Introduction

INTERIORITY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Theater Demetaphorized

In at least one version of the story, the modern novel is born from theatrical failure. Henry James is famously supposed to have learned his lesson in the theater, and the lesson was to stay out of the theater. Fortunately for literary history, this account goes, he alchemized his personal embarrassment into narrative innovation. In the years immediately following the *Guy Domville* disaster of 1895, James conducted a series of formal experiments in his fiction, arriving at a set of rules that made the novel into an object of undeniable artistic merit. Chief among these were the strict limitation of point of view to one or two focalizing characters and the avoidance of narrative summary in favor of tightly recounted scenes. The name James gave to these dicta, which were to have major implications for his explorations of interiority in the novels of the new century, was the "scenic method." This was a canny rhetorical recuperation of his theatrical failure, at once praising the theater and sidelining it: if on the one hand the novel thus conceived appears to aspire to the condition of theater, on the other it is understood adequately to displace and replace the drama as an embodied social event. In the scenic method the theater is remade as metaphor. James's theatrical debacle has become one of the better-known critical allegories for the birth of the modern novel for a number of reasons, perhaps most obvious being the pleasure of seeing humiliation reworked as aesthetic triumph. But this account also confirms our sense that the privileged subject of modern literature is the psychic interior, and, more darkly, buttresses a story of the modern novel as the exemplary genre of social forgetting, a sublimation of collective life into a self-enclosed technicism and aestheticism.

Empty Houses troubles this story by noting, first, that the Jamesian transmutation of dramatic frustration into narrative accomplishment has resonances in other important novelistic careers. In addition to analyzing James's

post-theatrical work, this book explores the afterlife of frustrated dramatic projects in the careers of William Makepeace Thackeray, George Eliot, and James Joyce. My most immediate claim is that what might seem a series of perplexing or amusing biographical anomalies merits recognition and analysis as a literary historical fact. That all these writers had serious ambition to write for the stage, and that all of them reworked their theatrical concerns into innovative and influential fiction, indicates that the novelistic turn to and away from the living theater was not a punctual event but has been an ongoing aspect of novelistic development. The list of important novelists who have written for the theater is long, stretching at least from Aphra Behn to Samuel Beckett. But the presence of the theatrical imagination is particularly striking in the four writers who are the subject of this book precisely because it seems so incongruous in them. The example of James makes clear two features of that incongruity: first, while theatrical writing is by definition committed to the absence of a narrative voice, these writers' signal contribution to literature consists of the perfection of a series of sophisticated narrative techniques; second, while the theater demands and depends on the literal fact of collective assembly, each of these writers routed their representations of social forces through various forms of inwardness. To examine the novelistic refunctioning of these writers' theatrical ambitions is thus to examine the collision of the most collectively oriented of forms with one that seems axiomatically individualistic. Thackeray's novels turn obsessively around the micropolitics of family and the affective exclusiveness of domesticity; Eliot is the great poet of sympathy, the advocate of a rigorous internal training in right feeling; James's fictions explore the tortuous workings of consciousness and intimate relations; Joyce made the sexual "core" of the self available for narrative exploration. The term by which I designate this tradition, the novel of interiority, is meant to capture this mapping of ever narrower interior geographies.[1]

    The novel of interiority seems to offer irrefutable support for Ian Watt's canonical description of the novel as "less concerned with the public and more with the private side of life than any previous" literary form, as well as for Sylvie Thorel-Cailleteau's recent claim that "the history of the genre is related to that of contracting space."[2] In a series of influential critiques, each of the writers treated here has been faulted for a betrayal of the collective imagination. Georg Lukács devotes several pages of *The Historical Novel* to denigrating Thackeray's psychologization of history, while Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society* attacks Eliot's dubious portrayals of democratic assembly.[3] Fredric Jameson memorably describes Jamesian perspectivalism as one of literary culture's "more desperate myths of self," "a powerful ideological instrument in the perpetuation of an increasingly subjectivized and psychologized world."[4] And Franco Moretti credits Joyce's aggressive multiplication of perceptual data with providing the individual with an alibi of "innocent

passivity" in the face of capitalist exploitation.[5] Although these novelists have received the harshest assessments from Marxist analysts, the terms of those critiques chime with descriptions of the novel of interiority articulated from a host of perspectives—from post-structuralist feminist Nancy Armstrong's claim that the novel's "phobic representations of the human aggregate" indicate that "the novel of course was not made to think beyond the individual" to sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's assertion that "the psychological novel . . . maximize[s] denial of the social world."[6]

Provoked by such unanimity, this book develops a counternarrative about what novels are and what ideological work they do. *Empty Houses* asks what contribution these writers' theatrical ambitions made to their invention of what by many accounts are among the most "novelistic," and thus reputedly individualizing, of novels. It argues that when we recognize the role of the theater in the creation of the novel of interiority, that novel emerges as a record of the discontents historically sedimented in interiority—less propaganda for the inwardly focused, socially atomized individual than a rigorous account book of interiority's exclusions. Historians and social theorists have long recognized the nineteenth century as the moment when the increasing abstraction and massification of public culture produced a hypercaloric interiority as its imaginary compensation—a situation virtually guaranteed to keep subjects shuttling between hunger for what they have lost and nausea at what has been offered in its place.[7] The novelists this book treats are often taken as apologists for this bargain—as if the very act of making interiority narratively interesting argued for interiority's adequacy as a substitute for a robust public culture. But *Empty Houses* demonstrates that the novel's interior spaces are lined with longing references to the public worlds they would seem to have left behind. In its contradictory character, at once inwardly oriented and outwardly desirous, the tradition explored here confirms the fundamental ambiguity embedded in the logic of the public/private distinction. Demonstrations of its ideological character have not made the public/private divide any less indispensable as an analytic tool, precisely because its ideological character means it is not susceptible to being "disproven." As Susan Gal has recently argued, the indexical sign of "privacy" powerfully marks realms of human experience by recursively nesting private zones inside one another.[8] Thus, while a suburb seems private in comparison with a business district, once inside that suburb the front lawns seem more private than the quiet streets—and, once inside the house, the front hall is marked as public over against the living room. This logic is of course headed for the bedroom, but it does not stop there: sexuality, the body, and the desires that drive them are themselves susceptible to further such subdivision. As Michael McKeon puts it in *The Secret History of Domesticity* (a book tracking the early modern emergence of the dynamic Gal is describing), "the 'privacy' of the individual can be conceived to consist not only of interrelations with other private

individuals and institutions . . . but also of the intrarelations that exist within any single individual."[9]

In tracing a line from Thackeray's obsession with the domestically enclosed family to Eliot's preoccupation with the sympathetic exchange between two characters to James's attention to subtleties of consciousness and finally to Joyce's plumbing of the sexual depths, this book might seem to verify the novel's inexorable drive inward. But I take these writers' desire to enter the theater as the symptom of a powerful ambivalence at the heart of their novelistic projects. In each career the experiment with theater occupied a pivotal moment, often directly preceding and always deeply imbricated with the novelistic innovations for which they are now better known. The turn to the theater indexes in each case a desire for a palpable relation to an embodied public and an impatience with the inward gaze of narrative fiction, in the process opening a self-critical perspective on these writers' apparent project of making domestic and psychological interiors seem narratively important. The empty houses for which the book is named refer both to the theatrical spaces their plays were unable to fill and to the domestic and psychological containers their novels appear to encourage readers to desert. Indeed, the novel of interiority bears out not only Gal's account of nested privacies but also the sense, implicit in her analysis, that intensified interiority can have surprisingly publicizing consequences. As in a process of atomic fission, the subdivision of ever more particularized realms of privacy builds a correspondingly explosive pressure toward exteriority, so that even as these texts push inward they fantasize about collective responses to the isolations of privacy.[10] The interior spaces traced in these novels bear the visible impress of a frustrated will to performative exteriority and collectivity, recalling what Hannah Arendt calls "the original privative sense" of the concept of privacy, its root meaning of being deprived access to an ample social world.[11] The novel of interiority is a record not only of relentless intensifications of interiority but of the desire to escape from it.

Far from confirming what Armstrong terms "the novel's irreversible contraction of the imagined community,"[12] *Empty Houses* demonstrates the novel's abiding interest in various scales of collectivity. The theatrical energies encoded—genetically, as it were—in the novel of interiority continually point beyond the enclosures represented by the family, the home, individual psychology, and sexual identity. Thus in Thackeray's theatrical work, as in the fiction he made from it, the family is haunted by the possibility of bohemian sociability; the intensity with which Thackeray maps the domestic enclosure prompts his readers to imagine more various arrangements of social space than those provided by the idealized family of mid-Victorian England. Eliot's half-finished play *The Spanish Gypsy* imagines a fragile but radical democracy among characters, and this expansive sense of the boundaries of human community lingers into her later fiction, where the suspicion that her characters

are participating in a universal theater threatens to undo the psychological clarity of the scenes of sympathetic exchange for which she is famous. Henry James's fascination with the scandal of sexual betrayal seems oddly beside the point in the novels he wrote immediately after his theatrical failure. His experimental novels do not depict the "typically Jamesian" situation of individuals isolated by perspectival and moral difference; instead, those novels present coteries of erotic dissidents united by an interest in evading late-century codes of sexual meaning. Similarly, Joyce's interest in the theater constitutes an auto-critique of his tendency to fix characterological truth through the exposure of sexual secrets. While his most recognizable narrative techniques are governed by an apparent desire to put the sexual core of human personality "on stage," Joyce's theatrical experiments also allowed him to imagine collective spaces where perverse sexual desire has no identificatory implications.

In every case the theatrical energy formally encoded in the novelistic representation of interiority turns that interiority inside out, prying open the closures of home and psyche and rethinking human identity and human pleasure in radically collective terms, while simultaneously tracing the obstacles to such collective conceptualization. The antimoralistic, antipsychologistic tradition I trace here might seem to constitute an underground line in literary history, so little does it fit our received sense of what novels do; but it is my argument that this allergy to interiority is weirdly central to the main tradition of the novel of interiority. Concurring with Jameson's claim that "all literature must be read as a symbolic meditation on the destiny of community," this book argues that the novel of interiority offers more compelling evidence of the persistence of the collective imagination than has been acknowledged.[13] The theatrical endeavors of these prominent novelists constitute a literary historical testament to the malaise inherent in inwardness and individuation as such. To be sure, these writers' theatrical ambition was in each case failed or frustrated—their plays were either never completed, never accepted for performance, or (if performed) often dismal flops—but these frustrations did not close down the theatrical imagination. The dramatic texts these writers created instead asserted themselves over a period of years. In several cases these dramatic efforts were recast in narrative form, and in each instance they came to inform stylistically and formally what are still routinely described as un- and even antitheatrical novels. In tracking this theatrical persistence, I have resisted the temptation to read these careers teleologically, as if the dramatic efforts were regrettable detours on the road to aesthetic integration. Instead, the chapters that follow register the depth of these writers' attachment to their theatrical failures, an attachment indexed most vividly by their habit of writing novels that ruefully refer to the plays they might have been.

One way to describe the method of this book is as a reverse engineering

of the metaphorization at work in Henry James's conversion of his theatrical failure into an aesthetic program. The depth of these writers' interest in the theater has been difficult to see in part because their signal aesthetic and ethical concerns employ a figurative use of terms that might also be taken to refer to scenes of literal performance. Thackeray's popularization of Bunyan's image of "vanity fair" is of course an attack on hypocrisy and petty snobberies —but it also makes reference to the urban fairgrounds that were a concrete (if obsolescent) reality in mid-Victorian England; Eliot's sympathetic aesthetics so routinely work by disciplining characters into a heightened awareness of what she calls the "inward drama" of consciousness that we may forget that drama is also the name for a collective social event; and Joycean epiphany originated not only from a secularization of Aquinian aesthetics but from Joyce's deep engagement with the naturalist (especially Ibsenian) drama's strategies for putting psychological truth on stage.

The concepts of "vanity fair," the "inward drama," the "scenic principle," and "epiphany" thus open an imagistic and conceptual traffic with the idea of concrete theatrical space, and so with the energies of publicity and collectivity. The tradition of novelistic longing for the theater is legible as the history of the yearning to reliteralize these figures; *Empty Houses* takes these authors' real-life theatrical endeavors as license for such a reliteralization. I ask what fairs mean in Thackeray's novels and if we can imagine live audiences to James's meticulously constructed scenes; how our sense of the plots of Eliot's novels might change if we imagine her characters preparing for their searching conversations by consorting in the wings of a real theater; and why Joyce's moments of epiphanic exposure so frequently invoke concrete performative spaces. The goal in each case is to revive a sense of the lost social referent of such figures.

This literalism is what most sharply differentiates this book from existing studies of the crucial figurative role theater plays in the novel. Although this scholarship sometimes notes the actual theatrical efforts of major novelists, the substance of those efforts has almost wholly escaped analysis.[14] This focus has hypostatized the novel and the theater as independent traditions, and my emphasis on the erratic trajectory of individual careers is meant as a reminder that these forms are not produced in isolation from each other. It also aims to complicate the antagonistic model of generic evolution that has shaped critical accounts of theater and the novel. Perhaps inspired by Bakhtin's claim that the novel "gets on poorly with other genres," critics have tended to assume the novel's expansionist ambition, its desire to absorb or otherwise neutralize the generic antagonist represented by the theater.[15] A guiding hypothesis of much of this criticism has been that when the novel engages theater, it does so homeopathically—to expel it, punish it, or marginalize it.

This assumption of generic competition has in turn buttressed the notion of the novel's essentially interiorizing function. The story of the novel

as an agent of privatization has frequently been told as a tale of two genres, in which the novel's achievement of cultural hegemony over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries entails the eclipse of theater in the same period. The claim in these accounts is not that the theater disappeared in these years (it can easily be shown that the Victorian theater in particular was a growth industry)[16] but rather that the novel increasingly set the terms in which both forms imagined subjectivity. Historians of theater have traced the changes in theater architecture, playwriting, acting styles, and urban space that effected what has been called the gradual "novelization" of the theater over the course of the nineteenth century.[17] An overview of these changes makes evident their general thrust toward interiorization. The disappearance of urban fairgrounds; the shortening of theatrical bills of fare to fit the schedules of suburban trains; the evaporation of the stage apron and thus the curtailing of interaction between actor and audience; the new emphasis on realism in stage design and characterization and on decorum in the audience; a focus on interior settings, domestic entanglements, and the complexities of psychological motivation that reaches its apotheosis in the "wallpaper horizon"[18] of Ibsen's and Shaw's naturalism; finally, an acting style (known first as the System and then as the Method) that achieves dominance in the twentieth century by ontologizing these developments via a quasi-religious emphasis on authenticity and interiority: together these changes transformed theatrical culture to reflect the new prominence of the domestically oriented and psychologically absorbed subject presumably called into being and sustained by the realist novel.[19] The supposed generic competition between theater and novel also allegorizes the creation of the modern subject as the socially deactivated subject par excellence. It is precisely the publicity, exteriority, and collectivity of the theater (we might just say the "theatricality" of the theater) that need to be disciplined in a culture of the novel, and by most accounts this is just what happened.[20]

But assuming such a disciplining occurred, what were its affective features? While theater historians have disputed the notion that the theater was somehow in retreat in the nineteenth century, the "decline thesis" was such a commonplace of the era that everyone from intellectuals like G. H. Lewes (who complained of "dramatic degradation") to Dickens's fictional Mrs. Curdle (who sniffs that "the drama is gone, perfectly gone") could agree on it.[21] The rhetorical conflation here—in which a supposed falling off in dramatic quality is rewritten as the disappearance of the theater itself—anticipates the ways that literary history has tended to ignore the dramatic efflorescence of the nineteenth century. It is, for example, notoriously difficult to reconstruct from the page the sensory and intellectual pleasures of the 1871 melodrama *The Bells*: although the play achieves effects of considerable psychic complexity, these are not primarily verbal in nature, depending instead on the subtle management of stage effect via shifting tableaux and musical accompaniment.

Moreover, the power of *The Bells* had much to do with the notoriously psychologized, hyper-realistic acting of Henry Irving in the role of its guilt-ridden anti-hero, and Irving's name was associated much more closely with the play than was that of its author, Leopold Lewis.[22] Music, stagecraft, and Irving himself are all of course absent from the play's text, which thus presents itself to readers as a notably thin artifact of a more vivid event. In response to the lack of specifically literary interest presented by most plays in the nineteenth century, literary history has until recently proceeded as if there simply were no drama in the years between Sheridan and Shaw.

While it is worth correcting this misperception, it is just as important to recognize that the idea of the theater's disappearance expresses a crucial truth about the period's economies of literary value. Sharon Marcus has argued that the features of nineteenth-century theater we have just reviewed—the weakness of its author function, its lack of literary prestige—make it fertile ground for critics seeking to "deconstruct the institution of literature."[23] We might add that it offers an equally promising viewpoint from which to canvas the constitution of the literary as an autonomous field, with all the attendant ambivalences of that process. The estrangement of literature from theatrical culture was a feature of Victorian contemporaneity: at once omnipresent and symbolically sidelined, the nineteenth-century theater was already an emblem of the felt abstraction of literature from social life, and thus a symbolic magnet for the culture's recessive energies. Given this complexly contoured symbolic terrain (in which the theater is both losing ground and expanding, both gone and omnipresent), *Empty Houses* questions the notion that the models of "contest" and "competition" provide the best rubric through which to comprehend relations between literary forms.[24]

The careers examined here make clear that writers do not always know what is good for "their" genre, or even which genre is theirs. Even if the novel were definitively established to be in competition with the theater, we should recall that competitors view one another with longing as well as with enmity, and that victors often ambivalently memorialize the values of their defeated rivals. Far from triumphing in the eclipse of the theater, some of the period's most important novelists registered their symbolic ascendancy ruefully. Where a loose Darwinism informs most existing accounts of the novel's relation to the theater, the economy structuring the generic negotiations tracked in this book corresponds better to Freud's classic analysis of melancholia. Freud distinguishes mourning from melancholia in part on the grounds of the latter's potentially interminable nature: melancholia, he claimed, is a way not to mourn—which is to say not to get over and not to forget. Because the melancholic incorporation of the lost object is also a way to sustain a relation to the energies and possibilities represented by that object, Freudian melancholia is a technology of retention.[25] In stubbornly refusing to abandon their theatrical projects—by reworking theatrical failures in narrative form,

creating novels that convey a sense of the plays they might have been, or re-minding readers of the embodied public their works have failed to convene —these writers make visible the regrets that accompany a genre's process of becoming unmistakably itself. They offer evidence of what we could call the melancholy of generic distinction.

Tracing this melancholy requires attending at once to the ways the novel seeks to resemble theater and to the ways it understands itself as irremediably distinct from theater. This involves some necessary terminological blurriness. The pages that follow sometimes contrast "novelistic" with "theatrical" logic, and I want to stress two points about this usage. The first is that this is a heuristic and not an essential distinction. My claim that some of the most formally innovative novels introject the "theatrical" deeply into their texture is meant to upset our certainties about the ideological orientation of either form. Still, such binarizing terminology has been unavoidable in discussing a span of time increasingly invested in the binary. The critical elevation of the novel in the nineteenth century proceeded by marking the novel's for-mal distinctiveness from the theater. Victorian critics followed classic Aris-totelian poetics in paying particular attention to the different compositional possibilities of narrative and dramatic modes, and the theater remained a more salient generic comparand for the novel than, say, poetry or epic.[26] This leads to a second point: despite the fact that the novel described in *Empty Houses* looks more determinedly "theatrical" than has been acknowledged, it is inescapably true (and essential to understanding the novel of interiority) that the novel and drama operate according to distinct protocols of storytell-ing and consumption. Because there are unavoidable distinctions between plays and novels, I have omitted scare quotes from the words "theatrical" and "novelistic" in the pages that follow; but this usage should not be taken to suggest that these modal distinctions can be invested with firm ideological significance.[27]

This terminological difficulty proceeds from the instability and inescap-ability of generic difference, and it suggests a further irony in the careers ex-amined in *Empty Houses*: these would-be playwrights have all been noted for their antitheatricality. From Thackeray's hatred of pretense and Eliot's suspi-cion of vain women to James's early diagnoses of the culture of publicity and Joyce's contempt for Buck Mulligan's performative flourishes, these writers are capable of rhetorically employing "theater" as a synonym for everything they most despise. But the mobility of the idea of theater in their work suggests an affective compound that the label "antitheatrical" handles too crudely.[28] The psychic alchemy whereby we abuse an object that has disappointed us is, of course, familiar enough. But Freud's conception of melancholia, sensitive as it is to the radical fungibility of bad feeling about self and other, instructively complicates this apparently clear psychic logic. Specifically, his essay suggests that these writers' antitheatricality might express not just personal anger at

a theatrical frustration but also a more sociohistorically resonant resentment at the theater's increasing resemblance to the novel. Freud claims that the lost object in melancholia cannot be submitted to the work of mourning because its loss is unconscious—and in the essay's most arresting moment, he clarifies that such unconsciousness can result even when the subject is "aware of the loss giving rise to the melancholia, that is, when he knows whom he has lost but not *what* it is he has lost in them" (166). One reason for an inability to mourn a lost object, in other words, is an inability to specify the qualities in it that might be worth mourning.

The antitheatricality of these writers should be understood as a second- or third-order affect such as Freud sketches here—an expression all at once of distress at a personal theatrical failure, at the increasing remoteness of theatrical values from the inward-looking fictional worlds they were constructing, and at the existing theater's assimilation of precisely the "novelistic" values they had turned to the theater to escape. The conditions for such knotted emotions only increased as the two forms came more and more to resemble each other toward the end of the nineteenth century. As the novel becomes ever more focused on interior spaces and as the theater that once promised to provide an alternative follows suit, the vitriol directed at the theater also becomes the carrier of a frustration with the increasing virtuality of the publicity and externality that theater emblematizes: anger at the object can represent the object's failure to represent a viable alternative. While the novelists I treat have been interpreted as establishing the generic superiority of the novel at the expense of theater, I read the intense desire and bitterness they attach to the theater as a complaint against the polarization itself. This book argues that the cohabitation in these writers of antitheatrical rhetoric with deep theatrical desire expresses not an acquiescence in the fortified boundary between novel and theater but a protest against their felt convergence on the terrain of the interior.

Theater Dethematized: Spatializations of the Novel

The novel of interiority registers that protest in a variety of ways. The strategy that features most consistently in the chapters that follow is these novels' habit of referring their readers to performative spaces. This is true first of all in a thematic sense. These texts consistently incorporate their creators' theatrical preoccupations through the depiction of public spaces; often these spaces are so heavily invested that they function as fantasy images of the novel itself. Bakhtin's word for this phenomenon was "chronotope," the term he invented to denote the spatio-temporal figure providing a work's texture and the generative matrix for its plot. The essay in which he introduced the term specifically invokes Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* as an example of the theater as

chronotope.[29] As chapter 1 shows, Thackeray's obsession with theatrical space in that novel extends from the fairgrounds that give the book its title to the children's puppet theater that provides its closing image. The relay the novel sets up between these chronotopes means that even the domesticated toy theater becomes a monument to fairground sociability. A similarly insistent depiction of theatricalized space informs George Eliot's career, notably in the city square where the heroine dances in *The Spanish Gypsy* and the casino that provides the setting for the opening of *Daniel Deronda*. As spaces where the boundaries of ethnic groups and human personality are strangely irrelevant, they are peculiar "containers" for what seem to be intensely psychologized narratives. Similarly, James's *Awkward Age* is centered on a salon whose principal activity is the fostering of sexually loose and psychologically confounding "talk," while the "Circe" chapter of Joyce's *Ulysses* is a closet drama set in a street in Dublin's red-light district and inside an improbably capacious brothel.[30]

These public spaces are overtly thematized in the fiction. But there is a further dimension of these texts' spatial imagination, one that, though more difficult to describe, is also more radically unsettling—precisely because it derives not from thematically represented spaces but from the text's formal presentation. If the chronotopic effects I have just discussed suggest that the novelistic world can be analogized to a theater, this second type of spatialization intimates, more troublingly, that the events of the novel might actually be transpiring inside one. With surprising consistency the novels examined in *Empty Houses* undergo a warping in their phenomenological texture, so that the narrated action appears suddenly to be taking place in a theatrical frame, and the characters to be self-consciously performing parts before an imaginary body of spectators. Perhaps the strangest feature of these theatrical spatializations, as we will see, is that they derive from a series of formal devices familiar to students of novelistic innovation, among them interior monologue, free indirect discourse, and the careful restriction of point of view. These devices are frequently read as handmaidens of interiorization, deeply individuating and psychologizing narrative technologies. But I argue that these novelists' inflection of such devices has a genetic relation to their failed theatrical experiments, and that these techniques thus smuggle the memory (or more properly the fantasy) of the crowded theatrical space into the psychic interior. The collectivization and spatialization attendant on these narrative devices only becomes visible when we perceive their intimate relation to theatrical form. If one result of studying theatricality in the novel without considering the theatrical projects of novelists themselves is to reify the sense of generic independence, another is to overlook the specifically formal traces the theater leaves in the novel. Critics, especially of the nineteenth-century novel, have tended to thematize theatricality as another name for duplicity, pretending, and self-difference: the ambivalent Victorian romance

with theatrical artifice has long been perceived as central to the period.[31] But too fixed a focus on this particular and heavily moralized understanding of theatricality ignores the other meanings it had even for the morally obsessed nineteenth century; in particular, it misses the consistent association of theater with the more properly formal project of gesturing toward collective space. This consciousness of theater as a publicizing and collectivizing technology is powerfully legible in the narrative devices I have mentioned; bearing the traces of these novelists' will to collectivization, these devices function as monuments to interiority's discontents. Among the most notable effects of these formal innovations is to sideline characterological distinction, and in the process to turn psychological questions into social ones.

We have seen, for example, that Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* conveys a palimpsestic vision of the home as an enclosure that keeps referring to the public spaces it excludes. But this torsion toward theatrical spaces is conveyed with equal power by the very texture of the narration. Chapter 1 examines the tonal shifts of the narrative voice in *Vanity Fair* as encoding a yearning for public scenes of performance. Moving between public speechifying and chastened intimate address, the Thackerayan narrator offers readers an acoustic map of different imaginary scenes of reception. The pitch of Thackeray's voice—both its tone and its reach, its sound and the spaces it organizes— indexes various fantasmatic scenes of readerly witness, conveying in the process a vivid sense of the erosion of public space in the face of the exaltation of the domestic sphere. The sociohistorical imagination evident in *Vanity Fair* was given a new intensity of focus in his unperformed play *The Wolves and the Lamb* (1854) and the novel into which he later adapted it, the formally innovative *Lovel the Widower* (1860). In retreating from the stage, Thackeray both amplified his critique of mid-Victorian domesticity and pioneered the practice of interior monologue. The novel's theatrical genesis crucially inflects Thackeray's version of this hallmark technique of narrative interiorization: *Lovel the Widower* is one of Thackeray's most psychologized works, with a narrator who constantly gives away his insecurity and bitterness in the face of the domestic comedy he relates. But his habit of speaking as if from a vanishing stage transforms this slight marriage comedy into a dark meditation on the restrictions of point of view; and it transforms this psychological portrait into a social diagnosis of the disappearance of a pre-Victorian culture of performance.

George Eliot's tangled engagement with the drama is the subject of chapter 2, which begins with an analysis of the mutual constitution of theatricalized space and characterological interiority in *Romola* (1863) and *Felix Holt* (1866)—transitional novels in which Eliot's emphasis on psychological inwardness works at the expense of demonized crowds. But during this period she also undertook a dramatic work that challenged her most fundamental formal and ethical commitments. Conceived as a play but published as an

epic poem mixing dramatic and narrative forms, *The Spanish Gypsy* shows Eliot refusing both the novel as a form and the inward cultivation it seems designed to encourage. *The Spanish Gypsy* includes narrative passages that take the grammatical form of free indirect discourse, in which a character's habits of mind are mimicked by the narrator's prose. But the exteriorized perspective demanded by the dramatic origin of *The Spanish Gypsy* assures that these eminently psychologizing sentences emanate from and attach to no character in particular, instead appearing to echo in an auditorium populated with spectators. Eliot carried this experiment in externalized forms of psychological narration into the novels she wrote next, *Middlemarch* (1871–72) and especially *Daniel Deronda* (1876)—in the case of the latter imparting to the characters a suspicion that the plots in which they are entangled are playing out in a giant performance space. Indeed, Eliot originally considered writing her last major novel as a play, and we will accordingly track the ways in which the thematically represented theaters of *Daniel Deronda* infect the narrative fabric of the text, so that the novel seems constantly on the verge of turning itself into that unwritten performance piece.[32] *Deronda* is famous for the harshness with which its two central plots ("English" and "Jewish") are kept ethnically and ethically separate; but the text's theatrical hangover continually intimates to its characters and to its readers that those plots share greenroom space backstage.

Such spatializations become more emphatic in the texts analyzed in chapter 3. Henry James conceived of *The Other House* as a play but published it as a novel in 1896. Almost exclusively reliant on dialogue and dense with the notation of movements that frustrate readerly visualization, the novel constantly alludes to the theatrical status it appears to have abandoned; James reworked the novel back into a play in 1909. Both versions suggest that the domestic tragedy constituting the plot is contained in the space of a theatrical auditorium: in perhaps the oddest moment in the 1909 version, an indisputably pathological character actually looks out challengingly at "the spectators."[33] Similar invocations of theatrical space haunt 1899's *The Awkward Age*, a novel whose characters begin to play to an imaginary theatrical audience that James posits just beyond the "footlights" of the diegetic universe. *The Other House* and *The Awkward Age* bookend James's experimental period of 1895–99, years often understood as a preamble to his perfection of the psychological novel in the new century. But in abandoning James's fabled "center of consciousness" in favor of elaborating a group subject, these drama-novels document James's ambivalence regarding the interiorizing narrative approach of which he would become the acknowledged master. We will see that the sense of collective endeavor is kept alive in James's late career by his work's most unmistakable feature, its style. In *The Wings of the Dove,* Jamesian style—precisely because it is a shared resource in his fictional world—emerges as the bearer of what I call performative universalism, conveying a

sense that his characters are participants in a shared effort to evade psychic distinction.

Chapter 4 traces this trajectory into the twentieth century, examining the collective spaces invoked in Joyce's career-long obsession with dramatic form—from the epiphanies he wrote as a teenager through his 1918 play *Exiles* to the closet drama of the Nighttown (or "Circe") episode of *Ulysses*. Joyce's experiments with theatrical form constitute a running commentary on his interest in the "depths" of the psyche. The different conceptions of theatrical space embedded in the idea of epiphany lend a dual valence to this keystone of Joycean aesthetics. If, on the one hand, epiphany imagines a humiliating theater of psychic exposure, on the other it gestures toward a perverse collective space where such exposures would lose their policing force. These isolating and collectivist impulses are both visible in Joyce's play *Exiles*, which follows Ibsenesque naturalism in its representation of psychic motivation but allows its characters to mount a notable collective resistance to the diagnostic imperative structuring their stage existence. And when he came to fold a play text into *Ulysses* itself in the Nighttown episode, Joyce rejected the psychologizing logic that grounds personality in sexuality. Nighttown is commonly read as a theater of exposure, a making-manifest of the sexual depths, but its status as a play script drains its revelations of psychic significance. Like an actor who knows that the "aesthetic frame he occupies . . . protects him from the abyss"[34] of his socially ratified identity, the characters in the brothel-cum-playhouse that is Nighttown take a performative step back from their emphatic sexual individuation by pointing us to the space they collectively occupy; the episode becomes a meditation on the possibility of an eroticized public culture released from the reign of psychosexual meaning.

As this overview indicates, the theatrical spatializations discussed in each chapter typically occur when someone inside the novel "breaks character" to gesture beyond his immediate diegetic context. Because this repeatedly occurs at these texts' most psychologized moments, this warping partially neutralizes what would otherwise appear their most interiorizing effects. We might describe these spatializations as formal paroxysms: moments at which the conventions of the genre become visible, even—strikingly—to the characters themselves. In these moments the text's awareness of its status as a novel reaches a fever pitch, and the novel pushes against its own novelness by pointing to the possibility that it might instead have been a play. Because this twinned sense of generic identity and generic contingency is imparted to characters themselves, those characters are thereby briefly lifted from their position "inside" the fiction—abstracted or formalized by means of a double consciousness akin to that of actors participating in a theatrical performance. These are moments in which the novel imparts to its characters what Bert States, in his phenomenological account of the performative event, terms "the permission of the mimesis," the ability to lay claim to one's dual status as

performer and as character.[35] In other words, these are moments in which the novel imbues its characters with the double aspect every character enjoys as a matter of course in theater.

The technical term for the making-explicit of this duality is parabasis, which designates the moment in classical Old Comedy when the chorus "came forward without their masks to face the audience and delivered . . . views on topics such as politics or religion about which the dramatist felt strongly."[36] The term is best known to contemporary literary criticism from the work of Paul de Man, who made use of it in his reading of the concept of irony in German romanticism. For de Man, parabasis vitiates a text's referential seriousness; as the trope "by means of which the illusion of the fiction is broken," parabasis is the deconstructive device par excellence.[37] This conclusion, however, may have more to do with de Man's lack of interest in the embodied theater than with the trope's inherent function. De Man notes the theatrical origins of the term but quickly translates it into a purely literary operation, where it becomes a figure for the expression of textual self-consciousness. But the term's derivation from the classical theater—and its etymological meaning of "a coming forward"—suggest that theatrical parabasis does not so much (pace de Man) detract from the substantiality of a fictional universe as it heightens the spectators' awareness of the fiction's spatial and social grounding. If theatrical parabasis reveals a certain brittleness in the diegesis, it also and at the same moment socially substantializes the performance: the robustness subtracted from the drama as story is rendered to the theater as space and as event.

Of course, this transfer only literally occurs in the case of the embodied theatrical event: in the moments of novelistic parabasis sketched above, the theatrical surround toward which the characters gesture remains imaginary. This designating of a ghostly theatrical frame is a crucial aspect of these novelistic self-spatializations, one just as significant as their supposed deconstructive function, and these writers' theatrical ambition should alert us to the proximity of the embodied theater as a referential destination of their writing. Rather than blanketing the diegetic universe in a self-conscious textuality, such spatializations should be recognized as, more oddly, adding a further imaginary spatial dimension to that universe. In each of the cases I have just discussed, the referential texture of the fiction is warped not by an awareness of its textuality but by the sudden interpolation—"between" the reader and the diegetic action, as it were—of a hypothetical theatrical context for that action. If under normal narrative protocols the reader is "alone" with the diegetic universe, in these moments the intimacy of novel reading is aerated with an idea of public space: we suddenly sense not only the crowd of spectators of which we are an imagined part but also the architectural fact of the space we imaginarily share with them. In this sense, novelistic parabasis is more accurately characterized as constructive than as deconstructive.

It is important to recognize that this fantasmatic spatialization is also a fantasmatic collectivization: to refer to the theatrical frame in which the action takes place is both to designate one's status as one player among many and to gesture out toward the collectivity of witnesses that fill that space.[38] As I have suggested, the theater's role as an agent of collectivization needs to be stressed in a contemporary critical context that tends to understand theater primarily as a figure for duplicity. Our current tendency to take theater as a metaphor may simply be a result of the relative marginality of theatrical performance in modernity. But it was not always thus; in the nineteenth century it is notable how frequently discussions of theatrical artifice modulate into meditations on the collective space of the performative project. In an essay titled "Stage Illusion" first published in 1825, for example, Charles Lamb deflected the question of the actor's professional duplicity onto a consideration of the theater's collective address. "Why are misers so hateful in the world," Lamb asks, "and so endurable on the stage?" His answer is that our awareness of the feigned nature of stage occurrences inevitably inflects their meaning. If the conclusion is unsurprising in its substance, it is strikingly phrased: theatrical events "please by being done under the life, or beside it; not *to the life*." Lamb elaborates on the claim in a discussion of cowardly characters: the stage coward makes

> a perpetual subinsinuation to us, the spectators, even in the extremity of the shaking fit, that he was not half such a coward as we took him for . . . We saw all the common symptoms of the malady upon him; the quivering lip, the cowering knees, the teeth chattering; and could have sworn "that man was frightened." But we forgot all the while—or kept it almost a secret to ourselves—that he never once lost his self-possession; that he let out by a thousand droll looks and gestures—meant at *us*, and not at all supposed to be visible to his fellows in the scene, that his confidence in his own resources had not deserted him.[39]

"Meant at *us*": Lamb's emphasis nicely indicates that every instance of theatrical pretending is by the same token an instance of public address; an acted gesture implicitly convenes a collective body of witness. This exteriorizing tendency is, of course, one source of antitheatrical pronouncements against the essentially meretricious nature of performance.[40] But if we join Lamb in forestalling such moralized thematizations (theater equals duplicity, theater equals meretriciousness) we can register the underlying formal promise of collective awareness heralded by theatrical performance. Note how the remarkable locutions and neologisms of Lamb's essay—"under the life," "subinsinuation," "meant at *us*"—take their distance from the particular characterological qualities of miserliness and cowardice that occasion them. These examples are, importantly, *only* examples, interesting less in themselves

than for the way they highlight an extradiegetic assertiveness that is a general feature of theatrical performance.[41] Indeed, it is easy to see how one could make a different version of the point with a wholly distinct set of attributes. Cruelty, gullibility, delusion, loyalty, warmth: all, if performed adequately, will convey that surplus of intention that Lamb describes as a subinsinuation. I refer to theatricality as a dethematizing energy in order to register this formalizing tropism of performance, its tendency to encase these qualitative differences among attributes within a shared structure of address. Theatrical pretending may "mean" duplicity; but it also always subinsinuates the bare fact of our collective presence.

While the collectivity indicated by the actor's performance is first and foremost that of the audience, it is also true that theatrical performance normally occurs through a collective body of performers. Important as it is in accounting for the distinctive phenomenology of the theatrical event, this fact may seem so obvious as to appear unremarkable. Note how casually, for example, the novelist Olive Schreiner invokes the collective nature of the theater in the preface to her 1883 novel *The Story of an African Farm*. Defending the book's downbeat plot, Schreiner contends that "human life may be painted according to two methods." She continues:

> There is the stage method. According to that each character is duly marshalled at first, and ticketed; we know with an immutable certainty that at the right crises each one will reappear and act his part, and, when the curtain falls, all will stand before it bowing. There is a sense of satisfaction in this, and completeness. But there is another method—the method of the life we all lead.[42]

Schreiner goes on to celebrate her novelistic practice at the theater's expense. But in the process she emphasizes that the theater is a mode in which the unfolding of story is premised on a collaborative effort. This fact, Schreiner suggests, underwrites even the most violently divergent narrated fates with an image of collective survival: "When the curtain falls, *all will stand before it bowing*." The words signal that the necessarily collective ground of theatrical presentation inflects at every point the meaning of whatever story is getting told: the curtain call serves to make this collective grounding explicit, but it is perceptible to spectators whether or not the entire cast assembles at the play's end. The phenomenology of performance thus effects a fundamental alteration both in the ontology of character and the meaning of plot. In the theater, even the bitterest characterological oppositions are premised on a foundational cooperation; even when, in the closing gesture of *A Doll's House*, Nora slams the front door of Helmer's house, we are aware that this definitive rupture is sponsored by necessarily collaborative preparation.

This is an ineradicable feature of theatrical performance. But literary critics, who tend almost by definition to approach plays via the medium of print, are perhaps especially prone to underestimate its implications for the texture of performative events. One of these implications is that performance tugs against individuation with a collective impulse that assimilates the most discrepant characters into a common category.[43] The collaborative nature of the theater—like theatrical impersonation—can to that extent be described as powerfully dethematizing: no matter the plot, what happens on stage communicates first and always the fact of collective endeavor. If "collective endeavor" sounds like an idealization of theater, it might more properly be understood as its definition. To recognize, with Darko Suvin, that "politics—the organization of people's living together—is always implicit in theatre performance," or, with Fredric Jameson, that theater is "the very figure for the collective," is not to claim the political virtue of collectivity per se.[44] My argument is not that theater is always politically beneficent (theater of course can enforce or disguise pernicious ideologies) but that the formal trace the theater leaves in the novel indexes the collective horizon that is the necessary ground of any meaningful political engagement.

This conception of theater animates one of the most provocative projects in recent critical theory, the work of Jacques Rancière. Accepting the terms of the Platonic invective against "theatrocracy" while inverting its value sign, Rancière makes the case that pretending and collectivity, far from contingently linked features of dramatic enactment, are always mutually entailed in theatrical performance. The theater in Rancière's conception is the privileged site of political subjectivization because it is at once a space of assembly and a space of licensed self-difference: if democracy is "the collective embodiment of the capacity of anybody, the power of those who have no 'entitlement' to exert power by the privilege of possessing a quality—whether birth, wealth, science or other," the theater's externality makes it impossible to stably ascertain who possesses those prerequisites of participation.[45] In Rancière's conception, in other words, the theater's *modal* difficulty in ratifying interior distinctions among subjects is key to its democratic orientation. In the space-for-seeing that is the theater, the predicates of political belonging are appropriable: anyone might claim to possess them by mimicking them. Indeed, in licensing such mimicry, the technology of theater invites such disruptive appropriations.

Rancière's linkage of theatrical mimesis and the collective has its roots in his archival work on nineteenth-century French theatrical culture.[46] In his account, the urban *théâtres du coeur* were spaces of "a disorder that expresses itself in various ways: the agitation of the queue and the overcrowding in the gallery; the din raised by a group of hired clappers frequently composed of tailors who were particularly able to disguise themselves as fashionable dandies; disorders of the imagination produced by the drama or the prestige of the actors."[47] In the wake of the 1848 Revolution, French authorities issued a

series of edicts regulating the use of music, costume, dance, and crowd scenes; the new rules were designed to

> make the performance space merely the space of execution of a text or music, a place where nothing happened, where the singer or the actor would function only as an executor and the public as consumer. The multitude of prohibitions . . . aimed . . . above all to suppress all theatricality . . . anything that could become the basis of an illusion or of a wink, any incitement of the public to active participation.[48]

If the state was clearly troubled by theater's ability to convene tumultuous crowds and by its provisional suspension of codes of class and sexual propriety, Rancière insists that these facts were connected to the work of theatrical mimesis as such, the "illusion" or "wink" that in his account addresses the crowd and licenses its disruptive self-constitution as a collective body.

Although the situation was distinct in the less explosive political context in England, Rancière's analysis accords in its outlines with accounts of early-nineteenth-century British theater by Elaine Hadley and Marc Baer depicting the Regency and early Victorian theater as channels of popular resistance to the logics of privatization and the market economy.[49] But while Hadley, Baer, and Rancière all tell a story of the progressive taming of the radical disruptiveness of the existing theater, Rancière's point is that this democratizing potential can never be totally expunged and in fact inheres in the technology of dramatic representation and assembly. The nineteenth-century commentary we have already examined indicates that an awareness of the collectivizing possibilities Rancière locates in the theatrical situation survived into and throughout the Victorian period, even after changes in theatrical culture had stratified the public along class lines and enforced stricter rules of decorum both on- and offstage. Rancière's interest in the theatrical "wink," for example, derives less from that gesture's ironizing effects than from its capacity to address an assembled crowd—precisely the function, as we have seen, of the actor's "subinsinuation" in Lamb's account. When Rancière notes (à propos the melodramatic audience's lack of interest in plot) that "it is assuredly difficult to make people profit from a moral if they do not make the analytic link between the crime and the punishment," his description accords well with Schreiner's complaint about the failure of theatrically presented fates to "stick."[50] Similarly, Rancière's emphasis on the collectivizing possibilities of disguise would have been familiar to Victorian audiences, who typically witnessed a troupe of actors appear in changing constellations of roles in several different pieces over the course of a single night at the theater. Deborah Vlock describes the resulting theatrical culture as entailing a "loosening of plot and character" and an emphasis on the troupe's self-constitution rather than the stories it presented—a dethematizing point Rancière puts more abstractly

when he claims that it "is not the value of the message conveyed by the mimetic *dispositif* that is at stake [in aesthetic forms], but the *dispositif* itself."[51]

Such comments suggest that the intimations of collaborative existence embedded in the theatrical apparatus are subtly but importantly anti-closural, even anti-narrative. As Schreiner's preface indicates, performance disconcertingly suggests that the narrated fates of individual characters are accompanied and in some sense negated by the fact of performative cooperation: the "share" doled out to one character is haunted by the sharing inherent in the collective performative project as such; the presence of the "cast" underwrites the casting of individual lots the plot narrates.[52] This fact in turn suggests that identification is an inadequate rubric with which to approach the phenomenology of theatrical forms. The theatrical event asks its spectators not only to identify with one of the parties to a conflict but, at a more basic level, to cathect the staging of the conflict itself; it asks them not only to feel along with one character to his or her end but to be present at the collective enactment of that ending. The concept of identification neglects the fact that what draws an audience to a scene is often less the ambition to be or to possess a particular character than the more fundamental desire that this project be maintained, that these characters coexist and play out what conversations or conflicts they will—in short, that this collectively maintained world exist and be given sufficient spatial ground.[53]

If this collectivist imagination is particularly relevant to the theater, *Empty Houses* seeks the traces of such de-individualization in the novel of interiority by attending to the spatializations through which it summons a virtual theater. The anti-narrative torsion of these novels' invocation of theatrical space serves as a reminder that the narratological category of closure derives from a spatial metaphor: closure in this sense refers not to what happens to individual characters but to the more elementary fact of their co-presence, their shared containment in the space of the work.[54] An awareness of the work as a kind of social container can be central even to the experience of a temporally articulated form like the novel. Indeed, this is an experience to which we pay colloquial homage when we say (for example) that *Daniel Deronda* has a famous actress and a consumptive Jewish mystic "in" it—even if we cannot recall these characters' relations to each other or what happens to either of them. In accounting for the spatialized and denarrativized senses in which we can apprehend a novel, it is useful to speak less about the book's plot than about its characteristic climate or pervasive atmosphere—features that derive more from elements of tone, style, and narrative presentation than from what actually "happens" in the book. Accordingly, *Empty Houses* sometimes takes what will seem a perverse distance from the plots of the novels in order to attend to the phenomenological texture conditioning the fictional world. I am less interested in the story of victimization that structures James's *The Awkward Age* than in the visually hazy atmosphere blanketing the action,

less intrigued by the marriage comedy Thackeray rehearses in *Lovel the Widower* than the sourness with which he maps the domestic space that comedy supposedly sanctifies, less preoccupied with *Daniel Deronda*'s Zionism than with its characters' intimations of their shared theatrical condition, less intrigued by the characters' fantasies in "Circe" than by the fact that Joyce's exteriorizing presentation refuses to say whether these are *their* fantasies, or fantasies at all.

If the themes of victimhood, marriage, Zionism, sexual fantasy, and so on, remain undeniably important to the meaning of these novels—and especially to the divergent character fates they narrate—their formal presentation insinuates a dethematizing element into the narrative fabric by ignoring or sitting athwart the movements of plot. The spatial imaginary indexed by this dethematizing theatricality suggests that novels can be read not only as records of fictional events but also as shelters for imagined forms of collective being. While their narrated events may support the notion that these novels are devoted to the mystique of the interiorized individual, their persistent encodings of theatrical space demand that we read them with an eye for their institutional erotics: these novels express at the most basic level a demand that these collective spaces exist, even if only in the provisional medium of the fictive world. And quite contrary to the received idea of the novel as devoted to the all-importance of interiority, the theatrical spaces conjured in these novels facilitate a distance from the notion of identitarian consistency. These are collective spaces conditioned by a suspension of hermeneutic attention. We might define a theater as a space marked by the ambition to make the permission of the mimesis publicly available—a space devoted to the non-traumatic collective consumption of slippage between human essence and human signification. In invoking the theater—in attempting, against the grain of narrative, to *become* theater—the novel of interiority that emerges in *Empty Houses* similarly shelters an agnosticism about what constitutes the truth of human personality.

To put this in terms of a contemporary critical lexicon that has been important to this book: these novels conjure a series of paradigmatically queer spaces. The formalizing gesture that inaugurates queer critique has strong resonances with the dethematizing projects operative in the novel of interiority; as many commentators have noted, the term "queer" takes its distance from the fixity of gay and lesbian identities in order to undertake the more properly formal project of articulating a critical relation to sexual norms. Moreover, this book's emphasis on issues of sexual difference and sexual shaming—an emphasis that grows more pronounced in the final chapters—has a historical rationale. A focus on sexuality is inescapable when treating a period (the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries) in which, as Foucault most powerfully articulated, the question of human interiority has a privileged relation to the question of sex.[55] The intensification of the

linkage between sexual and identitarian truth is borne out by the trajectory mapped in the following chapters, in which the domain of the interior moves from the domestic enclosure in Thackeray to the depths of sexual secrecy in Joyce. And as the question of interiority migrates to the subject's supposed sexual core, the communitarian energy I locate in the novel of interiority comes to center on the representation of sexual minorities: in the cases of Joyce and of James Baldwin, the subject of my epilogue, the male homosexual is the privileged site for the examination of interiority and its discontents.

The focus on homosexuality in these writers is notable but not exclusive: it is a feature of the theaters conjured by the novels analyzed here that they do not demand identification at the door. Michael Warner notes that queer theory is characterized by an "aggressive impulse of generalization"—a dethematizing refusal to specify where queer insights stop or to whom they might apply.[56] In keeping with that impulse, I have chosen not to read the collectivities these novels imagine, address, and desire as circumscribed by any particular sexual identity. The novel of interiority suggests that if sexual minorities have felt most intensely the isolating ravages of a culture obsessed with self-scrutiny, that particular experience has a broader relevance. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has shown, a radical oscillation between particularizing and generalizing paradigms—what she calls minoritizing and universalizing ways of understanding sexual difference—is hardwired into modernity's thinking about sexual subjectivity. Her *Epistemology of the Closet* is a study of the emergence of male homosexual identity in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but her sense of that particular group's proximity to broad questions of identity justifies her claim to be speaking not just about gay men but about what she frankly labels "Western culture as a whole."[57] For Sedgwick, the "radical and irreducible incoherence" (85) of minoritizing and universalizing paradigms means that it is always unclear in this period whether sexual deviance is a problem for a localized group or an aspect of human populations more generally. *Empty Houses* covers nearly the same chronological spread as Sedgwick's book, and in demonstrating how frequently the question of deviance abuts the issue of collective forms of life, it supports her claims about sexuality's adjacency to questions of the public broadly conceived. In conjuring a series of emphatically non-normative spaces with emphatically undefined outer boundaries, the novels examined here suggest that collective aspiration in modernity is lodged in the minor places of sexual and private life.

That sexual subjectivity is not in itself an adequate field for the achievement of such aspiration perhaps goes without saying; at any rate, this has been one insight of politically oriented criticism of the novel, which has consistently emphasized the containment of political desire in romantic and

psychological structures. *Empty Houses* grants this point while insisting on the multivalence of the novel's increasing sexualization. The novel's intensified attention to the representation of sexuality—and particularly of sexual minorities—in fact spotlights the traumatic closures of individualism, and this spotlighting of interiority is not equivalent to an ideological assertion of its political adequacy. In the wake of what has been called "homonormativity" —the emphasis in gay and lesbian politics on a consumerist version of identity, and on such issues as adoption, military service, and marriage equality— it has become tempting to read the history of queerness as always having tended toward our current moment of neoliberal accommodation, and to read any emphasis on sexual difference as reinforcing the privatized imaginary.[58] But in the years on which *Empty Houses* focuses, this particular future (that is, our present) was far from clear. Eli Zaretsky's recent history of the social meanings of psychoanalysis, for example, offers a complex account of how the late-nineteenth-century intensification of meaning around the question of sexuality made "personal life . . . the site of deep wishes and utopian imaginings."[59] Zaretsky's point is the ambivalent one that such localization could be both mystifying, encouraging an inattention to the "political, economic, and cultural preconditions" of interiority, and liberatory, "deepening the meaning of modernity" by encouraging the emancipation of women and sexual minorities (7–8).

For a certain stripe of left criticism, of course, the fact that the utopian imagination finds expression in the representation of specifically sexual community will seem to mark its insufficiency. In his essay "Pleasure: A Political Issue," for example, Jameson endorses a politics of sexuality only with the caveat that "the proper political use of pleasure must always be *allegorical* . . . The thematizing of a particular pleasure as a political issue . . . must always involve a dual focus, in which the local issue is meaningful and desirable in and of itself, but is also *at one and the same time* taken as the *figure* for Utopia in general, and for the systematic revolutionary transformation of society as a whole."[60] *Empty Houses* takes the force of this claim seriously but tarries at greater length with the sexually minoritized figure and his pleasures than does Jameson (in "Pleasure: A Political Issue," that length is limited to the sentence I have just quoted). To trace the history of interiority's investment with utopian longing is not merely to tell a story of mystification; far from occluding the non-fit between interiority and large-scale social transformation, the novel of interiority makes that inadequation painfully visible. This book's epilogue argues that the novel of interiority reaches an impasse and a breakthrough in the work of James Baldwin precisely when the contradictions inherent in the attempt to think collective problems through sexual interiority becomes unavoidably insistent—and does so through Baldwin's negotiation with the generic difference of the theater. Baldwin's career makes

clear that if the novel relentlessly personalizes collective issues, its theatrical preoccupation constitutes a record of the political costs of that reduction, one that demands to be read at the level of form.

The Vocation of Failure

Put another way, *Empty Houses* constitutes an argument about the ideological valences of the aesthetic. I have claimed that novels "summon" theaters, that they "invoke" spaces, and that they "imagine" the creation or maintenance of forms of community. If in one sense these are traditional descriptions for what art does, only a slight change in the angle of vision is required to make them look like notably modest claims. In contrast to much recent criticism that argues for fiction's role in solidifying or even creating some central feature of modern life, *Empty Houses* claims that these novels are intensely aware of their relative marginality and powerlessness. "Universalizing the individual subject . . . is what novels do," Nancy Armstrong flatly claims.[61] But the writers examined in *Empty Houses* are not so sure about the performative efficacy of their own work, let alone about the sanctity of the "individual subject" that work might be said to model. Many critics have noted that the historical transition from high Victorianism to high modernism intensified the aesthetic's status as supplementary to "real" life; the fracturing of the Victorian reading public had, by the turn of the century, created a high art whose cultural status was in inverse proportion to its actual readership. This fact is clearly of central relevance to the authors discussed in the second half of this book: James's New York Edition of his complete works (1907–9), a prestige collection that sold dismally, can be taken as the epitome of this process, and the notion that *Ulysses* was essentially destined for the professoriat was clear even to its creator.[62] But a sense of artistic irrelevance may have been evident even before sales fell toward the end of the nineteenth century. Isobel Armstrong has noted that the post-Kantian "purity" of the aesthetic realm could double as a sense of inconsequentiality: "the Victorian poets," she writes, "were the first group of writers to feel that what they were doing was simply unnecessary and redundant."[63] I argue that similar doubts about artistic efficacy obtained for the period's novelists; my claim that Thackeray and Eliot intimated the peripheral nature of art even from within their popularity is thus also a claim for their prescience and their modernity.

  Just as important is the fact that these writers' failed theatrical projects became charged sites for their thinking about the efficacy of the artistic in general. In an essay on the little-known theater of Baudelaire, Roland Barthes writes, "What is interesting about Baudelaire's plays is not their dramatic content but their embryonic state: the critic's role is therefore not to dissect these sketches for the image of an achieved theater but, on the contrary, to

determine in them the vocation of their failure."[64] One need not agree that failure is quite as purposeful as Barthes implies to see the suggestiveness of his phrasing. The types of theatrical frustration discussed in the following chapters range from the failure to complete plays to the inability to get them performed to (more or less definitive) negative popular reaction to staged productions—and it is not my purpose to claim that these are all equivalent forms of failure, or to explain whether or why these plays were fated to fail.[65] Rather, I argue that—whatever the reasons for it—theatrical frustration offered a visceral experience to these writers of the failure to establish successful contact with an audience. Thus these biographical failures became potent emblems of larger concerns: whether these plays needed to or were designed to fail, their authors "vocationalized" that failure, retroactively repurposing it as significant and productive of fictional experimentation. The novelistic texts most influenced by these theatrical failures are marked by a sense of incompletion that becomes a meditation on the marginality of the aesthetic in modernity. In place of making the (perhaps more galvanizing) claim that the novels I treat are forceful political statements, my point is that the limited extent of their force is one of the things they most powerfully consider.[66]

Thus where literary critics frequently speak of texts themselves as "performances" or "enactments" of an authorial project or ideological script, I have resisted such terminology and its silent metaphorization of the idea of theatrical performance. By insisting on the stubbornly literal fact that novels are not performances, I aim to make visible the sense of non-achievement and virtuality embedded in these texts. Such virtual or "failed" enactment holds especially for the effects of fantasmatic spatialization this introduction has been describing: the theater these devices sustain in the heart of the novel of interiority is an imaginary one. The performed theater is, of course, necessarily an affair of real bodies in real space; it is peculiarly strong in what Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht calls "presence effects."[67] As theater historians often have occasion to lament, writing about theater transforms the event into an artifact, bleaching it of the color, heat, noise, and social contingency that properly constitutes it.[68] The novel has often been understood as eliding this fact by co-opting the living theater into the two-dimensional form of metaphor. I suggest, to the contrary, that these novels are supremely aware, and work to make their readers aware, of their failure to be theater. This failure effect radiates most notably from the aspiration these texts often evince to approximate the appearance of play texts. Each of these authors makes recourse—sometimes sudden, sometimes sustained—to the look of the theatrical script in their narrative texts. Sometimes this effect proceeds from the simple fact of having dialogue massively preponderate over narration, as in the novels of James; at others, the effect is more blunt, as when Thackeray and Joyce suddenly adopt the typographic conventions of play texts, with speech marked by character tags and narration ceding to the notation of stage directions

enclosed in parentheses. In still others, as in Eliot's typographic invocations of the theater in *Daniel Deronda*, the effect of ambient theatricalization is fleeting but productive of powerfully uncanny effects.

It is tempting to see such code switching as a sign of the novel's incorporative drive, its much bruited habit of ingesting other forms into its texture. Novel studies has often understood the novel as the assimilative form par excellence, and self-confidence—of its centrality, its inevitable "rise," and its ability to absorb whatever material while still remaining itself—as its defining affect.[69] But the phenomenological oddity attending these writers' inclusion of theatrical cues suggests that this gesture should be read not as an emblem of assurance but as a self-conscious marking of the limits of the novelistic project. Far from signaling the triumph of the novel's expansionist ambition, such invocations of theater involve the narrated world in a deep sense of wrongness, clouding the text's referential clarity, frustrating readers' attempts to visualize the action, or pointing us toward a theatrical enactment that by definition we cannot attend.

The theater semiotician Keir Elam has noted that the sensory vehemence of theatrical performance frees the dramatic text from the responsibility of making the diegetic world linguistically available. The grammar of theatrical texts, as a result, is notably heavy with shifters and deictic expressions that simply *refer* to the world given to the spectators via the undeniable facts of stage, set, and bodies. The theatrical text counts on performance as its sense-making complement: as Elam puts it, "A mode of discourse, like the dramatic, which is dense in such indexical expressions, is disambiguated—acquires clear sense—only when it is appropriately contextualized . . . It is, in other words, *incomplete* until the appropriate contextual elements (speaker, addressee, time, location) are duly provided."[70] When novelistic discourse mimics what Elam calls the "deictic density of dramatic language" (131), the result is to court a sense of incompletion that will never be appeased by the text's animation.[71] These novels' encryption of theatrical codes thus adds another, phenomenological, variety of "failure" to the biographical one: the theatrical spatialization of the novel is a frustrated or failed deixis. It does not absorb or discipline an imaginary theater but points to it as an absent referent. In the process, it underscores the novel's necessary alienation from the embodiment and collectivity of the theatrical event.[72] But the pathos of incompletion inherent in the theatrical text is at the same time a provocation to imagine the theatrical event that would give the text referential density. Elam's emphasis on the insufficiency of the theatrical text intimates as much. "The language of the drama *calls for* the intervention of the actor's body in the completion of its meanings," Elam writes (130; my emphasis); his language suggests that the dramatic text indexes a desire, or a demand, that the enactment take place. In reading a play text (and, I argue, in reading the novels that invoke them), we are being asked to imagine a performance,

and this is also implicitly a demand to imaginarily convene a public and to hypothesize the space in which it might congregate.

To recognize this demand—even if only to register the impossibility of fulfilling it—is to respond to the petition that the text has made of us. It is to recognize what J. L. Austin terms the perlocutionary dimension of a speech act. "Saying something will often, or even normally," Austin writes in introducing the concept, "produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons: and it may be done with the design, intention, or purpose of producing them."[73] Perlocution here encompasses a wide range of response, from having an emotion in reaction to a speech event to being moved to do something about it. One form of perlocutionary response Austin does not name is that whereby we are made to feel with particular severity the difficulty in traveling along this spectrum, the restraints on our moving from response to action.[74] This sense of being enjoined to do something one is in no position to do is precisely the dimension of response in which we find ourselves in reading a play text, with its string of directives to actors who remain phantoms and set designers who are only conjectural—and its implicit invocation of an audience whose absence is a constitutive feature of our reading in the first place. Because the reader of a play text is asked to imagine both a collective space and the collective project that would populate it, the play text must in the first instance be understood as a solicitation to a collective project—at an even more basic level, as a solicitation to collective thinking. The thinness of the play text is a form of ghostly prompting; when we read a play, what is paradoxically invoked is an event in which our solitary status *as* reader will be canceled. If "all dramatic texts are hypotheses, yearnings," perceiving the formal trace the theater leaves in the novel should make us newly aware of the sense of petition embedded in the novelistic text.[75] The novels explored here perversely aspire to the world-hunger, the sense of incompletion and the corresponding ontological neediness, characteristic of the theatrical text. The novel of interiority thrusts its reader into a situation of solicited and blocked response when it points her toward a space of theatrical enactment from which her identity as a reader alienates her.

It is not clear to me that the desired or expected readerly response to this situation is one of resignation or of accommodation. Many forms of progressive criticism assume that what a text wants is for its reader to resemble it; this assumption of a basically mimetic desire frequently takes the form of a suspiciously neat compound verbal form, as in the claim that the bourgeois subject is both "described and reproduced" by the text.[76] This formulation underestimates the disequilibrium that can obtain between a text's narrated concerns and the effects it may have on its consumers. To put it simply, while interiority and privacy may find representation in the novel, it does not follow that interiority and privacy are recommended by the novel. The political

consequences of reading are notoriously difficult to specify. But the assumption that the novel of interiority makes interiorized subjects, and that this ideological work occurs without remainder, imputes an efficaciousness to the literary artifact that is hard to square with these texts' awareness of their potential irrelevance. Indeed, it is difficult not to suspect that by crediting the text with the power to remake life in its image, we permit ourselves to smuggle an officially discredited language of appreciation into our work under cover of a hardboiled political skepticism. The marginality of the aesthetic in modernity suggests that the literary artifact does not merit this particular form of ambivalent praise.

If *Empty Houses* subtracts something from our sense of the novel's political potency, it aims to augment our sense of the novel's political insight and its political desire. The story of the novel's rerouting of properly public energies into private scenes of contemplation is one we have perhaps become too fond of telling. The very repetitiveness with which novels are said to close down the social imagination they arouse would appear to betray the inadequacy of this model: a collective imagination so continually in need of re-containment must, despite appearances, be startlingly persistent. It is more responsive to its formal and tonal textures—more responsive to its intense desire for *response*—to say that in its continued invocation of an absent theater the novel of interiority works to make the reader dissatisfied with his status as a reader by rendering palpable to him the fact of his social apartness. "Performance" derives etymologically from the Middle French for "to furnish forth," "to carry forward," "to bring into being."[77] The perlocutionary demand issued by these texts is to furnish something they have revealed as missing in the world as it exists. We might take the recurrent theatrical longing of these major novelists as striving to make readers aware of the availability of the social, even its inevitability, as an ethical and political horizon for what seem the most inwardly oriented literary forms. Today especially, when the prestige of the private and the privatized could scarcely be greater, we should hesitate before ratifying that prestige analytically. Criticism has suggested that our failure to recognize the pressure of the collective is the result of our seamless reception of the novel of interiority. *Empty Houses* argues that that novel's injunction has yet to be absorbed.