Bivona highlights, story-tellers have their own blind-spots and perpetuate their own untruths. In his memoir, *A Personal Record* (1912), Conrad describes not only life at sea, but also the naval bureaucracy that he learnt to navigate as a merchant marine. Remembering the process whereby he ultimately achieved the rank of master marine, Conrad declares, with apparent admiration, that the "august academical body of the Marine Department of the Board of Trade takes nothing for

[109] Bivona's analysis of the bureaucratic existentialism of Conrad's narrative fiction highlights the importance of separating author and narrator, and yet it perhaps also exemplifies a willingness to attribute a level of sophistication to Conrad's critique of colonialism that is not always born out by his treatment of this subject. Conrad was in many respects a humanitarian writer, but his fiction is by no means unequivocally anti-colonial. Conrad's literary treatment of imperialism has been extensively interrogated, with Edward Said and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o providing important post-colonial critiques of his work. Walkowitz suggests that "Conrad in some ways admired British imperialism even as he criticized Belgian policies" (19). Similarly, Levenson writes that Conrad was primarily repulsed by the "inefficiency of imperialism" (270).

granted in the granting of its learned degrees" (112). However, whilst Conrad's memoir emphasises the formality and rigour of the examination processes, the historical documents indicate that the Marine Department was not sufficiently vigilant after all. Conrad's biographer Zdzisław Najder has shown that Conrad provided false documentation in applying to take the examination for second mate, documentation that exaggerated his experience of service at sea (80–2). In other words, the young Conrad managed to dupe his examiners, thus considerably fast-tracking his naval career.

The documentary wiles that Conrad employed as an aspiring second mate would seem to be far removed from his literary career, and yet, this act of forgery anticipates some of the recurring motifs in Conrad's administrative fiction, resonating with his work's attentiveness to the ways in which official facts tend to deviate from social or experiential reality. Moreover, the fallibility of documentation is a frequent point of reference in Conrad's articulation of the tenets of his impressionistic fiction. Contrasting literature with historiography in the 1905 essay "Henry James: An Appreciation," Conrad argues that fiction "stands on firmer ground, being based on the reality of forms and the observation of social phenomena, whereas history is based on documents, and the reading of print and handwriting—on second-hand impression. Thus fiction is nearer truth" (65). It is tempting to read this critique of "second-hand impression[s]" that are "based on documents" in relation to the counterfeiter's appreciation of how easily documentation may be fabricated. Of course, the irony is that Conrad's memoir suppresses the fact that he supplied forged documentation to the Marine Department, despite the author's first-hand knowledge of this crime. Moreover, despite Conrad's evident contempt for documentary "truth" both as a young marine and as a mature writer, documents do in fact speak their own truths, as Najder's research illustrates. By examining archival material, Najder was able not only to discern an act of forgery, but also to pick apart Conrad's version of events in *A Personal Record*, noting that Conrad falsely makes out that he passed examinations for first officer and master mariner on the first attempts (100–1, 108–11).[110] Here, then, one begins to see the problems with Conrad's dictum about the epistemological superiority of writing rooted in first-hand knowledge.

Conrad's experiences of marine bureaucracy are reflected in *The Shadow-Line* (1917), a significant late addition to his corpus of maritime fiction. In this novella, Conrad continues his project of critiquing administrative information genres. Here, it is not the official inquiry

[110] Conrad was in this respect something of a serial fraudster; in 1894 Conrad testified before the Board of Trade's Departmental Committee on the Manning of Merchant Ships and again "departed from the truth in reporting the length of his service and posts held" (Najder 186–87).

or report that is the object of scorn, but rather the bureaucratic register. The protagonist is a seaman who has grown tired of life at sea but who nonetheless finds himself at the Harbour Office seeking employment. He resents the fact that his fate is in the control of the Gradgrindian bureaucrats of the Harbour Office who seemingly view themselves as modern-day gods. He is particularly affronted by the clerks' depersonalised bureaucratic handling of the seamen in their charge:

> I was, in common with the other seamen of the port, merely a subject for official writing, filling up forms with all the artificial superiority of a man of pen and ink to the men who grapple with realities outside the consecrated walls of official buildings. What ghosts we must have been to him! Mere symbols to juggle with in books and heavy registers, without brains and muscles and perplexities; something hardly useful and decidedly inferior. (34)

The narrator is enraged by the bureaucrats' "juggling" with seamen "in books and heavy registers," a genre of "official writing" that is deplored as breeding an impoverished and spectral papereality. Crucially, the passage quoted above typifies Conrad's tendency to critique official textuality on precisely those points where his own style of writing is famously at its strongest; whereas the Harbour Office clerks ignore the nuances of social reality, Conrad's artistic mission lies precisely in "grappl[ing] with realities" and rendering "perplexities." The above passage thus exemplifies how Conrad's polemic with "official writing" doubles as a means of highlighting the value of literary writing.

Whilst the first-person narrator is generally dismissive of the Harbour Office and its clerks, his attitude towards Captain Ellis, the Harbour Master, is more ambivalent. The clerks of the office accord this Captain Ellis an almost godlike status as "the supreme authority," and this is also reflected in the Harbour Master's own estimation of his own powers:

> Captain Ellis looked upon himself as a sort of divine (pagan) emanation, the deputy-Neptune for the circumambient seas. If he did not actually rule the waves, he pretended to rule the fate of the mortals whose lives were cast upon the waters. (*Shadow-Line*, 29–30)

Ironically, in lieu of a "trident," the Captain wields the "official pen, far mightier than the sword in making or marring the fortune of simple toiling men" (31). This characterisation of Captain Ellis as "deputy-Neptune" is decidedly equivocal; it is mocking in tone, but nonetheless confirms the powers of the Harbour Master and his "official pen." In fact, the narrator becomes the beneficiary of the Captain's god-like influence:

> the deputy-Neptune signed it [the contract], stamped it with his own exalted hand, folded it in four (it was a sheet of blue foolscap) and presented it to me—a gift of extraordinary potency, for, as I put it in my pocket, my head swam a little. (32)

The portrayal of Captain Ellis is, in other words, simultaneously exalting and scornful, a doubleness that may be seen in Conrad's characterisation of bureaucrats more broadly, who tend to be vaguely ridiculous but also bearers of symbolically powerful official pens.

Departmentalism in *The Secret Agent*

The Secret Agent is not amongst Conrad's tales told by Marlow, but Conrad's metropolitan novel is positioned vis-à-vis administrative state epistemology by other means, whilst also conveying a bureaucratic existentialism of its own. Reiterating the polemic with official inquiries, reports, and registers found in his colonial and naval fiction, *The Secret Agent* centres on an investigation performed by the Special Crimes Department of the London Metropolitan Police into a fatal explosion that occurs outside the Royal Observatory in Greenwich Park. Conrad's novel is, in fact, based on a real life occurrence: the gruesome death of the anarchist Martial Bourdin whose explosives detonated prematurely outside the Greenwich Observatory in 1894. Emphasising that the organisational structure of the police department determines the manner in which it operates, *The Secret Agent* highlights issues that arise from bureaucratic organisational structures—from the ways in which bureaucratic institutions "think," to cite Mary Douglas.

Conrad's administrative fiction generally establishes a dichotomy of administration and adventure. This is evident in his colonial and sea-faring fiction, as well as in *The Secret Agent*. In Conrad's colonial fiction, the colony constitutes a site of both administration and adventure, experiential domains that are placed in stark opposition, establishing an opposition of stolid and hollow paperwork versus meaningful and exciting experience in the field. Notably, this narrative and thematic structure is central to Conrad's portrayal of colonialism in *Heart of Darkness*, in which Marlow's first encounter with colonial rule on reaching the Outer Station is his meeting with the company's chief accountant, a bureaucrat who doggedly persists with leading a "sedentary desk-life" amidst a chaotic and deadly atmosphere: "perch[ed] on a high stool," he attempts to stay "out of the chaos," his attention fully "devoted to his books, which were in apple-pie order" (18). The staunchly administrative comportment of this accountant in a "badly put together" shelter (highly reminiscent of Dickens's clerkish police officer Mr Inspector, who refuses to let the commotion at the police station interfere with his paperwork) is severely tested. "The groans of this sick person [...] distract my attention," the awkwardly situated bureaucrat complains, adding that "it is extremely difficult to guard against clerical errors in this climate" (18). This is not only a satirical account of an

agent of a European bureaucracy encountering the "chaos" of an environment without bureaucratic amenities, but it is also a critique of the backwardness of the bureaucratic mindset of an administrator who regards the social world as little more than an impediment to the administrative tasks at hand. As indicated in the previous section, the imperative of "mak[ing] correct entries" that is keenly felt by this chief accountant stands in an inverse relationship to Marlow's attempt to account for the experiential reality of the colonial enterprise (19).

As numerous critics have observed, Conrad's critique of bureaucratic organisation in *Heart of Darkness* anticipates the terms of Weber's conceptualisation of bureaucracy in the foundational sociological essays that he wrote over the first two decades of the twentieth century. As Michael Levenson aptly puts it, Conrad's "drama of officialdom" explores the tension between traditional "charismatic" authority and "rational" institutional power that is fundamental to Weber's analysis (266).[111] This comparison between Conrad and Weber is significant given the parallels that may be drawn between these two influential contemporaneous commentators on bureaucracy. The dichotomy of adventure and administration that Conrad establishes clearly aligns with Weber's opposition between charismatic and rational authority. This tension is embodied in Conrad's infamous "rogue-bureaucrat" Kurtz (Bivona 106), a functionary in the colonial commercial operation who has become a half-crazed, tyrannical tribal overlord. The adventurous and exploitative Kurtz, who has a background both as a journalist and as an artist, represents the antithesis of the bureaucratic company accountant who remains fixed to his makeshift desk at the station. Indeed, Kurtz's strange and heinous transgressions signify, amongst other things, a departure from bureaucratic protocol and organisational frameworks, thus, in a sense, demonstrating the possibility, but also the difficulty, of transcending administrative state culture.

As indicated above, the contrasting of adventure and administration is also evident in Conrad's sea fiction. *The Shadow-Line* follows a young seaman who leaves his berth on an "Eastern" ship and finds temporary accommodation at a shipping port, where he is unexpectedly entrusted with a captaincy by the Master of the local Harbour Office. In this novella, as noted in the previous section, red tape is figured as a life-sapping force: "[t]he atmosphere of officialdom would kill anything that breathes the air of human endeavour,

[111] Much as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* expresses a yearning for the charismatic hero, Weber's analysis carries a strong "nostalgia for the bearer of charisma" (Jameson, "Vanishing," 89). Though there is no direct evidence that Conrad read Weber, Conrad's portrayal of the tension between rational bureaucratic rationality and charismatic authority resonates with Weber's work. Levenson writes that "under the same historical pressures Conrad came to much the same perception" as Weber (268). On Conrad and Weber, see also Bivona and Chan.

would extinguish hope and fear alike in the supremacy of paper and ink" (30). Conrad's figuration of naval bureaucracy as dehumanising establishes a contrast or contest between naval bureaucracy and sea-faring itself, which is conversely the arena of "human endeavour," that is, adventure and personal growth. The protagonist's visit to the Harbour Office represents a portal of sorts within the structure of the novella through which the protagonist emerges onto the scene of the main action, in this case the ship that he captains.

The aforementioned movement from the Harbour Office to the sea exemplifies a characteristic narrative pattern in Conrad's administrative fiction, where administrative state culture is juxtaposed with some form of externality. In the sea-faring novels, it is the sea that comes to represent an alternative to the noxious naval bureaucracy; in the colonial fiction, the European coloniser's contact with the indigenous culture of the colonised land stands as an alternative to colonial bureaucracy; and, in Conrad's domestic "drama of officialdom," as I will show in my reading of *The Secret Agent*, it is the ideology of anarchism and the destructivity of anarchist terrorist practices that emerges as a site of potential externality to the administrative state culture. In all three cases, then, the narrative action in some respect gestures towards a possible escape from bureaucratic institutional life. This recurring narrative trajectory is suggestive of a well-nigh utopian impulse to transcend the framework of the administrative state. However, in all three cases this outward movement is checked or compromised, as the potential escape route turns into something inaccessible, threatening, or morally compromising. Indeed, as will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, the fate of the anarchists of *The Secret Agent* is instructive in this regard: they cannot find any escape from administrative state culture.

In *The Secret Agent*, the dichotomy of adventure and administration is encapsulated in the personality and situation of the protagonist, the Assistant Commissioner of Police, who has previously served as a colonial policeman but now finds himself in a senior position in the London Metropolitan Police, a background story that also serves to link Conrad's London novel to his earlier work (89).[112] Crucially, the Assistant Commissioner finds himself, through promotion, the reluctant recipient of a desk job:

> The Assistant Commissioner did not like his work at home. The police work he had been engaged on in a distant part of the globe had the saving character of an irregular sort of warfare or at least the risk and excitement of open air sport. His real abilities, which were mainly of an administrative order, were combined with

[112] For an illuminating discussion of the figure of the returned colonial administrator in late-Victorian fiction, see Siddiqi 63.

> an adventurous disposition. Chained to a desk in the thick of four millions of men, he considered himself the victim of an ironic fate[.] (89)

Temperamentally, the Assistant Commissioner has much in common with the rogue-bureaucrat figure Kurtz; however, the Assistant Commissioner's administrative proficiency has earned him a career as a high-ranking bureaucrat back in the capital. Whereas life as a colonial administrator had been exciting and exotic, following his transfer to London, he finds himself ruled by his desk, so to speak. In terms of literary forebears, the Assistant Commissioner's adventurous spirit places him in the lineage of Dickens's hero-policeman Inspector Bucket, but there is also a kinship of sorts with Dickens's more bureaucratic police detective Mr Inspector, with whom the Assistant Commissioner shares the anonymity of being denominated only with an official title in the narrative.[113] The Assistant Commissioner ultimately rebels against the fact that, as "head of the so called Special Crimes Department," he is "debarred by his position from going out of doors personally in quest of secrets locked up in guilty breasts" (92). Eager to escape the confines of the office, he throws himself into the investigation of the Greenwich bomb affair as a rare opportunity for adventure, but also for "charisma creation" (Chan 26). The exhilaration of this "quest" makes him feel "light-hearted," as though he were "miles away from departmental desks and official inkstands" (*Secret*, 116).

Conrad's emphasis on the bureaucratic dimension of police work reflects the movement from the enthusiasm and initative of the "mid-century specialist" towards increasing bureaucratic regulation, or "departmentalism," in late-nineteenth-century British officialdom, meaning essentially a greater emphasis on "formal procedures and codes" in government departments (MacLeod 15–6). The *OED* defines "departmentalism" as "attachment to departmental methods," and gives the first documented use as 1886. In *Humour in the Civil Service* (1928), John Aye likens this term to the Dickensian catchphrase "Circumlocution," by observing that both terms were frequently used during the First World War to critique the bureaucratic aspects of the war effort: "Once more was the Barnacle family dragged into the light of day. Again, in capital letters, were the general public [...] confronted with the terrifying words 'Departmentalism' and 'Circumlocution'" (15). As is anticipated already in and by Dickens's characterisation of Mr Inspector in *Our Mutual Friend*, the days when official detectives *à la* Inspector Bucket were free to operate

[113] The Assistant Commissioner is not the only unnamed bureaucrat in Conrad's fiction. In *Heart of Darkness*, as Bivona observes, "Marlow tells us of his interactions in Africa with 'the Chief Accountant,' the 'fork-bearded agent,' and the 'Manager'—all of them distinguished by titles instead of proper names" (106).

independently had come and gone. Indeed, the bureaucratisation of policework during the late Victorian era helped inspire Arthur Conan Doyle's genius sleuth, Sherlock Holmes, who famously operates as a private detective alongside the official police (more on this below). However, Conrad's account of the Metropolitan Police in *The Secret Agent* provided perhaps the fullest literary exploration of this phenomenon to date.

The Assistant Commissioner is nominally in charge of operations as the head of the Special Crimes Department, but his autonomy and agency is limited by his reliance on his subordinates' actions. He therefore becomes "irritat[ed] with the system" and feels like he is "stuck in a litter of paper" (91). This sense of being overburdened by paperwork reflects the reality of life in turn-of-the-century public administration, when "[t]he sheer physical problem of coping with the influx of paper became chronic" (Pellew 64). However, the Assistant Commissioner's problem is not that he is overwhelmed by paperwork, but rather that he is constrained by it (he is "stuck *in* a litter of paper," rather than *under* it). Crucially, the Assistant Commissioner views "desk work" as "the bane of his existence" not only because of its "confined nature," but also because of its "apparent lack of reality," its leading away from a true grasp of social reality (104). Being stuck in paper is, in other words, an epistemological problem. As the Assistant Commissioner puts it, "[I am] supposed to hold all the threads in my hands, and yet I can but hold what is put in my hand, and nothing else. And they can fasten the other ends of the threads where they please" (91). He is beholden to his colleagues' reports for information, which becomes a problem not least through their unprincipled handling of the "threads" that connect his bureaucratic papereality to the state of affairs in the actual world.

According to Weber, the distancing effects that occur as information is relayed within bureaucratic institutions are not a flaw of bureaucratic systems but rather a crucial means of safeguarding disinterestedness and objectivity. For an organisation to be rational-bureaucratic in the Weberian sense, the decision-makers "cannot have direct firsthand knowledge of the problems they are called upon to solve" (Crozier 190). As Weber notes, "[t]he content of discipline is nothing but the consistently rationalized, methodically trained and exact execution of the received order, in which all personal criticism is unconditionally suspended and the actor is unswervingly and exclusively set for carrying out the command" (*From Max Weber*, 253). These organisational principles are clearly antithetical to Conrad's impressionist and existentialist literary project, which insists upon the value of experiential knowledge and of independent decision-making.

Conrad's characterisation of departmentalism in *The Secret Agent* undermines the idea that departmental information-sharing and depersonalising chains of command would lead to greater rationality or efficiency. Above all, Conrad highlights how interpersonal factors may influence bureaucratic practices, causing information to be distorted and falsified. In portraying inter- and intradepartmental communication, Conrad especially problematises and complicates the relationship between efficiency and knowledge in bureaucratic systems. He writes,

> A department is to those it employs a complex personality with ideas and even fads of its own. [...] A department does not know so much as some of its servants. Being a dispassionate organism, it can never be perfectly informed. It would not be good for its efficiency to know too much. (73)

This passage consists of a sequence of analytical statements about what a department is and can be, which contain a set of paradoxical or counter-factual claims. The narrator's suggestion is, in short, that the ideal departmental informational regime is secretive and obfuscatory—that partial ignorance is, on some level, conducive to organisational efficiency. This is not the only paradoxical statement in this passage: there is also the seemingly counter-factual claim that a public servant's knowledge may outstrip the pooled information of his or her department. Moreover, in this passage, the department as such is first personified—indeed, it is characterised as unruly and faddish—and then described as a "dispassionate organism." To add to the contradictory nature of this bundle of statements about the nature of departments, there is also a stylistic contrast between the analytical rhetoric of the passage and the unconventional ideas put forth. Indeed, the analytical register that is used in the passage is coupled with an ironical, flippant tone. The putatively rational organism of the government department becomes associated with inexplicable quirks and contradictions, as the language of rationality becomes mixed-up with that of paradox and mystery.

As seen, Conrad establishes an opposition between departmental information-sharing and the individual state functionary's knowledge, which ties in with the wider epistemological contest that Conrad stages between factual and experiential knowledge of the social world. In *The Secret Agent*, officialdom's desire for an easily legible, bureaucratically digestable social world is embodied by Sir Ethelred, the Secretary of State, who shares the Assistant Commissioner's dependency on, and fraught relationship with, subordinate's updates and reports. On the one hand, Sir Ethelred sullenly declares himself starved of information: "I am glad there's somebody over at your shop who thinks that the Secretary of State may be trusted now and then" (108). On the other hand, he implores, "no details, pray. Spare me the details,"

"shrink[ing] away as if in physical dread of details" (106, 167). A caricature of state epistemology, Conrad's Secretary of State lives a sheltered existence, desperately avoiding all forms of complexity and ambiguity. His eyes are quite literally his "weak point" and in need of protection, and his office is furnished accordingly: "[s]hades of green silk fitted low over all the lights imparted to the room something of a forest's deep gloom" (164). Crucially, this senior civil servant's sensitivity to alarming facts and details causes his subordinates to adapt their reports so as to avoid friction; for instance, when Chief Inspector Heat assures the Secretary of State that he foresees no terrorist outbreak, he does so partly because he perceives that "the high official desire[s] greatly to hear that very thing" (69). This exemplifies how Conrad's novel lays bare the incentive structures that influence the behaviour of government officials, who are far from impartial bureaucratic automatons, showing that interpersonal relations affect departmental information-sharing practices in ways that undermine the notion of bureaucratic rationality.

In his investigatory work, Chief Inspector Heat recoils from complexity—not out of fear, as in the case of Sir Ethelred—but rather because he considers truthfulness to be secondary to following established praxes: "it appeared to him just and proper that this affair should be shunted off its obscure and inconvenient track, leading goodness knows where, in a quiet (and lawful) siding called Michaelis" (96). In other words, rather than inquiring into the details of an "obscure" affair like the Greenwich explosion, the Chief Inspector is ready to frame Michaelis, a well-known anarchist, for the suspected terrorist deed. Heat is, in fact, happy to bend the facts, proclaiming, "[t]here will be no difficulty in getting up sufficient evidence against *him*" (90).[114] Heat is clearly corrupt and motivated by self-preservation, but his methodology as a policeman may also be understood as an extreme version of street-level bureaucrats' tendency to "close epistemic gaps through routinized practices" (Hoag and Hull 20). Whilst state functionaries are supposed to abide by rules and regulation, bureaucrats also develop experience-based "systems of meaning" so as to manage indeterminacy (19). This is essentially the case with Inspector Heat, who interprets the Greenwich explosion in accordance with a set of expectations and principles that he has developed in performing a highly discretionary role.

Through Conrad's state functionaries' unprincipled withholding and manipulation of the truth, and their avoidance of complexity, administrative information management is

[114] The newly formed Detective Branch of the Metropolitan Police was marred by cases of professional misconduct during its early existence. In 1877, three of four chief inspectors were convicted of corruption, prompting organisational restructuring (Emsley, *The English*, 69).

figured as both feeble and eminently corruptible. However, this picture is complicated by the Assistant Commissioner's decision to step outside his role in the departmental structure, to undertake his own inquiry into the Greenwich bomb affair. The Assistant Commissioner's investigations are pitted against Heat's unscrupulous police work: "[m]y line of inquiry would appear to him an awful perversion of duty. For him the plain duty is to fasten the guilt upon as many prominent anarchists as he can" (110). The Assistant Commissioner's sardonic perspective on Heat's conception of duty serves to effect a contrast between Heat's crude and lawless policework on the one hand, and the Assistant Commissioner's truth-seeking on the other. And yet, as will be further discussed below, Conrad ultimately undercuts the Assistant Commissioner's seeming heroism, as a part of his satire on the trope of the smart detective, which "blow[s] up that generic figure in a number of entertaining ways" (Bodenheimer 751).[115]

Conrad's characterisation of the Metropolitan Police in *The Secret Agent* undermines the notion of the impartiality and professionalism of state functionaries, which is a key ingredient in the legitimacy of state institutions. Early in the narrative, Heat appears to be spectacularly proficient at anticipating and neutralising the anarchists' terrorist activities; however, it soon becomes evident that his success in this regard stems not from his professional abilities, but from his use of the secret agent Verloc as a private informant. At the same time, the disinterestedness of the Assistant Commissioner increasingly comes into question. It is evident from the beginning that it is the ennui of office life and his dissatisfaction with his department's modus operandi that drives him to seek the truth in the matter of the Greenwich explosion. The Assistant Commissioner's truth-seeking "quest" is, in other words, circumstantial. His credibility as a hero-investigator is further diminished once it becomes clear that he has an ulterior motive for embarking on this inquiry; that is, if Heat were to succeed in his plan of framing the innocent Michaelis, this would damage the Assistant Commissioner's relations with an influential friend (through his wife) who is an admirer of Michaelis's politics: "[t]he Assistant Commissioner made a reflection extremely unbecoming to his official position without being really creditable to his humanity. 'If the fellow is laid hold of again,' he thought, 'she will never forgive me'" (89). The Assistant Commissioner recognises that his motives are unethical and unprofessional, but he accepts the fact that he is guided by an "instinct of self preservation" (89). The Assistant Commissioner is

[115] On Conrad and the literary fantasy of the "genius sleuth," see also Rosen and Santesso 148.

truth-seeking insofar as he has the capacity for self-criticism; however, he does not fulfil the role of a disinterested and honest state functionary.

The Assistant Commissioner is said to have a "considerable gift for the detection of incriminating truth" (92). And yet, ironically, his efforts in this respect are primarily directed towards his subordinates, inasmuch as he is required to inquire into their actions and motives in order to keep his institution well-functioning: "a department is at the mercy of its subordinate officers, who have their own conceptions of loyalty" (79). Meanwhile, his subordinates' energies are expended in a similar fashion: "[t]he problem immediately before the Chief Inspector was that of managing the Assistant Commissioner of his department, his immediate superior" (77). The contest that plays out between the two policemen illustrates the ways in which irrational office politics may arise in government bureaucracies that distract from the public services such institutions are supposed to provide.

Another irony in the Assistant Commissioner's fate is the fact that he ends up enforcing the very bureaucratic system that he wishes to escape. In dealing with Mr Vladimir of the foreign embassy that plays a large part in the narrative, the Assistant Commissioner suppresses the truth about his department's fortuitous and organisationally haphazard manner of solving the mystery of the Greenwich explosion. He forgets any qualms about the bureaucratic side of his department or about his colleagues' frailty and corruption, boasting that "[i]n less than twelve hours we have established the identity of a man literally blown to shreds, have found the organiser of the attempt, and have had a glimpse at the inciter behind him" (172). The Assistant Commissioner describes this as a remarkable feat of detective work, when the investigators actually discovered the suspect's address purely by chance. More than celebrating his department's efficiency, the Assistant Commissioner leverages the success of their investigation as an answer to external criticisms and pressures, defending the policies of the British government and celebrating the modus operandi of the Metropolitan Police: "'[w]e can put our finger on every anarchist here,' went on the Assistant Commissioner, as though he were quoting Chief Inspector Heat" (172). Given the dissonance between these comments and the Assistant Commissioner's earlier criticisms of Heat's methods, there is indeed an element of farce to his cocksure declaration that "we don't intend to let ourselves be bothered by shams under any pretext whatever" (172). Ultimately, as Aaron Fogel points out, *The Secret Agent* belongs to a comedic literary tradition in which the reader or audience is "made to feel with pleasure that it understands" a situation which the authority figure struggles to comprehend (188–89). It is not only the Greenwich explosion

itself that Conrad's reader comes to understand in greater depth than the authority figures in the novel, but also the internal contradictions and flaws of the bureaucratic department.

Official and Unofficial Agents

A focal point in Conrad's interrogation of state bureaucracy is the concept of officiality. Conrad's playful and sarcastic manner of deploying the term "official" epitomises his manner of writing *against* the symbolic power of the state, as exemplified, in *The Shadow-Line*, by the "official pen" belonging to the Harbour Master. This imposing pen is described as "far mightier than the sword in making or marring the fortune of simple toiling men" (31), but the pomp of this mighty instrument is also undermined: "[a] subtle change in Captain Ellis's manner became perceptible as though he had laid aside the trident of deputy-Neptune. In reality, it was only his official pen that he had dropped on getting up" (32). By hyperbolically likening the bureaucrat's "official pen" to the instrument of a mythical god imbued with magical properties, Conrad both highlights the influence of the bureaucrat's pen and mocks the bureaucrat's perceived pretensions to supreme power over social reality (in this case life at sea). There is an equally sarcastic treatment of office equipment in *The Secret Agent*. Here, government bureaus are furnished not only with official pens, but also with "official inkstands" and "official clock[s]," along with other vaguely ridiculous administrative paraphernalia (111, 116). This playful use of "official" as a descriptor may be viewed as a part of Conrad's stylistic homage to *Bleak House*, in which, as noted in the previous chapter, the term "official" is used in a satirical and subversive manner. By insistently according official status to mundane administrative objects such as pens and inkstands, Conrad undercuts the symbolic power that is bound up with those acts of official nomination that these objects are used to perform, a key aspect of Conrad's polemic with administrative statecraft.

More broadly, in *The Secret Agent*, Conrad debunks the "distinction between the official sphere and private life," showing it to be a "fantasy" (Purdon 26). In the late nineteenth century, social reality was increasingly shaped by this "structuring structure" (Bourdieu, *On the State*, 165) of the administrative state. This is also evident in fictional representations of Britain from this period, in which official-ness constitutes an important category or marker. A useful point of reference is Arthur Conan Doyle's treatment of the concept of officiality. Doyle famously contrasts Sherlock Holmes's maverick detective work with "the slow process of official inquiry" ("Adventure of the Blue," 257). Indeed, a large

part of the attraction with Holmes, and, more broadly, with the figure of the private detective that was popularised in the late nineteenth century, is the private detective's ability to solve cases that have been "abandoned as hopeless by the official police" ("Scandal," 6). Crucially, Holmes is amazed, and somewhat affronted, that anyone should "confound [him] with the official detective force" ("Adventure of the Spectacled," 243), and he takes every opportunity to declare, "I am no official agent" ("Boscombe," 129).

In *The Secret Agent*, Conrad problematises what it means to be an "official agent." Unlike Doyle's hero, Conrad's Assistant Commissioner has to contend with the bureaucratic constraints of the official police department that he is a part of. This position clearly involves the performance of a role, which implies not only following certain departmental rules and norms, but also adhering to certain codes of conduct in public life. This raises the thorny ethical and existential question of where the official agent's responsibilities ultimately lie, and how to distinguish between the individual and the role, questions which were interrogated already in Dickens's midcentury fiction—notably in and by the legal clerk Wemmick's punctilious, and indeed almost schizophrenic, separation of private and professional life in *Great Expectations*. Conrad similarly problematises the notion of the impartiality and disinterestedness of the state functionary in *The Secret Agent*, spotlighting the human element in the operations of the "dispassionate organism" that is the government department, and thus problematising the legitimacy of the administrative state. Performing the role of impartial bureaucrat with aplomb, the Assistant Commissioner demonstrates mindful restraint at a private gathering where the anarchist question is discussed: he "expresse[s] no opinion either then or later, his position making it impossible for him to ventilate any independent view of a ticket-of-leave convict" (87). Interestingly, Conrad's problematising treatment of the idea of the dispassionate state functionary takes on shades of magical realism when a police constable is described as "looking a stranger to every emotion, as if he, too, were part of inorganic nature, surging apparently out of a lamp-post" (17). The impassive constable (reminiscent of Dickens's Mr Inspector in this regard) seemingly ceases to be fully human, inasmuch as he merges with the physical environment that he patrols, a feat which he is able to perform, it seems, precisely on account of his professional ability to transcend his individuality by becoming "a stranger to every emotion"—that is, by merging with the bureaucratic state apparatus that he is representing in his official capacity.

And yet, if Conrad's patrolling constable has transcended his individuality and truly become one with the dispassionate organism that is the department, then Chief Inspector Heat is conversely "swayed by his passions like the most private of citizens" (204). By spotlighting

the subjectivity of Heat, Conrad draws attention to the instability of the concept of officiality, an issue which is not only highlighted and nuanced through the narration, but also addressed explicitly by the two main state functionaries of Conrad's novel in their heated debates about their professional code of conduct. When the Assistant Commissioner confronts Chief Inspector Heat about his use of Verloc as an informer on the anarchist community, Heat maintains that he was justified in keeping their communications "private" since there was "nothing official about them" (101). The Assistant Commissioner questions Heat's professionalism, asking, "do you think that sort of private knowledge consistent with the official position you occupy?" to which Heat replies, "[p]rivate friendship, private information, private use of it—that's how I look upon it" (99–100). Here, the issue of demarcating officiality is debated from various perspectives, in a manner that is highly reminiscent of Arthur Clennam's questioning of the Barnacles regarding the status of the injunction on the imprisoned debtor Mr Dorrit in Dickens's *Little Dorrit*. Both Dickens and Conrad problematised the concept of officiality in order to highlight and interrogate the symbolic power of the administrative state.

After the heated conversation between Conrad's two policemen, the defiant Heat decides to pay a "friendly call to Mr Verloc, casually as it were," in "the character of a private citizen [...] walking out privately" (153). Visiting Verloc again, Heat makes out that he is now operating as a "private citizen," a self-serving conceit the absurdity of which is reflected in the ways in which his actions are reported in the narrative. That is, during the conversation that ensues between Heat and Winnie Verloc, the policeman is alternately denominated by the narrator as "Chief Inspector Heat" and "Private Citizen Heat," as though he is ontologically split in two and vacillating between these two different capacities (153–58). This ontological wavering between official and private states typifies Conrad's satirical but understated critique of the state's power of naming. The official policeman Heat asserts that it is his prerogative to decide when he is acting in an official capacity; however, in the context of *The Secret Agent*, the symbolic power of the state is trumped by that of the narrator, who is the one according (or retracting) titles in the narrative.

Ironically, when Winnie informs Heat that the Assistant Commissioner has already been there to visit her husband, Heat is "intensely disgusted [...] at the unofficial conduct of his immediate chief" (154). And yet, unbeknownst to the Chief Inspector, the Assistant Commissioner has in fact received Sir Ethelred's blessing before tracking Verloc down, meaning that the visit is in fact strictly "official," despite taking place outside of working hours and exceeding the Assistant Commissioner's remit. The disagreement between the two

policemen shows that official status is interpreted and negotiated at various levels and in various contexts by agents of the state. Conrad thereby problematises the perception that state functionaries' actions are governed by well-defined (albeit often incomprehensible) rules and regulations.

The police inspectors' struggle to arrive at a shared view of officiality (or to enforce their own ideas about it) in the context of their work serves not only to capture the state's symbolic violence, but it also functions as a foil for Conrad's equivocal and impressionistic narrative style, the "ironic method" that Conrad describes in the "Author's Note" (7). Elaborating on Conrad's method, Nathan Waddell observes that "ambivalence" constitutes the novel's primary "narrative principle," in the sense that "no single perspective takes essential priority over another" (151).[116] If Marlow's narration was integral to the impressionist style of writing that Conrad developed in his colonial fiction, then the narrative perspectivism of *The Secret Agent* constitutes a significant evolution of Conrad's "new form." Scholars have debated to what extent *The Secret Agent* is an impressionist novel, with Albert Guerard proposing that *The Secret Agent* represents a "major change from the impressionist to the realist method" (146). However, Conrad's impressionism is certainly not limited to his use of Marlow as a narrator. In *The Secret Agent*, as indicated above, the very lack of a narrator internal to the story-world enables Conrad to create a different form of narrative "ambivalence," representing numerous characters' clashing perspectives on social reality.

Crucially, in *The Secret Agent*, Conrad situates his impressionist narrative principle—his "ironic method"—in contrast with the epistemological practices of a bureaucratised official police department, which are shown to lead away from a truthful recognition of social complexity and ambiguity.[117] The bureaucratic mindset is described as the antithesis of intellectual cultivation or philosophical thought:

> Chief Inspector Heat was not very wise—at least not truly so. True wisdom, which is not certain of anything in this world of contradictions, would have prevented him from attaining his present position. It would have alarmed his superiors, and done away with his chances of promotion. (69)

In other words, Conrad indicates that there is a fundamental opposition between the sphere of public administration and the type of "wisdom" that he was seeking to express or promote through his impressionist writing.

[116] On the "ironic perspective" that characterises Conrad's novel, see also Ian Watt 248.

[117] Conrad's portrayal of police detectives' ways of managing ambiguity anticipates recent discussions in scholarship on bureaucracy in the social sciences about ambiguity and indeterminacy in bureaucratic practices (Hoag and Hull 20). Notably, Jacqueline Best delineates a form of "domination through ambiguity," where ambiguity becomes "a source of authority through the power to interpret" (101).

As I have shown in the present section, *The Secret Agent* not only sheds light on the psyche of the bureaucrat, but it also dramatises how bureaucratic institutions "think," particularly by foregrounding the interpersonal factors involved in bureaucratic information-sharing and decision-making. Conrad's novel also spotlights the symbolic violence of state bureaucracy, which insists on clear-cut distinctions in a world of contradictions. In the next section, I will focus on Conrad's engagement with the epistemological challenge of representing London, situating this literary project in relation to the administrative state's management of urban social reality.

"Metropolitan Topological Mysteries": A Legible London

The Secret Agent was not only Conrad's first domestic drama of officialdom, but it was also his first city novel. In May 1907, Conrad warned his agent J. B. Pinker that *The Secret Agent* would constitute a "distinctly new departure" in his work, and that "[p]reconceived notions of Conrad as sea writer [would] stand in the way of its acceptance" (*Selected*, 434). This turn in Conrad's career as a novelist entailed not only new worries about his critical reception, but also new representational challenges. Describing the genesis of his novel in the "Author's Note," Conrad emphasises the daunting nature of writing about a "monstrous town" in which there is "room enough [...] to place any story," but also "darkness enough to bury five millions of lives" (6–7). In connection with these reflections about the difficult choices that become necessary in metropolitan story-telling, Conrad suggests that his chief aim with the novel was "telling Winnie Verloc's story" (8). In fact, Conrad indicates that making Winnie the focal point of the narrative presented itself as a solution to the difficulty of representing city life:

> Irresistibly, the town became the background for the ensuing period of deep and tentative meditation. Endless vistas opened before me in various directions. It would take years to find the right way. It seemed to take years. Slowly the dawning conviction of Mrs Verloc's maternal passion grew up to a flame between me and that background [...]. At last the story of Winnie Verloc stood out complete[.] (6–7).

Here, then, Conrad's musings on the enormity of London seem to prompt and also to motivate the focus on Winnie, the imagery of the passage suggesting that the act of telling Winnie's story will help light up the epistemological darkness of London.

Drawing on the aforementioned prefatory comments, Joseph McLaughlin proposes that the "domestic plot" of *The Secret Agent* represents "a way of managing or coping with

the horrific magnitude of a metropolis" (145). However, more than a way of "coping" with the challenge of depicting metropolitan social reality, Conrad's portrait of Winnie may be understood as a form of critical commentary on metropolitan representations. Crucially, Winnie's story is, in many ways, the story of subaltern anonymity, insofar as it is the type of life-story that would be "buried" in the metropolitan darkness. Tellingly, Winnie's ultimate demise is marked, chillingly, by a brief newspaper article with the heading "Suicide of Lady Passenger from a cross-Channel Boat," a news item which concludes: "*[a]n impenetrable mystery seems destined to hang for ever over this act of madness or despair*" (228). The wording of this account of Winnie's suicide clearly harks back to the mystery surrounding the Greenwich explosion earlier in the narrative. However, the journalistic foreclosure on the possibility of discovering the details of the Lady Passenger's circumstances and actions suggests that in this instance there will be no extensive police investigation into the matter. Winnie's story is thus interwoven with Conrad's polemical thematisation of the limitations and injustices of official inquiries.

The "impenetrable mystery" of Winnie's suicide also ties in with Conrad's writerly emphasis on epistemological murkiness and ambiguity. As indicated above, Conrad's ironic method consists in an ambivalent and open-ended rendering of social phenomena. Describing *The Secret Agent* as a "transitional novel," Marina Mackay notes that Conrad's London of "obscuring fog and crepuscular state bureaucracies" is recognisably Dickensian, but that Conrad refuses to provide the type of "revelation and closure" that tends to be found in nineteenth-century urban fiction, insofar as the novel instead emphasises the "harrowing impossibility of knowing even those with whom one shares a home, let alone a city" (95). Crucially, whereas detectives like Inspector Bucket and Sherlock Holmes manifest the symbolical resolution of the problem of the "opaque complexity of modern city life" (Williams, *Country*, 227) through their ability to solve urban criminal cases, Conrad's police detective's pretensions at mastery are instead exposed as hollow and unfounded.

As indicated in my previous section, officialdom's attempts to govern an increasingly complex metropolitan social world had brought a move (after the midcentury rise of the expert) towards more systematised and formalised departmental modus operandi. As this new informational regime arose, the British state simultaneously became increasingly adept at representing the city. The burgeoning metropolis posed major epistemological problems for gernment departments throughout the long nineteenth century, prompting both urban reconstruction initiatives and the development of new "[t]echnologies of representation" (McClintock 119–21). In Victorian England, the discipline of statistics had not yet risen to the

task of representing the city, because the "technical apparatus, administrative infrastructure, and tools for formalizing data were still too limited" (Desrosières 175). However, towards the end of the century new informational technologies of urban representation were on the horizon, as epitomised by Charles Booth's groundbreaking seventeen-volume study of *Life and Labour of the People in London* (1889), which shed new light on urban socio-economic distributions and thus drastically changed the perception of the city.[118]

It is no coincidence that Conrad came to favour a narrative form that reflected the ambiguity of metropolitan social reality at a time when officialdom was developing more sophisticated ways of knowing (or "seeing," to borrow Scott's phrase) the city. Nicholas Freeman suggests late nineteenth-century writers such as Conrad, who were "consciously compet[ing] with a variety of other discourses," were galvanized into exploring new ways of depicting the city in part by the state's increasingly sophisticated informational approach to describing urban social reality (29, 41). Crucially, Freeman suggests that the stiffening competition from statisticians and journalists caused many writers to reject the "empiricist" approaches to accounting for urban life that had characterised the social problem novel, in favour of a more impressionistic style of writing (33). Abandoning the idea that "the city could be mapped and eventually understood by processes of painstaking investigation and analysis," writers such as Conrad and Ford were of the belief that "if the city could be known, then it could be so only fleetingly, and from a wholly subjective position" (26–7).

The competitive streak that Freeman identifies in *fin-de-siècle* literature comes to the fore in *The Secret Agent*, a novel that is overtly polemical in the sense that it picks up where a police investigation has failed. The terms of Conrad's intervention are articulated in his "Author's Note," where he describes Bourdin's death as a "blood-stained inanity of so fatuous a kind that it [i]s impossible to fathom its origins by any reasonable or even unreasonable process of thought" (5). Of course, going by this description, an empiricist inquiry—such as a crime scene investigation—would be unlikely to shed much light on the incident. However, whereas Conrad suggests that the mystery surrounding Bourdin's death is closed to processes of "thought" (whether "reasonable" or "unreasonable"), his preface frames the novel as an attempt to arrive at some other means of comprehension that bypasses ideation, an

[118] Booth challenged the established notion of a dichotomy of a rich West and a poor East side of London. That is, Booth's remarkable *Descriptive Map of London Poverty*, which accounted for levels of wealth and poverty on a street by street level, demonstrated that poor neighbourhoods were spread throughout the city, interspersed with well-to-do areas. Noting the "utter exclusion" of the East End in *The Secret Agent*, McLaughlin suggests that Conrad's novel may be read as part of a "crisis in metropolitan mapping" following the new statistical vision of the city afforded by Booth's study: "[g]one was the comforting imaginative containment granted by the fictive East End of earlier decades" (133, 141-42).

impressionistic literary programme which is underscored by the suggestive language that Conrad employs. In this respect, *The Secret Agent* may be read as a challenge to the administrative state, flaunting the superiority of the epistemological tools available to the novelist over those of the London Metropolitan Police.

Given the competitive dimension of Conrad's city novel, it is noteworthy that his exploration of "London's topographical mysteries" in *The Secret Agent* involves a particularly close interrogation of "the mysteries of municipal administration" and of bureaucratic spatiality more broadly (17). As noted above, the modern administrative state typically combines city planning initiatives with an informational approach to rendering the city legible. Metropolitan reconstruction was perennially on the agenda in European states during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with Baron Haussmann's renovation of Paris under Napoleon typifying the state's attempts to "make urban geography transparently legible from without" (Scott, *Seeing*, 55, 59). At the turn of the century, ambitious schemes for the redevelopment of London were proposed, with Arthur Cawston's *Comprehensive Scheme for Street Improvements in London* (1893) advocating for "improving our street system in a statesmanlike and comprehensive manner" (viii). Although late-Victorian plans for a radical restructuring of London never materialised, significant efforts to render London administratively legible were made, especially following the Local Government Act of 1888, which gave the newly formed London City Council (inheriting its powers from the Metropolitan Board of Works) the charge of city planning and council housing, as well as the systematic renaming of London streets.

Conrad situates his novel in relation to this paradigm of city planning, describing Mr Verloc's house as "one of those grimy brick houses which existed in large quantities before the era of reconstruction dawned upon London" (9). Ironically, Conrad indicates that the municipal administration tends to exacerbate, rather than reduce, the topographical mysteries of London, as may be seen by its trouble "keeping track of London's strayed houses" (17). Thus, for some reason, one building has "No. 1 Chesham Square written on it in black letters" despite Chesham Square being "at least sixty yards away" (17). Through its attempts to render the city legible, Conrad indicates, the bungling urban authorities have only succeeded in making it all the more confusing.

In this respect, the developing administrative state culture continued to throw up new challenges of cognitive mapping, contributing to the complexity of metropolitan modernity. For one, numerical and cartographic representations served to create a variety of geographical constructions of city space—"myriad Londons," as Freeman aptly puts it (16). That is,

administrative representations in the shape of postal directories, censuses, registers, and maps, effectively generated an ontological layering or multiplication of "London." Freeman observes that Ford's *The Soul of London* (1905) "distinguished 'a little arbitrarily' between [...] the 'Administrative County,' and what he termed 'the London of natural causes, the assembly of houses in the basin of the lower Thames'" (15). The administrative areas that were established by public institutions operating various forms of bureaucratic systems were, in other words, not organically linked to the contours of the built environment. This proliferation of "Londons" was an effect, Freeman notes, of the fact that the "Administrative County" established by the city council boroughs existed alongside another broadly self-determining administrative entity: the City of London, "a London within London," the administration of which frequently clashed with that of the city council boroughs (16). The imagining of metropolitan community by dint of administrative areas—a mode of thought which Dickens gestured towards in his midcentury fiction—was not, in other words, at all straightforward. London's administrative units, systems, and representations were designed to help the state "see" the social world, but their idiosyncratic ordering of metropolitan space gave rise to further mystification and disorder.

In addition to exploring the effects of administrative state culture on the city at large, *The Secret Agent* depicts various official institutional milieus, much as Dickens's administrative fiction centres on institutions such as Chancery Court and the Circumlocution Office. Dickensian intertexts and influences are frequently remarked upon in scholarship on *The Secret Agent*, particularly with respect to Conrad's portrayal of London.[119] Whilst comparisons with Dickens have helped to illuminate aspects of Conrad's fiction, at times they have also been misleading and overly schematic. Contrasting Conrad's and Dickens's modes of representing London, Aaron Matz argues that Dickens's novels feature zones of satire that are "cordoned off from much of the rest of the novel, such that Chancery or the Circumlocution Office of *Little Dorrit* typically seem like self-contained worlds," whereas the portrayal of London in *The Secret Agent* leaves "little hope for such consoling partition" (148). There is, of course, a fundamental structural difference between Dickens's midcentury administrative fiction and *The Secret Agent*, given the greater number of plot threads in Dickens's novels that are not directly connected to official institutions. However, whilst the stylistic and tonal shifts are more overt in Dickens than in Conrad, Dickens's critiques of officialdom do not exactly generate "self-contained worlds." Indeed, according to D. A.

[119] See Walton 446 and Bodenheimer 746.

Miller, Dickens's Chancery represents "an organization of power which, ceasing entirely to be a topic, has become topography itself" (61). Likewise, even though *The Secret Agent* is relatively uniform in narrative style and tone, Conrad does, in fact, isolate officialdom as a distinct social field or spatial configuration, inasmuch as he foregrounds and interrogates the distinction between "official ground" and London at large (84).

There is actually a recognisably Dickensian "aesthetic of cognitive mapping," to borrow Jameson's phrase, at play in the treatment of bureaucratic spaces in *The Secret Agent*. Conrad underlines the separateness of bureaucratic spatiality particularly clearly in his treatment of the foreign embassy which is one of the agencies that Adolf Verloc secretly reports to. As the Assistant Commissioner and Mr Vladimir debate their governments' share of the responsibility for the Greenwich explosion, the British official pins the blame on Mr Vladimir's embassy, which he describes as "[t]heoretically only, on foreign territory; abroad only by a fiction" (172). The narrator clarifies that the Assistant Commissioner is here "alluding to the character of Embassies, which are supposed to be part and parcel of the country to which they belong" (172). This commentary about the strange apartness and doubleness of embassies illustrates how Conrad's interest in cognitively mapping administrative state culture extends to interrogating the characteristics and quirks of its institutional spatialities.

Conrad's treatment of official institutional spaces in *The Secret Agent* is a part of the novel's broader engagement with issues of topography and cognitive mapping, and also with Winnie Verloc's subaltern story. Having murdered her husband Adolf in response to his callous revelation of her brother's death, the traumatised Winnie is suddenly called upon to navigate the social world independently in a new and more pressing way. On escaping the domestic murder scene, she frantically considers her options and realises that she must flee the country: "[i]t came to her suddenly. Murderers escaped. They escaped abroad. Spain or California" (203). However, whereas the cosmopolitan male anarchists of the novel move between Britain and the continent "like the influenza," the inexperienced Mrs Verloc's sense of the "vast world created for the glory of man" is only that of "a vast blank" (11, 203). Winnie's inability to conceive of an independent course of action (she decides to leave the country with the anarchist Ossipon) highlights what Karen Piper aptly describes as a "gender difference [...] in cognitive-mapping skills": "[w]hen Winnie enters London, lost and alone, her cognitive-mapping ability fails" (34). Indeed, Winnie's failed attempt to leave the country is contrasted with comrade Ossipon's intimate knowledge of timetables and travel routes: "[s]uddenly he slapped his forehead. He had by dint of cudgelling his brains just thought of

the Southampton-St Malo service. The boat left about midnight. There was a train at 10.30" (212).

There are similar gender- and class-related differences in Conrad's characters' abilities to cognitively map officialdom. The ideas about officialdom that Winnie Verloc articulates in the novel are anything but empowering: "Mrs Verloc, though not a well-informed woman, had a sufficient knowledge of the institutions of her country to know that gallows are no longer erected romantically on the banks of dismal rivers or on wind-swept headlands, but in the yards of jails" (201). At the other end of the spectrum stand the bureaucrats of the novel. The Assistant Commissioner moves purposefully about the city, thus demonstrating his familiarity with a variety of urban environments, including the institutional landscape of officialdom. He weaves in and out of government departments, criss-crossing Whitehall and Westminster, frequently visiting Sir Ethelred, the Secretary of State, "at the very centre of the Empire on which the sun never sets" (162). Seeking a private interview with the Secretary of State, he "walk[s] along a short and narrow street like a wet, muddy trench, then crossing a very broad thoroughfare enter[s] a public edifice" (105); when the interview is over, he goes "out by another door," and "crosse[s] the wide thoroughfare, walk[s] along a narrow street, and re-enter[s] hastily his own departmental buildings" (113). Here, Conrad captures what historian Jon Agar has described as the "strangely organic feel" of the group of buildings that house government departments, colloquially known as "Whitehall," where "it is hard to tell where one stops and the other starts" (4). This densely knit departmental landscape might confound outsiders, but it clearly facilitates cross-departmental cooperation and communications amongst intimates. The repetition of the collocation "very wide thoroughfare" and "wide thoroughfare" may be read as actualising the question of the accessibility of public offices. The Assistant Commissioner does not use the the thoroughfare (that is literally supposed to enable passage) but rather "crosses" it. The suggestion is that the route taken by the majority is not the most efficient, and that only those intimately acquainted with Whitehall's institutional geography have full access to this space.

The titular secret agent Alfred Verloc is not wholly dissimilar to the Assistant Commissioner in the sense that he is a social chameleon who moves between and adapts to different social milieus. In the first pages of *The Secret Agent*, Mr Verloc walks East to West through London, having received an unexpected summons from the embassy of an unspecified country for which he operates as an informer on the city's anarchists. Making his way to the embassy, Adolf tells himself that he is "cosmopolitan enough not to be deceived by London's topographical mysteries," almost as though he is mustering his self-confidence

ahead of the embassy visit (17). This smug sense of socio-spatial mastery is extinguished by the cold welcome that he receives at the embassy. On leaving this portentous meeting, Mr Verloc will have taken on a new mission, very much against his wishes: he is to do more than simply report on the anarchists—he is to orchestrate or incite a terrorist attack in order to provoke the British authorities into taking firmer repressive measures against the international anarchist community that is operating with London as its base.

The meeting that takes place between Verloc and the ambassadors is a fascinating example of the "chronotope of meeting" which Bakhtin describes as a key element in "the life of the state." Such meetings play a central role in Conrad's administrative fiction, much as they do in Dickens's midcentury bureaucratic horror stories. The embassy's manner of manipulating Verloc into doing its bidding is a master class in bureaucratic domination, reminiscent of the solicitor Mr Vholes's manipulation of Richard Carstone in Dickens's *Bleak House*. The destabilising psychological effects of Verloc's embassy meeting are remarked upon later in the story, by the policeman who is investigating the faux terrorist attack that Verloc stages. Reporting to the Secretary of State, the Assistant Commissioner suggests that Verloc was "driven out of his mind almost by an extraordinary performance, which for you or me it would be difficult to take as seriously meant, but which produced a great impression obviously on him" (165).

The ambassadors' "performance" begins with Privy Councillor Wurmt, the "Chancelier d'Ambassade," entering the embassy office in which Verloc has been told to wait, "holding a batch of papers before his eyes" (18). Wurmt's manner of holding the paperwork before him is evocative of the bureaucrat's manner of seeing (or perhaps failing to see) social reality via documents. Indeed, by not deigning to put the papers down, Wurmt signals his distaste for his visitor, reducing the meeting to a strictly impersonal bureaucratic formality. Moreover, by preventing Verloc from reading his facial expression, Wurmt creates a sense of dread and submission in Verloc which will help incite the course of action that the embassy wants him to take. The emotional effect of the cold welcome that Verloc receives is immediately apparent from the way that he tenses up and becomes all but immobilised:

> [Wurmt] made no sign of greeting; neither did Mr Verloc, who certainly knew his place; but a subtle change about the general outlines of his shoulders and back suggested a slight bending of Mr Verloc's spine under the vast surface of his overcoat. The effect was of unobtrusive deference.
>
> "I have here some of your reports," said the bureaucrat in an unexpectedly soft and weary voice, and pressing the tip of his forefinger on the papers with force. He paused; and Mr Verloc, who had recognised his own handwriting very

> well, waited in an almost breathless silence. "We are not very satisfied with the attitude of the police here," the other continued, with every appearance of mental fatigue. (18–9)

This initial interaction between Verloc and the ambassador establishes the uneven power dynamic between the bureaucrat and the secret agent. The effect of Wurmt's comments is heightened by the unsettling contrast between, on the one hand, his "soft and weary voice" and, on the other hand, his brusque bureaucratic demeanour and vehement handling of his visitor's reports. There is, moreover, a stark asymmetry in how Wurmt ignores Verloc (focusing on the paperwork), while Verloc concentrates intently on the ambassador, evidently looking for clues as to what the embassy meeting has in store for him. The agenda and pace of the meeting is set by the bureaucrat; reactively, Verloc plays a submissive role, as is encapsulated in the phrase "he certainly knew his place." And yet, this phrase also contains a note of self-satisfaction and agency, indicating that Verloc is seeking to create his own strategic "effects." Going into the meeting, then, Verloc takes a strategic approach, which may be contrasted with the unpreparedness of most of Dickens's civilian characters.

However, at the embassy, Verloc is subjected to an oppressive intimidation process that leaves him with a sense of severe agential curtailment, a debilitating state of mind which, as the perceptive Assistant Commissioner notes, precipitates the desperate and tragically fatal course of action that he takes. Throughout Verloc's embassy visit, there is a stark contrast between his movements and those of the embassy employees; Verloc is steered mutely through the building:

> Mr Verloc, thus led along a ground-floor passage to the left of the great carpeted staircase, was suddenly motioned to enter a quite small room furnished with a heavy writing-table and a few chairs. The servant shut the door, and Mr Verloc remained alone. He did not take a seat. [...]
>
> Another door opened noiselessly, and Mr Verloc immobilising his glance in that direction saw at first only black clothes, the bald top of a head, and a drooping dark grey whisker on each side of a pair of wrinkled hands. (18)

In this passage, Verloc does not make a single independent movement. Indeed, when he ventures to look in the direction of the incoming Privy Councillor Wurmt he does so, curiously, by "immobilising his glance." Verloc simply follows the lead of the embassy staff, who take turns ushering him hither and thither:

> "I think," [Wurmt] said, "that you had better see Mr Vladimir. Yes, decidedly I think you ought to see Mr Vladimir. Be good enough to wait here," he added, and went out with mincing steps.

> [...] when the servant in brown appeared at the door silently, Mr Verloc had not moved an inch from the place he had occupied throughout the interview. He had remained motionless, as if feeling himself surrounded by pitfalls.
>
> He walked along a passage lighted by a lonely gas jet, then up a flight of winding stairs, and through a glazed and cheerful corridor on the first floor. The footman threw open a door, and stood aside. The feet of Mr Verloc felt a thick carpet. The room was large, with three windows; and a young man with a shaved, big face, sitting in a roomy armchair before a vast mahogany writing-table, said in French to the Chancelier d'Ambassade, who was going out with the papers in his hand:
>
> "You are quite right, mon cher. He's fat—the animal." (20)

In this passage, Verloc's movements are completely governed by the people of the embassy. He barely moves except when instructed to do so, his agency evidently reduced by the institutional environment itself. The embassy staff, on the other hand, keep coming and going, in through one door and out through the next, as swiftly and surefootedly as the Assistant Commissioner moves through Whitehall's departmental landscape, or as the legal professionals in Dickens's Chancery.

In a seemingly coordinated manner, then, the embassy people play the institutional milieu to their advantage, their unexpected and unaccountable movements and handovers making it impossible for Verloc to predict what happens next, thus eroding his belief in his ability to affect the outcome of the interview. Under the weight of the demands that Vladimir places on him, Verloc enters a state of utter paralysis: "[f]or sometime already Mr Verloc's immobility by the side of the armchair resembled a state of collapsed coma—a sort of passive insensibility interrupted by slight convulsive starts, such as may be observed in the domestic dog having a nightmare on the hearthrug" (31). This mental collapse is an effect not only of the shock of Vladimir's plans, but seemingly also of the claustrophobic embassy environment. There is, indeed, something sinister about Conrad's embassy, with its funhouse-like corridors, hidden doors, and secret passages, reminiscent of the uncanny medieval castles that may be found in early Gothic fiction or indeed in Dickens's bureaucratic Gothic. When the interview with Vladimir is over, Verloc is unceremoniously escorted outside: "[t]he footman in trousers, appearing suddenly in the corridor, let Mr Verloc another way out and through a small door in the corner of the courtyard. The porter standing at the gate ignored his exit completely" (33). Through their curt handling of Verloc and their mechanical countenance, the footman and porter play their part in creating the frosty bureaucratic ambience that leaves Verloc with a sense that there is no escaping the embassy's demands.

Conrad scholars often relate the embassy scene to Conrad's visit to the Russian embassy in London in 1886, but there is also a clear family resemblance to Conrad's meetings

with "all the examiners of the Port of London," as described in *A Personal Record* (112). If Verloc's visit to the embassy spotlights the affective, psychological, and indeed existential dimensions of encounters with state bureaucracy, then the exams described in Conrad's memoirs provide a similarly impressionistic and Kafkaesque account of the mind-bending effects of drawn-out bureaucratic processes. Describing a "microscopic examination" that "lasted for hours, for hours," Conrad remembers how,

> at length the feeling of my brain getting addled crept upon me. And still the passionless process went on, with a sense of untold ages having been spent already on mere preliminaries. Then I got frightened. I was not frightened of being plucked; that eventuality did not even present itself to my mind. It was something much more serious and weird. [...] Some very queer thoughts passed through my head while I was considering my answers; thoughts which had nothing to do with seamanship, nor yet with anything reasonable known to this earth. I verily believe that at times I was lightheaded in a sort of languid way. (113)

Here, the sluggish examination process is described as producing strange hallucinatory effects, as well as a form of stupor that is markedly reminiscent of Verloc's state of paralysis at the embassy. There is also a suggestion of the type of bureaucracy-induced mental instability that several of the Chancery suitors in *Bleak House* suffer from. Of course, unlike Dickens's Miss Flite, the lightheaded young Conrad remains sanguine (he is never afraid of being "plucked"), and eventually makes headway in his encounter with naval bureaucracy (113).

Conrad's suggestion that the marine exam produced "thoughts which had nothing to do with [...] anything reasonable known to this earth" resembles his prefatorial commentary on the investigation into Bourdin's Greenwich attack, in which he indicates that such an action could not be explained through "reasonable or even unreasonable process[es] of thought." This conjunction of administrative state culture and the "unreasonable" or unfathomable is emblematic of Conrad's problematisation of state thought, spotlighting the idiosyncrasies of state spaces, as with the "fictional" spatiality of the embassy, and exploring the strange perceptual effects produced by bureaucratic meetings. The use of defamiliarising stylistic features such as paradox and irony at such moments accentuates the ways in which Conrad's problematising thematisation of administrative state culture seeks to inspire readers to see state forms afresh, by jolting them out of the habitual and the everyday. Extrapolating from the embassy's hypnotic "performance" and its disempowering effect on Alfred Verloc, Conrad's suggestion is that people in modern administrative state cultures who are

accustomed to being shepherded around by institutional authorities are in danger of finding themselves in a similar state of "passive insensibility."

Bureaucracy and Anarchism

Conrad's probing treatment of administrative state culture in *The Secret Agent* is entwined with his thematisation of anarchism. Indeed, Conrad's novel figures anarchism as a potential alternative to societal bureaucratisation. However, Conrad establishes this opposition only to undercut it by indicating that these seeming polar opposites are in fact mutually implicated and at times even indistinguishable or reversible. He does so by weaving an intricate pattern of correspondences and connections, where "legality and crime are depicted as inter-implicating aspects of a limited system" (Waddell 150–51). In other words, Conrad juxtaposes the police detective and the criminal—the political criminal, in particular—in order to problematise notions about what upholds, and what potentially threatens, the state system. The anarchist is, of course, a special type of offender; in Heat's words, "[a]s criminals, anarchists were distinctly no class—no class at all" (78). As opposed to the ordinary criminal, who "finds his or her definition within the purview of the state," a political criminal such as the anarchist forcefully questions the legitimacy of the state and operates in defiance of its logic (Lloyd 5). On the other extreme stands the state official, whose most fundamental or primary responsibility is the very preservation of the state. Yet, in Conrad's topsy-turvy account of the relationship between officialdom and its sworn enemies, as David Weir notes, the police "seem more anarchistic than the anarchists," with Chief Inspector Heat habitually "operating outside the law, without using any of the official methods available to him" (Weir 81). Indeed, Conrad's narrator frequently compares policemen unfavourably with criminals, observing that Heat "manoeuvr[es] in a way which in a member of the criminal classes would have been stigmatized as slinking" (153). This problematising juxtaposition of the policeman and the criminal is a key aspect of Conrad's probing treatment of administrative state culture. Crucially, the inversion of the police and the "criminal classes" in *The Secret Agent* goes both ways, insofar as the anarchists' unproductive mode of opposition to state culture is seen to have the effect of consolidating the state system.

As noted in the previous section, *The Secret Agent* is a claustrophobic novel in the sense that, as Matz aptly puts it, "[t]he monotonous streets never seem to lead outward" (149). This sense of psycho-spatial confinement—epitomised by the tragic end to Winnie's escape from London—also informs Conrad's portrayal of administrative state culture. As noted

above, the Assistant Commissioner feels as though he is "stuck in a litter of paper" and yet he ultimately not only participates in the departmental modus operandi that he secretly abhors, but also entrenches it, as encapsulated by his boastful comments to Mr Vladimir about his department's ability to speedily resolve the Greenwich mystery. Besides dramatising the Assistant Commissioner's acquiescence to the logic of the bureaucratic system, Conrad devotes much of the novel to depicting the ineffectual and often half-hearted seditious activities of a loosely connected group of London émigré anarchists. The anarchists represent a pseudo-alternative to the status quo, who are purportedly committed to abolishing the state, but who are not making any great strides in this regard. They are, in fact, no different from Conrad's titular secret agent, Verloc, who is literally pretending to be an anarchist, and whose very inertness and pliability makes him "an exemplary agent at the nexus of London's confounding web of agencies and institutions of which he even sees himself to be the 'protector'" (Robinson 143). Whilst the protection afforded the state by its official and unofficial agents indicates its position of strength, it is the paltry and half-hearted oppositional activities of the Soho anarchists that compounds the claustrophobic feel of the political ontology of the state in *The Secret Agent*.

Edward Said suggests that Conrad viewed imperialism as "pure dominance and land grabbing" but was incapable of seeing an alternative to empire (30). The same thing may be said about Conrad's attitude towards state power, in the sense that he was profoundly critical of the status quo, but equally pessimistic about the "possibility of political betterment" (Waddell 24). Frequently, Conrad gave expression to anti-authoritarian ideas, decrying the very concept of governance: "[o]f course, government in general, any government anywhere, is a thing of exquisite comicality to a discerning mind" (*Nostromo*, 152); similarly, in his 1905 essay "Autocracy and War," Conrad speaks of "the absolutism inherent in every form of government" (46). Read in isolation, these proclamations seem decidedly anarchistic. And yet, Conrad did not exactly wish to abolish the state.[120] Indeed, in *The Secret Agent* Conrad emphasises the comicality not only of government, but also of the anarchists who would oppose and transcend state culture: anarchism is roundly dismissed as a *cul de sac*. And yet, by highlighting stasis and ineffectuality, Conrad's treatment of anarchism works through the aforementioned problem of breaking cognitively with the framework of the state. In this

[120] In Paul Armstrong's words, "Conrad is a political conservative in his belief in the need to preserve institutions in order to sustain the illusions of stability and community. But he is radical and even anarchistic in his scepticism about the justification any social constitution can claim" (151).

respect, Conrad's novel reads as an early articulation of the problem of the state-made man's inability to transcend the conceptual horizon of state culture.

The political philosophy of anarchism was born in the nineteenth century, partly as a response to the rise of administrative state culture.[121] In his 1851 manifesto *The General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*, French libertarian socialist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon declared that the Enlightenment project had broken the "hermetically closed box" in which "God and King, Church and State" constituted the entire "Universe" and people "imagined nothing beyond" that socio-political structure (291). In other words, Proudhon proclaimed a popular cultural and intellectual awakening to the possibility of statelessness. And yet, whilst Proudhon's writings helped catalyse the emergence of an anarchist movement during the late nineteenth century, the anarchist project of "imagining" societal forms beyond the state coincided with the increasing formalisation and spread of modern statehood into a form of global monoculture. As Scott puts it, the nineteenth century brought a "radical shift in the relationship between states and their peripheries," whereby "nonstate spaces" grew increasingly marginalised (*Art*, 10–1). In other words, the political project of anarchism arose at a time when actual non-state cultures were rapidly disappearing.

The rise of anarchism as a political ideology over the second half of the nineteenth century marks the first major attempt to break with the frame of the modern administrative state, at least in a European context.[122] Anarchists engaged in various organisational and political projects, but perhaps the most high-profile method employed by anarchists was that of the "propaganda of the deed," which consisted in direct, and often violent, action that served to achieve political goals or to communicate political messages. Numerous deadly attacks were perpetrated by anarchists in the late nineteenth century, primarily in mainland Europe. The violence of the anarchist movement gave rise to an entire genre of popular fiction dealing with political terrorism and subversion (Freeman 12). Like many other novels in this genre, including a notable precursor such as Henry James's *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), *The Secret Agent* centres on the cosmopolitan London district of Soho, which became a haunt for political refugees and revolutionaries in the aftermath of the revolutions of 1848.[123] During this period, Britain attracted a large number of refugees due to the country's

[121] Alternative modes of state organisation were also proposed in the late nineteenth century by leading socialists. In the pamphlet "The Civil War in France" (1871), written on the behalf of the General Council of the International, Marx envisioned a "commune-state" which would differ markedly from the bourgeois state in that its state functionaries would be elected and easily recallable representatives working in wholly transparent institutions (Mandel 63).

[122] Scott provides a detailed history of anti-state cultures in *The Art of Not Being Governed*.

[123] For a discussion of Soho as a "revolutionary space" in the late nineteenth century, see Whiteley 184–87.

laissez-faire immigration policies, which were made official with the Extradition Act of 1870 whereby the British government granted asylum to political fugitives. These conditions, then, fostered the growth of a revolutionary Soho, home to Karl Marx already in the 1850s and anarchist luminaries such as Mikhail Bakunin and Pyotr Kropotkin towards the end of the century.[124]

In his 1897 essay "The Literature of Anarchism," published in *The New Review*, C. B. Roylance-Kent provided an overview of the "voluminous" writings and publications that anarchists such as Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin had produced over the previous decades (281–82). This essay is of particular interest here given the ways in which Roylance-Kent's ambivalent, non-committal stance on anarchism anticipates Conrad's treatment in *The Secret Agent*. Crucially, Conrad's *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* was being serialised in *The New Review* at the time when Roylance-Kent's essay was published in the magazine, meaning that Conrad presumably knew the essay and that it perhaps influenced his portrayal of anarchists shortly thereafter. Interestingly, Roylance-Kent offers something of an apology for anarchism, conceptualising the anarchist movement as a by-product of administrative state culture. That is, the doctrine of anarchism is described as having "a reasonable basis" in that it represents "the quintessence of Individualism and the antithesis of Bureaucracy"—it is, in short, an understandable, if not legitimate, response to the problem of "overgrown bureaucracy" (289). If Conrad ever read this essay, then it is easy to see how Roylance-Kent's billing of anarchism as the "antithesis" of bureaucracy might have inspired Conrad's contrasting and problematising figuration of these phenomena in *The Secret Agent*.

Roylance-Kent's account of anarchism as a counter-response to excessive bureaucracy is supported by the account of state power provided in *The General Idea of the Revolution*, in which Proudhon proclaims:

> To be GOVERNED is to be kept in sight, inspected, spied upon, directed, law-driven, numbered, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, estimated, valued, censured, commanded, by creatures who have neither the right, nor the wisdom, nor the virtue to do so... To be GOVERNED is to be at every operation, at every transaction, noted, registered, enrolled, taxed, stamped, measured, numbered, assessed, licensed, authorized, admonished, forbidden, reformed, corrected, punished. (294)

[124] Foreign governments—especially those of France and Russia—were exasperated by the British authorities' permissive attitude towards émigré revolutionaries, an impatience that is reflected in *The Secret Agent*, with the ambassador Mr Vladimir complaining that England is "absurd with its sentimental regard for individual liberty" and that "the utter absence of all repressive measures [in England], are a scandal to Europe" (28, 19).

Proudhon's list of what he considers illegitimate state practices illustrates the variety of disciplinary and administrative forms of control that ordinary citizens were subjected to, and that together composed administrative state culture, in mid-nineteenth-century Europe.[125] The rhetoric of this passage is reminiscent of Dickens's cataloguing of administrative excesses in "Red Tape," that too, alongside Proudhon's book, published in 1851, insofar as the list format not only provides a sense of the pervasiveness of state control, but also constitutes a bureaucratic poetics which underlines the proliferation of administrative documentation.

The aforementioned problem of breaking with "state thought" is at once conceptual, material, and socio-cultural. As the limited success of anarchism as a political project arguably illustrates, it is difficult to see where a political movement should strike in order to deliver a telling blow to the administrative state. Indeed, Weber proposes that "[w]here administration has been completely bureaucratized, the resulting system of domination is practically indestructible" (*Economy*, 987). However, whilst the tradition of administrative fiction that is delineated in the present study helped naturalise and thus cement the hegemony of the bureaucratic state, it also generated its fair share of fantasies of state destruction. Dickens came closest to expressing anarchistic inclinations precisely when venting frustrations with red tape and the slowness of institutional reform. Mr Boythorn of *Bleak House* proposes that, in order to dispel the power of Chancery Court, "nothing but a mine below it on a busy day in term time, with all its records, rules, and precedents collected in it [...] would reform it in the least" (108). Boythorn's suggestion is clearly that—rather than persisting with piecemeal reform and ineffectual policy changes—real change may be achieved by attacking the textual basis of legal-bureaucratic power. This sentiment anticipates Bakunin's suggestion that in order to overthrow and abolish a modern European state, anarchists would first have to incinerate "all title-deeds, wills, bills of sale and gift, legal papers—in other words all legal and civil red tape" (170).

However, Weber questions the "naive idea of Bakuninism," proclaiming that the emphasis on "destroying the public documents overlooks that the settled orientation of *man* for observing the accustomed rules and regulations will survive independently of the documents" (*From Max Weber*, 229). For Weber, then, administrative state culture is irreducible to its material and institutional manifestations, given that it resides also in administrative dispositions and sensibilities. This position chimes with Bourdieu's analysis of

[125] Similarly, in a 1850 piece in the *Rambler*, Richard Simpson, a British Catholic writer, declared that bureaucrats seek to "direct our life, to know what is best for us, to measure out our labour, to superintend our studies, to prescribe our opinions, to make itself answerable for us, to put us to bed, tuck us up, put on our nightcap, and administer our gruel" (114).

the "bureaucratic habitus" ("From the King's," 30). In describing the condition of state-made man, Bourdieu proposes that anarchists will struggle to transcend the "thought of the state," given that statehood is ingrained in fundamental aspects of modernity that have become second nature. As Bourdieu aptly puts it, "I don't know any anarchist who does not change his clock when we go over to summer time, who does not accept as a matter of course a whole set of things that relate, in the last analysis, to state power" (*On the State*, 8). Bourdieu's image of the clock-winding anarchist is, of course, highly germane to the present discussion given the fact that the Greenwich Observatory, Bourdin's presumed target, famously represents the symbolic and functional centre of the international system of time zones.

On some level, Conrad's novel emphasises the abstract, philosophical dimension of Bourdin's rather unusual exemplar of the anarchist "propaganda of the deed," aimed at a symbol of the international system rather than an official institution. And yet, if the abstract nature of this terrorist act informs Conrad's engagement with anarchism and state thought in *The Secret Agent*, then this symbolism is complicated by the fact that in Conrad's version the Greenwich explosion constitutes a faux terrorist action, one that is orchestrated by a foreign embassy, planned by their secret agent, and unwittingly executed by an innocent child. It is Mr Vladimir who hatches the plan: "[g]o for the first meridian. You don't know the middle classes as well as I do. Their sensibilities are jaded" (33). The attack on an iconic monument is thus rendered as a matter of attacking the abstract notion of "the first meridian" itself, on the grounds that such a symbolic action is required in order to jolt "jaded" Britain into taking serious action against London's anarchists. Somewhat unexpectedly, the embassy scene sees the ambassador lecturing Mr Verloc on "the philosophy of bomb throwing," emphasising the importance of considering "the sensibilities of the class you are attacking" (30, 32). The fact that the idea of targeting the observatory comes from a cynical ambassador rather than a revolutionary changes the significance of the whole action from an ideologically-informed attack on the organising principles of state culture to a form of underhanded *Realpolitik*.

At the time when he began work on *The Secret Agent*, Conrad wrote two short stories dealing with the theme of anarchism, which were published in *Harper's Magazine* in 1906: "An Anarchist: A Desperate Tale" and "The Informer: An Ironic Tale." The former short story is reminiscent of *The Secret Agent* in that it concerns an involuntary "anarchist" who, according to his own account, becomes embroiled in a violent anarchist group through happenstance and subsequent blackmail. This story deals with anarchism and colonialism in a way that bridges *The Secret Agent* with Conrad's earlier stories set in colonial contexts, highlighting the thematic continuity between Conrad's London novel and his earlier work.

Examining the germination of *Heart of Darkness*, Levenson argues that Conrad's "original problem," for which the renegade-bureaucrat Kurtz was the answer, was finding something to set against "institutionalized depravity" (270). If Kurtz's defection from modern bureaucratic organisational life comes to represent a quasi-alternative to administrative state culture in *Heart of Darkness*, then the anarchists of *The Secret Agent* serve a markedly similar function, as a potential counter-hegemonic site of opposition to officialdom. Moreover, the unbridled violence of a sudden terrorist attack is comparable to the "savagery" portrayed in Conrad's colonial fiction, insofar as it similarly disrupts the sense of order that resides in ordinary and habitual urban civilized modernity. In both cases, Conrad leverages these alternatives to civilized society in order to foreground the effects of administrative state culture on the psyche of state-made man.

"The Informer," the other of Conrad's short stories about anarchism of 1906, focuses on matters of anarchist organisational structures. "The Informer" centres on conversations about anarchism between a prominent anarchist and the narrator, who is an interested, but naive outsider who struggles to grasp the idea of anarchism. Conrad's first-person narrator ponders what it means to be an anarchist: "I don't understand anarchists. Does a man of that—of that—persuasion still remain an anarchist when alone, quite alone and going to bed, for instance?" (22). These childlike musings on the ontological status of the anarchist and of anarchism (fumblingly defined as a "persuasion") tangentially actualise the question of the ontology of the state. If the narrator fails to even "understand anarchists," then the prospect of visualising the state's abolition seems wholly impossible. In Dickens's *Bleak House*, the bureaucratically naive laypeople confronted with institutional milieus confess, "I don't understand these places"; in Conrad's short story, the problem is instead that of "understanding" anarchists. This juxtaposition illustrates a striking disparity between what these two novelists characterise as cognitively challenging: the bureaucratically illiterate layperson of Dickens's midcentury novels lacks the conceptual equipment to navigate administrative state culture, whereas Conrad's state-made man instead seemingly lacks the conceptual flexibility to grasp the concept of anarchism (or statelessness). This reversal is emblematic of the shift from the problem of familiarisation to that of defamiliarisation, which is key to understanding the literary and historical logic behind the differences between Victorian and modernist administrative fiction.

Listening to the anarchist's reminiscences, the narrator of "The Informer" interprets the information that he receives in light of what he knows about the precepts of anarchism, seeking to gauge the extent to which the anarchists pose a veritable threat to the status quo.

When the anarchist relates that there is "no hierarchy amongst the affiliated," the narrator takes this as confirmation of the impotency of anarchism:

> My surprise was great, but short-lived. Clearly, amongst extreme anarchists there could be no hierarchy; nothing in the nature of a law of precedence. The idea of anarchy ruling among anarchists was comforting, too. It could not possibly make for efficiency. (26)

What makes this passage particularly germane to the present chapter is the fact that this commentary on anarchist organisation—in which the keywords are "hierarchy," "system" and "efficiency"—echoes the terms of Conrad's interrogation of state bureaucracy and anarchism in *The Secret Agent*. In short, the narrator contentedly surmises that the anarchists fail to mount a serious challenge to officialdom because their movement lacks an effective organisational structure. And yet, the hierarchical organisational structure that the narrator fails to discern in the anarchist community is, of course, precisely the type of social strucure that anarchists generally oppose.

This concern with anarchist modes of organisation carries into *The Secret Agent*. With the exception of the fiercely independent anarchist known as the Professor, the loosely connected community of Soho anarchists of *The Secret Agent* are all members and delegates of highly formalised international organisational bodies, such as the "International Red Committee," the "Revolutionary International Council," "The Future of the Proletariat," or else they are acting on directives from a "Central Red Committee" (26, 57, 63, 102). Clearly, this is not a case of "anarchy ruling among anarchists." Not only do these different anarchist organisational bodies have distinctly bureaucratic-sounding titles, but their modus operandi is also markedly hierarchical. In other words, there is an irony at play in Conrad's depiction of anarchists in *The Secret Agent*: they are shown to be producing a version of administrative state culture through their own organisational endeavour to abolish the state. In this respect, Conrad's portrait of anarchist organisation anticipates Weber's critique of "Bakuninism," which emphasises the role of bureaucratic sensibilities (as opposed to official records and institutions) in safeguarding the continuation of the modern administrative state.[126]

Conrad's novel thus spotlights what Ernest Mandel describes as the tendency of workers' organisations to produce their own version of "officialdom" consisting of "proletarian functionaries" who gain "a growing monopoly of knowledge, of centralized information" (60). Crucially, Mandel suggests that such "functionaries" often end up

[126] Weber argues that "[w]hen those subject to bureaucratic control seek to escape the influence of the existing bureaucratic apparatus, this is normally possible only by creating an organization of their own which is equally subject to bureaucratization" (*Economy*, 224).

prioritising the upkeep of their organisational structures above the political struggle itself (60). This critique is anticipated by Conrad. When Ossipon hears about the Greenwich explosion, the unexpected news of a presumed terrorist attack committed on English soil causes something of a personal crisis; Ossipon's paramount concern is how this event will affect his working relationship with the proletarian bureaucracy:

> He dreaded the blame of the Central Red Committee, a body which had no permanent place of abode, and of whose membership he was not exactly informed. If this affair eventuated in the stoppage of the modest subsidy allotted to the publication of the F. P. pamphlets, then indeed he would have to regret Verloc's inexplicable folly. (63)

Ossipon's response indicates that his activities as a revolutionary are governed by an intensely hierarchical organisational culture composed of anonymous bodies that exercise control via coercive measures. This is also the viewpoint of the sardonic Professor, who never misses an opportunity to remind his fellow anarchists of the contradiction between their ideological aspirations and their mode of organisation: "[y]ou are the worthy delegates for revolutionary propaganda, but [...] you are as unable to think independently as any respectable grocer or journalist" (57). Indeed, the contradiction between anarchist ideology and organisational practice is voiced in the novel above all through the Professor's commentary. Responding to Ossipon's jibes about his isolation from the anarchist movement and preoccupation with constructing bombs, the Professor highlights his fellow anarchist's subservience to the organisations that he belongs to: "[y]ou couldn't find anything half so precise to define the nature of your activity with all your committees and delegations. It is I who am the true propagandist" (58). According to the Professor, then, the bureaucratic nature of the anarchist movement prevents its members from "thinking independently" and achieving their political goals.

Conradian Anarchism

Conrad's characterisation of bureaucratically-minded anarchists such as Ossipon encapsulates his interrogation of the problem of state thought, in that it illustrates the difficulty of transcending the cognitive horizon of administrative state culture. The extent of the state's symbolic violence is indicated not only by the fact that the "institutional grip" has a firm hold on the anarchists, but also by the very language that they speak. As noted above, Ossipon's immediate response to the news of the Greenwich explosion is, ironically, one of annoyance; in fact, he decries the act as "nothing short of criminal," to which the philosophically-minded

but murderous Professor responds: "[c]riminal! What is that? What is crime? What can be the meaning of such an assertion?" (59). Defending himself against a fellow anarchist's accusations of hypocrisy, Ossipon replies, "How am I to express myself? One must use the current words" (59). This disagreement between Ossipon and the Professor lays bare the ways in which anarchists are, to some degree, linguistically beholden to the extant state culture, highlighting the difficulty of transcending, whilst simultaneously operating within, such a culture. In seeking to transcend and dismantle the state, then, the anarchists employ not only the current organisational forms, but also the "current words."

It is hardly surprising that a writer so attuned to questions of perception and symbolism as Conrad should explore the linguistic dimensions of the state's symbolic violence. In *The Secret Agent*, Conrad indicates that the symbolic power of the state circumscribes even the most intense oppositional impulses. And yet, perhaps Conrad's work may also be read as seeking a way out of the impasse of state thought. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, an integral component of Dickens's administrative fiction is the invention of a bureaucratic vocabulary ("Wiglomeration," "the Circumlocution Office," "red tapeworm") designed to embolden and empower Victorian non-bureaucrats vis-à-vis officialdom. In Conrad's administrative fiction, the problem is instead that of finding the words that allow for thinking beyond the state. To the extent that Conrad finds the right words, he does so not in the shape of a new lexicon, but rather in the shape of literary devices such as irony and negation, as well as through the suggestiveness of the paradoxes and unexpected reversals that compose his ironic treatment of state bureaucracy in juxtaposition with anarchism. When paired with the foregrounding of interiority, these sudden semantic twists and turns may be read as seeking to bring about a rupture with "state thought," in and by their destabilisation of the habitual perception of statehood.

In the words of Bertrand Russell, Conrad "thought of civilized human life as a dangerous walk on a thin crust of barely cooled lava which at any moment might break and let the unwary sink into fiery depths" (87). Conrad's concern and fascination with the proximity of civilised modernity to destruction and disorder is all-apparent in his fictional engagement with the "propaganda of the deed." However, Conrad's treatment of anarchism also underlines the fact that Conrad regarded modern civilisation not only as a feeble safety net, but also as a tremendous constraint on human potentiality. Moreover, in many of his commentaries on literature and art, Conrad indicates that the artist has the power and responsibility to break through the civilisational cocoon. In *A Personal Record* (1912), for instance, Conrad describes the act of writing as a liberatory experience, celebrating the

creative process whereby the author is able to access an "interior world" of "imagined adventures" where "there are no policemen, no law, no pressure of circumstance or dread opinion to keep him within bounds" (7). Whilst Conrad here describes a form of utopian escapism that is very much the private joy of the author, his delineation of this imaginative space points to the deliverance from socio-political restraint that readers may experience through literature, especially if the literary text partakes of the escapist or liberatory impulse described by Conrad. Indeed, as Conrad proposed in a 1897 letter to his socialist friend Cunninghame Graham, "one writes only half the book; the other half is with the reader" (*Collected Letters*, 1: 370).

In light of Conrad's conception of the reader as co-creator, Conrad's confession in his preface to *The Secret Agent* that there were "moments during the writing of the book when I was an extreme revolutionist" (8), indicates that these moments may have their corollary in passages in the novel that could incite a revolutionary spirit in the reader. Indeed, in *Conrad Among the Anarchists* (2016), David Mulry indicates that there are "moments of ambivalence" in *The Secret Agent* which show that Conrad's sympathies "extend[ed] toward anarchism, philosophically at least" (17).[127] At the same time, Conrad's reference to instances in the writing process where he felt himself a revolutionary may also be understood in relation to the emphasis that he places on epiphanic moments in certain key texts where he discusses his aesthetic ideals and ideas about literature. An important formulation of Conrad's artistic creed may be found in the preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus."* Here, Conrad describes his writing practice as a matter of seeking to capture some aspect of an inherently elusive reality, "hold[ing] up unquestioningly [...] the rescued fragment [...]. It is to show its vibration, its colour, its form; and through its movement, its form, and its colour, reveal the substance of its truth" (5). Elaborating on this articulation of his impressionistic epistemology, Conrad avers that "[m]y task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you *see*" (5). This, I take it, is the underlying principle that motivates Conrad's manner of setting his impressionist fiction against the administrative state's informational mode of seeing. As tends to be the case with Conradian aesthetics, the above declaration of artistic intent doubles as a form of civilisational critique; it implies that his readership lacks the perceptual capacity to grasp social reality as they might. In short, Conrad aims to make his readers perceive things afresh.

[127] David Weir also describes *The Secret Agent* as a work that is in dialogue with the ideology of anarchism (81). Weir valorises the political uses of irony in modernist art and literature more broadly, and (rather cryptically) suggests that such "culture might have the anarchic potential to replace the state" (87).

To make us "see," is, as Mulry notes, "as much the task of the revolutionist as it is the artist" (163). This analogy is implied both in Conrad's preface and in *The Secret Agent* itself, through explicit commentary on the correspondences between the artist's object and that of the anarchist. Interestingly, the Professor, who takes a philosophical attitude towards matters of political campaigning that excite his fellow anarchists, becomes something of a mouthpiece for the author's ironic or ambivalent method, through his voicing of the idea that "[i]n principle what one of us may or may not know as to any given fact can't be a matter of inquiry to the others" (52). This position clearly echoes the perspectivist epistemology that is articulated by Conrad's narrator. Similarly, Conrad's comments about the challenge of writing about London in the "Author's Note" are paralleled by the Professor's sense of being oppressed by the vastness of London's population:

> He was in a long, straight street, peopled by a mere fraction of an immense multitude; but all round him, on and on, even to the limits of the horizon hidden by the enormous pile of bricks, he felt the mass of mankind mighty in its numbers. (67)

Here, the "mass of mankind" represents a political rather than an artistic problem. The seemingly immovable hegemonic state culture seems to weigh like a nightmare upon the mind of Conrad's most devout anarchist. The Professor's despondency on account of this seemingly insurmountable challenge is described as an "emotional state" which comes to "all men whose ambition aims at a direct grasp upon humanity—to artists, politicians, thinkers, reformers, or saints" (67). The anarchist is thus likened to the artist, insofar as both are confronted with the problem of capturing the hearts and minds of the public.

Echoing and extending this analogy between the artist and the anarchist, Conrad's "Author's Note" flirts with the idea that his portrayal of anarchism aligns with the anarchist tactic of the propaganda of the deed. Responding to complaints about his treatment of anarchism, Conrad proclaims that his authorial intention was not to "elaborate mere ugliness, to shock or even simply to surprise my readers by a change of front," nor to "commit a gratuitous outrage on the feelings of mankind" (4, 8). In defending his novel, then, Conrad uses expressions such as "shock" and "outrage" that seemingly allude to the propaganda of the deed in a tongue-in-cheek-manner. Rather than disentangling the novel from the charge that his treatment of anarchism was unseemly, Conrad uses inflammatory language that reproduces and reinforces the very effect that his critics disapproved of.

Modernist literature is broadly defined by an impulse to challenge habitual modes of thought, often through "the shock of the unintelligible" (Adorno 180). In this respect, it may

be argued that modernist writing resembles the similarly consciousness-expanding scare tactics of militant anarchists. The defamiliarising intent that appears to inform Conrad's juxtapositional treatment of anarchism and state bureaucacy may indeed be compared to the anarchist propaganda of the deed, with literary devices such as parallelism and paradox functioning as non-violent alternatives to the "perfect device" that the Professor is looking to construct. Here, it is important to observe that Conrad's narrative primes the reader to take notice of such destabilising moments in the narrative, through, for instance, the suggestion that Sir Ethelred's spurious "wisdom [...] of an official kind" prevents him from "reflect[ing] upon a matter not of theory but of experience that in the close-woven stuff of relations between the conspirator and the police there occur sudden solutions of continuity, sudden holes in space and time" (69). This densely metaphorical description of the strange phenomenology of administrative state culture not only highlights Sir Ethelred's epistemological shortcomings in the face of the complexity of policework, but it also indicates that systemic contradictions in the relationship between the police and the anarchists produce strange ontological fissures ("sudden holes in space and time"). At the same time, this passage underlines the aforementioned importance of ironic reversals and epiphanic moments in Conrad's administrative fiction, which seem to represent or point towards the possibility of a rupture with a habituated perception of administrative state culture.

Frustrated with the theoretical and ideological stalemate of the anarchist project, the Professor concentrates on the act of destruction itself, specialising in bomb-making. He is dismissive of his fellow anarchists, declaring that "[t]he terrorist and the policeman both come from the same basket. Revolution, legality—counter moves in the same game; forms of idleness at bottom identical" (58). This jibe at revolutionary organisation doubles as a critique of officialdom, undermining the legitimacy of the policeman and the anarchist in one fell swoop. Tellingly, the Assistant Commissioner shares the Professor's analysis of the anarchists' "idle" game-playing; the real threat, as identified by the Assistant Commissioner, is not the political criminal, but rather "authorised scoundrelism" (109). That is, in his report to Sir Ethelred, the Assistant Commissioner hypothesises that an agent provocateur "in the pay of foreign governments" is more dangerous than the anarchist, since the former "can afford to be more reckless than the most reckless of conspirators. His occupation is free from all restraint. He's without as much faith as is necessary for complete negation, and without that much law as is implied in lawlessness" (109). Here, the Assistant Commissioner implies that anarchists are bound by certain societal norms, but that there are other forms of transgressive spaces or states. The quoted passage culminates in a flurry of paradoxes which

seem designed to propel the reader into such a space of radical potentiality. This, then, is Conrads's "perfect" literary device for transcending administrative state culture.

Conclusions

As opposed to the pedagogy of familiarisation that characterises the administrative fiction of Martineau and Dickens, which is oriented towards establishing a positive and empowering grasp of the administrative state, Conradian state play instead seeks to render state bureaucracy strange—or, to "defamiliarise" it.[128] Conrad was essentially dismantling and destablising the state imaginary that writers such as Martineau and Dickens had played a large part in establishing. At the same time, Conrad was also intervening in the formation of the modern perception of bureaucracy as a rational mode of organisation, as theorised by Weber in the early decades of the twentieth century. The terrible consequences of the embassy's Kafkaesque manipulation of Verloc encapsulate Conrad's interrogation of the profoundly irrational effects that are produced by modern administrative state culture.

In the present chapter I have argued that Conrad's critique of the symbolic power of the state converges with anarchist ideology in certain respects. Conrad's characterisation of *fin-de-siècle* anarchism suggests that a major challenge for this political movement was to contend intellectually with the modern individual's habituation to administrative state culture. In *The Secret Agent*, Conrad's verdict appears to be that anarchism as a political project was doomed to fail given state-made man's cognitive and organisational bureaucratic conditioning. Conrad's claustrophobic account of the bureaucratic native's inability to imagine a viable alternative to statehood may be interpreted as politically pessimistic; however, there is also a sense that this critique seeks to move us beyond state thought, so to speak, by articulating the problem at hand. Whilst a rupture with state thought may not be feasible in the domain of political organisation, a literary text may produce certain anti-state effects. As I have demonstrated in the present chapter, Conrad's treatment of officialdom, characterised by irony and paradox, is transgressive in the sense it destabilises the state imaginary that keeps the individual "within bounds." This is epitomised by Conrad's satirical and topsy-turvy juxtaposition of anarchism and state bureaucracy. There is, in other words, an

[128] State play is an especially fitting conceptualisation of the treatment of officialdom in *The Secret Agent* given that, as Terry Eagleton notes, "'game' is a central metaphor" in the novel, employed particularly in the narration of what Eagleton describes as the "stalemated game" between anarchists, policemen and foreign ambassadors (29).

almost utopian streak to Conrad's administrative fiction, which mediates and counter-balances the political pessimism of his writing. Turning in my next chapter to H. G. Wells's explicitly utopian administrative fiction, I will explore another major Edwardian writer's attempts to write and think beyond turn-of-the-century Britain's administrative state culture.

Chapter Five

Utopia and the Bureaucratic Horror Story: H. G. Wells's Administrative Feeling

Introduction

At the turn of the twentieth century, H. G. Wells pivoted to writing socio-political treatises, having made his name as a writer of "scientific romances" in the late nineteenth century. In the space of a few years, Wells produced a series of essayistic volumes that included *Anticipations* (1901), *The Discovery of the Future* (1902), and *Mankind in the Making* (1903), books that "made his reputation as a political thinker" (Parrinder, *Shadows*, 100).[129] Tellingly, in a 1902 letter to Arnold Bennett (who was presenting Wells to an American public in an article for *Cosmopolitan*), Wells emphasised that he wished to escape the epithet of being the "English Jules Verne": "[t]here is something other than either story writing or artistic merit which has emerged through the series of my books, something one might regard as a new system of ideas—'thought'" (qtd. in Sherborne 158). This new focus on "thought" would define Wells's career in the highly productive decades that followed, during which he not only delineated his ideas about politics in highly influential tracts, pamphlets, essays, and novels, but also played a prominent role in politico-administrative organisational life, most notably as a leading member of the Fabian Society and as an advocate for the institution of a League of Nations after WWI.

The issue that came to dominate Wells's socio-political writings—beginning with *Mankind in the Making*—was that of the state's role in the modern world, and, relatedly, the role of literature with respect to the state. Much as Harriet Martineau's statist fiction was born of the excitement surrounding the 1832 Reform Bill, Wells's advocacy for the state needs to be understood in light of the broader resurgence of collectivist statism at the turn of the twentieth century. The drawbacks of free trade policies had become increasingly apparent over the second half of the nineteenth century, giving rise to a New Liberalism which viewed

[129] Wells's essays were also commercially successful, "appeal[ing] to a natural popular curiosity about what th[e] twentieth century was going to be like" (Hynes 93). *Anticipations* initially sold better than any of his previous books (James 134).

the state as responsible for individuals' well-being and development. A decidedly interventionist Liberal government of 1906, backed by the nascent Labour Party, extended the role of the state in the provision of welfare, through measures such as the Old-Age Pensions Act of 1908, the Labour Exchanges Act of 1909, and the National Insurance Act of 1911.

Wells's views on politics were broadly aligned with New Liberalism and Labour during these years, but his valorisation of the state was rather idiosyncratic and radical, tending towards a technocratic form of state socialism. In 1903, Wells became a member of the prominent London-based socialist organisation the Fabian Society, established in 1884. The Fabians were social democrats in the sense that they regarded administrative reform and state intervention, rather than revolution, as the pathway to socialism. In *New Worlds for Old* (1908), Wells formulated his understanding of the Fabian creed, declaring that "[t]o have public spirit, to be aware of the State as a whole and to have an administrative feeling towards it, is necessarily to be accessible to constructive ideas—that is to say, to Socialistic ideas" (262–63). The Fabians, spearheaded by Sidney and Beatrice Webb (née Potter), alongside prominent intellectuals such as renowned writer and dramatist George Bernard Shaw and political scientist Graham Wallas, sought to inspire this type of socialistic "administrative feeling" primarily by improving the educational system and through their involvement in municipal administration, as well as by means of publishing tracts on socialism and public administration.

Wells, who did not always agree with the Fabian gradualist strategy of working with extant municipal and political structures, took a more visionary and literary approach to reshaping the popular state imaginary. And yet, igniting fervour for the administrative state was not an easy matter. In *The Future in America* (1906), Wells declared that Britons suffered from a form of "state blindness," insofar as they lacked a well-developed "sense of the state" (153). And yet, in *New Worlds for Old*, published just two years later, Wells was more optimistic about his compatriots' receptiveness to socialist statism, contending that the rise of an imperial "governing class" in nineteenth-century Britain had made the country "State-conscious" and the "British mind as a whole 'administrative'" (262). There was clearly a measure of wishful thinking to the latter proclamations, given Wells's Fabian trust to "state-consciousness" as a route to socialism. At the same time, the sudden shift in Wells's assessment of "the British mind" reflects the progress that statists and socialists made at this time, with the Liberals' landslide victory and the rise of the Labour Party, which may have signalled to Wells that Britain was all but ripe for state socialism. Wells's change of mind might also have been prompted by the popular reception of his "thought" during this period.

Wells was indeed extraordinarily influential as a socio-political thinker, as is highlighted by Orwell's suggestion that "[t]hinking people who were born about the beginning of this century are in some sense Wells's own creation. [...] I doubt whether anyone who was writing books between 1900 and 1920, at any rate in the English language, influenced the young so much" ("Wells," 87).

The present chapter examines the administrative fiction that Wells wrote in a bid to expand Britain's budding state-consciousness during the Edwardian era, focusing on the essayistic novel *A Modern Utopia* (1905), Wells's first endeavour to give literary shape to his statist "thought." *A Modern Utopia* is, in short, a compound novel and essay, in which Wells describes a utopian future society that is governed by a technologically advanced world state. Whilst Wells situates *A Modern Utopia* within the utopian tradition, this novel also resembles Wells's earlier scientific romances, in that it describes a mode of societal organisation made possible by advances in administrative technologies. As Parrinder observes, *A Modern Utopia* differs from classical utopias precisely in that it "depend[s] on specific scientific discoveries and their technological application" (*Utopian*, 5).[130] *A Modern Utopia* may thus be described as a work of administrative science fiction, or as a "techno-utopia," to borrow Nayanika Mathur's expression ("Afterword," 113).

"State play" is a particularly fitting description for a utopian novel such as *A Modern Utopia*, which may be described as "imitating statehood-with-revisions" (Cooper 158). As a work of administrative science fiction, *A Modern Utopia* is also oriented toward "*cognitive estrangement*" (Suvin 15)—that is, bringing the reader out of the extant culture and thereby defamiliarising it.[131] In other words, Wellsian state play strives to expand the readers' conception of statehood, in this case by delinking statehood from nationhood and by illustrating how radical administrative reforms could transform society. Wells's brand of

[130] Parrinder also observes that Wells's hyper-technological utopian construct shows a "faith in the beneficence of scientific advance and social engineering" that constitutes "an intellectual product of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that now looks decidedly jaded" (*Utopian*, 5–6). Indeed, later works of administrative science fiction, such as Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1921), George Orwell's *1984* (1949), and Stanislaw Lem's *Memoirs Found in a Bathtub* (1961), have generally been dystopian in nature.

[131] See Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future* (2007) for a discussion of the relationship between utopian fiction and science fiction; Jameson suggests that science fiction seeks to "defamiliarize and restructure our experience of our own *present*" (286). Notably, in an earlier essay on Max Weber, Jameson likens the "dizzying pessimism" of Weber's notion of the "iron cage" of rationalism with "the early novels of H.G. Wells, which, contemporaneous with it, offer the same remorseless gaze into a dwindling future" ("Vanishing," 71). Ambiguously, however, Jameson does not specify which novels he is referring to; Weber first addressed the subject of rationalisation and the "iron cage" in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (*1905), which is contemporary with *A Modern Utopia*—and yet, Jameson appears to be describing Wells's first scientific romances. Whilst *A Modern Utopia* does not provide a vision of a "dwindling future," it may be argued that there is an element of the Weberian rational "iron cage" about Wells's utopia.

administrative fiction is thus easily differentiated from Dickens's aesthetic of cognitive mapping, which was geared toward empowering laypeople within an emergent administrative state culture, and also from Conrad's problematisation of the conditions for independent thought within an administrative state culture. Wells's treatment of administrative statecraft is, in fact, closer to the bureaucratic utopianism of Martineau's Poor Law novellas, in which administrative statecraft is similarly eulogised. With *A Modern Utopia*, Wells sought to show that a different administrative state was possible—in short, Wells effectively asked his reader to imagine a reformed Circumlocution Office, as hard as that may be.

In emphasising Wells's reenvisioning of the state, I take my cue from Benjamin Kohlmann, who observes that "[i]n the decades around 1900, literature took on the task of imagining the kinds of life that would be possible under the auspices of the emerging welfare state" ("Reformist," 14). Using *A Modern Utopia* as one of his main examples, Kohlmann argues that one of the key ingredients in the reformist imaginary of this period lay in "a form of speculative thinking that made it possible to envision the state not merely as an ensemble of institutional structures external to social life but as intimately connected to the sphere of the social itself" (*British*, 3). Whilst I draw on Kohlmann's conceptualisation of Edwardian authors' re-imagining of statehood, my reading of *A Modern Utopia* departs from Kohlmann's analysis by foregrounding Wells's investment in "institutional structures" and administrative statecraft, as opposed to the "sphere of the social."

By focusing on the administrative side of Wells's utopian imagination, the present chapter delineates how Wells's novel builds upon and renews the British tradition of administrative fiction. In order to delineate the distinguishing traits of Wells's utopian administrative fiction and to explain its relationship to familiarising and defamiliarising forms of state play that have been discussed in previous chapters, my first sections will explore some of the key intellectual and literary influences on Wells's administrative fiction. I will focus on Wells's conflictual relationship with the Fabian Society and on his equally stormy relationship with Joseph Conrad. Here I will draw on Wells's memoirs—*Experiment in Autobiography* (1934)—in which he describes his development as a writer during the first decade of the twentieth century as shaped by the "pull of two main groups of divergent personalities" given his parallel involvement in literary and politico-administrative spheres (532).

Turning my attention to *A Modern Utopia*, I will contextualise and interrogate the utopian dimension, as well as the unexpected dystopian overtones, of his account of an administrative world state. Wells's treatment of administrative statecraft is largely

proselytising and romanticising; and yet, in *A Modern Utopia*, surprisingly, there are also elements of the bureaucratic horror story that Dickens had helped establish as a key mode of writing the state. Wells's did not want to be known as "the English Jules Verne," but he did want to make his essayistic novel as "entertaining as its matter permits" (*Modern*, 7). Briefly put, Wells's protagonists are suddenly transported to the utopian world and cast adrift in its unfamiliar, all-embracing, and rather frightening bureaucratic system. This is a new type of bureaucratic horror story, a thriller that plays out in a hyper-administered globalised world; but it is a bureaucratic horror story all the same, one that repeats the conventional folkloric wisdom about incompetent petty bureaucrats and red tape. The present chapter will, in other words, draw out certain inconsistencies in *A Modern Utopia*, showing that Wells's "administrative feeling" is lopsided: he enthuses about the potential of new administrative technologies and schemes, but shows no corresponding interest in rethinking the more quotidian dimensions of street-level bureaucracy. The latter sections of the chapter investigate what these tensions in *A Modern Utopia* say about the narrativisation of state bureaucracy more broadly.

As a coda to my discussion of *A Modern Utopia*, my final section discusses Wells's treatment of administrative statecraft in his next major statist novel, *The New Machiavelli* (1911), written after his fallout with the Fabians. This novel is not an example of administrative fiction per se, but instead constitutes a fictionalised account of Edwardian British politics, coloured by Wells's acrimonious exit from the Fabian Society. Here, Wells's administrative utopianism is tempered and circumscribed by a newfound awareness of the frustrations of political organisational life—and yet, utopianism is far from absent, taking the shape of a lyrical and elegiac celebration of the "white dream of the state" (367). By tracing Wells's shift from administrative fiction to a form of fictionalised statist autobiography, then, the present chapter will shed light on his experimentation with different literary approaches to the challenge of reimagining the administrative state and spreading administrative feeling.

Wells and Conrad

At the turn of the twentieth century, Wells and Conrad became friends and, for a time, literary associates of sorts. Wells had been instrumental in popularising Conrad's work through positive reviews of Conrad's *Almayer's Folly* (1895) and *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896) for the *Saturday Review*. In the novels of "this unknown newcomer," Linda Dryden proposes, Wells "recognized a potentially powerful new type of writer of Empire, exactly the type of

author that his keen, iconoclastic tendencies sought" (4). Having made each other's acquaintance, Conrad and Wells came to live in close proximity on the Kent and East Sussex coast, living "within cycling distance" of each other from 1898 until 1907, when Conrad moved (Hammond 34, 143). As neighbours in rural Kent, Conrad and Wells became a part of a lively literary scene, mixing with illustrious writers such as Ford Madox Ford, Henry James, Stephen Crane, and W. H. Hudson; they also developed a practice of reading and discussing each other's work-in-progress, with Wells in particular offering stylistic advice on Conrad's prose and becoming "something between a stern schoolmaster and a muse" (Dryden 6, 27). However, the literary friendship of Wells and Conrad was in many respects ridden with tension, owing to temperamental, aesthetic, and political differences between the two writers.

Wells's Edwardian fiction is often compared and contrasted with Conrad's writing from this period, given their conflicting viewpoints on literature and politics.[132] Dryden writes that "Wells's fiction is didactic, designed to cultivate a consciousness of the need for radical political and social change. As such, his view of the purpose of fiction is at odds with that of Conrad" (24). However, this contrastive appreciation of Conrad and Wells, which highlights Wells's more pronounced didactic streak, does not account for the educational dimension of Conrad's artistic project of making his readers "see." Nor does Dryden's comparison do justice to the formal complexity of a novel such as *A Modern Utopia*, which, as Nathan Waddell observes, goes "far beyond instructive pressures to something more akin to the impressionist dispositions against which Wells's writing is typically positioned" (44).

Conrad's *The Secret Agent* is a useful point of comparison when exploring Wells's treatment of state administration in *A Modern Utopia*, given that these novels respond to the same historical moment in the evolution of administrative state culture. Whilst their works of administrative fiction differ greatly, there are also certain fundamental characteristics that they share. Crucially, the long-nineteenth-century tradition of administrative fiction that I am delineating in this dissertation is generally "instructive," and yet, as I have suggested in previous chapters, the Edwardian period saw a shift from familiarisation to defamiliarisation. The underlying ambition of Wells and Conrad was not to familiarise readers with the emergent administrative state culture, as in the case of Martineau and Dickens, but rather to break with a calcified state imaginary. For his part, Conrad sought to destabilise his readers' perception of the administrative state so as to promote intellectual independence; Wells, on

[132] It has been argued that the tension between Wells and writers like James and Conrad took on a symbolic significance, encapsulating the stratification of the English novel into distinct "artistic" and "popular" types, though a writer such as Conrad certainly sought to straddle both categories (McConnell 22–3).

the other hand, set out to rewire state thought into a more active form of state consciousness or administrative feeling.

In *Experiment in Autobiography*, Wells writes dismissively of Conrad. He describes their relationship as "a long, fairly friendly but always rather strained acquaintance" (*Experiment*, 527). Though they admired certain aspects of each other's work, they also clashed head-on regarding aesthetics and narrative style. Wells objected to Conrad's carefully studied prose, and Conrad in turn considered Wells's attitude toward narrative fiction maddeningly inartistic (527). Wells suggests that the politicising education that he received as a member of the Fabian Society insulated him against the influence of "such vivid impressionists as Conrad" (*Experiment*, 529–30). Conrad was also, in Wells's words, "incredulous" that Wells "could take social and political issues seriously" (527).

Wells and Conrad's differences were clearly exacerbated by Wells's turn to "thought" during this time, and the two writers began to grow increasingly estranged.[133] Encouraged by Wells's return to fiction with *A Modern Utopia*, Conrad sent Wells a letter of congratulation, proclaiming that

> From the first line of the preface to the closing sentence I feel in touch with a more accessible Wells—a Wells mellowed, as it were, in the mediation of the three books of which this last one is certainly the nearest to my understanding and the most commanding to my assent. (*Collected*, 3: 234–35)

As Dryden notes, Conrad's letter betrays a desire to effect a reconciliation with Wells (123), and whilst his commentary concerns the temperament or tone of Wells's writing, the subtext is that Conrad hopes Wells will continue writing fiction as opposed to essays.

However, Conrad's suggestion that *A Modern Utopia* is close to his "understanding" may also be read at face value, in light of the views expressed by Conrad in essays written during this period. There is clearly a vast gulf between, on the one hand, Conrad's distaste for the administrative state, and, on the other hand, the radical statism of *A Modern Utopia*, on the other; however, Conrad's commentary on statehood in the essay "Autocracy and War" published in 1905 (the same year as *A Modern Utopia*) in fact bears a marked resemblance to Wells's statist speculative fiction. In this essay, Conrad's trenchant critique of imperial Russia leads into a more philosophical discussion regarding the possibility of the creation of a truly great state:

[133] Conrad was not the only writer to express dissatisfaction with the "time and energy" that Wells was expending on political activity—John Galsworthy and Virginia Woolf similarly objected to Wells's discursive and propagandistic work (Sherborne 174, 180).

> It is a matter of logical growth, of faith and courage. Its inspiration springs from the constructive instinct of the people, governed by the strong hand of a collective conscience, and voiced in the wisdom and counsel of men who seldom reap the reward of gratitude. Many states have been powerful, but, perhaps, none has been truly great—as yet. [...] Perhaps mankind has not lived long enough for a comprehensive view of any particular case. Perhaps no one will ever live long enough; and perhaps this earth, shared out amongst our clashing ambitions by the anxious arrangements of statesmen, will come to an end before we attain the felicity of greeting with unanimous applause the perfect fruition of a great state. It is even possible that we are destined for another sort of bliss altogether, that sort which consists in being perpetually duped by false appearances. (39)

These musings on the subject of the *longue durée* of statehood and the development of a "great state" shares a clear affinity with Wells's speculative administrative fiction. Conrad's manner of gazing into the future is strikingly Wellsian, as is the language of this passage, which emphasises the importance of "constructive" impulses and "logical growth." Of course, Conrad characteristically undercuts the discourse on state greatness by dwelling on the likelihood of "false appearances" and disappointment. Nonetheless, it is intriguing to think that both Wells and Conrad were speculating about future great states at this time, and to speculate whether this shared theme might have been touched upon in their prior conversations.

A Manifesto for Administrative Fiction

In the first pages of *A Modern Utopia*, Wells reflects on the style of the book, presenting it as a "queer" "hybrid" of a text that combines "philosophical discussion" and "imaginative narrative" (10, 14). This stylistic and formal experimentation needs to be understood in terms of Wells's broader project of finding a suitable literary form for his statist "thought." In this section, I will lay out some of Wells's key ideas about the role of literature with respect to the state.

As observed in the previous section, Wells reacted against Conrad's "over-sensitized receptivity" (*Experiment*, 528). In fact, Conrad's insistence on the importance of finding "the perfect expression" caused Wells to lean into a more politicised or journalistic style of writing (531). In 1912, tellingly, Wells rejected an invitation to the Royal Society of Literature, on the grounds that he had no interest in "literature" in the loftier sense: "better the wild rush of [...] the Quack than the cold politeness of the established thing" (qtd. in McConnell 22). Moreover, Wells's fraught relationship with Conrad also appears to have spurred him into articulating his own views on literature. Wells commented on the relationship between

literature and the state in his essays before statecraft emerged as a major theme in his fiction. In *Mankind in the Making*, first published in 1903, Wells proclaimed, "[l]iterature is a vitally necessary function of the modern state" (xiii).[134] This conceptualisation of literature would have provoked the ire of Conrad; indeed, perhaps Conrad's dismayed outburst about authorship becoming a "municipal function" with the rise of the interventionist welfare state (see previous chapter) was prompted by his reading of Wells's *Mankind in the Making*, a book which aggravated the rift that was developing between them.

In *Mankind in the Making*, Wells effectively reverses Plato's position regarding poets (Wells's first chapter is, not coincidentally, titled "The New Republic"), outlining a scheme for an "organized literature" in which writers would be remunerated by the state so as to better serve a "necessary public function in the progressive State" (375, 388–9). Wells would later reject this project of establishing a system of official literary patronage, having seen a personal request of an annual subsidy of £1,000 (as compared to the £100 per annum received by Conrad through the civil list) denied by the Prime Minister, Balfour (*Correspondence*, 71–3). And yet, he remained firmly convinced that authors should serve a "public function" in the modern state.

In 1911, Wells gave a lecture on "The Scope of the Novel" at the Times Book Club, later reworked as "The Contemporary Novel," one of the essays in *An Englishman Looks at the World* (1914). This essay constitutes a significant articulation of Wells's literary creed, delineating what sort of "function" literary representations of state institutions might perform. In fact, the essay reads as a manifesto for administrative fiction—the first of its kind in British literature. Wells begins the paper with an impassioned critique of literary critics who regard fiction as mere entertainment for the "slippered hours"—and, building on this critique, Wells advocates for a "laxer, more spacious form of novel-writing" capable of stimulating readers' "higher ganglia" ("Contemporary," 149–53). This emphasis on formal experimentation and questioning of dogmatic criticism shows an affinity between Wells and early modernists such as Conrad and Ford—and yet, Wells was arguably an outlier in this context given that his formal experimentation was oriented towards politics rather than aesthetics. Wells's primary concern as a writer during this period is aptly summarised in *The New Machiavelli*: "[s]omewhere between politics and literature my grip must needs be found, but where?" (202).

[134] In the preface to the 1914 edition of *Mankind in the Making*, Wells reiterated that literature served "the most necessary [function] of all" (xiii).

In the aforementioned paper, Wells identifies state administration as a subject on which the contemporary novel might focus its attention and productively exercise readers' "higher ganglia." Articulating a literary programme of sorts, Wells valorises the novel as a medium for commenting on administrative practices and institutions, proclaiming that the novel represents the "only medium" fit for grappling with the "immense cluster of difficulties that arises out of the increasing complexity of our state" ("Contemporary," 163). Indeed, celebrating fictional representations of state institutions, Wells elevates the novelist to a position of authority on matters of public administration: "I know of no means of [...] creating an intelligent controlling criticism of officials and of assisting conscientious officials to an effective self-examination, and generally of keeping the atmosphere of official life sweet and healthy, except the novel" (164). According to Wells, then, the genre of the novel has unique affordances for scrutinising official life and illuminating the mechanisms of the administrative field, and, for this reason, he proposes that fiction might serve as a regulating force that assists officialdom's "self-examination."

Wells gives the portrait of the parish official Bumble in Dickens's *Oliver Twist* as an example of a "supreme and devastating study" of a state functionary (164). Indeed, Wells proposes that candidates for administrative posts should be subjected to "a severe examination upon 'Oliver Twist'" given the illuminating nature of Dickens's portrayal of institutional power in this novel (165). Beyond Dickens however, Wells finds little in the way of trenchant and meaningful administrative fiction in British literature, and he calls for his contemporaries to "give us a score of other figures to put beside [Bumble], other aspects and reflections upon this great problem of officialism made flesh" (165).[135] Remarking upon a sudden increase in the rate of bureaucratisation and the scope of state intervention, Wells observes that "[o]n every hand we are creating officials, and compared with only a few years ago the private life in a dozen fresh directions comes into contact with officialdom" (163). However, according to Wells, British writers had not kept pace with the advances of officialdom and the saturation of everyday life with state bureaucracy: "so far the novel has scarcely begun its attack upon this particular field of human life, and all the attractive varied play of motive it contains" (164). In other words, whereas Britain was "creating officials" aplenty, British authors were not following suit. This was an urgent matter for Wells and a missed opportunity, given that he regarded literature as a means of illuminating and popularising administrative statecraft.

[135] Edwardian writers on the public service frequently invoked Dickens's example; a contemporaneous editorial of *Red Tape: A Civil Service Magazine* provides the following provocation: "the man with eyes to see could not spend half-an-hour in the average Government Department without experiencing bitter regret that Dickens is dead. Look about you, good writers, and when you have looked let us share your laughter" (Saunderson 2).

The cadre of fictional state functionaries that Wells envisions would not only show state functionaries at their worst *à la* Dickens's satires, but they would also provide a more complex picture of the experiential side of administrative statecraft: "[w]e must have not only the fullest treatment of the temptations, vanities, abuses, and absurdities of office, but all its dreams, its sense of constructive order, its consolations, its sense of service, and its nobler satisfactions" (165). In other words, Wells called for a psychologically penetrating administrative fiction dealing with the "problem of officialism made flesh," which in fact fits the description of Conrad's treatment of state functionaries in his fiction; indeed, the fact that Wells fails to mention the work of Conrad in this connection is a glaring omission, especially given the fact that Conrad had dedicated *The Secret Agent* to Wells only a few years earlier.

Before moving on to the subject of Wells's involvement in the Fabian Society in my next section, I want to briefly contextualise Wells's valorisation of administrative fiction, which would appear rather hubristic had it not been for the idiosyncratic development of British officialdom over the late nineteenth century. Indeed, Wells's suggestion that fiction should serve as a check on officialdom would have confounded and galled a Victorian critic such as Fitzjames James Stephen (see chapter three). The professionalisation of British public administration had resulted in a distinctly stratified civil service, where entry to the higher civil service was not achieved through advancement from the lower rungs of the service, but rather through competitive entry exams. The exams which potential recruits to the higher civil service underwent did not test for skills relating to administrative tasks, but were instead modelled on classical curricula developed at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. The typical higher civil servant had, in other words, not undergone any form of professional training, as opposed to their continental counterparts. Thus, even in the late 1950s, the poet and administrator, C. H. Sisson suggested that British civil servants were "shocked to discover that many countries [we]re administered by men who read books about public administration" (28). Indeed, according to Sisson, foreign administrators were viewed as "committing the crime of learning from books something that one just *does*" (28). This suspicion towards administrative book-learning constitutes an important context for Wells's championship of literature as a regulating force in officialdom, and also for the emphasis that the Fabians placed on cultivating a more "scientific" attitude towards public administration.

Fabianism and Utopianism

If Conrad was an important interlocutor for Wells during the first decade of the twentieth century, then another major influence was the Fabian Society, from which Wells's ideas about

public administration are partially derived. The Fabian Society was one of the leading socialist organisations in Britain at the turn of the twentieth century. Indeed, though London was home to numerous socialist societies encompassing a broad range of ideas, when Wells moved to London in the 1880s, "Fabianism was Socialism, so far as the expression of views and policy went" (Wells, *Experiment*, 201). In this section, I will situate Wellsian "thought" in relation to the main tenets of Fabianism.

The Fabian brand of socialism has been given many names, including "State Socialism" (Morris, "Fabian," 29), "Municipal Socialism" (Pease 81), "informational socialism" (Duff 188), and "gas and water socialism" (Beilharz 55), but Wells preferred the term "administrative socialism," which is the title of his chapter on Fabianism in *New Worlds for Old*. The Fabians presented themselves as a business-like alternative to other socialist organisations, and, indeed, tried to "sell themselves as almost a free-lance civil service" (Duff 189).[136] Operating as a form of think tank *avant la lettre*, the Fabian Society came to play a key role in the development of municipal politics and state administration in the decades around the turn of the century. The Fabians sought to raise the standards of British administrative state culture through education and via strategic "permeation" of municipal and government bodies, as a means of achieving socialism.[137] In *Fabian Essays in Socialism* (1889), a best-selling collection of essays by members of the Fabian Society which is broadly regarded as a "signpost" to the twentieth-century welfare state (Briggs 15), Shaw emphasised that the development towards socialism was already underway; Britain was tending towards state socialism through the "gradual extension of the franchise" and the "transfer of rent and interest to the State [...] by instalments," processes overseen and driven on by "politicians who d[id] not dream that they [we]re touched with Socialism" ("Transition" 218). In other words, there was no need for any break with established institutions or values; British socialists need not engage in any course of action "supposed to be essentially un-English," like "guillotining" or "declaring the Rights of Man" (235). This was, in other words, a far cry from the anarchist tactic of the propaganda of the deed, which I discussed in my previous chapter.

[136] Sidney Webb and Sydney Olivier, who were colleagues in the Colonial Office at one stage, used to store Fabian records "on a table in Downing Street" (Pease 64). Reports produced by the Fabian committees, such as the Fabian Research Department's report on "State and Municipal Enterprise," are described by Margaret Cole as having had a quasi-official character (154–55).

[137] Sidney Webb became a London County Councillor in 1892. Leading Fabians were also part of the Labour Representation Committee of 1900, which evolved into the Labour Party. Beatrice Webb sat in the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress (1905–9), and was instrumental in the production of a Minority Report that has often been cited as an influential articulation of the idea of state welfare.

As a counter-point to confrontational revolutionary tactics, the Fabian strategy was one of "gradualism," or of administrative reform. The Fabians not only permeated official institutions, but they also created their own institutions in order to establish public administration as an area of scientific study and "to train the bureaucracy of a future collectivist England" (Halévy, 6: 266). Most notably, the Fabians established London School of Economics in 1895 as a laboratory of social science, and formed the magazine *New Statesman* in 1913—two prominent examples of Fabian "institution-building" (Duff 191). From 1884 to 1915, the Fabians also produced the so-called Fabian Tracts, a series of essayistic books, committee reports, and statistical compilations dealing with social and administrative questions. By training expert administrators and generally improving state institutions and expanding state welfare, the Fabians sought to demonstrate the improvability and plasticity of statehood, thus putting an end to what Shaw termed the "old bugbear of State imbecility," typified by the "Whig doctrinaires who accepted the incompetence and corruption of States as permanent inherent State qualities, like the acidity of lemons" ("Transition," 215–16).

Wells attended socialist meetings at William Morris's house as early as 1885, and frequently "trailed off to open meetings of the Fabian Society" during the late 1880s (*Experiment*, 193). He had, in other words, been a long-time observer of the Fabians by the time he met with the Webbs individually in 1902 (Pugh, *Educate*, 82). The Webbs found *Anticipations*, the first of Wells's socio-political essays, to be "very close to Fabian thinking" (MacKenzie and MacKenzie 323). In *Anticipations*, Wells focuses on the social consequences of emergent technologies of transport, arguing that extant "areas of administration" are outmoded and that an expansion of the scale of administration should be undertaken (100). Furthermore, *Anticipations* concludes with a chapter that prophesises the emergence of

> an unprecedented sort of people, a New Republic dominating the world. It will be none of our ostensible governments that will effect this great clearing up; it will be the mass of power and intelligence altogether outside the official state systems of to-day[.] (262)

It is easy to see how this vision of the rule of the intelligentsia might have appealed to a technocratic and quasi-official organisation such as the Fabian Society.

In a diary entry dating to December 1901, Beatrice Webb lauded *Anticipations* as "[t]he most remarkable book of the year: a powerful imagination furnished with the data and methods of physical science, working on social problems," but she also opined that Wells's "capacity for foreseeing the future machinery of government" was curtailed by his insufficient

"knowledge of social organizations" (*Our Partnership*, 226). That same month, Sidney Webb wrote Wells a letter in which he expressed his admiration for *Anticipations* whilst also offering constructive criticism:

> I want rather to take the liberty of inviting your attention to a side of your own 'anticipation' that you seem to undervalue, if not to ignore. [...] In the extremely complicated, densely-populated world on a large scale that you foretell, there must inevitably be a great deal of what is called 'administration.'" (Webb, *Letters*, 144)

Webb goes on to suggest that,

> I believe that along with your engineers and chemists in the dominant class of the future will be the trained administrator, the expert in organising men—equipped with Economics or a Sociology which will be as scientific, and as respected by his colleagues of other professions, as Chemistry or Mechanics. You seem to ignore this class. Its inclusion, and the influence of its studies on the other men of science, perhaps alters the colour of your picture at this place. It takes, for instance, more imagination to organize men than machines—even more poetry! (144)

Webb's suggestion that there was "poetry" involved in organisational-administrative work typifies his enterprising project of instilling administrative feeling in others, a project which Wells would very much make his own. In fact, Wells's imagination seems to have been sparked by Webb's message about the significance of attending to the "question of administration," a point that Wells reiterated in his first major publication as a member of the Fabian Society ("Paper," 275). However, it is perhaps telling that Wells declared, in a letter to Graham Wallas regarding a manuscript version of *Mankind in the Making*, that he did not wish to "follow details of administration too far" (*Correspondence*, 396).

Wells's caution in this regard was partly the product of the lecturing of the Webbs, which (though decidedly more successful than Conrad's attempts to convert Wells to the "New Form" school) did not necessarily have the desired effect. In his memoirs, Wells writes that the Webbs took up "the attitude of specialists towards a vexatious pupil" during their earliest meetings (*Experiment*, 210). This overbearing attitude is reflected in an entry in Beatrice Webb's diary on February 28, 1902, which laments Wells's "ignoran[ce]" regarding matters of state administration:

> he does not appreciate the need for a wide experience of men and affairs in administration. [...] [H]e does not see that specialized faculty and knowledge are needed for administration exactly as they are needed for the manipulation of machinery or [natural] forces. But he is extraordinarily quick in his apprehension, and took in all the points we gave him in our 48 hours' talk with him, first at his own house and then here. He is a good instrument for popularising ideas, and he gives as many ideas as he receives. (*Our Partnership*, 231)

Whilst Beatrice Webb felt that Wells had a lot to learn about administration from the Fabians, she also recognised that he was potentially "useful to gradgrinds like ourselves in supplying us with loose generalisations which we can use as instruments of research" (*Our Partnership*, 289). Indeed, the addition of Wells—who officially joined the Society in February 1903—was a major coup. Not only was Wells a literary giant who would bring much-needed publicity to the society, but his "thought" would ideally help rejuvenate and develop Fabian policies.

If a deeper understanding of administration was missing in his early essayistic volumes, then Wells developed this side of his thinking very quickly. Given Beatrice Webb's negative assessment of Wells as an administrative thinker, it is, indeed, ironic that his first paper as a member of the Fabian Society—a talk on the subject of "Administrative Areas" that was given in 1903—saw him upbraid the Fabians for neglecting to analyse administrative praxis, proclaiming that "[t]he more we are disposed to municipalize, the more incumbent it is upon us to search out, study, and invent, and to work to develop the most efficient public bodies possible" ("Paper," 402). Having begun this lecture by declaring himself eager to "municipalize"—and thereby nailing his colours to the Fabian mast—Wells expounded on the role of the state in a future socialist society. He emphasised that even a fully collectivised and democratised society would require expert administrative institutions ("you can't settle a railway time-table or make a bridge by public acclamation"), but he also maintained that official institutions were not *a priori* preferable to commercial enterprise:

> if you were to suggest some method of election that would produce officials that, on the whole, were likely to manage worse than private owners, and to waste more than the private owner's probable profits, I should say then by all means leave the service or concern in private hands. (401)[138]

This standpoint (which probably rankled with some of the Fabian municipalisers) indicates that Wells's statism was, at least at this point, fundamentally pragmatic as opposed to ideological. In other words, despite what critics have said to the contrary—with Michael Sherborne speaking for instance of Wells's unswerving "faith in the supreme competence of the state" (185)—Wells could occasionally display an awareness of the pitfalls of administrative mismanagement and a suspicion of unthinking statism. Indeed, Wells's thinking in fact oscillated between statist and state-critical positions; notably, in the essay

[138] Wells also debunks the dichotomous understanding of private and public, highlighting that there are gradations: "Even in our state to-day there are few private owners who have absolute freedom to do what they like with their possessions, and there are few public officials who have not a certain freedom and a certain sense of proprietorship in their departments" (402).

Socialism and the Family (1906), Wells averred that "[o]ne's dreamland perfection is Anarchy" (46).

Though Wells only owned a "transitory and never entirely harmonious marriage of minds" (Pugh, *Educate*, 95) between himself and the leading Fabians, there is considerable overlap between Fabian administrative socialism and Wellsian thought. However, the complex interplay between Fabian and Wellsian is often misconstrued. For instance, Goodlad reads Wells's "dream of a bureaucratic utopia" in *A Modern Utopia* as a mere expression of a short-lived Fabianism (10), when Wells's statism in fact exceeds the Fabian context. According to Wells, his statist imagination had its provenance in reading experiences that predated his exposure to Fabianism, Plato's *Republic* constituting his "first encounter with the Communist idea" (106, 141–42). Having won a scholarship to the Normal School of Science in Kensington, Wells "came full face upon Marxism" when he became an active member of the school's Debating Society (142). In 1886, notably, Wells gave a paper on "Democratic Socialism" at the debating society, in which he emphasised "the merging of the individual in the State" (MacKenzie and Mackenzie 64). Another potential source of inspiration for Wells's statism is Thomas Huxley, Wells's biology teacher at the Normal School. Back in 1871, Huxley had critiqued liberal anti-statism in an essay with the weighty title "Administrative Nihilism" that decried excessive anti-statism and emphasised the useful societal functions performed by the state (286). Huxley's essay also addressed the topic of international governance and, more specifically, the concept of the supranational state, proposing that "[i]f any number of States agree to observe a common set of international laws, they have, in fact, set up a sovereign authority or supra-national government" (285–86). Given that Huxley was a major influence on Wells in other aspects, it is quite possible that his ideas about public administration were instructive to Wells as well; the supranational state would become a cornerstone in Wells's utopian statist imagination, and Wells would also engage at length with the problem of moving his countrymen from laissez-faire "administrative nihilism" to a type of administrative feeling conducive to socialism.

However, whilst Wells certainly drew inspiration from various sources when writing *A Modern Utopia*, Fabianism was doubtlessly the most salient influence.[139] As suggested in previous chapters, there is a widespread scholarly tendency to take a depreciative view of

[139] See W. Boyd Rayward on the links between Wells and the European community of "documentalists" which centred on the International Institute of Bibliography founded in 1895 by Paul Otlet and Henri La Fontaine. Rayward suggests that Wells's thinking was "indebted" to the European documentation movement, but does not indicate whether Wells was aware of the documentalists' work prior to his contacts with the movement in the 1930s (234).

British writers' engagement with the theme of state bureaucracy. This tendency is manifest also in scholarship on Wells.[140] As indicated above, Goodlad dismisses *A Modern Utopia* on account of the Fabian influence, insisting that Wells "ultimately declined to affirm the Fabians' technocratic pastoral agenda," given his satirical depiction of the Webbs in *The New Machiavelli* (227). However, *The New Machiavelli* by no means represents Wells's final, conclusive position regarding administrative statecraft, nor even his last word on Fabianism. In fact, Wells continued to harbour decidedly Fabian "pastoral" inclinations long after leaving the Society. Moreover, it is not so much Fabian administrative socialism that Wells critiques in *The New Machiavelli*, as it is the Fabian strategy of gradualism and permeation. Indeed, the technocratic views that Wells attributes to the Fabians in *The New Machiavelli* "actually bear uncanny resemblance to his own," as Peter Beilharz observes (81). In short, there is no reason to privilege Wells's critique of Fabianism in *The New Machiavelli* over the Fabian-inspired administrative utopianism of *A Modern Utopia* or to regard the latter as a mere expression of a short-lived and imitative interest in administrative statecraft.

As indicated above, *A Modern Utopia* is in part an expression of Fabian administrative socialism, but is also decidedly more expansive in outlook. That is, in *A Modern Utopia*, Wells's statist socialism and his belief in scientific-technological progress are combined in a vision of a technology-powered administrative system that far outstrips any Fabian vision of the future. Indeed, whilst *A Modern Utopia* has been characterised as a "Fabian Utopia" (Morton 250), the term "Fabian Utopia" is essentially an oxymoron, given that the Fabians defined their gradualist policies in opposition to the tradition of revolutionary and utopian socialism.[141] For the Fabians, "[p]ublic administration [...] replaced 'utopianism,'" as Beilharz aptly puts it (56). The Fabians were a part of a broader "construction of so-called scientific socialism" in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, a brand of socialism based upon the principles of Marx's historical materialism (Beilharz 1). In *Socialism in England* (1890), Sidney Webb firmly rejected the very concept of ideal societies on the grounds that societies

[140] The scholarly readiness to downplay Wells's statism is typified by Warren Wagar suggestion that "[c]ritics should always feel a keen reluctance to apply the word 'state' to Wells' Utopia, although Wells himself now and then talked about the 'world state'" (211). This dismissive "now and then" is an understatement to say the least. Supra-national administrative statecraft in fact constitutes Wells's overriding concern as a writer, thinker, and campaigner from *A Modern Utopia* and onwards. Similarly, Goodlad reads *A Modern Utopia* against the grain, sensing "liberal allegiances" and a "distaste for statism") in Wells's utopian vision and construing it as one of "quasi-dystopian statism" (*Victorian*, 223–24, 241).

[141] The Fabians were not always dead-set against utopianism. In May 1907, the Fabian Executive Committee asked Wells to edit a series of Utopian texts from Plato to the present, with introductions by Fabian writers (Pugh, *Educate*, 91).

are "dynamic" rather than "static," and that socio-political change was for that reason necessarily gradual (5).

The administrative utopianism of *A Modern Utopia* thus constitutes a radical departure from the core tenets of the Fabian Society. As Halévy puts it, Wells "revived the Utopianism [...] which the Fabians [...] had attepted to banish" (5: 360). However, Wells followed the Fabians in framing his conception of socialism in scientific terms; notably, in 1907 (towards the end of his active membership in the Fabian Society) Wells wrote that "[s]ocialism is the scientifically organised State" (*Correspondence*, 156). But Wells could not accept the Fabian interdict against speculative blueprints, objecting to their Marxist "repudiation of and antagonism to plans and arrangements" ("Great State," 110). Indeed, Wells believed that statist utopian schemes could be elaborated in a scientific fashion. Thus, rather than wilfully contradicting Fabian doctrines, Wells's administrative utopianism reads as an attempted synthesis of utopianism and Fabianism. As Kohlmann writes, Wells frames his utopian fiction—a genre otherwise closely linked to the idea of the revolution—in "the reformist register of slow politics" (Kohlmann, *British*, 157). Taking his cue from Sidney Webb, Wells emphasises that his modern utopia is dynamic, or "kinetic," rather than static (*Modern*, 5).

The self-proclaimed scientificity of Wells's futurological method consisted in arriving at a "knowledge of coming things" by uncovering the "laws of social and political development" (*Discovery*, 33).[142] In *A Modern Utopia*, Wells speculates about the potential applications of new administrative technologies in combination with new modes of long-distance travel. That is not to say that Wells's futurological essayistic novel is drily scientific or bluebookish in style. In writing *A Modern Utopia*, as Wells declares in his preface, he eschewed the seriousness of the argumentative essay for a looser form and more playful style. Gary Saul Morson characterises *A Modern Utopia* as a "meta-utopia," highlighting Wells's use of literary devices such as humour, tonal shifts, and ironic meta-commentary to satirise and destabilise the conventions of the genre of utopian fiction (153–55). Morson observes that Wells alternates "utopian formulae with ironic discussions of those formulae, discussions that generally have the effect of parody" (150). And yet, Wells's ironical meta-commentary does not undermine the futurological analysis, but instead creates a critical distance between the utopian scheme and its narrativisation.

A Modern Utopia came at the end of a period when British literature was "permeated with anticipatory or utopian consciousness," and is often read as the "postscript" to this

[142] On Wells and futurology, see Tim Armstrong 11.

literary epoch (Beaumont 3, 13). Wells situates his decidedly meta-textual essayistic novel in relation to the most significant utopian fiction from this period, referencing novels such as Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888) and William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890). These two *fin-de-siècle* precursors are highly germane to the present discussion of Wells's administrative utopianism given that they epitomise two conflicting strands in Anglophone utopian socialism during the period. On the one hand, Bellamy's *Looking Backward* famously advocates for state socialism, meaning a fully nationalised industry and large-scale central administration; Morris, on the other hand, was a firm believer in socialism without centralised large-scale government. In a trenchant 1889 review of *Looking Backward* in the socialist magazine *Commonweal*, Morris contended that "the unit of administration" in a socialist future has to be "small enough for every citizen to feel himself responsible for its details, and be interested in them"—"individual men cannot shuffle off the business of life on to the shoulders of an abstraction called the State, but must deal with it in conscious association with each other" ("Looking," 195). Shortly after reviewing *Looking Backward*, Morris wrote *News from Nowhere*, precisely to challenge and improve upon Bellamy's utopian vision. Morris envisioned a future society that had broken entirely with modern administrative state culture, to the degree that it had converted "Parliament House into a dung-market" (107).

News from Nowhere doubled as a critique of the Fabian brand of socialism, which, for Morris, was considerably closer to home than Bellamy's writings. To begin with, there were close ties between the Fabians and the Socialist League (1885–1901), in which Morris played a leading role, but the two societies clashed regarding their analyses of the state, with the Socialist League leaning increasingly towards anarchist politics. Wells's *A Modern Utopia* was, in most respects, closer to Bellamy's vision of centralised administration than to Morris's model of local governance; indeed, Wells went one step further than Bellamy in drastically expanding the "administrative unit" (which Morris wanted to minimize) by envisioning an administrative state that transcended the national frame. Moreover, Wells's utopian imagination differs from both of these utopian texts in and by its emphasis on the radically transformative potential of administrative technology. As an early example of a techno-utopia, then, Wells's modern utopia was, in many respects, its own breed, transcending both the Fabian context and literary antecedents.

From "Mammoth Municipality" to World State

It was not only the utopian inflection of Wells's administrative socialism that was at odds with Fabian gradualism, but also the very scale of his utopian schemes. Already in *The Discovery of the Future* (1902), a frustrated Wells proclaimed that "all our public affairs are cramped by local boundaries impossibly restricted and small" (19–20). In the same essay, Wells predicted that, at some point in the future, "humanity w[ould] be definitely and conscientiously organizing itself as a great world state" (51). As a member of the Fabian Society, Wells would continue to explore this idea of expanding state spaces, both locally and internationally. In fact, Wells's conceptualisation of the administrative world state appears to have evolved out of "Administrative Areas," the first talk he gave to the Fabian Society, in which he argued that the Fabian "working theory of local government" had overlooked the problem of the size of administrative areas ("Paper," 405). Wells argued that an expansion of the areas of local government (town councils, urban district boards, etc.) had become necessary as a result of processes of "delocalisation," a term that Wells coined in this talk to denote increasing social mobility and interconnectedness resulting from improved means of transport and communication (Garside and Young 109). Wells criticised the Fabians for uncritically accepting outmoded administrative systems that had come to hamper the large-scale organisation of public utilities such as water supply, sewage, electricity, communications, and public lighting. For this reason, Wells encouraged the Fabians to set their sights on a new type of "mammoth municipality"—"[m]unicipalize on this scale, I would say, and I am with you altogether", he declared ("Paper," 416–17).

The Fabian Society responded to Wells's forceful critique, which had the character of an ultimatum, by appointing a Committee on Local Government to consider the issue of administrative areas. Wells sat on the board of the committee, and was involved in producing a series of pamphlets titled *The New Heptarchy* that propagated for a form of administrative regionalism (Pugh, *Educate*, 86; McBriar 232).[143] The first publication in this series was *Municipalization by Provinces* (1905), a report which echoed Wells's paper in observing that Britain's administrative regions were outdated, and that "movements and aggregations of population pa[id] no heed to municipal landmarks, not even to those fixed by the L.C.C." (2, 4). Though Wells later grumbled that the reference to heptarchy (the seven early modern Anglo-Saxon kingdoms) in the title of this series of tracts was "picturesque, silly, and

[143] The term New Heptarchy alludes to the period of the Saxon Heptarchy when there were seven Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. This feudal structure, then, served as a model of sorts for the form of administrative regionalism that Wells and the Fabians wished to promote.

misleading" (*After Democracy*, 7), the title in fact closely resembles those of *A Modern Utopia* and *The New Machiavelli*, which invoke classic political models in promoting transformative statist ideas.

The committee concluded that larger cities should be regarded as "centres" rather than as "self-contained" administrative units (5). This recommendation clearly evolved out of the proposal that Wells had put forth in his paper to create a greater administrative unit even than London County, which would include "the whole system of [...] the London-centred population" (415). Importantly, by incorporating Wells's concept of administrative expansion, the Fabians ensured that it "gradually came to be seen as practical politics," paving the way for the "formation of a Greater London authority" (Garside and Young 110–11).[144] In his memoirs, Wells observes that his idea of the mammoth municipality was "Fabianized in a tract," but that "[t]he association of the rank and file of the Socialist movement with contemporary political hopes and ambitions was [...] too close to admit of any really bold and thorough pursuit of this idea" (*Experiment*, 210). Wells goes on to write that he was "baffled for a time by this tepid reception of my bright idea by my Fabian teachers," and that this lukewarm reception provoked his subsequent elaboration of this idea in his literary work: "since it could find no adequate outlet in any modification of Fabian policy, it expressed itself in a fantastic story, *The Foods of the Gods* (1903–4) [...]. And in my *Modern Utopia* (1905), I took the inevitability of a world-state for granted" (211). Wells's advocacy for mammoth municipalities as a member of the Fabian society thus prefigured the more extreme articulation of this idea in *A Modern Utopia*, where the envisioned administrative area was itself drastically expanded.

In *A Modern Utopia*, Wells valorised large-scale administration not only as the solution to problems relating to urban sprawl, but also to international and planetary forms of delocalisation. This was the beginning of Wells's "tireless campaign" for "a new form of political organisation, the world state, to which the adjective 'Wellsian' has frequently been attached" (Parrinder, *Shadows*, 18). Whilst Wells's politics has rightly been criticised on many points—as Kohlmann notes, Wells's writings are "often associated with the potentially coercive aspects of turn-of-the-century statism," especially given his interest in eugenics (*British*, 177)—Wells's emphasis on internationalism is regarded as an "important contribution to the history of utopian thought" (Haynes 92), and indeed to early-twentieth-century international political organisation (Bell 867; Deudney 190–91; Partington 2).

[144] Wells later noted that the Fabians "applied" his analysis to various "group[s] of administrative problems," including Poor Law administration (*New Worlds*, 274).

Roslynn Haynes observes that Wells did not change his views on international politics significantly after *A Modern Utopia*, but only "refined them and speculated on various methods for setting up a world state" (91). In other words, according to Haynes, the "Wellsian utopia" constitutes a "relatively homogenous concept" (91). Whilst Haynes rightly stresses Wells's long-standing interest in the idea of a world state, the emphasis on the homogeneity of Wells's articulations of this idea risks obscuring the fact that its *raison d'être* shifted markedly: Wells initially conceived of the world state as a way of harnessing the perceived utopian potential of free international mobility and administrative technology—then, with the outbreak of WWI, Wells repurposed or reimagined supranational governance as an alternative to warring nations.[145]

Wells was not the first utopian writer to propose a world state, notwithstanding his declaration in *A Modern Utopia* that "[t]he old Utopias were all localised" (47). Global statehood had been envisioned earlier by writers such as Thomas Carlyle, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Havelock Ellis (Haynes 104). Moreover, Maxim Shadurski suggests that the "initial stirrings" of Wells's concept of a world state can be found already in his 1898 novel *The War of the Worlds* (1). *A Modern Utopia* differs from these other turn-of-the-century imaginings of the world state primarily through Wells's idiosyncratic combination of Fabian administrative socialism and planetary utopianism, which involved a detailed delineation of the practicalities of administering "a state so vast and complex as this world Utopia" (70).

Wells's major revision of statehood in *A Modern Utopia*—the remodelling of the nation-state into a world state—highlights the plasticity of the concept of statehood. Here, it is interesting to note the looseness of Wells's use of the term "the state," especially in later writings. Wells frequently remarked upon this himself, as when he conceded, in the essay "The Great State" (1914), that "[i]t will be possible for anyone to argue that what is here defined as [...] the Great State is indeed no state at all" (95).[146] Whilst Wells would at times move away from the concept of the state as a set of institutional apparatuses, this is hardly the case with the remoulding of statehood in *A Modern Utopia*, in which administrative structures similar to those of the imperial British state are put to radically new uses.

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[145] Wells became a leading advocate for supranational peace-keeping during WWI. In *The Idea of a League of Nations* (1919), he observes that, "[u]nder the lurid illumination of the world-war, the idea of world-unification has passed rapidly from the sphere of the literary idealist into that of the methodical, practical man" (6). Moreover, during WWII, Wells formulated an early declaration of human rights in *The Rights of Man* (1940), which laid the groundwork for the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948).

[146] In the essay "The Great State," Wells writes: "[w]e propose to use the term The Great State to express this ideal of a social system no longer localised, no longer immediately tied to and conditioned by the cultivation of the land, world wide in its interests and outlook and catholic in its tolerance and sympathy" (119).

In *A Modern Utopia*, Wells outlines a model of supranational governance fit for the task of sustaining a "world without boundaries, with a population largely migratory and emancipated from locality" (45, 79). This seemingly intuitive combination of utopianism and borderlessness is, in fact, atypical of the utopian literary tradition, in which, as Aaron Santesso notes, one rarely finds "optimistic speculation about the breaking down of borders" but rather the introduction of hard-line borders (329). In Wells's utopia, conversely, travel is "in the common texture of life" (43). Wells's world citizens lead itinerant lives of generalised bourgeois comfort and ease. Everywhere there are "convenient inns, at least as convenient and trustworthy as those of [turn-of-the-century] Switzerland," and the trains are "as comfortable as a good club," endowed with "librar[ies] with abundant armchairs and couches" (44–6; 240). This comfy globetrotting lifestyle represents one of the main selling-points for Wells's utopia. Wells argues that increased international travelling and supranational organisation will solve a host of "local" issues such as xenophobia, unemployment, and metropolitan congestion, phenomena that are dismissed as mere symptoms of "an awkward transitory phase" in the early stages of the "travel age of mankind" (45). In his most bullish formulations, Wells presents supranational organisation as a panacea for all social issues caused by processes of delocalisation. However, Wells simultaneously describes planetary organisation as a matter of necessity: "[n]o less than a planet will serve the purpose of a modern Utopia" (11). Wells briefly considers the possibility of local utopian projects in remote areas of Central Africa and South America—in Wells's words, the "last refuges of ideality"—but he quickly dismisses the local utopia as unfeasible (12). In short, Wells proposes that processes of delocalisation catalysed by technological invention have altered the conditions for utopian community-building, rendering local utopias untenable.

Wells's analysis speaks to Scott's observation that the rise and global spread of the nation-state ultimately tends towards the "complete elimination of nonstate spaces" (*Art*, 10–1). This idea of the ubiquity of "state space" undergirds Wells's notion of a world state with its concomitant "unavoidable citizenship" (*Modern*, 31). Wells's world state system is purportedly all-embracing, and yet there are also pockets of non-state space, geographical areas that possess some degree of externality to the system. Recognising that a certain experience or freedom is lost in a global surveillance state, Wells devises a scheme whereby the elite administrative class, the so-called "samurai," may venture beyond state space:

> Certain great areas are set apart for these yearly pilgrimages beyond the securities of the State. There are thousands of square miles of sandy desert in Africa and Asia set apart; much of the Arctic and Antarctic circles; vast areas of mountain

> land and frozen marsh; secluded reserves of forest, and innumerable unfrequented lines upon the sea. Some are dangerous and laborious routes; some merely desolate; and there are even some sea journeys that one may take in the halcyon days as one drifts through a dream. Upon the seas one must go in a little undecked sailing boat, that may be rowed in a calm; all the other journeys one must do afoot, none aiding. There are, about all these desert regions and along most coasts, little offices at which the samurai says good-bye to the world of men, and at which they arrive after their minimum time of silence is overpast. (304)

This recuperative trip—the exercise of going "clean out of the world"—is designed to "secure a certain stoutness of heart and body in the members of the order" (303–4). In other words, the Samurai are afforded a taste of the "wilderness" that upholds the last vestiges of non-state space, because they need the experience of a temporary escape from the planetary administrative state culture.

If this annual cathartic pilgrimage is a privilege as well as a duty of the ruling class, then people at the opposite end of Wells's surprisingly stratified utopia are instead expelled from the state to quasi-external spaces. That is, Wells's utopian state deports certain types of serial offenders to semi-independent penal colonies:

> the State will give these segregated failures just as full a liberty as they can have. If it interferes any further it will be simply to police the islands against the organisation of serious cruelty, to maintain the freedom of any of the detained who wish it to transfer themselves to other islands, and so to keep a check upon tyranny. The insane, of course, will demand care and control, but there is no reason why the islands of the hopeless drunkard, for example, should not each have a virtual autonomy, have at the most a Resident and a guard. (144–45)

In addition to the externalised islands of the insane and of the drunkards, there is also the "Island of Incurable Cheats," a place for gamblers and thieves, with graceful casinos, public lotteries, and, of course, comfortable inns (145). These are not places of correction, but rather places where like-minded criminals can enjoy "virtual autonomy," albeit moderated by the world state, a model akin to the British colonial penal practice of "transportation" to Australia during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. There are, in other words, gradations and partitions in the global territory of the world state; the world state has designed or retained certain types of spaces that are external to the administrative system.

"Organised Clairvoyance": Borderlessness and the Biometric Index

As indicated above, Wells's reasoning was "futurological" in the sense that he arrived at his predictions by extrapolating from ongoing socio-cultural and technological developments. In

A Modern Utopia, Wells took the rise of European tourism as a foretoken of more widespread delocalisation, claiming that the rest of the world would soon follow the English middle class in becoming "habitually migratory" (43). Here it is important to remember that the second half of the nineteenth century represented something of a "golden age" of international mobility in Europe (Feldman 167). Not only was there a "boom in global migration rates" (Szreter 244), but European nation-states had yet to establish rigorous methods of border control. During this period of largely unchecked international mobility throughout Europe, British border control was exceptionally lax. In the second half of the nineteenth century, following the repeal of the controversial passport system adopted during the Napoleonic Wars, the British state made virtually no attempt to monitor its borders or its immigrant population (Feldman 167)—people arriving from abroad "simply disembarked," without any obligations "to notify the authorities, to register with the police, or to conform to special rules" (Marrus 19).

Borderlessness was, in other words, both a utopian ideal and a rather mundane actuality when Wells wrote *A Modern Utopia*. Indeed, Wells's prediction that the whole world would one day become as "open and accessible and as safe for the wayfarer as France or England is to-day" speaks volumes about his historical vantage-point (44). It was not until during the First World War that border control was strengthened to the point that "the idea of open frontiers [became] impossibly strange" (Harvey 265). However, much as Wells's utopian ideas are a product of a comparative "golden" age of relatively unrestricted international mobility, they also foreshadow modes of mobility control that became dominant over the latter half of the twentieth century. In fact, when Wells wrote *A Modern Utopia*, the curtain was already falling on the prospect of open borders, and his utopian vision thus needs to be understood partly in terms of European nation-states' increasing "monopolisation of the legitimate means of movement" (Torpey 7), and as a literary expression of this "age of experimentation" in European migration control (Fahrmeir, Faron, and Weil 2).

In *A Modern Utopia*, Wells expresses an intense disdain for "earthly statesmanship" which fails to realise that "all local establishments, all definitions of place, are even now melting under our eyes" (162).[147] Wells's utopians have, in short, ceased "yapping about nationality" (109). This critique of nationalist state-building underlines the pronounced cosmopolitanism of *A Modern Utopia*, with which Wells was intervening in a socio-political climate of mounting nationalism and xenophobia. The topicality of border control in turn-of-

[147] See Shadurski for a discussion of the "complex entanglement" of nationalism and cosmopolitanism in Wells's utopian fiction (56).

the-century British public debate is rarely noted in Wells scholarship; however, in 1905, the year that *A Modern Utopia* was published, Britain passed a new Aliens Act, ending its notoriously liberal policies of border control. Crucially, at a time when Britain and other nation-states were on the cusp of bringing about more rigorous border regimes, Wells responded by stressing the "rich socio-political consequences of enabling freedom of movement," as Chi-She Li observes (122). And yet, Wells's advocacy of open borders was not premised on liberal, anti-statist grounds; Wells wished to do away with nationalism and border controls, but in their place he wanted to build a supranational state operating a global system of personal identification.

Reconfiguring statehood along planetary lines, Wells's utopian scheme points forwards to the era of "post-Westphalian" state-building, with the dissolution of nation-state sovereignty as a result of increasing globalisation (Brown, *Walled*, 39).[148] At the same time, the global documentation and identification practices that Wells describes in *A Modern Utopia* answer to administrative issues similar to those that Martineau addressed in the context of the Poor Law reforms of the 1830s. It is hardly coincidental that Wells compares his utopian scheme of global administration to the "British institution of the workhouse," which, Wells argues, might have served its purpose in the job market were it not that it was "administered parochially, and on the supposition that all population is static and localised" (*Modern*, 139). As noted in my second chapter, two different identification mechanisms suggested themselves to Martineau: first, using the deterring effect of workhouses to identify those truly in need, and, second, professionalising and centrally coordinating the administration of poor relief. Wells's "techno-utopian" administrative model instead relies upon emergent administrative technologies of fingerprinting and centralised registries, tools which were not at hand in the 1830s. In *A Modern Utopia*, Wells declares that processes of delocalisation have long since vitiated the "homely methods of identification that served in the little communities of the past when everyone knew everyone," giving way to an urban modernity in which "undistinguished men who adopt an alias can make themselves untraceable with the utmost ease" (163, 166). However, by combining two administrative technologies of identification and surveillance that were emerging at this time—biometrics and central registries—Wells conceived of a "scheme by which every person in the world [could] be promptly and certainly recognised, and by which anyone missing [could] be traced and found" (163). There would, in other words, be no room for the type of wily manoeuvres

[148] Elsewhere, I have argued that Wells's concept of an administrative world state presages developments in 21st century mobility control, such as the European Union's Schengen cooperation ("Organised Clairvoyance").

that Martineau's Pleasance Nudd enacts in order to dupe parish overseers in *Poor Laws and Paupers Illustrated*.

When fingerprinting was introduced in Britain, this technology was primarily viewed as a forensic tool and as a means of ascertaining the track record of criminals. However, Francis Galton's *Fingerprints* (1892) drew Wells's attention to the broader potential uses of this technology (McLean 164). In *A Modern Utopia*, Wells repurposed fingerprinting as a means of personal identification, suggesting that transparent "index cards" containing fingerprints could be used to circulate biometric information throughout a planetary administrative system. Pairing fingerprinting with the idea of the central register, Wells imagined a "system of indexing humanity" that the world state would use to "watch its every man," likening this surveillance system to a form of "organised clairvoyance" (172, 164–65). Wells suggested that "each human being could be given a distinct formula, a number or 'scientific name,' under which he or she could be docketed" (164). According to Wells, a world state that employed such an "index" of "scientific names" would be able to harness the radical utopian potential that inheres in widespread international mobility, thus completing the transition into the "travel age of mankind." This, then, is the "novum," or society-altering technological innovation, that qualifies Wells's novel as a work of (administrative) science fiction (Suvin 80). In other words, the utopians of *A Modern Utopia* are "emancipated from locality" by the very precision and reach of the surveillance state, which "watch[es] its every man [and] record[s] movement hither and thither" (163–64). Ironically, Wells later reproached the Fabians for assuming that socialism could be achieved through the creation of a "good filing system" (Marsden 20–1), and yet, his entire utopian scheme was built upon the foundation of a pre-digital biometric database.[149]

Wells's conceptualisation of administrative statecraft was radical for its time. The introduction of central registries and identification technology was staunchly resisted throughout the nineteenth century by British state institutions. The notion of a central register was perceived as a "symbol of oppressive bureaucracy" antithetical to the British "national identity" (Agar 85, 135). It was only with the introduction of old age pension in 1908, and of national health and unemployment insurance in 1911, that the British government began to

[149] For a discussion of whether this type of pre-digital administrative database was "materially realizable," see Agar 136. A contemporaneous example may be found in the radical architecture of the Larkin Administration Building in Buffalo, "a building that was effectively a giant filing and card-indexing system," designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and opened in 1906 (Luckhurst 238).

"collect information on all its citizens" (Fyfe 574).[150] Wells recognises that the management of a global biometric database would "necessarily involve a vast amount of book-keeping"—and yet, he suggests that "colossal task though it would be," it would not be "so great as to be immeasurably beyond comparison with the work of the post-offices in the world of to-day" (*Modern*, 77, 163).[151] Wells pictures a comprehensive informational network consisting of ubiquitous substations connected to a central index that would be "housed in a vast series of buildings at or near Paris"—this due to "the distinctive lucidity of the French mind"—but which could equally be "housed quite comfortably on one side of Northumberland Avenue" (163).

Seeking to inspire administrative feeling, Wells renders the biometric database in a particularly painterly style, with colourful and arresting images such as that of "organised clairvoyance." In one of several decidedly lyrical and expressive passages about the envisioned administrative network, Wells glories in a description of its main engine room:

> A little army of attendants would be at work upon this index day and night. From sub-stations constantly engaged in checking back thumb-marks and numbers, an incessant stream of information would come, of births, of deaths, of arrivals at inns, [...] of applications for public doles and the like. A filter of offices would sort the stream, and all day and all night for ever a swarm of clerks would go to and fro correcting this central register, and photographing copies of its entries for transmission to the subordinate local stations, in response to their inquiries. So the inventory of the State would watch its every man and the wide world write its history as the fabric of its destiny flowed on. At last, when the citizen died, would come the last entry of all, his age and the cause of his death and the date and place of his cremation, and his card would be taken out and passed on to the universal pedigree, to a place of greater quiet, to the ever-growing galleries of the records of the dead. (164)

Here, planetary surveillance is framed as a gloriously Herculean task, in a proto-Futurist celebration of an administrative system capable of keeping track of a global population. This administrative lyricism—a concentration of metaphoric language ("stream of information," "swarm of clerks")—reads as an attempt on Wells's part to move his readers not only through argumentation, but also by way of expressive language.[152] In this respect, and in the subject

[150] Census returns for individual households were filed by the GRO from 1841, but this was done for the purpose of enumerating the population rather than for keeping returns for future retrieval, and for this reason, these census files "cannot be regarded as a database of information on individuals" (Fyfe 574).

[151] Wells frequently compared his utopian world administration to the post office, but another source of inspiration was undoubtedly the imperial system, which impressed Wells, and other members of the Fabian Society, by its "smoothness" and "order" (Morton 240). Indeed, Duncan Bell describes Wells's ideas about universal order as the "apotheosis of the nineteenth century conception of empire" (870).

[152] The phrase "stream of information" has, of course, become a collocation or set phrase; it is debatable whether it would have been received as such—and not so much as a vivid metaphor—already in Wells's day.

matter itself, Wells's account of the central "inventory of the State" is reminiscent of George Augustus Sala's midcentury journalistic sketch of London's Great Red Book in *Household Words* (see my discussion in chapter three), which similarly poeticises the management of an official inventory of a population. These expressions of "sublime bureaucracy," to borrow Sullivan's expression, stand in direct opposition to Dickens's figuration of bureaucratic systems as grotesquely overdimensioned, showing the breadth of affective registers in which administrative statecraft was treated in long-nineteenth-century British literature. As with the writers discussed in previous chapters, Wells's creative imagination as a writer of administrative fiction was devoted in part to finding a new language for writing the state. Whereas Dickens and Conrad's representation of state institutions contributed to what Foucault terms "the lyricism of the cold monster" (*Security*, 109), Wells, like Martineau, sought to arouse administrative feeling, a passion for the state.

"Tramps in this Admirable World": Wells's Bureaucratic Horror Story

The formal hybridity of *A Modern Utopia* has shaped its critical reception, dividing scholarly and critical opinions as to how the text should be classified and what its strengths are. When discussing the demerits of *A Modern Utopia*, certain scholars emphasise the "textual and imaginative qualities, rather than its political ideas" (Parrinder, *Shadows*, 97), whereas others suggest that *A Modern Utopia* "makes only a token gesture towards a story" (Haynes 88), highlighting the novel's "lack of narrative interest" (Sherborne 165) and "doubtful literary merit" (Beaumont 6).[153] In other words, scholars have alternately downplayed the narrative component of the book and the political analysis. In a bid to move beyond this critical impasse, I wish to explore how the "philosophical discussion" in *A Modern Utopia* shapes the "imaginative narrative," producing new narrative tropes that reinforce, but also contradict and destabilise, Wells's utopian scheme. In this section, I will spotlight the ways in which Wells incorporated the characteristic tropes of the bureaucratic horror story, in and by foregrounding the complications and struggles that an administrative state culture holds for non-bureaucrats.

The phrase was used already in 1861, by an anonymous contributor to *The British Quarterly Review*, in a piece about parliamentary information management with the heading "The Government Machine" (190).

[153] In late-nineteenth-century utopian fiction more broadly, according to Judith Shklar, the utopian imaginary society was "merely a device to popularize social ideas"—"[t]here was nothing in [utopian fiction] that could not have been better presented in a political manifesto or in a systematic treatise" (109); even a talented story-teller such as Wells failed to "save the genre," Shklar declares (110). Whilst I am hesitant to affirm Shklar's position, I would say that it is supported by the fact that Wells incorporated elements of the scientific romance and the bureaucratic horror story into *A Modern Utopia* when seeking to create an exciting narrative.

As Simon James puts it, a utopian society is "intrinsically non-narratable" in the sense that it "needs its perfection to be disrupted to generate the text that will articulate it" (137).[154] Building on James's discussion of the "irruption of the narratable into *A Modern Utopia*" (137), I will argue that the Dickensian bureaucratic horror story serves the purpose of making Wells's administrative utopia "narratable." At the same time, this mode of narrativisation undermines the very utopian-ness of his future society.

What is most noteworthy about the slender narrative component of *A Modern Utopia* is, indeed, the fact that it is a thriller about supranational surveillance. The narrative begins with a mysterious case of inter-world travel. Wells's first-person narrator—"the Owner of the Voice"—and his friend—"the botanist"—are out mountaineering in the Swiss Alps, discussing utopianism, when they are suddenly transported, through some inexplicable mechanism, to a planet "[o]ut beyond Sirius" that is identical to Earth and inhabited by utopian doubles of the people on Earth—a world that, somewhat confusingly, also represents a vision of Earth in the year 2100 (12). This sets the stage for a story in which the two earthlings gradually familiarise themselves with the ins and outs of the utopian world-system. At the beginning of this journey of discovery, the protagonists (especially the first-person narrator) are filled with rapturous appreciation of the wonders of the utopian system. However, their enjoyment turns into existential fear as they begin to realise that they are at the mercy of an unfamiliar and powerful administrative state.

The arrival of the protagonists as undetected foreigners in utopia introduces an element of much-needed dramatic suspense. The earthlings are initially wary of disclosing their status as foreigners, feeling "grave solicitude about their personal freedom" (*Modern*, 31). The narrator muses that "[t]owards the Stranger […] the Utopias of the past displayed their least amiable aspect": "Would this new sort of Utopian State, spread to the dimensions of a world, be any less forbidding?" (31). These misgivings prove more than warranted: while the earthlings are treated hospitably in utopia, their otherworldy origin effectively excludes them from the otherwise open and inclusive planetary society. The crux of the matter is that everything in Wells's utopia revolves around practices of personal identification and that the earthlings have no documentary presence in the utopian database, nor any "bit of a flying machine or a space travelling sphere" to support claims of interplanetary travel (133). The protagonist is lucid about their predicament:

[154] Conversely, dystopian narratives are shaped by the "theme of individual resistance to state power [that] offers a ready-made source of drama and narrative tension that utopias lack" (Parrinder, *Utopian*, 6).

> The thing of the moment is that we find ourselves in the position—not to put too fine a point upon it—of tramps in this admirable world. The question of all others of importance to us at present is what do they do with their tramps? Because sooner or later […] whatever they do with their tramps that they will do with us. (133–34)

Given the precarious situation of these two "tramps"—an expression which brings to mind the 1824 Vagrancy Act, which was still in force in Edwardian Britain—Wells's narrative becomes more than a pretext for describing the utopian world; the earthlings are not only discovering utopia, but they are also trying to avoid being discovered by the world state.

Wells's visitors in utopia soon realise that they are dealing with a remarkably powerful state that has "an eye so sensitive and alert that two strangers cannot appear anywhere upon the planet without discovery" (172). The earthlings get their first taste of the utopian surveillance apparatus when they are required to identify themselves on leaving an inn. Whilst book-signing was common practice in continental inns in the early twentieth century, in *A Modern Utopia*, guests staying at any of the comfortable utopian inns are presented with "a slab, upon which ink has been freshly smeared" (109). Acting impulsively, Wells's protagonists try to trick the system of identification:

> "Thumbmarks," says my scientific friend hastily in English.
>
> "You show me how to do it," I say as quickly.
>
> He signs first, and I look over his shoulder.
>
> He is displaying more readiness than I should have expected. The book is ruled in broad transverse lines, and has a space for a name, for a number, and a thumbmark. He puts his thumb upon the slab and makes the thumbmark first with the utmost deliberation. Meanwhile he studies the other two entries. The 'numbers' of the previous guests above are complex muddles of letters and figures. He writes his name, then with a calm assurance writes down his number, A.M.a.1607.2.αβ⊕. I am wrung with momentary admiration. I follow his example, and fabricate an equally imposing signature. We think ourselves very clever. (108–9)

Having recorded these bogus identifiers in the innkeeper's book, they hurry away from the scene, leaving the innkeeper scrutinising their entries and watching them "doubtfully" (109). Afterwards, they regret this invention of "ridiculous sham numbers," through which they have potentially incriminated themselves (223). The "readiness" of the protagonist's companion is noteworthy; the fact that the earthlings are capable of this type of impromptu manoeuvre indicates that they have an intuitive grasp of identification practices and administrative systems. They are not victimised by bureaucratic naivety *à la* many of Dickens's characters—they are instead coming to grips with a more advanced administrative state culture using what they know about bureaucracy from back home.

The two earthlings seek to avoid "trouble with the authorities," but are ultimately forced to visit a labour bureau in order to find a source of income (133). Here they engage in further subterfuge and dissimulation: "[t]he public office of Utopia would of course contain a few surprises for two men from terrestrial England. You imagine us entering, the botanist lagging a little behind me, and my first attempts to be offhand and commonplace in a demand for work" (156). In this intriguing extraterrestrial variation of the chronotope of meeting, the bureaucratic literacy of the protagonists is put to the test. When asked for identification, the narrator invents a story about how their papers were lost in an accident, "astonish[ing]" himself by "the readiness of [his] answer" (157). There is a sense of exhilaration and bravado in the protagonist's show of bureaucratic agency, his daring ploy of masking their true origins.[155]

When the functionaries at the public office question the earthlings about their missing papers and identification numbers, the protagonist ultimately confesses,

> we come from another world. Consequently, whatever thumb-mark registration or numbering you have in this planet doesn't apply to us, and we don't know our numbers because we haven't got any. We are really, you know, explorers, strangers[.] (160)

The utopian official rejects this explanation as nonsense, and continues to press them for their papers. The protagonist therefore decides to show him the type of documents in his possession:

> "And as for papers—! Where in your world have you seen papers like this?"
>
> I produce my pocket-book, extract my passport, and present it to him.
>
> His expression has changed. He takes the document and examines it, turns it over, looks at me, and smiles that faint smile of his again.
>
> [...]
>
> I follow up that blow with my green British Museum ticket, as tattered as a flag in a knight's chapel. (160–61)

As seen, the protagonist brandishes his documents in protest against the utopian official's incredulity. The contrast that is wrought between the earthly passport—"chequered with visas and addressed in my commendation and in the name of her late Majesty by We, Robert Arthur Talbot Gascoigne Cecil, Marques of Salisbury, Early of Salisbury, Viscount Cranborne, Baron Cecil, and so forth, to all whom it may concern"—and worn cards, on the one hand, and the high-tech utopian identification technology, on the other, seems calculated to

[155] The thriller aspect of *A Modern Utopia* belongs to a long tradition of counterfeit narratives. Such stories grew especially prevalent with the rise of identification papers in the early modern period (Groebner, "Describing," 21), and become a staple of the bureaucratic horror story, or the popular narrativisation of the administrative state.

introduce a note of levity, as if to defuse the tension in the narrative (156). Indeed, Wells combines suspense and comedy in his treatment of the utopian visitors' attempted counterfeit. The act of proffering identifiers that belong to another world also serves to underscore the strangeness of this scene of personal identification, defamiliarising early-twentieth-century paper-based identification artefacts and practices.

When the non-utopians cannot identify themselves with papers, it becomes a matter of biometrics instead. The protagonist challenges the officials to "discover the faintest trace of us" in the database (160). Taking this as a provocation, the chief official replies almost vindictively, "You'll get found out [...]. You've got your thumbs. You'll be measured. They'll refer to the central registers, and there you'll be!" (161). The possibility that anyone could have eluded the central index is rejected out of hand. This is essentially a defensive response to an unprecedented and potentially disruptive glitch in the utopian administrative machinery. As the first-person narrator puts it,

> the eye of the State that is now slowly beginning to apprehend our existence as two queer and inexplicable parties disturbing the fine order of its field of vision, the eye that will presently be focussing itself upon us with a growing astonishment and interrogation. "Who in the name of Galton and Bertillon," one fancies Utopia exclaiming, "are *you*?" (166–67)

The reference here to Galton, whose research was an important source of inspiration for Wells (McLean 154–64), and to Alphonse Bertillon, another contemporary inventor of identification techniques, connects the utopian identification practices with developments in this field at the turn of the twentieth century—it also indicates that these pioneering writers on biometrics are regarded almost as deities in Wells's utopia.

The official who confronts the two visitors is seemingly disconcerted not by their declarations of otherworldly origin, but rather by the potential disruption of the surveillance system. The earthlings' identifiers are promptly relayed to the central registry and checked against the database:

> Our thumb-marks have been taken, they have travelled by pneumatic tube to the central office of the municipality hard by Lucerne, and have gone on thence to the headquarters of the index at Paris. There, after a rough preliminary classification, I imagine them photographed on glass, and flung by means of a lantern in colossal images upon a screen, all finely squared, and the careful experts marking and measuring their several convolutions. And then off goes a brisk clerk to the long galleries of the index building. (167)

Unexpectedly, the operators of the central registry in Paris find matches for the earthlings' thumb marks: those belonging to their utopian doubles. These are not simply papereal "data

doubles" (Bouk 87), but rather actual utopian doppelgangers linked with them via the biometric database. The utopian officials are perplexed by this, since the latest entries in their database indicate that the two individuals in their office are actually supposed to be elsewhere on the planet (168). "'Here I am,'" the narrator affirms, "'[i]f I was in Norway a few days ago, you ought to be able to trace my journey hither'" (169). The "perplexed" official responds that "'[y]our case will certainly have to be considered further […]. But at the same time'—hand out to those copies from the index again—'there you are, you know!'" (170). The discrepancy between the administrative records and the visitors' presence in the room provokes a resilient response from the utopian bureaucrat for whom official papereality has become indistinguishable from reality, almost as a form of prosthetic consciousness overlaying his own perception. Indeed, he seems to have an unshakeable trust in the veracity of the central index:

> "But here!" says the official, and waves what are no doubt photographic copies of the index cards.
>
> "But we are not those individuals!"
>
> "You *are* those individuals."
>
> "You will see," I say.
>
> He dabs his finger argumentatively upon the thumb-marks. "I see now," he says. (170)

This state functionary has grown so reliant on the surveillance system of "organised clairvoyance" that he "sees" the social world through biometrics and indexes rather than his own eyes.

The protagonist and his companion feel some "uneasiness about the final decision" as they wait for the world state to solve this "perplexing problem" (223, 214). When a decision has been made, the formerly imperturbable bureaucrat greets them with "the bearing of a man who faces a mystification beyond his powers, an incredible disarrangement of the order of Nature" (236). The earthlings' utopian doubles have been located, and the "Standing Committee of Identification," satisfied that the earthlings are not fraudsters but rather freakish doubles, has remitted the case to the "Research Professor of Anthropology in the University of London" (237). Cleared of all suspicion of wrongdoing, the protagonists' travails are over: they are free to travel to London without further ado, at which point they are suddenly returned to their own world, having caught a glimpse of utopian London. All is well that ends well, and yet there is a significant disjuncture between Wells's advocacy for supranational governance and the decidedly Kafkaesque tenor of the thriller narrative of *A Modern Utopia*, which will have done little to relax opposition to official central registers at the turn of the

century. Indeed, a critic writing for the *Independent Review* described Wells's idea of a planetary database as "monstrous" and "nightmar[ish]" (Mayor 115–16). It is also telling that *A Modern Utopia* played an important part in catalysing the rise of dystopian fiction, by inspiring Aldous Huxley to write *Brave New World* (1932), a novel "on the horror of the Wellsian Utopia," as Huxley put it in a May 1931 letter (Huxley, *Letters*, 348).

Part of the monstrosity of Wells's utopia is the symbolic violence enacted by the world state's identification system. Giving new meaning to the expression "illegal alien"—a late-Victorian term of North American provenance (*OED*)—Wells's depiction of an inter-world administrative mix-up foregrounds the ontological dimension of administrative documentation and registration. Given that the utopian state has no record of the two visitors in its all-embracing planetary index, they are construed as "global foreigners," to borrow a term that Rebecca Saunders uses to describe the "spectral" outsider-status of undocumented migrant workers in globalised twenty-first century economies (88). Wells wrote *A Modern Utopia* in an era when being "undocumented" was the rule—and yet, Wells's novel spotlights the precarious nature of being undocumented in a world where identification controls are ubiquitous. The protagonists are, understandably, gravely concerned about how they will be received by the utopian state; they are afraid to find out whether they will be "tolerated and admitted to this unavoidable citizenship" (31)—because if not, then what would the alternative be?

Wells's conceptualisation of a world state with a fully "indexed" population anticipates Arendt's commentary on international law in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). Examining the consolidation of state power in Europe in the mid-twentieth century, Arendt interrogates the concept of statelessness:

> Nobody had been aware that mankind, for so long a time considered under the image of a family of nations, had reached the stage where whoever was thrown out of one of these tightly organized closed communities found himself thrown out of the family of nations altogether.
>
> The second loss which the rightless suffered was the loss of government protection, and this did not imply just the loss of legal status in their own, but in all countries. Treaties of reciprocity and international agreements have woven a web around the earth that makes it possible for the citizen of every country to take his legal status with him no matter where he goes[.] (294)

In the increasingly integrated system of legally interconnected nation-states, then, as in Wells's world state, one is either identifiable as a citizen or rendered wholly external to the all-embracing legal-administrative system. Arendt notes that twentieth-century states grew increasingly frustrated with this framework in which they were frequently called upon to

provide protection for the stateless, especially given the perception that cast-offs from other nation-states exploited the legal loopholes associated with statelessness. With time this resulted in a significant terminological and juridical shift: "[t]he postwar term 'displaced persons' was invented during the war for the express purpose of liquidating statelessness once and for all by ignoring its existence" (267). In other words, by discarding or suppressing the concept of statelessness, nation-states could manage aspects of international law that empowered refugees. In Wells's utopia, as noted, the idea of "liquidating statelessness" instead comes in the shape of an "unavoidable" planetary citizenship.

As has been shown in the present section, the administrative surveillance apparatus depicted in *A Modern Utopia* is anything but "utopian," and clearly runs counter to Wells's advocacy for the supranational biometric database as a means of dismantling national borders. Despite purportedly describing a utopia of identifiability, the novel in fact belongs to a longer narrative tradition—one delineated by Groebner—which foregrounds the "glitches, failures, and aporia of identification" (*Who Are You*?, 154, 248). In short, the narrative tropes that structure and drive Wells's plot are those of a thriller-type bureaucratic horror story. The earthlings visiting utopia are "state-made men," to borrow Borrow's expression, who suddenly find themselves in an unfamiliar administrative state culture where they no longer have the "immediate mastery of state things" that Bourdieu describes as preventing a reflexive appreciation of state power (*On the State*, 108). By vicariously placing the reader in this position—by defamiliarising administrative statecraft and street-level bureaucracy—Wells's utopian state play provides for a reimagining of statehood; and yet, Wells's recourse to the bureaucratic horror story with its emphasis on maladministration ultimately consolidates rather than expands the state imaginary inherited from the Victorians.

Wells, Wallas, and "Official Thought"

When the protagonist of *A Modern Utopia*—the Owner of the Voice—meets his utopian double, it just so happens that this individual is one of the elite utopian administrators, the "samurai." More specifically, the utopian double is an investigator of public administration who is "analysing the psychology of prison officials and criminals in general with a view to some better scheme" (278). This utopian double is arguably Wells's true avatar in the novel. Indeed, like the protagonist's utopian double, Wells was interested in exploring the importance of psychological factors in public administration. When describing the utopian

administrative apparatus, Wells stresses that his "modern Utopians, having systematised their sociology, will have given some attention to the psychology of minor officials, a matter altogether too much neglected by the social reformer on earth" (*Modern*, 64). Wells does not, however, provide any detailed explanation of how his utopian state manages the psychology of its "minor officials"; instead, he provides a painstaking account of the framework within which the world state's governing class operates, detailing everything from how one becomes a "samurai," to how the career of a samurai is managed, and what sort of recreation is provided for samurai.

Wells's emphasis on the psyche of the state official speaks not only to Conrad's existentialist administrative fiction, but also to the writings of the political scientist Graham Wallas, who was a part of the Fabian Society when Wells joined and who was an important intellectual interlocutor for Wells.[156] Wells in fact describes Wallas, rather than the Webbs, as the main "Fabian" influence on his thought during this period. Indeed, in his memoirs, Wells portrays the influence of Wallas as a counter-weight to that of Conrad and the literary circle in Kent, declaring that he eventually "came down off the fence between Conrad and Wallas and [...] remain[ed] definitely on the side opposed to the aesthetic valuation of literature" (*Experiment*, 532). Crucially, *A Modern Utopia* evolved from discussions that Wells and Wallas had during a walking tour in the Swiss Alps in 1902 (Sherborne 160). Their trip to Switzerland in fact figures as the frame narrative in *A Modern Utopia*, seemingly in homage to Wallas (though the character of the protagonist's companion, the Botanist, bears little resemblance to Wallas). Given Wallas's key role in the germination of Wells's utopian novel—he also provided feedback on early drafts of *A Modern Utopia* (Wiener 78)—it is not surprising that there are significant parallels between *A Modern Utopia* and Wallas's major work from this period, *Human Nature in Politics* (1908). This pioneering study of psychological factors in politics and administration constituted an important "turning point" in the development of the nascent field of political science (Kang 536), and is close in its

[156] Wallas joined the Fabian Society shortly after its formation in 1886, and he became a lecturer in political science at LSE from its inception in 1895. When he resigned from the Fabian Society in 1904 in protest against its support for protectionist tariff policies, Wells very nearly resigned in sympathy (MacKenzie 199). Despite leaving the Fabian Society, Wallas remained a part of Fabian social circles, and also continued the Fabian municipalising tradition by serving as a member of the LCC and being appointed a member of the Royal Commission on the Civil Service in 1912. Wallas also became Professor of Political Science at LSE in 1914, a chair he held until his retirement in 1923.

interests to Wells's writings on the state and on the role of literature with respect to the state.[157]

Wallas's focus on the psychology of public administrators was somewhat anomalous in Fabian circles. Indeed, Wallas is known to have remarked that whereas the Webbs were interested in town councils, he was interested in town councillors (Wiener 59). Wells seemingly shared Wallas's perspective. In *New Worlds for Old*, he castigated the Fabian Society for trusting the capabilities of British state functionaries: "[s]ocialists tried to claim Bumble as their friend and use him as their tool. Bumble turned out to be a very bad friend and a very poor tool..." (271).[158] In a fascinating chapter on "Official Thought" in *Human Nature in Politics*, Wallas discusses "the intellectual life of the government official," exploring, amongst other things, why British officialdom was apparently so resistant to change (267). Wallas suggests that even in cases where administrative reform had been achieved, the resultant structures were regarded as immutable and not subjected to further critical questioning:

> the invention of a competitive Civil Service, when it had once been made and adopted, dropped from the region of severe and difficult thought in which it originated, and took its place in our habitual political psychology. We now half-consciously conceive of the Civil Service as an unchanging fact whose good and bad points are to be taken or left as a whole. Open competition has by the same process become a "principle," conceived of as applying to those cases to which it has been in fact applied, and to no others. What is therefore for the moment most needed, if we are to think fruitfully on the subject, is that we should in our own minds break up this fact, and return to the world of infinite possible variations. (255)

In other words, Wallas regards the disinclination to address structural problems in officialdom as a problem of the administrative imagination. The spell of what Wallas terms "habitual political psychology" had to be broken ("we should in our own minds break up this fact"), whether through critical commentary or some other means of rupture with "half-conscious" thought and perception.

According to Wallas, the introduction of competitive civil service entry exams in the latter half of the nineteenth century, on the recommendation of the Northcote-Trevelyan

[157] There are also signs of Wellsian influence in Wallas's *Human Nature in Politics*. Notably, Wallas echoes Wells in observing the territorial plasticity and scalability of the area of the state, emphasising that "the modern State must exist for the thoughts and feelings of its citizens, not as a fact of direct observation but as an entity of the mind, a symbol, a personification, or an abstraction. The possible area of the State will depend, therefore, mainly on the facts which limit our creation and use of such entities" (274).

[158] In "The Contemporary Novel," Wells reiterates that the Fabians "assume that the sort of official they need, a combination of godlike virtue and intelligence with unfailing mechanical obedience, can be made out of just any young nephew" ("Contemporary," 164).

Report, had signalled to Britons that the "race of Tite Barnacles [...] was now to become extinct" (261). In actual fact, Wallas emphasised, rationalising the recruitment process was merely a first step towards a well-functioning officialdom: "effective thinking" would only be cultivated if close attention were given to "the whole working life of the appointed official" (261). Wallas emphasises the importance of intellectual stimulation and calls for further inquiries into official institutional practices, and especially into the "organisation of collective thought," so as to "prevent or minimise the danger that a body of officials w[ould] develop 'official' habits of thought," inward-looking modes of thinking that would increase the distance between officialdom and civil society (265–67).

In *A Modern Utopia*, Wells shows a similar concern with the intellectual and psychological factors involved in public administration, including disinterestedness and precision, which, as noted above, Wells associates with "the distinctive lucidity of the French mind." Wells delineates various activities and rules that the so-called samurai are to engage in and abide by, including the cathartic ritual yearly practice of going "clean out of the world" for seven days straight. Wells also declares that his ruling class is to be a reading class: "they must read aloud from the Book of the Samurai for at least ten minutes every day. Every month they must buy and read faithfully through at least one book that has been published during the past five years" (297). This mandatory reading practice exposes the samurai to new ideas and popular opinion, thus ensuring that they do not become insular or detached from public discourse—a measure that was instated, in other words, to ward against "official habits of thought," to borrow Wallas's expression.

In describing his utopian administrative class, Wells also includes various minor caveats and inbuilt mechanisms designed to guard against the perceived danger of full-blown bureaucratic technocracy:

> Practically all political power vests in the *samurai*. Not only are they the only administrators, lawyers, practising doctors, and public officials of almost all kinds, but they are the only voters. Yet, by a curious exception, the supreme legislative assembly must have one-tenth, and may have one-half of its members outside the order, because, it is alleged, there is a sort of wisdom that comes of sin and laxness, which is necessary to the perfect ruling of life. (310–11)

The idea is clearly to include ordinary civilians in governmental bodies, in lieu of actual democratic institutions, in order to counterbalance the obligatory bookishness of the samurai. There are, in other words, numerous structural checks in place to avoid bureaucratic aloofness or homogeneity. Moreover, Wells's utopian administrators may only hold semi-permanent positions: "[e]very ruler and official [...] is put on his trial every three years before a jury," a

jury which decides "whether to continue him in office or order a new election" (311). This system of semi-permanent positions, with detailed strictures by which positions are renewed, is intended as a means of preventing corruption and incompetence in Wells's utopian officialdom. Wells's system of officials elected by jury also problematises the customary distinction between elected representatives on the one hand and "permanent" civil servants on the other, in a manner which is emblematic of Wells's broader attempt to reimagine the administrative state. Indeed, in his attentiveness to the problems of what Wallas's terms "official thought," Wells delineates a model of governance that differs distinctly from the Weberian conception of rational bureaucratic administration. In other words, whilst Wells values administrative statecraft and bureaucratic technology, his utopia is not placed squarely in the bureaucratic paradigm.

However, as indicated above, there does not seem to be a corresponding system in place to train and regulate Wells's street-level utopian bureaucrats; at least, there is a clear disparity between the romanticised upper echelons of the utopian officialdom and the petty bureaucrats that the two protagonists come across in local administrative agencies. In fact, Wells's street-level bureaucrats appear to be no better than Dickens's Bumble, the "bad friend" of the Fabians. One explanation for this seeming oversight would be that the concept of a utopian petty bureaucrat was simply too far-fetched. Wells's effort to rethink state administration was, in fact, decidedly lopsided and class biased, retaining the British nineteenth-century division between the higher (or "intellectual") and the lower (or "mechanical") rungs of the civil service.[159] In keeping the two-tier civil service system that had crystallised in late-Victorian Britain in the wake of the Northcote-Trevelyan Report, Wells's utopian imagination in fact underwrote rather than problematised extant administrative structures, and in this respect he exhibited the type of narrow organisational imagination that Wallas bemoans in *Human Nature in Politics*.

Wells addresses the fact that the powerful administrative mechanisms that he envisions would be dangerous in the wrong hands:

> The dreadfulness of all such proposals as this lies in the possibility of their execution falling into the hands of hard, dull, and cruel administrators. But in the

[159] On the connection between Wells's prejudice towards petty bureaucrats and his complex relationship with his own "lower-middle-class origins," see Higgins 457. Steven McLean picks up on a disconcerting class bias in the discourse on clothing in connection with the utopian state functionaries, observing that: "[i]nitially, the narrator had stated that the thought of universal tolerance should provide a reassuring introduction to Utopia for two men dressed in tweed. Yet the surprise reaction of the male official, the first of the Samurai encountered in the work, to the clothing of the protagonists hints that the dress code of Utopia might not be so permissive after all" (176–77).

> case of a Utopia one assumes the best possible government, a government as merciful and deliberate as it is powerful and decisive. (142)

Wells purports that his utopians have established the requisite checks on its all-powerful administrative system—and yet, as noted in the previous chapter, the earthlings' experience in utopia suggests otherwise. Wells's utopia of identifiability is shown to be far from foolproof or consistently benevolent. At one stage, the frustrated official at the local bureau comes up with his own groundless, and rather menacing, conclusion: "'Frankly,' he says, 'I think you have escaped from some island. How you got so far as here I can't imagine, or what you think you'll do.... But anyhow, there's the stuff for your thumbs'" (161). The idle speculation of this irate bureaucrat indicates that administrative matters might be determined by the caprices of individual utopian state functionaries.

As Wolfe notes in his 1924 essay on British civil service fiction, the characterisation of public servants in *A Modern Utopia* is surprisingly negative. Wolfe observes that "since *Little Dorrit* is an argument for the abolition of the public service, and *A Modern Utopia* is an argument for its universal expansion," one would suppose that "Wells is as enthusiastic a devotee of the public servant as Dickens a critic" (50–1). However, it turns out that post-mistresses and petty bureaucrats are incompetent also in utopia, potentially blunting the tentacles of the hyper-efficient system of organised clairvoyance. To round out the stereotypical figuration of bureaucrats, Wells's street-level bureaucrats are not only narrow-minded, and frequently snide and vindictive, but also Francophone: "[o]n earth, where there is nationality, this would have been a Frenchman," the narrator ventures about one of the utopian public officials, "the inferior sort of Frenchman—the sort whose only happiness is in the routine security of Government employment" (238). This barb against French bureaucracy may be contrasted with Wells's celebration of the efficiency of French administrative capacities elsewhere in the novel. This highly discordant commentary on nationality and bureaucracy underlines the glaring disparities in Wells's thinking with regards to the utopian promise of administrative technology and the street-level bureaucrat's utter lack thereof.

Beyond the xenophobic comments about French petty bureaucrats, Wells does not exactly criticize his utopian lower-level bureaucrats outright—instead, their shortcomings are exposed through the protagonists' dealings with the unhelpful and vindictive local authorities. Tellingly, the frustrations and worries of the protagonists are assuaged only when they meet one of the samurai:

> suddenly there looks out from this man's pose and regard a different quality, a quality altogether nearer that of the beautiful tramway and of the gracious order of

> the mountain houses. He is a well-built man of perhaps five and thirty, with the easy movement that comes with perfect physical condition, his face is clean shaven and shows the firm mouth of a disciplined man, and his grey eyes are clear and steady. His legs are clad in some woven stuff deep-red in colour, and over this he wears a white shirt fitting pretty closely, and with a woven purple hem. His general effect reminds me somehow of the Knights Templars. On his head is a cap of thin leather and still thinner steel, and with the vestiges of ear-guards—rather like an attenuated version of the caps that were worn by Cromwell's Ironsides. (159)

In this passage, the samurai administrator is described as aesthetically akin to the eye-pleasing utopian infrastructure and architecture; in other words, as opposed to the petty bureaucrats previously encountered, Wells's elite administrator has qualities which make him properly utopian. In describing the samurai's spectacular outfit, Wells likens it to the garments of a wealthy medieval Christian military order and cavalry troopers in the English Civil War, thus creating a striking contrast between the samurai and the decidedly ordinary-looking street-level bureaucrats.

As compared to a novel such as *The Secret Agent*, which deals extensively with the experiential side of operating within an official department, *A Modern Utopia* does not dramatise the "problem of officialism made flesh," but rather discusses various remedial measures ("Contemporary," 165). This is a criticism that is often levelled at Wells—that there was a lack of depth in much of what he wrote following his statist turn. Notably, Virginia Woolf cuttingly declares of Wells's utopian imagination that the most "damaging criticism" that she can conceive of is that his utopian world will be "inhabited here and hereafter by his Joans and Peters" (147). In bemoaning the flatness of Wells's characters, Woolf references *Joan and Peter* (1918), Wells's literary intervention in debates about the British educational system. Woolf's suggestion that Wells's utopian fiction fails on account of the unconvincing characterisation is all the more damning criticism if read in light of a contemporary reviewer's notion that *A Modern Utopia* supplements Wells's earlier essayistic works by showing "what sort of persons they are who inhabit [his] system, and, in particular, what sort of persons they are who control it and make it possible" (Mayor 113). An unsigned review of *Anticipations* in the *Westminster Gazette* observed that "Mr. Wells paints his efficient class in rather drab colours. It is distinctly a dull class, as he presents it to us. It is segregated and specialised; it lives wholly for its serious pursuits, feeds on Blue-books and biscuits" ("Unsigned," 86). In fact, as Humbert Wolfe notes, Wells's novels provide few memorable state functionary characters. Wolfe makes this point with respect to the "astoundingly pointless" civil servants of Wells non-utopian fiction, such as the "pretentious donkey" Mr Manning of *Ann Veronica*

(1909), declaring that Wells takes a "conventional view" of the civil servant as defined by "deadly dullness and unswerving fidelity to routine" (51–2). This criticism is pertinent also to Wells's characterisation of petty bureaucrats in *A Modern Utopia*, which, as already noted, is surprisingly negative and stereotypical.

Wells evidently did not share Wallas's interest in improving the conditions for effective thought throughout officialdom, inasmuch as he struggled to find poetry in quotidian street-level bureaucracy. Instead, as noted above, Wells's account of the protagonists' encounter with utopian bureaucracy is markedly reminiscent of Dickens's (or indeed Conrad's) bureaucratic horror stories. This incongruously negative characterisation speaks volumes about the conditions for writing statehood at the turn of the twentieth century. The lower-level state functionaries of *A Modern Utopia* are essentially stock characters, variations on familiar bureaucrat characters such as Bumble and the Barnacles. Together with already-familiar tropes such as the administrative mix-up, the negative bureaucrat stereotype was a constituent feature of the bureaucratic horror story format in which Wells steeped his narrative. In short, Wells's utopian-cum-dystopian administrative fiction highlights the difficulty of writing the administrative state in new ways at the turn of the twentieth century, given the ubiquity of the bureaucratic horror story, especially after Dickens.

"That Storm in a Fabian Tea-Cup": Wells's Fabian Samurai

In *A Modern Utopia*, Wells emphasises that his utopian scheme does not represent a political programme. In fact, the narrative concludes on an uncertain, open-ended note, and not, as might be expected, "*with a swelling heart and clear resolves, with lists of names, formation of committees, and even the commencement of subscriptions*" (371). And yet, this rather studied avoidance of explicit political ambition, prompted perhaps by his allegiance to the Fabian Society, is belied by the fact that Wells subsequently attempted to refashion the Fabians into what he termed an "order of the Fabian Samurai" (*Experiment*, 565). *A Modern Utopia* was broadly well-received by the Fabians. Sydney Olivier's 1905 review in *Fabian News* deemed it an improvement on *Anticipations* and *Mankind in the Making*, declaring that "[i]t furnishes more of our common inclinations with aims clothed in forms that appear desirable" (110). Proposing that *A Modern Utopia* constitutes a more realistic or realisable vision of a future society than Morris's *News from Nowhere*, Olivier nonetheless questions its feasibility on account of Wells's emphasis on administrative feeling—the idea that "citizens of the future"

should "consciously and deliberately acquiesce in the government of the state by a Platonic bureaucracy" (111). This degree of investment and faith in state bureaucracy seemed implausible, in the view of this leading member of the Fabian Society. And yet, Olivier is quite ready to accept Wells's figuration of a "governing caste of 'Samurai,'" proclaiming that "[n]o member of the Fabian Society will deem this an insane ideal" (112).

The year 1905 saw the publication not only of *A Modern Utopia*, but also of *Municipalization by Provinces*, the first volume in the Fabian *New Heptarchy* series that Wells's paper on administrative areas had stimulated.[160] Wells was, in other words, performing the role of provocative inspirational thinker with aplomb, supplying the "gradgrinds" of the Fabian Society with ideas that they could "use as instruments of research," as Beatrice Webb had predicted. And yet, though the Fabians were forming committees to incorporate Wells's ideas, Wells was far from content with the progress that the Society was making, and in June 1905 he proposed a formal enquiry into its effectiveness (Sherborne 172). Wells had sufficient support in this undertaking to organise a Reform Group and establish a Special Committee to act upon the Reform Group's proposals (Hynes 111). In addition to these organisational challenges to the Fabian executive, Wells delivered the paper "The Faults of the Fabian" at a members-only meeting at Essex Hall, in February 1906. In this paper, he described the society as "an extraordinarily inadequate and feeble organization" operating on the misguided "belief that the world may be manoeuvred into socialism without knowing it" ("Faults," 391, 400). Wells critiqued the Fabian executives for simply wishing to insinuate themselves into existing structures: "[n]o doubt it is quite possible to achieve all sorts of good purposes through existing organizations and institutions, only—it isn't the way to socialism" (401). As Samuel Hynes aptly puts it, Wells outlined a vision of a Fabian Society that was "large, moneyed, and militant"—in short, "a Fabian Society without the Fabianism" (110).

Soon after delivering the aforementioned paper, Wells travelled to the United States. On his return, in the early summer of 1906, as he writes in his memoirs, Wells "contrived a rebellion against the Old Gang" (*Experiment*, 211). He challenged the Fabian Executive Committee, pushing for a vote of non-confidence. When this failed, he instead tried to get his allies elected in their place. In Wells's own words, he undertook a "campaign to turn the little Fabian Society, wizened already though not so old, into the beginnings of an order akin to

[160] Wells was broadly dismissive of the *New Heptarchy* series, but also appears to have taken some pride in it. In *New Worlds for Old*, he describes it as the "first systematic recognition on the part of any organized Socialist body of the fact that a scientific reconstruction of the methods of government constitutes not simply an incidental but a necessary part of the complete Socialist scheme" (274).

these Samurai in *A Modern Utopia*, which should embody for mankind a sense of the State" (*Experiment*, 564). Judging by Wells's own account, then, he in fact desired to change the Fabian Society into a vanguard organisation that would work to bring about the utopian scheme outlined in *A Modern Utopia*.[161]

In September 1906, Shaw wrote to warn Wells that he had to be more pragmatic and less combative an organiser if he wanted to be "anything more than a novelist bombinating in vacuo" (qtd. in MacKenzie 236). The aforementioned Fabian Special Committee had produced a report drafted by Wells, which laid out a set of radical proposals for the restructuring of the Fabian Society. Having read the draft report, Sidney Webb wrote Wells an embattled response in which he objected that the proposed reforms far exceeded the Society's budget and that the overhaul was such that the "Committee ought to make up its mind whether it wants to change the name of the society or not—whether in fact it wants a new society" (*Letters*, 237–38). The committee's report provoked members of the Fabian executive into producing their own report, drafted by Sidney Webb and Shaw, with a separate set of reform proposals (MacKenzie 236). The report of the Special Committee was submitted in October 1906, leading to a series of meetings where the two proposals were discussed, at which point, Wells forced the issue by attempting to move an amendment that would effectively drive out the "Old Gang" (Hynes 111). The contest between Wells and the "Old Gang" generated a great deal of interest and excitement within the society. At special meetings held in December to discuss the reports, Shaw served as the Executive Committee's spokesman. The contest thus evolved into a "confrontation between two stars at the height of their reputations," one which attracted large audiences (Sherborne 181).[162] The debaters made it abundantly clear that the Society's decision regarding the proposed reforms would define its identity going forward. Wells called for a vote of no-confidence in the Fabian Executive and Shaw emphasised that the Old Gang would resign in the event that the reformers' proposals were accepted (Toye 166). Shaw, who was a "world-class public speaker," won a resounding victory, outperforming and outmanoeuvring Wells in every regard (Sherborne 181). According to Beatrice Webb, it was Wells who tripped himself up by attacking the Executive Committee—had he "pushed his own fervid policy [...] for vague and big ideas, without making a personal attack on the Old Gang he would have succeeded" (qtd. in MacKenzie

[161] Recounting a conversation with Wells about *A Modern Utopia*, Beatrice Webb notes in her diary that Wells had "laughingly remarked" that the novel's account of the utopian governing class would "pander to all [her] worst instincts" (*Our Partnership*, 305). This further underlines the fact that Wells conceived of the samurai as a Fabian-esque organisation.

[162] For more detailed accounts of these special meetings, see Patricia Pugh 85–6 and Sherborne 180–82.

237). In other words, it appears as though Wells came very close to wresting power from the executive.

In his memoirs, Wells describes the whole campaign as "confused, tedious, ill-conceived and ineffectual," proclaiming, "no part of my career rankles so acutely in my memory with the conviction of bad judgement, gusty impulse and real inexcusable vanity, as that storm in the Fabian tea-cup" (*Experiment*, 564). Wells was, by all accounts, not cut out to be a municipal socialist, given his minimal interest in actual organisational work, as well as his appetite for large-scale and transformative, rather than gradual, societal reformation. However, whilst Wells dismisses the campaign to gain control of the Fabian Society as unorganised, David C. Smith, the editor of Wells's *Correspondence*, suggests that the publication of Wells's collected letters laid bare the fact that "Wells and his followers had planned better than is usually thought" (*Correspondence*, 125). Ironically, in his memoirs, Wells indicates that he viewed the special committee's very adherence to bureaucratic protocol as its fatal flaw: "[w]e typed and printed and issued Reports and Replies and Committee election Appeals and Personal Statements, and my original intentions were buried at last underneath a steaming heap of hot secondary issues" (*Experiment*, 565). This shows that Wells tried, but failed to use Fabian bureaucracy to his own ends, an experience that contributed to his disenchantment with the Society.

Wells had been defeated by Shaw and the Old Gang: his "order of the Fabian Samurai perished unborn" (*Experiment*, 565). And yet, Wells's efforts did not end there. In April 1907, a conference was held at the New Reform Club, with the support of the Fabian Arts Society, to discuss the possibility of forming a Samurai Society (*Correspondence*, 148). Beatrice Webb was in attendance, as were members of a small and short-lived London-based group that styled itself as Wellsian "samurai" intent on enacting his utopian ideas. This group was led by Harold Monro, a poet who would go on to found the influential Poetry Bookshop in Bloomsbury, and Maurice Browne, who later became a theatre producer in the US. The aforementioned conference was not very impactful—but the fact that such an event was even organised indicates that Fabians entertained the idea of an affiliated order of Wellsian samurai. That same year, Monro and Browne also established the Samurai Press, with Wells writing to Browne to express his approval of the project: "I'm very curious to know what your <u>First Book of the Samurai</u> is to be" (*Correspondence*, 151). Wells met with them as a group, and, somewhat reluctantly, "counseled them for the better part of a year," before a lack of momentum caused the group to disintegrate (Crossley 453). Another group—the Utopians—was also formed around this time, based at Cambridge University and spearheaded by Amber

Reeves, who was the daughter of members of the Fabian Society and who had also founded the Cambridge University Fabian Society. As Robert Crossley writes, both the Cambridge-based Utopians and the London-based Samurai "rose and fell in the shadow of Wells's spectacularly public failure to reshape the Fabian Society in his own image" (449). The demise of the Utopians also occurred in the shadow of Wells's extramarital affair with Reeves, which caused scandal in Fabian circles and accelerated his exodus.

In September 1908, Wells communicated his decision to leave the Fabian Society. His letter of resignation appeared in *Fabian News* in October 1908.[163] As indicated above, Wells later expressed regrets about his behaviour towards the Fabian leadership. At the same time, Wells's caustic remarks about the "storm in the Fabian tea-cup" are indicative of a lasting bitterness and sense of rivalry.[164] Wells's time as a member in the Fabian Society constituted a significant influence on his development as a writer and thinker, and also a significant moment in the history of British socialism. Indeed, commenting on the power struggle in which Wells engaged the Old Gang, Hynes proposes that "[t]he outcome of that battle determined the future shape of Fabianism and thus of modern England" (88). In what direction, one wonders, would a Wellsian order of Fabian Samurai have taken British administrative state culture? It most likely would not have facilitated the rise of the British welfare state quite as expediently as the Fabian Society would go on to do under the leadership of Shaw and the Webbs.

Coda: Feeling like a State in *The New Machiavelli*

Hynes expresses surprise that the Fabian Society which "appealed so strongly to imaginative minds during the Edwardian period found no major literary expression either in Wells' work or anywhere else" (126). *A Modern Utopia* would be the obvious candidate for this distinction, but Hynes does not even mention it in this connection. *A Modern Utopia* constitutes a remarkable expression of Fabian-esque administrative statism—but in its utopianism and in its reluctance to claim bureaucracy for socialism, it is hardly a Fabian

[163] Wells in fact remained a non-voting subscriber until he was expelled in 1910 for failing to pay his subscription (Pugh, *Educate*, 98).

[164] In his address to the Liberal Summer School at Oxford, in July 1932, Wells bemoaned the "impatience, bad-temper, tactlessness, and all-round incapacity with which I attempted to shove my remedial measures upon my fellow Fabians" (*After Democracy*, 3).

tract.[165] Wells's participation in the Fabian Society was marked by ambivalence and dissatisfaction, and, after his resignation he consistently positioned his own conception of state socialism in contradistinction with Fabianism, primarily by emphasising "the liberal aspect of his political identity" (Toye 172). However, the very fact that Wells continued to engage with Fabianism in his writings is indicative of his considerable intellectual debt to the Fabians.[166] Many of the ideas that Wells developed as a member of the Fabian Society stuck with him, and particularly the concept of the world state. In 1932, he proclaimed, "I shall keep on turning over that idea and trying out its possibilities under fresh labels until I die" (*After Democracy*, 12).

Though he remained committed to the formation of a world state, Wells's understanding of state administration was changeable and equivocal.[167] Many of the essays that I have cited in this chapter—dealing with the "Great State," "administrative socialism," and so forth—date from the years that followed Wells's departure from the Fabian Society. The chapter on administrative socialism in *New Worlds for Old*, written while Wells was in the process of breaking with the Fabian Society, reiterates the main criticisms advanced in "Faults of the Fabian." Here, Wells condemns the Fabians for having "a mania for achieving Socialism without the overt change of any existing ruling body," whilst also bemoaning the Society's "indifference to the forms of government" (268–69). In the essay "The Past and the Great State"—his contribution to the collection *Socialism and The Great State: Essays in Construction* (1912), which he co-edited with Frances Evelyn Warwick and G. R. S. Taylor—Wells once more considered the "whole problem of government, administration, and officialdom" (40). In this essay, Wells commends the Fabians for having sought to address the statist "riddle," but dismisses the "Fabian conception of a bureaucracy, official to the extent of being a distinct class and cult," as a mere "starting-point for healthy repudiations" (40).

[165] On the other hand, Wells's essayistic volume on socialism *New Boots for Old* (1908) was in fact published as one of the Fabian tracts.

[166] Shortly after his withdrawal from the Fabian Society, Wells made it clear that he objected to a tendency among critics to read his work in relation to his time in the Fabian Society; in June 1912, he wrote a scathing letter to the editor of *The Nation*, criticising the newspaper for providing a "fanciful" biographical review of Wells's work in which his "entire intellectual life" was described as having been shaped by his stint in the Fabian Society, with his output neatly parcelled into a period "'when the Fabian spell was working'" and a subsequent "'anti-Fabian' phase" (*Correspondence*, 328). Emphasising his intellectual autonomy, Wells proclaimed that, "[f]rom first to last I was at issue with Fabianism" (328).

[167] Interestingly, in 1909 Wells joined the National Committee for the Prevention of Destitution that was formed to bring about the proposals made in the Minority Report that Beatrice Webb had drafted. However, following Hilaire Belloc's critical intervention regarding the proposed introduction of enforced labour and "detention colonies," wherein the Committee's Prevention of Destitution Bill was described as leading to the establishment of what Belloc termed the "servile state," Wells agreed that the proposed colonies "sounded disagreeably like State serfdom" (qtd. in Toye 173).

Critiquing the Fabian devotion to bureaucratic rationality, Wells in fact takes a position that seems almost designed to provoke the ire of his former associates. That is, Wells claims that the "method of making men officials for life is quite the worst way of getting official duties done"—instead he envisions a future where citizens take turns serving as state functionaries (much as in local administrative structures of bygone days) because they have learnt to "value a certain amateurishness in [public] service, and prefer it to the trite omniscience of the stale official" (41).[168] In other words, after breaking with the Fabian Society, Wells denounced the type of hyper-efficient administrative "omniscience" that he had championed in *A Modern Utopia*. As opposed to the Webbs—and indeed Weber, who professed that "[t]he choice is only between bureaucracy and dilettantism in the field of administration" (*Economy*, 224)—Wells here sided with the amateur against the professional state official.[169] That is, Wells departed, in the early 1910s, from the more technocratic administrative utopianism of *A Modern Utopia*, in which the informational precision and scope of the world-state depends, at least in principle, on the expertise of its state functionaries.

The distrust of petty bureaucrats that surfaced in *A Modern Utopia* evolved into a more explicit critique, then, in Wells's post-Fabian reconceptualisation of state socialism—perhaps because Wells no longer had to toe the party line, but seemingly also because he felt the need to distance his views from Fabianism. In *New Worlds for Old*, Wells congratulates the Fabians for realising that "a new scheme of administration is necessary," but finds that their conception of state socialism lacks a critical component (271):

> [It] supplies us with a conception of methods of transition and with a vision of a great and disciplined organization of officials, a scientific bureaucracy appointed by representative bodies of diminishing activity and importance, and coming to be at last the real working control of the Socialist State. But it says nothing of what is above the officials, what drives the officials. It is a palace without living rooms, with nothing but offices; a machine, as yet unprovided with a motor. No doubt we must have that organization of officials if we mean to bring about a Socialist State, but the mind recoils with something like terror from the conception of a State run and ruled by officials, terminating in officials, with an official as its highest expression. One has a vision of a community with bluebooks instead of literature, and inspectors instead of a conscience. (276–77)

[168] Wells's critique was not very well-received by British lower-level clerks. In a 1915 review of Wells's *Bealby: A Holiday* (1915) in *Red Tape: A Civil Service Magazine*, J. D. Feely responds to Wells's interventions in British officialdom: "It was discovered about 1859 that to fill the Service with the failures of other professions was bad, and how will Mr. Wells attract the successes? By the prospect of not making them officials for life?" (191).

[169] In later commentaries, Wells similarly averred, "I am able to think more freely than most of those concerned with politics and statecraft because I am quite unencumbered by any immediate interest in this respect" (*After Democracy*, 107).

Wells shared the Fabians' technocratic ideal of statehood without democracy, but he recoiled from the thought of unmitigated bureaucratic rule, an officialdom which answered only to itself.[170] In his paper on the contemporary novel, as already noted, Wells valorised fiction as a medium which might serve as "an intelligent controlling criticism of officials." Similarly, in the passage quoted above, Wells's strikingly lyrical language (e.g. the image of the "palace without living rooms") contrasts with the purported dullness of Fabianism, thus serving not only as an analytical, but also as a cultural or stylistic corrective to a Fabian-styled Gradgrindian officialdom which reads "bluebooks instead of literature." More than an attempt to inspire administrative feeling, then, Wells's vivid and imaginative treatment of administrative statecraft following his departure from the Fabian Society served to indicate the humanism of his brand of administrative statism.

As noted above, Wells's discourse on the "psychological factors in government" (*New Worlds*, 275) during this period was strongly influenced by Wallas. In 1908, Wells wrote a letter congratulating Wallas on the publication of *Human Nature in Politics*. In this letter, Wells declared that he had begun work on a novel that would "give scope to the discussions of many of the points you raise" (*Correspondence*, 222). This manuscript evolved into *The New Machiavelli*, a novel in which Wells thematised the topic of human nature in politics "by way of biography," as he puts it in his memoirs, focusing on the individual in contradistinction to what Wells describes as Wallas's focus on "mass reactions" (*Experiment*, 519). This renewed emphasis on psychology and biography constitutes a significant shift in Wells's statist fiction, which I will sketch out as a way of summing up the present discussion of Wells's Edwardian statist fiction.

In writing a semi-autobiographical novel, Wells approached the topic of statecraft from a new vantage point. The protagonist of *The New Machiavelli*—Richard "Dick" Remington—addresses the reader as the author of the book, presenting it as a twentieth-century sequel to Machiavelli's *The Prince* for a political era that is "infinitely more complex" (7). "Neither the public or the historian will permit the statesman moods," Wells's first-person narrator declares (376). This, then, Wells intimates, is his accomplishment with

[170] Wells's description of the Fabian vision as leading to the creation of a culturally barren administrative "palace" foreshadows the Fabians' embrace of Soviet communism. In *New Worlds for Old*, as Sherborne notes, Wells insists on "the importance of socialists carrying over liberal principles such as freedom of speech and information, warning that a Marxist revolution might produce an intrusive bureaucracy" (185). However, Wells vision of liberalism or liberal socialism was itself decidedly anti-democratic. Indeed, speaking at the Liberal Summer School at Oxford University in 1932, Wells professed himself "flatly opposed to" parliamentary democracy, urging his audience of young liberals to become the "Fascists of Liberalism," waxing lyrical about the "public-minded" Italian Fascists and Communist Party in Russia, and their ability to "handle the problems of the modern state" (*After Democracy*, 10–11, 25).

The New Machiavelli: spotlighting the human interest that may be found in the life of the statesman, and thus, by extension, in statecraft. Wells's Remington complains not only about the reduction of statesmen to their official roles, but also about the "state-making dream" having "play[ed] too small a part in novels" (5). In *The New Machiavelli*, the protagonist proclaims (in a rather self-effacing manner) that "the statesman's idea" is "the protagonist of [his] story" (112). This professed abdication of the role of protagonist on Remington's part complicates Wells's emphasis on the biography and roundedness of the "statesman," blurring the lines between the individual official, the "state-making" dream, and the state itself. As we shall see, this identification of statism as the novel's protagonist ties in with a broader attempt to render statecraft in more human shape and thus transcend the bureaucratic paradigm of Fabian administrative socialism.

Remington is a fervent and idealistic statist, who "grows giddy with dazzling intimations of the human splendours the justly organised state may yet attain," a giddiness that is reflected in the effusive language that is used to described statehood in the narrative (9). The structure of the novel is that of a "pessimistic political *Bildungsroman* that proceeds from idealism to adult pragmatism" (Kohlmann, *British*, 182); it follows Remington's political awakening during his school years and subsequent attempts to realise his statist ambitions through party politics, a career that is cut short by his decision to prioritise romantic life over political goals. However, as indicated above, there is more to the biographical focus of *The New Machiavelli* than the foregrounding of Remington's life story. For instance, Wells effectively brings administrative statecraft down to human scale by highlighting the many institutional changes that occurred in a lifetime during the turn of the twentieth century:

> It is wonderful how many of the clumsy and limited governing bodies of my youth and early manhood have given place now to more scientific and efficient machinery. When I was a boy, Bromstead, which is now a borough, was ruled by a strange body called a Local Board—it was the Age of Boards—and I still remember indistinctly my father rejoicing at the breakfast-table over the liberation of London from the corrupt and devastating control of a Metropolitan Board of Works. Then there were also School Boards; I was already practically in politics before the London School Board was absorbed by the spreading tentacles of the London County Council. (22)

This historicisation of official bodies early in the novel highlights the plasticity of state institutions. Moreover, despite Wells's ominous, and distinctly anti-Fabian, image of the "spreading tentacles" of the LCC, the passage quoted above emphasises the clear-cut advances that can be made—and have been made—over the course of a lifetime. Remington further suggests that

> It gives a measure of the newness of our modern ideas of the State to remember that the very beginnings of public education lie within my father's lifetime, and that many most intelligent and patriotic people were shocked beyond measure at the State doing anything of the sort. (22–3)

This retrospect echoes the passage in Wallas's chapter on "official thought," in which Wallas highlights the fact that administrative structures are, in fact, changeable, as a means of breaking with a "habitual political psychology" which cannot see beyond the status quo. By emphasising that an earlier generation would have been amazed by the administrative state culture of the early twentieth century, Wells implies that continued state expansion and administrative innovation would undergo a similar process of normalisation, and that seemingly radical changes need not be feared.

Like *A Modern Utopia*, *The New Machiavelli* features a "thinly fictionalized" account of Wells's trip with Wallas to Switzerland (Wiener 79). Whilst the protagonist's sidekick in *A Modern Utopia* is far too anti-intellectual for there to be any sense that this character is a portrait of Wallas, the character Willersley, who accompanies Remington on the Swiss hike in *The New Machiavelli*, is closely modelled on Wallas. Remington describes Willersley as "a man some years senior to myself, who had just missed a fellowship and the higher division of the Civil Service, and who had become an enthusiastic member of the London School Board" (134). Contemplating Willersley's travails as a municipal functionary, Remington mourns "the days of arid administrative plodding [...] he must have spent" (139). These sentiments reflect Wells's views on Wallas's self-effacing commitment to his role as chair of the London School Board management committee, a role he held from 1897 to 1907.[171] However, it also reads as a dig at the Fabian model of permeation, which is dismissed as "arid" as opposed to Wells's project of reimagining statehood.

Ironically, given Wallas's interest in understanding the role of "human nature" in politics, Wells's novel turns the psychologising lens on Willersley, interrogating the motives of a municipal socialist:

> He does it without any fee or reward except his personal self-satisfaction in doing his work [...]. No doubt he idealizes himself a little, and dreams of recognition. No doubt he gets his pleasure from a sense of power, from the spending and husbanding of large sums of public money, and from the inevitable proprietorship he must feel in the fair, fine, well-ordered schools he has done so much to develop. (139)

[171] Indeed, many of Wallas's associates felt that his devotion to performing this role had held him back as a writer (Wiener 80–1). In a December 1908 letter to Shaw, Wallas proclaimed that "I have never looked upon myself as a professional writer. My 'Works of Charles Lamb' have been the bound volumes of committee minutes" (qtd. in Wiener 80–1).

However, Remington surmises that the municipal socialist's work-life satisfactions must pale in comparison with the strain of performing the dismal administrative labour. These musings reflect Remington's private concerns about his own motivations as a statist idealist, foreshadowing his eventual crisis as a statesman. In short, Remington weighs politico-bureaucratic self-abnegation against the desire for recognition, observing that both are determining psychological factors in any pursuit of "the statesman's idea."

During the Swiss hiking trip, the young Remington and his companion Willersley place themselves in a state of feverish statist enthusiasm: "'We build the state,' we said over and over again. 'That is what we are for—servants of the new reorganization'" (141). Under the influence of the sublime natural environment, the two comrades repeat the mantra "We build the state" as a means of willing themselves into passionate administrative feeling. Remington remembers that

> We projected an ideal state, an organized state as confident and powerful as modern science, as balanced and beautiful as a body, as beneficent as sunshine, the organized state that should end muddle for ever; it ruled all our ideas and gave form to all our ambitions. (145)

However, whilst these zealous statist projections and aspirations are full of sweetness and light, there is, as noted above, a mountain of dreary paperwork and political "muddle" to climb if they are to bring about their ideal state. They will, in short, have to contend with an administrative state culture that is everything other than "balanced and beautiful." This is the central tension in *The New Machiavelli*—the fact that whilst the "statesman's idea" is valorised as the novel's "protagonist," the actual state (or the stateman's reality) becomes the chief antagonist. The story that unfolds tests whether their youthful exalted appreciation of the beauty of the "organized state" will sustain them through the years of organisational work that lie between them and any potential realisation of their ambitions.

In *The New Machiavelli*, Wells famously paints an exceedingly unflattering pen portrait of Beatrice and Sidney Webb, under the names of Altiora and Oscar Bailey. Having made his name as a writer on politics, Remington becomes acquainted with the Baileys and is initiated into their circle, which is devoted to studying "the methods and organization and realities of government in the most elaborate manner," and which serves as an influential, albeit unofficial, "centre of public information" (209). Remington likens the Baileys' home to "a sort of signal box with levers all about you," and at first, Remington is impressed by the efficiency and power of this control centre (217); however, he soon begins to question the extent of the Bailey's actual influence on society:

> And then with all this administrative fizzle, this pseudo-scientific administrative chatter, dying away in your head, out you went into the limitless grimy chaos of London streets and squares, roads and avenues lined with teeming houses [...]; and you found yourself swaying back to the opposite conviction that the huge formless spirit of the world it was that held the strings and danced the puppets on the Bailey stage... (217)

Remington's sudden sense that the Baileys' "administrative chatter" cannot hope to control or change the metropolitan "limitless grimy chaos" echoes the dénouement of *A Modern Utopia*, in which the utopian imagination of administrative order is suddenly broken off. The protagonists' stay in utopia ends abruptly—"there is no jerk, no sound, no hint of material shock. We are in London" (*Modern*, 358)—and they are confronted with a cacophony of "re-echoing actualities" (367–68), an image of uncontrollable urban din that anticipates the way in which Bailey's administrative "fizzle" and "chatter" falls short of managing metropolitan social reality in *The New Machiavelli*.

Remington becomes increasingly disenchanted with the Baileys' political project, which appears to be "neglecting human life altogether in social organization" (329). When Remington brings his statist ideas into the sphere of parliamentary politics, his first taste of the electoral process is equally disaffecting in its stultifying populism. Remington comes to regret the political allegiances that he makes: "[m]uddle isn't ended by transferring power from the muddle-headed few to the muddle-headed many, and then cheating the many out of it again in the interests of a bureaucracy of sham experts. But that seems the limit of the liberal imagination" (350). This sweeping dismissal of "the liberal imagination" is strikingly similar to Wells's critique of Fabianism, insofar as the politics of both factions—socialists and liberals—are viewed as tending towards bureaucratic technocracy.

Throughout the novel, Wells uses the metaphor of "play" in his figuration of politics and statecraft. Standing alongside Willersley on a Swiss mountain-top, Remington feels as though he is "survey[ing] the world," likening this newfound sense of mastery over the social world to "the games I used to set out upon my nursery floor" (147). The metaphor of play-acting recurs in the description of the Baileys as puppet masters—and here the image of statist game-playing acquires a negative valence. Further ahead in the narrative, Remington the MP begins to feel that he is merely "playing for points in the game of party advantage" (366). This metaphor is also employed by one of Remington's friends, who is unimpressed by Remington's entanglement with "self-satisfied New Liberalism and Progressivism," which he describes as "foolery": "[i]t's prigs at play. It's make-believe, make-believe!" (299). According to this friend, Remington's political associates "don't know anything of life at all,

shirk life, avoid life, get in little bright clean rooms and talk big [...] while the Night goes on outside—untouched" (299–300). Here, as in Remington's dismissal of the Baileys' administrative "fizzle," a dichotomous opposition is established between politics (or play) and "life."

This dichotomy of life and statecraft is operative both in the plot—culminating in the protagonist's decision to prioritise his love life over his statist ambitions—and in the language of the narrative. Indeed, Remington frequently comments on "the great contrast between warm, personal things and the white dream of statecraft" (367). The "white dream" here signifies something pure and pristine, which is bloodless in that respect—an ambition or idea that is devoid of, and maybe irreconcilable with, human desires and foibles. Indeed, in his retrospective narrative, Remington bemoans his younger self's "too abstract a dream of statesmanship" (4). The cerebral and dispassionate aspect of statecraft is thus identified as a fundamental problem in the statist project.

Wells's exploration of the idea that ambitious, forward-thinking administrative statecraft cannot but be impersonal and vague goes back to his discourse in *A Modern Utopia* on the "unreality" of utopian constructs:

> Whatever institution has existed or exists, however irrational, however preposterous, has, by virtue of its contact with individualities, an effect of realness and rightness no untried thing may share. It has ripened, it has been christened with blood, it has been stained and mellowed by handling, it has been rounded and dented to the softened contours that we associate with life; it has been salted, maybe, in a brine of tears. But the thing that is merely proposed, the thing that is merely suggested, however rational, however necessary, seems strange and inhuman in its clear, hard, uncompromising lines, its unqualified angles and surfaces. (10)

The problem for the author seeking to rewrite the state, then, is the very richness of the picture-writing of the extant institutional apparatus, and the fact that is has "softened contours"—contours softened in part by fictional representations. In other words, Wells laments the fact that an envisioned institution necessarily seems "strange and inhuman" in contrast with the familiarity of the extent administrative state culture.

In *The New Machiavelli*, then, Wells problematises and reflects upon the challenge of rendering statehood—or the "dream of statesmanship"—in a different and more convincing light, especially in terms of novelistic representation. Articulating his own conception of administrative socialism following his departure from the Fabian Society, Wells sought to build a "palace with living rooms," so to speak—to imagine an administrative state culture in which fiction was preferred to Blue Books. This aspect of Wells's thinking with respect to the

issue of reimagining or rewriting the state underlines the pronounced lyricism of his writings on statecraft during this period. Alongside the refitting of statehood to planetary proportions in *A Modern Utopia*, the most dramatic revision of statehood in Wells's Edwardian fiction is, in fact, precisely the effusive lyrical language of Wells's descriptions of the state. The impassioned rhetoric that Wells uses effectively reframes statehood as a phenomenon with all the qualities befitting a poetic literary motif, an object on which adulation may be bestowed (an affect more commonly associated with patriotic or royalistic nationalism). *The New Machiavelli* is, in part, an idealist's apology for statism—but, on the other hand, it also constitutes a significant problematisation of the linguistic and emotional associations that tend to be attached to state institutions, which anticipates contemporary scholarly theorisations of what the state "feels" like. In her recent contribution to this area of scholarship, Cooper observes that "[s]tates are routinely expected to feel hard, impersonal, cruel, coercive, dominating, and humorless" (156). In *The New Machiavelli*, as noted above, Wells interrogates why the state has these connotations. Indeed, Wells seeks to change this affective register, expanding his contemporaries' emotional registers to encompass affection for the state.

The New Machiavelli concludes with a return to the lyrical mode, with "statecraft" once more becoming "wonderful" and "splendid" in Remington's eyes (481). In short, Remington rediscovers the administrative feeling that he and Willersley shared in the Swiss Alps. He does so, not coincidentally, through the intellectual and amorous companionship of a younger woman named Isabel Rivers, a character closely modelled on Amber Reeves. Remington comes to realise that "instead of abstractions and blue-books and bills and devices," it is "that shy wild thing in the hearts of men, love, which must be drawn upon as it has never been drawn upon before, if the State is to live" (482). Remington's extra-marital relationship with Isabel causes a scandal, and Remington has to decide whether to pursue his political project or elope with Isabel. He considers sacrificing himself for the cause—"What is one life against the State?"—but ultimately he cannot see the state ever being made to "live" in the absence of love (525). This maudlin conclusion to Remington's story provides a (somewhat unconvincing) resolution to one of the central themes explored in the novel, namely that of synthesising autobiography and the writing of the state.

The romanticisation of the state in *The New Machiavelli* constitutes the apex of Wells's post-Fabian attempt to articulate a warm, graceful, and non-bureaucratic statism, as an alternative to the Fabian Society's benevolent but bland bureaucracy. Indeed, whilst the idea of statecraft powered by "love" has all the hallmarks of a "big" Wellsian idea, it is

exceedingly hard to see how the self-professed Gradginds of the Fabian Society could have deployed such an idea as an "instrument of research," to borrow Beatrice Webb's expression. Wells clearly wished to differentiate his own statism from that of the Fabian Society. At the same time, the unexpected coupling of love and statecraft, building on the broader juxtaposition of biography and statecraft in the narrative, may also be read in light of Wells's attempt to find a lyrical mode of writing about administrative statecraft, a figuration of the state that might be capable of rivalling and supplanting the bureaucratic horror story, which had emerged as the dominant mode of writing the state over the long nineteenth century and which had, to some extent, blighted his account of utopian state administration in *A Modern Utopia*.

Conclusion

In *State Power: A Strategic-Relational Approach* (2007), Bob Jessop observes that "the state is at best a polyvalent, polycontextual phenomenon and its institutional architecture, *modus operandus*, and specific activities change along with the dominant political imaginaries and state projects" (73). By the same token, literary representations of the state are "polyvalent" and "polycontextual," changing with the evolution of the state and in conjunction with literary trends. My study has illuminated the germination of a literary tradition of writing about the administrative state in the Victorian era and its subsequent reinterpretation or reinvention at the turn of the twentieth century. By shedding new light on the shifting dynamics of the literary treatment of state bureaucracy during this period, I have sought to expand and redirect the scholarly conversation about the writing of the state in long-nineteenth-century British literature and beyond.

I have argued that what is distinctive for the long-nineteenth-century British state is the crystallisation of a modern *administrative state culture*. Furthermore, I have shown that this culture inspired a veritable British "literature of Bureaucracy" (Diani, "Preface," 6), that is, a literary tradition of portraying and characterising administrative statecraft. Another key claim that I have made in the study is that literary representations of the emergent administrative state established a set of narrative tropes that shaped the ways in which public administration was interpreted and imagined. Whilst "administrative fiction" (Waldo) is too protean in form to be considered a genre, the long nineteenth century did, in fact, see the crystallisation of the "bureaucratic horror story" (Herzfeld 3) as the dominant literary mode of story-telling associated with public administration, a type of narrative that focuses on interactions between public servants and their clients, highlighting the dangers involved in such encounters, primarily for civilian non-bureaucrats.

As my study has shown, there was a strong conviction amongst the authors examined that fictional depictions of public institutions served several important societal functions. Such fiction was celebrated by Wells as a mode of critique, or a "controlling criticism," of officialdom ("Contemporary," 164); it was championed by Martineau as an educational "guide" to the state (*Illustrations of Taxation*, 104); and it was valorised by Dickens as a mode of contestation, or a "declaration [...] to those who are put in authority" ("Great Tasmania," 37). And yet, these authors' involvement in matters of state was not universally

welcomed; there were certainly Victorian critics, such as the lawyer James Fitzjames Stephen, who, harking back to Plato's *Republic*, considered popular literary representations of state institutions a bad influence on the state culture. It is, of course, impossible to know whether the arguments put forth by Martineau, Dickens, and Wells, and to a lesser extent Conrad, would have satisfied Plato, convincing him of the need for literature in an ideal state; nonetheless, my discussion of these authors' writings has hopefully brought out the force, complexity, earnestness, and indeed cultural impact of their administrative fiction.

With the exception of Conrad, all of the writers dealt with in the present study were deeply involved in various political projects pertaining to administrative reform: Martineau wrote fiction commissioned by state functionaries in support of the prospective New Poor Law, Dickens campaigned with the Administrative Reform Association, and Wells advocated for administrative socialism as a leading member of the Fabian Society. Meanwhile, Conrad's experiences of imperial and naval bureaucracy resulted in a lasting commitment to exposing the horrors of administrative statecraft. By situating these writers' treatment of state bureaucracy as interventions in Britain's evolving administrative state culture, my study has delineated the three aforementioned functions that these writers saw themselves performing with respect to the state: the critical, the educational, and the contestatory. A *critical* mode may be seen in these writers' reformist concern with spotlighting maladministration and envisioning better forms of public administration. An *educational* mode is manifest in these writers' emphasis on characterising the mechanisms and effects of administrative systems for the benefit of their readers. And a *contestatory* mode is evident above all in these writers' playful and subversive treatment of official representations and constructions of statehood, which undermines what Pierre Bourdieu would call the state's "symbolic power."

In my chapters on Martineau and Dickens, I have shown that these two writers presented their narratives as educational resources for a readership that increasingly encountered administrative phenomena in everyday life. Martineau's stories condemned fraudulence amongst bureaucratically-literate paupers, whereas Dickens depicted professional bureaucrats taking advantage of bureaucratically-naive civilians. These works of administrative fiction were not explicitly earmarked as guidebooks, but their educational components are often highlighted in authorial prefaces and made all but overt at various moments in the literary texts themselves. That is, these narratives feature guide-like commentaries on administrative statecraft, as well as instances where civilian non-bureaucrats verbalize their bureaucratic competencies in the shape of maxims and terminological

coinages, as well as scenes of staged "state play" (Cooper 159) in which fictional characters jointly process administrative phenomena.

In my chapters on Conrad and Wells, I have emphasised that these Edwardian early-modernist writers were less concerned with the issue of achieving bureaucratic literacy than their Victorian counterparts. Instead, Conrad and Wells drew attention to the drawbacks of becoming acclimatised to the extant administrative state culture. Conrad in particular took the bureaucratic horror story in a new direction, by foregrounding the ways in which institutional structures govern thought and perception in a fully-fledged administrative state culture. That is, whereas the Victorian bureaucratic horror story gained its potency from the threat of pervasive societal bureaucratisation, at the turn of the twentieth century the administered world seemed an ineluctable fact of modernity, thus lending a stronger sense of claustrophobia to fiction dealing with bureaucracy from this period, as typified by Conrad's work. This oppressive quality of much Edwardian administrative fiction, and of Conrad's *The Secret Agent* in particular, is epitomised by Verloc's torment at the hands of the ambassadors of an unnamed London embassy, and by the feebleness of the political imagination of the anarchists of the same novel.

The inability of Conrad's anarchists to transcend the conceptual horizon of administrative state culture is emblematic of Conrad's delineation of the idiosyncrasies and perceptual constraints of the modern "state-made man" (Bourdieu, *On the State*, 108). That is, Conrad's administrative fiction illustrates how the modern individual's understanding of the social world is shaped by and anchored to the administrative state. In the twenty-first century, according to political scientist Jens Bartelson, we "seem to lack the intellectual resources necessary to conceive of a political order beyond or without the state, since the state has been present for long enough for the concept to confine our political imagination" (1–2). Whilst this imaginative limitation has potentially been exacerbated by the longevity of the modern administrative state, Conrad's novel shows that the weight of the bureaucratic iron cage was keenly felt even at the dawn of the twentieth century by what was arguably the first generation of bureaucratic natives, at least in a British context. And yet, in this connection it is important to note that Conrad's treatment of the state indicates that he viewed fiction as a productive medium for developing the "intellectual resources" required in order to think more freely about the state. In this sense, Conrad's treatment of administrative state culture should not be regarded as wholly pessimistic with regards to the possibility of political progress and intellectual freedom, but rather as articulating a liberatory critique.

As noted above, in this study I have argued that long-nineteenth-century administrative fiction played an important part in solidifying the state imaginary, particularly by reinforcing "state effects" (Mitchell 89) which help to naturalise statehood. At the same time, I have shown how writers such as Dickens and Conrad sought to disrupt and destabilise official narratives about administrative statecraft. Michael Herzfeld has suggested that the popular narrativisation of state bureaucracy is defined above all by story-tellers' eagerness to "draw on a predictable image of malfunction" (3). The clearest example provided in the present study of how the "predictable image" of bureaucracy has swayed authors dealing with public administration is Wells's account of utopian administrative statecraft in *A Modern Utopia*. Seeking to show the administrative state in a radically different light so as to revivify the popular state imaginary, Wells's utopian novel extracts statehood from its conceptual ties to the nation and expounds upon the transformative potential of administrative technologies. However, as I have shown, Wells's attempt to inspire administrative feeling was curtailed by the narrative mould in which he cast his narrative, which is that of the bureaucratic horror story. Wells's contradictory adoption of this narrative model—which had been popularised by Dickens through his invention of the infamous Circumlocution Office—in writing about a utopian state underlines the strength of its hold on the popular state imaginary.

Taken together, the narratives that I have examined in this thesis develop an "aesthetic of cognitive mapping" (Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 53), a form of cultural expression that helped people make sense of a disorienting administrative state culture. The Dickensian character who is lost in the Circumlocution Office serves as a literal manifestation of the authorial project of cognitively mapping state bureaucracy, as does Wells's story of an encounter with a futuristic administrative world-system. However, none of the authors examined in this study simply lay out a map of a real or imagined institutional landscape. Rather, the three aforementioned "functions"—the critical, the educational, and the contestatory—performed by long-nineteenth-century administrative fiction are interwoven or at least contiguous. The writing of the state could never take the shape of a neutral guidebook, given the absence of a disinterested and totalising perspective from which to observe the workings of the state. In fact, Dickens was not only seeking to empower the governed *vis-à-vis* those who govern with his administrative fiction, nor indeed merely critiquing the epistemic culture of the administrative state, but he could also be said to have been advancing his own interests as a writer by tacitly asserting the ascendancy of literature over the administrative state.

There was, in fact, a distinctly competitive edge to the ways in which writers such as Dickens and Conrad engaged with administrative statecraft, perhaps betraying a fear on their part that paperwork and statistics should dethrone literature, or, worse, that literature was ultimately not wholly different from the state's informational modes of accounting for social reality. These writers critiqued official documentation and state archives in ways that foreshadow contemporary scholarly debates and critical theorisations of administrative statecraft, such as James C. Scott's influential critique of the modern state's manner of "seeing" the social world via censuses, registries, and inquiries. As Scott writes, "human community is [...] far too complicated and variable to easily yield its secrets to bureaucratic formulae" (*Seeing*, 22). In this dissertation I have highlighted that writers such as Dickens and Conrad made this point very forcefully and that they situated their own literary projects as remedies for societal wounds caused by the state's symbolic violence.

As Ann Laura Stoler observes, there has been a general tendency in cultural criticism of modern administrative statecraft to privilege what she terms "'Un-State-d' histories"—e.g. the narratives of subaltern individuals—as potential correctives to "the warped reality of official knowledge" (47). Such tactics of inversion and recuperation are, of course, vitally important, and yet, as Stoler observes, critical (and artistic) practices of reading administrative statecraft against the grain leave intact certain assumptions about state bureaucracy that prevent a deeper understanding of bureaucratic writing (50). Focusing on expressions of epistemological uncertainty in bureaucratic textual artefacts, Stoler finds that "[a]rchival power was no more monolithic than the governing practices that it enabled and on which it was based" (51). Stoler's consequent attempts to read colonial state archives "along," rather than against, the grain (as she puts it in the title of her monograph), can be contrasted with my aim to read "Un-State-d" literary narratives against the grain. That is to say, in examining the critical opposition that Dickens and Conrad establish between state bureaucracy and literature, I have consistently emphasised that this polemic was as much a form of self-promotion as it was a mode of critique, and that the proximity of literature and state administration is as interesting to explore as their formal differences.

In this study, I have highlighted that the official informational genres that arose during the long nineteenth century in many ways resembled the genre of the novel, insofar as they sought to describe the same social reality. The interests of official statisticians and Royal Commissioners did not always overlap with those of popular authors, and yet, along with journalism, narrative fiction and administrative information emerged as the dominant textual modes of the day, with competing epistemological foundations. As I have shown, the

closeness of these two genres invited both conflict and collaboration, leading to considerable interplay and innovation. Moreover, the proximity of administrative and literary forms of writing during this period also helps explain the analytical verve of the works of administrative fiction dealt with in my study. In other words, the evidence presented in this study suggests that narrative fiction constituted a fruitful medium for conceptualising state bureaucracy partly because authors were able to interrogate administrative statecraft through the lens of their own craft.

In my study I identify one particularly significant example of narrative craft informing conceptualisations of state bureaucracy in long-nineteenth-century fiction. This is the theme of *administrative worlding*, a concern that is most prominent in the work of Dickens and Conrad, but which pertains to all four authors. Victorian and modernist writers responded to the rise of the administrative state by variously highlighting, critiquing, and tapping into the worlding dimension of administrative modes of representation, meaning the ways in which official documentation both shaped social reality and constructed a virtual "papereality" (Dery 687). It is no coincidence that writers of administrative fiction should be attuned to this phenomenon and adept at describing, if not mimicking and adopting, it, given that their own business as authors lay in creating textual worlds.

The aforementioned affordances of narrative fiction as a model for conceptualising administrative forms of writing raises the question of how writers have responded to the advent of digital administration during the late twentieth century and early twenty-first. Scholars such as Mary Douglas, Jon Agar, and Cornelia Vismann emphasise the continuity between digital data management and older forms of files and registers (Agar 136; Douglas 92; Vismann 164). Indeed, the potential correspondences between administrative worlds and "data worlds" (Bode and Goodlad) are indicateed by Douglas's suggestion that state institutions share the "megalomania of the computer whose whole vision of the world is its own program" (92).[172] On the other hand, whilst it may be argued that certain fundamental features and mechanisms of administrative worlding remain operative in contemporary information management, digital computing and storage technology has radically transformed administrative statecraft, and the bureaucratic papereality in many ways pales in comparison with contemporary data worlds.

In this thesis, I have focused on some of the major writers on state bureaucracy in long-nineteenth-century British literature, mapping out their engagement with the

[172] In Mark Poster's words, electronic databases create "additional social identities," individuals that appear to be "present somehow inside the computer" (87–8).

administrative state, and retracing connections and relationships between this particular set of writers. I have thus been able to show that these writers engaged with public administration partly by engaging with each others' work, and that their writings on state bureaucracy therefore may be said to constitute a veritable literary tradition. In order to give a fuller account of the engagement with state bureaucracy during this period, more excavational work is required, examining a larger corpus of administrative fiction. With the present study I have sought to improve our understanding of the development of British administrative fiction over the nineteenth century, but the picture remains incomplete given that there are a number of important questions that I have not explored in depth, such as the relation between the metropolitan state and administrative structures in other parts of Great Britain, and the ways in which regional differences might have registered in administrative fiction, or how depictions of British colonial administration influenced representations of domestic bureaucracy, and vice versa.

Future research might also inquire further about the gender dynamics of administrative fiction. As I have discussed in the present thesis, several female characters in Martineau and Dickens come into contact with state functionaries, and these women often display a perhaps unexpected degree of bureaucratic comprehension and readiness. And yet, none of the writers examined in the thesis gave significant attention to the fact that public administration was a male preserve, or indeed that women were beginning to take up positions within public institutions. In Martineau's account of the parochial administration of the Old Poor Law, wives may assist their overseer husbands with administering poor relief, but that is the extent of women's involvement in local administrative structures; meanwhile, the centralised New Poor Law system that Martineau envisions will be supervised by "a blessed society of three or four wise men in London" (*Town*, 113). Gender roles were clearly not at the forefront of Conrad's critique of the administrative state either, despite the influx of female civil servants at the turn of the twentieth century, nor of Wells's reimagining of the administrative state, despite the readily available model for the professional "femocrat" in Beatrice Webb.[173]

A later writer on the state such as Virginia Woolf formulates a feminist novelistic critique of the administrative state without writing administrative fiction per se. Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) is, crucially, a novel set in Westminster featuring numerous male British statesmen and official personages, which is pointedly not about the corridors of power. Focusing on the life of the wife of a Member of Parliament (rather than focusing on the MP

[173] The term "femocrat" was invented in the 1970s in Australia to describe feminists who went into women's policy positions.

himself), *Mrs. Dalloway* reads as an inversion of the masculinist genre of the "bureaucratic memoir" (Grewal 609).[174] During the long nineteenth century, the administrative state was written through numerous genres, extending from files, memos, and Blue Books, to literary genres such as administrative fiction and the aforementioned "bureaucratic memoir." Woolf's novel represents yet another mode of writing the state—one which provocatively reconfigures statehood as a peripheral part of the social world.[175] That is, read in this context, Woolf's decentring of the state in *Mrs. Dalloway* represents not only a powerful feminist critique of a patriarchal administrative state culture, but also a mode of undermining the symbolic power of the state.

Administrative fiction has continued to serve various critical, educational, and contestatory functions. It seemingly gained a new-found currency during the First World War, when there was "hardly a novel" that did not "introduce its public servants" (Wolfe 55). This trend did not have time to abate before the Second World War, when novels such as Evelyn Waugh's *Put Out More Flags* (1942) characterised "the difficulties and impossibilities of bureaucratic life" during the war (75). Waugh's novel describes wartime organisation as a monumental bureaucratic labyrinth in which ne'er-do-well aristocrats may get by without contributing to the war effort simply because they are adept at manoeuvring bureaucracy, whereas others are prevented from contributing by irrational quirks of the administrative system. The bureaucratic horror story has remained a fixture also in later British literature, from George Orwell's critique of totalitarianism in *1984* (1949) to Salman Rushdie's account of xenophobia and structural racism in British border control agencies in *The Satanic Verses* (1988).

Even after the modernist shift from familiarisation to "defamiliarisation" (Shklovsky 12) in literary representations of state bureaucracy, a trajectory which I have theorised in the present study (and which reaches its apex in Franz Kafka's strange and allegorical portrayal of bureaucratic life), administrative fiction has continued to serve a pedagogical function in illuminating bureaucratic phenomena. The pedagogic dimension of literary treatments of state institutions is underlined in James Kelman's trenchant portrait of state bureaucracy in *How Late It Was, How Late* (1994). Early in this Glasgow novel, Kelman's protagonist Sammy gets into a fight with two plainclothes policemen and seemingly loses his eyesight. The remainder of the narrative charts Sammy's uncertain path through a host of bureaucratic

[174] Such autobiographies written by elite civil servants do not focus on revealing private intimacies, but rather elide domestic and private life, "seemingly provid[ing] access to the state" by "insisting on the demarcation between public and private" (Grewal 609).
[175] See Hentea for an illuminating discussion of Woolf's treatment of state bureaucracy in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

institutions (using a makeshift walking stick), as he fights to receive compensation for what one of the doctors who examines Sammy describes as an "alleged dysfunction" (225). Sammy is soon approached by a man named Ally who offers to act as his legal representative and who has a great deal to say about "good habit[s] to get into for official purposes" (238). Above all, this Ally stresses the importance of understanding the workings of the institutional system:

> It's how they think and how they act, the authorities I'm talking about, how they breathe; how they hold their knife and fork, the kind of car they drive; where they stay—which is hard by the way cause they hate folk knowing where they stay. And that's afore ye reach the rules and regulations and all the different procedures; the protocols and formalities, when ye bow and when ye scrape; when ye talk and when ye hold yer wheesht—ye follow me, when to shut the auld gub[.] (238–39)

The talkative Ally explains that he "got to know about cases in general" while he was in jail, through the bureaucratic rigmarole of seeking to secure an earlier release (299). Crucially, Ally regrets having taken a confrontational approach with his own case. He recounts having sent a vitriolic letter to a newspaper column in which he joked sarcastically that the incarceration of innocent people "serves to educate them in the protocols and procedures of the due processes of state and this cannot be good for society as a whole" (300). Ally suggests that he was punished for his sardonic wit through the denial of his request to have his jail sentence shortened; and yet, he declares that this episode taught him a lesson that he would have had to "pay a lot of dough for [...] on the outside" (300). And now, the bureaucratically self-taught Ally wishes to coach Sammy. Ally's acerbic comments about "educating" civilian non-bureaucrats in the "protocols and procedures of the due processes of state" (underlines the pedagogical thrust of Kelman's critique of the British welfare state, which, in a Dickensian vein, serves to highlight both the broken nature of the system and the ways in which it might be navigated and bested.

Administrative fiction has, in other words, continued to serve educational purposes in recent decades. Indeed, administrative fiction has been touted as an important pedagogical tool in the discipline of public administration studies for over half a century, going back to Dwight Waldo's pioneering work in the 1960s (Waldo 5; McDaniel 548; Holzer, et al., vii; Goodsell and Murray 6; Illiash 71), an educational practice which all but realises Wells's glib proposal that civil service applicants should be subjected to "a severe examination upon 'Oliver Twist'" (*Englishman*, 165). At the same time, it has been suggested that the significance of bureaucratic organisation is waning as a consequence of the transition into a "post-Westphalian" era in which the nation-state increasingly becomes enmeshed in other

social, political, and economical structures (Brown, *Walled*, 39). As Saskia Sassen puts it, neoliberal global capitalism has challenged the dominance of "the spatio-temporal order of the nation-state, an order constituted particularly through the bureaucratizing of time and space" (379). Indeed, certain commentators speak of an era of "post-bureaucratic organisation" (Sullivan 5). Thus, Peter Becker and Rüdiger von Krosigk suggest that "[f]rom today's vantage point, it looks as though bureaucratic organizations both in the public and the private sector tend to become an endangered species" (15). However, other analysts conversely find that we have simply reached a stage where bureaucratisation "becomes the very logic of [...] society, its response to everything" (Castoriadis, "Modern," 272). David Graeber offers a similar interpretation of bureaucracy's status in contemporary cultures. Graeber suggests that if bureaucracy has become less salient a concern in the popular consciousness over the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries, then this is simply because "[b]ureaucracy has become the water in which we swim" (Graeber, *Utopia*, 4). As I have sought to show in this thesis, literature has historically played its part in helping people learn how to swim in these murky waters.

Acknowledgements

Anthropologist Nayanika Mathur observes that, in order to "grasp the workings of bureaucracy, one needs a hook of some sort," because otherwise "one risks drowning in bureaucratic banality." Mathur is referring here to the type of keywords that structure her analysis, but I would say that an equally vital "hook" or safety-net in this regard, in any sustained encounter with bureaucratic banality (even one mediated through fiction), is companionship.

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When I started writing this thesis there was a distinct lack of scholarly contexts for researchers interested in literature and the state, or literature and bureaucracy. Happily, this is now beginning to change. My project has gained immensely from discussions with, and input from, scholars working in this burgeoning area of research. Thanks to Derek Dunne, Jonathan Patterson, Christophe Premat, Rebecca Oh, Elliott Mills, Karl O'Hanlon, Daniel Jenkin-Smith, Nishant Gokhale, and—my fellow "bureaucritic"—Alexandra Irimia.

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Sammanfattning (Summary in Swedish)

Att skriva staten: Skildringar av statsförvaltning i brittisk skönlitteratur under det långa artonhundratalet

Denna avhandling undersöker hur statliga myndigheter och offentlig förvaltning skildrades i brittisk skönlitteratur under det långa artonhundratalet, samt vilka sociokulturella funktioner dessa litterära framställningar hade i sina historiska kontexter. Undersökningen belyser historiska och formmässiga kopplingar mellan skönlitterära texter och offentlig förvaltning under den administrativa statens framväxt, och erbjuder därmed ett ramverk för framtida forskning om samspelet mellan litteratur och statsförvaltning.

Forskningsprojektet har delvis motiverats av den relativt bristfälliga uppmärksamhet som brittiska litterära gestaltningar av statlig administration rönt inom tidigare forskning. Forskare har hävdat att Storbritannien – i jämförelse med exempelvis Frankrike och Tyskland – saknar en litterär tradition av betydelse inom detta område. Detta ses som en effekt av Storbritanniens kulturella särprägel, i egenskap av en stat som byråkratiserades sent och i mindre utsträckning. Med utgångspunkt i fallstudier av fyra författarskap – Harriet Martineau, Charles Dickens, Joseph Conrad och H G Wells – visar avhandlingen att beskrivningar av statlig administration hade en stark närvaro i brittisk litteratur under det långa artonhundratalet.

Tidigare studier av relationen mellan viktoriansk brittisk litteratur och den brittiska staten har tenderat att framhäva liberala anti-interventionistiska styrformer (Goodlad) eller disciplinära aspekter av den viktorianska romanen (Miller). Denna avhandling rör sig bortom sådana Foucauldianska perspektiv på litteraturens och statens relation: dels genom att framhålla hur litterära framställningar av statliga myndigheter under det långa artonhundratalet syftade till att förhöja läsarens byråkratiska agens, dels genom att belysa hur synen på den moderna administrativa staten formades av skönlitterära framställningar under denna period. Med avstamp i Pierre Bourdieus teori om statens ”symboliska makt” utforskas det skönlitterära berättandets möjligheter att befordra officiella föreställningar om stat och samhälle men också dess förmåga att bestrida och destabilisera statens symboliska makt. Avhandlingen undersöker vidare de berättartekniska uttrycksmedel som tidigare nämnda författare använt för att gestalta offentlig förvaltning, samt de litterära effekter som administrativa praktiker gav upphov till i deras verk. Därmed synliggör avhandlingen det byråkratiska paradigmets betydande inflytande på viktoriansk och modernistisk litterär estetik.

Avhandlingens huvudfokus är byråkraticentrerade berättelser av det slag som Dwight Waldo, forskare inom offentlig förvaltning, har benämnt som ”administrativ skönlitteratur” (”administrative fiction”). Undersökningen identifierar två centrala skeden i utvecklingen av berättelser om den moderna brittiska administrativa staten. Den visar att Harriet Martineau och Charles Dickens – två pionjärer inom vad som kom att utvecklas till en sorts litterär tradition – betonade vikten av att man som icke-byråkrat utvecklade byråkratiska färdigheter för att inte halka efter i samhällsutvecklingen. Vid sekelskiftet 1900 hade emellertid byråkratins väsen blivit välbekant för befolkningen i stort, delvis genom skönlitterära skildringar. Vid denna tidpunkt flyttades fokus från pedagogiska framställningar av statlig byråkrati till en mer djuplodande problematisering av byråkratins inverkan på både individ och samhälle. Detta blir synligt i Joseph Conrads beskrivning av den rådande administrativa statskulturen som ett hinder för självständigt tänkande, liksom i H. G. Wells försök att förändra den gängse bilden av staten och därmed bädda för utvecklingen mot en stat med socialistiska förtecken

Avhandlingen består av ett kortare kapitel som introducerar studien, ett längre introduktionskapitel som presenterar avhandlingens teoretiska, metodologiska och historiska utgångspunkter, följt av de fyra kapitel som fokuserar på de respektive författarskapen, och slutligen ett sammanfattande kapitel med studiens slutsatser.

I det första längre kapitlet motiverar jag mitt urval av litterära verk och beskriver avhandlingens metod. Jag presenterar och diskuterar studiens nyckelkoncept och relaterar därigenom mitt projekt till den vetenskapliga diskurs kring litteratur, byråkrati och stat i vilken studien är förankrad. Vidare belyser jag behovet av en mer ingående och sammanlänkad diskussion om hur litteratur kan förstås i förhållande till stat och byråkrati, då forskningsområdet hittills lidit brist på de varaktiga interdisciplinära utbyten och samtal som kännetecknar ett fullt utvecklat forskningsfält.

I detta kapitel formulerar jag även mina huvudsakliga forskningsfrågor, som kortfattat lyder: Hur beskrevs den framväxande administrativa staten i skönlitterära verk under det långa artonhundratalet? Vilka sociokulturella funktioner hade dessa litterära uttryck? I anslutning till detta betonar jag särskilt vikten av vad antropologen Michael Herzfeld kallar ”byråkratiska skräckhistorier” (*bureaucratic horror stories*) – det vill säga sådana erfarenhetsbaserade historier som gemene man tenderar att berätta om byråkratins systematiska misstag och obstruktioner. Avhandlingen visar att sådana troper kom att dominera skönlitterära framställningar av staten under det långa artonhundratalet.

Mitt andra kapitel undersöker Harriet Martineaus skildringar av fattigvården i *Poor Laws and Paupers Illustrated* (1833–4), en serie noveller vilka Martineau skrev på beställning av statliga tjänstemän i syfte att komplettera en pågående utredning av Storbritanniens fattigvårdssystem. Genom att visa på tematiska, formmässiga och ideologiska kopplingar mellan Martineaus noveller och den statliga utredningen ger kapitlet en ny bild av relationen mellan skönlitteratur och statsapparatens framväxande informationskapital vid denna tid. Martineaus noveller beskriver ingående de administrativa missförhållanden inom fattigvården vilka hade kartlags i den officiella utredningen, samt utforskar administrativa lösningar på dessa problem. Martineaus förslag liknar i stora drag de reformer vilka sedan kom att genomföras på rekommendation av den officiella utredningen. Dessa reformer utgjorde ett väsentligt steg mot Storbritanniens administrativa centralisering och professionalisering. I kapitlet argumenterar jag också för att Martineaus fattigvårdsnoveller – vilka kretsar kring maktdynamiken i relationen mellan administratörer och vanliga medborgare – utgör en för sin tid ny och betydelsefull typ av litterär berättelse.

Det tredje kapitlet undersöker hur Charles Dickens vidareutvecklade den sortens administrativ skönlitteratur som Martineau skrivit, i skildringar av statlig administration i verk som *Bleak House* (1853) och *Little Dorrit* (1857). Dickens beskrev samhälleliga spänningar och konflikter som intensifierades vid artonhundratalets mitt när Storbritannien utvecklades mot en modern administrativ statskultur och statlig byråkrati alltmer kom att påverka vanliga medborgares liv. Dickens byråkratiska skräckhistorier betonade vikten av att stärka den civila icke-byråkratens byråkratiska kompetenser, mot bakgrund av det påfallande hot som statlig myndighetsutövning utgjorde – åtminstone i Dickens tappning. Kärnan i byråkratins upplevda hotfullhet låg framförallt i tjänstemännens tilltagande byråkratiska kapital, samt de nya administrativa metoder med vilka staten dokumenterade och beskrev sociala förhållanden. Medan Martineau hade lierat sig med staten och nyttjat dess symboliska kraft, tog Dickens avstånd från officiella informationsgenrer såsom statistik och bokföring, och positionerade skönlitteratur gentemot dessa som ett epistemologiskt och etiskt korrektiv. Kapitlet visar slutligen hur Dickens inflytande medförde att den byråkratiska skräckhistorien kom att utgöra en vedertagen mall för skönlitterära framställningar av statliga myndigheter i brittisk fiktion under det sena artonhundratalet.

Det fjärde kapitlet lämnar den viktorianska eran och undersöker istället hur narrativ om statlig administration utvecklades under det tidiga nittonhundratalet. Här utforskar jag Joseph Conrads sarkastiska och ifrågasättande gestaltning av statlig administration i *The Secret Agent* (1907), där en byråkratisk polisavdelning ställs mot sin skenbara motsats i en

Soho-baserad anarkistgrupp. I romanen betonas brister i polisens utredningar som till stor del är en följd av institutionens byråkratiska organisation. Denna organisatoriska problematik drabbar också anarkisterna i romanen, vilka framställs som fångna i samma byråkratiska strukturer och tankesätt som poliserna. Anarkisterna är med andra ord oförmögna att erbjuda ett reellt alternativ till, eller hot mot, staten. Kapitlet visar att anarkisternas bundenhet till den statskultur de säger sig vilja omkullkasta blir till en symbol för det problem som Conrad utforskar, nämligen hur perception och tanke formas av byråkratiska strukturer. Conrads underförstådda mening är att romanen utgör ett viktigt medel inte bara för att bättre förstå staten, utan också för att lyckas tänka bortom staten.

Mitt femte kapitel utforskar den administrativa utopism som genomsyrar H. G. Wells idéroman *A Modern Utopia* (1905). Under 1900-talets första decennium utvecklade Wells, som var engagerad i den inflytelserika London-baserade socialistiska organisationen Fabianerna (*the Fabian Society*), en stark övertygelse om att lokala samhällen spelat ut sin roll och att världen behövde nya och vidare administrativa strukturer. I *A Modern Utopia* presenterar Wells en utopisk vision om en värld utan gränser, där global rörelsefrihet garanteras av en administrativ världsstat genom dess sofistikerade system för biometrisk övervakning. Wells hade en stark ambition att förnya berättelsen om den moderna statsapparaten och att inspirera till entusiasm för administrativ teknologi genom sitt skrivande. Wells hyste dock en ambivalent inställning till statens byråkratiska aspekter, delvis som en följd av sin konfliktfyllda relation till Fabianerna och deras vurm för byråkratiska institutioner och tillvägagångssätt. Kapitlet utforskar hur denna ambivalens yttrar sig i Wells försök att skriva en medryckande berättelse om administrativ statskonst. Trots sitt utopiska och visionära anslag i *A Modern Utopia* hemföll Wells likväl till att upprepa det förhärskande skräcknarrativet om byråkratisk förvirring och inkompetens, vilket gav hans vision om en administrativ världsstat klart dystopiska undertoner.

Det avslutande kapitlet summerar projektet i sin helhet och erbjuder några övergripande reflektioner kring administrativ skönlitteratur under det långa artonhundratalet. I detta kapitel anges också områden för fortsatt forskning, med särskilt fokus på vikten av att vidare undersöka hur könsroller och regionala skillnader skildrades i administrativ skönlitteratur vid denna tid. Gestaltningar av offentlig förvaltning i senare brittisk nittonhundratalslitteratur diskuteras även korfattat – detta i syfte att beskriva hur de teman och uttrycksformer som identifierats i studien kom att både bestå och utvecklas.

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